

“Meeting God at the Altar” series (A study from Leviticus)

Week 7: The law of choice

December 21, 2025

Joshua 24:11 Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. 12 I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you – also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. 13 So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant. 14 Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

Introduction

- We have been exploring the bible book of Leviticus which is almost entirely about the early Israelite religious system and laws.
- You see, some 700 yrs earlier, God had introduced himself to Abraham and told him he was going to make him a great nation through which he was going to bless the world.
- He made himself known to Abraham and his son Isaac and then eventually Jacob and to the twelve sons of Jacob. The process of making this extended family into a nation ended with them in Egypt where they eventually became slaves.
- After 400 years in Egypt, they had grown to become a nation of people. They were no longer a family. God delivered them from their slavery and brought them out to take them to a land they could call their own, called the Promised Land.
- God had not forgotten WHY he made this nation. His purpose was that through them he could show the world, a world that had strayed far from their creator, what God was like and why people should follow this God.
- But this people did not know how to do this. They knew who God was in general. They knew him as the real God. They knew him from stories about their ancestors. And they knew him through the miracles he had done. But they didn't really know him or how to interact with him.
- The book of Leviticus records how God demonstrated this to the people of Israel. His law showed what God was like and how Israel could have a relationship with God, one that every other nation could have if Israel demonstrated it well. Plus, it foreshadowed what was to come 1500 years in Jesus, who was the ultimate door to a relationship with God.
- Since the altar played a central role in this system of laws for the Israelite nation in how they were to know God and follow him, we have subtitled this series, **meeting God at the altar**. It was at the altar that the Israelites were invited to meet God and let him change their lives.
- And while we don't physically offer sacrifices the way that Israel was supposed to, the altar is **where we have an opportunity to surrender to God so that we might know him and be changed**. It is the act of coming to God to acknowledge who he is, who we are, and the implications for how we live today.
- What have seen so far is that God required the Israelites to meet him at the altar with thanksgiving to surrender their priorities, their sin, their relationships, their time and their money.

Main Sermon Text

- In other words, to know God and follow him and have the kind of life they desired required surrendering every area of their life to God, daily, in very practical ways.
- It was detailed. It was their law, their moral code. It was a set of rules but it was way deeper than that – it gave them a picture of what God was like and what they were like.
- It showed them what would trip them up and how they should live to give them the life God designed.
- After God had given them all these instructions he summed it all up with a law. A law that they failed to follow often over the next 1000 years, a law that governs us today in all we do.
- **It is the law of choice.**

- God concluding giving them the law by saying:

Leviticus 26:3 "If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, 4 I will . . ."

- In the next paragraphs, God describes what will happen if they choose to surrender themselves on an ongoing basis to him.
- Their businesses will succeed (v4)
- They would not have to worry about having enough (v5)
- They would live in safety and in peace (v5)
- Their enemies would not bother them (v6)
- God would multiply their abilities and resources to their advantage (v7-8)
- Their families would be healthy and grow (v9)
- They would have more abundance than they could actually use (v10)
- God's presence would remain among them and they would experience him in amazing and personal ways (v11-12)
- It sounds amazing, but God wasn't done.

14 "But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, 15 and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, 16 then I will . . ."

- God then describes what would happen if they did not surrender, if they selfishly did what they wanted, ignoring the ways of God.
- They would experience anxiety and sickness leaving them weak and tired (v16)
- The work they did would be taken by others (v16)
- Their enemies would conquer them and they would live in fear (v17)
- Their businesses would not succeed no matter what they tried. Their work would have little benefit (v18-20)
- They would experience problems in the land and their families would not flourish or grow (v22)
- They would be conquered by other nations (v25)
- They would experience plagues and death (v25)
- There would not be enough food. They would never feel satisfied (v26-27)
- Their country would be destroyed and desolate. There would be civil wars and strife (v28-29)
- Places of safety would become abandoned ruins (v30-31)
- You will be separated from those they love (v33)
- They would live fearful, anxious, timid lives (v34-37)
- God himself would be opposed to them (v23-24, 38-39 and more)
- Now, let me ask you, if you were Israel and God just told you this, what would you do?
- It seems pretty obvious doesn't it. The first sounds great, the second sounds awful. So choose the first. Why wouldn't you?

- Just before Israel entered the Promised Land almost 40 yrs after this, God reiterated this covenant and laid the law of choice in front of Israel.

*Deuteronomy 30:19 This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now **choose life**, so that you and your children may live 20 and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.*

- Joshua, the man who led Israel after Moses, after having led the nation for his whole life, came to the people and told them the same thing.

