

The Knowledge of God

by Art Katz

Art Katz emphasizes the importance of understanding the knowledge of God as revealed through Israel's history and relationship with Him.

Duration: 1:51:05

Scripture: Exodus 20:12, Numbers 6:24-26, Deuteronomy 10:12-13, Psalm 27:4, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 40:31, Malachi 3:10

Topics: "Knowledge Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of bringing the message of God's word to a divided and violent world. He questions whether the revelation of God at Mount Sinai and the laws and covenants given to the Israelites are still relevant and real for believers today. The speaker mentions the Orthodox Passover Seder and the four sons, highlighting the foolish and wicked sons who disregard their ancestors' experiences and fail to see the significance of their own deliverance. The sermon also touches on God's jealousy and references another book on God as a mystery.

Transcript

I boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord. I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord. So God delights in those that understand and know him.

And our subject this morning, for as many days as the world will give us, is God. The knowledge of God. And I've been up half the night looking at some very rich material, at least of the effect of which is to realize that God's revelation to Israel is God's revelation to mankind.

That the only way that God, in fact, could communicate himself is by picking a particular people and investing in them the revelation of himself, and that they would in turn be the witness to that revelation. And that's not unlike the role of the church, even as a continuation of the ministry that was given to Israel as a nation. I remember once we talked about coming back to the New York area and establishing some kind of a ministry of witness to Jews.

I was talking about myself coming back, but the wife of a brother who had been with us for years said, no Archie, if there's a witness to the Jews, there needs to be a corporate expression. It's not just one man that will need some way to bring a whole band of souls to present the witness to the Lord. And that's touching

the principle of God's employment of an entire nation.

So how God chose to reveal himself to Israel is a remarkable instruction about God himself. What he says of himself in the words that he gave to that nation through Moses, through the prophets, through the psalmists is the statement about himself that he wanted communicated. God wants to be understood and wants to be known.

And it's interesting that in the messianic age, one of the descriptions is that the knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. And if we are hurting for any single one thing in the church today, it's the want of a true knowledge of God. Because if that is one thing, if that is deformed, if that is inadequate, everything else will be affected by it.

Everything will be askew. So I can't think of a better investment, and evidently that's the Lord's thought, but that we should look to this. So I want to pray again here over the table for that.

What a topic. I just talked earlier with the Lord this morning already. I said, Lord, if no man has the right to preach the cross or to teach the cross, but him who was impaled on it, who then shall speak about the knowledge of God but God? So, Lord, we ask that again.

We desire what you desire. We want to be instructed in the knowledge of God. And we admit that we share with the church at large, everywhere in the world, an inadequate knowledge.

We do not know as we ought to know, and it shows. And we're asking, my God, that you would help us and bring us to a better perception of yourself, far more complete and intensive. And only you can perform this, Lord, by the grace of your spirit.

So I thank you for those men who have sought you out in this regard, two of whose books are before us this morning, and that you would draw freely from those things that you have richly given them. Bless us, my God, as we embark on this great subject and we thank you even for the privilege of it. It would be a privilege to fail at it, and we should succeed in something less or other than this great subject, God, as he in fact is, and not as men or we have thought him to be.

So bless this, Lord, we pray, and bless those who will receive benefit from these tapes. And we thank you again for the subject that you've put before us. In Jesus' name, amen.

I pray to the Lord for my birthday gifts, the complete set of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics, 14 volumes, and this one is entitled The Doctrine of God. I knew it was there, and the Lord, I believe, prompted me to pick it up early this morning. And then another book that I'll be quoting from perhaps more extensively, Theology of the Old Testament, by another German, Walter Eichrodt.

So as I've mentioned before over this table, it's a remarkable thing, even an anomaly, strange kind of contradiction, that the most superb Old Testament study is performed by Germans. And we Jews are indebted to them. I don't think that we know what our own treasure is.

And the church has suffered from a kind of separation from all the New Testament that God never intended. There's kind of a rupture. And for too long, many Christians have come to their church services with the New Testament and Psalms, as if the rest of the Old Testament has very little cogency or relevance and don't know what they're missing.

So part of our burden is to restore an appreciation for what God has given in the Old Testament scriptures and what he has made manifest through that revelation of Jesus as a fulfillment of what has been hinted and known and understood and sought for by the Old Testament saints. I just started looking at Bart on this subject and just want to share a few things out of it. I didn't realize I'd turned up many pages.

I was just sitting there going, wow, just started. That was a week's worth of turning. Well, I read until my eyes closed up on me.

I went to bed about 6 a.m. knowing that I had to be up within a short time but desperately needing a little rest. I'm wondering, I'll fall into a state of stupefaction. I'll sleep right through the 7 o'clock bedtime.

But also I just, my eyes blinked and opened at about quarter to 7. Another miracle from the Lord. So it gave me a bit of rest but enough to be prompt and on time. I'm looking for a footnote.

He makes reference to another very famous book on God. I'm trying to remember the author's name. Who wrote of God as a mystery.

A kind of spiritual phenomenon communicated in a kind of a hazy way. Oh Lord, turn me to that. That had made quite a stir in its time but he shot it down.

Here it is. About the Holiness of God, a book by Rudolf Otto where this other German theologian talked about the numinous, N-U-M-I-N-O-U-S. It's like a word that describes what is indescribable.

The vague sense of God's mysterious spirit and that this was supposed to be the communication of God and the sense of the divine. But Barthes says that the Holy God of Scripture is the Holy One of Israel. He was not impressed with this man's work.

The knowledge of God is not some kind of a numinous mystery that is going to be promoted by referring to some vagary about a sense of God as mystery but that God is going to be revealed by his relationship with Israel. That that's where the action is. That's the payoff.

The God who made a covenant with Israel. The God who made promises. The God who spoke to the patriarchs.

The God who revealed himself to Moses. That this is the foundation of revelation for the knowledge of God and not some speculative consideration about God in the sense of a mystery. There are mysteries as things that are withheld until the time when God will reveal them.

But the foundational knowledge of God is not going to come as some kind of a vapor and that you have to somehow intuit. And it's really interesting that the man who wrote that book did not have Barthes' grasp of the revelation that had come to the Old Testament saints. It may be something in the spirit of men that balks at acknowledging the centrality of Israel in the purposes of God that leads them often to other by-paths trying to find some key to the revelation of God which would have been revealed had they understood the centrality of the people that God had chosen to make the knowledge of himself known.

So, Barthes says, it's not this numinous thing of which this man writes but the Holy God of Scripture is the Holy One of Israel. That is the primary and fundamental thing to be said about him. That one quotation is worth everything.

The primary and fundamental thing about God is his relationship to Israel and what he has revealed to Israel. Present Israel or the descendants of present Israel, modern day Jewry know little or nothing about it and to some extent are even offended by the history of God with Israel. Don't even believe it.

Look upon the Bible as their own accomplishment. That somehow it's our Jewish contribution to the world in giving the world a book that's made up of fanciful things that are not intended as some factual account but are imaginative or picturesque or historic or mythological and brings the concept of a monotheistic God which is an advance over pagan views of multiple gods. That's the way most modern Jews would look at the Bible which they themselves do not read or if they read it, they read it as a kind of an antiquity just something of a cultural interest that happens to be our contribution.

They cannot bring themselves to understanding that the Bible itself is a piece of supernatural reality given of God by the Spirit. That these 66 books, I'm including the New Testament are a statement of God through the ages over a millennium through almost as many authors and so Bot is that kind of a man who looks at the scripture and particularly the Old Testament as the primary and fundamental thing to be said about God is what was said and established with Israel with that people. So this does not mean first of all and decisively that God who is exalted over Israel separated from it and confronting it to be feared by it as the one to whom it has obligations.

