

Sermon Transcript from April 3rd, 2016
Understanding the Old Testament
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We've been in a year-long initiative called The Year of Biblical Literacy and our hope this year is to know the Bible by actually reading the Bible. We've found that a lot of people reject the Bible but never read it, but just read Facebook posts on it and blogs, and that's not a good way to do that. So, if you're going to reject it, why don't you read it first? So, we think it's the most important book ever written, but we also call it a library of books. It's the most important library of book ever written.

So, you guys have been doing that, you guys have been reading through the Bible. And, as we have been reading through the Bible, we are starting a series today, a new one, through this Year of Biblical Literacy, that we're calling "The God I Don't Understand."

We'll be doing a little bit of heavy lifting this morning, so I really encourage you to pull out your phones or moleskin or whatever you take notes on. Take notes today. If you've never taken notes at church, today would be a really good day to take notes at church so you can remember some of the things that we're talking about, because I think this, today, kind of lays a foundation of like, how do we even start to understand and comprehend and thread the Old Testament and New Testament together?

One of the things that we do at this church is we learn. Sunday mornings are also a time of learning. So, we're going to be learning today. You guys have been in the Old Testament since January in your personal reading. Many of you are reading the Old Testament for the very first time or maybe the first time in your adult life. And you just started reading 1 Kings today. You just finished 2 Samuel. But, I want to start in Luke 24, and I think this is appropriate to start in Luke 24 because it's the Sunday after Easter. So, I think this text is very relevant. It's the account of when Luke, after the resurrection, writes this account where a couple of followers of Jesus leave town and Jesus follows them out of town and starts talking to them like a normal dude, but they don't know it's Him. It's the risen Lord. It's like classic Jesus. He's just walking with them and He's like, "Hey, what's up?"

We'll read it. You'll get it. Once I read it, you'll understand why I want to start here when we start talking about the Old Testament. So, let me start by reading Luke 24:13-25.

Luke 24:13-25, "Now that same day..." – meaning the same day the resurrection happened – "...two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they walked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

"He asked them, 'What are you guys discussing together as you walk along?'

"They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?'

Like, this last week. Are you kidding me?

"What things?" he asked."

Jesus is just like, "Come on. Tell me more."

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped...' – these were followers of Jesus – "...that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen visions of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.'

"Then he said to them," – now, check this out – "'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets," – which is the Old Testament – "he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures

concerning himself."

So, He was walking along this road with them and they're tripping out because Jesus was crucified and all their hopes were pinned on Jesus. But, they had heard He had risen from the dead, but they were leaving Jerusalem for some reason, I have no idea what was more important than that. They're leaving. Jesus goes and chases them down and says, "Why are you so foolish and slow to believe?" And then He gives them this Bible study that contains all of the Old Testament and how all the Old Testament ties to Him. That's a good Bible study.

This is our text this morning and this is where I want to launch from. Let me pray.

God, we ask this morning that You would teach us, that we would be people that sit under the Scriptures to be taught and learned, that we would become more like You, God, in this world, that You would make us more humble, more compassionate, more loving, more faithful and full of faith, God, this morning. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to You, God. May we receive, by faith, the things that You want to speak to this congregation. In Jesus' name, amen.

At the beginning of March, last month, it was like a random Thursday night at the beginning of March. I think the Warriors were playing. I think they were losing. And, out of the blue, Thursday night, randomly, Kendrick Lamar dropped a new album and the Warriors started winning, I think, after that. Kendrick Lamar is a rapper, a hip-hop artist, from Compton. His latest album before this album that came out was called "To Pimp a Butterfly." It was nominated, earlier this year, for eleven Grammy awards. Eleven Grammy awards. The only album to receive more than that was Michael Jackson's, "Thriller."

