Leviticus 26

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Preacher: David Helm

[0:00] I want to title the sermon from this text, Put on your walking shoes.

! I want to argue from this text that the wonder of it all, the wonder of it all is this, that God would now even now, walk with us.
The year was 1940 and Kenneth Morris, a Southside Jazz musician whose band had played in the World Fair, the Columbian Exposition here, both wrote and published a gospel song that was titled, Just a Closer Walk With Thee.
That song, which stands apart really as part of our city's unrivaled gospel music history, would later be recorded by, well, so many artists, including Mahalia Jackson, Ella Fitzgerald, Little Richard got into it.
You ready for this? Even Willie Nelson did it. And for those of you who are even older than I am, Lawrence Welk did Just a Closer Walk With Thee.
[1:27] The lyrics capture the refrain of the chapter before us today. Here are the lyrics, at least to the opening verse. Just a closer walk with thee.

Granted, Jesus is my plea. Daily walking close to thee. Let it be. If you know it, do the last line with me. Let it be.
Dear Lord, let it be. Well, that might be the first time so many of you ever heard those lyrics. But take a look at Leviticus. Seems to come right out of the lyrical refrain, the melody of our reading.
Verse 3. If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them. It opens on the theme of Israel's walking with God.
Verse 12. I will make my dwelling among you and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God and you shall be my people.
[2:32] Verse 27. But in spite of this, if you will not listen to me but walk contrary to me, then I will walk contrary to you. Verse 40 through 42.

But if you confess your iniquity, the iniquity of your fathers that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies.
If then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember the covenant. I will be their God.
I will, in a sense, walk with thee. I will, in a sense, walk with thee. This idea of walking with God and God with us is an apt metaphor upon which this book begins to close.
Some weeks ago now, we opened this series with an understanding that they had set something up for God at the end of the book of Exodus, namely the tabernacle.
[3:40] God settled in. And the beginning of the beginning of the book of Numbers on the back side, they are going to be setting out with him.

So God, now having settled in with his people, is by the close of the book preparing them to set out with him.
It's walking with God. Walking with God. You know, last weekend I missed church. I was in New York.
I actually hit into the Zoom just for a moment to see that you were all still meeting. And you were. Praise God.
I was walking through Central Park at the time. I don't think I've done so much walking in a long time as I did last weekend.
[4:39] I packed my Nike walking shoes because I knew what was coming. And then I looked at my app on the heart monitor and the steps.

And on Friday I did 18,796 steps. Only to be exceeded on Saturday where I did 21,191 steps.

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Falling back on Sunday, the day of rest, to do 17,816 steps. But I've been home now for a few days. And on Wednesday, returned to my normal walk of 2,959 steps.
Walking. God walking with us. Us walking with God. The wonder of it all, by the time we conclude, the wonder of it all is that he would now, even now, walk with us.
What are the outcomes of a decision that you might make this morning to put on your walking shoes?
[5:56] Maybe you've never worn them before. By that I mean, by way of metaphor, you've never set out to walk with God. Certainly many of you have been coming now week by week, perhaps month on month end.

And have considered, do I really lace up those shoes and set out with this people in an endeavor to walk close with God?
Perhaps you took off those running shoes some time ago. You've walked contrary to his word. Perhaps you've been a Christian and yet feel like, well, I've been rather sedentary.
I'm not walking daily close to him. What are the outcomes of a decision for any of us here today who would decide on the backside of leaving the auditorium that I'm going to walk with God?
The first outcome is there really in verses 3 through 13. It's a wonderful outcome for those who decide to walk with God. If it says there, verse 3, you walk, and then we see a number of outcomes.
[7:08] For Israel, walking with God began to resemble a reclaiming of the Garden of Eden. It almost looked as if life was flourishing.

