

Sabbath Sermon: Do and Teach, Teach and Do

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First Fruits Ministries, an affiliate of Corner Fringe Ministries

Torah Portion: Yitro (Jethro): Exodus 18-20; Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:6-7;

Matthew 5:8-20; 19:16-26: <http://tinyurl.com/wrnxb6my>.



Shabbat Shalom, brothers and sisters. Today's Torah Portion is called Yitro, the Hebrew name for the man we know as Jethro, Moses's father-in-law. He is also known as Reuel, meaning "friend of God." Last month when we covered the plagues Yahweh brought upon Egypt, we looked ahead to this week's reading and I explained how Jethro confessed the Truth of God because of the testimony Moses brought to him from Egypt. Jethro came into the faith because he heard what God had done to liberate His people from bondage, and this is the very reason why God freed Israel from bondage in Egypt the way He did. We also spoke about how this freedom from bondage was a prophetic template—a type for what we experience in Yeshua when we trust in the Blood of the Lamb, just as Israel did in Egypt. I want to start here today, because Jethro's confession is a powerful reminder of how our faith is structured, even if we were not eye witnesses to the sacrifice, and it sets the stage for the main message today. We read from Exodus 18 (Exodus 18:8-12): "And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them." The key words here are that Moses told his father-in-law "all that the LORD had done" to deliver them from bondage. Our sister shared a sermon with us recently from Charles Spurgeon, called, "The Sweet Uses of Adversity" (<https://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs283.pdf>), and if you haven't read it yet, I highly recommend that you do. Let me know if you need a link and I'll get it to you. One of the most salient points in Spurgeon's sermon was how the LORD brings us through adversity so He can deliver us for His glory, and in the process He also strengthens us and makes us closer into the image He designed us to be. When we go through the trials and tribulations of life, the LORD expects us to tell others about our experience, because this testimony of how He helps us increase our faith in the midst of them is what helps others to "taste and see that the LORD is good" and we know that "blessed is the man who trusts in Him" (Psalm 34:8)! If our audience presently has faith in the LORD, our testimony strengthens and encourages them. If our audience does not have faith, our testimony impresses on their hearts the reason to consider it and plants a seed for the LORD to develop. "There is no want to those who fear [the LORD]" by enduring as saints who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Yeshua

(Revelation 14:12, Psalm 34:9), we read in Psalm 34 and Revelation 14, and this ought to be our attitude as we go out with our testimonies in obedience to Yeshua. When we herald, proclaim, or preach our testimony, which is the testimony of what the LORD has done for us, our audience can strengthen their faith or come into the faith, make the choice to walk with the LORD, and consequently defeat any strongholds the enemy has in their lives. Paul asked in Romans 10:14, concerning this duty to testify: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” The word “preacher” here is the Greek “kérussó, which means to herald, proclaim, or preach, and this we ought to do by modeling Moses here; we ought to give our testimony on how the Word of the LORD has delivered us from bondage.

How important is our testimony? When we read Revelation 12, John explains that the dragon, who is the devil and Satan, the great serpent of old, the deceiver of the whole world, this enemy of our LORD, spends every last minute that he has going to war against “those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Yeshua.” Spurgeon also covers this in his sermon, and I want us to keep this in mind: When we put our faith in Yeshua and consequently keep the commandments of God, our life is not going to suddenly be perfect, and we cannot expect affirmation and blessing at every turn. If we do, we risk setting false expectations for the LORD and falling away from our faith in discouragement. We have to face the Truth head on, which is this: the enemy is going to come after us and he’s relentless. We’ve been warned about this repeatedly by our brothers who first preached the Gospel to us. The enemy is going to keep coming, which is what makes the testimony about what the LORD has done for us all the more important. Pharaoh wouldn’t let Israel go and even chased the people of God into the Sea of Reeds to his own destruction. Satan does not want to let a single one of us go, and he will keep coming until his destruction comes when the LORD returns. We ought to testify concerning the promise of the enemy's destruction. We can endure through challenges because we know how the story ends, we know what God has promised to us and we ought to speak about these things. It’s important for us to believe wholeheartedly that the enemy’s fate is sealed. We read in Revelation 12:10-11: “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Messiah have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the Word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” Our undying testimony about God’s Word must endure until our last breath, because we have been freed by the blood of the

Lamb and our very testimony, backed with the blood of Yeshua, helps us defeat the enemy.

