

Starting Over

A teaching on Parashahs 32-33

Behar/Bechukotai

by Kevin Phipps

In my job, I work with mostly unbelievers. Most of these men have never been to church, and barely believe in God at all. Working with these men has been a challenge, but it has taught me the mind of the unbeliever better than I have known in the past.

To the typical unbeliever, when it comes to religious matters, there are basically four types of people. The first are the really bad people. These are the murderers, rapists, thieves, and such that live, for the most part in prison. These are the people most people compare their own level of morality and goodness. Though they are not perfect, they are not like they are. The average unbeliever falls into the next group. This second group knows they do bad things, but the bad things they do are “normal”. They even know they are going to hell, even if in a tongue and cheek manner, and to a warped sense of what hell is. As a result, the idea of going to hell does not bother them, at least not enough to change anything about themselves. Generally, people in this group assume that the way they are is the way they are and nothing can be done about it anyway. They think that God has already written them off and any possibility of having a relationship with Him, going to heaven, and enjoying the many other benefits of the Kingdom is lost to them. They believe this and just sort of accept it.

The next group is where most of us are. These are the “good” people. Most of these people are religious, go to church, they don't do the “bad” things the people in the second group does. This generally causes people in the second group to notice, and even admire to an extent the positive qualities of these people. There is admiration, but not to the point of inspiring change in most cases. The last group are the religious fanatics. These are people who are very strict about their religion, and not only for themselves, but for everyone else as well. They push their religion on people in ways few people accept and fewer appreciate. The focus of their faith is so much on the rules and rites of their faith, that more important matters such as compassion, peace, and joy are lost. Such is the mind of the average unbeliever concerning religious and non-religious people.

Scripture teaches us a very different picture.

“There is no one righteous, not even one! No one understands, no one seeks God, all have turned away and at the same time become useless; there is no one who shows kindness, not a single one! Their throats are open graves, they use their tongues to deceive. Vipers' venom is under their lips. Their mouths are full of curses and bitterness. Their feet rush to shed blood, in their ways are ruin and misery, and the way of shalom they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” **[Romans 3:10-18 quoting Psalm 14:1-3; 53:2-4(1-3); 5:10(9); 140:4(3); 10:7; Isaiah 59:7-8; Proverbs 1:16; Psalm 36:2(1)]**

This pretty much puts all four groups of people in one boat, and it is a sinking one at that. I learned in Jr. High, under threat of a truant officer being sent to my home due to being late for school almost every day, that it doesn't matter if you are 30 seconds, 3 minutes, or 30 minutes late, late is late. In the same way, sin is sin. Murder, adultery, stealing, lying, or breaking the Sabbath are all equally part of the 10 commandments, and are thus all equally

considered sin. Certainly, some sins have more of an effect on people and are more offensive to God than others. But, sin is sin, and all have sinned and come short of the glory of God [Romans 3:23], and the wages of sin are death. [Romans 6:23] So this means that the “really bad” people who are in jail, and the “normally bad” people that make up most everyone else are the same in the eyes of God. Even the “good” people and the “ultra-good” people are not exempt from sin, so they are still given the same title of “sinner” by God. There is no room for self-righteousness or pride by anyone.

We have arrived at the end of Vayikra (Lev). Beresheet (Gen.) taught us that though we are the greatest part of God's Creation and made in His image, all the sons and daughters of Adam are sinful, apart from God by birth, and destined to eternal death. Sh'mot taught us the way to righteousness, and Vayikra has taught us how to be holy. Through this, we know what God's standards are, and likewise we know how far short we have fallen. We know the sad state we are in without God.

You probably see this as bad news. This is actually quite the opposite. It is actually the best news of your life. Everything in our world, especially our culture, is based on merit. You have to be good enough, smart enough, tough enough, fast enough, good looking enough, rich enough, and so on. With God, it is impossible for anyone to be anything enough. So when you've had enough of trying to be enough you need to go to God where He provides more than enough of all you need to get through this life and into the next. The word for this kind of news is jubilee, or in Hebrew it is “yovel”, which means trumpet, or the blast of a trumpet. This blast is always used to usher in a feast or celebration. Why is our unworthiness before God a cause of celebration?

“The land is not to be sold in perpetuity, because the land belongs to me – you are only foreigners and temporary residents with me. Therefore, when you sell your property, you must include the right of redemption. That is, if one of you becomes poor and sells some of his property, his next-of-kin can come and buy back what his relative sold.”

[Vayikra 25:23-25]

The year of Jubilee is all about starting over. Here is the background for redemption. There were multiple ways in which the people and the land started over. The above passage illustrates one of them. A person who is unable, on his own, to maintain possession of his property, will have to sell it. However, the sale of his property is done in such a way that a next-of-kin, who is able, can buy it back. This is redemption. Now let's think of your soul as land. You, through your spiritual poverty, otherwise known as sin, are unable to provide salvation for your own soul. The result of this is sale of your soul to HaSatan, and eternal death. However, God's Son, who through faith according to Yochanan 1, becomes our spiritual brother, is more than able to buy back our soul from HaSatan, and give us eternal life. Our inability to live up to the standards of God is good news in that through faith in Messiah Yeshua, we don't have to, but He can. This gives us the ability to enter into a spiritual year of Jubilee, and start over.