So, Kendrick Lamar was the second most Grammy-nominated artist ever, and it's a hip-hop album; it's a rap album. Then, out of the blue, he just comes out with this album called "Untitled Unmastered." That's a great album title. "Untitled Unmastered." And, one reviewer of the album compared Kendrick Lamar to Jeremiah the Prophet. He said that "To Pimp a Butterfly" was his major prophecy – like Jeremiah's major prophecy – and "Untitled Unmastered" was Kendrick Lamar's book of Lamentations. It's his book of lament. He says:

"It's a prophetic text of lamentations. A text which, like all texts of lament, reveals something about the author as well as society."

So, he's saying that this album that came out, "Untitled Unmastered," is his lament. It is Kendrick Lamar's lament of society, asking questions about God, wrestling with things. In the second song, called "Untitled 2," the second track on the album, the bridge of the song, as it goes into the verse, Kendrick says this:

"Stuck inside the belly of the beast. Can you please pray for me?"

And then he goes right into verse one and he says:

"Get God on the phone."

"Get God on the phone." He keeps saying that over and over and over again in the song. It's like he sees this world, he sees life, he sees what's happening, what's going on and he's like, "Get God on the phone. I have questions. I have things I need to talk with Him about. I need to sort some things out." And I feel like this is kind of what's going on to a lot of you as you are reading through the Old Testament. You've been reading some insane things in the Old Testament. And some of you are reading this for the very very first time and, as you read through the Old Testament, you're like, "Get God on the phone. I need to talk with someone."

I have people pulling me aside when I'm walking like, "Have you been reading? Are you? Can you...? What's going on here?"

Like, you might feel safe in the New Testament. Jesus is like an old friend of yours, but you are being completely disrupted by the Old Testament. It's almost like you don't know this God. Like, you may have thought this even as you're reading through the Old Testament. Like, "I don't even know if I know this God. I know I remember the God of the New Testament, but I don't know if I know this God. I need to sort of some questions."

And this is the question, right? Like, we want to ask God, we want to ask maybe our

community group leaders or our minister or some of the neighborhood ministers or the pastors here, "What is going on in the Old Testament? Is the Old Testament God a different God than the God of the New Testament?"

Many people have thought this, have even said this. There was actually an early Church theologian who made the claim that the Old Testament God was different than the New Testament God. But, he was thrown out of the Church because he was a heretic. So, no. The answer is no. There aren't different Gods between the two testaments. But, we still have questions about this. We have a lot of questions about this. We did a survey of our church a few weeks ago about how your time is going in the Year of Biblical Literacy. And, for the most part, this experience is overwhelmingly favorable. You guys are loving going through this personally and then in community and there are lectures and stuff like that.

But, we left a blank space for you to write in your questions so far. And most every single question that came in were about the Old Testament. Like the law or the strange regulations or the violence or the wrath or the blood, whether it's violence blood or sacrifice blood. There's just blood everywhere. And what do you do with all these crazy stories in the Old Testament? So, we have to step back. We wanted to do this series a little later in the year. We had planned on doing a "What's Going On" or "Dealing with Difficult Questions in the Bible" once you've been disrupted by it. We wanted you to get disrupted by it. I was hoping, I mean, I get questions a lot like, "What do we tell them about...?"

I'm like, "I want our church to be a little bit disrupted by the Old Testament."

So, now that you are disrupted by the Old Testament, or maybe you have been and you're being disrupted all over again, what do you do? How do you begin to understand the Old Testament? So, this is the question I want to try and start to answer today, and it's on the screen: Is the Old Testament full of timeless wisdom?

Is the Old Testament full of timeless truth? Do we take it straight, laws and all, and say, "This is to us? Now, I've got to find the moral in the story. I have to find, as I'm reading my daily reading this morning, the nugget of wisdom for me right now."

Is that what we're supposed to do? Someone posted an open letter to Dr. Laura Schlessinger not too long ago online. Dr. Laura Schlessinger is a Jewish author and a she used to be a radio talk show host as well who offers practical advice about relationships and parenting and ethical dilemmas based on Old Testament principles. So, this person wrote in an open letter to Dr. Laura about some questions that they have and it's dripping sarcasm. Let me just read it to you. It's not on the screen. I'm just going to read it to you. Here's part of the letter:

"Dear Dr. Laura,

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to follow them.