Now Jethro was a Gentile, for all intents and purposes, and it's relevant that Moses, a son of Israel, brought the testimony of the Word of the LORD to him, and he believed, and I want you to ponder for a brief moment the final verse of this section; that "Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God." This is a type of how Yeshua would bridge the gap between Jews and Gentiles and bring all the people of the whole world together by His blood and by His Gospel. Now all people would love Him and keep His commandments, whether they are Jew or Greek, Israeli or Midianite. This is such an important point, but it's also a topic for a different sermon, so I'm going to leave it at that for now. What I want to show you here again is how Jethro responded to Moses's testimony, for this is the point of bringing you back to this passage. We read: "Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the Lord had done for Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians." You see, "Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done" and "then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the LORD had done." He believed, but he did so much more than this. He also confessed his faith and He confessed the identity of the LORD, which are two things we also must do. We read: "And Jethro said, 'Blessed be Yahweh, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, and who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them.'" What a powerful outcome. Moses testified that Yahweh is good because of what He has done and Jethro agreed, Yahweh is good because of what He has done. This is the agreement that we're looking for when we bring our testimony of what the LORD has done for us to those in the world. We know from Romans 10:9, Paul wrote "if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is LORD and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." This is about the identity of the LORD and our faith in what He has done. Jethro's confession, though not exact, has this same form. He blessed the name of Yahweh and confessed that Yahweh was greater than any other god, which coincides with what the angel declared in Revelation; namely, that the enemy has been conquered by the blood of the Lamb and by the Word of the testimony of the Saints. The grace God had afforded to Israel in rescuing them from bondage in Egypt was now being explained to others who didn't experience it directly, and because of the testimony of grace that God had offered, Jethro rejoiced, He confessed His faith and then He acted to give back to the LORD. He "took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to Yahweh." Later,

Jethro's sons traveled with Israel into the Promised Land, a legacy of obedience to the God who is greater than all other gods.

But first, we learn that Jethro offered Godly wisdom back to Moses, the one who brought the news of salvation to his ears. We know that all who call upon the name of the LORD will be saved, and as saved believers we become brothers and sisters, each one knowing the LORD, and we are called by the Apostle Paul to “convince, rebuke, [and] exhort [one another], with all long-suffering and teaching,” particularly as it pertains to the Word of the LORD (2 Timothy 4:2). This is one of the main purposes for coming together in fellowship, and with such instruction we can go out and declare the Word of God even more effectively, but we ought to do so without building strife, leveling accusations, or causing controversy. After Jethro sacrificed to Yahweh and ate with the elders of Israel in God's presence, which identifies him as a brother with them, He then took Moses aside and privately offered his son-in-law and brother in the faith some Godly wisdom—even prophesy. This is the right way to offer a rebuke or exhortation, and Jethro's good advice delivered the right way still carries weight among the people of God today. Jethro observed Moses answering the questions of each of the 600,000-plus men who came to him “to inquire of God,” and he marveled, asking why Moses did this from morning to evening. Moses responded, “I judge between one and another, and I make known the statutes of God and His laws.” Jethro responded: “The thing you do is not good,” which is not to say that it was wrong for Moses to do either of these two things. Jethro even clarified this, by saying: “Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out.” In other words, Moses needed to implement a method that would multiply his efforts, and he couldn't do it all himself. We too must have such a method.

