

The Father Who Fights For His Children

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[0 : 00] Preaching to us, and we are in the book of Leviticus this evening, and we have plenty of visitor Bibles at the side, at the back, so if you don't have a Bible with you, please do grab one of the visitor Bibles.

And that's page 104, if you're using one of those visitor Bibles. Leviticus 25, and we're reading just the very last verse of chapter 25 and then through into chapter 26.

So Leviticus 25 and verse 55. For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

You shall not make idols for yourselves, or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it.

For I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary. I am the Lord. If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

[1 : 29] Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land securely.

I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land.

You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.

I will turn to you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and will confer my covenant with you. You shall eat old, store, long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new.

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 : 40] I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you walk erect.

But if you will not listen to me, and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, then I will do this to you.

I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.

I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you.

And if in spite of this, you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again, sevenfold for your sins. And I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron, and your earth like bronze.

[3 : 56] And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit. Then, if you walk contrary to me, and will not listen to me, I will continue striking you sevenfold for your sins.

And I will let loose the wild beasts against you, which shall bereave you of your children, and destroy your livestock, and make you few in number, so that your roads shall be deserted.

And if by this discipline you are not turned to me, but walk contrary to me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins.

And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall execute vengeance for the covenant. And if you gather within your cities, I will send pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the

enemy.

When I break your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven, and shall dole out your bread again by weight. And you shall eat, and not be satisfied.

[5 : 06] But if in spite of this you will not listen to me, but walk contrary to me, then I will walk contrary to you in fury. And I will discipline you sevenfold for your sins.

You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols.

And my soul will abhor you. And I will lay your cities waste, and will make your sanctuaries desolate. And I will not smell your pleasing aromas.

And I myself will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled at it. And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, your city shall be a waste.

Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbath, as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemy's land. Then the land shall rest and enjoy its Sabbaths.

[6 : 11] As long as it lies desolate, it shall have rest. The rest that it did not have on the Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it. And as for those of you who are left, I will send faintness into their hearts and the lands of their enemies.

The sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight. They shall flee as one flees from the sword, and they shall fall when none pursues. They shall stumble over one another, as if to escape a sword, though none pursues.

And you shall have no power to stand before your enemies. And you shall perish among the nations. And the land of your enemy shall eat you up. And those of you who are left shall rot away your enemy's lands because of their iniquity, and also because of the iniquities of their fathers.

They shall rot away like them. But if they confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery 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 my covenant with Jacob. And I will remember my covenant with Isaac, and my covenant with Abraham. And I will remember the land. But the land shall be abandoned by them, and enjoy at Sabbath while it lies desolate without them.

[7 : 45] And they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they spurned my rules, and their soul abhorred my statutes. Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them.

Neither will I abhor them, so as to destroy them utterly, and break my covenant with them. For I am the Lord their God. But I will, for their sake, remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt, in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God.

I am the Lord. These are the statutes, and rules, and laws, the Lord made between himself, and the people of Israel, through Moses, on Mount Sinai.

Well, amen. May God bless his word to us. Good evening all.

Please keep your Bibles open at Leviticus 26, as we go through this rather somber chapter together. Do you know, through the highs and lows of parenting, one of the things I find consistently most difficult, is discipline.

[9 : 05] Time and time again, when a little one misbehaves, it gets to a point where something needs to be done. Whatever form that takes, whether it's the naughty step, taking away privileges, or grounding them, or anything in between, it never comes easy.

As it's not what we want to do as parents. We want to give them good things, to bless them, to show them kindness. But, as any good parent will tell you, there is good reason for this discipline.

We don't do it because we enjoy or relish it. Far from it. Anyone who does enjoy or relish discipline has lost the big picture, and is probably the last person who should be doing it, as they're likely to lash out in anger.

But we discipline because we love our children. And any normal parent knows that. Our kids may not understand that, and feel like we're fighting against them, that even we hate them.

But we know ourselves, that we are fighting for our children, as we discipline them. As we hear in the book of Proverbs, whoever spares the rod, hates his son.

[10:18] But he who loves him, is diligent to discipline him. We do it precisely because we love them, and want to bless them. Good and measured discipline, always comes from a place of love, wanting to avoid greater harm, further down the line.