- I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?
- I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?
- A friend of mine feels that, even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Leviticus 11:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?
- Leviticus 21:20 states that I may not approach the alter of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20 or is there some wiggle room here?
- I know Leviticus 11:6-8 says that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

I know that you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident that you can help. Thank you, again, for reminding us that God's Word is eternal and unchanging.

Your devoted disciple and adoring fan."

So, that's a problem. When someone reads that to us, we're like, "Yeah, just read the New Testament. That's just... don't even go there." We have to deal with that though. I mean, we're reading through this and this is the stuff that's been disrupting you. When we approach the Old Testament as if it's full of timeless truth or wisdom, we can actually get into a lot of trouble. So, here's the thesis I'm going to be working through, and you might not agree with this at first, but just stick with me. And you might not agree with me afterwards either. That's fine. I mean, you're free to be wrong. That was a joke. But, here's the thesis I'm working through.

The Old Testament is full of wisdom, not timeless wisdom.

So, I'm going to break this up into two parts. The Old Testament is full of wisdom. Part one. Not timeless wisdom. Part two.

Okay? So, part one: the Old Testament is full of wisdom. Most of the Old Testament, especially the law, comes in the form of a story; a narrative. So, you're reading these laws and you're reading this Old Testament and you're reading narrative; you're reading a story. You're not reading propositions. God's interacting with the nation of Israel. He actually, literally, birthed the nation of Israel through the call and a promise to Abraham. Israel wasn't even a nation until God called Abraham to follow Him and then made Abraham a nation and gave Abraham a sign of circumcision. And the reason why the sign was circumcision was like to put a mark on the fertile part of your body so that you know that all of your generations after you are because of my promise to you.

So, that was a sign to Israel. Like, God literally birthed this nation. And when we get to the part of the narrative that talks about the Law and all those really crazy laws, you have to realize that it comes after grace. God called Abraham by grace, and Abraham believed God and his faith was accredited to him as righteousness. And then, Israel was slaves to Egypt, the most powerful nation at that time, and God saved them out of that.

So, when you read the laws in Exodus or Leviticus and then again in Deuteronomy, you have to remember that all of that came after God saved them from slavery. So, even the Ten Commandments start with a statement that "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God who saved you, and this is what my saved people are to be like."

This is what God was doing. So, all of the laws that happened in the Old Testament happened after grace. God saved Israel and then made a covenant with Israel that she would be shaped into a nation where people all over the world could look and see the wisdom and the justice of God being worked through this nation at this time and point in history. So, keep in mind, when you're reading the Old Testament, that God is after saving the world. That's what God said to Abraham. "I want to bless the entire world. I want to save the entire world. I want to bring everything back to Genesis 1 and 2 and I'm doing that through you."

And so, what you find at the heart of the Law, when you get to the Law and you're reading through all the strange laws in the Old Testament, was actually God was telling Israel, "I need you to imitate what I am like to the world."

So, there's part of the Law where, when you break it down, you see what God is like in the Law. So, the original intent of the Law was made to enable Israel to be like Yahweh or to be like God; their God. To infuse into their national life God's character and behavior. I mean, and that was their moral target. That's what they were aiming for. That's what God was trying to shape them into. A favorite expression in the Hebrew Bible, if you're reading through it, was "walking in the way of the Lord."

That is to say: walking in God's way, as distinct from the ways of other God's or other nations. So, when Israel was called to be holy – we see in Leviticus – and it's given all the holiness code and the holiness law, especially in Leviticus 19, it doesn't mean "we need you to be extra super religious." What God was trying to do in making them holy had actually a lot to do with having this down-to-earth practicality. So, if you read the holiness laws in Leviticus, – and they're hard to get through, they're hard to understand for us – this is what God was

doing:

God was telling them to be generous to the poor. In there, you see fair treatment and payment of employees. You see practical compassion for the disabled and respect for the elderly. You see the integrity of the judicial process. You see safety precautions to prevent endangering life. You see ecological sensitivity. You see quality before the law for ethnic minorities. You see honesty in trade and business. You see all of that through the codes and the laws of Leviticus for the people of Israel.

