

Sabbath Sermon: Building Right Relationships

Andrew J. Manuse, Pastor — 3/2/2024

First Fruits Ministries, an affiliate of Corner Fringe Ministries

Torah Portion: Ki Tisa (When you count): Exodus 30:11-34:35; Ezekiel 36:16-38; 1 Kings 18:1-39; Mark 9:1-10; 2 Corinthians 3: <http://tinyurl.com/bdedwj87>.



Shabbat Shalom, brothers and sisters in Messiah Yeshua. I'm grateful to the LORD for the joyful time He provided for us last week with Pastor Kraig's visit to New Hampshire and the company of several traveling brothers and sisters who came for the occasion, and I want to tell you this: I'm grateful for the joy I am experiencing seeing your faces here in the room today. This fellowship in the LORD's presence on His Holy, set apart, consecrated Sabbath Day is special to me whenever two or more are gathered in the name of Yeshua and come together to praise Him and hear from His Word with all faithfulness. I'm going to take a page from Pastor Kraig's playbook—for he is one of my coaches, after all. Please take a moment and share your love with your brothers and sisters around you by greeting them a hug or a handshake. ...

You know you're with brothers and sisters in the LORD when you can come together and praise the name of Yeshua together and feel like there is an eternal tie between you and among you. I can tell you that I experienced this phenomenon when I first met our brethren at Corner Fringe Ministries in Minnesota in the summer of 2021. When we came together and spoke about the goodness of Yeshua together, I felt as though we had known one another forever—and I believe there is truth in that experience, because we are united together by the eternal Father who created the Heaven and the Earth and everything in them, and He designed us to dwell together in unity like this. David wrote in Psalm 133:1, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity!" I can tell you that I've personally felt this same way every time I've gathered together with these brothers and sisters, and this is why we're affiliated with Corner Fringe, but I want to say something else, and this is important for you to hear: Since this church celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles in late 2023, and many of us met one another around or after that time, I've felt this same eternal tie with you. The LORD is doing a work here, I believe, and we need to both guard it and build on it according to the Way the LORD has instructed, with diligence and discernment to be sure—so we do not allow the enemy to defile us—but also with long-suffering, kindness and love to ensure that we are exhibiting the same fruit that God has shown toward us. Speaking of David, I want to show you an example in his experience that ties into what I'm trying to communicate about the timeless unity among believers that can only occur in the presence of the LORD. Consider 1 Samuel 18:1, where we read: "Now when [David] had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Does the LORD not command us: "love one another as I have loved you"? He also said everyone would know we are His disciples if we have love for one another (John 13:34-35).

Our God has this vision for us. When Yeshua was in the flesh, He spoke His Word for us, His deepest desire for us, His creative purpose for us—in the form of this prayer: In John 17:20-23, speaking in the presence of his disciples, He said: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” He was praying for His followers from that day until the Last Day—those who have total faith in the Father and show their love for Yeshua by obeying His commandments—to share in the joy of unity together; to be knit together in their souls. It is this very experience that draws people in who don’t know the LORD. When they see the love we have for one another, they will know that the God we serve is living and powerful, that He truly came in the flesh to die for our sins, that He has conquered death and rose on high and sits on His throne in Heaven discerning the thoughts and intents of our hearts, that He desires for us to build an intimate relationship with Him through His Word and share that experience with one another.

This is not to say that we will feel this way always or that we will always achieve that upward call of God in Messiah Yeshua (Philippians 3:14). There will be struggle, there will be hardship, there will be rebukes and corrections—sometimes in good faith and sometimes not—and there will be a need for our humility either way. To become intimate with God and one another, we need willing, vulnerable hearts with enough faith to stand with God as we bear one another’s burdens. Our hearts have to be sold out for Yeshua, completely and totally, for us to get to this place of unity with one another. If Yeshua is not on the throne of our hearts, it is impossible to get there. I don’t want to dwell on David and Jonathan’s story too long today, for it wasn’t a part of our weekly reading, but I do think there’s some lessons for us to explore in this episode that will lead into our reading in Exodus. Let’s read 1 Samuel 18:1 again before we move forward: “Now when [David] had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” I want you to notice here, first of all, that David was speaking with Saul, but it was Jonathan and David whose souls became knit together. Why not Saul? At the end of 1 Samuel 17, after David had defeated Goliath the giant on account of his complete faith in God, Saul called for David and asked the young lad about his heritage. David replied that he was the son of Jesse in Bethlehem. From there, the text moves into 1 Samuel 18:1, which is on the screen. Whatever else David spoke about with Saul wasn’t recorded for us in Scripture, but the discussion did nothing to move the heart of Saul. Why was that?

