

Leviticus 27

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[0 : 00] I've been walking with the Lord now for many decades.! And experientially, I can say beyond a shadow of a doubt,! When it comes to drawing near to God, that is when it comes to walking through life with God, I've often taken one step forward and two steps back.

What I mean is, I have a tendency to over-promise, but under-deliver. To say one thing, but then supply something less.

It's a discouraging reality when that settles in. By disposition, there are others who might actually be here this morning who have arrived at my age, or at any age, and have said, yes, this is what has kept me from setting out with the Lord.

I know well my frame and my frailties. And to make commitments to God, promises to God, to walk with God.

Well, I'm already quite aware that I'll fall short. And so for some, they don't think they can begin.

[1 : 32] For others, they are looking through life to begin again. For like Peter, who once promised Jesus, even though all these others will fall away, I will walk all the way with you, even to my own death.

Wow. Wow. And then Jesus looks at him and paraphrasingly says, really, Peter? Before the morning light, you're going to walk that statement back three times over.

I mean, at least for me, I take one step forward and two back. But he took one step forward and three back and then needed to learn what it would mean to walk again.

Let me put it simply. We put our foot in our mouth. Truth be told, we all know what it takes, some of us anyway, to swallow our entire leg.

God's not working with the sharpest tools in the shed, is he? True for me.

[2 : 52] Speech falls short. Words spoken recklessly are not fulfilled. For I and we do not have the constancy of character or disposition that belongs to God alone.

So what then? Israel now stands at the close of this book and in preparation of setting out with God through the wilderness.

In ten days' time, tenth day of the second month, they will leave Mount Sinai, upon which all these words have come, and they will begin to walk with God. God who demonstrates absolute constancy to all that he says.

He will accomplish everything, even when they're incapable of accomplishing little things. So what then? How will Israel, how will I, how will you, how will we, how will we walk on with God when our time in this book closes?

Fortunately, this last chapter in Leviticus seems to be aware that God knows that whenever someone sets out with him, there's going to come a time where he's going to need to accommodate himself to them once again.

[4 : 20] He's got a plan for it. This goes for the kind of vows Israelites might make.

Let me put it simply, the promises we make to God based upon what we want him to do for us. Have you ever made that kind of prayer?

God, if you will do this for me, then I will covenant to do this for you.

It's really the subject matter of the material, that strange material in verses 2 through 13. These are vows, the kinds of promises we would make if God will do something, and yet after making them, we regret them.

We wonder if we should have made them. We want to redeem them. We want to be released from them. We want to buy them back from God.

[5 : 25] Let me put a word picture on it. It was a woman in the Old Testament by the name of Hannah. She was barren, literally without child, and she was now aging well beyond the capacity to have children.

She was ridiculed by those in her home for not having children. She wept bitterly at what God had not done for her.

And so she, one day, walks into the temple, into church, and she makes just such a vow. She sits in the chair on her own, dejected, depressed, devastated, and says literally, O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor shall not touch his head.

The pastor, who was not really a very proficient pastor, had misunderstood what was happening, but nevertheless placed a blessing upon her. She went home and conceived, and then the day came when she gave birth to a son named Samuel, and the question is now there, what are you going to do with the promise to give him to me all the days of his life?

Imagine, then, what she does. Did she regret making the vow? Did she have any recourse if she wanted to get out of the vow?

[7 : 14] Would God be sympathetic of her own inconsistency, given his constancy? And the answer, according to chapter 27, verses 2 to 13, is yes.

There was a way forward for her, in light of the frailties of her covenantal promises, to keep walking with God. But here it is. While the promises she made to God mattered, they would come with a cost.

That's where this strange language comes in on shekels. You know, all of this material in chapter 27 are promises made by individuals that would keep the priesthood and the relationship with God mediated.

And so, if somebody like Hannah had said, I'm going to give my son to the ministry, as it were, and then she woke up one day and said, I think I don't want to do that.

What you have in these early verses is the cost given to her to redeem him or buy him back. Now, interestingly, and I'm sure that when that part was read, your mind highlighted on the distinction that of gender, the male and the female, and the male is valued at a higher level.

[8 : 37] If she wanted to buy back Samuel when he was over 20 years of age, it was going to cost her 50 shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary tables, which is four years of labor.

Now, if she wanted to buy him back, she would have been far better off buying him back in his infancy before he went off to kindergarten, because then it was only five shekels of silver.

But interestingly, the distinction is made, and you caught it, between the male and the female. And, of course, we're wondering, wait a minute, what happened to equal pay for equal work?