One Old Testament scholar, named Christopher Wright, says this about all of the Levitical code and laws:

"We call such matters 'social ethics' or 'human rights' and we think that we are very modern and civilized for doing so. We go to great lengths to get them written pompously into declarations for this and charters for that and codes for something else. God just calls them 'holiness.'"

God says to Israel, "Be holy. Be set apart. Be different." And I want to infuse into your nation, into your society as you are becoming a nation, I want to infuse what I am like. Generosity. I want you to be generous to the people who are slaves because, remember, you were a slave. Remember? I delivered you. And I want fair treatment and payment of employees and I want compassion for disabled and respect for elderly."

So, God weaves this into their nation. So, there's actually a lot of wisdom in the Old Testament. When Jesus said that all of the Law hangs on love – so, a teacher in the Law came to Jesus one time and Jesus was an expert in the Law, a teacher of the Law; He was a rabbi. They come to Jesus and said, "Jesus, we have a question for you. What is the greatest of the commandments? There's 613 commandments. What's the best one?"

And there's a lot of debate around this. Jesus says this. It's just brilliant. He says, "All of the Law is broken up into two parts: love God and love your neighbor. All of the Law and the Prophets hang on these two things."

So, where did Jesus get this? Where did Jesus get this "love for God and love for neighbor?" Jesus didn't just make that up. It's not some revolutionary new love ethic Jesus invented. It was the fundamental ethical demand of the Old Testament. Love God, and then, this is how you are – in that society for that time – to love your neighbor. Now, all this sounds great. Now, if I'm saying to you, it all sounds great. But, you're reading the same thing I am if you're reading the Old Testament and you know that a lot of disturbing things happen in the Old Testament. And when you look at it now, you don't see human rights. You don't see human rights and love for neighbor by our standards today. We see the opposite.

We read it and we're like, "Wait, you cannot be telling me that God's telling them to love their neighbor when they're doing this to them."

Let me give you one example. There's a ton I can use. But, let me give you one. It's from Deuteronomy 21. When you read through this, I guarantee you everyone probably dropped their Bible or skimmed over it like, "Ah, I don't want to listen to this."

Deuteronomy 21:10. This is straight from the Scriptures: "When you go to war against your enemies and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her."

No one reads that in this room and says, "The Bible is awesome." No one does that in this room. No one goes, "See, look. This is my memory verse this week. God, thank You for this. How do I apply this? I'm going to apply this today."

No one does that. If you do, you should live in a compound or something. That's not – no one reads that and goes, "This is awesome."

Now, this is the problem with the Bible in many people's opinion, especially the Old Testament when you read stuff like that and you're like, "This is why I don't read the Old Testament." Now, instead of looking at the Old Testament from a post-enlightenment

critique, you must enter their world. Their world was, indeed, barbaric. The ancient Near East was barbaric. And, if you enter into their world, you actually start to see – maybe you can, you might not agree with me – the beauty of God's Law. First of all, notice how the Law – keep that verse up, by the way. Especially the last part of it, if you don't mind.

Notice how the Law carefully restricts the rights of the victorious soldier. In that day, in the ancient Near East, if you were the victorious soldier, you had all the rights. You can do whatever you wanted to with anyone you beat in battle. You know what God does? He actually restricts the rights of the victor. He says, "You cannot rape people. That is not an option for Israel. You cannot rape anyone. Nor can you just take a woman for temporary sexual pleasure. You cannot do that."

