

## [IN GOD'S IMAGE 22 – PROPHET, PRIEST AND KING]

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### ***We have been discussing various questions regarding the Mosaic Covenant.***

- ◆ Last time we looked at the changing dietary laws and misconceptions concerning sacrifices offered to God.
- ◆ The changing aspects of the dietary law revolved around who God was offering salvation to at the time, the Israelites in Moses' time and the Gentiles in Peter's time.
- ◆ Clean foods represented Israel and unclean foods represented Gentiles.
- ◆ However the primary message is not about food, but rather how God is offering salvation to both Jew and Gentile alike especially as viewed from the perspective of the two sets of animals going onto Noah's ark.
- ◆ Pagan superstitious sacrifices are offered as a way to manipulate or influence the gods to gain some positive benefit from them – rain, crops, good health, etc.
- ◆ But the sacrifices commanded by the God of Israel had a totally different aim.
- ◆ They were made not to appease or manipulate God but to remind the people of the source of the grace, mercy and forgiveness extended towards them (Exodus 34:5-7).
- ◆ So the animal sacrifices of both the Mosaic Covenant and the Lamb of God's sacrifice of the New Covenant are reminders for us to worship the One who is gracious, faithful, and merciful and has redeemed us from our sins.
- ◆ He is not to be regarded and worshipped as a god who can be influenced by manipulative human beings.
- ◆ The object of true worship is to focus on God and His graciousness (Exodus 20:2-3; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

### ***Now we need to address the two distinct priestly roles of Moses and Aaron.***

- ◆ In an earlier sermon, I mentioned how the Mosaic Covenant allowed for the unique opportunity to develop a structure where both the administrative and spiritual aspects of government were pulling in the same direction.
- ◆ There was no separation of church and state as there are in our western democracies.
- ◆ Moses headed up the administrative side and Aaron headed up the priesthood, sacrificial and tabernacle functions.
- ◆ You may remember Moses was the one who the people came to in order to make judgments on disputes that came up (Exodus 18:13-14).

### ***But there was another important function Moses played in the spiritual life of the nation – He too had a priestly function.***

- ◆ When God wanted to communicate to the children of Israel, He would do so through Moses, not Aaron.
- ◆ ***Exodus 33:10-11 Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. <sup>11</sup> The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.***
- ◆ So here we see Moses also a priest from the tribe of Levi given the role of "spokesperson" or the "word" of God.
- ◆ So Moses enjoyed a special role as God's spokesperson that not even Aaron, the high priest enjoyed.
- ◆ Also when it came to matters of revealing God's will for the Israelites as in the giving of the Covenant and the law, it was done through Moses, not Aaron.
- ◆ Aaron had the responsibility of administering the priestly responsibilities revealed by God through Moses such as the functions of the priesthood, the tabernacle, and the sacrifices.
- ◆ So we see a separation of priestly responsibilities between Moses and Aaron.
- ◆ Moses acted as the Word/Logos/Spokesperson/Prophet and Mediator in relaying God's will to the people.
- ◆ Aaron's responsibilities were restricted to the liturgy and rituals associated with the priesthood and the Tabernacle.
- ◆ But Aaron's responsibilities were subordinate to Moses' role - he was to carry out the instructions God gave to Moses.

### ***But right from the very start of the Covenant relationship, we see tension developing between these two important priestly roles.***

- ◆ While Moses is up on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, what do we see happening back at the foot of the mountain? Aaron played to the wishes of the crowds and built a golden calf (Exodus 32).
- ◆ He would have made a good politician as he was simply responding to the latest opinion poll.
- ◆ God threatened to destroy the Israelites because of their sin, but Moses operating from his position as priestly mediator intervened to "change" God's mind.