What Jethro says next is critical to understand, for he talks about the way any congregation of the LORD ought to operate. It is a good model for any body of believers, any ministry, or any other discipleship effort. It is a model for how we are building First Fruits Ministries, and also the model for how Pastor Daniel Joseph built Corner Fringe Ministries. Jethro said: “Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall

judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.” (Exodus 18:19-23) Moses, being a man who honored his father-in-law and brother in the faith, heeded Jethro’s good advice, and I believe God was behind it, too, or Moses would not have acted. Consider the application of this passage for us today: A lead pastor or a leader of a ministry or other discipleship effort ought to teach the statutes and laws of God, and show the people how they ought to walk with God and what works they ought to do, and also bring the difficult matters before the LORD. That’s what I do here each week at the pulpit and in my prayer closet, and this ought to be done. But it’s also important that we look to God for the right time to appoint elders to help lead the people according to the Word of God that is taught here. The larger matters ought to come back to the lead pastor, but the smaller ones ought to be handled by the elders. Elders, Jethro explained, must be able men, such as fear God, men of truth, who hate covetousness. I think we all ought to aspire to be described this way, but for leadership, it’s required. As Pastor Daniel explained in his 45-part sermon series on “The Ten Commandments” (<https://www.cornerfringe.com/media/series/ph4jnscs/the-ten-commandments>), which considering the rest of today’s subject matter, I highly recommend you watch if you haven’t yet, “you shall not covet...” is the one commandment that only the LORD can judge. Covetousness is a matter of the heart, and only God searches the heart and knows us (Jeremiah 17:9-10), whether we covet a relationship with Him by abiding in His will, or whether we desire “all the things of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). This is why a pastor ought to have a calling from God to teach and respond obediently to that calling, and only God knows the hearts of His pastors. For a pastor, serving God has to come first before anything else. We ought to be willing to give our entire lives to God, not just our time or affections, because we fully trust in the Word of His testimony and the blood of the Lamb who freed us from bondage. His Truth, which is His Word, ought to cause such a state of awe in us, such a stir in our hearts, that we can’t help but speak of it day and night. We also have to be able to communicate it, to round out the list of requirements, and perhaps this is the reason why James wrote that “not many should become teachers,” warning that we who teach will receive “a stricter judgment.”

Speaking practically relative to First Fruits Ministries, I don’t think we will be ready to add formal elders until we have a steady 50 people coming in based on my reading of the Scripture, but that doesn’t mean we can’t have an informal structure based on where we’re at, or that God can’t do something different than we might expect. And whether anyone is actually called an elder in the church or not, I hope each and every

one of you aspires to the character that Jethro explained above that an elder ought to possess. Not coincidentally, these characteristics are quite similar to the character Paul describes for overseers and elders in 1 Timothy 3. They must be “able to teach,” which is the same as being able men, they must be “blameless,” “temperate,” “sober-minded,” “of good behavior” and so on, which is to be “a man of truth,” “such as fear God,” and they must not be “greedy for money” or “covetous,” which is the same as “hating covetousness.” Paul further explains, “he must have a good testimony among those who are on the outside,” which means that the pastor or elder is willing to go out and preach the Truth to those in the world who don't necessarily want to hear it, though gently. He has to take the Word of God that He learns from the LORD, and if an elder, from his overseer, also, and take this teaching out into the world, to multiply the faith. Right now, we don't have any formal elders, but one day when the LORD wills it, we will. For the time being then, the heads of households, our fathers, ought to be spiritual leaders—elders—over their own households, and their wives ought to be their counselors, and I'm here to help guide them through this. I'm also here for those members who don't fit into such a structure. But I think there's another level to this, since one of our church's main focuses is on building disciples for Messiah Yeshua. I'd like to see men and women rise up and participate in our Mighty Men and Women of Valor discipleship programs, for once we have some of you trained up in this way, we can begin to multiply the effort to become disciple-making disciples of Messiah Yeshua, and this is how the Gospel of Yeshua and the commandments of God become the foundation for revival all around us.

