

From Bondage to Maturity

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:129-136

1st Scripture: Galatians 3:1-4:7

2nd Scripture: Romans 7:1-8:17

Hymn #35- *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*

Hymn #280- *I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord*

Hymn #27- *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

Introduction

Last time, we considered an extremely important text in Matthew 5, which I stated, contains the key to unlocking the whole of the Sermon on the Mount. After working through that short (vs. 17-20), but weighty text, I had come to the realization that I probably packed a bit too much into one sermon. So, I wanted to take one additional week to further address, especially some of what I had said in the latter portion of the sermon, concerning the ongoing, present use of the entire Law of Moses, in the life of the true believer. To this end, I want to better explain what I meant when I stated that the “spirit of the Law,” is to be given priority over the “letter of the Law,” and how, when considering the ceremonial and judicial aspects of the Law of Moses, the people of God have been brought from the holding place of temporal bondage, into a greater freedom and maturity in Christ. In other words, as I stated last time, there were particular aspects of the Mosaic Law, which were put in place, in order to keep the Old Covenant people of God in check, until the coming of Christ, which have since come into their fuller, more substantial and greater reality for the New Covenant people of God. They are not ultimately done away with in this sense, as they have simply come to meet the maturity of the people of God, who now live under the full dispensation of the Holy Spirit, who was poured out at Pentecost. I hope that, by the end of this message, you will have a greater understanding and appreciation for “why” and “how” this is the case.

I. Why was Israel Chosen?

Let us begin this journey, by first, considering the significant circumstances surrounding God’s separating the nation of Israel for Himself, in Abraham. To this end, we will use four major points of reference to help get to the bottom of God’s setting apart of Israel, namely, the events surrounding the fall, the flood, the Tower of Babel and Sodom & Gomorrah.

1) The Fall: When Adam, our representative head, fell into sin, and incurred the righteous judgment and wrath of God on all of mankind, our gracious God had yet, given Adam a promise, which would ultimately provide a way of redemption for sinful humanity, leading unto the ultimate glorification of God. He promised to set apart a Seed, through the woman, who would crush the head of the serpent, and by virtue of His own suffering, bring about redemption for a people united to Him.

Now, the great paradox of this reality; of the fact that God would bring about this Savior through the womb of a contaminated humanity (which was necessary, so that He could truly mediate on behalf of humanity), comes in the form of the following question: How is God going to accomplish this feat; how is God going to succeed in fulfilling this promise, in a context where mankind, because of his already fallen condition, will constantly be moving away from God and toward utter rebellion and chaos? How will God bring peace and beauty out of a huge bomb, whose fuse is constantly lit and on the verge of blowing up?

2) The Flood: Perhaps, one of the greatest displays of the severity of this paradox can be found, at the time when God destroyed the entire earth by flood. There seemed to be a sparkle of hope during the time of Seth, when people began to call on the Name of the Lord. Through his line, we find a godly seed (including men like Enoch), who provided a banner of hope, that seemed to present us with a breath of fresh air in a world that was being eroded by sin, keeping the igniting of the bomb at bay. But then, the “sons of God” eventually mix with the “sons of men,” leading to ultimate contamination, such that, by the time you get to Noah’s day, we are told that all of the people on earth were so evil, that even their thoughts were only evil, continually!

And so, God determines to intervene, bringing judgment on the entire earth, as chaos has reached it’s boiling point. Nevertheless, because God is gracious and faithful, He sets apart Noah. Noah found grace in the sight of God, and so, God spared Noah and his family. Noah was then a righteous man in the sight of God, and he was commissioned with the task of building the ark; that glorious means of salvation (and type of Christ), to preserve him and his family from the coming divine judgment. And we take a deep breath, as an avenue for the coming of

the Messiah is yet preserved. God has not given up on man, and intends on fulfilling His promise, in spite of the wicked condition of mankind.