The holiness of God does mean all this too because it means primarily that and decisively that God has adopted and chosen Israel as his child and given it his promise and has already conferred upon it his gracious help. And that's why Israel can say who is like unto thee O Lord and speaks about the holiness of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God because this is Israel's experience of God. So God makes his entry into the world with the nation and with the people and the record of that relationship is our basis for the knowledge of God.

So we need to go back again and to maybe come to it in a fresh way. I myself have been guilty of just kind of gliding over or looking at those statements about who is like unto thee among the gods fearful and praises doing wonders as kind of a poetry. But these are the statements of the people to whom the wonders have been performed.

And for them it was very real. They had a real knowledge of God based on his acts. And what distinguishes the faith we call Christianity is that God has made an entry into the world and before men.

There's a historic testimony. This is not something imaginative or speculative like other world religions but that this is predicated and based on history on God's actual entry and involvement with a nation. And that is the foundation of our knowledge of God because God knows how men love speculative fanciful things that sound very spiritual like this book by Rudolf Otto on the mystery of holiness but it's not a statement of God as he in fact is.

It's a statement of a man's speculative thought on what he would think the holiness of God is when it's considered outside of and separate from the actual acts of God what God has actually spoken and done with the nation Israel. So the great events of Israel like the parting of the Red Sea the exodus out of Egypt the judgments that came to Egypt are the foundation of God's revelation. God is in judgment God in mercy God in faithfulness the provision in the wilderness all of that are the foundational elements of Israel's faith about God who has revealed himself through those provisions and through those acts.

There's a whole number of things here about the grace of God and the mercy of God as it was revealed to Israel that God's grace is revealed even in the opposition of the people for whom the grace is intended. That it's not a grace given to those who agree or even willingly receive it but that the grace is all the more grace when it's expressed to a people who resist it. So that the love of God does not require even agreement but it's all the more demonstrated when it has to be brought to a people who even oppose it as has been the history of Israel and even to this day with many.

Only in this opposition is God known in his being as love and grace for only in this relationship of opposition does he actually create and maintain fellowship between himself and us and turns toward us. Only in this tension as we experience and recognize it and are subject ourselves to it do we truly believe in him and yield to him the right which he has against us and over us the right in which we can then place our confidence. So how is God's grace revealed? All the more when it's not welcomed all the more when it's opposed God persists and he has no condition that makes his grace acceptable.

The fact that he's willing to contend and strive with men and to make his grace and mercy known even in their opposition is the very demonstration of that grace and mercy. You see what I mean? So Israel's stubbornness is God's foil. He couldn't ask for a better platform to communicate himself and what he is in grace and mercy than in the stubbornness and opposition of the people who have bucked against it.

Isn't that a remarkable statement about God? And that's why Israel was selected. Not because it was most conducive to the grace of God but most opposed. Not because they were the most spiritual but because they were the most carnal.

Not because they were the greatest but because they were the least. In everything that was adverse toward God and that the whole history of the nation is shot through with terrible apostasy the grace of God and the mercy of God is made more apparent. And that's Israel's purpose is to reveal God as God.

And in that revelation God revealed himself in a personal way. The tendency of men to think about God would have been even to prefer God as being abstract. I can remember occasions when I was a missionary to the Jews and came in contact with rabbis in Kansas City they would ridicule my faith and the reference of believers to God as being known personally as Lord.

I realized that they actually preferred a God who is abstract and distant than a God who is personal, real, and immediate. Why would that be? That there would be a tendency in men to prefer God abstractly than God personally. But the genius of God's revelation to Israel is God at a personal level immediate, intimate, real and as a personality himself having attributes just like man.

He sees, he feels, he aggrieves, he hurts. Why would men prefer not that God but a God who is abstract and distant and speculative? You can't even say that an abstract God has spoken but the God who is intimate, personal, and real in that hand has and requires with that speaking. And God has even not only revealed himself in a personal way but he's given Israel names for himself and that these names El Shaddai and Adonai Shabaoth the Lord of Hosts or the Almighty God are like progressive revelations they have come at different times in Israel's history.

I can't remember where it was I think with Moses that I have not given you this name till now but now I want you to understand me as the Almighty God or to Abraham, I think it's Genesis 15 Abraham, walk thou before me I am the Almighty God walk thou before me and be blameless. It's the first time that God uses the name Almighty at a point in Abraham's personal history with him because Abraham is now being

called to a more exacting walk that will require the Almightyness of God to perform. I am the Almighty God I'm speaking to you now with this name that I have not given to you before walk thou before me and be thou blameless.

So the name brings not only revelation but a requirement and so this is characteristic of God's dealing with Israel and it's a way in which we in our generation can come to an understanding and the knowledge of God by looking back on the kind of relationship that they had and what God intended by giving himself in a personal way and by the use of his name. That's why he was so insistent that his name not be taken in vain that there was a power in the name that the name was not just an appellation, a designation but communicated something and even to invoke the name with that kind of an understanding had a meaning and a consequence that would not have been Israel's privilege except the name was given. Now this is completely lost to modern people.

We think the name... I spoofed my mother for calling me Arthur my birth certificate says baby she couldn't think of a name and then it was crossed out and she finally called me Arthur of all names. She said that she leaned over the crib and she said, Abraham? And I went, what? So she scratched that. So we call our kids Fawn and Bruce and Dawn and all kinds of lovely poetic sounding names but they're just designations.

A name to us does not mean in our generation what it meant biblically to an Old Testament people because the name was the identification and even became the thing in itself. That the first privilege given to Adam as a son of God was to name the other animals that God had created that were nameless until Adam himself gave them names. When he gave them the names that he did it was not just a label that was conferred but an identity.

You could almost say that the giving of the name was a creative act that established the distinctness of those different pieces of God's creation. So the bestowing of a name has a remarkable significance and Israel's privilege was that God had bestowed his name upon that people and given to Israel various aspects of himself in the names that he would employ at different times in their history. Even the blessing that God ordained the Aaronic blessing in Numbers chapter 6 anybody can turn to that? Telling Aaron how to pray that this prayer would not just be a mumbo-jumbo kind of a religious exercise but the conferring of something.

In verse 22 the Lord spoke to Moses saying speak to Aaron and his son saying thus you shall bless the Israelites you shall say to them here's the remarkable significance of words and of speaking that was pagan nations in their mythologies and their occultic and other forms of religion had some significant sense of words but not the kind of sense that the Israelites had that words were almost like a sacred trust particularly a word that would come from God because they knew God as creator who created by his word he brought all things into being by his word so Israelite religion the faith of the nation Israel has to do with God as a creator and the account of creation given in Genesis is the key to understanding God as creator by his word and this is one of the profoundest foundations of

Israel's whole understanding about its own God no other nation had this kind of grasp of God that Israel had because this was the revelation given it about its own God and that revelation is given to Israel but it's intended for all generations for the people of faith of all generations and for all nations and we'll come into this in the Psalms and in other places where Israel is made conscious that it has an obligation to the nations to communicate their knowledge of God to the nations or else the nations will be walking into walls

and continuing in their primitive mythologies and other kinds of occultic practices for the want of the knowledge of God who alone is God it's a strange conundrum thing to consider how do you keep yourself from a kind of nationalistic self-exaltation when you

have been singled out for the privilege of the revelation of the one God who is God how do you communicate that to other nations without exhibiting some kind of a superiority over them was a contradiction that Israel had to find its way through the problem for God is how do I communicate what I am to a nation without their getting puffed up over that communication and being corrupted by the very thing that I intend for their sanctification it's a strange kind of paradox it's a remarkable question we're not through with it yet the church itself can well do to consider what it does with its revelation and Paul what did he say that for the measure of the revelation given him he was given a gold a thorn in his side lest he be exalted beyond measure so even the great apostle had to receive