That is absolutely revolutionary. "And," God says, "If you do want a woman, you find her attractive and you want to marry her, you have to take full responsibility and make a commitment of giving her the status of your wife with all the legal and social benefits that went with that. But, you can't do that immediately. Don't do that right away. That's just wrong. Give her time to mourn and adjust to the loss that she has suffered. And, after all that, if you regret your action, you can't just toss her like a piece of property. She has to be given the normal, though tragic, freedom of a divorced wife. But," – look at this line. But. The last line is an implicit criticism of the whole entire practice. The last line is this. It says, "Don't sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her."

God says, right in the Law, "This whole thing is dishonorable. This whole thing is not awesome. This whole practice is dishonorable."

God is not saying, "This is the best thing in the world."

God is saying, "I'm entering into your world, I'm putting limits on the way you're going to act and react in war. But, this is not awesome. You have dishonored her. This is not the ideal."

So, here's the point: we don't see this clearly now because we're so far removed from the world of the ancient Near East. But, the laws that we read about that confuse us in the Old Testament are both accommodating for that culture and future-looking for that culture. God goes in and accommodates this culture. God entered into their world as they knew it and brought about radical reform to that culture, not necessarily to our culture today, but to that culture. And then incrementally pulled Israel forward to be a light to the nations. He entered into their world, gave them laws that pulled them forward as a culture, as a society. Their culture was barbaric and, in some ways, Israel was barbaric too. So, God accommodated for that and was trying to move them forward toward His ideal which, ironically, was behind them in the Garden of Eden.

God was trying to move them back to the Garden of Eden. God was trying to bring them back to seeing everything as good, where there was harmony and peace with God and peace with one another and peace with their environment. See, life in the ancient Near East wouldn't just be alien to us with all its strange assumptions. It would be. It wouldn't just be alien to us. We would also see a culture whose social structures were badly damaged by the fall.

Yesterday, my wife and I were driving home and she just had this, I don't know, though. She just started laughing and she was like, "I just had this thought." We were just driving home through the mission and she's like, "I had this thought about if we took someone from like 15 years ago and had this time machine..." – that's a great thought, by the way. Time machines. And then she's like, "If we had time machines and we brought him into today and they were driving with us, they would probably go, 'Why is everybody looking down at their hands? What are those little machines? What do they have in their hands? Why is everyone looking at their hands?'" She goes, "It would just be so..."

I told her, "Yeah. Absolutely."

Like, everyone's on their phone. Everyone's looking. Everyone's walking and just doing this. She goes, "I think they would be disrupted by it." They're like, "Whoa. What's happening? Why? What's so special about that thing?"

That's the culture we live in. When you transfer one person to another culture, there's culture shock. If we were to transfer back to this culture, we would not understand it and when we would look at social structures, we would see all the social structures were

damaged by the fall. The point is this: it's within this context that God entered in and then raised up a covenant nation and gave people laws to live by to help create a culture for them. A culture that was to be a light. So, the practices of Israel were wholly different than their neighbors, and that's the point.

Look at Exodus 19:6. God says, **"Although the whole earth is mine,"** – everything's mine – **"you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."**

"So, what I'm going to do through you, Israel, is I'm going to make you a kingdom of priests. You're going to show the world what I am like."

Israel would only be seen by the world through their practical obedience to God's Law. When they lived into God's Law, for them, it would visibly raise questions about God. It would visibly raise questions about the God they worshipped and about the social quality of life they exhibited. And this was built into the law.

Look at Deuteronomy 4:6. God says through Moses, **"Observe these laws carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations,"**

Stop. Listen to this. "Observe all these things I'm telling you to the nations because the nations are going to look at this and it's going to show the world at that time your wisdom and understanding."

"who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?"

This was not snobbery, this was Israel, by obeying God, switching on the light in a dark place. They were going into Canaan, which was a dark and barbaric place, and they were switching on the light. Was it enough for us today? Probably not. But, for them at that time it was enough. God accommodates to Israel and the world of the ancient Near East, which is why we have the second point; the next point.

The Old Testament, and specifically the Law, is not timeless wisdom. The Old Testament Law is not timeless wisdom or not timeless truth. Let me explain what I mean by that. At this point, you're probably thinking, "What about 'do not murder?' That seems pretty timeless."