Plants were growing. Rains were coming. Food was harvested. Children were nurtured, cared for. Peace in the land.
I mean, you can see it there. Verse 4, the land shall yield its increase. Verse 6, I will give peace in the land. Verse 9, I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply.
That's like a growing congregation. And then, on top of it all, verse 12, and I will walk among you and I will be your God and you shall be my people. It's the echo of Eden.
Genesis 1 to 3 in the garden where he created man and woman with the expressed intention of dwelling with them and them with him.
[8:16] Indeed, it even says that he would at that time walk with them in the cool of the day. All of those images are here for Israel.

Having been saved by God, having set something up for God, now standing on the cusp of setting out with God, he's giving them, if you do it, if you do it, you will walk right toward Canaan, right into all the promises I have for you.
Right into the blessings of God that will be likened, as it were, to Eden of old. You know, there's another little song, Trust and Obey.
Trust and Obey. I'm going to bring you some of these old songs one day. Maybe I'll get Joe up here on the piano because we've got no one else that can do these other than you and me. But when we walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on our way.
While we do his goodwill, he abides with us still and with all who will trust and obey. Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.
[9:43] That's what this begins to look like in 3 to 13. Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies, but his smile quickly drives it away. Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear can abide while we trust and obey.

This is the image of any man, woman or child who today decides, I'm going to put on my walking shoes and set out day by day to follow God and his way.
Sounds wonderful if only the chapter ended there. You all were hoping she'd stop at 13 and have you be seated. But put your eyes on it, would you?
Verse 14, a very interesting three letter word that is one of the most important kinds of words whenever you're reading speech, which is what this is, God's discourse.
It's the word but. All the if then of glory and Eden somehow now, but if you will not.
[11:01] You know, when you see the word but in discourse, a speech, you're actually moving toward what they were getting ready to talk about before they ever got there.

I mean, let's say you go into a restaurant this afternoon. Let's just call it Medici. Medici for those of you who think you know better.
We know the man's name was Medici, but in Hyde Park, it's always been the Medici. But at any rate, you go in, you sit down, you go, I'm going to get that garbage burger.

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I can't wait to get that garbage burger. It's Mother's Day. I'm getting the whole thing. You sit down, you begin to look at the menu. And I'll be if you don't decide to order a Cobb salad instead.
I went in to get the garbage burger, but I got the Cobb salad instead. That's the thing you're wanting to talk about.
[12:03] That's the emphasis of your discourse. So it is here. The echo of Eden gives way, unfortunately, to the but of verses 14.

And look at it. Put your eyes on it. It ran all the way to 39. All the way to 39.
What's the outcome of not walking with God? Let me just make it pastoral. What is the expected outcome for Israel, the church today, the individual man, woman, or child who says, you know what?
I'm going to forsake my understanding of God, his word, and his ways, and his statutes, and I'm setting out on my own.
What's the outcome? Here's the outcome. You won't reclaim the Garden of Eden. You'll relinquish Canaan for a wilderness and the exile.
[13:05] That's what he's telling Israel. Notice how the four blessings of walking with God have now been reversed.

The blessing of having a land that increases in verse 4 moves over in verse 19 to heavens like iron and earth like bronze.
The blessing of peace in verse 6 gives way in verse 25 to a sword executing judgment within your cities.
The fruitful and multiplying nature of God's people give way in verse 22 to a letting loose of wild beasts which shall bereave you of your children.
Indeed, even the notion of walking with God, of him walking with you, it gives way. You're not walking with God anymore. He's not walking with you.
[14:15] The outcome across the page is verse 41. So I will walk contrary to you. Four blessings echoing Eden giving way to four curses that in every respect relinquish Canaan for the wilderness.

And even worse, it moves beyond four. Did you catch the repetition? I'm going to do something sevenfold, he says. You only hit four of them by the time you get to verse 26.
But then he moves on to catch all seven. He's going to put you in exile. Verse 33, I'll scatter you among the nations. And then verse 36, if that wasn't bad enough.
As for those of you who are left, after I've already decimated the land, hauled people off to Assyria, another group of people off to Babylon, those who are still around?
Well, if you're still around, I'm going to send faintness of heart into you and you will fall when no one pursues. And then the seventh fold curse, verse 38 and following, you shall perish among the nations, verse 39.
[15:32] And those of you who are left still, well, you will do nothing other than rot away in your enemies' lands. I mean, it's creation. In Genesis 1 with Eden was the seven days in which you have this never ending fellowship with God under his rule.