something from God as a countermeasure because of the revelation given him remember Exodus 3 the revelation to Moses of God in the burning bush who shall I tell them is sending me and God's answer is for all generations you shall tell them this I am the God of your fathers the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but moreover this is how you shall be known of me that I am that I am and so when Jesus in John chapter 8 when they said who do you think you are are you greater than the prophets who were sent to us are you greater than our father Abraham whose remains are with us Jesus said well verily I say unto you from the Latin word veritas verily, truly I say unto you that before Abraham was I am and they picked up stones to kill him they knew exactly what that meant that was uttermost

blasphemy because they knew that they knew as Israelites that God had given the name I am as his eternal designation how dare this upstart and carpenter's son employ that language so their meaning and their revelation is a unique provision of God to Israel no other nation can boast of it and the God who is giving this is the one who is God in fact and so this is through this nation that knowledge and revelation is to be communicated to others not in a prideful and a boastful way but in a humbled way maybe in keeping that with the thought to whom much is given much is required we're privileged but we also have the greater responsibility well getting back to the blessing that God gave Aaron to say you shall say to them the Lord bless you and keep you the Lord make his face to shine upon you

and be gracious to you the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace remarkable statement and I love it when we will from time to time conclude a service or someone will pray the Aaronic blessing on God's people now and then it says so they shall put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them what a strange statement by speaking these words so will my name come on the people who have heard this benediction benediction bene means good like beneficial and diction means speaking it's a good speaking why? because something is conferred with that speaking that is tangible and palpable that is an actual blessing so God is instructing the nation even in the efficacy of words that words have a value a content, a meaning, a power particularly the words that are given you

shall say this to them I'm calling you to say this to them and when you do that my name will be upon them what does that mean? what is in my name what's intrinsic to my name the meaning of that name what I am as God in that name will also be conferred this is I don't think that this has been appreciated sufficiently but this is radical this is unknown and unheralded in the history of mankind and this is only a few thousand years old but it's God breaking in this is the grace of God the mercy of God and the very choice of a nation for this revelation is itself a revelation of a God who chooses I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy so everything that God does with Israel for Israel making a covenant with Israel a

covenant making and a covenant keeping God is a statement about God

himself the God who makes promises the God who puts great emphasis on his word is God so by his act of bestowing a name on himself God chooses to be described as the definable the distinctive, the individual in this way the faith of Israel sets its face both against an abstract concept of deity and a nameless ground of being what are the alternatives to have a God who is not named you're either going to fish around and speculate and have some abstract notion that is not God it's your own abstraction or you're going to use a phrase like the ground of being he's actually quoting, I think another German, Tillich used that phrase well it sounds very poetic but what in fact does that mean to call God a ground of being can you pray to a ground of being can you have a hope and a confidence in a

ground of being does a ground of being give promises to which you can remind him and anticipate by faith that can give you hope when every kind of thing is set against you a ground of being is not or an abstraction is not capable of any of those things so from the beginning God is explicit personal and gives his name and reveals himself takes the risk of allowing the people to get puffed up in their knowledge or to misuse it so that he himself has got to caution and don't take my name in vain I'm giving you a sacred trust I've not done this for any other people I'm doing it for you but be careful with it it's an extreme privilege don't misuse it he talks about this a little bit later on as actually being a falling away not a statement of an increase of intimacy and knowledge of God but a

falling away from it because the orthodox Jews today think that they are honoring God by saying Hashem the name what they're actually doing is pronouncing an abstraction they have lost the intimate sense of God that their forefathers once had and this is since the destruction that came upon the temple and the dispersal of the priesthood this is the rabbinical Judaism that came out of the crisis of Israel's judgment and so they've lost the sense of intimacy the knowledge of God that Israel had before that judgment and so what they have now is a kind of abstraction that they speak in the sense that they think that they are honoring God but what it really indicates is they don't know Him beyond that abstraction Hashem, the name but what name? both deceived thinking that they're doing service

to God and that somehow this is honoring to God when actually it's a statement of a falling away because God desires to be known and He wants to be known intimately and you can't have that kind of relationship without communicating yourself in your name so to be reduced to a Hashem the name without saying what that name is and having no greater meaning for the name and unable to bring yourself to the place where you can say Yahweh or Jehovah or Yeshua shows how destitute they are and their religion is like unto that abstraction it's an abstract legalism and it has lost the intimate sense of God and maybe the end of that is the statement of Jesus of those who say Lord, Lord and He says depart from me you workers of iniquity, I never knew you you've been reduced to such a state that you're

just invoking a little syllable but there's no comprehension no knowledge of myself and you've never had that but you think that by invoking that you do have it so it's an astonishing coming up short in a final moment of great mortification I never knew you just to come back into an Old Testament Hebraic mindset just to appreciate the meaning of names the meaning of words the communication of why it was given the personal sense the intimacy this is what I'm trying to touch now not so much although it's interesting to examine the different names that were given but what underlies the God who reveals Himself by giving His name He desires to be known intimately He's giving people the privilege of the name that is an insight into His makeup as God it makes Him very personal He's taking the

chance of the familiarity that breeds contempt He would be much wiser so to speak and safer to keep those people at a distance terrify the dickens out of them and let them have an abstract fear of God but that would not be His nature He's not in business to terrify or to keep His people at a distance the kind of God that He is and the grace that He exhibits which is the expression of His love is the desire to be known and to be an intimate relationship with His own people and it's the love that's willing to take the risk of being abused I think probably to use it like a kind of genie lamp to think that by invoking it we can use the name magically and this is the characteristic of all pagan religions is that its use of God as they knew it was magical things were invoked and intoned to

obtain a certain effect or result what it is is man in the saddle man using and manipulating that which is holy this is the taking of the name in vain that Israel would come down to the level of its pagan neighbors and take the holy names of God and seek to manipulate them for their own advantage as a means to their own ends it's not given for that it's given for intimacy not for manipulation so religion that becomes a manipulation which is even Christianity today in many ways is an offense to God but He opens the door for it that possibility by giving His name but the God who's here's the point the God who's willing to take that risk is showing us what He is as God I'm a God who so desires intimate relationship and the knowledge of myself as a person of what I am that I'm willing to take

the risk that you might abuse this I'm warning you not to but it's the fact that I'm warning you shows that it is a possibility but I'm willing to take that risk you'll be sorry if you do you'll be chastised there'll be unhappy consequence but what is love? we're learning what love is love is the willingness to take risks by making itself vulnerable and this is the most high God who's the creator of the heavens and the earth and all that in them is we would not have known that except that God had done that historically with this nation and that's why Barth in the other book said I'm not impressed with this Rudolph Otto and the numinous mystery of God as a kind of a sense or vapor the true knowledge comes in God's relationship with Israel and what he has both spoken and done for that

nation and that's what we're seeing here this is so good so God doesn't desire to be abstract or just a nameless ground of being that's rejected so the proclamation of the divine name was treasured as an act whereby God himself came forth from his secret place and offered himself in fellowship isn't that a beautiful picture? beautiful statement it's a picture of not only the love of God but the humility of God to come down and come to send to be in fellowship with his own creation with his own creatures even at people who are going to be his heartache through many generations this is a God who comes down so even before the advent of Jesus where we see the literal physical fulfillment of that aspect of God it's already indicated in the history of God from the beginning with that nation

that's why they should all the more recognize Jesus because Jesus was the fulfillment of all that God had all along been conveying in the one way or another and here he is now in all fullness before you it's a God who comes down so by revealing his name God has, as it were made himself over to them he has opened to them a part of his very being and given them a means of access to himself I don't know that I'm that willing myself to be that open and available to others but God is isn't that a remarkable revelation of God?

