

Emor **Say** **Promoting Vital Holiness**

Torah: Leviticus 21:1-24:23

Haftarah: Ezekiel 44:15-31

Brit Chadashah: Luke 14:12-24

Holiness remains the foundation of biblical spirituality, not as a legalistic exclusion for all who do not measure up to the standards of an exclusive elite, but as the sole objective of the saving grace which calls us out of darkness into His wonderful light. The Bible consistently teaches that holiness is a dynamic set of habits, disciplines and celebrations which create a clear separation in our lives between the darkness of this world and the light of the world which is to come. It is the reconstructive agency of His grace which seeks to move our lives off the shifting sands of this fading world and onto the rock of His eternal Word. This is so that we can draw close to Him and let His light shine through us and disperse the shadows where sin and evil generationally lurk in the world we are only passing through.

Holiness is that practical function which converts our loss and ruin into a temple of praise for His love and joy and peace. It is not a judgmental, dirty word, it is the cosmic soap of His grace which seeks to remove the stain of sin and shame whenever it tries to tarnish His voice and His work in our lives.

This passage continues to speak about the standards of holiness for the family of Aaron and makes provision for those among this group who are afflicted with any flaw or default which would exclude them from ministry. It also outlines the festivals of the L-rd, beginning with the Sabbath and as we consider the meaning and impact of the Festival Cycle, we realize that the L-rd built the Sabbath into the temporal fabric of the cosmos. And that learning to rest in Him and what He has done and will continue to do, remains the solid core of what it means to walk with Him and to worship Him. This is how we should live, as we prepare to for the arrival of His everlasting Kingdom, which is our only true home and where our only enduring citizenship lies.

The Haftarah portion deals with the rationale behind the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood - to teach the people to discern between that which is holy and permanent and that which is profane and temporary. Being heavenly minded is the only effective way to be of any earthly good.

The New testament portion speaks of the divine call to the Final banquet, where the lame and the crippled are called because those who received the first invitations refused to respond. There is no excuse, however noble or courageous it may sound, for not responding to the Messiah's invitation to the final Banquet in eternity. A positive Banquet response becomes the solid basis for of a dynamic, redemptive lifestyle full of light and salt which calls all the darkness dwelling zombies of this fading age so that they too may experience the wonder and the freedom and the healing of the sons and daughters of the coming Kingdom.

I want to use four passages from this Torah portion to discuss promoting vital holiness.

First, we need to understand that the practical requirements of holiness require that our conduct and our lifestyle if full of the signs and symbols of redemption and stipulate that we refrain from promoting anything tarnishes or diminishes the wholeness and the wholesomeness of holiness. A priest was not to deface his or her body for a dead person or in honour of a pagan god. There

is nothing wrong with cutting the corners of your beard, as long as it is not in honour of a dead person or a pagan deity.

Laos a priest who had a physical deformity was exempt from serving in the sanctuary, but was to be fed and taken care of nonetheless. Promoting wholeness is one of the main features of vital holiness, but those who could not do so in their public ministry were still taken care of and not excluded from the community.

This entire passage is divided into discussions which end with the affirmation that it is G-d who sanctifies us and who wants us to take an active part in the process by learning both the habit of holiness and avoiding those which would compromise or diminish our vital task.

My favorite passage in this portion is in Lev. 21:12 which says that the oil of anointing from the L-rd is a crown for those who receive it. In our world today, whenever we enter the presence of the L-rd in worship, study or prayer, He crowns us with the oil of His presence and we get a taste of the world which is to come. How many tastes of the coming world do you build into your life and how effective are you at making sure that you are feeding on this presence and not diluting your spirituality with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the pride of life?

Leviticus 23:3 indicates that the L-rd built the Sabbath into the temporal fabric of the cosmos for three reasons. First it was the first activity He engaged in once He completed creation and second, when we engage in it, we are hooking up with Him and His creation and letting it power and joy to fill our lives. Lastly, we need to understand that time is a limited commodity which we are called to handle with wisdom, before our time is up and we have to give an accounting to Him about how we spent this temporary gift. He wants us to make Sabbath rest the first and foremost use we make of our time, because we are also part of His creation and His rest is that vital energizing activity he wants to use to energize, redeem and fulfil the rest of our lives.

There is always so much more which can be said as we study each weekly portion and I have only skimmed the surface of a bottomless ocean of wisdom. I commend to you the rest of the content which I have not touched on for your personal study and private enrichment. And remember to bring your questions to Yeshiva or text or email them to me so that the study of His Word is that activity which most promotes vital holiness in our personal and in our corporate lives. Shabbat Shalom.

Sermon: Learning to Do It His Way: Building a Fireproof Life.

Passage: According to the grace of G-d which was given to me, I have laid the foundation as a wise architect, and another builds upon it. But let each take heed to the manner with which he builds. For no one can lay another foundation, except that which is laid and which is Yeshua HaMashaich.