And here, we have a chapter in which God's fatherhood, is center stage. That's his role here. He's not a punisher of his people, venting his frustration. But he's shown to be the father of his children, raising them to bless them, and enjoy good and hearty life in his name.

So what kind of father is he? Well, he is the father who loves to bless his people, and loves to be with his people, to be generous to them, to protect them, and grant them all they need, in this life and the next.

He's not stingy, not grumpy, not reluctant to give his people anything good, but is full of grace and love, which he makes known through his blessings.

He's the father who truly knows how to give good gifts to his children, and who loves doing so. And he does so through this pattern of blessings and curses, where obedience brings blessing, and disobedience brings curses.

[11:39] And as we go through this passage together, it's helpful to have two vistas of fulfillment in mind of how this applies to Israel then, and to us as the church today. Israel as a nation are the first people we need to consider.

The Lord is the God of Israel. This covenantal agreement was given directly to the people of God, and this was how they were to relate to him, with obedience bringing blessings, and disobedience bringing curses.

This sets the pattern for the rest of the Old Testament era. But secondly, we need to consider us today as the church. Today, God is the Lord of the church, and we need to consider how we might expect to see the Lord's blessing if we walk with him, or how the Lord might discipline us if we as a widespread group deny him and worship the idols of this day instead.

We are not a nation-state like Israel, so can't expect to see exactly the same blessings and curses as was true for Israel then. But we will see a pattern of how the Lord might interact and bless his church today.

We need to keep these in mind as we go through this passage. Because our obedience matters, and the Lord cares about how we respond to his grace. Sometimes we might think to ourselves that our obedience doesn't really matter at all because, well, the world keeps spinning, and we presume that God's going to bless us anyway.

[13:10] But this passage makes clear that the blessing of God is tied to our treatment of his law revealed in the scriptures for us. So we'll split our passage into three sections, seeing firstly blessings, then discipline, and the final word goes to hope.

So we'll see firstly, looking at verses 1 to 13, the blessing of obedience. And here we see that obedience to the Lord brings Edenic bliss, found chiefly in knowing and loving and serving him. This whole chapter is bookended in God's gracious work of salvation, almost enveloping it in grace. He is the God who, last verse of chapter 25, has redeemed them from slavery, and that's echoed in 26:45.

He's redeemed them from slavery, rescuing them from Egypt. And he reminds Israel of this, because this covenant, yes, it is conditional, but it is rooted in grace.

We'll misunderstand this completely if we lose sight of that. If we think that this is conditional alone, then we may begin to think that our obedience earns blessing. But that ignores the fact that we have been saved by God's grace in the first place.

[14:33] This is conditional, yes, but it's always rooted in grace. And the Lord begins by reminding Israel what they are saved for.

That's what you see in verses 1 and 2. They function as a summary of the Ten Commandments, beginning this agreement with some of the laws given at Mount Sinai, focused on the Lord's worship. Verse 1, don't worship any idols.

And verse 2, worship the Lord instead. And there's a sense in which these commands are representative of the rest of the Ten. But in another sense, these are the front door to all the commandments.

And obedience to them indicates where a person's trust is. Worshiping the Lord on his day as part of his people and worshipping no one else shows where a person's loyalty is and who they belong to.

Then the covenant conditions come. And in these blessings, the Lord paints a picture of Eden, recalling language used in the Genesis account to give his people an emotive picture of what life lived in obedience to him is like.

[15:41] So if you, verse 3, walk in God's ways, observe and do his commandments, well, blessings will follow. And this isn't setting the bar too high.

The Lord is not setting an impossible standard, but is asking for a true repentant obedience where the people of God listen to and do his will and repent, say sorry, when we sin against him.

Then, verse 4 and 5, you will have more than enough food to eat. The rains will come, crops will grow, and your plate will never be empty. Verse 6, there will be peace in the land.

You'll dwell securely and no one will make you afraid. No wild beasts, no war in your nation. Verses 7 and 8, your enemies, well, they will be terrified of you.

And you'll defeat them even when overwhelmingly outnumbered. War tactics go out the window.

Five of you will overcome 100. 100 will chase away 10,000 with the result never in doubt.