Saul, who was once anointed by Samuel as the first king of Israel, who was filled with the Holy Spirit, who prophesied in the name of the LORD and did all manner of wonders in the name of the LORD, had turned his heart away from the LORD toward his own way—toward

lawlessness. If you read his whole story, you'll see this sad truth in one example after another; Saul turned his back on God and followed after the dictates of his own heart, all the while thinking he was doing what was right. His life is a warning to us, so we do not fall in the same way. In his battle with the Amalekites that precedes our discussion, the LORD had commanded Saul to destroy everything that lived among the godless people who hated Israel, but Saul preserved the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs and all that was good, destroying only what was worthless (1 Samuel 15:9). He justified this by saying he planned to sacrifice these animals to the LORD—practically speaking, this meant he was planning to enjoy a feast with his men. In doing this, Saul disobeyed the LORD's commandments with dire consequences for his soul. The situation could not have been more serious. Listen to what Samuel said to the king: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the Word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king" (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Saul had a stubborn heart in rebellion to God, and the LORD understood that he no longer desired to follow the LORD's will. Following a representative dialogue with the prophet in 1 Samuel 15, Samuel explained to Israel's leader: "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you" (1 Samuel 15:28). David was that neighbor. In between scenes, the LORD directed Samuel to the sons of Jesse to anoint one of them as king to replace Saul. Samuel examined each of Jesse's seven older sons, but the LORD did not choose any of them. The LORD said to Samuel, as we read in 1 Samuel 16:7, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man seeks; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

The LORD chose the eighth son, the "youngest," the one who was "keeping the sheep," the "ruddy" one with "bright eyes" (1 Samuel 16:10—and we know the eyes are the lamp of the body (Matthew 6:22); a window of the soul. According to what we read in 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22, David was a man after God's own heart, the one who would do His will, and the LORD knew this about Jesse's youngest son because He searches and knows the hearts of men. In Jeremiah 17:10, we read, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." The LORD knew David was the man to lead His people. Despite the rather serious stumbling David would later experience, this son of Jesse would retain a heart of humility and contrition to the end of his life, and the LORD saw that from the beginning. As Samuel was standing in front of Jesse and his eight children, the LORD directed the prophet toward David: "Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!," God said. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed [David] in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." (1 Samuel 16:12-13). And truly, David never did lose the Holy Spirit of God because His heart always moved toward the LORD. We too ought to be men and women after God's own heart, both

loving Him fully and also desiring to keep His commandments, building a life-long relationship with the Father that resonates with everyone else who is doing the same.

At the end of David's life, Scripture records this important truth in 1 Kings 15:5: "David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." I don't want to dwell on the one act of stumbling to which David succumbed other than to say that we all fall short of the glory of God, even the best among us, and this is why we must always maintain our humility before the throne of Heaven and be ready to confess our sins and repent whenever we become aware of them. This is the heart God desires for us, according to His Word in Isaiah 66:1-2. There we read, "Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, And so they came into being,' says the LORD. 'But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and [he] who trembles at My word.'"

David exhibited this heart that the LORD desires, particularly in Psalm 51, following his grievous sin concerning the matter of Uriah the Hittite and Bathsheba his wife. He prayed, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You." (Psalm 51:1-2, 10-13). Any sin leads to death, and the LORD has confirmed this when He said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book" in Exodus 32:33. But the LORD is also faithful to forgive us of our sin and cleanse us of all unrighteousness when we confess our sin and then go and sin no more (1 James 1:9). He is faithful to use us to grow His kingdom and build relationships with one another in faith as we build our relationship in humility with Him. It is God's grace through Yeshua that saves us and sets us on this path—we do not deserve the love He has for us, but He desires to give it to us when we have a heart to serve Him and follow Him all of our days, and this was the heart of David, but not the heart of Saul, which the Scriptures prove.

