

# OpenTheo

## April 9th: Leviticus 19 & Mark 6:30-56

April 8, 2020



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Love your neighbour as yourself. Feeding the Five Thousand and walking on the water.

Some passages referenced:

Exodus 19:5-6 (a royal priesthood, a holy nation); Exodus 20 (Ten Words); Exodus 21—23, Deuteronomy 6—26 (expositions of the Ten Words); 1 John 4:20-21 (loving God and one's brother); Exodus 20:13-17 (the Second Table of the Law).

1 Kings 22:17 (Israel scattered like sheep without a shepherd); Ezekiel 34 (Israel under wicked leaders like sheep without a shepherd); Numbers 27:15-21 (Joshua appointed, so that Israel won't be like sheep without a shepherd); Ezekiel 34:11-15 (God coming to shepherd his people); 1 Samuel 21:3 (David receives five loaves of bread); Exodus 13:18, Joshua 1:14 (leaving Egypt and entering Canaan in fifties); Exodus 12:37 (numbered apart from women and children); Exodus 16 (manna in the wilderness); Exodus 18 (subdivision of the people under the elders); Mark 14:17-23 (Mark's account of the Last Supper); 2 Kings 4:42-44 (Elisha multiplying loaves); Isaiah 43:16, 51:9-10, Psalm 77:19 (potential basis for allusions to the Red Sea Crossing in the walking on the water); Job 9:8 ('walking upon the sea as upon dry ground'); Job 9:11 ('Behold, he passes by me...'); Exodus 33:17-23, 34:6 (God passing by Moses).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

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Leviticus 19 The importance of the body as something to be honoured and as a realm set apart to God is once again underlined here as it was in the preceding chapter. The Sabbath commandment in verse 3 is followed by commands that speak of the importance of honouring the things that belong to God, commands concerning the avoidance of false gods and the making of idols, and the proper practice of sacrifices. Verses 9-18 largely expand upon the second table of the law and sum it up in a positive concluding statement.

So in these verses we see the refraction of commandments into further distinct principles. For instance, the prohibition upon stealing also includes a commitment to give the poor their due of our produce. This section especially focuses upon not stealing or bearing false witness and synthesises these commandments into a vision for a just and equitable society where oppression and injustice are opposed, there is loving concern for everyone, native or sojourner, and everyone is provided for.

In this material we see also the seeds of prophetic concern for justice in society. If we just read the Ten Commandments by themselves we could be forgiven for missing this concern about social justice. But when you see the Ten Commandments expanded in the material that is ancillary to them you'll realise that this is actually integral to those principles, particularly the principles concerning not stealing and not bearing false witness against your neighbour.

Those things concern not just not lying and not stealing but giving people their due and being a society where there are not structures of oppression and institutions such as the law being used in a predatory way. Verses 17 and 18 parallel each other. They present an alternative to the nursing of hatred and grudges, frank communication with and love for one's neighbour.

We must speak openly and honestly and address our concerns to our neighbour in words and deal with them and start to resolve our conflicts. The focus here is upon our

neighbour with whom we are at odds. The second great command finds its first articulation in the context of our duty to love our enemy.

Jesus' teaching that you should love your enemy is something that is grounded within the Old Testament itself. Jesus is merely elaborating and developing something that is quite clear within the text of Leviticus 19 itself. And we should also note the way that the teaching here is similar in structure to the way that Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount.

So you have hate or a grudge within your heart. How do you deal with that? You deal with it by frank communication with your neighbour, communicating through your problems and through that you dissolve the conflict. Or you deal with the root of vengeance by pursuing love, and love being seen not just as a sort of state of mind or feeling, but something that is very practical and worked out in action.