Honestly, whether or not we ever develop things into a formal structure like Jethro explained, I'd like to see all of you who consider First Fruits your home church to become disciples of Yeshua who make disciples for Yeshua, for how else are we going to fulfill the great commission that the LORD asked us to fulfill? Remember that Moses had brought the testimony of the Word of God to Jethro, and Jethro became a believer who was willing to do the works of the LORD because of this. One of Jethro's works recorded for us was to give Moses a model for multiplying his efforts, and “Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said,” we read in Exodus 18:24. Yeshua gave us a similar model for multiplying His efforts. Because Yeshua has all authority over all the heavens and the earth and everything in them, He commanded us to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” He promised to come with us as we do this, to never leave us nor forsake us, all the way until the end of the age. I know I've been mentioning this a lot lately, but I'm doing so today for a purpose. I want some of you to step up,

regardless of any formal structure in the church, and start leading efforts to fulfill this commandment; in whatever way the LORD directs. Clearly, I want to be involved in guiding these efforts, but I also think it's time that we start identifying what needs to be done in the greater community, whether deliverance, prayer, charity or something else, and then take the action to do it. These good works we ought to do, not because they help us achieve any reward, but because we love the God who commanded us to do them. This is not an easy road, and the LORD has made this clear. Few are the number of people who will find His narrow way, but that is why I intend to keep preaching the Word of God up here according to what it actually says each week, because I want each of you hearing this message today, and so many more than you, so that you and anyone else the LORD wills can find the way into the Kingdom.

Here's what the Word of God says, from a reading in Titus 2:11-14, where the Apostle Paul writes: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." It is because of the LORD's grace by which He has saved us from sin that we ought to live godly and righteous lives, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and we ought to be zealous for good works. The LORD has moved to save us and redeem us from sin, and nothing we can possibly do will accomplish this salvation on our own. However, because He has made us His special people when we trust in His grace, we ought to be zealous for good works, which is not exclusive to works of charity or good will toward men, but rather to both do and teach others to do the things He has commanded, to love God first and then to love our fellow man. Pastor Daniel Joseph of Corner Fringe Ministries pointed to this verse and its parallel in Torah yesterday in the 18th part of his series, "Why Christians Should Keep the Law" (<https://www.cornerfringe.com/media/series/scbkh5z/why-christians-should-keep-the-law>), another resource I highly recommend if you haven't seen it yet. As he pointed out, I'd like to call your attention to Deuteronomy 26:18-19, where Moses explained, "today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God, just as He has spoken." Again, you can see that the LORD offers grace to call out His special people to be a nation set aside for Him, but He expects His people to obey His commandments because of what He has done for them.

Yeshua Himself said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." When a man went to Yeshua and asked Him, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life," Yeshua responded, "If you want to enter life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:16-17). As if responding to the misled greasy grace Christian pastors of today, the LORD also said in Matthew 5, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." And He told us to follow Him, to fulfill all of the law just as He did. To the point I want to drive home today, the LORD explained the following, "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." The Christian life is not only about keeping the commandments of God because we love Jesus, but also teaching the commandments to others so they can keep them also, because we love Jesus. We do this not to earn salvation, but because we have received it. The LORD's special people are set aside to do this very thing: to trust Him, to keep the commandments of God and to make disciples, teaching them how to keep the commandments of God. To drive the point home, consider what else the LORD says here, and I'm going to elaborate on this today: "I say to you," Yeshua said, "that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." These are high stakes, for the Scribes and Pharisees were known for their righteousness, but were they truly righteous?

In Matthew 23, Yeshua presented a long list of severe rebukes against the Scribes and Pharisees, which you ought to review as you do your own studies. When you do this, please consider the rest of what I'm going to say to help you with understanding the details there. Let's review verses 27-28, which gives a great overview. Yeshua said: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." This is a harsh rebuke! Read the rest of the chapter—it gets harsher. In this context, perhaps we might consider it relatively easy to exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, according to Yeshua's definition of righteousness. But what is that definition? Also, what kind of lawlessness were these Scribes and Pharisees engaging in inwardly. How exactly are they hypocrites?

