

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

9.3.14

The Law and the Prophets – Part 1 – Joss Bray

Recap:

Over the last few weeks we have thought about some of the “I have come ..” sayings of Jesus – last week it was “I have come in my father’s name...”

We looked at how Jesus did what his father was doing and how he did his father’s will. He represented God the father on earth. We in our turn are ambassadors for Jesus in whatever we do and represent him. So what we say and do reflects on Jesus if we call ourselves Christians. This is thought provoking and challenging. It should change the way we look at everything we are involved in – relationships, work, school – all of our life basically.

We also looked at doing things in the name of Jesus and what that means. It’s about the authority that we have from him, and the responsibility to do what he would do with the love he would show. If we pray in the name of Jesus, we are saying, I believe this is what God wants to say into this situation and also what he wants to do. Again – it’s thought provoking and challenging.

This week and next week:

We are having a brief look at what Jesus said about the law and the prophets. These are basically the first five books of the Old Testament, and all the prophetic books which come after them. The Old Testament as we know it was the Hebrew bible at the time of Jesus and also includes other history, poetry and wisdom books.

So what did Jesus say?

MT 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

It seems Jesus was being a bit ironic because he also said to those same religious teachers of the day –

JN 5:39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

So there was clearly something wrong with the way Israel had gone since Moses was given the 10 commandments on which the law was based.

So how relevant are the Law and the Prophets to us today?

When the writers in the New Testament refer to the scriptures – these Old Testament books are part of what they are talking about. They are in no doubt about their importance – as Paul said to Timothy –

2TI 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So we see that there are some important principles:

1. Jesus did not come to do away with the Old Testament
2. He came to fulfill what was written
3. The Old Testament is in fact about Jesus
4. The Old Testament is still useful for us now

So why is the Law of Moses still important for us?

Because it was important to Jesus -

MT 22:34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" MT 22:37 Jesus replied: " `Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: `Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

MT 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

So the law is the God given way in which we should relate to Him and to each other. It has not changed. The fundamentals are as Jesus said – about loving God and loving your neighbour.

It is our benchmark – the “moral compass” we often hear about now in the media – they have forgotten where it comes from! It makes us all accountable for our actions -

RO 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

So there is a problem for man – sin. But then came Jesus.

Jesus fulfilled the law.

HEB 10:1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.⁷ Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.' "⁸ First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). ⁹ Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Jesus was the once and for all sacrifice for the atonement of sin – i.e. all the law breaking that has ever been done. He was the sacrificial lamb – slain once and for all. He was the scapegoat for the rest of us. He was the only one who could do this as he was without sin himself – he had not broken any commandment and was right with God.

He was the high priest that opened the way into the inner holy of holies in the temple where God's presence was so intense. When he died the curtain was torn in two. When he rose from the dead, it was a once and for all declaration and demonstration that he was victorious over death and it was defeated for ever.

Atonement – becoming at one with God through forgiveness. It used to be “a day” – now it was permanent.

This heralded the transition between the old covenant and the new covenant. A covenant was basically an agreement between God and mankind. The old one was where God spoke to specific people only and gave the law to Moses which became a whole system of rituals and animal sacrifices. This was mediated by earthly priests and a high priest who went into the holy of holies once a year to meet with God.

The new covenant came when Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the old one and made possible a new way of relating with God that didn't need priests or animal sacrifices or rituals. It became a heart and spirit connection with a Father God and the power of God through the Holy Spirit became available to all who believed in Jesus.

This is how Jesus summed it up -

LK 16:16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached

How are we able to fulfill the requirements of the law?

This is the good news of the kingdom of God that Jesus talked about. We cannot do it by ourselves although many try – all will fail. It's through Jesus of course.

RO 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

We are justified – the record will be rewritten to be just as if we hadn't sinned. This is possible because of sacrifice of atonement – becoming at one with God through forgiveness. This leads to righteousness – the ongoing expression of atonement - being right with God. We all need this – we can all have it through faith in Jesus. That is the promise for us and all those who are far off at the moment.

Note that all this is not some loosening of the law or slackening of justice – quite the reverse -

RO 3:25He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

We have seen before that there will be a judgement day and God will judge with justice – he has not gone weak on sin at all – or become an unfair judge. In fact the only way of escaping punishment is faith in Jesus. It is very clear and a message we need to tell others – their whole future depends on it.

Next week we will look at how the prophets pointed to Jesus and how he fulfilled and will fulfill the prophecies about him in the Old Testament.