[16:52] Verse 9, you will be fruitful and multiply, echoing both the Eden command and the covenant the Lord made with Abraham. Verse 10, you'll have even more food than you need, having to throw out the old store.

There's almost more coming and it's getting hard to find space to put it. But all of these are just preambles to the blessing of verses 11 to 13. This is the key promise, verse 11.

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.

Again, there is one picture that the Lord is giving his people here in their minds and that is Eden. As the Lord and his people live together at peace with the Lord himself even going for walks in the cool of the day to have a conversation with his people.

The tabernacle would still be his residence but he wouldn't be confined to it but walking around freely enjoying the company of his people. But this is here as a reminder that the Lord God is the source of all of these other blessings.

[18:07] They are not merely the predictable patterns of weather systems or political movements or army strategy but the blessing of the Lord shining upon his people working his way through these means that he uses.

We so often reduce everything in our created world to these neutral terms like weather patterns and political change decisions we make. But the Lord was clear with Israel that he was responsible for all these blessings.

And he's given them these blessings that they might end of verse 13 walk tall chin up heads held high. They're not slaves they don't have to be victims anymore they're not to have a victim mentality but they are free men and women walking tall because they have been redeemed by the Lord and are able to live like they were always destined to.

No longer crushed by their oppressive Egyptian taskmasters but free to obey the Lord and walk tall with him. And what a world that would be to live in.

And for Israel for brief moments in their history they did experience something like this. Particularly at the height of David and Solomon's reign they knew the peace security and abundant blessing that came from trusting and obeying the Lord.

[19:38] Now this doesn't mean that if we are faithful then everything will be wonderful and easy for us and we will face no troubles. Of course that's not the case and very sadly this passage is a favourite haunt of preachers of the prosperity gospel saying that if you have faith and do God's will then all your earthly desires all your earthly dreams will come true.

And now that doesn't account for reality of life in a fallen world and crucially it doesn't treat the passage fairly because this passage is not addressed individually to each individual Israelite promising to solve all their problems but to the corporate group to everyone to the whole people of God to show a trend towards blessing showing that the Lord's favour is on his faithful people.

The Bible is quite unashamed about that that there is a kind of blessing and good order that comes from living faithfully as believers as people who listen to and do the commandments of the Lord.

Why not read the commandment to honour your parents which comes with a blessing or read the book of Proverbs which is full of blessings that will come if you obey the Lord. And isn't that what Jesus means when he says don't be anxious saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear?

The Gentiles seek after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. [21 : 17] The greatest blessings we ever could have the blessings that really matter the blessings we really need are found in listening to the word of God and doing his will because that is the path to a life well lived.

The Lord's law is the way to the life of blessing. And so what Moses wants Israel to do is clear he wants them to choose blessing don't choose curses.

He paints this picture of Edenic bliss so that the people will be running towards it desiring the fruit of faithful obedience to the Lord desiring the blessing of God himself.

And next we'll turn to the consequences for disobedience as we look at the kindness of discipline in verses 14 to 39. And here we see that the Lord of creation will use everything at his disposal to draw his people back to the path of salvation.

There are a series of escalating curses that follow if Israel continues in her disobedience and refuses to listen to the Lord repenting of her sin. Verse 14 he says but if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments if you spurn my statutes and your soul abhors my rules so that you will not do all my commandments but break my covenant then I will do this to you.

[22 : 49] And what is clear from that description is that this is not painting a picture of one individual Israelite person sinning and being punished. Instead this is congregation wide sin for the people of God flagrantly sinning to his face.

Verse 14 they won't listen to him. Verse 15 they hate him and break the covenant. Verse 21 they walk contrary to they walk against the Lord's ways instead embracing the ways of this world of this age.

Verse 30 there is rampant idolatry. Verse 40 treachery against God spanning generations generational sin. This is serious and sustained nationwide sin against the Lord where they are taking his blessings for granted and repeatedly time and time again saying no I don't want to listen to you.

I want to go my own way. God's response to this sin is carefully measured. He's not lost his rag but is carefully ensuring that the discipline fits the sin.