I think Matthew 15 explains this well. There we read, “Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Yeshua, saying, ‘Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’” Let’s pause here for a moment. Is it unlawful according to Torah for Yeshua’s disciples to eat bread with unwashed hands. The answer is definitively “no.” While Torah explains that the Levites had to wash their hands and feet before entering the Tabernacle of God to engage in sacrificial services, including those practices involving the shewbread, there is no such law in Torah that every believer must wash their hands before they eat bread for a meal. Instead, just as Yeshua said, this law comes from the oral tradition of the Scribes and Pharisees—it is a law of men and not a law of God. I think it’s important that we take an even closer look at this, because this understanding is often missed.

In “Everyman’s Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinical Sages,” by Abraham Cohen, we read an explanation that gives us a sense of what the Scribes and Pharisees might have been drawing from in their oral tradition. Granted, these teachings were not written down in Yeshua’s age and were only written down later, but again, they give us an idea of what that oral tradition might have been like during His time. We read, relevant to Matthew 15 (and Mark 7): “Whoever eats bread without first washing his hands is as though he had sinned with a harlot.” This may seem extreme, but it gets worse: “Whoever makes light of the washing of the hands will be UPROOTED FROM THE WORLD.” Really? Washing our hands is salvational? I think not, but it continues: “A person who despises the washing of the hands before a meal is to be excommunicated.” We read on: “There is even a benediction prescribed for the purpose.” Who came up with this benediction? It certainly wasn’t God in His Word. At the same time, I hope this shows you why the Scribes and Pharisees might have been coming down so hard on Yeshua and His disciples. These doctrines do not come from God; they come from men. They are not from the Scripture; they are traditions of the elders. If you think what we’ve read so far is off-base, though, I want you to consider how extreme these traditions have become. In the Midrash Sifre from Talmud, we read: “Even if they [the Rabbis] instruct you that your right is left, or your left is right, you must obey them.” What kind of authority were these men claiming for themselves? I want to show you a couple more examples of oral tradition that was later recorded to make the answer to this question clear.

If we look at Sanhedrin 11:3a, it reads: “A more strict rule applies to the teachings of scribes than to the teachings of Torah.” In other words, this teaching states that the laws of men exceed the law of God, which is the very subject that Yeshua is

addressing with them. If that isn't clear enough, though, consider this teaching from the Midrash, in Pesikta Rabbati, which reads: "A person must not say, 'I will not keep the commandment of the elders because they are not from the Torah. The Almighty says to such a person, 'No, my son! Rather all that they decree upon you, observe! As it is written, 'According to the instruction which they teach.' Even I [God] must obey their decree, as it is written, 'You will decree, and He will fulfill it.'" Talk about misinterpreting the Scriptures. Contrast this with what Yeshua said, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Yeshua was God who came in the flesh, but God the Son obeyed the will of God the Father, because He could not contradict His own Word. And while we can observe the divine elegance of God's unity in Messiah, these Scribes and Pharisees believed that God would obey them when they spoke. I want to clarify that this mentality is not exclusive to the Scribes and Pharisees, and not even just to Rabbinical Jews, but we see this same blasphemy in mainstream Christianity today, in catechisms and in commentaries. Rather than believe the commandments of God, most pastors believe the "tradition of the elders" who declared the Sabbath could be changed from Saturday to Sunday or that we could celebrate a pagan festival to Ishtar instead of the Passover about which Yeshua said, "Do this in memory of Me." Let's hear what Yeshua has to say about this.