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- ◆ The golden calf incident was the first of many attempts by the priesthood to manipulate worship according to their desires rather than God's ("We prefer to worship like the Egyptians," Exodus 32:4).
- ◆ The second attempt to usurp Moses' position came when Miriam and Aaron began to criticise Moses over his marriage to a Cushite woman.
- ◆ **Numbers 12:1-2 Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite.**
- ◆ This was nothing but a smokescreen as the next verse reveals their true motive.
- ◆ **V.2 "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the Lord heard this.**
- ◆ Aaron's and Miriam's jealousy resulted in Miriam being struck down with leprosy.
- ◆ Again Moses as mediator intervened and asked God to heal Miriam.
- ◆ So again we see the liturgical priesthood trying to impose their will on God's revealed preference – Moses was the one God spoke through, not Aaron.
- ◆ Miriam and Aaron were guilty of that same old trait of human nature – they wanted to decide for themselves how they should worship God.
- ◆ We see the age-old problem of free will agents wanting to be their own gods raised again.
- ◆ Even with God so close to them, the Israelites wanted to worship according to their guidelines.
- ◆ This was a scenario that was to play out throughout the history of Israel. At various times we see the people being led astray by their spiritual leaders, as they would set up their own sacred places of worship, groves, idols, and adopt the pagan practices of the nations around them.
- ◆ In response God would send his spokespersons in the form of prophets with His "Word" to warn the people to repent and return to him.
- ◆ **Ezekiel 34:1-2 The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?'"**
- ◆ Unfortunately, the messages the prophets brought to the nation were not well received.
- ◆ Most of them did not have a happy ending.
- ◆ Finally because of their disobedience, God allowed the nation to be taken into exile at the hand of the Babylonians.

**When the Jews had returned to Jerusalem after the captivity, the group identified as the "Scribes" assumed the role of the Word.**

- ◆ This was a group who descended from the Priest Ezra who led the Babylonian exiles back to Jerusalem (Ezra 8). One of his titles was "Ezra the Scribe" (Ezra 7:11-12).
- ◆ Nehemiah, Ezra's contemporary, rebuilt the city walls but after this was completed, he asked Ezra to read the Law of Moses to the assembled Jews (Nehemiah 8:1-3).
- ◆ In response to the reading there was a great outpouring of remorse on the part of the Jews and the commitment was made by the people to follow the instructions of the law.
- ◆ This was understandable as it was a lack of obedience that had resulted in the Jews being taken off into captivity in the first place.
- ◆ However the change of heart didn't last very long and it was only a few years later that Nehemiah had to rebuke the people for their lack of commitment to the law (Nehemiah 13).
- ◆ But during this period between the Testaments, the Scribes took it upon themselves to expand the law governing every aspect of Jewish life under the pretext of preventing a future exile.

**But now we see the Word and the Law distorted in a totally different way.**

- ◆ Up to this point, the Israelites were just plain rebellious and disobedient ignoring God's Word, killing the prophets, etc.
- ◆ But now in their zealotry to protect the nation from disobedience the priests used the law to give themselves the authority over every minute aspect of an Israelite's life.
- ◆ In other words they usurped the role of the Word and imposed their interpretation of the law on the people.

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- ◆ And the law that was to be a blessing to the Israelites (which it was under God's direction) became a burden under the direction of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-4).
- ◆ And that is why even today orthodox Jews still conform to these rules that govern every aspect of their lives.
- ◆ So once again we see the priests exerting their independence from the Word of God.
- ◆ It was into this environment that the true Word of God arrived and the stage was set for confrontation between Himself and those in the religious establishment who had usurped His rightful role (Matthew 23:1-3).
- ◆ We will come back to this later, but with the arrival of the true Word of God we will see these two priestly roles represented by Moses and Aaron combined in the one man Jesus Christ.