Yes. That is very timeless. But, it's found in Genesis 1 and 2 on the sanctity and dignity of all life. Same with the Sabbath; taking a day off. Same with honoring God. Same with not committing adultery. Same with not coveting. The tree would never have been eaten if they obeyed "thou shall not covet." So, you can actually say that the Ten Commandments are pulling Israel, and thus the world, back to the heart and the values of Genesis 1 and 2; life before paradise was lost. So, the Old Testament law that surrounded the nation of Israel, that surrounded these laws are not and is not timeless. The law for the nation of Israel is not for all people at all time. The laws weren't permanent. They weren't the divine ideal for all persons everywhere.

God even informed the people of Israel that a new enduring covenant is necessary. So, God even told Israel through Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31:31, "I'm going to make a new covenant with you. The old covenant is going to go away. There's going to be a new one and I'm going to write it on your hearts."

And Ezekiel would go on to say that "I'm giving you a new heart so that you can obey me and follow me." Built into their very texts is a promise of a better, more enduring covenant. A new covenant. So, for example, as followers of Jesus, because there's a new covenant, we get to the Old Testament through Jesus. That's the only reason why any of us are reading the Old Testament, really, is because of Jesus. Unless you're Jewish, and then you get to Jesus through the Old Testament. You go the other way. If you're Jewish, you read the Old Testament and then you get to Jesus. If you're not Jewish, you read the New Testament and then you get to the Old Testament through Jesus.

So, as followers of Jesus, we don't keep the food laws from the Torah anymore. All those laws that you're reading, we don't keep them. Not because they were bad or wrong, but because they were for an earlier part in the story. Same with farming laws and what kind of clothes you were to wear, etcetera.

This is how Paul puts it in Galatians 3:23: **"Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So**

the law was our guardian..." – that word literally means "nanny" – "...until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."

Paul says and uses the analogy that the law, the Torah, was a nanny to grow Israel up and make her ready for a Messiah. And now a Messiah has come and there's no need for a nanny. No one who's 28 has a nanny, or you shouldn't have a nanny. If you have a nanny, we need to talk. This is what it's saying. Like, once you've grown up and the Messiah has come, there's no need for a nanny anymore. Here's another analogy, and it's not great, but it might be helpful.

Think of it like this: the first generation iPhone was not created to be the end-all and be-all of all smartphones. They didn't get up and say, "We just created this new thing called an iPhone, and we'll never create another phone again. This is it." There was actually, planned in it, for the iPhone to be obsolete at one point. It was designed, actually, to pull technology forward through fingertip recognition and apps on your phone that would turn into an App Store, etcetera. It was never intended to be enduring. That phone was intended to pull technology forward to what we have today and what we have for our future.

The Law is kind of like that. It's there and it was meant to pull Israel forward to be like God and to show what God is like into all the nations. It was not the end-all and be-all. It was created to pull Israel forward because of their sin and because of the disobedience until Christ. And when Christ came, He said, "I did not come to abolish the Law, I've come to fulfill the Law."

And what that means is like, if you're engaged, the fulfillment of your engagement will be your wedding. The purpose of your wedding is to be married. And so, the engagement pulls you forward to your wedding day. And then, at your wedding day, your engagement is fulfilled; it's reached its purpose. When Jesus says He fulfills the Law, He pulls Israel to its purpose. It's Him. He takes on their vocation; He becomes the one who brings the Law to its conclusion; to its expected end. This is what Jesus does.

That's what the Law was for. Paul Copan, who wrote a wonderful book that I highly recommend to you called "Is God a Moral Monster?" writes this about this subject. He says:

"How then did God address the patriarchal structures, primogeniture (rights of the firstborn), polygamy, warfare, servitude/slavery, and a number of the other fallen social arrangements that were permitted because of the hardness of human hearts? Answer: He met Israel [halfway] partway. As Jesus stated in Matthew 19:8, 'Because of the hardness of your heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not always been this way.' We could apply this same passage to many problematic structures within the ancient Near Eastern context: 'Because of the hardness of your heart Moses permitted servitude and patriarchy and warfare and the like, but from the beginning it has not been this way.' They [the laws] were not ideal and universal."