Turning back to Matthew 15, Yeshua sets the record straight. When the Scribes and Pharisees asked Him, why do your disciples transgress the "tradition of the elders" and not wash their hands before eating bread, He answered and said to them, 'Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God'—then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" (Matthew 15:1-9) In His example here, Yeshua cites the fifth commandment, honor your father and your mother, which He interprets, in part, as taking care of our folks in their old age. The Scribes and Pharisees had come up with an oral tradition called "Corban," which explained that Jews could donate money to the Temple or local synagogue instead of care for their parents. In effect, Yeshua is calling them out for violating God's commandments by inventing their own rules, and for this he calls them hypocrites. If our righteousness must exceed the Scribes and Pharisees to enter Heaven, we ought to heed their teaching on Torah as it applies in Spirit and Truth, but

more importantly hold to the commandments of God, which are superior in every way to any teaching of men. Let us always go back to the Word of God to verify everything that any man says, including me, for only the Word of God has authority in Spirit and in Truth.

Matthew 24 ends with a parable about the wise and faithful servant and a wicked servant, and I want to bring you here simply to hammer the point home that we must both do and teach the commandments of God first before we do anything else, for this is how we exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. In the parable, which I've put up on the screen, you can see that the wise servant, whom the master has set over his household to give them food at the proper time, will be doing the work the master commanded them to do when the master returns from His journey. In other words, the wise servant, who will inherit all of the LORD's possessions, is teaching the Word of God, the Bread of Life, to the people who have faith in the LORD, while they wait for Yeshua to return. I'm certainly tempted to say "the proper time" is Shabbat, and I do believe that we ought to be doing this each week when we gather together here, but I don't want to limit our teaching of the commandments to Shabbat, because Yeshua commanded us to make disciples and teach the commandments of God in general, and I think wise servants ought to be doing this all the time, both "in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2)—every chance we get. The wicked servants, on the other hand, are beating their fellow servants and eating and drinking with drunkards. In other words, they are persecuting the believers who are teaching the commandments. They are doing this specifically because they are also living a life of lawlessness, teaching falsely perhaps that love is affirming and never corrects wrongdoing or simply that grace covers all, even those who "practice lawlessness." Such Christians "turn the grace of God into lewdness," as Jude 1:4 explains about the condemned. These wicked servants will not make it into the Kingdom of God, Yeshua explains. They will be cast out with the hypocrites, where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." As Yeshua said in Matthew 7, if we say "Lord, Lord" but "practice lawlessness," the LORD will say "depart from Me," even if we did perform "all kinds of wonders in His name." It's not the wonders that matter as much as our names being registered in the Lamb's Book of Life. Yeshua called the Scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, who will be among those cast out where there "is weeping and gnashing of teeth," according to this parable. He said we must exceed their righteousness to make it into the Kingdom of Heaven. Surely we can exceed their righteousness by simply obeying the commandments of God, and surely we fulfill this in our lives because we love our Savior and want to build a good relationship with Him—this is what pleases Him.

John wrote in 1 John 5:3, confirming what we've discussed so far: "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." The Scribes and Pharisees "bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers," Yeshua said in Matthew 23. They sit in Moses's seat, so we ought to observe what they tell us to observe in that light. In other words, what our leaders say relative to Torah, we ought to observe and do. However, it's important to recognize that the commandments of the LORD are not burdensome, and we ought to both do and teach them according to what our Rabbi Yeshua has taught us, for He doesn't just sit in Moses's seat, but He is also the One Who gave the commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai, for He is the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Only God can give us commandments that are for our good, and this principle is critical to consider when we come across Yeshua's saying in John 13:34, where we read: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another," we ought to take this to heart. The command to love one another is not new; Leviticus 19:18 commands: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In Exodus 23:4, the LORD commanded us to love our enemy by returning his ox or donkey to him if it is lost. So what's new? The LORD had come in the flesh to dwell among us and show us by example how we ought to keep His commandments. Now that He has come, we have His example, to love as He loved us, and it is in this manner that we ought to love one another. This is how we will know if we are His disciples, if we love one another as He loved us. And we ought to be training up new disciples who make disciples to do the same.