This middle moment in our text is a de-creating moment. It's a dehumanizing moment. It's God seven times over coming after you in the worst of ways.
What an outcome. So let's sit on that for a moment. I mean, let's make it real.
What do we make of this? Particularly, what do we make of God? What do we make of the character of God given this? I mean, this is like Nancy Sinatra.
Yeah, Frank's oldest daughter recording, These boots were made for walking. And that's just what they'll do. These boots were made for walking.
[16:43] And they'll, come on, you know this one. They'll walk all over you. That's God. That's God. What do we make of this? What does it convey to us about his nature?

Is God a conditionally minded God? Even worse, is God a judgmental God? Even worse, is God a spiteful God? Even worse, is God a cruel God?
Even worse, is God that harsh of a God? Even worse, is God evil? These are good questions that rightly rise in all of our minds.
Certainly that's what many people think. Let me just give you a couple Richard Dawkins. Familiar name to some, maybe not known by any to others here. A British evolutionary biologist.
A very staunch atheist. Evangelistically so. He says this about the God of the Old Testament. And see if you don't resonate with parts of it.

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[17:46] Quote, the God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character. And then he says in all fiction.

I'll tell you what you think of this too. Jealous and proud of it. A petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak. A vindictive, bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser.
A misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestitential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.
Dawkins. Dawkins is not alone. You don't have to be some educated evolutionist to struggle with coming to terms with what we just read.
Ordinary everybody kind of people. Christians and non-Christians alike are wondering what do I make of moments like this? What do I make of an Old Testament God like this? C.S. Lewis put our problem with God this way.
[18:49] The ancient man approached God or even the gods as the accused person approaches his judge. But the modern man, the roles are quite reversed. We are the judge.

God is in the dock. We are kindly people. God should have a reasonable defense for being the God who permits war, poverty, disease. He's ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God's acquittal.
But the important thing is that we are on the bench and God is in the dock. Or as a friend who is with me here this morning said to me recently, when I was growing up, God was good and we were bad.
And what we had to sort out was how do bad people come to know a good God? It's all reversed today. God is bad and we are good.
God is good and he has to give an accounting for literature like this. What do we do with it? What can we say about God as he's presented here?
[19:54] Let me say a few things. But what if there is a God who created the world and humanity with the express intention that it would be a moral universe under his word in which his desire was to have fellowship with us and we were to walk with him?

I'm not, I'm not, I'm just saying what if that was indeed the case? What if the very creation and then your life and being born into this world was meant to have the express purpose of you walking with God?
If that's the case, then we do live in a moral universe regardless of what we might think. Let me put it where I can get it.
What if this world is God's world and not ours? What if when we go about living our lives as though God doesn't exist, we're actually mocking the truth of the matter?
What if we are the ones that are creating a fairy tale, a pretend world? What if what God's really doing in the mess is putting up roadblock after roadblock after roadblock of you and me pursuing everything we want as though he doesn't exist, crying out for attention until we actually do see him?
[21:40] What if he just wants you to keep bumping into him through all the things that don't make sense? Could it be that we who bite the hand that feeds us are now ended up licking the bottom of the boot that's kicking us?

You know, that would be an ungrateful act for someone who's received so much to disdain the hand from which it came.
What if that's actually what's going on with us? What if we're ungrateful to God? What if he wants our attention?
I mean, think about Israel. This is within days of them making the golden calf. And yet he's still saying, wonder of it all.
Even so, I want to walk with you. What if the repetition of the sevenfold judgments should be read differently?
[22:56] What if they were really, God's not the God of second chances. The God of the Old Testament is the God of sevenfold chances.