That is how you deal with the issue of hatred in the heart. Leviticus 19 foregrounds the importance of right relationship to neighbour as the context within which faithful relationship to God can be lived out. While much of Leviticus is focused more directly upon appropriate ritual and relationship to God, in Leviticus 19 loving relationship to one's neighbour, to the poor, to the alien and stranger, to the blind, the deaf, the elderly, to father and mother, etc.

is presented as the testing ground for the truth of our relationship with God. As the Apostle John says in 1 John 4, verses 20-21, Verse 18 then is a version of the Golden Rule. It can also be regarded as a positive expression of the Tenth Commandment, an understanding that then can inform the entirety of what it means to keep the second table of the law.

The Tenth Commandment, the desire in covetousness, desiring what belongs to your neighbour, that is reversed in love for your neighbour. Not seeking to take from him, but to give to him. To give to him what is due to him in the way of love and also to seek his good, rather than to seek to take from him what is his.

The Tenth Commandment also propels our attention inward to the deeper reality that underlies our keeping of the law. It's not just a matter of external conformity to certain external actions. It's about dealing with the issues of the heart itself.

Love your neighbour also presents the negative prohibitions of Exodus 20, verses 13-17 in a positive form. So the law is summed up not in a series of do-nots. It's summed up in a positive injunction to love your neighbour and to love God.

The material that follows this, much of which concerns divisions, extends the sorts of concern for division and order that we see in association with the tabernacle and its service to other parts of Israelite life. And what such laws do is create a pronounced

sense of order and meaning in Israel's life more generally. Israel's life is a choreographed life, a life that has structure and order to it, where there are clear divisions, there are clear categories in which Israelites would understand themselves, their day-to-day life and the world around them.

And those categories give a sense of the holiness and the order of their life more generally. The similarity between their lives, which have these categories at play, and the life of the tabernacle, where those divisions and those categories of holy and profane or clean and unclean are of central importance. By regulating the sowing of fields or the making of cloth or the way that you would cut your hair and your beard, the law presented the entire fabric of the average Israelite's life as a matter of holiness and being set apart for God.

Even in the most quotidian events of their lives, they were supposed to recognise and remember that they belonged to God, that they were his people, and that they behaved differently for that reason. Verses 33-34 extend the principle of love for neighbour even further. The neighbour is not just the person like us, but includes the stranger and the alien.

Israel must remember that they were once the stranger and must show hospitality to the strangers in their land. And perhaps we can think back here to the story of Hagar. Hagar was a stranger in the house of the Hebrews, Abram and Sarai, and she was afflicted there.

And then they were told in the previous chapter that one day their descendants would be strangers in a land not their own, that they would be afflicted there, but they could not see the person in their own house who was suffering that fate. Now Israel has to have learnt its lesson. They were once the strangers, now they should be able to recognise and see the strangers, the ones who others would overlook.

They need to remember that they were once that person, that God is a God who takes concern for the outcast, for the stranger, for the widow, for the orphan, for the poor, and for the oppressed of the world. And they must treat them accordingly. That is part of what it means to be a holy people set apart to the Lord.

A question to consider. The ethics of Leviticus chapter 19 focus our duty upon love to our neighbour, the person who is in our path, as it were, whoever that person may be. Rich or poor, alien or native, or someone of high status, someone of low status, someone who is elderly, someone who is young.

It is not focused, however, as we often focus our ethics, upon a more general duty to just love everyone. It is focused upon a particular person, upon the neighbour, upon the person in your path. What might be some of the practical and the theoretical implications of this difference in focus? Mark chapter 6 verses 30 to 56.

And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages, and buy themselves something to eat.

And he answered them, You give them something to eat. And they said to him, Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat? And he said to them, How many loaves do you have? Go and see. And when they had found out, they said, Five, and two fish.

Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing, and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people.

And he divided the two fish among them all, and they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.

And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified.

But immediately he spoke to them and said, Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid. And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased, and they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore.

And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him, and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds, to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and implored him, that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

In the second half of Mark chapter 6, the apostles return from their mission, with news of their success. With Jesus they go to a deserted location to rest for a while. Like Jesus, they need time to refresh themselves and regain their strength.

