

Dear Friend,

On Sunday, April 30, we are going to begin working our way through some of the most difficult passages in the Bible in the sermon portion of our worship. They are difficult not because it is hard to understand what they say but rather how they apply to Christians. They are difficult because we believe what Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” We believe what Jesus says in Matthew 5:18-19, “For I tell you the truth, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished. Therefore, anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but anyone who practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

We believe that every word of the Bible is given by God through men who “were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Therefore, even these difficult words are necessary for us to understand and apply to our lives. The reason our sermon series usually work through books of the Bible is so that we will actually be forced as a congregation to practice what we say we believe. If we believe that the whole Bible is inspired by God then it is our responsibility to understand what God has to say to us from the whole Bible.

Yet, we cannot minimize or gloss over the difficulties this approach to the Bible will cause us. The Bible is a complex book and while it is not difficult to get the main point of the Bible, understanding the details can be quite challenging. As pastor, author and seminary professor Eugene Peterson has said, “Anyone who reads the Bible and is not confused at least half of the time is not paying attention.” Nowhere are the difficulties more pronounced than in understanding and applying the laws that governed the life of Israel as God’s chosen nation to Christians and the Christian church. Jonathan Edwards, arguably the greatest theologian that the U.S. has produced said this about the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Gospel of Jesus Christ: “There is perhaps no part of divinity (knowledge of God and his ways based upon the Bible) attended with so much intricacy, and wherein orthodox divines (true Christian pastors and theologians) do so much differ as stating the precise agreement and difference between the two dispensations of Moses and Christ (Old Testament vs. New Testament).”

I need your help as we begin to work our way through Exodus 21:1-23:19. First, will you pray for me as I read and study to teach these passages? My ambition is to be faithful to God’s word and to teach in a way that helps all of us to better understand our Bibles and thus grow in our knowledge of God and his saving work in Christ. I feel particularly weak and so please pray. Also, you will make my job easier and make these sermons more useful for yourself if you would read through at least these chapters and Matthew 5, Romans 3, 4, 5, 7 and Galatians 3-4. (Reading through Deuteronomy and the book of Hebrews would be even more helpful.) I am excited about this adventure we are about to embark upon and look forward to the ways in which God the Holy Spirit is going to make known to us more of the glory of God the Son through the written Word of God the Father.

Seeking to know God with you,