What if all that we're reading here are the lengths to which he will go to get us to put on our walking shoes?
Well, that would be quite a different thing, wouldn't it? What if this wasn't a vindictive, immediately inbreaking of judgment, but what we really see in Israel's history?
It took 330 years beyond this text for him to execute on the fullness of the judgments. Let me ask you, are you going to wait 330 years for people who continue to walk not according to the moral

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universe or rightness or justice?
Of course not. Get this. He loves his enemies in this sense even more than he loves his own.
Guess how long it took from when he made promises to Abraham about judging the Amorites until their sin was actually full enough.
[24:06] He waited 330 years to get after his own family. He waited 430 years of kindness, patience, forbearance, hoping, turning, looking, speaking, making life not work.

So that you would one day go, I've been living in a fairy tale. It's ridiculous for me to think that I live in a world without God.
I've created a nightmare for myself. What if the Dawkins of the world, which come off with the learned wisdom of the world, will one day be shown to be the most foolish in the world?
Or dare I say arrogant? What if Jerry coined another one in our own midst is actually wrong? What if God exists?
This is God's world. And we are trying to do life without him. Then what we will be seeing here is the tender, disciplining, persistent, never leaving activity of God until we are stopped and turned.
[25:33] You know, this is the way the New Testament sees it. You got to stay with me on this.
This is really crazy because you and I think that I like Jesus.

Give me the New Testament. Don't give me the old. I mean, how many of us think that? The God of the Old Testament? No, thank you. No, thank you. God of the New Testament? Yeah, that's the one I want. Turn over if you've got a Bible.
If you don't have one, throw it up on your phone and take a look at this thing. This is Peter's summary of what the apostles thought between the God of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Between his preaching and their preaching.
I'm going to have you just look quickly. This is stunning to me. Acts chapter 10. Peter, the apostle who begins to proclaim Christ, gives a summary of the distinction between what the prophetic discourse in the Old Testament said about God, in contrast to what the apostles in the New Testament were saying about God.
Chapter 10, the book of Acts, beginning in verse 42 and 43. He says, And he commanded us, that's the apostles.
[26:45] He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify. That is, he meaning Jesus. So Jesus commanded the apostles, us, to preach to the people and to testify that he, that is, Jesus, is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.

To him, that is, Jesus, the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives, interestingly, forgiveness of sins through his name. The apostles' reading of the Bible was very different than our own.
They're like, oh, give me the God of the Old Testament. Slow, patient, steadfast, kind, receiving forgiveness.
Sevenfold opportunities. Time and time and time again. God in the Old Testament saying, forgiveness is yours. I'm waiting for you to begin with me.
But now that we're in the New Testament, now that Jesus has come, now that his son has put on his royal robes, now that he has executed justice in the world, sits at the right hand of the Father, is judge of the living and the dead.
[27:54] Well, now, the time of waiting, patient, kind, forgiveness, that's over. Now is the time for repentance. Now is the time to believe. Now is the time to bow the knee. Now is the time to know that there is one in the world, at the right hand of the Father, who will judge.

And you could be before him before dinner. What an inversion. I've begun to think that chapters like this, which are so hard to read, might actually be indicating something to us of the slow, working, patient kindness of God.
That his people would return to him. How long, let me ask you, how long has it been since you had on your walking shoes after having set out with God in faith in Christ?
When was it along the way that you took them off, put them in the closet, never put them on again, so that you could do life as you went? For some of you, how many years, how many months, how many days, how many decades, how many decades have you decided to live in a world that's a make-believe world?
As though he doesn't exist. The real wonder then comes, fortunately, that the chapter doesn't end there.

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[29:21] Come on back. Leviticus 26, the beauty. There was another but. I've got it right there in verse 40. Thank God for that word that it came again.