And once again, Jesus and his disciples are treating the wilderness as if it were a base of operations. This might be reminiscent of the story of David when pursued by King Saul,

or of the story of Elijah the prophet. The wilderness is the natural place to reform Israel.

It's reminiscent of God's original formation of his people in the wilderness, after he led them up out of Egypt. John the Baptist was the voice of one crying in the wilderness. In chapter 1, and the frequency with which Jesus spends time in the wilderness, recalls his message and location.

The sea crossings might also draw the mind of the hearer of this text back to Exodus, and the Red Sea crossing. However, even though they tried to get away for some solitude, they are immediately recognised, and the crowd follows after them. Jesus takes compassion upon the crowd, as they are like sheep without a shepherd.

That expression, sheep without a shepherd, is one that is also used to describe Israel, after a defeat in 1 Kings 22, verse 17. It's also used to describe the state of Israel under the wicked and neglectful leaders in Ezekiel 34, and to describe the appointment of Joshua in Numbers 27, verses 15-21. Moses spoke to the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who shall go out before them, and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.

So the Lord said to Moses, Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eliezer the priest, and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey.

And he shall stand before Eliezer the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him, the whole congregation. And Ezekiel 34, verses 11-15 provides an even more startling background.

For thus says the Lord God, Behold I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out, as a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country.

I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God.

Hearing all of these verses in the background gives Jesus' statement added texture.

Jesus is recognising that Israel have been ravaged by their enemies, neglected and preyed upon by their leaders, and that they need a faithful, divinely appointed leader over them. Jesus is like his namesake Joshua, the one who will play the part of the shepherd for the neglected sheep, and will bring them into the promised pasture.

However, he is also God himself come to shepherd the abandoned flock. We might also hear hints of the story of the Exodus in the background here. Moses was the shepherd who led the flock of Israel through the wilderness with his shepherd's rod.

Jesus also crosses the sea, leads the flock, and provides them with bread in the wilderness. Jesus challenges the disciples to give the crowd something to eat. However, the scale of that task is suggested by their response.

200 denarii would be about half a year's wages. Jesus instructs them to tally up what food they do have to hand, five loaves and two fish. The five loaves might recall the five loaves of 1 Samuel chapter 21, which David received when he was fleeing from Saul, from the priests at Nob.

Jesus then tells them to sit down in groups on the green grass. Why mention the green grass? Well, maybe because they're sheep. Jesus is the shepherd and he's providing good pasture land for a formerly shepherdless flock.

They sit down in groups of hundreds and fifties. That's an interesting detail, as is the fact that only the men are numbered. This suggests that they are like a military company.

Military companies could be divided into hundreds and fifties and that sort of group. In Exodus chapter 13 verse 18, Israel left Egypt, and in Joshua chapter 1 verses 14, Israel entered Canaan in fifties. They were also numbered apart from women and children, in places like Exodus chapter 12 verse 37.

Here they are being given bread in the wilderness, as Israel was fed by the manna in Exodus chapter 16. In Exodus chapter 18, Israel is also divided into thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, under appointed leaders. And Jesus, by telling his disciples to do all of these things, seems to be highlighting their role as his ministers, acting on his behalf towards the flock, of which he is the chief shepherd.

He blesses and breaks the loaves and divides the fish, and the disciples distribute them. But it seems as if the miracle is taking place in their hands, not in his hands. We shouldn't miss the Eucharistic themes here.

Jesus treats the bread in much the same way as in the Last Supper. He takes it, he gives thanks or blesses it, he breaks it and he gives it. If we compare this account with Mark chapter 14 verses 17 to 23, and the description of the Last Supper there, further parallels can be seen, including the fact that it is in the evening, the eaters are reclining and that all partake.