Something we should be concerned about. Why is the man worth more than the woman? It's not a sense in this text of intrinsic value. Please understand that.

God created man, male and female, equally. This is an agrarian culture where the value of the worker generally stated, thought that an 18 to 25-year-old male would bring in more hay during the day than an 18 to 25-year-old female.

[9 : 49] Now, of course, there are exceptions to the rule, but it's actually a value placed not on, I'm intrinsically worth more or less, but on the productive nature of what one might accomplish in that kind of day.

And so, she had opportunity. The kindness of God was ready to accommodate the frailty of her promise if she wanted to go back on her word.

Now, reading the story of the life of Samuel, it became clear that the mother never redeemed him, but she kept her vow in total. She didn't redeem him before the age of five.

She didn't redeem him between five and 20. She didn't redeem him when he was older. But here it is. God, people getting ready to walk with God, and God says, I know the difference between you and me.

I do what I say, and you often don't. And so, with the best intentions of your heart, if you are to vow or make a pledge to God concerning persons or animals, living things, that first unit of thought, there was the redemption.

[11 : 16] But notice it was a cost. Did you catch it throughout? I mean, you might as well glance your eyes through it, discover it for yourself, see it for the first time. You had to add one-fifth.

Now, what's God saying here? Your promises to me matter. And if you want out, that comes with a cost.

I guess as the book closes, we should understand that God is concerned with our speech as well as our actions.

Do you remember how the book started? God's concerned with the sacrifices that you would bring before him. As it closes, he wants you to know, I'm also concerned with the speech that you would promise before me.

It opens with offerings that will make you right with God, but it closes with obligations in light of what you say before God.

[12 : 21] And so God in this chapter is saying to me and to you, I'm quite aware of your frame. I know you are frail.

I know you are but dust. And I know that as soon as we set out on this road in the wilderness, your hearts are going to be filled with things you want to accomplish for me, promises that you'll make to me.

But when you wake up and wonder whether you really want to get that done, he was gracious in providing a way forward.

I suppose this is why Jesus ends up saying things like, you know, given all this, better not to make big promises to God. You know why certain books say when you go to church, it's better to kind of be quiet and listen rather than to try to get everything done.

Take care. Take care. Those of you who, like me, have walked with him for some time and know the frailties of your own promises and all the things you're going to accomplish, and then you wake up and you go, wow, I didn't get that done.

[13 : 30] I mean, it happens with us in all kinds of ways, doesn't it? I'm going to drop 20 pounds by the time July 4th comes. Well, July 4th is coming. I don't think I'm going to get that done.

It's one thing to not get done things with goals. It's another thing to say to a friend, you know, we're going to get together in a month's time. I look forward to that time together, and then you don't do it.

But imagine now the elevated nature of it all when we say to God, God, I'm going to do this for you. And he says, well, let's get one thing straight.

Your promises to me matter. I will accommodate myself to your frailties. You are not like me in any respect. The constancy of your word is as fickle as your own frame, but I will condescend that I might continue to walk with you.

Isn't that an amazing thought? That God will walk with us even when our own word fails? It comes with a cost. But what a kind God at the close of this book.

[14 : 41] This goes then for things we promise him concerning God. If you do this, then I'll give you that.

But it also goes, look at verses 14 and following, not just for vows of that nature, but things you dedicate to God, not on behalf of what he will do for you or might do for you, but things that you're like, let me talk to you about what he has done for me.

I got a house now. I got a land now. I mean, this is a very different movement here at verse 14 and a very different word.

It moves from vows to dedications. When a man dedicates his house as a holy gift to the Lord, the priest shall value it, so it shall stand. And that goes for land as well. Imagine an Israelite who was prospering and had more land saying, you know, I actually want to do more for the priesthood.

I want to do more for the temple. I want to dedicate a proceed, a patch of land, an acre or two, to actually further what the ministry and the church here and the temple is getting done.

[15 : 50] God said, that's great. And your heart is full. God has done this for me. I have something I want now to give to him. I dedicate it to him, whether it be houses or lands.

But this is the key then, is the movement of the text, is just as your vows before God matter and come with a cost, so what you dedicate to God matters.

And guess what? He wants it willingly, voluntarily, joyfully. He's not a God who just wants you to do all this begrudgingly.

Let me sit on that just for a moment. Think of Ananias and Sapphira. If you're not familiar with the scripture reading, it's a couple in the New Testament when God had begun to really do things for people and evidently had done things for them.

And so they dedicated a sale of land to the welfare of the church. It looked good on the outside. But they were actually giving something to God in hopes of what they would get from the community, namely recognition.