And so, this brief overview of these two men really brings us back to the heart of today's message, which is this: "Now when [David] had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1). We know from this one verse within the context of the story and what we've discussed so far that Jonathan was also a man after God's own heart, and many other passages in Scripture also confirm this. Rather than go through them all, I'm going to ask for your agreement so you can follow me on this first point that I want to make, and that is this: It is our heart for the LORD,

our heart to love Him and obey His commandments that serves as the foundation of our unity with other brothers and sisters who also have a heart for the LORD, to love Him with all of their hearts, souls, minds, and strength. It is this love for God that enables us to have love for one another, and when two people share this love for God, this unity knits their souls together in the same way that David and Jonathan were bound as brothers. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't love unbelievers or doubters, for the LORD calls for us to love our enemies, also. Recall what the LORD said in John 17, which we also read earlier, that our love for one another and unity in our faith is the very thing that shows those in the world that Yeshua is of God. We serve as a living Gospel for those with eyes to see. And it is this exhibited faith that leads to salvation, and salvation that leads to obedience, and obedience that leads to multiplication through the shared love of God among all the saints. Saul, who had a disobedient heart and sought his own glory, could not recognize the love of God in David, and thus he would be eternally separated from God's mercy. Later on, with the craze of murderous jealousy haunting his soul, Saul would throw javelins at David's head and hunt him down in the wilderness, trying to end him, but Jonathan sought to save David from his evil father because of His love for God. The one thing that made David and Jonathan's relationship special was their shared love of God, and this is what ought to drive our fellowship here. We cannot have Sauls among us; we have to cultivate hearts like David and Jonathan, for this is what knits our souls together with the LORD for all eternity. When Jonathan warned David about Saul's intent to kill him and they saw one another for the last time, they parted ways in sorrow, but not forever. They gave one another a brotherly kiss on the cheek and wept, knowing they would not see one another again in this life, but Jonathan knew they would later dwell together in God's eternal kingdom: He said to David: "Go in peace, since we have both sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'May the Lord be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever.'" Pastor Kraig spoke about an analogous encounter last week regarding Paul and Timothy when they saw one another for the last time, and it brought tears to my eyes to consider the heartache of leaving the company of a true brother in the LORD. While Paul had preached the love of the LORD and the Gospel of grace alongside his brethren for many years, he was about to end his earthly mission. They would not see him again in the flesh, they would see his face no more, and this departure brought tears to their eyes. They all fell on Paul's neck and kissed him goodbye. These men were knit together in their souls. While they would depart from one another in this world, because of their heart for the LORD it would not be the end of their unity. In the Kingdom of God that is coming, all who call upon the name of the LORD will be saved. All who follow Him in all His ways will be raised up on the Last Day together, where we "shall always be with Yeshua" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is the relationship that the LORD is calling us to cultivate here and now, lest we fall short and fail to build this eternal relationship.

And so that leads me to the second point I want to make today. Who is God? Who is Yahweh? Who is Yeshua? What is His nature? Who is this Divine Creator who has made Himself available for us to know? We read in Hebrews 13:8 that "Messiah Yeshua is the same

yesterday and today and forever,” and also in Romans 10:9 that we must confess that Yeshua is Yahweh to be saved, and so when Yahweh revealed Himself to His friend Moses in Exodus 34:6-7, we can rest assured that this same character is His eternal nature that we are called to fall in love with first before we do anything else, even before we love one another. When the LORD passed by Moses, He proclaimed: “Yahweh, Yahweh God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and fourth generation.” This is a God I want to know intimately, and anyone who will ever enjoy true fellowship together with Him must feel the same way. David certainly knew God intimately, and loved Him, and appealed to His nature when he came to understand the sin that he had committed in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. Remember from what we read earlier, David said: “have mercy on me, O God, according to your lovingkindness, according to Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” David was calling on the LORD’s divine nature that Yahweh described to Moses to help him overcome his shortcoming and restore grace for his soul. Like David, we have to humbly cry out, “LORD help!” “LORD, save me!” We have a gracious God, and He desires to cleanse us from our wrongdoing. He desires to set us on the path of freedom. He desires a relationship with us to help us stay on the right track from that point forward. We simply need to trust Him and believe that He is who He says He is and continue on in faith, and this is literally what it takes to build a lasting relationship with the Creator of Heaven and Earth and everything in them as well as those fellow creatures who praise His Most Holy Name. On the other hand, those who walk in the guilt of their iniquity, which is another word for wickedness, these the LORD will “by no means” forgive. Saul was a man of this nature, and the LORD destroyed Him for “practicing lawlessness.” Yeshua told us in Matthew 7:21-23 that He would command all who do the same as Saul in their lives to depart from Him forever, but those who do the will of the Father like David will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