*Joshua 24:15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then **choose for yourselves** this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*

- You get to choose. You can choose life or death. And against all logic, they chose poorly. Despite all that was laid before them, the people of Israel consistently chose to do their own thing, to ignore God, to live their own sinful, selfish ways, and they ended up as a nation scattered throughout other nations, and eventually ceased to be a nation altogether.
- All because of the law of choice. **My choices have consequences consistent with those choices.**

- Before we go through this more deeply, I need to clarify a couple of things.
- This law with the promises attached to them is called a covenant, an agreement, that God is making with Israel. There are two kinds of covenants that God makes with humanity.
- There are unconditional covenants. In other words, he promises to do something and he is going to do it regardless of what people do.
- Examples: he will never again destroy the world with a flood, no matter how evil people get; promising to make Abraham the father of many nations and use his family line to impact the world. God was going to do that no matter what happens.
- There are conditional covenants. These are covenants where God commits to do something but it is connected to people also doing something.
- For ancient Israel, this law, this agreement, that God was making with Israel was called a “conditional covenant.” If Israel followed the law, God would bless their money, families, life, and more. It almost sounds like what we call the prosperity gospel. If I just do all the right things, God is going to fulfill all my dreams.
- Understand that God did this because he wanted the nation of Israel to show all the surrounding nations that God was the true God, the real God, and it was supposed to make him and his character attractive to draw people to himself.
- What I do not want you take from this is that if you do all the right religious things, God is going to make your life smooth, profitable and easy. We do not live under this law or covenant.
- Jesus was the fulfillment of everything in Leviticus and just before he died, he told us that his death and resurrection created a “new” covenant with his people.
- That covenant is BOTH an unconditional AND conditional covenant.
- It is unconditional in the sense that it is initiated by God's grace through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He offered salvation to all who believe. His promise was to write his laws on people's hearts such that they would be his people. He did it and it was not because of anything we have done. It is available to anyone.
- It is conditional because to receive this salvation requires faith and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It requires us to surrender our lives, confess our sins, and repent to become part of God's kingdom family.

- While God made salvation and a relationship with him available to all, our participation in that relationship, and our growth in it, comes down to our choices.
- This is how God summed up all he had told Israel and it is how we sum up this entire series.
- He has called us to surrender our priorities, our sins, our relationships, our time and our money to him. You and I get to choose. Will we? Or won't we?
- And whatever we choose **will have consequences consistent with those choices**.

I. Following God is a choice.

- God told Israel that they could experience the blessings of knowing him, and this was a choice. They could embrace God's ways or not. It is no different for us today.
- God has offered us forgiveness. He has said he will wipe away our sins. He will give us peace. He will bring us into his family and give us purpose, belonging and security. He has committed to give us an eternal life that will glorious and amazing.
- To those who believe and follow, he invites us to choose to surrender our lives and follow him. To repent and confess and believe.
- It is God's grace and love that allows us the freedom to make this choice. God would have saved a lot of grief on this planet if he just made people choose to follow him. Yet he leaves the choice to us and it is the most important choice you will ever make in this life.
- And when you choose to follow him, he calls you to, every day, choose to surrender to him.
- Surrender your time. Your money. Your priorities. Your relationships. Your sins.
- The people that you meet that seem to have God's peace when their lives are a mess, those who are ridiculously generous, who are impacting the lives of others, are people who have chosen to follow him.
- **Following God – it's your choice.**
- Many people reach a point at which they accept Jesus as their Savior, as many, if not most, of you have done. Then:

II. We surrender one day, one moment, one choice at a time.

- God built into the law daily, weekly, monthly and yearly spaces to surrender and follow him.
- Every single one of us faces daily, weekly, monthly and yearly choices that are either going to move us in God's direction or away from him.
- We rarely become all that God has for us with one choice. It is choosing to surrender over and over and over and over again and when we choose sinfully or selfishly, it is coming back and choosing wisely the next time.
- When you encounter someone who is 50 yrs old and they have no debt, and own their house, and seem to have few financial problems, it is easy to think, "They're so lucky. I wish I had the advantages they had". What we don't see is the financial plans, the years of saving, the discipline of not spending everything they have, of practicing generosity. We see the result of choices made over time.
- When you listen to someone pray and you are blown away by them. Their prayers seem to have power. They really KNOW God. God seems to know them and answer them. You think that you could never be like them. What you don't see is 5am mornings, praying when they didn't feel like, their pursuit of God when no one saw.
- When you see a couple married 40 years and they seem to get along so easily and smoothly. They have the kind of relationship you dream of having and wish you had. It is easy to say that: "They had all the breaks", but you did not see the hard work they put into communicating. Their decision to remain sexually pure until after marriage. The late-night discussions and arguments. The sacrifices / practice of loving when they did not feel like it.