Following the flood, God makes a covenant with all of mankind, now to come from the loins of Noah's three sons; Shem, Ham and Japheth. He promises to never again destroy the entire world by flood, providing the rainbow, as a covenant sign of this gracious promise. But, will not man keep moving in the same direction of utter rebellion and chaos? Will not the rebellion of man, yet again, reach its boiling point, leading to utter destruction again? How will God preserve His chosen Seed, through the course of man's natural propensity toward utter rebellion and chaos, without bringing universal judgment or compromising His holiness in the process?

3) The Tower of Babel: Enter the Tower of Babel. Following the sin of Ham, in looking upon and mocking his father's nakedness, the curse of God's judgment falls upon Canaan, Ham's son. But, what then happens, as time elapses? Mankind moves in the exact direction that had led to God's judgment by flood in time's past. Only this time, what would God do, since He had promised to never again flood the entire world in judgment?

Well, what did man do? Rather than spread out and populate the earth, they all banded together and sought to build a tower up into the heavens. They created their own local, all-inclusive rebellion, which if they had succeeded, would have thwarted God's great plan of redemption. They moved into the direction of universal contamination, yet again, where, if given the chance, they would come to the point, yet again, of utter chaos and rebellion. So serious was this rebellion, that God stated in Genesis 11:6, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them." So as to prevent man from thwarting God's glorious plan of redemption then, which would have ultimately led to the destruction of mankind, God then confuses the languages, which leads to the division of the peoples, who are then forced to spread out. What then does God do, to ensure the pathway for His chosen Seed? How will He prevent this inevitable movement of man toward utter chaos and destruction from continuing to threaten His plan?

He appears before a man, named, Abraham, whom He calls out from His own people, and sets apart, with the intention of making a great nation out of His seed. And it is through Abraham, that God would both, bring about the Seed of Promise (from Genesis 3), and bless all nations, restoring a people from out of the temporarily divided nations, to Himself. Indeed, that Seed, would be anointed unto this purpose and end; He would be called the Anointed One; the Messiah/Christ! And it is no coincidence that when Abraham is one year away from having Isaac, his son, supernaturally wrought in the womb of a ninety-year old Sarah, that God presents Abraham with a visible display of the local destruction of two cities, which had gone the way of pre-flood condemned mankind; which had regressed to the place of utter rebellion and Chaos, namely, Sodom and Gomorrah.

4) Sodom and Gomorrah: In Sodom and Gomorrah, we have then, a final, visualized picture of the end of all of mankind that remains in rebellion against God; a complete and final judgment, not by flood, but by fire. And in that localized picture, Abraham is, both, given a graphic display of where all of fallen mankind is heading, and warned to carefully rear his son (who was to be separated by the sign of circumcision—the sign of being cut off from the natural way of the flesh and the outside heathen nations— along with all of Abraham’s servants)...so that, he would rear his son in the ways of God; in the way of faith. By this means, God was exhorting Abraham to take on the precautionary measures of teaching and raising the nation that was to come out of him, to walk faithfully with God.

And so, these events; the fall, the flood, the Tower of Babel, and Sodom and Gomorrah (all, pictures of the natural regression of fallen mankind), accompanied by God’s promise to redeem a people out of this natural propensity toward rebellion, chaos and judgment, under a covenant promise of God to not destroy the world by flood again (because of the filling up of this propensity), carry us into the true ultimate purpose, for which, God had separated Israel, through Abraham. God would set parameters and put restrictive binders on Israel, which would keep them under guard, until the ordained time, within which, the Messiah would finally arrive, to deal with man’s curse of sin and death, and his natural propensity unto rebellion, chaos and judgment. And at the time of this fulfillment, God would restore a people of every nation to Himself, through the Christ, dealing with the main root of man’s constant regression into

destruction; the fallen heart. Through the Christ, God would, both, deal with the curse and penalty of sin, while giving His people a new heart; indeed, writing His Law on their hearts, so that, they would obey Him, and walk faithfully with Him toward glory. You see, a redemption that begins and ends only with being delivered from the penalty of sin, and not the power of sin; a redemption that provides grace for reconciliation and not for heartfelt obedience to God's Law, falls short of the very intention of God's overall plan, for rescuing a people out of the damnable condition and mindset of pre-flood man, and the Tower of Babel, and Sodom and Gomorrah, with the intention of forming them into the glorious image of the Last Adam, the Christ!