There’s another part of God’s nature that we ought to cover; namely, He is perfectly holy. When we sin, we cannot stand in His presence, for His holiness would literally consume us in an instant—God cannot coexist with anything that rebels against His goodness. Right before proclaiming His nature to Moses, God explained the solution to this problem. When Moses asked God to show him His glory, because Moses desired the intimate relationship I’ve been describing, the LORD replied, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of Yahweh before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’ But He also said, ‘You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.’ And the Lord said, ‘Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:19-23). Think about the sun that God has made, perhaps not visible on a rainy day like today, but it will be again soon.

The sun is so bright that simply looking at it long enough on a clear day would burn out your eyes and blind you. If you were able to fly a spacecraft near it, it would burn you up in an instant. God created that sun, and He also created many stars that are even brighter and more powerful. If we cannot even look upon the sun, let alone get close to it, how can we look upon the glory of the God who created that sun? In our fallen state of sin, we cannot. The LORD's glory would consume us in an instant, for "our God is a consuming fire." His holiness is pure, and just one sin makes us unworthy of standing before Him. But God is good, and He desires to dwell with us, to be near to us, so He sets us up on a rock of faith in Him. Prior to this experience, God covered Himself in a pillar of cloud so "[He could talk] to Moses face-to-face as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11) outside of Moses's tent. Now that God was coming in His glory, He covered Moses with His right hand so that Moses would be protected from His consuming fire. He does the same thing for us. You see, Yeshua is the "right hand of the Father" and today "He sits at the right hand of the Father."

When He came in the flesh, He showed Peter, James and John His glory on the top of Mt. Hermon, and they were able to withstand it, while bowing down in godly fear and worship. We read in Mark 9, "He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them" and the LORD spoke saying, "This is My beloved Son, hear Him." This is good advice, if we want to live. Right before He was crucified as the atonement for our sins, the Jewish Leaders asked Him to tell them plainly whether He is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, to which He replied, quite emphatically, "I AM," invoking the divine name for Himself and inciting their murderous, rebellious hearts even further. He then continued, "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). Peter later declared in 1 Peter 3:22 that Yeshua is sitting at God's right hand today, interceding for us. And so we can see through the whole of Scripture that it is the LORD Yeshua who covered Moses so He was not consumed, and Yeshua has covered us who trust in Him so that we can stand before God; His blood has washed us clean so that we can bow before God's glory for God's glory, but in order to obtain this protection, we must "put on Messiah." Paul writes in Romans 13:14, "put on the LORD Yeshua HaMashiach and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." And so, Yeshua Himself embodies the nature of God, because He is God, He is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." When we are in relationship with Him, He covers us so that we are not consumed by the glory of God and we can stand before Him, as a man stands before his friend. But those who reject Him and dwell in the sinful desires of the flesh will be burned up in an instant, for He will by no means clear the guilty who do not confess their sins and repent, by calling on the name of Yeshua. If we reject God's hand that covers us from His consuming fire, how can we expect anything other than destruction?