I think I share Karl Barth's feeling I'm not impressed with this mystical stuff but I love this I love this, the reality that could only have been communicated in the tangible way that God did by being in relationship with this people and giving them his name he has opened to them a part of his very being and given them a means of access to himself he wants to be accessible whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord is only a final statement of what was all along God's way with men he wants to be called upon and what do

we see in the psalmists but a generation of men who are continually calling upon God with a real intimacy and holding him to his promises didn't you say and didn't you show us in the past weren't you faithful in the past didn't you open the Red Sea how come now we're

faced with these enemies and where are you? are you sleeping? it's amazing the kind of directness it almost borders on what's the word impoliteness in the address of some of the psalmists to God in their crisis times but never once is there an indication that God reproves them for that kind of talk he actually loves it he loves to be addressed he wants to be reminded of what he had promised that men are believing for that and expect God to act on the basis of what he has said because that's what he is as God and we'll only learn that in one way by investing ourselves in the history of Israel and the great irony is that we for the most part who are Gentiles are being nourished by this whereas Jews who are the descendants of Israel have little or no notion or even interest in the kind of

thing that blesses us so that part of our calling is to make known to them their own God and what could be more powerful than it should come to them through Gentiles who are more enamored and taken up with the truth of the God of Israel than is Israel itself and even in that mystery is a revelation of God by itself so the knowledge of his name is more than an external means of distinguishing one person from another it is a relation with the person's being isn't that a beautiful statement God has made himself accessible by giving his name it's like saying here's an aspect of myself I'm not just giving you a little key word to invoke in a magical way but I'm inviting you to a relationship with me and my being and what I am in myself as God because that's going to have though it doesn't say

this consequence for yourself how do you enter into a relationship with God as God and what he is in himself and not be changed into that very image if we are changed from glory to glory beholding in each other's faces the glory of God what potential for change is there in having God as accessible in the aspects of himself that are contained in his name this is another revelation of God it's not just that he enjoys the intimacy he wants to see us transformed into his own precious image and the way to it is through the communion with him as he in fact is and not as we would have thought him to be a lot of people who shun the Old Testament have some kind of erroneous view that this is the God of judgment I like the New Testament God he's mercy and kindness but the Old Testament wrath and

fury and anger I'm afraid of that I don't want anything to do with that they don't realize what they're losing they're being stunted in their knowledge of God they're being deprived of a relationship in a fullness that would be theirs and they have a mistaken notion of God because they played upon some aspect of himself as judge but have neglected the other aspects which were as conspicuous as the God of the Old Testament as they are in the New his grace and his mercy and his love his benevolence put my name on the people so the church that has satisfied itself with the New Testament with the Psalms and dismissing the whole Old Testament has to a great degree dismissed God himself and to that degree their Christian life is stunted unnatural it lacks a fullness that would have been there

had they availed themselves of the accessibility that God intends they don't know that bridge if God had not done this we would have every reason to shrink back from any relationship that we would have to assume that God who is the creator and stands above all this is foreboding distant fearful the only reason that we have a disposition to seek him and to find him in a way in which we can say Abba, Father or say Lord with an endearing sense is because he has communicated himself to us in that way otherwise we would not have known it we could err as much about insisting on Yahweh as the alternative to the word Lord and make that a new legalism and be bereft of any real intimacy even though we're invoking the right

word I'm thinking of a place in the Psalms and I think it's mentioned

several times where the psalmist is invited to run into the name of the Lord and find his security there that those who know the name of the Lord will run into it what does that mean? that they've got the secret code? that they know the letters? the name of the Lord is the Lord it's what he is in himself and that knowledge is ultimate security that's what it means Paul, he calls himself husband father lover friends who sticketh closer than a brother he uses a variety of endearing terms that are shot full of implications of intimacy that we would never have dreamed that God would have desired but the fact that he's the one who has invoked those terms he calls himself husband, father, friend encourages us that this is a God who is desiring this kind of relationship and that's the very

release but where do we learn that? we learn that in his relationship with Israel versant I'm just saying over what I said before with their own history with their own tradition with their own scripture far from being offended with Jesus and rejecting him they would have seen the very fulfillment of all that God was hinting and implying throughout their history here it is now rolled up or stated in one so this author goes on to say we look in vain for any instance of the magical use of the divine name though it was given to Israel they did not use it that way the whole climate of the religion of Yahweh was unfavorable to such a use it never had a chance to develop the assurance that the divine name constituted a guarantee of Yahweh's presence remained a free gift of grace at the hand of a

sovereign God Israel had enough to realize this is not something to be misused or abused but rather it's the statement of God as a gift of grace coming from the God who is sovereign and that is so holy you don't violate it so what he's saying is the thing that safeguarded the intimacy to which Israel was invited was the very sense of the holiness of God that came with that they could not misuse it because the climate that God had established the environment of Israel itself as the people of God forbade the magical use of his name which was the way in which pagan peoples employed the names of their deities and so what can we say that when judgment came to Israel and that environment was destroyed then we find a kind of a Judaism that goes back again to the abstract Hashem and has lost the

intimate sense of God and is even offended by those who imply that not only is that possibility real but that they themselves know it there's nothing that infuriated these rabbis Kansas City was where I was living as a missionary to the Jews and the fact that I could say that the Lord brought me or the Lord sent me or I'm here because the Lord that you can speak in a personal sense in that way of a God who is immediate and intimate who directs who provides who enables was offensive to them so not only have they moved away from it but they were offended by those who are in their own very tradition that God gave at the first the fact that you're offended by what once blessed your own nation is a statement itself of judgment so this God he says is beyond the reach of any human pressure and

God did not give it like something that Israel can possess in order to manipulate any more than gifts of the spirit as if we own them and we can turn them on and off at our pleasure something the Holy Spirit will give it's not a sense of possession with the potential for misuse it's a gift but one that is in his control in that house lest it puts us in the place of manipulating God see what I mean? that's the whole tension there of grace when it is given that it comes close to the possibility of a grace abused or misused and in fact we can say that that's happened historically where people will misuse God or for their own purposes and even invoke the name of the Lord to justify it as if somehow they can put that phrase that it sanctifies what is otherwise selfish and has to do with their

own ministry their own foundation their own this or their own that God takes that risk which is a precious love it's good to think of the problem before God how do I reveal myself to my creation? how do I make myself known to the nations who have gone off in their own perverse directions into occultic and magical forms of religion calling upon the false gods of this world to their own destruction how do I reveal myself to them in a way that can correct them and bring them into alignment with myself and be a provision for their own life how can I do that? safely that was God's problem and his answer according to his wisdom was I will choose a nation from among all the nations and to them I will bestow my name and the revelation of myself and I'll call them to be a priestly nation to the

nations and to mediate and communicate the knowledge of myself which I have made dear to them and intimate to them that the nations might know sanity peace and righteousness that was God's problem and so Israel's history is painful to consider seeing how great was their privilege and their obligation an instructor for us as the church who have essentially that same calling but understand what the problem of God is and the communication of himself to the nations and to the world that he himself has created how opportunistic men are even to employ good things God-given things to their own ends don't we see that now taking the name of the Lord in vain is not just some vocalization but it's going off in some carnal direction in ministry where you're riding high and inviting finance and

contributions and so on and so forth and sanctifying it by invoking the name of the Lord so easy to misuse and to abuse they'll have their comeuppance they'll have to stand before God one day for the misuse of the name in order to sanctify their carnality but the Lord is willing to take that risk but think of the kind of situation how does he communicate himself except by taking that risk and that that risk as I've said is itself the statement of his love so God reveals his name and his way, his person to affect the life of those to whom it's given to teach them how to live and to walk walk thou before me and be thou blameless, I am the Lord God almighty would be an example of that and this will affect the concrete details of the daily life of the nation how to conduct themselves that's

