

Tetzaveh **You Shall Command** **Keeping It Real**

Torah: Exodus 27:20-30:10

Haftarah: Ezekiel 43:10-27

Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 13:10-16

Reading: Julie p. 167 and Ps. 65 Jewish Hero: Jacob; Torah carrier: Teresa

SHABBAT ZACHOR (Deut. 25:17-19; I Sam. 15:2-34) **PURIM PLAY Oneg**

Today is a triple celebration, followed by an Oneg. We are going to deal with both the regular Torah portion, as well as Shabbat Zachor. Afterwards, we are celebrating Purim a day early with a play presented by our children. Finally, we will all enjoy a feast (Oneg) downstairs as we celebrate another divine deliverance and the coming end of our long Canadian winter. To make sure we include all these elements in today's celebration, I will be combining my message with the Torah portion and Shabbat Zachor. Lets start with Shabbat Zachor.

When our people were travelling from Egypt to the Holy Mountain, they were bushwhacked by a group of raiders called Amalekites. They were the first military threat our people encountered after their deliverance from Egypt and these attacks were meant to terrify the camp and measure how strong it was before they launched a full scale attack from behind.

We remember what the Amalekites did, not because we still bear a grudge against these people, but because we need to be on the alert against sneak attacks as we wander through this life on our way home to our Father's House in Glory. It is now one month until Passover and this is one of four special Shabbats that form the lead up to our annual Passover celebration. There is a generational conflict between the light of the L-rd and the darkness which is trying to overwhelm the world we are wandering through and Shabbat Zachor reminds us to remain vigilant so that darkness does not get a foothold in our midst.

This darkness attacks both what we believe and the values and morals which we uphold in response to what we believe and while we want to keep it real and be able to relate to this world, our desire to accommodate our faith should never be seen as the first steps towards assimilation. We are not going to abandon our biblical faith and we are certainly not to going to accept any part of a lifestyle which the Bible finds unacceptable.

Purim deals with a time when our people were in exile in the ancient Persian empire and this same conflict between accommodation and assimilation had to be resolved so that we could keep it real while we lived in the Persian world, without assimilating into that world. Judaism has traditionally traced the chief adversary of the Purim story back to the Amalekites as a warning that we shall encounter spiritual opposition in every generation and situation we find ourselves in. There are still Amalekites waiting to bushwhack us from behind.

Our two heroes in the story, faced the threat of genocide, where Jewish people were hated just for being different, even though they lived as good citizens and presented no threat to the empire they lived as guests in. They creatively turned the tables on their enemies and were able to do to them what our enemies proposed to do to our people.

The Bible indicates that it was one year from the time the decree to kill our people was made law to the date when this slaughter was to occur. They arrived at this horrible date by the rolling

of dice (Purim means dice in Hebrew) and there are people in our world today who are also rolling the dice to find new and horrible ways to make Jewish people and the nation of Israel disappear. Many would also like to see all believers in the Messiah disappear.

Purim records the second mass conversion to Judaism found in the Bible, because when people saw how G-d looked out for His people and the courage they showed in not giving in under pressure, many people throughout the Persian empire wanted to join the generational family of the House of Jacob. Even today, we need to see that while many people are still plotting against Jewish people, the people we live among are not our real enemy.

They may wrongly believe false stories which claim we are secretly trying to take over the world and are pulling all the strings behind the scenes in global events, like so many spies and secret agents. This is simply not true and we want to dialogue with them and tell what we really believe and how we are trying to live our lives, peacefully, in the light, as we follow the teachings of the Bible, along so many Gentile Christians.

Instead of stringing up these people who speak out against us and are trying to incite violence against us and against Israel, we want to string up their false ideas and the lies they are spreading about us. We need to see ourselves as so many Mordecai's and so many Esther's who have been placed where we are for such a time as this and ours is a double calling.

First, we are to speak up about what we believe – that the only true G-d and Creator so loved the world that He sent His only Son, our Messiah, to die on the cross for the sins of the world so that we could all be released from the power of sin and receive the free gift of everlasting life, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Next, we are to speak up against the lies and the negative false propaganda which is swirling through our world and trying to stir up false hatred of the Jewish people and against Israel. There are too many modern day Haman's who are armed with the same cruel hatred of the House of Jacob. They are not our enemies, they are just victims of lies and falsehoods and we should never be afraid of speaking up when they make so many false claims against us.

The Torah portion deals mainly with putting together the clothes of the high priest and there are three things I would like to briefly touch on with you as we discuss keeping it real and learning to accommodate our faith to make it relevant to the world, without assimilating into the world.

First the clothing of the high priest resembled the garments of royalty which are still used in many countries of the world. G-d is our only true King and the beauty of the high priest's clothing and the richness of the materials which went into constructing the Ark and the tabernacle, are to remind us that we serve the King of Glory who is both beautiful beyond description and always present in our midst.

My favorite part of the high priest's clothing were the twelve precious stones which represented the twelve tribes of Israel.