There are broadly speaking five curses that follow which mirror the blessings of covenant obedience in verses 3 to 13 but turns them all on their head showing that walking away from the Lord means walking away from his blessing.

[24 : 23] So firstly there's the curse of disease and defeat in verses 14 and 17. When Israel first refuses to listen to the Lord instead of chasing away their enemies easily their enemies will eat of their crops and rule over them.

Verse 18 to 20 there's the curse of drought. If this continues and they still will not listen instead of the rains coming in their seasons the heavens will be like iron and the earth like bronze with no food to eat.

Verses 21 and 22 there is the curse of wild beasts. If this continues and they still will not listen instead of the wild beasts being away from them they will freely roam the land and attack their children and their livestock too.

Verses 23 to 26 there is the curse of devastation if this continues and they still will not listen to the Lord instead of knowing peace their enemies will rule over them as the Lord delivers Israel right into their hands.

Verse 27 to 39 the curse of desolation and exile if this continues and still still they will not listen instead instead of walking among them in love and grace the Lord will walk against them in fury he will smash their idols to pieces and even their temples and he'll devastate the land so the enemies think of it as not worth fighting for.

[26 : 00] What was all this fuss about? He will evict them from the land delivering them into the hands of their enemies and then the land of promise will finally get its rest from them.

It will be allowed to recover and breathe after the sin that Israel have polluted it with. And any who are left will be utterly ruined. Verse 36 they are so demoralized that even the sound of a driven leaf will make them run away.

Instead of chasing down their enemies verse 37 they will be haunted by the ghosts of war escaping enemies who are entirely imagined. And this all leads to verse 39 which is a desperate note.

And those of you who are left shall rot away in your enemies lands because of their iniquity and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall rot away like them.

The people of God his special treasured possession picked out of all the peoples of the earth left to rot in some Gentile country away from the Lord's presence away from his garden just like Adam and Eve banished from Eden under the curse for their sin.

[27 : 25] All the blessings of the Lord's presence have been taken away and we are meant to feel the pain of these curses. it makes for uncomfortable reading that makes you bristle doesn't it?

But we need to feel this pain. And so what are the key lessons from this section? first one is that the Lord will not be mocked.

The Lord is unashamed to take ownership of this and state that he is responsible for Israel's discipline and will not be mocked. If his people continue in sin he will act against them in discipline as he is not the God of presumptuous grace who will let his children run riot around him but who will lovingly discipline them in the hope that they repent.

Secondly the Lord disciplines with measured purpose because this is discipline it's not punishment. The Lord is not flying off the handle at his people and he certainly doesn't enjoy this.

That's why this punishment escalates in the way he outlines in the text because it's only after years and years and years and years of the Lord pleading with Israel and them ignoring him that he will send these curses.

[28 : 46] And Israel's history is littered with examples of that. Of the Lord sending messengers to plead with the people so that they would return. That's what the prophets were. Covenant enforcers who were sent to plead with the people so that they might repent and avoid the disaster that was heading their way.

So the next step of discipline would not come and that they would not be exiled out of the land away from God's presence on earth. And more importantly so that they would not be out of God's presence forever exiled in the eternal lake of fire.

The Lord was disciplining them so they would not end up separated from him forever. The stakes are high so the discipline is designed to help them realize that.

And thirdly, the Lord disciplines out of love. Discipline of the Father shows love for the Son.

He fights for his people even as he fights against them. These acts of discipline are a mercy as they are tasters of what is to come.

[29 : 59] As the people continue to be hard-hearted, obstinate, stiff-necked people refusing to turn to the Lord. But the Lord will not give them up without a fight.

He loves his people enough to be honest with them, to plead with them, to make the first move so that they would repent. And when do the people we live among most feel the pull towards the Lord? Well, often isn't it that they know they need him because they have gone through loss or pain. there are many people in the kingdom, probably many of us in this room, whose Christian story starts with loss, grief, or pain.

Perhaps you might be able to think of what it was that drew you to the Lord in the first place and know that it was a place of difficulty, of a source of comfort or security taken away, and you were crying out for help.

You finally realized your state. it may even have been a mess of your own making that drove you to your knees. And yet, it was there that the Lord spoke to you.