Some think they have lived in sin too long, or have sinned too deeply to change, or to be saved. They think God has written them off a long time ago. If they even step foot in a church or synagogue the building will spontaneously combust. Well, they're wrong. There are many examples throughout God's Word to show why this is wrong. Let me show you just one of them.

"Look, I am YHVH, the God of every living creature; is there anything too hard for me? Therefore, here is what YHVH says: 'I will hand this city over to the Kasdim and to N'vukhadretzar king of Bavel; and he will capture it. The Kasdim who are fighting against this city will enter and set this city on fire; they will burn it down, including its houses, on whose roofs they offered to Ba'al and poured out drink offerings to other gods, in order to make me angry. For from their youth, the people of Isra'el and the people of Y'hudah have done only what is evil from my perspective; the people of Isra'el have done nothing but provoke me with what their hands make,' says YHVH. 'This city has so provoked my anger and fury from the day they built it to this day that I ought to remove it from my presence, because of all the evil that the people of Isra'el and the people of Y'hudah have done in order to make me angry - they, their kings, their leaders, their cohanim, their prophets, the men of Y'hudah and the inhabitants of Yerushalayim. They have turned their backs on me, not their faces; and although I taught them, taught them frequently, they have not listened so as to receive instruction. Instead they put their detestable idols in the house that bears my name, to defile it; and they built the high places for Ba'al which are in the Ben-Hinnom Valley, to burn alive their sons and daughters to Molekh - something I did not order them to do, it never even entered my mind that they would do such an abominable thing - and thus they caused **Y'hudah to sin.**' [Yirmeyahu 32:27-35]

Remember the “really bad” people who are in jail, whom I was talking about? Well, even they have concepts of certain crimes being worse than others. Those at the bottom of the list are those who have committed crimes against children. Sin is sin, but in the hierarchy of sin, it doesn't get any worse than what is described above. These people were burning alive their own sons and daughters, which even by prison standards is the lowest of low, but then it gets worse. They did this in worship to a false god, which is not only murder, but idolatry. To make it even worse, these people were the people of God. This is taking God's name in vain. This one act comes pretty close to breaking all ten commandments at one time. Chances are your worst sin doesn't even come close to this. For hoots and giggles, let's assume it is. Look what happens in the passage which follows.

"Therefore, thus says YHVH the God of Isra'el concerning this city, of which you say that it is handed over to the king of Bavel by sword, famine and plague: 'I will gather them out of all the countries where I drove them in my anger, fury and great wrath; and I will bring them back to this place and have them live here in safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and singleness of purpose, so that they will fear me forever - this will be for their own good and for the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant not to turn away from them, but to do them good; I will put fear of me in their hearts, so that they will not leave me. I will take joy in them, so as to do them good. I will plant them in this land truly, with my whole heart and being.' For here is what YHVH says: 'Just as I have brought this complete disaster on this people, so likewise I will bring on them all the good I have promised them.' [Yirmeyahu 32:36-42]

This is concerning Israel, and is yet to come, but the message of redemption is the same. If you doubt it, look at a passage from the New Covenant. By God's grace, without earning it, all are granted the status of being considered righteous before him, through the act redeeming us from our enslavement to sin that was accomplished by the Messiah Yeshua. [Romans 3:24]

No one is righteous in and of themselves, but through faith in Messiah Yeshua, righteousness and salvation are readily available. This is a free gift regardless of what you have done or what has happened to you. For what you have done, there is forgiveness. For what has happened to you there is healing from the Great Physician. We are saved by grace, so what about Torah? Let Yeshua tell you Himself.

Yeshua said to them, "This is what I meant when I was still with you and told you that everything written about me in the Torah of Moshe, the Prophets and the Psalms had to be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds, so that they could understand the Tanakh, telling them, "Here is what it says: the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day; and in his name repentance leading to forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to people from all nations, starting with Yerushalayim. You are witnesses of these things. Now I am sending forth upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been equipped with power from above." **[Luke 24:44-49]**

How about Shaul?

So [the Jews] arranged a day with him and came to his quarters in large numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, giving a thorough witness about the Kingdom of God and making use of both the Torah of Moshe and the Prophets to persuade them about Yeshua. Some were convinced by what he said, while others refused to believe. So they left, disagreeing among themselves, after Sha'ul had made one final statement: "The Ruach HaKodesh spoke well in saying to your fathers through Yesha'yahu the prophet, 'Go to this people and say, "You will keep on hearing but never understand, and you will keep on seeing but never perceive, because the heart of this people has grown thick with their ears they barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, for fear that they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and do t'shuvah, so that I could heal them."' Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Goyim, and they will listen!" **[Acts 28:23-28]**

Redemption is of God through Messiah Yeshua, but we live Torah to live Yeshua in our lives. Our life then becomes a living testimony to the reality of Yeshua. The laws of God do not lead to salvation. They lead to Yeshua, who himself provides salvation to all those who believe in Him.

"Come now," says YHVH, "let's talk this over together. Even if your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow; even if they are red as crimson, they will be like wool."**[Yesha'yahu 1:18]**

This is what starting over is all about.