These were a sign that the needs of G-d's people were always foremost in G-d's mind and that He considers us to be precious and worthwhile, well deserving of His attention. Sure, He sees us as sinners who need to seek forgiveness and learn repentance, but He also sees our great spiritual potential, once we have been mined out of the dirt and polished up so that none of the darkness and folly of this world prevents our true value from being seen.

Secondly, the high priests magnificent robes had a fringe of golden bells which could be heard as he moved around behind the veil once a year on Yom Kippur, making sure the contact with G-d and His forgiveness was not lost. No one was allowed behind the veil, just like no one is allowed into a nuclear reactor, without the proper protective gear. The high priest's garments were this protective gear and as he moved about, the people heard the bells and knew that he was safe and sound, and that G-d was still willing to be present in their midst and hear their prayers, year by year, as they walked with Him according to His word.

Lastly, the priests who were to perform their duties in the Holy Place, just outside the Holy of Holies, received a special anointing so that their service for the L-rd did not end, once they had finished performing their duties in the Tabernacle. Blood was placed on the ear lobe of their right ear, on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot.

This was so that they would understand that what they listened to and what they did with their hands and where they went with their feet, once they left the sanctuary, was just as important as they work the performed while they were in the tent of meeting. We cannot claim to walk with the L-rd, if the way we live while we are in His presence is different to the way we live during the week. We should never live one way in shul and another way during the week.

This is also the message of the prophetic portion and the New Testament portion. We have to keep it real and understand that all the joy and wonder we express and experience when we gather to worship should be reflected in the way we live in our ordinary weekly lives. We can not be one kind of person on Shabbat and slip back into being an entirely different person for the rest of the week. We need to live for Him seven days a week!

It was because our people lived this way in Persia that hatred was stirred up against them. They stood out, both as worshippers of the one true G-d and as good citizens who made a positive contribution to the communities they lived in. They made a difference and were never dangerous or harmful to the people they lived amongst.

On Shabbat Zachor we need to understand that we have enemies who will try and bushwhack us and pull us away from our faith in the one true G-d. We should never be surprised when we encounter this level of hostility against our beliefs and our lifestyle. In response, we should always try and keep it real, without caving in under pressure and sliding away from the light back into the growing darkness of the world.

The message of Purim is one of great courage where we rely upon the L-rd to provide us with all the wisdom we need to speak up and speak out for such a time as this, whenever we all called to defend our faith and the values and morals which this faith teaches us to adopt as a lifestyle of light and salt in a dark and spiritually bland world.

Finally, the Torah portion reminds us of the incredible wonder and beauty of the G-d we serve as we acknowledge both our need for His help to set us free from the sin which haunts our lives and His desire to be present with us daily, both as we stand in His awesome presence and also as we walk with Him during the week.

You see, Judaism has flourished in any number of different cultures over the years by making accommodations to help us fit in among the people where we dwell, without assimilating away

from our faith and becoming part of the world we are only travelling through. Some have adopted a distinctive way of dressing so that they stand out in a crowd, I would rather encourage our members, both Jewish and Gentile, to adopt a distinctive lifestyle so the way we live speaks louder than any change of wardrobe would.

Accommodation means expressing your faith in a lifestyle which is meaningful to the people among you live without adopting beliefs and values which contradict what we believe and how the Bible says we should live. But we want to build bridges, not walls.

Assimilation means losing touch with both the core beliefs and core values which should always set us apart from the world we are passing through, but to which we should never belong. We need the courage of Esther and Mordecai so that we are never bullied away from our faith by those who hate us and who make up all kinds of lies about us.

As we gather together on Shabbat and during the week, we are slipping away from the noise and clamour of the world and taking refuge in the Presence which still follows us and guides us. We don't have to dress differently in order to stand out and make a difference in our world. We have to realize that we are different and are on a different path and live that way.

We are following the Good Shepherd who is beautiful beyond description and who wants us to shine and be salty as we wander through the valleys of this life. We want to keep it real and constantly be reminding ourselves that our lives are just a generational pilgrimage towards our final destination so that we do not get lost along the way.

Our friends and neighbours are not really our enemies and those who make up lies and tell bad things about us are just trapped in these lies which we need to speak out against. We have never been part of any global conspiracy, nor do we pull the strings behind every major global event. Israel is not an invader in the land which was given to the House of Jacob as a perpetual inheritance and still, without exception, Israel remains the safest place for Muslims and Christians to live in the Middle East. Israel stand for peace and never for war.

We are called to be a great nation which will bless all nations, both by the salty light we are called to shine with and by the Messiah of promise who is calling all nations to the salvation which the cross of Calvary so freely offers, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

May our celebration of Purim and our celebration of Passover keep us focused on what is really important in this life: faith in the one true G-d and a lifestyle of biblical spirituality. If this is what we believe and is this is how we are trying to live, then we are keeping it real as we strive to accommodate our faith to make it meaningful to the world, without ever slipping and sliding back into this same world. Assimilation is our enemy, not the world's lost souls.