[17 : 16] In fact, it says that they kept some back for themselves. Selling land in service to God, but actually in their heart, out for a certain spiritual social status in the church.

John Calvin said, since it often happens that those who are under the obligation of a vow change their minds and are not eager and ready to pay it, nay, discharge it with much pain and unwillingness, God permitted that what was promised might be redeemed at a certain price in order that their offerings might be voluntary.

God doesn't want to walk through the wilderness with you through life and have you giving them stuff. And he's like, well, I don't need this first of all, and I'm grateful for it, but it's obvious you don't really want to do this.

This isn't fun for me, says God. I hope you buy this back. I want a relationship with you. I want willing, joyful service and sacrifice.

That's what he wants. He wants you, not merely what you have. There's nothing more depressing in church life than seeing someone doing something for God, but you continually get the sense that underneath it all, all they really want is recognition, standing, service, seeing.

- [18 : 53] Truth be told, it's already begrudgingly given all along the way. What a depressing way of life together. Lisa's father wisely used to say, if you're going to do something for God or you're going to give something to God, do it from the start and with a willing heart.

That's worth just playing back again. Do it from the start and with a willing heart. Given our propensity for these kinds of things, I love what our Westminster Confession of Faith says on lawful oaths.

If you're not familiar with this church, we look to what we believe through a confession that was made long ago, and they actually pick up the subject of vows and oaths.

It says, That's just a good check, a good balance.

God wants us to do things. God wants us to give things. But God wants it done out of an overflow of thanks to him. Your promises to God matter. They come with a cost.

- [20 : 23] They are to be kept willingly and joyfully. Finally, the text closes. And just a reminder again for how dull we are.

Verse 28 and following, But no devoted thing that's devoted to the Lord or anything which man or beast or inherited field shall be sold or redeemed. Every devoted thing is already devoted to the Lord.

Or verse 26, The firstborn of animals, as a firstborn belongs to the Lord, you don't dedicate it. What he's trying to say is, you know, there's stuff that he just already gets.

He's already laid out for you. So don't be coming into church going, you know, hey, I'm going to give you this. God's like, that's already mine. Thank you for the firstborn. I already told you the firstborn was mine.

So it's this wonderful, gracious word at the close of Leviticus. God says, here we go now. I'm going to walk together.

- [21 : 25] I'm going to keep my word. I'm going to remember the covenant, the promises with Abraham. I'm going to get your salvation done. I'm quite aware you won't be able to get your stuff done.

But I love you. I want you. I long to walk with you. And so when you're in a moment of discouragement, I did it again.

One step forward, two steps back. God says, well, there's a way forward. When you're in a moment where you say to yourself, really, can I start with him even when I know I can't always conclude with him?

The answer is yes. On what basis? What kind of God is this who's so tender with us? Well, you walk with God by stopping first at the cross of his son.

You let your burden down there. You let your discouragements down there. You let your sins down there.

- [22 : 47] You let your frailties down there. You say, I've been walking with you for a long time and I've got to get back to that. cross where he accomplishes the work on my behalf.

It was never dependent on what I did. This is the way forward. This is the way back. This is the way in. This is the way on. It's all there. The grace of God.

His kindness toward us. His mercies. New every morning. Every single morning. If you don't know that kind of mercy that I invite you today to say, I'm going to come.

I'm going to come anyway. I'm going to give my life to Christ who accomplished all things for me. If you've walked away, you're going to come and you're going to say, I'm getting back.

Getting back to the place that I first believed. I got to go back. And Leviticus closes by saying, you serve a God who's committed to loving, tenderly walking with you.

[24 : 03] You know, it's interesting and I'll shut this down with my friend Peter. Well, that is the Apostle Peter. You know, after he made that thing, that big promise, couldn't even make it last one night.

After the resurrection, word gets out that Jesus says, hey, by the way, I get it. Get Peter over there. Bring him.

Bring Peter. I'm still going to build stuff on him. I want to walk with him. These are the commandments.

And the statutes the Lord commanded Moses to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. and he gave you something much better than Mount Sinai.

But the love of God in Christ was saying to you this morning, get up. Come back.

[25 : 22] Get up. Let's go forward. Lord, our promises to God matter. You know that.

You're aware of the cause. You know they're to be kept with joy. so may we walk forward with him. Our Heavenly Father, we pray that our time in this book as archaic as these readings have been and as distant as it has felt before we've heard it explained.

we thank you for Leviticus. We thank you for teaching us how to draw near to you. We thank you for teaching us what our life should look like in light of the fact that you have drawn near to us.

And help us now as a church to walk forward with vibrant faith and joy committing all of ourself to you in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, let's get on our feet.