All of this seems to offer a picture of the order of the Church. You have Christ as the chief shepherd, you have the under-shepherds of the apostles, and they minister to people who are divided into different groups. John the Baptist is Elijah, and in the previous account he's been described in a way that recalls the story of Elijah, in his conflict with Ahab and Jezebel.

Jesus is the successor, he's like Elijah. And Elijah performs a multiplication of loaves in 2 Kings chapter 4 verses 42 to 44. A man came from Baal-shalisha, bringing the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack.

And Elijah said, Give to the men that they may eat. But his servant said, How can I set this before a hundred men? So he repeated, Give them to the men that they may eat. For thus says the Lord, They shall eat and have some left.

So he set it before them, and they ate and had some left, according to the word of the Lord. Jesus then performs a similar miracle. The parallels really aren't difficult to hear, but on a much greater scale.

Not just feeding 100 people, feeding 5,000 people. Performing an Elisha-like miracle at this point may also cast the succession of Jesus from the Elijah-like John in sharper relief. The story of the feeding of the 5,000 is told in each of the four gospels, and each gospel includes the detail of the 12 baskets of fragments gathered up afterwards.

It's obviously very important. Why 12? Perhaps it's in association with the fullness of Israel. Perhaps it's to make the point that each of the 12 has a basket apiece.

In keeping with the ecclesiological themes, they are each equal partakers in the ministry of Christ. We should also remember that the story comes after they have returned from their mission. Mission to the last is followed by ministry to the flock.

Immediately after this, Jesus dismisses the crowd and makes his disciples go before him to the other side in the boat, while he goes up on the mountain alone to pray. Perhaps we might think of Moses ascending Mount Sinai here, but if so, I think it would only be a faint illusion. The boat, however, is caught in a storm, as at the end of Mark chapter 4. Jesus comes to them around the time of the dawn, walking on the sea.

And there's a peculiar detail mentioned at the end of verse 48. He meant to pass them by. They, seeing him, are terrified, thinking that he is a ghost, at which point Jesus assures them, gets in the boat with them and the wind ceases.

Once again, I think that there are anticipations of his later resurrection here, not least in the uncertainty about whether they are seeing a ghost, although I think there's more going on here. A number of scholars have connected the walking on the water with the Exodus and the Red Sea crossing, and have pointed to verses such as Isaiah chapter 43 verse 16 or chapter 51 verses 9 to 10 and Psalm 77 verse 19. However, Richard Hayes



suggests another background.

In Job chapter 9 verse 8, in the Septuagint translation, God is described as the one who walks upon the sea as upon dry ground. If this is the primary connection, it may also help us to understand the reference to Jesus' intention to pass them by. Because just a few verses later, in Job chapter 9 verse 11, we read In Job 9, God's walking upon the sea is associated with the mystery of God's ways, and the way that he passes by without our truly perceiving him.

Mark may be telling his account in a way that helps the hearer of his passage recall these verses from Job. The reference to passing by might also bring to mind Exodus chapter 33 verses 17 to 23 and Exodus chapter 34 verse 6, where God reveals his glory to Moses, passing before him while shielding him from the sight. Passing by is repeatedly referred to in this passage, connecting the notion with the revelation of God's glory.

When Jesus speaks to his disciples then, he tells them, It as I could also be translated, I am, a reference to the name of God, and that expression do not be afraid is commonly found when God appears to his people. The event of walking on the sea then is, for Mark, a sort of divine epiphany in which the identity of Jesus is being revealed. But although the disciples are astounded, they have insensitive hearts and they don't truly understand.

We are told that this is related to their failure to understand the loaves. What is that connection? Perhaps the connection is that their fear arises from an inability to appreciate the manner of Jesus' presence with and empowering of them. He has equipped them to cast out demons, he has enabled them to multiply the loaves, and his spirit and his presence is also with them in the boat facing the wind.

A question to consider. Reading the story of the feeding of the five thousand and of Jesus walking on the water, how can we better understand ourselves as the church in light of them?