how the law was given what they should do, how to proceed what happens in an instance like this where a neighbor takes your animal or there's an act of violence even right down to the details of marriage, sexual relationship God gave them his word, gave them law gave them a way to proceed and to conduct themselves so he's not an impersonal God, but wants the people to live and to have their being in a way in keeping with what his name means another beautiful thing that this writer takes up are the references to God's jealousy you see this very often in the Psalms that he's a jealous God how would we know that? well, because we're told that and the fact that God is jealous says something about God not jealous in some narrow mean way, but jealous for us jealous that we will receive the

benefit and not misuse something to our own detriment and he says that the concept of a jealous God determines the whole slant of this mosaic faith and shows Jehovah's soul dominion the desire with regard to his people and all of the men of God Moses to Ezekiel, the prophets emphasize this jealousy so this is a feeling God, and one who can be offended and grieved and good to know that, that this is not some kind of impersonal deity who cannot be offended, and somehow lacks what constitutes our humanity our humanity is distinctive because it has the capacity for joy for grief, for pain, for loss for sorrow, and so also God, we're made in that image and it behooves us to know that that this is a jealous God and that it will give us an attitude toward him because we know that, that would

save us from an unnecessary offense toward him and so this is reiterated through the psalmists, Moses and others about the jealousy of God for his own name so that when we get to Ezekiel we hear God

saying not for your sake have I done this I have not restored you because of any virtue of your own, but for my name's sake, which you have blasphemed in all the nations where I have driven you, there's a jealousy of God for his own name, why? because if that name becomes profaned if Israel has so wallowed in abuse of that name, and blasphemed it what would that mean then for the nations? what would that mean then for the way in which people would behold God? it would have brought down the whole appreciation the reverence for God, and when that comes down, everything comes down with it

morality, values honesty, decency respect for life then you see the increase of sexual immorality, lying, cheating abuse, violence murder, mayhem he's jealous because he's a God who's a creator and he doesn't want to see what he has created deformed and produced and turned into its opposite, so he has got to cherish and be jealous over his own name, and the way in which it is held, and the way in which he's understood, and the way in which he's honored and obeyed and conveyed to the unbelieving and it's good to know that about God it shows that it's not a selfish egoism that he wants his name and his honor maintained because he needs self-esteem he doesn't need it he's a God who is free from any dependency on anything that men will bestow to him he is a acts out of a complete freedom unto

himself, he's not driven or affected by anything that men would need to establish themselves, why then is he jealous? because he's jealous for his creation's sake he's jealous for mankind's sake, he's jealous that life have a decency and that human beings would conduct themselves in a way worthy of their call and of the kingdom, but it's good to know that he has that jealousy and that it's not a selfish jealousy it's not someone insisting upon his prerogatives or his name as if he's going to lose prestige if it suffers loss if he were that kind of a God he would not be standing at the door of our hearts and knocking and if any man hear my voice I will commend the humility of God the very fact of a God who incarnates himself in flesh who is willing to come down to earth in the form of an

infant in complete dependency upon those that would care for him and suffer the abuse of his own nation right through to rejection and to the wretched things that were performed on the day of his execution, the jeering and the taunting is not a God who is jealous for his reputation his jealousy is of another kind and because we know the kind of jealousy that is God's it's elevating for us that breaks the power of any need to be jealous for our reputation if he's not jealous for his the knowledge of God and what he reveals about himself is a benevolence for us it saves us from being mean narrow, selfish self-justifying and all the kinds of things in which we would automatically be plunged if we did not know God as God, that's why the knowledge of God is all let not the wise man boast in

his wisdom let not the wealthy man boast in his wealth but let them boast in this that they know and understand me so what God is is the basic assumption of all thinking, the unshakable cornerstone of man's whole attempt to construct a picture of life in the world his existence remains at all times unquestioned there's never an instance in the Old Testament scripture where the issue of God's existence is at all ever taken up it's understood it's implied and it's unquestioned he is that's a given and Israel knew that, but what he is as the God who is is the something that needs to be revealed and that there's a whole list of scriptures here referring to the jealousy of God, if anybody's interested I can give you some of them to look up so you don't get anything about God in the abstract or

God philosophically but you get only the knowledge of God personally what he is in his own person and that runs the risk of making God anthropomorphic of making him like man and somehow debasing or bringing down God at our level because he's showing us that he's a God who feels, he's a God who aches he's a God who grieves, he's a God who's jealous, he's a God who's passionate, he's a God who loves

he's a God who abhors and his hand is mighty or he stretches out his arm the language of the poets and the psalmists and of the prophets depicts God anthropomorphically in the way that as if he were himself a man though he's above man, the danger is in being communicated like that is that we might bring him down to our level here again, he's willing to run the risk, and so the whole revelation

of God if it's to be accepted and received to retain the benefit has to come in an environment of a kind that will not allow it to suffer loss we're not going to allow him to be degraded to the form of a man, there's a certain there's no way to understand God except that he be communicated and having something of the same dispositions that we ourselves know but to say that he's not much more than man or to lose the sense of the transcendence of God which is beyond man, is to suffer very great loss, you see the tension he needs to make himself known, there's a need for intimacy he uses the language through the psalmists and the prophets and Moses and the men of God who knew him, that is anthropomorphic but he's yet transcendent and above that so our obligation the tension for us as

believers is that though God speaks about his hand outstretched, or his grief or his jealousy, is not to allow it to come to a place where we lose sight of the transcendence of God who is yet those things and yet above them at the same time, it says no man has approached the light, how does it go in a light that is unapproachable, this is the same God, he's in a light that is unapproachable, no man shall see my face and live, so there are warnings even the holiness of God, there's a great sanctity, and yet at the same time, he desires a relationship that would be discouraged by that kind of fear and so there's a tension of things that need somehow to be balanced, in Israel we see both the priest and the prophet so the prophet would be speaking about God's jealousy the attributes of God

that are anthropomorphic, that display God humanly, so to speak, that we might know him, and walk in his way, but the priests might more likely take up the sanctity of God, sacrosanct holy, higher, his thoughts are above your thoughts, in a light that no man can approach, so here even in the offices that God creates, both prophet and priest, we see a provision from God, from two aspects of things that are essential for the knowledge of God God in his humanity, so to speak and God also in his transcendence and he gives men the calling the priestly man would be a little bit uncomfortable with these intimate terms of God, that in his attributes he would much rather be disposed to speak of God in his transcendence, the awesome God who lies beyond words that you fall on your face and whereas

the prophet would have just the opposite tendency, both are needed and God has provided both and that provision is another statement about God how majestic, how great is his way, how great is his grace how great is his provision how great is his wisdom in balancing the kinds of things that if we went off into one tangent as against the other, we would have a deformed knowledge of God and we would be ourselves deformed because as our knowledge of God is, so are we also so he has provided both prophets and priests both intimate endearments about himself and his own emotion as well as suggestions of his unspeakable holiness that is not to be transgressed what a God we have what a mighty God we have who is both intimate and ethereal transcendent and both things are necessary for our sanity

and the correctness of our walk and somehow we have the intimacy of love we say Abba Father and at the same time we're not going to become familiar there's a holiness that we dare not transgress you know and the only way I'm saying again and again in which this complex statement about God and all of his richness could be communicated was to a nation which he had chosen and to whom these things were communicated by both prophets and priests through Moses, through Abraham and those who had received the revelation of himself in one aspect or another and came into the total compendium of what

we call the Old Testament so that to set this aside as somehow being passé is to do great disservice to God, he never intended this as somehow to be chucked out but to see a fulfillment in the new but

what makes the new so endearing and rich is because we have a firm inheritance and grasp of what God has given from the first so God himself shatters the spiritualizing images and concepts which men make for themselves in order that they may encounter them in living reality as a person you know, some people would prefer the ethereal and transcendent God like these rabbis who like a God abstract and distant, but what is this writer saying?