Before we move on from this point, consider with me again how Yeshua strongly rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees and how he sent the rich young ruler away from Him sorrowful. Let's look at the rest of Leviticus 19:17-18 for a little more insight. There the LORD said, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." You see, we must leave vengeance to the LORD. We must let people go who wrong us and forgive them. However, before we do this, it is our duty to correct them. To truly love our brother and sister in Messiah Yeshua, it is important that we do not tell them what they want to hear, but rather, we must tell them the Truth appropriately, seeking counsel for help if need be before we do this so we can approach them with gentleness and love. After this, it is up to the brother or sister to go to the LORD and review the Word for themselves. They alone will answer to God in the end. Yeshua said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to

repentance.” That doesn’t mean the righteous are left out in the cold where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, for the righteous already have their names written in the Book of Life. It simply means that the LORD’s heart is “long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” We ought not wonder why the LORD delays in His return—He desires all people to know Him. However, we cannot interpret this verse wrongly and say that all will be saved in the end, for the LORD is quite clear this is not the case; He later told Moses: “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of my book” (Exodus 32:33). Thank God He makes room for confession, repentance and the forgiveness of sins!

This makes our calling all the more serious and important. If the LORD calls us to make disciples of all the nations, to baptize them according to His divine nature, and to teach them the commandments of God, then this we ought to do. However, our long-suffering God is a God of love—He will not force us or anyone to obey Him, and we can have no part in force, for force is not love. Instead, as the LORD instructed, “whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet” (Matthew 10:14). We are obligated to teach the Truth, but we must leave the decision with each person on whether they will follow the LORD. Paul warned us in 2 Timothy 4:3, “the time will come when men will not tolerate sound doctrine, but with itching ears they will gather around themselves teachers to suit their own desires.” I bring this up only to say that I pray this never describes any one of you who is hearing me preach this message. I’m calling for all of us to preach and teach the Truth when we go out to make disciples, as the LORD has commanded, and I’m praying that the Word we teach falls on fertile soil and grows. Yeshua prayed for His disciples saying, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth” (John 17:17).

I would be remiss if I did not remind you, when we teach the commandments of God the right way, we are going to be hated for it, even when we teach with gentleness and love. This doesn’t seem like it should be right, but I’m not the one saying this, and I simply don’t question the LORD in this but remind myself and you that this is the Truth. The Lord explained in Matthew 10, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. ... A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be

revealed, and hidden that will not be known.” We can expect to be hated, and we can expect persecution, lies against us, and all kinds of trouble because we are doing what the LORD commanded us to do.

In Matthew 5, the LORD gives us necessary context, which He also explains elsewhere saying “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6). Here in verses 10-12, Yeshua said: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Continuing, He said we must be the salt of the Earth, fertilizing the soil so the Word of God can be planted and grow. We also have to be the light of the world by using the Word of God to illuminate every situation. The light must be put on a lamp stand to bring the light of Messiah Yeshua into a house; it cannot be hidden under a basket, lest the darkness overcome us. When we teach the commandments of God properly by fertilizing the soil and shining the light of Christ, we’re going to be persecuted. In fact, if we’re not seeing persecution in our lives, we have to ask ourselves whether we’re doing it right. The writer of Hebrews explains: “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons” (Hebrews 12:7-8). We ought to rejoice always, and pray without ceasing, as Paul explains, while continuing to do the work He has called us to do, which is to keep the commandments of God and teach others to keep them, because of our love for Yeshua. As we go out and do this, the LORD is going to bless us—I can assure you of this, because I’ve experienced it. For every 100 people who either reject Yeshua or the commandments of God, or both, there will be one who comes to knowledge of the Truth, and the joy that comes from one soul coming to repentance reverberates throughout the Heavens and the Earth. (Luke 15:10). Yeshua said in Matthew 10:40, “He that receives you receives Me, and he that receives Me receives Him that sent Me.” When one more soul receives God within their heart, the Kingdom multiplies, especially when we spend the time to make that new believer into a disciple-making disciple.

