

Immerse Day 50 :: April 9

Today we come to the end of the Book of Leviticus. (And there was much rejoicing! Yay!) It's been a long read, and if you've read this far, well done! The rules, and rules, and rules with little to no narrative storyline are really hard for us to read let alone understand. But through our small groups, blogs, and discussions together, I hope we've gotten a broader understanding and appreciation for this book, infamous among all bible readers.

Today, in the big finale of the book, we find the blessings of following God's law and the curses associated with disobedience to it. And they are drastic. If obeyed, abundance, plenty, peace, victory, success, fertility... everything we associate with "the good life", at least for an agrarian society. "I will walk among you," God promises, hearkening back to the Garden of Eden, the last time God walked among us (and perhaps hearkening forward to His Son who would walk among us as well?) And then the ultimate blessing repeated again and again throughout scripture: "I will be your God, and you will be my people." To be identified as God's is the greatest blessing there is, more than military victory, more than financial abundance, more than agricultural fertility. Unity with God rules it all.

But if you disobey these commands - this seems to be a universal disobedience of all laws rather than the breaking of one or a few laws - calamity strikes. Terror, sickness, military disaster... essentially the very opposite of all the blessings promised a paragraph ago. But in this punishment, there is grace for it is by ever increasing levels of severity, each level allowing for a return to God. Again and again we hear, "And if you still refuse to return..." or "If you go on breaking this Covenant..." God gives plenty of opportunities to turn back to Him, to repent, and it is the deeply hardhearted that will not in the face of such universal catastrophe.

Yup, God uses a very big carrot and a very big stick.

But what triggers this punishment? What brings this blessing? In true American form, we find ourselves asking, "What level of disobedience can I get away with before tripping God's alarms and bringing this calamity?" Over and over these past weeks we've looked at these individual laws with their individual punishments, when I think there might be something bigger going on here.

What if these laws are not a true false test with only binary answers, "obey or disobey", and a specific punishment for each. What if these laws are pieces of a puzzle that, when put together, form a beautiful lifestyle, a society, a community, in which God wants His people to live? What if these laws are not about individual acts but about a posture of the heart? These laws are all about Holiness, being different than the world around us *and being ok with it!* They are about treating each other lovingly, with respect and justice. They are about caring for each other with compassion rather than seeking your own benefit at the expense of others. God wants us to grow into these kinds of people, where all of these Levitical laws don't matter because we just do them without needing to be told or threatened with punishment. This is God's will, that we care enough about each other that we won't lie in court to get our way, we won't sleep around with people we shouldn't, we will honor God, His festivals (which are created for our own benefit and are in no way a burden), and His people, and we will seek His input on how to live our lives.

If this is the case, then we can see the closing blessings and curses in a new light. To break this law, not parts of it but the whole of it, is to live selfishly and without respect for God or His people. To obey this law is to allow yourself to be formed into the people God created us to be, bearers of His Image.

May we see this world as God sees it, live our lives as God desires us to, and love the Lord our God with all we have and our neighbors as ourselves.