

Text: [Deuteronomy 28:1-19](#)

Date: October 28, 2018

Title: “Life UNDER God” – With: Reimagining How We Relate to God – Wk 2

Theme: Life with God is not an IF-THEN proposition.

Intro

Last week, we got to hear from one of our key mission partners – REACH in Roanoke – I want to thank you all for giving nearly \$1800 to support their work

Before that, we had just gotten started on this WITH series, about different approaches we take when we relate to God and some of the ways each falls short

This week, we’re going to examine one I think about a lot, because I see it a lot: Life UNDER God

Question

As we approach the mid-term elections, what are you doing to promote understanding & relationships across political divisions?

Prayer

Sermon

1

Do you remember when you were in school – or maybe growing up with sisters and brothers at home –

And there was some kind of an incident

Maybe there an argument or a fight

Maybe the classroom just got a little too loud

And all you were trying to do was to settle things down

Pull the people who were fighting apart

Tell people to be quiet

But when Mom comes in, or the teacher turns around

You’re the one who gets in trouble

Have you had that experience?

And you feel like, “I didn’t do anything wrong, why am I getting blamed?”

Or, you know, something goes wrong
It could be something simple like a tree fell on your car
Or worse, like you lost your job
Or you get sick
And you find yourself at night, thinking, “What did I do wrong?”
“Is God punishing me for something?”

2

If you’ve ever had that feeling, you’re certainly not alone
We’ve all been there
One of the challenges of faith, when you believe that God is real and that
God works in the lives of people –
is the question, whenever something goes wrong –
“Did I do something to deserve this?”

Sometimes, of course, the answer is “yes”
Those times are obvious to most of us
Our actions have consequences, there’s no question about that

But there are lots of things that happen that fall somewhere in the in-
between
TV evangelists are always ready to proclaim that they know exactly why a
natural disaster or tragedy has occurred –
“The country’s turned away from God!” they say, “God’s removed the
blessing of protection from us”
(You’ll notice they don’t have a lot of great answers when people are killed
in their church, or in their synagogue like what happened yesterday in
Pittsburgh)

3

This problem is not new – in fact, people asked Jesus about it
There’s a passage in Luke 13 where the crowd comes to Jesus with some
contemporary examples –
What about the people who were offering their sacrifices when Pilate killed
them?
What about when that tower fell on a bunch of people and crushed them?
And Jesus says, “Do you really think that happened because they were
worse sinners than everyone else? Really?”

Sociologists and psychologists will be quick to point out that this is the way religions worked from the beginning of human history
People didn't understand why the volcano erupted every once in a while and killed a bunch of people, so they said
Let's try to keep the god of the volcano happy – offer a sacrifice, perform a ritual

This is the life UNDER God approach in a nutshell
Think UNDER as in, UNDER the heel of God's boot
We're pretty sure that God is just looking for a reason to smite us
So we toe the line

4

And if you're looking for reasons to believe that's the case, the Bible will give you plenty
In fact, it's the prevailing theology of large portions of the Bible
The idea that if you do right, God will bless you
And if you do wrong, then look out, because God's coming after you

We call it Deuteronomistic Theology
It's called that because it's most prominent in the book of Deuteronomy
We read a prime example this morning <slide>

“IF you will only obey the LORD your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, [THEN] the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth; all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, IF you obey the LORD your God”
- Deuteronomy 29:1 (NRSV)

Life UNDER God is an IF-THEN kind of theology
You follow the rules, then the blessings are limitless:
You'll defeat your enemies
Your crops will produce a hundredfold
Your herds will multiply until you're rich
Your home will never be without children
You can see why this would be appealing, right?

It's a human effort to try and control our circumstances through our behavior – and not just our circumstances, but God
IF we follow, THEN we are blessed – it's like a key to unlock everything you're dreaming of

But step out of line, and you're in trouble
Now, I stopped at verse 19, when the curses were just getting going
There are a lot more – they run the whole way to verse 68
Moses was trying to make a point!

This point runs through a lot of the history in the Old Testament
Through all the prophets
To explain, for example, to Israel and Judah –
you want to know why the Assyrians, the Babylonians, all these foreign powers keep showing up to conquer your land?
It's because you've forgotten God

5

I don't want to argue the idea that we should do right
That we should follow the commandments
That our lives are better, the world is better,
when we learn how to live in love
How to respect ourselves and our neighbors
I believe we SHOULD live with an attitude of respect and even awe of God
– which is not without a little bit of fear

And 9 times out of 10, IF-THEN works just fine
It achieves the desired moral result –
we do right and the world is better for it
and much of the time, the world even rewards us for it – maybe not always materially, but relationally, spiritually

So what's the problem with a life UNDER God approach?
The problem is, we DON'T live in an IF-THEN world
Sometimes, even when you're doing everything right,
The wheels come off the bus
Some people say this kind of IF-THEN preaching – when our young people grow up with it, and then find out the world is a lot harder than we said, is one of the factors turning a generation away from the church

A few years ago, a friend of mine was pastoring a church in North Jersey
And some of the Jets players started coming to worship with him
One one week, and then another the next
And what do you know? The Jets got hot and started to win.
Soon, a few more of the guys came
They were convinced they had hit on the secret:
Go to church on Sundays and God will bless you!

Except, you know, they played for the Jets.
So you already know how this story ends. It didn't last.
And after a couple losses, he stopped seeing those players.

6

Life UNDER God works so long as things are going well
But when life gets rough, the corner it puts us in is that we either have to
blame ourselves or blame God
Either "it must be my fault," or "what happened to God's end of the
bargain?"
Neither option is good

The people who wrote the Bible understood this
So as a counterpoint to Deuteronomy they included Job
Here's someone who did everything right, but whose life still ended up a
mess

But for Christians, we don't have to look even that far
We preach that Jesus lived THE MOST RIGHTEOUS LIFE anyone has
ever lived
THE MOST PERFECT life anyone has ever lived
And look what happened to him!

Stuff happens sometimes
Things beyond our control
We can't guarantee nothing bad will happen
By going to church or synagogue
Or reading our Bibles every day
Or giving 10% of our income
That's not what it's about
That's not who God is or how God works

God wants to bless us - I believe that
And as a Christian, I know that the law of the universe isn't karma - it's
grace
Blessings we don't deserve, even when everything around us seems to be
coming apart

It's fine to live a life UNDER God, so long as you don't think it gives you
control OVER God – or even over your own life
It doesn't

I don't follow because of what we think I can get from God
But because I believe I have something to offer God – which came from
God to begin with, so all I'm doing is handing it back
God doesn't owe me anything, because God's already given me everything

I'm telling you this because life can be frustrating
And faith isn't easy
Life WITH God isn't an IF-THEN proposition
Because we don't live in an IF-THEN world
It's not IF I do this, THEN God will bless me
But IF God has given me this – this life, these gifts – THEN I want to pass
that blessing on
Even in my trials, even in my struggles
That's what life WITH God looks like

Amen.

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