For if someone builds upon this foundation with gold, silver and precious stones or with hay wood or stubble, the work of each shall be made manifest. For the day will make it known, for it shall be revealed in the fire and this fire shall test it and reveal its true quality. If the work built upon the foundation by someone, survives the fire, he shall receive a reward. But if someone's work is consumed, he shall lose his reward – as for him, he shall be saved as if through fire. (I Corinthians 3:10-15)

Over the years, both the synagogue and the church have come up with some pretty strange and bizarre teachings, which, while loosely derived from the Scriptures, totally miss what the L-rd was trying to say. Our Roman Catholic friends believe that whatever unconfessed sinfulness we commit in this life and from which we have not repented, will be burned off of us during a temporary period of time some believers will pass, suffering in the flames of torment and G-d's judgment. The place is called purgatory, and length of time spent in the flames is said to depend on the severity of the sin which believers did not deal with in their lives.

Purgatory is derived from a Latin root and refers to the word in Greek used by Paul for testing or purging, so as to determine the true quality of works we have performed in this life. There is only one specific period of time referred to – the Day. As well, the fire is not described as having flames which will punish or afflict believers in any way similar to those flames which await those who will be thrown in to the lake of everlasting fire.

There are many references to the L-rd using a refining fire to remove impurities from believer's lives and His return is described as an all consuming fire which will purge the cosmos and cleanse it from all of its sin and folly. Once this cleansing process is completed, and all impurities and dross are removed, that which has been refined, will shine forever as He rebuilds a new heavens and a new earth, wherein everlasting righteousness dwells.

Paul is using this powerful metaphor of a house built on a solid foundation to remind believers, that especially in the L-rd, and on the Day of His return, we will reap what we have sown with our lives. It is still possible to purge our lives from mistakes and sinfulness throughout this life, and not to get any unhappy surprises when we all pass through the fire of His impartial judgment. But we need to remember that His return is also a Day of Judgment and with G-d there is no favoritism when it comes dealing with sin and folly in our lives. There is not one standard of holiness for unbelievers and another for believers – we are never exempt from the scrutiny of His Word.

There are six categories of building materials which are mentioned in our passage and they are grouped into two sections – those which are noble and permanent (gold, silver and precious stones) and those which are dishonourable and temporary (wood, hay and stubble). It is interesting to note that most of the materials which went into the building of the tabernacle were in the first group because they do not decay or rot. How much of what you are building into your life will not decay or rot?

Salvation is a gift which depends solely on His grace and mercy and which His Word reminds us accessible by faith alone. It is a work of grace which He accomplishes in our hearts and lives and which we really had no part in implementing or completing. The blood of the cross washed away our sin and planted everlasting life in our souls.

However, there is no point in this life where we lose our free will and what we build upon this solid, immovable will depend on the choices we make and the reactions we have on our pilgrimage through this life towards our Father's home in glory. In a very real sense we are still under construction, and while how we live will not affect our eternal destiny, it will affect how much of our lives counts for something in eternity. What Yeshua did for us, cannot be shaken or added to or subtracted from because it is something which comes from Him and which we received as a free gift from our loving heavenly Father.

But the story does not begin there and in a very real sense it only begins there. Believers need to live their lives daily for the life which is to come and gauge the impact which their decisions will have once our life is over and the truth of G-d's Word burns away all the chaff, hay and stubble which too many of us too often allow our lives to become cluttered with.

Now this does not mean that we should not have anything to do with the temporary things of this life, just that we should only use them to accomplish the eternal purposes which our salvation requires that we build into our lives. There is a false teaching circulating which says that once believers have received the power of everlasting life, that it no longer matters what they do in their lives, because their eternal destiny is secured. It is called eternal security and while we should never feel insecure about G-d's love for us and should never doubt what He accomplished for us, we need to understand that our lungs will only keep on working properly as long as we continue to breathe.

There are people who slip in unconsciousness and who give barely perceptible signs of life and it often takes an expert to distinguish between a corpse and a coma. It is not always easy to determine at what point a comatose person in a vegetative condition finally slips into the arms of death. But rather than seeing how close to death a person can get to death without actually dying, as those who understand the enduring, unshakeable nature of our foundation, we do not want to become negligent when it comes to manner in which we are building upon it.

Paul warns us to take heed to the manner in which we build, even though we have no guarantee that the storms of life will not throw themselves against our house to demolish it and bring our faith to great ruin. You see, all of us, both Jews and Gentiles and leaders and followers, will have sometimes have to deal with situations which are beyond our control and which we may not even see coming. We are not being promised an easy ride to glory, always full of endless victory and bliss. There may be any number of heart breaks and personal and physical defeats along the way.

We only have control over the decisions we make and over the reactions we adopt when what happens to us is beyond our control. He will definitely lead us through the valley of the shadow of death and prepare a table for us in the presence of our enemies as He anoints our heads with oil and our cup overflows. This may occur while we are hiding in a cave or being chased all over the mountains. Sometimes the path to victory means making one or more strategic retreats until we are out of line of fire and can regroup and rebuild.

I Corin. 10:13 works with Phil. 2:13 and Eph. 2:10 to make sure that Heb. 12:13 is our response so that no matter what, we never build with wood, hay or stubble in our lives.