[31 : 12] It was there in the mess of sin and loss that he softened your heart, that you responded in humility and repentance and sought his blessing. There is a kindness to the pain that may come to us from the hand of the Lord.

C.S. Lewis spoke of how our western world has become deaf to God, that as we chase more and more pleasure in a time of prosperity and abundance, we have ignored God.

He writes, but pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures. He speaks to us in our conscience, but he shouts to us in our pain.

It is his megaphone to megaphone to arouse the deaf world. While what we call our own life remains agreeable, we will not surrender it to him.

What then can God do in our interest but make our own life less agreeable to us and take away the plausible sources of false happiness? It is just here where God's providence seems at first to be most cruel, that he most deserves praise.

[32 : 26] sometimes the kindest thing that the Lord can do is give us a little pain now to avoid eternal pain that comes from separation from him.

And friends, if we begin to sin and fail to worship the Lord, worshiping the idols of this world and inviting them into the church, the Lord may in his kindness take away our blessings so that we might be humbled and see our need to repent.

the church in Scotland could dwindle away into nothingness if she welcomes in and worships the idols of the day. God can take away his blessings and we would do well not to point fingers at others in their perceived unfaithfulness but to look at our own hearts, examine them and confess the sin that lies in our own lives.

Perhaps we are uncomfortable with the idea that the world is not neutral, that the Lord acts in history and in the present day to bless or to curse. Or we find it quite easy to read of this in the Old Testament but the idea that it may happen now to Christ's church, well, that doesn't sit well with us. We don't like the sound of that. But here it is clear, God is responsible both for blessings and curses, for these acts of nature, of politics and of war.

[33 : 53] The Lord is actively at work in our world and his blessings and curses are being played out in a multitude of ways. Consider the church in Corinth, who Christ himself sent sickness and death to because they despised the Lord's supper, pleading with them to repent.

repent. And when it comes to pain, isn't that true for the church in Ukraine right now? The church are facing war and famine in terribly difficult circumstances.

And yet, according to the Slavic Gospel Association, the church in Ukraine is growing. They're in the business of planting more churches as the Lord shouts to that country in their pain.

But that's not to say that every disaster is to be attributed to some sin. The Lord doesn't want us playing some cruel guessing game. That's exactly what Jesus explained when asked about a local disaster in Luke chapter 13, when the Tower of Siloam collapsed, killing 18 people.

Jesus said it's not for us to apportion blame, because they weren't more sinners than anyone else, even than those in Jerusalem, in God's covenant people.

[35 : 11] But he wanted his heroes to look at this event so that they also would not perish. Every act of God, whatever means it is worked through, is a kind and stark reminder that we are sinners who will one day die and must choose life.

We must choose blessing that only comes from knowing the Lord. The Lord uses these curses because he loves his people.

He is not punishing them, but is urging them towards repentance. He is shouting to them in their pain, making it clear that they need to listen to his words of warning and walk in his ways.

But how could a people, after all this sin, after generations of continued deliberate sin, how could they ever find hope? Well, that's what we'll see in our final section in verses 40 to 46, the final word of hope.

And here we see that the Lord shows grace to the humble, to those who genuinely confess their sin, are brokenhearted, and repent towards him. And the great shock of this section is that it exists at all.

[36 : 27] Because this comes after generations of Israelites have spurned the Lord and turned away from him. After they've denied and ignored him for decades, centuries even. Surely the Lord would be done with them.

Surely he'd be tired of them after all this time and move on. Pick a different nation. Bless someone else. They're clearly not grateful for it. And yet, he is patient, long-suffering, and steadfast in his love.

Just like the parable of the prodigal son, which in many ways mirrors the curses we see here, as he ended up amongst the Gentiles, jealous even of pigs for what they had.

But when he repented, well, our father delights when one of his lost children returns to him, humbly asking forgiveness. He gets the fattened calf out and prepares it for everyone.

Because just as in Eden, the curse is not the final word. Just as hidden amongst the curses for sin given to Adam and Eve, the serpent crusher was promised.

[37 : 38] And so grace is promised to Israel, and so grace is promised to us. No matter how disloyal and disobedient Israel would be, the Lord would never go back on his covenant promises, and he grants his people hope.