The law was looking forward to the time we would have the new covenant written on our hearts. So, the question: how are we supposed to read the Old Testament without being completely disrupted by it? How do we read it so when we read it we're not like, "Oh my gosh? What's going on?"

Well, the first part of the answer is this: you're supposed to be disrupted by the Old Testament. I think that's kind of the point. It's a narrative that builds and swells and resolves and then builds again and then swells and the resolves kind of, but doesn't completely resolve and you're waiting and you're waiting and you're waiting finally for the one, the Son who comes with healing in His wings. That's what you're supposed to do. So, you're supposed to read Judges and be like, "What the heck, Judges?"

You're supposed to. If you read Judges this last time and you pulled some moral from Judges, if you do, you're probably reading way too fast forward to Jesus, which is okay to do, but the narrative is supposed to work on you. Judges is supposed to work on you and you're supposed to, at the end of Judges, go, "Umm... there needs to be a King in the joint, because these people are screwed up. These people are really messed up. They need a king."

And then you read 1 Samuel. What do they do? They get a king. That's what the narrative is supposed to do. So, if you're reading it for the timeless little moral, it's not there yet. You read it and it's supposed to work on you. You read it and you're going, "This place is messed up. They need a king." And then they get a king, but that king's messed up. And they get another king, and he's kind of good. Listen what Timothy Keller says in his book "Counterfeit Gods:"

"The reason for our confusion over the Bible is that we usually read the Bible as a series of disconnected stories, each with a moral for how we should live our lives. It is not. Rather, it comprises a single story telling us how the human race got into its present condition and how God, through Jesus Christ, will come to put things right."

That's the point of the Old Testament. It's supposed to work on you like that. So, when you get to David in 1 Samuel, you see, actually, "Okay, this is a good king." But, he wasn't a perfect king. He's messed up as well. He power-rapes a woman and then kills her husband. What the heck? You're supposed to think "what the heck." The narrative is descriptive of deeply flawed humans, not prescriptive of how to act.

The Old Testament is descriptive of deeply flawed humans, not prescriptive of how to act.

1 Corinthians 10 says this exact thing. Here's a sample of 1 Corinthians 10. Paul says, **"Now these things..."** – speaking of the Old Testament – **"...occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were. [...] We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did. [...] We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes."**

I left that in there because that's a great line. "And were killed by snakes."

"And do not grumble, as some of them did. [...] These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come."

Meaning Christ has come upon us.

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

The Old Testament was written for us, not to us. It's not written to you. It's written to Israel. And it was written to Israel at that time. And it was written to Israel for getting them ready for a Messiah. But, it's written for us to learn from. John Barton, an Old Testament scholar, says about the story of David and how we're supposed to read that, because you're reading that right now:

"The story of David handles human anger, lust, ambition and disloyalty without ever commenting explicitly on these things, but by telling its tale in such a way that the reader is obliged to look at them in the face and to recognize his or her affinity with the characters in whom they are exemplified."

That's what a narrative does. But, what about their faith? You're like, "But, don't they have faith?"

Yes. The hero status of the Old Testament figures is rooted not in their moral perfection, but in their uncompromising dedication to the cause of Yahweh and their rugged trust in the promises of God rather than lapsing into idolatry of many of their contemporaries. So, lastly, what do we learn by reading the Old Testament? This is kind of what I want to leave you with as we move into a time of response. This is true. I think this is universally true. We see this in the Old Testament. God meets us where we are, but He doesn't leave us there.