God himself doesn't allow that he shatters that possibility by giving himself to us in the way of intimacy he doesn't allow a spiritualizing of images and concepts which men make of him for themselves, isn't that interesting? it serves their purposes to see God idealized and spiritualized and distant, and God knows our carnal hearts, who knows the heart better than he, and has made provision for it, how? that he may encounter them in living reality as a person what a remarkable feat, to communicate himself as a person and yet not in such a way that we would lapse into a kind of familiarity by which there would be loss.

He empties himself and lays aside the form of divinity he humbles himself and assumes the form of a man he appears to men not as distant conception or lofty idea, not as the absolute, the incomprehensible the infinite with capital letters, but as the one who is truly closest to all, as supremely the personal friend or foe of that humanity in which he reveals himself what a God I mean to have solved the problem of how do I make myself known in my creation, without disfiguring or giving a warped view to those to whom it would be communicated how do I solve the problem of giving them a fear of me that is a right respect and reverence and awe, without making myself so distant and so formidable that they would be afraid to approach, and on the other hand, how do I make myself known to them in a way that would be endearing that I could have the loving intimacy that I want with them as sons and daughters without it lapsing into a kind of familiarity that would be a disservice to them that was God's problem, and God has solved it gloriously and so it's not unusual to come up in our conversation to hear God referred to as the living God, I love that phrase, and I'll tell you what that that phrase in these very days has become very dear to me because I've seen it in these very days not knowing how to begin this school what the subject matter was, not having the program, the curriculum the agenda, I've seen the living God, anyone who was with us in the first week, session by session knew that something was being unfolded of a precious kind, of which we had no previous knowledge, and even now today to embark in this direction and to feel and grow up our way is to show again, he's a living God, a present God he's with us now, in the immediate moment, he's not just the God of the Old Testament as if somehow that's sealed in the past but the God who was and is, is now presently with us, they called him the living God because they experienced the reality of the grace of his life in their immediate circumstances even as is our privilege now imagine what it means to be a witness unto him in this way to communicate these things to those who are locked and imprisoned in faulty notions of God and find him threatening or intimidating who don't know his grace and the intimate love, and yet at the same time his righteous requirement, who can exhibit that?

What person has apprehended the divine in the sense of the intimacy and at the same time the righteousness and holiness of God, and can communicate that, not only in their words but in their person that's exactly what Jesus was and did and waits now for a church of the same kind this is why God is exalting the knowledge of himself or else in the absence of that men will continue to fashion a God in their own image they'll project something that is not God, that intimidates and threatens them, or serves their purpose and leads, and will result in living a deprived and stunted life the knowledge of God, as he in fact is, and not as men think him to be, is the great issue now when he says you shall be witnesses unto me

this is what he means so it's not are you saved brother? but somehow, not only in our words, but in our whole demeanor we exhibit both a fear for God, a reverence and an awe for his majesty who only does wondrous things and yet a sense of God as present, intimate, real living.

Who of us could not say we don't know him as we ought that the knowledge of God is all, but what a knowledge and how is it to be gained to capture be taken in by this remarkable richness and the balancing of things let me just read a few things and then we'll take a little break see how beautifully this man writes it, and when we say he's a scholar, does that mean that he was some impersonal academician who only brings academic disciplines to the study of God he may express himself with a disciplined mind but you can believe that what he has seen, the insight that he knows and communicates, has come on his face and in tears and in groanings and in struggles of his own that's what makes this kind of scholarship so exalted, that's what makes theology a discipline different from any other

the study of God is not just an academic discipline I appreciate the academic quality of mind and learning that these men bring but we mustn't think by that, that they were somehow indifferent themselves to God as God so what gives this belief in Israel its unparalleled importance is first that it rules out all rival deities God is absolute he's the one God, the living God the creator and that assertion rules out any other claim that any other God might have that are entertained by other nations by his very nature God is exclusive and it puts the other gods in a place of jeopardy and if men are benefiting from having false gods, that's why they have them then there's going to be a threat and a resistance to the word of truth that only this God is in fact God and until you repent of your

false gods you are not only presently losing out but you are in a place of eternal jeopardy so God has given both Israel and we who are the continuation of Israel such an unwelcomed message that no wonder men have paid for it with their lives the Jewish apostle who went to India Thomas died violently in fact the only apostle who survived of whose end was likely not violent was John of Patmos every other apostle died in bringing an unwelcome message to the nations this runs across the very grain of the nations in their insistence that their gods are also credible and how dare you tell us or imply that somehow we're barking up a wrong tree you're just being nationalistic you're just wanting to convey your sense as if it's the only God, you know keep him, because the history of religion is

the history of comparative religions and of local deities and regional gods but how do you say that your regional God is the God of all nations that's an effrontery that is ultimate offense that is absolutist and dogmatic and it's an unwelcome thought especially in this age of relativism that says that there are many paths to truth how do you insist that your path is the only path that was Israel's predicament and it's ours so you'd have to have an enormous confidence and an assurance in what you believe you cannot be dissuaded by impressive evidences that they also are receiving benefit you better believe they're receiving benefit because the devil is able to heap up those benefits to those who worship him and the gods of this world so you're coming with an unwelcome message, and it's

got to be spoken, it's an absolute word, and it's got to be spoken with an absolute conviction it can't be merely our opinion or men will not regard it and maybe there's nothing more persuasive about the truth that we hold than our unwillingness to die in the proclamation of it, and maybe our death is the only and last thing that will verify and confirm it as being the truth that people will recognize that anyone who is willing to die for their noxious belief must really be on to something that I have an obligation to consider see what I mean? the call of the church and the call of Israel is a call to monogamy it's the very nature of the thing, so this belief of Israel as being unparalleled in importance rules out all rival deities it's not just

that it's your official religion but your

responsibility to the knowledge of God that is to be maintained at all times with shattering force, this writer says that nothing comparable can be observed in the history of other civilized people no wonder Israel has been such an offense, no wonder Hitler hated the Jews, no wonder there's been a historic anti-Semitism not because Jews were faithful in this obligation but even in their apostasy however dimly they reflected the call to make the God of Israel known as the only God they were still hated that there's such an instinctive hatred against the truth of God that would threaten men in their pagan alternatives that even Israel was an offense unto death even in its own apostasy how much more when Israel would be alive in its faith and dare to challenge the nations in their false gods

and we can see from Psalm 2 why do the heathen rage and imagine a vain thing and the kings and rulers take thought against the Lord and against his anointed to break their barns asunder with such a deep inveterate hatred of God the whole world is at enmity with God, they do not want to know God as God they prefer false gods so anyone who will contest their false religion with the truth of the God of Israel puts his life at jeopardy and so who will do that but only those who are absolutely persuaded that the only God is the God of Israel and that the rejection of him has a consequence for eternity that is dread beyond all thinking and is worth even the risk of our own lives we don't really believe what we say we believe unless we're really passionate about that conviction and willing to

suffer that loss maybe that's the reason why Israel backtracked maybe they were not willing for that burden they didn't want to be noxious and be distasteful to other nations and even now what we hear from present state of Israel is not that we want to take up this burden, we're a chosen people we do not desire to be chosen, as a matter of fact what we really desire is to be like all other nations, we don't want to be conspicuous, we don't want to stand out we don't want to make any extraneous claim because we ourselves do not believe those claims let alone be willing to suffer for them can you see what God has got to deal with? that the nation that he appointed to make himself known to the nations is itself unwilling for that task and does not even believe the primacy of the God of