***Before we leave the Old Testament there is a third important role established by God that needs to be discussed as it was also a precursor of things to come and that is the establishment of the monarchy in Israel.***

- ◆ Although God preferred that Israel would treat Him as their king, He gave in to their demands to have a human king like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:4-9).
- ◆ Initially established through King Saul, the title passed to David when Saul proved himself untrustworthy
- ◆ ***2 Samuel 7:15-17 But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup> Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.'"***
- ◆ Saul's downfall lay in that like Aaron, he assumed roles he was not entitled to assume.
- ◆ First he presumptuously assumed the role of a priest when he offered sacrifices when Samuel delayed his coming (1 Samuel 13:8-14).
- ◆ And secondly he disobeyed the Word of God given by the prophet Samuel when he spared the king of the Amalekites, Agag and kept the best of the livestock when God had specifically commanded him to destroy them all (1 Samuel 15).
- ◆ So we see Saul in his role of king assuming roles God had specifically reserved for prophet and priest.
- ◆ So the kingly line passed to David, a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:13-14; 15:27-29).
- ◆ David himself had his weaknesses. However, unlike Saul, David was willing to admit and repent of his mistakes (Psalms 51).
- ◆ It was from the Davidic line that the promised Messiah was to come.
- ◆ ***Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.***
- ◆ We see these three aspects of prophet, priest and king carefully woven into the fabric of the history of ancient Israel.

***Despite the failings of each of these groups as well as the nation in general, God remained faithful to his called out people.***

- ◆ God had bound Himself to Israel as it was through Israel that redemption would come to the whole world as promised to Abraham.
- ◆ But He also knows that his children in their sin and frailty are unable to fulfil their side of the Covenant.
- ◆ But in a grand design known only to God and planned from the foundation of the world, God is going to provide the means from within Israel to fulfil the Covenant requirements.
- ◆ However, the means to achieve this end can only come as a result of the continuing saga of wickedness and disobedience on the part of God's chosen nation.
- ◆ For their part in the event, they would not realise that through their fearful wickedness they would bring about reconciliation with God not only for their nation but also for the whole world.
- ◆ Like Adam and Eve, Israel was elected to act in a representative capacity for all nations so that all would be included in God's grand design of making us in His image.
- ◆ This was a heavy burden for Israel to carry and they suffered as a consequence, but only because of their persistent refusal to respond to God's love and grace.
- ◆ In an amazing display of rebellion, the more God gave Himself to His people, the more they rejected Him.

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- ◆ But this has been humanity's response from the very beginning; Adam and Eve hiding from God; Israel's rejection of their Deliverer; and the priesthood hiding behind the "works of the law" which gave them a pseudo righteousness.
- ◆ Humanity's decision to exercise his self-will is a curse that leads to sin and sin leads to guilt.
- ◆ Guilt in turn leads to shame and the inclination to hide from God.

***What we fail to realise is the further one strays or hides himself from God the further he removes himself from being in the image of God.***

- ◆ We are social animals and God created us to be in relationship most notably with Him.
- ◆ It is this primary relationship that makes it possible for us to be in His image.
- ◆ But once this primary relationship with Him breaks down every other relationship suffers irreversible damage.
- ◆ Conflict between male and female began when Adam and Eve got into the blame game.
- ◆ Conflict within families began when jealous Cain slays his brother Abel.
- ◆ Instead of love and cooperation governing relationships, we see individualism and independence exerting itself.
- ◆ Our human nature is fatally flawed and despite man's attempts to restore it, the disease persists.
- ◆ Beginning with Babel, man has devised many "isms," ideologies, philosophies, counselling techniques all in an attempt to draw mankind together, yet the disease persists.
- ◆ And the sad news is from man's perspective there is no cure for this hideous disease called "sin."

***Fortunately, what is impossible for man is not impossible for God.***

- ◆ The God who created us loves us despite ourselves.
- ◆ Despite Israel's continued rejection of God and their failure to measure up to the Covenant they agreed to, God remains faithful to his people.
- ◆ Notice what he says to his rebellious children.
- ◆ ***Jeremiah 31:3-4 Long ago the Lord said to Israel: "I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself. 4 I will rebuild you, my virgin Israel. You will again be happy and dance merrily with your tambourines.***
- ◆ ***Isaiah 43:1-5 But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.***
- ◆ ***Hosea 2:20 I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as the Lord.***
- ◆ So despite his anger at His people for their sinful rebellion against Him, God shows he is committed to his children.
- ◆ Humanity is about to witness the extraordinary lengths to which God will go in order to restore His relationship with His creation.