**“Rock of Flesh and Wood”**

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Exodus 20:1-17

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

John 2:13-22

 Lent 3

What came right after the Gospel read … then what I think is the key passage in that reading, verses 19-22: “Now when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing. But Jesus on His part did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for **He Himself knew what was in man**.” And Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. **He was speaking about the temple of His body**. **When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the Word that Jesus had spoken**.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Bridge

Jesus “knew what was in man”. And if you had not read the (“As We Gather”) paragraph at the beginning of our bulletin, it starts us this way today: “The Church **has** what the world (or men) **do not want**: God’s Law, which always **accuses us sinners**, and His Gospel, which **allows for no boasting on our part**.” Men (by nature) want the Commandments of God actually **locked away** **in the Church** away from where they might see them and face them, never to visit for this reason (of men): there are **standards** by which **men will be cursed if not for their personal receipt of the salvation of the Christ of God**. Those standards are not (you should know) of the abstract looseness of tolerance and watered-down intentions, but of **perfection** demanded by God and **carved into a Rock book of rules** (the “you shall’s and you shall not’s” of **specific** expectation **so** **all-encompassing** that no man could ever honestly feel comfortable with how they perform them). “**Good enough**” could never be “Good **enough**” because God says: “I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before Me. I am a **jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation**, and you shall remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. You shall, also, not murder (or hate anyone), commit adultery (having any unclean thought), steal (or fail to protect someone else’s holdings from the Lord with all your abilities), don’t bear false witness (or slander) or covet (wanting and not perfectly thankful for what is your current provision from God … what He knows you need and provides one way or another).”

Today’s Scriptures make major points using **rocks** and **stones**, construction **bricks** and a stumbling **block**. **Boulders** **(big rocks)** crush. And if there is one of those “**rocky things**” that can certainly compare to all that God’ expects, a **boulder it is** … and certainly not **pebbles**. The **Commandments** are not **suggestions**, and men (Jesus said) don’t like to face that. Men don’t want them enforced all that much, graded for performance on a curve somehow, and not dictated, and (as I said a moment ago) hidden away in the Church, collecting dust like the relics of **everything** men would prefer the Church stood for.

See, I contend to this very day (and from this pulpit) that if the Church would be **recognized by men as God’s when it is The Church**, each and every one of this world’s issues (and to name just a few: disagreements, poverty, illness, even pandemic, immigration, abortion, and **great division even in politics**), **none** **would exist**. I, actually, challenge anybody to **ask me about this, and really care about** **God’s position on any issues,** **finding them all answered by Him**.

**My bet** is that all who will **choose to ask me about this (or particular issues that they want God’s edict upon)** will **already know the answer**. Those **not asking** (I guarantee) will be the “**men**” (and “**women**”) who **don’t want to hear what they would** **prefer not to acknowledge**.

If that sounds **harsh** and **firm** and, maybe, **too judgmental**, well, the Law **IS** a **boulder of absolutes (right and wrongs)**. It is as **solid** and **firm** as the **rock side of the mountain God Himself carved-into on Mount Sinai**. And it’s as **heavy** and **crushing** as **our inability to uphold it like it’s expected of us to do**. Killing (for instance) is absolutely **wrong** unless we bear the sword with the Lord’s authority. There’s no such thing as “**mercy** killing” nor a **judgment-call-by-men about the “relative value of life”, like** **which one’s worth caring for (a mother or her child’s yet in her womb)**. Killing is **killing**, and the worship of ourselves (what **we want** or decide over what **God does**) is **damning**. Tell me you perfectly worship **God always over yourself** and I **will** address you as the “liar” that **I would be** if I said such a **stupid thing**.

Text

And you should know that the Law’s absolute and knowable **demands** came from the **same Rock that the salvation of the Gospel came and comes from**. You can’t cast-out one (Law or Gospel) without casting-out the other … and Jesus knows that “**men**” **do all of that** (“The Church **has** what men **do not want**: God’s Law that always **accuses us sinners**, and His Gospel, which **allows for no boasting on our part**.” And Jesus said: “’Destroy **This Temple (Law / rules and Gospel / salvation in Him and The Church that He gave Himself to)** and in three days I will raise **it** up’. The Jews then said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking about the temple of His body.” **So it was construction stones** and **bricks** that all were wrangling over within **this conversation**, yet really a **Boulder** and a **building and a stumbling block /** **ROCK OF FLESH AND WOOD** that **they were**. Paul called Jesus and the preaching of Him crucified a “Stumbling Block”, so **Rocks**, then, are **foundational about every which way** … no sand giving way nor mudslides or snowbanks or grassy knolls, just the **Boulder of the Law** and the **Stumbling Block** / the **Rock of Salvation** which is **Jesus and Him crucified** / **Him on His cross because He had to be, to save “men” who don’t like to obey the demands of the Law**.

Because “I did not come to **abolish** the Law or the Prophets; but **fulfill them”,** He said (that is **keep** **them Myself where you wouldn’t**). “For truly, until heaven and earth pass away, not an **iota**, not a **dot**, will **pass from the Law until all is accomplished**. Therefore whoever **relaxes one of the least of the commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of Heaven**.” **Not something you want called!**

**The “Law and Prophets / Gospel” make men stumble**. The only **innocent One** **became guilt** (wasn’t it naturally, but **became it, though innocent Himself**) so as to destroy its potential destruction in **His sacrificial death for it … a Rock of Flesh and Wood**.

Application

You know, if you want to **boast?** (and I’ve heard it countless times: “I’m a pretty good guy. I try to do my best. God certainly won’t consider me as bad as most. I take care of my own and don’t hurt people and always try to help where I can. God owes me Heaven before all that’s comparably far worse. He owes me! He owes me! God owes me!”) **but what He owes you don’t want** but, **rather**, **what you do not deserve Jesus offers in the glory of Heaven and Paradise**.

I love that Paul called “**God’s wisdom**” “**men’s foolishness and folly**”. It, obviously, **ISN’T FOOLISHNESS AND FOLLY ALL THAT**: absolutely (and un-mistakenly) given in the Law of His demands then His love so as to save us from ourselves.

I still hold you to my **challenge** on the **concreteness** (there’s another one of those **“Rock” words)** of **God’s policy upon any human issue (politics along with it)**. I still bet that those who **will ask** will **already know the answer** while **those not asking** are going to be the ones (both “**men**” and “**women**) who **won’t want to hear what they’d** **prefer to not acknowledge**.

And **“acknowledgment”** **goes both ways**. **My sin** I plan to always confess, and I hold **MYSELF** accountable also to you as The Church wielding the **clear confrontation of God’s Laws upon my errors**. I need the Savior and His death for my sins upon a cross. But I will also always be that for you. And we must not ever hedge around the **clarity** of God’s will and design. It is taking the **weight of THAT which is our confessed and even unconfessed failures that smothered and suffocated Him to the last or His breath**. And it’s **why** it’s the “hopeful” who are thrilled that, through Easter, death from our sin couldn’t hold Him long.

May the Lord **not let us** **hide from the Boulder of truth and honesty** and **forgive us our errors confessed to Him … living then as His**. In +Jesus+ name, and for **His sake**. Amen.