These Israelites who had been exiled, well, they'd even gone so far as to make themselves like the Gentiles. Verse 41, with their uncircumcised hearts. They were just like the nations around them, reveling in their sin and under the curse.

So what is the answer to their curse? Where is the hope? Verse 40, confess, repent.

And verse 42, trust that the Lord remembers his covenant. If they confess their sins, they may cry out to the Lord for grace, appealing to him to remember his promise to let grace always have the final word.

They could have assurance the Lord would hear them because of his covenant promises. He would remember his covenant with Jacob, with Isaac, with Abraham, and the land.

[38 : 54] And when the Lord remembers his covenant, he always acts in grace. grace, not cheap grace. Verse 41, amends must be made first.

And verse 43, the land will be given the Sabbath rest that the Lord promised it. And we stand on this side of the cross where his covenant in Christ stands for him too. Grace wasn't cheap for him either.

The price had to be paid. The blood shed by him stands as an eternal reminder, an everlasting plea for grace from our Father in heaven.

That is the plea we need to give. And the Lord in his grace will hear it, even though we don't deserve it. For verse 44, for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them.

Neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them. For I am the Lord their God. The Lord will not forget his people, not because they're worthy, not because of anything good that Israel had done.

[40 : 09] But the certainty of his promise rests entirely on himself and his covenant. For he is the Lord our God. He is the covenant God who is true to his word of grace, always pleading for repentance, that they might return to him and know blessing and life in his name.

That's why God's grace always gets the last word. And why even his discipline, even his curses are full of grace. Israel experienced that throughout their history with prophets preaching judgment to rebellious Israel, yet always offering grace to the humble.

Think of the prophet Amos, who after eight whole chapters of covenant curses and judgment declares that I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel. I will plant them on their land and they shall never again be uprooted.

Or the prophet Micah, who after giving three cycles of judgment to the people declares that the Lord does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love.

He will again have compassion on us. He will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. He will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham.

[41 : 29] Or take the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi. The day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

The message of the Lord throughout the prophets, throughout his covenant enforcers, his covenant preachers was constant. There is a judgment coming. So choose life.

Confess your sins. Believe and trust God to remember his covenant. For his grace gets the last word. He will forgive the sin of the humble. He will forgive the sin of the brokenhearted.

He will forgive the sin of the repentant. And it is the same message today from the God of the covenant. After all the curses promised in revelation, the Lord promises blessing to all who trust in him.

And the new creation, when we are with him forever, not with even a whisper, or an echo of the curse remaining, but only the blessings won for us by Christ. Only the goodness of God radiating out unfiltered as we enjoy him forever.

[42 : 51] For he is the God of the covenant. He loves to bless his people. And for us today, if we want to enjoy those blessings, it all starts with listening.

Listening to the voice of our father, as he offers us blessings or curses week after week, in word and in sacrament. That's what Israel failed to do time and time again.

And it's at the beginning of all these curses. If still, you do not listen. So friends, let us choose blessing and choose life by listening to the voice of our father and walking faithfully with him.

Listen to the voice of your father as he speaks to you. Listen to the voice of your father as he calls you back from your sin. Listen to the voice of your father as he wants to bless you.

It's God's grace to us that he has given us his word. And in it, we find these warnings of curses that will fall upon us if we are disobedient, both now and forever.

[44 : 02] That that word is not given to condemn us, but to warn us and save us. Because the curse does not get the last word. The church of Christ is to listen to his word as Christ stands before you and offers his blessing, both now and forever.

And that listening is to be followed by keeping that word. Because listening to the Lord leads to walking in his ways, as those who trust and obey him.

That's what our heavenly father longs for. His people with him. Walking with their heads held high, knowing they have been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

Because that's what we are saved for with him. To enjoy him and his blessings, both now and forever. And we do so by listening to his word of grace and walking faithfully in it.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father God, we praise you for who you are.

[45 : 15] That you are the God of the covenant who remembers his promises and acts upon them. And we thank you that those promises are true today. That anyone, that any sinner in this room with a humble heart who seeks your grace may know that life is in your name.

Please help us to live in response to the grace you have shown us by walking in your ways, by trusting that your way is the way of blessing. In Jesus' name.

Amen.