Rather than being afraid of that which can only kill our body, we need to fear the One who can toss us into the flames, after our feeble bodies have been destroyed. While He never saves us from passing through much tribulation, He saves us and delivers us through the tribulation and our reactions either provide our lives with durable materials for eternity or our bitterness and anger clutter the job site with materials not worthy of the task He wants us to accomplish with our lives. How we respond and the choices we make as we live our lives, are the brokers for the materials we are building with. They will not so much have to stand the test of time, as they will have to stand the test of eternity.

Our daily choices and reactions will have not have an impact on our eternal destination, but on how much of an impact our lives will have once they have passed through the cleansing fire of

His judgement.

Said another way, once the fire of G-d's final judgment is kindled, all the foolishness and carnal stupidity which believers have collected over their lives, will be burnt off, while unbelievers will continue to burn forever. Said yet another way, believers will either spend eternity with the rewards they have won from the way they built on the solid foundation, or they will see the negative results of their lives come needlessly crashing down on them, as they barely escape being consumed in the fire.

Paul is calling for regular, honest scrutiny, where we do not bury our problems or disguise them, but deal with them according to the Word. This is so that we do not suffer eternal loss on the final Day because of the carnal folly we have filled our lives with. So instead of ignoring or indulging our problems and allowing our spirituality to slip into a comatose state, we need to regularly purge our lives and live in a healthy fear of G-d's final judgment.

When we allow the power of this positive fear to prevent us from building with wood, hay or stubble, we access the transforming power of His Word and build some serious spiritual real estate for which we will be rewarded for in heaven. In the L-rd, we do not succeed by avoiding negative situations or by running away from our problems. In the L-rd we, attain success in the life to come by the way we live in this life and we attain success in this life by living lives focused on the life which is to come.

Too many success seminars confuse material gain with spiritual triumph and promise health and wealth and total freedom from trials and temptations. They ignore the fact that the Bible teaches that it is when we overcome opposition that we obtain victory, not when we avoid it or run away from it. Success in this life is no measure of success in the life which is to come.

Instead of seeing the circumstances of this life as measures of authentic success, we need to see that how we respond to even the harshest of circumstances as either the building blocks of a big bonfire or as the materials for which we shall receive a reward on the Day when we all stand before the Messiah.

We will be treated unfairly in this life and we will be cheated and even have people falsely say all manner of evil about us. However if we bring this to the L-rd and respond with faith and love and hope, we will break the power of injustice both in this life and in the one which is to come. So instead of being unfair and cheating, and speaking falsely against people and cluttering our lives with combustible waste products which will only be consumed on the Day when all of mankind stand before G-d, we need to determine to have a different destiny. One day soon, G-d will separate the goat rabble of this world from the sheep of His flock and take us into His Kingdom, each of us bearing the eternal weight of glory we built into our lives by the choices and responses we filled our hearts and lives with.

It would be sad to arrive in the Kingdom empty handed, covered with the smoke and ash of the lives we wasted, when we could have had fire proof lives. This world is indeed a testing ground for the life which is to come and there is no way to avoid the final test or somehow be exempt from it – all we can do is to prepare for it. we need to learn from the wise architect and make sure that we are building on the foundation of our Messiah.

We also need to sift through our building materials and purge ourselves from all and any of

them which shall cause us loss in the life which is to come. How we live can either be a ticking time bomb we keep on adding fuel to or it can be a garden of praise where the fruit of the Spirit grow solidly rooted and fire proof.

How fire proof is your life? How fire proof is the life we are building into our shul? We are a unique ministry, competing with larger congregations and any assortment of sophisticated TV and internet teachings. What will continue to set us apart must be the materials we are using to build our house of faith upon the foundation of our Messiah.

We are holding our first quarterly meeting after our AGM earlier this year. It is a time for reports and updates so that we know where we are excelling and where we need more prayer and work. Join us for the nosh and learn more about what is happening in our community.

At least three things need to happen for our shul to fulfil its mandate and continue to build for a fire proof eternity. First we need to increase our support base of solid, regular attenders, who represent every stage of life from the cradle to the grave. We do not want any gaps between the generations in our community. we want everything we do to be fire proof.

Next we need to pool our temporal and our financial resources to do the best job of managing our finances that we can, both with what we have and with the growth we know is coming. In the process, we will not allow any wood, hay or stubble to creep in and take root in how we manage the resources the L-rd has blessed us with.

Lastly, we need to maintain a community which is a safe place, free of bullying and biting and devouring, where authentic Jewish space is fostered and welcomes both Jews and Gentiles to explore their spiritual gifting and find a place of service in our midst.

These are high ideals, which not everyone will be willing to embrace, but these are the only ideals which are worth our time and energy as we move irresistibly towards the Day of His appearing. Then all the building materials we have allowed into our lives, both as individuals and as a community, will be put to the final fiery test, because none of the pain and foolishness of this life will allowed to sully the wonder and beauty of the world to come.