

Mercy for Ma'al Ma'al

2 Chronicles 36:14

(Hosea 11:1) When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

God the Father delivered his rebellious son from slavery. Out of Egypt, Israel passed through the waters, and on their way into the promised land, by foot a two week journey that lasted 40 years...

(Leviticus 25:1ff) The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the LORD. For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD..."

(v.8) "You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return..."

I don't know that Israel ever observed a Sabbath year. I don't know that Israel ever observed a year of Jubilee. I do know that Israel was restless. **I** know what it means to be restless. Even when I get to my destination, when I've finished my plan or accomplished the goal, even then, satisfaction is only a brief moment, and I am restless again. I don't know that Israel ever truly observed a Sabbath day, or week, or Jubilee. But I do know that I live days, and weeks, and years with rhythms of time that drift always towards restlessness.

Out of Egypt, Israel, God's son is finally in the land, but they are restless. They finally have their king, but their first king is *ma'al*; he's unfaithful, he broke faith with the Lord and dies. This is where the story of Chronicles begins. King Saul is dead. Fast forward to King David.

I know I mentioned Sylvester Stallone last week, but I honestly don't ever remember watching one of his movies. But I have seen enough movie trailers to know that Stallone pretty much blew up everything in the 80's and the 90's. Just in case you missed the 80's and 90's, in the last decade old man Stallone assembled

every 80's and 90's action movie star and made at least 3 more movies. If you like your stories with no plot and loaded with violence and explosions, watch Stallone, or, just read Chronicles.

Like old man Stallone, King David assembles his mighty men from all Israel and they immediately go blow a bunch of stuff up. The plot is pretty simple in the first part of the story (1 Chronicles), with all of his mighty men, King David kills everyone, and takes all their stuff. He brings back all the spoils of war, he gathers all the priests together in Jerusalem to worship God, and then he sets out to build the temple, the house for God. Then the unexpected happens. God tells David that he cannot build the house.

The entire story of David's life is conquest in the power of God *so that* he can build the temple, unite all Israel, and worship God. That's it. And God says, "You will not build the temple. I will build my own house, and I will establish your son on the throne forever."

Like Moses, David dies never having seen the promise fulfilled. This is the first part of the story of Chronicles. Every victory in battle, every sacrifice, every organizational plan, points forward to this moment.

(2 Chr) All Israel is united as one. The mighty men, no longer mighty in battle but mighty in worship in the assembly. David's son, Solomon, is on the throne, and he sings to God, "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."

All the hopes of Israel are embodied in Solomon, son of David. He builds the house of God according to plan. The earthly palace for the heavenly King is blessed, all the heads of the tribes, all the priests, all the congregation, all Israel on their knees in prayer, all the Levitical singers with a loud voice singing songs of ascent as they go up, in order that all the peoples of the earth may come to the King of heaven and know and love and fear the Lord.

But the people are *ma'al*, unfaithful. They store up their treasure on earth, in earthly kings, in the temple, in the moment. They put their hope in their loud songs of praise and their fervent prayers. The Son of David, Solomon dies, and with him

all hope is lost. The people no longer gather together to worship. The kingdom falls apart, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The house for God was just built, and immediately there is division in the house of David.

Most of David's sons do evil in the sight of the Lord; they are *ma'al*, unfaithful. Even the few good kings after David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, they all fail.

(2 Chr 36:14a) "All the officers of the priests and the people *likewise* were exceedingly *unfaithful*, following all the abominations of the nations."

Our Old Testament reading this morning is on the last page of the Hebrew Bible, looking back to Adam all the way to the Kings, they were all *ma'al*. But it wasn't just the kings who were unfaithful. All the people, including the priests, they were not only *ma'al*, they were *ma'al ma'al*. They were exceedingly unfaithful unfaithful. The first king Saul was *ma'al*, and you are *ma'al ma'al*.