- Do you know how you have an impact on people that will last to eternity? By praying and listening to God for how to connect with people **today** and then choosing to do it even when you don't feel like it.
- Do you know how you get close to God and experience the joy and peace from him? By choosing to get up to read your bible **today** when you'd rather sleep. By going to Life Group or church service when all you desire is alone time. By helping others when God leads even though it's been a crazy week.
- Do you know how you become generous and gain freedom from worry about money? By asking God **today** how he wants you to use your money and then choosing to do what he puts there, whether it's helping one person or making a plan for this year to give.
- Do you know how you conquer the sin in your life? By confessing and repenting **today**. By seeking God and choosing to live differently today!
- You will have dozens, if not hundreds, of choices, today. Each one is an opportunity to move you in God's direction or away. **It's your choice.**
- It's good news because it reduces change to bite sized pieces. The law of choice comes with other built in good news.

III. The consequences of our choices have an escalating nature.

- When you read through God's list of consequences in Leviticus 26, you would notice that while there is a direct connection between choices and consequences, it is not a 1:1 ratio.
- The list of consequences for not following God grew in nature.
- He told them if they didn't surrender, then this would happen. If they didn't listen, it would get worse. If they STILL didn't listen, it would get even worse. And so on. That's exactly what happened to them and it happens to us.
- The person who eats poorly today, and again tomorrow, and for a long time, ends up obese with joint and heart problems and diabetes. The one who flirts with their co-worker and indulges their fantasies ends up with an affair and a broken marriage. The one who drinks just a little to cope with stress and continues in it ends up with debilitating alcoholism.
- The consequences of bad choices gets larger and larger over time.
- How is this good news? Because it works in both directions. When Israel followed God, his blessing seems disproportionate. He told them that not only would they defeat their enemies, that 5 people would defeat a hundred and a hundred would defeat 10,000. They would not only be blessed financially but would have so much that they won't even know what to do with it all.
- God loves to bless those who are surrendering and following him. Those blessings are not always physical (like perfect health or lots of money), but his blessings far exceed our surrender.
- If this is true, then why did Israel choose poorly despite the clear consequences laid out by God? Why do we make bad choices when we KNOW there are poor results? Because the consequences of our choices are often delayed. We rarely see the immediate benefit or consequence of a daily choice.
- Your choices to surrender will bear fruit. So will your choices to live contrary to God's ways.
- It may not happen right now, but it will ALWAYS happen. That means you can benefit from your daily actions - **it's your choice!**
- But perhaps the best news?

IV. It is never too late to choose wisely.

- God ends Leviticus 26 with this declaration.
40 "But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors . . . I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land."
- Even if every choice has been sinful, selfish and unwise, if they change. If they surrender. I am so ready to re-engage with them. To bless them. To love them.
- It doesn't matter what how old you are, what your past is, how you were raised, whether you had advantages or disadvantages, whether you had made so many bad choices that you feel like there is no way out, you can begin surrendering today.
- And whatever choices you make from this point forward can lead you in God's direction. You can have peace, joy and God's presence.
- It's never too late. **It's your choice.**

Conclusion

- **My choices have consequences consistent with those choices.**
- God eagerly desires for us to choose him and to surrender to him since he knows best what is good for us, and he eagerly desires to bless us.
- And as with this whole series, we see this shown and fulfilled in Jesus.
- Jesus surrendered his will to the heavenly Father. He did not selfishly choose his own way, but chose to surrender his priorities, his time, his money, his relationships to his Father.
- The greatest temptations that Jesus faced, in the wilderness and in the garden before his death, was to choose selfishly. To do things his own way.
- Yet he perfectly surrendered and the result was our salvation. Our eternity. Our souls. He chose and it changed the course of humanity.
- In the law as seen in Leviticus, God told Israel that they had the choice to follow him. To experience him and his blessings or not. Their choice.
- Jesus modeled choosing to surrender and then issued the same call as was in Leviticus.
Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done."
- Following me is a choice. And if you choose to follow me and surrender every area of your life to me, it will be the best choice you will ever make.
- My friends, what do you need to surrender?
- Maybe you need to surrender your life to him and accept his gift of salvation today.
- Maybe you chose to do that but now what is God asking you to surrender? Is it your priorities? Your sin? How you relate to others? How you reserve the right to your time and money?
- Right now, in this place, at this time, you can surrender that part of your life to God anew. The consequences of that choice, to surrender or stubbornly hold on to it, will have consequences consistent with that choice. You can do this today. Surrender. Jesus promises freedom.
- **It's your choice.**