Before we close, I would be remiss in skipping over Exodus 19 and 20, the two chapters of Scripture that explain what happened when God spoke His Word and wrote it on tablets of blue sapphire stone with “the finger of God,” a metaphor for His Holy Spirit. Perhaps I’ll get into this more in the coming weeks, but let’s summarize: When the people of Israel—who had cleansed themselves and prepared themselves

for the moment as the LORD had commanded—"witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw [God descend on the mountain in thick smoke and fire, with great quaking (Exodus 19:18-18)], they trembled and stood afar off. [And] then they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.' And Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin. So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.'" (Exodus 20:18-21). The LORD had given them the "Ten Words," which we read each week. In summary: worship Yahweh alone, don't worship any other gods; don't make an image of God to worship; don't speak falsely about the Word of the Lord; remember to keep the Sabbath day holy; honor your father and mother; do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; and do not covet anything of the world. The people were terrified by the LORD's presence and His voice because of this Word, but Yahweh had given them these commandments for their good so they could have a relationship with Him. These are the things the people of God would need to do and teach one another in order to show their love of the LORD, but the people stood afar off. They wanted to hear from a man rather than from the One who created the Heavens and the Earth and everything in them. When the people stood afar off and Moses drew near to the LORD, we can surmise from the text that the LORD kept talking to Moses, and what a marvelous thing He said. We don't find out what He said in Exodus, but in Deuteronomy 18:17-18, Moses tells us. There he wrote: "And the Lord said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.'"

This "prophet like unto Moses," Saint Stephen explained in Acts 7, is Yeshua, the Word who was made flesh and tabernacled among us. When He came, the same people who did not want to hear Him from the fiery mountaintop also did not want to hear Him speak as a man, and so they put Him to death. This was seemingly a tragic irony, but it was all part of God's plan to redeem us, for only His own perfect sacrifice could save us from our sins. After He rose from the dead, He appeared again with thunderings and lightening flashes, expressed in Acts 2 as voices and tongues of fire, this time writing the law on the hearts of men. Now, just as He promised, He would help us to keep His commandments; He would dwell with us and be in us. The only thing He requires of us is our love, and this love He fully explained, means to keep His commandments. As time progressed, the LORD continued to make the deal better for His people, and it is a very good deal for us, but in order to partake in the deal, we

have to do two things: we have to accept the free gift of grace that frees us from bondage—the Blood of the Lamb on the cross—and out of gratitude, thanksgiving and love for God, our hearts ought to desire to obey Him and to teach others to do the same. This is truly a small thing to ask. I often wonder why it is so hard for so many of us? Don't let it be hard—John has taught us that God's commandments are not burdensome.

I want to conclude with two passages at the end of Hebrews 12, for they present a dichotomy between the Old Covenant deal that the LORD gave through Moses at Mount Sinai, and the New Covenant deal that the LORD offered to us at Pentecost. You may be surprised to see that the warning against disobedience is more severe in the New Covenant, something we are not used to discussing in Christian circles, but something that Scripture bears out to be true. The LORD said in Luke 12:48: "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required." Here is what the LORD says to you and me, through the writer of Hebrews, especially those of us who are at risk of growing weary. We read: "strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; ... For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: 'And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.' And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.')

“...But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Yeshua the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.' Now this, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which

cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:12-15, 18-29). Brothers and sisters, as the End of this World and the realization of God's eternal reward approaches, if we have the faith in Yeshua and are keeping the commandments of God by both doing them and teaching them, then our names are registered in Heaven. But in this position, we must embrace the grace the LORD has given us by offering Him reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire. When He returns, every impurity will be burned up. We endure in eternal life by keeping the commandments of God because we love Him and want to be with Him, and by teaching them to others. His Word explains this, I believe it, for it is truly a message of hope when properly understood, for He will never leave us nor forsake us so long as we never leave and forsake Him. Let us encourage and exhort one another to endure until the end. Shabbat shalom.