[Romans 9, "Unless the Lord of Hosts had left us a Seed, we would have all become like Sodom and Gomorrah—the natural propensity of fallen man toward ultimate rebellion, chaos and judgment]

II. The Mosaic Covenant

Enter the Mosaic Covenant. As God gloriously displays the very picture of redemption from the bondage of sin, in the redemption of His people out of the Egyptian bondage, it is critical to see that, following this redemption, He brings them to Mt. Sinai, where He gives them the entire Law of Moses, with the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God on tablets of stone. And it is by means of this Mosaic Covenant, containing the entire, codified system of the Mosaic Law, that God is able to restrain His people; to bind them, so that, they do not come to the place of utter rebellion, chaos and judgment, until the Christ should come. If God is going to withhold judgment; if He is going to fulfill His promise, then He must set a system in place to keep His people under guard, until the Holy Spirit is given, following the victory of the coming Christ, who would deal a fatal blow to both satan and sin. The full inheritance would come, to all of true Israel, who share the same faith of Abraham, but, the Old Covenant people of God, whom God had chosen to safeguard His Promise, would be put under "guardians and stewards," as it were (the Mosaic Laws) until the time that the Christ should come, ushering all of God's people into full maturity, where they would be ready to receive the promised inheritance. [Read Galatians 3:19 & 4:1-7 & Romans 8:1-4 & 12-15; Emphasis on the Spirit enabling us to cry out "Abba, Father."

[Note: This is why Paul avows that the Law was never meant to, nor could ever, annul the Promise, which came 400 years before Moses! Indeed, the Law was given to ensure that the Promise would be fulfilled, as we have seen]

Now, brethren, before we bring all of this to a conclusion, four very important points of clarification must be given right here, which will help move us to the place where all of this is brought together:

1) It is important to understand that while the entire Law of Moses was codified for Israel, and used as a means of restraining the Israelites (from becoming pre-flood man and Sodom and Gomorrah, as it were), unto preserving a line for the seed, and unto the housing of God's prophetic oracles, that mankind was still under a Law of God. In other words, Law did not begin with Moses. A codified system of Law, including ceremonial principles of separation and atonement, judicial consequences unto the preservation of the chosen Theocracy of God's bound people...etc, came with Moses, but there was most certainly a Law of God, which preceded Moses. And I firmly believe that this universal Law, which was the very foundation for all of the Laws of Moses, is summed up in the Ten Commandments, which, interestingly enough were written by God on tablets of stone, and spoken audibly by God to the people.

The evidence of this is clearly seen by the fact that God judged the nations (and the entire world, for that matter) for their sins, which must presume a violation of laws. Also, we see specific violations of the Ten Commandments being punished and dealt with, before the Law of Moses was codified [furthermore, even the Sabbath Command was set apart at Creation, after God rested and blessed the Seventh Day]. And then, finally, when you read through Leviticus, the whole premise to the Holiness Code, which God delivered to Moses, rests on the fact that Israel was not to commit the abominations that were taking place among the heathen nations in the Land of Canaan. In other words, the very basis for God giving all of the moral commands, was to keep Israel from acting in the lawless ways of the heathen nations, who presently dwelt in the Land, and were ripe for judgment. And so, God's Law, preceded Moses, [indeed, the sacrifices also preceded Moses, for that matter— Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Job...etc] even though it was officially codified through Moses. To this end, we can distinguish the "Law of

Moses,” as a whole, from God’s “Universal Law,” which supersedes and serves as the very foundation of the Law of Moses.