God meets Israel where they are and He pulls them forward. God meets us where we're at and He pulls us forward toward the ideal which is found in Jesus. So, when Jesus was on the road to Emmaus, He is going after two people who were walking away from the resurrection event. Why in the world are they walking away? I have no idea. I still don't know it to this day. I cannot wait to ask them one day in heaven. Like, "What? Why? What was going on there? And what did Jesus talk about? But first, why were you walking away?"

And then Jesus goes after them. This is how we ended last week on Easter. This is actually what happens in the Bible is that God is going after us. And God is going after us and God doesn't stop going after us, even once He's found us. When God starts to work in our life to change us, you don't control that change that you go through. God does. I've always found it funny that we come to Christ because of some big thing we want to get over. It might be a broken relationship and we turn to God because a broken relationship. And God's like, "It's really not about that one relationship. I'm going to actually overhaul and redeem your entire sexuality. The whole thing. I'm not going to stop with this one heartbreak. I'm going after the whole thing."

We think we need to get over this one addiction. We go to God like, "I'm going to get over this one addiction, God. I need Your help."

And God's like, "I want you to completely be reoriented about the way you treat every single substance and every single activity, where your ultimate pleasure and delight comes from me. I'm not happy just to have you not drink yourself to death, I want you to see everything differently."

And this is the character of God. God meets us where we're at. And wherever you're at today, God wants to meet you right where you're at. And the beauty of it is that God meets us where we're at and He pulls us forward. He pulls us forward and He works in us. And Paul says that He works in us to will and to do according to His pleasure. He doesn't stop with one flaw. He's after total restoration of everything and every way that we see. Everything. This is what God's after in us. This is the character of God. This is what we see in the Old Testament.

So, as we sang at the beginning of the first set of music, we sang that God delights in mercy. He delights in showing mercy. If you have been just disrupted by what you've been reading in the Old Testament or disrupted by a place where you're at in life right now, I want to invite you and lead you into a prayer right now of inviting God into work in a place in your life where you feel like you need God to meet you right where you're at. Like, you see the ideals and you're like, "I don't know if I can even get to those ideals. If I knew about the ideals right now it would crush me."

You need God and you're saying, "I need God to meet me where I am." This is Yahweh God. This is the God of the Bible. The God that meets us where we're at. Would you do me a favor and close your eyes? I want to lead us in a prayer right now. Invite the worship team out.

Let's pray.

God, I want to pray for everyone in this building and this room right now. I ask, God, that You would show us Your character right now, God. Make it really palpable and manifest Your loving, enduring character with us right now. We might, God, confess to You that we read the Old Testament with snobbery and superiority that we're so much better. Search our hearts, right now. Would You confirm to us that we're not that much better?

We need this same God to meet us where we're at today with all of the deceit that lies in our hearts, mixed motives that lie in our hearts, our conflicting desires, all our questions. We're not that much better, God. Thank You, God, that You meet us where we're at, though. So, Lord, I want to invite You, on behalf of this church. Lord, would You meet us where we are right now? In our brokenness, in our waywardness. If we're running from You, would You go after us like You did these goofy disciples on the road to Emmaus just walking away from the resurrection event?

If we just find ourselves just walking away, would You go after us? Would You meet us where we are? Would You minister to us? Would You pull us forward? I ask for sanctification for this church. That this church, by the power of Your Spirit, would become more like Jesus; more compassionate and holy and loving and kind and generous and self-sacrificing for the sake of Your world, God. You saved us to be light in the world.

So, I pray You'd pull us forward, God. Today, through repentance, through turning to You, through You meeting us where we're at. We're thankful, God, that You're so gracious to meet us where we're at. But, pull us forward, please. Let us not stay in our mess. Let us not stay in our junk. Let us not stay the same. Move us onward, God. And may we learn from Israel that we would not have hard hearts, that we would not steep ourselves in sexual immorality or idolatry or anger or lust or greed, that if that is our heart, meet us where we're at and pull us forward, God. Challenge us today.

You are holy, Lord. You are holy, God. Draw us to You right now. Meet us where we're at, please, God. Thank You for being gentle and thank You for being strong. In Christ's name, amen.