I want to really hone in on the relationship piece today, because I really think our eternal life depends on this more than anything else. It's not enough to confess that Yeshua is Yahweh

and believe that God has raised Him from the dead, for this salvational expression starts us off on the path toward God's kingdom but doesn't get us in through the door. When we have such faith, we enter into relationship with the LORD, but this is truly the beginning of our relationship. It is faith like this that saves us from the punishment for sin, but what happens if we don't grow closer to Him afterward and instead continue to serve other gods or even our own self interests? Messiah is NOT a minister of sin (Galatians 2:17). What happens if we worship our own image of Yeshua but fail to pursue the living God? The LORD said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15), and He also said that the love of God was the greatest commandment of them all (Matthew 22:37). Remember how we started today's message; it is the shared love of God that unites us as brothers and sisters who are knit together in our souls. Such saints are united in two ways: We have faith in Yeshua—who He is and what He has done for us—and because of this gift that the LORD has provided for us, we obey the commandments of God because we love Him. Because we have been given the promise of eternal life, Peter taught that we ought to be diligent to add to our "faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love." (2 Peter 1:2-9). We can only grow in this manner when we have a relationship with Yeshua, and frankly, we also have to have a relationship with other people who also have a relationship with Yeshua and can hold us accountable to His Word. We get together to edify and exhort one another, and sometimes even for godly rebuke to restore us on the right path in kindness. When we grow in relationship with the LORD in this way, we will "never stumble" and "an entrance will be supplied to [us] abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Messiah Yeshua." (2 Peter 1:10-11). However, if we don't build our relationship with the LORD and one another like this, but pursue other things instead, we will be blinded and may even forget that we were cleansed from our sins. Our relationship with the LORD is the key to eternal life. It's not that we have to check a box, dot an "i" or cross a "t." But it's not enough for us to simply provide lip service to our faith. When we love the LORD, and desire in our hearts to obey His commandments, just like David did and just like Moses did, He will come to us and dwell with us. He will show us His glory and cover us with His righteous right hand, and we can share in this together.

As I get into the final part of today's message, I want you to consider a thought. If you're married, picture your spouse. If you're not married, consider your closest human friend. How is it that we might show love toward the other person in the relationship and build that relationship and make it stronger? Isn't it by spending time with the other person and learning more about them. What makes them tick? What gives them joy? What gives them sorrow? Isn't the relationship then enhanced further by actually doing the things that the person likes and by not doing the things he or she doesn't like? I wonder how close your friend and you would feel to one another if you spent all your time studying a photo of him or her instead of actually getting together and sharing your time. Or what if you told the person how much you loved him or her while simultaneously doing the things they hate? Or what if you told a whole bunch of

people about your special person, but everything you said about them was a lie. How would that go for your relationship with that person? I think this happens far too often in our faith, and Yeshua makes special note of it in Matthew 15, quoting Isaiah 29, where we read him rebuke the hard-hearted who don't know Him: "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.'" These men had made their tradition and pride an idol in their lives and they forgot to include God and His way. Ezekiel 33:31 has an analogous prophesy. There the LORD addresses Ezekiel directly, explaining how the people seek him out to hear a Word from the LORD, but then they flatly ignore that Word. We read: "So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain." These thoughts cause my heart to mourn, for I could not imagine having such a relationship with the LORD or even with another person who is pursuing the LORD alongside me. How can we love God or love one another and build a true relationship when we are pursuing the things that only bolster our own interests? Honestly, I wouldn't even desire such a relationship with someone I don't get along with.

Sadly, this self adoration is the image of Christendom that I get when I hear of pastors getting caught in adultery or stealing from the collection basket, or church attendants who are checking their watch during the sermon so they can make it home before kickoff. Maybe they're even worried about overcooking the ham they left in the oven? It's also the image of Israel that I get when we read the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32. There are few stories that do a better job showing what a false relationship with Yeshua looks like. In Exodus 32:1-6, we read: "Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, 'Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And Aaron said to them, 'Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord.' Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." They had an appearance of godliness, but they denied the power of God (2 Timothy 3:5), and they certainly did not seek to know the God who had freed them from bondage. They sought their own self interests, their own pleasure, and they used one another in their depravity. The most obvious problem with this passage is that it directly follows the LORD's delivery of the Ten Commandments from the top of Mt. Sinai. The people had literally heard the LORD's voice rumble from the top of the mountain 40 days earlier, telling them that they