(36:14ff) "... they polluted *the house of the LORD* that he had made holy in Jerusalem. The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

There was "no healing" left for God's son, so God sent his son to Babylon. The people wanted the abominations of the nations, so God gave them what they wanted. "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves." (Romans 1:24) God's son was restless because he slept in the bed of a Babylonian prostitute. There was "no healing," there was "no remedy" except to give his son up to Babylon, let him sleep in the bed of his own making.

(Jeremiah 23:3ff) [After this] I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Jeremiah, the prophet of Josiah's restoration, watched as the kings and the kingdom after Josiah crumbled to the ground, and he wept. But he did not grieve like one who has no hope. "The days are coming! The King will return! We *will* dwell securely!"

(2 Chr 36:20–21) [The king of the Chaldeans] took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons *until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia*, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

God's son was always restless in the land. So the Father, the good shepherd made his son lie down in green pastures. In the judgment of exile in Babylon the land finally rested. According to Chronicles, 50 generations after Adam, the son of Adam, God's son Israel would finally rest. After 50 generations of man, in the 50th year, the year of Jubilee, "the great super-Sabbath year," in the judgment of exile, God's son rested. (Leithart, 247) Like Adam in the garden, even in the moment of judgment because of his breach of faith, there was hope: "my son will be forced to rest in exile in Babylon... *until* the establishment of the kingdom of Persia."

Persia? Our other great enemy? Hear the last words of the Hebrew Bible:

(2 Chr 36:22ff) Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'"

David didn't build God's house. Solomon built the house and gathered the church to worship in the house. The house was destroyed. And now this, the surprise ending to the entire Old Testament,: a Gentile Persian king delivers God's son to "go up" into the house of the Lord. God shows *mercy* to his *ma'al ma'al* son with the proclamation of a pagan king. Judgment *leads to* rest in exile; this is all mercy. Deliverance out of exile to go up to rebuild the house of shalom in the city of shalom in the year of Jubilee; this is all mercy. The final Messianic word of the Hebrew Bible is spoken by a Gentile: "God is merciful."

The last word of the Old Testament, God shows mercy through a Gentile king. The New Testament begins with another Gentile king ruling over Jerusalem. God's son, Jesus, comes out of Egypt, but he is faithful. The long-awaited son of King David, Jesus sets his face towards God's house in Jerusalem. Along the way, he proclaims the year of Jubilee, like Hezekiah and Josiah, he proclaims a feast at Passover, he multiplies bread for 5,000 hungry people, and then he tells them that they must feast upon the bread of heaven his body. The house of God, the temple of his body will be torn down and in three days it will be rebuilt, resurrection, rest.

Why are we, New Testament Christians, post-resurrection people, we are we still restless? Because God intends to humble us, to make us rest in exile until he returns.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. And now, Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven. He has sent the Spirit to comfort and lead us. Why? *So that* we would be made humble as we wait in exile, *so that* we New Testament believers might understand Egypt and Babylon, *so that* we might be refined in the fires of life, *so that* we would learn that there is no rest outside of God.

(Hebrews 4:8–13) For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Every year we repeat days, and weeks, and seasons, rhythms of remembrance that on the seventh day God rested. In the Season of Lent, we wait in exile and look forward to Holy Week: at the beginning of holy week, Palm Sunday, we follow King Jesus into city of peace humble and mounted on a donkey. We share the King's meal and wash one another's feet on Maundy Thursday. On the sixth day of holy week, Good Friday, we remember the Lamb of God crucified on the cross for our sins. On the seventh day, Holy Saturday, we do nothing. We wait at the tomb where Jesus, God the Son rests on the seventh day. And in the dark of

night we keep vigil and we wait and we rest. The dark of night on the seventh day turns into the light of the first day of the new creation, the Pascha Feast, the Great Feast of Easter, we will gather and sing and feast on the Bread of Heaven, Jesus. Jubilee. Mercy for the *ma'al ma'al*, the exceedingly unfaithful.