

Victory of the Lamb – June 20/21, 2020 God is Here

Numbers 24:17 - God Blesses Us – Pastor Bill Limmer

What do you think of when someone zips past you on HWY 94 at about 90mph? You think they deserve a ticket. And sure enough, a few miles down the road, there they are pulled over by the State Patrol. As you pass by, you know they are getting what they deserve. And you have a little smirk on your face.

Today we are wrapping up our series God is Here. By the time we meet the children of Israel today, they have a regrettable past. They have amnesia about God's blessings and promises. I mean, if God is going to set them free and open up the Red Sea, I think that is pretty strong evidence that they are in good hands. They can't wait to get into the Promised Land and Moses sends 12 spies into the Promised land. And sure enough, the land is amazing just like God said. It is like California vineyard good! But by a 10 to 2 vote the spies say the Canaanites are too big for us we will get destroyed. And so instead of receiving God's promise, they walk away.

Not only do they walk away but they become grumblers and complainers - first about the lack of food and then the food is no good. What do you think of the children of Israel? Can you believe it? I mean we would never complain about food, would we? I remember when I was in college standing in line at the cafeteria, wondering sarcastically what kind of burnt sacrifice we were going to have to eat that day. And it dawned on me, I am way worse than the Israelites. They had the same food day after day after day. Picture the little Hebrew boy or girl asking, "Mom, what's for lunch." She responds, "same as yesterday, and the day before, and for the last forty years."

But here is how I know they were first team all grumblers and complainers: They even grumble and complain about their freedom and lament that they are no longer in slavery. What?! Their past is full of stubborn rebellion, idolatry, edgy impatience, out of bounds sensual and sexual desires, and lack of trust in God. They need God and they just want his blessings. They are in the wilderness of sin. They have a messed up past and they don't deserve anything good, only and everything bad.

Enter Balak, the ungodly king of Moab who seeks out a wicked sorcerer named to Balaam whom he promised to give serious cash if he would give Israelites what their past deserves – a curse. By the way, the name Balaam means, "he who destroys the people." Israel is primed to get what they deserve.

I am assuming that you like me have a past that you are not super proud of. Tik Tok finger down challenge – so hold your hands up and when I say something that applies to you put a finger down. (maybe you better do this just in our head) – Have you ever done anything illegal? Have you ever made a bad decision that not only affected you but others? Have you ever said something you wish you had not said? Have you ever rationalized your wrong? Have you ever drank too much? Have you ever hated someone? Have you ever had sex outside of marriage or thought about it? Have you ever wished someone else got what they deserved? Have you ever taken advantage of grace?? Have you ever complained about a blessing? Have you ever wanted God's blessings more than God himself? Are you relieved that I didn't mention your past indiscretion?

Like the children of Israel we have a messed up past and God knows all about it. You and I, by God's grace, are on our way to the promised land but we place ourselves in a wilderness of sin. We have a past. A bunch of us have trouble getting past our past. And for us some of our past wasn't years ago, it

was last week or last night. Like the children of Israel, if we are honest, we are in the wilderness with our sins with the God of justice standing right beside us.

Be honest. Have you ever thought that God was out to get you? That he had a you-sized fly swatter to take you out? And you have to watch your back because he is going to get you, because after all you really do deserve to get it?

Let's go back to Balak hiring Balaam whose name means to destroy the people and see what happens. First thing you need to know is Balaam is going to have seven cracks at cursing Israel. But you also need to know that God intervenes in Balaam's life and Balaam can't say anything but what God wants him to say. And so, Balaam gives not curses that the people deserve but blessings. And the fourth blessing is so good. It is for all people. Numbers 24:17 v "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. **A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.** (Num 24:17).

God is blessing the Israelites through Balaam, but he is also blessing us too. Balaam is talking about the light of the Gospel that shines in our darkness. This is the Star that shatters the darkness of sin by bringing the light of forgiveness to people who, are you ready for it, don't deserve it. This is the promise of the Savior who brings deliverance from what you deserve, forgiveness instead of fear. peace instead of punishment,

Take away number 1 – In Christ I am completely forgiven.

Romans 8:1 there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Some of us have trouble getting passed the past: We are having a great day and then we see him or her, the song comes on, or we drive by the location and guilt and shame overwhelm our hearts. We feel condemned because we know not only the sins our friends know about, but we know all about our sinful thoughts too. And we think, if people really knew what I am like they would never welcome me let alone accept me let alone love me. It is hard to live today, if you don't let go of the past.

The Apostle Paul had a past too, he was a self-righteous murderer who received his forgiveness and said, Philippians 3:13,14 **one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,** ¹⁴ **I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.** We just sang these words - O, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God O, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine I couldn't earn it, and I don't deserve it, still, You give Yourself away O, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God, **You don't achieve forgiveness; you receive forgiveness.**

Take away number 2 – in Christ I am valuable.

For some of you, you were treated like trash by someone and so you treat yourself to big bowl of shame because you have conceded you must be trash. Some of you have the weighted blanket of guilt over your head. You can't believe you did what you did. You hate yourself. Your failures don't define you; God does through Jesus Christ. You can tell people's value judgments by how much they are willing to pay for something. When I go shopping for running shoes, and I run a lot, I'm looking for a good deal. For me, I don't want to spend \$140 for shoes. I am going to run through them in just a few months. So, I don't even look at them. I'm more in the \$50-\$75 dollar range. You are more valuable to God than you can ever fathom.

1 Peter 1:18,19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the

precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. Reckless Love - When I was Your foe, still Your love fought for me You have been so, so good to me When I felt no worth, You paid it all for me.

Here is how much God was willing to pay for just you. **The cross of Jesus proves your value** You, yes you, are immensely valuable to God. You have intrinsic value to God.

Take away number 3 – In Christ I am unconditionally loved.

He can't love you any less because He is love. He can't love you anymore because He is love. He loved you before you were created. Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me You have been so, so good to me Before I took a breath, You breathed Your life in me You have been so, so kind to me Parents love their kids not because they earned but because they are your kids. Parents love their kids not by performance but by position even when they are messy. **God is bigger than your mess.** Your sins are many but his mercy is more. You are God's kid through Jesus Christ. God is the God of loving and generous forgiveness. **The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. . .**¹⁰ **he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.** ¹¹ **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;** ¹² **as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.**

This is the gospel, the good news. It is God's story of kindness, forgiveness, reconciliation, grace, and mercy. It is the opposite of what we deserve. And it's this story of the good news that God has for us that helps us when we are faced with our own decision to give people what they deserve or not. Do we take offense or strike back, or do we seek to extend kindness and offer a gentle answer? It applies when we are at odds with a family member, when our children don't listen or are disrespectful, a colleague, when our views are criticized, when we are misunderstood, when someone rejects us for whatever reason.

Because Jesus has forgiven all our sins, we can forgive others who sin against us. Because Jesus has loved us at our worst, we can love others at their worst. Because Jesus offered a gentle answer to us when we sin, we can offer gentle answers to people who sin against us.

Let go of your past and the past of others. Hold onto God's promises. He is holding on to you.