It isn't just but, you will receive all these things by walking away. But look at the way the text ends. This is what it's been moving toward. He's got another turn to take in the chapter.
But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers and their treachery that they committed so that I walk contrary to them. If then the uncircumcised start as humble and they make amends in their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob.
I will remember my covenant with Isaac, my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. Look at verse 45. For their sake. That is for your sake.
For the people's sake. And for the forefathers. I will remember the covenant that I might be their God. I am the Lord.
[30:25] This is the way it ends. The whole chapter has been moving in this way. And notice the appeal. The wonder here in the closing section is that God, even so, will still walk with his people.

They will recover not only Canaan, but then some. Notice the appeal. The appeal is not to the covenant of Moses under which the curse has come.
This is fascinating to me. Verse 42. He remembers the covenant with Jacob, Abraham, and Isaac. Now, while the covenant with Jacob, Abraham, and Isaac dealt with land, dealt with being God's people, there's a particular aspect of that covenant that you don't find in the Mosaic covenant that they've been reading about.
And it's the repeated frame in Genesis 12, in a sense, in Genesis 26, in Genesis 28, where he says to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, you will be a blessing to all the families of the earth.
I'm doing something that you can't do on your own. That's the covenant he appeals to. Not to the conditional covenant that he made with Moses, which we all fail, but it's the covenant that he made with Abraham, that he's just going to get done on his own because he knows we can't.
[31:46] And that covenant comes, unlike Jacob, who saw a ladder going to the sky and a reconnecting point of the promise, where humanity could walk up and down and actually traverse between heavens and earth.

But Jesus coming and basically saying, well, if you think I'm big, wait, you're going to see stuff. You're going to see the angels coming and descending on the Son of Man, indicating that Jesus himself is the one that gives access to the throne room of God, relationship to him.
He's the one that the angels descend. He's the open door. He's the way back. He's the road to your running shoes. He is the one. He is the one. It's unconditional.
It's all of God. And what does God get? What do we get? This is what you get. You get salvation. You get justification. You get glorification.
You get forgiveness. And what does God get? He gets you. He gets me.
[32:54] He gets me. That's what I'm saying. Put on your walking shoes because the wonder of it all from this text is that God, even now, would walk with you.

He'll walk with you. He'll save you. There is a fellowship sweet.
We shall sit at his feet. On that day, we'll walk by his side in the way. What he says, we will do. Where he sends, we will go. Never fear. Only trust and obey.
Tell me. How's your walk? Better yet, talk to me about your shoes. Even more, where are your steps taking you?
[34:04] I was 17 years old, sat in a piece of shop, had my own shoes on. A guy drew out on a napkin, two arrows, one going to heaven, one going to hell.

Differently, one going to Canaan, one going to exile, one going back to Eden, one going my own way. He says, which of these two lines are you on? I said, I don't know. I think I'm probably going to be all right in the end. He goes, no, you're not.
I know you. I watch you. You've never repented. You never believed. You grew up in a home where you knew these things. But you're walking contrary to the word of God. And not everyone gets a chance to turn around, repent, and get on the other road.
He basically looked me in the eye and said, what are you going to do? I said, I'm going to turn my life over to Jesus. I'm going to start wearing different shoes. I'm going to walk according to his word. I want forgiveness from my sins.
I want to daily commune with him. I want to get back to Eden. I want to get ahead to Canaan. I want to end up in heaven. It changed my life. If you're a young person here today, university student,

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high school student, I can guarantee you this.
[35:07] You will never regret walking out of this auditorium and remembering on that day, believer or non-believer, that day, I walked out with shoes on.

I was calling myself to Christ. And he'll take you wherever he wants you to go. And you will live in a world that isn't all right.
But you will live in a world in which you are pursuing him at the center of it all. Because the beauty of it is this. He wants you.
You. The desire of God is communion with you. Does it get any better than that? Our Heavenly Father, create in us, both believer and unbeliever alike, a new heart.
Give to us, even from a chapter like this, which is so strong in regard to the things we're required to deal with. But may we see your mercies in it.
[36:20] And may it move us to receive your word in ways that help us to walk with you. In Christ's name. Amen. Our steward.

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