2) None of what we have gone over concerning the natural regression of man toward utter rebellion, chaos and judgment, was ever a surprise to God. I’m sure we all know this, but I just want to make sure that I affirm that the Scriptures clearly teach that everything has transpired right according to plan. God was not thinking of a Plan B, when Plan A didn’t work out...etc. The preordained progression of the unfolding of God’s will served many purposes, such as, giving us an understanding of the condition of mankind, the utter wickedness and power of sin, and the glorious grace of God, and allowing for God to send His son at His appointed time. And so, God does not view history, in the way that we do. The fall, the flood, The Tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, the setting apart of Israel...all of these things (and all of history, for that matter) were foreordained to unravel in the exact way and timing that they came to be. The sovereignty of God has always remained consistent, universal and linear, from beginning to end.

3) As we have seen, and our Lord (along with the NT writers, especially the Apostle Paul) goes out of His way to affirm, the Mosaic Laws were never given as a means of providing a way of being righteous in the sight of God. In other words, it was never given for the purpose of bringing about justification. It could never do that, because we are already fallen and naturally condemned. Rather, the Mosaic Laws were given to provide restraint and boundary, until the Messiah should come, to die on behalf of sinners, so that, in accordance with God’s promise (from the beginning), His people would be justified by faith. By faith in His Anointed, we would be united to this Anointed (this Christ), coming out of our natural union with Adam, and into spiritual union with the Last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, we are naturally under the Law (under a Covenant of Works) for justification, but in Christ, who fulfilled the Law for us, we are united together with Him, inheriting His righteousness, so that we might stand justified before God (now, under a Covenant of Grace). And so, the Law, while important, while unchangeable and still binding (as we saw last Sunday), was never meant to be a means of justification, once Adam fell into sin. The fall rendered this impossible.

4) We would do well to note the power of sin and the utter depravity of mankind’s fallen condition, by considering this additional factor, brethren. Considering that Israel was given the

Law, as a means of restraint, until the Messiah should come, note how even Israel (with the Mosaic Laws) had often grossly regressed toward utter rebellion, chaos and judgment. Work through the judges and the kingdom years, and ultimately into the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles/captivities, and you can see just how wicked the heart of man is, because of the fall. Even the most enlightened people, had often become like Sodom and Gomorrah, leading to judgment, and had God not continually chosen to keep a remnant for Himself, utter destruction would have come, even to Israel. Let this highlight the amazing grace of God, and His unwavering determination to keep His promises! If you ever want to doubt the goodness of man, and question the integrity of man, by all means do so. Even the best of the redeemed, fall far short and grossly disappoint. But, never, ever, doubt the goodness and faithfulness of God. He has a proven record, doesn't He?! "Great is His faithfulness!"

III. Bringing it All Together

Having worked through God's purpose for choosing Israel, unto the preservation of a line for His Seed; holding them down by the Mosaic restraints until the Messiah should come, let us then bring this altogether, so as to suit our Mathew 5, Sermon on the Mount context.

As we saw last week, Jesus had not come to destroy the Law, but rather to fulfill it. He came to keep it, to reveal its true intent, and to see it through to its proper end, until heaven and earth should pass away. And furthermore, He came to bring His people to full maturity, so that, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, they would willingly embrace the entirety of God's Law (in its Principle sense), no longer restrained by tedious shadows, but in its full and complete substance. The age of God dealing with a small nation, unto the preservation of the Messianic line; the age of a small Theocracy, bound by laws of physical separation, judicial punishments (to keep the nation in check) and temporal atonement, animal coverings, has now reached full maturity, merging into the age of the reversal of the Tower of Babel; namely, the calling out of a universal Church, living out of a kingdom of the heart, governed by the spirit of the Law, over the abused letter. And to this end, the great spiritual disease which inevitably led to eternal death, the flood, the confusing of the languages and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (all pictures of the final judgment to come upon all, who remain outside of Christ), has been cured in Christ, so that,

the Law of God can, and must, now be fulfilled in all of His people, who now walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit! [Romans 8:1ff]