ought to worship Him alone; that they ought not make any image to worship, and now they were saying that Moses the man is the one who brought them out of Egypt and because he went missing they ought to make a golden bull to worship, in a similar way that the Egyptians worshipped their idols. They couldn't see their God in front of them, even as the mountain still rumbled with His voice. We might think the situation sounds extreme—like this couldn't happen to us—but how many Christians pray to images of Jesus, or worse, images of Mary or one of the apostles, while denying the power of prayer to the Father of life? How many deny Yeshua all together, saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since our fathers died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation,” when we know that He promised to return at a time we don't expect (2 Peter 3:4)? Perhaps they even deny creation itself and claim the Earth spontaneously formed itself over billions of years, when the Word of God clearly spells out how all things came to be. What about those who worship Jesus on days that were originally dedicated to pagan demons, thinking they are honoring Him through such sacrifice instead of the obedience He desires as our good, good Father? Do you know others who claim to worship Yeshua, but don't give Him any more thought than the hour they spend at church on Sunday, and are they even thinking about Him then? What about those who say they're Christians, but promote the murder of innocent children, or hormone therapy, or sexual perversions, worshipping their father the Devil? They may say the law is done away with and grace covers all, but by so doing they insult the living Spirit of grace. What about those who believe the LORD is a magic genie who will give them whatever earthly pleasure they pray for, when the LORD has clearly articulated that our treasure awaits us in Heaven. On the flip side, what about those who call on the LORD to destroy these same people, or others like them, rather than pray for those who are aimlessly lost in their own world, perhaps deceived by the spiritual enemy that wants to destroy us all. Were you like any of these? How did you break free?

When the LORD noticed Israel worshipping the golden calf, His anger grew hot against them, mourning their failure to turn toward Him. He said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.” Honestly, the people of Israel earned this response from the LORD, for death is the punishment for any sin and we don't deserve a do-over. These people had not only sinned, but they were in direct rebellion against the first two commandments the LORD had just given them. Some people in the church today would be cheering God on with such a response, but I don't believe this should be our heart. Moses, a prophetic template for our Messiah Yeshua, gave the response that we should all consider as he intervened for the people of Israel on account of his good relationship with God. He thought first about the glory of His friend, the LORD, and He went to prayer appealing to God's merciful, long-suffering nature as well as His glory to save his brothers and sisters who had gone astray. We read in Exodus 32:11-14: “Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: ‘Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people." This is a good model prayer for us. We ought to consider the Word of the LORD, what it says and what it means for our relationship with the Father, and appeal to the LORD's very nature as well as what the LORD has promised to His people. "He is long-suffering, not willing that any will perish," Peter writes in 2 Peter 3, "but [He desires] that all should come to repentance" and Moses interceded for God's people by reminding the LORD of this. This is not to say that God needed a reminder about who He is, only that He so desires a relationship with people who truly seek after Him in all of His goodness that it is literally this relationship we have with the LORD that can lead to the salvation of others. We can see that on account of Moses's prayer, the LORD relented from the destruction that the people of Israel deserved. I believe this was the LORD's plan from the beginning. He didn't have to make us the way we are, with a free will that often takes us off in the wrong direction, but He did, because He wants us to choose the right path by building a relationship with Him, and in that relationship He will lead us all the way into His Kingdom.

Now, when Moses made his way down from the mountain, we might be tempted to read a change of heart for God's mediator in the text, but that would be a mistake. After destroying the golden idol and rebuking the priests who had allowed the people to sin, Moses offered the LORD's grace to the people of Israel, just as we are instructed to do. Now granted, we ought not take vengeance into our own hand, for vengeance is the LORD's and He shall repay (Romans 12:19), but Moses was acting in a special role here as mediator between God and man. He was fulfilling a similar role to Yeshua's role in the New Covenant, a role He will fill quite analogously at the final judgment, separating the sheep from the goats. We should also consider this section of Scripture as a prophetic template for that time. Notice as we read Exodus 32:25-29, Moses called for the people to repent, and this is our job as we go out to love our enemies—those who are in rebellion against the LORD. We read: "Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, 'Whoever is on the Lord's side—come to me!' And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, 'Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother.'" We won't find out until we get to Numbers, when Moses conducted the first census of Israel, but the men of Israel

included more than 600,000 people at this point. Many of the people repented of their sins, but those who were hardened in their desire to worship the golden calf were removed from the congregation. In Spirit and in Truth, we ought to think similarly within our own congregation. God's Word is meant for us to get to know Him better. If there is any idolatry, any rebellion, any sin, or any wickedness within the church, we ought to identify it and eliminate it, while giving anyone involved with it the chance to repent and return to proper relationship with God. Paul taught this very thing in 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Corinthians 3.

