

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

October 18, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

## Commentary on Exodus 33:1, 3, 12–23

(Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

When Moses finally came down from the mountain and saw the sin that God had described, his anger burned against the Israelites. While he had pleaded with God to spare the people, he then called the Levites who then killed about “three thousand” (32:28). The rest who had sinned were then struck by the Lord with a plague (32:35). This destruction, however, did not fully satisfy the justice of the Lord who then told the people to follow an angel to the promised land rather than leading them in a pillar of fire as before. Moses, however, refuses to go without assurance of the Lord's blessing. This marks a shift in the relationship between the Lord and the Israelites. No longer will the Lord be among them but rather Moses will intercede on behalf of the Israelites at the tent of meeting. The tent that will soon become the Tabernacle will be a “portable” mountain for Moses and Joshua to intercede with the Lord. Despite these encounters in the tent, on the mountain, at the burning bush, Moses seeks a more intimate encounter. What Moses does not truly realize yet is that the Lord is beyond the comprehension of a mortal mind or even imagination for an imagination is limited by experience. The Lord, however, is the totality of all experience throughout all of time and space.

Exodus 33:19 - “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious”

Do you still feel like encountering God in prayer and communion is a privilege?

Do we tend take the unlimited power of God for granted because of Jesus?

Has Jesus become a good luck charm or an “ace in the hole” rather than a gift that can be taken away?

Are you still in awe of the Love that forgives and invites even you?

## Commentary on Matthew 22:15–22 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Upon Jesus' return to Temple after his triumphal entry, he was questioned regarding his authority (21:23). In response, Jesus told them three parables: the two sons, the wicked tenants, and the wedding banquet. The point of these parables was to call the authorities to repentance and true worship of God with their hearts. Instead of leading to repentance, the authorities attempted three times to trap Jesus. These traps can be viewed in contrast to the three parables. The first trap based on the payment of taxes mirrors the choice of the two sons. If Jesus says it is lawful to pay taxes but then refuses to pay, he is shown to be unlawful. This would result in the Herodians (Jewish authorities who supported Roman rule) arresting Jesus. If Jesus says it is unlawful but then tells his disciples to pay taxes, he is then shown to be a hypocrite just like the Pharisees. His response, like his parable, is not about the action but to whom the action is directed. Just as the emperor should receive what belongs to him, so God should receive what belongs to Him – our obedience and our heart. The test by the Herodians is followed by a test by the Saducees concerning resurrection. This test focuses on the state of the people rather than the eternal nature of God just as the wicked tenants focus on possession rather than ownership.

Matthew 22:21 "Give ... to God the things that are God's."

What is the foundation of your reality – your faith or your surroundings?

If God is the foundation of our reality, what in creation can threaten or destroy that reality?

If all things are God's, then is the future also God's?

“Emperors” or leaders from Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler to Henry VIII, Victoria, and George Washington have come and gone but God is the same always - does that give

you hope?

**Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The first letter to the Thessalonians was written when Paul was still expectantly looking for the second coming of Jesus. For this reason, apart from Revelations, this letter is one of the most referred to scriptures regarding the rapture. In anticipation of this second coming, the focus of the letter is holiness both personal and communal. Paul begins by giving thanks that the church of the Thessalonians has produced fruits of holiness recognized throughout the region despite persecution. Signs of holiness include the turning from idols, in the service of the living God, and anticipation of Jesus' return. The fruits of the Spirit manifested in the work of faith, labor of love, steadfastness of hope, and inspired joy by Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 “to serve a living and true God, and to wait”

Are you still waiting for Jesus' return or are you focused on you retirement?

If to wait is also to trust, should we spend so much time speculating about the end?

Instead of debating about the end, what if we focused on service now?

Is your holiness seen in how you treat yourself and others as children of God?

**Sermon "What is Holiness?"** (*[Sermon Video](#)*)

In his book "Wesleyan Grace Theology", Donald Haynes recalls going to a holiness revival camp as a youth. During that period, holiness was seen as a counter-culture movement in reaction to rock-n-roll, dancing, and more liberal sexual expressions. Holiness meant to be set apart from the secular world with all of its temptations. While holiness has been a hallmark of the Methodist movement, John Wesley argues that there can be no personal holiness without social holiness. Holiness, for early Methodists, was not a retreat from the world but a call to go into the world with the transforming power of God. The scriptures today explore what holiness is not, what it is, and how it should transform our world.

When Jesus was tested by the Herodians concerning taxes, the common religious view of holiness was one of separation. If Jesus said that paying taxes was lawful, the Zealots and those view everything Roman as unclean would have question Jesus' teachings on righteousness. If, however, Jesus had answered that it was unlawful, the Herodians would have been able to have Jesus arrested. Jesus' response not only avoided these traps but redefined how Christians would view holiness. If God is the God of everything (give to God that which is God's), then can holiness mean separation from the world. Jesus modeled holiness engaged in the world by eating with tax collectors and prostitutes. Jesus looked beyond human customs and saw only children of God who were lost and broken. While we might live in Caesar's secular and temporal world, our hearts and our minds belong to God. Holiness is not separation from but rather engagement with a broken and hurting world.

In order to engage in the world and still keep holiness in our hearts and minds, we must walk with God every step of the way. Moses understood this which is why he would not lead the people to the promised land without the assurance that the LORD would go with him. Just as Jesus told the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit, Moses would wait until he received God's blessing and presence. The "goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name" of the LORD is the Holy Spirit. Holiness is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and not separation from society. Walking every day with God being guided by the Holy Spirit is to grow in holiness. That daily walk changes how we view ourselves, our neighbors, and our world. It changes our actions and our beliefs about people and society. The closer we walk in the footsteps of Jesus, the more we find Jesus in every aspect of human

life. His compassion with the broken and his anger at injustice and hypocrisy. We begin to know the Gospel not only in our minds but in our hearts as the Holy Spirit takes root in our lives.

This transformation is what happened to the Thessalonians. Paul says that the word was not only heard but "also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction". This power could be seen in their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ". Their personal holiness not only produced the fruits of the Spirit but also became social holiness as it became a light to the entire surrounding region. When they "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven", they began to change their society. By living as God created us to live, we become a beacon of truth in a world of illusions. Holiness is not simply for personal salvation but is a means of grace by which Christ is made known to the world. Christians without holiness is like a car without an engine. It may look like a car from the outside but it will not get you to where you want to go.