No, Christ didn't come to destroy the Law. He came to fulfill it, and by bringing us into union with Him, to actively fulfill it, *in us!* And every spiritual principle given by the ceremonial and judicial laws (principles of separation from sin and the world, principles of morality and godliness, and the ongoing reception of all of the benefits that come through our glorious Mediator and High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ)...all of it, every jot and tittle, is mined unto our spiritual edification, like diamonds from a coal mine! And we rejoice in this! Because, now being under, and within, an unbreakable sphere of grace, we love God's Law! It's our beloved friend and guide, teaching us about the holiness of God, and all that pleases Him! Such is the freedom that comes with the blessed state of maturity, into which, Christ has brought His true people. The binders have come off; the restraint has been loosened, and we are free to willingly serve our God, our Creator, our Redeemer and Savior!

Now brethren, let me just make one final point of clarification, so as to ensure that what I have said about the "spirit of the law" being preferred over (*not* eliminating, but being preferred over) the "letter of the law" is clearly understood. In a very real sense, yes, we are to keep the letter of the Law, in accordance with the intention of God of course, but the spirit of the Law is to be given the priority. A few illustrations will help explain what I mean by this:

1) The Sixth Commandment (which we will be looking at soon, Lord willing) states, "You will not murder." Now, that certainly entails not actually, intentionally killing someone, but as we will see next time, that also includes not hating someone (or wishing someone dead) in the heart. To this end, from the standpoint of God, even the very *desire* to harm someone, is sinful in His sight. But furthermore, is there ever a time to actually take someone else's life? Well, certainly. And to this end, the letter is not without exception: for example, if you are defending a victim from some present intended harm by someone else, or if you are defending your country (which is your duty as a citizen of your country...etc), there is the warrant to use whatever force is necessary, even killing, in order to fulfill the greater principle of defending life.

2) Regarding adultery, the Seventh Commandment (which we will be considering next time, Lord willing), yes, we ought not to violate the letter of the command, by partaking in

sexual relations with someone who is not our spouse. However, lusting after someone in the heart, is the very root of adultery, and a violation of the spirit of God's Law to this end. Consider this. By the letter, an Israelite might not commit adultery, while lusting after a woman. And then, in accordance with the letter of the Mosaic Law, which gave instructions concerning what ought to be done in cases of divorce, an Israelite could divorce his wife, as long as he followed the instructions. And then, he could go ahead and marry whomever it was that he lusted after. You see, the Jews, and especially the religious leaders, would use the law, in this kind of a deceptive way, so as, to work around the letter, in order to do whatever they wanted (Ex: They shirked their responsibility of caring for their parents, by claiming that they were dedicating all of their assets unto the service of God...etc). [Also, positive aspects of Law; preserve life...etc]

None of this was ever intended by God, in the giving of His Law. Again, it is just like the way in which politicians in the present distort the constitution. And so, I say all of this to simply explain, that while the letter is still valid, the spirit of the Law is to come before the letter. God never intended His Law to be used in a rigid, hardline fashion, without any thought about the surrounding circumstances. The letter says that the priests only eat the showbread. The spirit of the Law says, the letter can be overruled when the higher priority of preserving life is at stake (And so, David and his men are given the showbread to eat). The letter says, you are not to pluck heads of grain on the Sabbath. Jesus and His disciples plucked grain on the Sabbath, during their missionary labors, not violating the spirit of the Law. The letter of the Law condemns lying. The Hebrew midwives (who lied about the births of the Israelite children), and Rahab (who lied about the Hebrew Spies she had hid), were wholly in keeping with the spirit of the law, as they preserved life. There is a place to bear false witness, when it is done unto such a righteous end as this. Anyway, I think you get the point.

And so, brethren, thank you for bearing with me here, but I really wanted to (hopefully) better explain these things, as we prepare to work through the remainder of our Lord's Sermon, especially since, as I said, getting this, is the key to unlocking all that follows.

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25