Just as Moses did the following day, as we read on, Yeshua provided atonement for the sins of the people, but the LORD, according to His character, will still judge the guilty. As Exodus 32 concludes we read, "Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, 'You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.' Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.' And the Lord said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin.' So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made" (Exodus 32:30-35). What sacrificial love Moses showed for His brethren, and they truly didn't deserve it. Moses had not sinned, and yet he offered up Himself to save his neighbor, rebuking them for their sin in the process. This is the example the LORD wants us to follow. This sacrificial love is the very nature of our God, who came in the flesh and lived a sinless life but then sacrificed Himself, rising from the dead in victory, so we could trust in His deeds for our salvation and then follow Him into eternal life. Whoever sins against the LORD after experiencing the salvation Yeshua offers puts the grace of God to an open shame, and we cannot sacrifice the LORD on the cross a second time (Hebrews 6:4-8). We read in Hebrews 10:26-31, and I didn't put this up on the screen, so listen carefully: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Our hearts must turn to pursue a relationship with the LORD and one another because He has interceded for us, and He will heal us and help us when we do.

The same experience Israel experienced at the foot of Sinai prophetically points to what the LORD will do on the Last Day, as we studied a couple weeks ago. Jude, quoting from the book

of Enoch, wrote, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 1:14-15). Yeshua told us several times that He will separate the sheep from the goats and the wheat from the chaff. He will judge between the wise virgins and the foolish virgins, and He also said, those who endure until the end will be saved. Those who love the LORD by keeping His commandments and bring the love of God to everyone they encounter through living relationship with Him and one another, these are the ones who will endure. It's all about relationship. The people who gathered to Moses when he asked them to separate themselves from the sins of the people, these are the ones who were saved. The LORD sent His angel, His messenger, His Salvation ahead of them to guide them toward the Promised Land, but those who continued in sin would suffer punishment. At the End of all Days, this punishment will be eternal.

There's one more image I want to leave you with, for it really paints a picture of what it means to build a true relationship with God and one another. Recall that David, the man we started today's message with, was a shepherd tending his father's flocks. This was a metaphor for the End Days, for Yeshua, the son of David, is the one who tends His Father's flocks today from the right hand of the throne. The sheep who follow Yeshua know His voice, which is the living Word of God, and they reject the voice of the imposter who leads them astray. Yeshua said in John 10, where we read in part: "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. ... My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:14-16, 27-28). In order to enter the Promised Land, we have to not only have a relationship with the good shepherd, but we also have to listen to His voice, which is the Word of God. We can't just listen to the voice of the Shepherd, but we also must know His voice so that we know the right way to go. We cannot just follow the other sheep in the world, for those who don't know the shepherd's voice can lead us into great danger, and even death. It is critical for us to know the shepherd, to know His voice, and to know other sheep who also know the shepherd and His voice.

You might have seen this video before on YouTube, but I want to play it for you as we close, because it shows you the reality of this metaphor in real time. The first three people who call out to the sheep are imposters, and the sheep of the true shepherd do not listen to their voice. They don't have a relationship with the sheep and the sheep don't know them, but the farmer, He knows the sheep, and the sheep know His voice, and they come when He calls. These are the sheep we want to be. We want to know the True Shepherd Yeshua, we need to recognize His voice in the living Word of God, and we need to walk with other sheep that have the same relationship with Him. There is no greater joy in this life than to dwell in such a flock, and this is

the flock I want us to cultivate here. I pray that you agree that it brings peace and comfort to follow the good shepherd with other sheep who know Him, and that this ought to be the primary goal of our congregation, so that we can dwell together in eternal pastures with the ones we truly love. Shabbat shalom.