Israel as being the only God and the true God for they do not even know him that way and do not desire themselves to know him that's why yoga and the cultic things are popular in Israel today and that there's no resistance to anyone coming to Israel as a Jew who is subject to the law of return they'll take you back you can be an atheist, you can believe in yoga, you can believe in some Indian guru and you're still Jewish but come and seek re-entry to Israel in the law of return as one who believes that Jesus is the Messiah and the Holy One of Israel and you find yourself rejected they can take every other consideration but not this one this is too absolute and in its absolute insistence it threatens every other belief and makes those beliefs non-beliefs and non-credible and requiring

their rejection and the world cannot abide that God is still waiting for people who so love him, who know him to be the only God and the true God and the living God that they're willing to die to make that knowledge known and maybe nothing less than that willingness will indeed persuade men so we have to take up where Israel left off and in fact the irony of our call is to persuade Israel itself about the truth of its own God as Gentiles who have been saved out of our own paganism and our own false gods and our own idolatries and our own materialisms and the kind of false things that would have been our destruction because the revelation of God as God has come to us in the mercy of God and we're so grateful for that that that gratitude is the incentive to make him known what can we do for

him who has saved us out of death but to save others out of death by seeking to communicate that truth so through all the poetry of the scriptures the psalmists the prophets that this God has spoken and is real and seeks to determine the whole of life this isn't a Sunday matter this isn't a religion as an addendum this is the whole of life that's at stake here this is a way this is a way to live it's not just a religious category it's a message that is more than just an alternative to your religion it's a whole mode of being and of living in righteousness because if you're in error about God and you're willing to live in that error every other reckoning and every other consideration must be askew it's warped, it's out of whack and the consequence of that must be made visible your kids

will go haywire your kids will shoot students they will not obey you there will be no respectful authority the whole of your life is going to show its cracks and finally will crumble because at the heart of it you have not surrendered to what is true about creation itself and about life itself that God is God that is the God of Jacob and that you have an obligation to not know him but to walk in his way you're not just offering a religious alternative you're striking at the very reality that men presume is real and is false you're blowing the whistle on what appears to be real and is false and the only way you can blow it effectually is to demonstrate the reality that is real namely that issues out of the relationship in an intimate way with this God who has made himself known we're

involved in an awesome drama and for this to be reduced to a Sunday religion for ourselves is itself a falling away from the faith of the God of Israel that faith is all inclusive the whole of life and the kind of retorts that I get that my mother will say to me is that all you know? don't you have any other interest? you used to be so interesting you were interested in socialism, Marxism is this all you know? if I check out I bought some books are they all on religion? they don't like this overwhelming absoluteness that takes in the totality of life they're much more comfortable if what you believe is only an aspect of all your interest but that it is total is the thing that is intimidating and threatening but if God is God, isn't that as it ought to be? and is anything else a true

relationship with God except in its totality?

God didn't call us to a Sunday religion he called us to a totality of life, a mode of being to walk in the way and walk before him and so to make him known in this way as the whole of life this writer says, requires a reckless energy and a self surrender it takes a kind of prophetic absoluteness that men will look upon itself as an insanity, you're too extreme you're over the deep end is that all you know? and you're insisting on, for me, you're pressing me to share and surrender to that same God you're going too far so where is a church that has this prophetic insistence this reckless energy and in fact if we're listless and we're wanting an energy it's because there's not a conviction that we ourselves desire to make known it has not really been communicated to our hearts the

absoluteness of this and the truth of this and that it is for this reason that we were saved there's an issue at stake here of such moment to save men from eternal death and a howling and a shriek without relief and without remedy that this is the purpose for our salvation and until we understand that and give ourselves to it he's not going to give us the energy the energy is not to spin our wheels the energy is for a task that except to be divinely enabled is impossible and all the nations are opposed to it including his own nation Israel so we need a divine enablement that he'll give when we take up the task and say it's for this purpose that I've come into the kingdom for such a time as this and this kind of reckless energy and surrender characterized all the leading spirits from Moses

onward through the whole succession of the prophets the power of the divine assertion shines forth like light reflected in the mirror this is what made Moses, Moses and Abraham, Abraham and the prophets, the prophets and the psalmist, the psalmist they were taken up with this absoluteness it took me a while until it broke upon my consciousness that God's call to discipleship was the call to every believer the fact that men were not walking in it was showing at what variance they are from the faith of God itself listen, this is our call this is God and we have to surrender to it it deserves a consuming intensity of faith he talks about the Sinai revelation and how it remains an abiding witness that cannot be paralleled by any other kind of religion in the world the question for us is is

Sinai and the revelation of God at the mount and the law and the covenants and the promises as real for us as those to whom it was given is it our inheritance or is it just a bookish archaic antiquated thing of the past, is it made real for us, you know that in the orthodox Passover Seder they speak about the four sons someone maybe can help me with this one is a foolish son who says what has this got to do with me one is a wicked son who says that has no relevance for me what my ancestors passed through, he's wicked because he's unwilling to make the passage through the Red Sea and the deliverance of God out of Egypt and through the wilderness his deliverance and his passage he's a wicked son, he's unwilling to identify with his forebears and make the past his own now and these are

unsaved Jews who have devised this as a kind of a Passover Seder understanding, but it's deeper than what we know and so the question for us is, can we be that witness, except that Sinai is to us, and what the revelation of Moses and the ten commandments the covenant, the law is as real and as part of our inheritance as it was to whom, to those to whom it was first given can we be alive in that vibrancy and totality that witness requires, except it become that, or are we wicked sons who have shunned the past and we don't see it as part of our inheritance it's not real for us and to the degree that it's not we've lost the sense of the divine majesty of God, the wisdom of God, the provision of God the God who wreathed the mount of his revelation in smoke, and he was the fiery presence upon

it, we have to fight to gain something of that revelation, because it's lost to us, even though we have the record and I realized this on this last trip overseas, I went to the Treblinka concentration camp, I went to the cemetery at Warsaw the cemetery of Germany, I saw all of the evidences of the recent history only 50 years old of the most fearful episode that had befallen Jewry in modern times and I realized the futility of trying to memorialize it they had their monuments, they had their Warsaw Ghetto monument, you took a few pictures, but the whole thing had been landscaped and cleared away there's not the ruins, there's not the debris there's not the stink of the cadavers that came up out of the sewers, raising their hands before the Nazis who gunned them on the spot so how did, if

we've lost the past as recent as only 50 years ago, what are we going to do with the past that goes back a few thousand years? there's maybe an imperative in the faith to strive for and seek for the reality of those things and not to dismiss them as kind of history that has no relevance for ourselves about the scripture that says, contend for the faith, once and for all given to saints, which we naively think means keep the articles of the faith to credo, but how much more does it mean if it does not mean this, contend for it, if you don't strive for it to keep it alive in your consciousness and spirit, you'll not be a witness, and the church is failing that, who are we affecting in this locality? who is challenged by our presence, what do we communicate even in our silence that would in

any way cause them to take pause, to think the awfulness of the divine majesty, which can only be worshipped with trembling here creates a deep impression on others, if we ourselves have the sense of

that majesty the fear of God no wonder those who know their God will do great exploits just that very knowledge will itself be an exploit so I don't know what the answer to that is but to contend for it examine yourself to see if you're in the faith maybe another scripture that is pointing to that, as being more than just the sum of the credos of the faith, we have satisfied ourselves with becoming just credally correct and we think that if we can recite the confession or the apostles' creed that we have fulfilled all of God's requirements the faith has got to come alive for us prophetically

God has got to be seen in his awesome majesty and holiness or we are not a witness men think nothing of disregarding what we are about we're only exercising another alternative, another option that you can safely disregard without any fear of eternal consequence to be able to communicate that is to put your head on the block men will either have to fall before you and say, what must we do to be saved? or to cast you out over the brow of a hill it will either be our persecution or their salvation the fact that men have other responses to us shows that we have not communicated this kind of faith and the awesomeness that requires a response for or against God and that this is the faith that God intends for all nations the one and only God of Israel is the God of all creation and of all

nations and will one day his glory will fill the whole earth so I wrote an homage and I went to a Lutheran seminary and I was shocked that this very attitude that I'm commending and I don't say that I myself have it was looked upon askance as Christofascism this insistence that Christ is the only way is an offense even to Lutherans and is called Christofascism and a kind of a sneering disregard for this absoluteness because it's unbecoming in an age of relativism to be absolute and to insist on your Christ is Christofascism and it's not fair to others who have another faith commitment can you imagine that this is being taught in a Christian seminary so far have we moved from the faith of the fathers it would shock the prophets and the apostles to death to know that this is a Christian

mentality today that they are offended by the gospel and it's absolute claims it's ironic but that Jews are so opposed and fearful of fundamentalists that they might make America Christian and that will change the atmosphere of relativism that they think would be safe for themselves are really cutting their noses to spite their faces actually if they but knew it was the fundamentalists those who insist on the faith is really their hope but they see it as a threat from their unregenerate way of looking at it and of course I have to say that a lot of the fundamentalists are so offensive in their dogmatism that is not tempered by mercy that indeed there is reason why Jews can well be offended by that we got it and you don't got it mentality and God is not hearing the prayers of Jews I mean

there is reason for them to be turned off so not only we need the absoluteness of the prophets but the mercy of God that it's not enough to be correct but that we've got to show forth God as well as make his claims known and that's why the church is so defunct this is ultimate requirement and how is it to be obtained how do we come to be bearish not only of the word but the reality except that God has himself dealt with us in the root of our own being and has identified those things that are idolatrous and false in our own life even as we speak the right words and that kind of sanctifying work can only take place when the church is really the church which is to say the community of God's people it's a radical alteration of their lifestyle it's putting themselves at risk it's an open

invitation to be humiliated who would want that so it will take even a message to the church itself about what kind of reality God is wanting at the last days and the environment alone in which it can be obtained so you've got to come out of that environment you have to be sent from that environment of community in order to invite people to it as a living option and a possibility you can't bring it as an abstract message if

you yourself are not sent forth out of it and maybe that's not the least if not the heart of Acts 13 and the first epistolic sending that came not to Jerusalem but to Antioch to a church that was made up of diverse races, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds who had come to the place where they worshipped the Lord together in fact it was in the moment of such worship

where men were not distracted from their ethnic and racial differences they had come to a unity in the faith the hard way that the Spirit of God said separate unto me you've got now something that can be exported you've got a message that's alive the reality is written in you now this needs to be sent into the pagan world where men are still divided and at enmity with each other on the basis of race, ethnic background, culture, religion.

Now bring this heavenly reality to men whose lives are shot through with violence and hatred because you have come to it in Antioch now you can be sent forth from it. Maybe that's what we're waiting on. So who is it who can stand outside the grave of contemporary church and cry out come forth that will be just more than a hopeful statement but it's so charged with prophetic reality and the resonance of God that it will bring them out of their tombs and then we say loose them and let them be now to the nations and can't think of anything more cruel than men should come to the church and invite it to community who are coming only, community is some cutesy alternative some technical thing that they were able to fashion or they think that because they live on the same property that they have it you know what I mean? That it's just another alternative there's a reality an awesome reality that needs to be conveyed but it takes something to obtain that and to obtain it corporately.

Leaders are the least likely to expect that reality or to encourage it because they have a vested interest in perpetuating what already is and they're not willing to the threat of the sacrifice or the loss of it if they themselves are leaders. So it's an enormous requirement and pray for those who are willing to venture into this and that it might be obtained so let me read the last paragraph here that sort of sums up a lot of what we're saying. The development of Old Testament religion shows that the essential factor in the emergence of a vital and moral faith was not philosophical speculation or moral or play on words or word game I'm adding that, but the experience of God's close and living reality if Israel's belief had secured a foothold prematurely it would have made no progress it would have been a pale abstraction devoid of inner force and this has been the fate of all conceptions arrived at by speculative methods.

Oh boy, just don't want to lose this. This would be our fate if community for us is a speculation or an abstraction or a set of principles the loss would be unfathomable so what is required is a reality that comes out of living experience and the reality of community is the reality of the cross and the reality of the cross is the reality of Christ.

The reality of Christ is the reality of God You know the precious church legend, some of you may have heard me share this of Columbo the man who was sent by God to Scotland when Scotland was nothing but contending and rivaling pagan peoples and before they could come to the mainland this Columbo had, was part of a community, they don't say how many but God brought them to an offshore island where they remained for two years and at a moment of God's release, maybe something like Antioch they came to the shore of this pagan pick people P-I-C-T who were savage in their fierceness and something of that yet remains in Scotland the violence of the McCoys and the still tribal lines and differences that eventually the legend is that Columbo stood outside this double thick fortress and they were

looked upon with contempt by those on the watchtowers and he made the sign of the cross and when he made the sign of the cross the gate opened of itself there was something in that demonstration that was honored by God that moved the supernatural power to open the gate that could not otherwise be opened by any power except the men inside and when the king saw this demonstration he was converted and called for the conversion of his entire pagan people and when I heard that I thought was well what gave that thing its power anybody can make this genuflection of a cross but this pointing upward to God and the pointing horizontally to men was the heart of that power they were in relationship horizontally as they were in a relationship vertically, in fact nothing will compel you to the vertical

relationship with God but the frustrations, the trials, the problems the crises that come in your relationship with men so there's something about this reality that waits, the reality of the cross that has to do with the horizontal member as well as the vertical member that will be the revelation of the reality and the truth of God to pagan peoples that they might be saved, that's how it was then, that's how it will be at the end and that's what he's saying here the experience of God's close and living reality probably waits on close and living relationship with God's own people it was only because their God Yahweh was at hand to dominate the whole of life and to give practical proof of his reality that Israel's picture of God was able to grow and her ability to make that God known

something about the whole of life practical proof of this reality was the issue then and it's the issue now as a people in covenant relationship as a people and not as individuals we have become very individualistic and when we take the cup of covenant, the Lord's Supper in most churches is with an individual plastic glass cup and an individual little piece of wafer so that we can be sitting alongside a number of people who are themselves taking it individually and we're taking it individually there's no covenant sense of a peoplehood who are in the same relationship with God as Israel and that with the church, as you who are far off without God, without hope in the world have been brought nigh by the blood of the Messiah, into their covenants, promises, hope and commonwealth so that

we're called to be the continuation of that once authentic faith in such a way as Gentiles as to move them to jealousy as they see it performed but we need to know what we're being brought into it's this faith the faith of Israel well one of the things given Israel in the revelation of God that's unique is covenant and maybe we'll talk about that in the next occasion, one of these occasions what I'm coming to sense is that the kingdom of God is patterned on or modeled after or issues from Israel's covenant relationship with God and that the kingdom of God is the universal thing for all nations reflecting a kind of covenant relationship that Israel had as a nation with God the kingdom is the extension of that covenant for all nations so here's the thought of God for Israel that ultimately

is intended for all nations that we need to consider and then one final thought in my experience here at Ben Israel I came with such a distaste for what they call the Lord's Supper having gone through the sitting with a plastic cup in my hand with a sea of anonymous and unknown saints without any sense of covenant connection or family or community that if it came once a month that was soon enough once a year as in fact is the practice in some denominations would have been enough but when we came to the life here the requirement of it was so demanding that our nice guy-ism ran out after about two weeks and we realized that without the frequency of God's life and the power of it enhanced and given through the bread and the wine we could not be to each other what we ought let alone to others

and we began to take communion with a frequency that became daily that's how much we needed the life of God because of the demand of community itself so something will become a form unless there's a

corresponding life and that's how God intended it and out of that reality will come a witness we'll be driven to know God as we ought just to be to each other what we ought let alone to others and show forth his mercy, his grace all of the things that he is and desires to communicate let's have a little prayer we're past our time even for the continuation of this appreciate this direction the Lord is giving us so feel free to pray I'll just not let

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