

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 33 – FULFILLING THE OLD COVENANT]

We have been looking at the tasks Jesus has been accomplishing as He begins his official ministry. These tasks are outlined in the early chapters of Matthew.

- ◆ He is baptised to identify with us as sinners and to represent us and begins the task of overcoming our fallen human nature and to live the perfect life we fail to live (Matthew 3:13-17).
- ◆ He confronts and overcomes the devil in the wilderness wrenching back the role of King of Kings the devil has usurped (Matthew 4:1-11).
- ◆ We see the embryonic formation of the early church when Jesus chooses twelve disciples to follow his every move for the next three and a half years (Matthew 4:18-22).
- ◆ We see him beginning the redemptive process of healing mankind both physically and spiritually through His healing ministry. He healed the sick and forgave sins (Matthew 4:23-25).
- ◆ And He begins His preaching ministry about the kingdom of God (Matthew 4:17).
- ◆ Last time we looked at four points to help us understand the context of Jesus' teachings.

Today we are going to look at another important aspect of Jesus' ministry, the fulfilling of the Old Covenant on behalf of Israel by introducing a New Covenant.

- ◆ We looked earlier at the failure of the Israelites to uphold their side of the Mosaic Covenant through their unbelief.
- ◆ God however remained faithful to His side of the covenant agreement.
- ◆ Now in a remarkable display of grace, we see Jesus taking on Himself the task of accomplishing for the Israelites what they could not do for themselves.
- ◆ In other words, He fulfils the covenant relationship from both the side of God and the side of the Israelites.
- ◆ Again we see the "representation" principle in effect.
- ◆ ***Galatians 4:4-5 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.***
- ◆ We need to notice a few things about this verse.
- ◆ First, God the Father has a timetable for the salvation of mankind and it is has been carefully planned out to maximise His goal of redeeming as many of his children as possible (2 Peter 3:9).
- ◆ Christians rightly mourn for the condition of this world and pray for Christ's return, but we should remember it is God's timetable not ours.
- ◆ Second, Paul reaffirms both the deity and the humanity of Jesus.
- ◆ Third, Jesus was born at a time when the Mosaic Covenant was still in effect.
- ◆ Fourth, why was He born at this particular time? ***To redeem those under the law***, Israel, and restore them as His children.
- ◆ Rather than being resentful and bitter about Israel's unfaithfulness, God is the one who takes the initiative in the redemptive process.
- ◆ God is an inclusive, not an exclusive God.

I mentioned Jesus was to fulfil the requirement of the Mosaic Covenant from both the side of God and the side of Israel.

- ◆ When the covenant was presented to the Israelites at Sinai, they had agreed to uphold their side of the arrangement (Exodus 24:1-8).
- ◆ Despite their good intentions, the Old Testament is a sorry chronicle of their repeated failures.
- ◆ However, God had anticipated their failure and in His mercy made provision for their disobedience through the sacrificial rituals associated with the tabernacle.
- ◆ These sacrifices, both the daily and the annual Day of Atonement sacrifice, allowed a holy God, although at a distance, to maintain His relationship with His chosen nation.
- ◆ We should mention that these sacrifices were not designed to placate an angry God, but a reminder to the Israelites of the mercy and forgiveness offered to them by a graceful God and to point them to their need for a Redeemer.
- ◆ The Israelites continued existence relied on a merciful God who was willing to forgive their sins.
- ◆ However these sacrifices were only a temporary measure and a precursor of what was to come.

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- ◆ Forgiveness was not granted on the blood of the animals that were sacrificed, it was granted on the future fulfilment of what those sacrifices represented.
 - ◆ The book of Hebrews tells us.
 - ◆ **Hebrews 10:1-4** *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 Otherwise, 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 It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*
 - ◆ Forgiveness was not extended to the Israelites based on the animal sacrifices the priest offered on their behalf, but on the future fulfilment of what those sacrifices represented.
 - ◆ It was never God's intention for the Mosaic Covenant to solve the problem of sin. The problem of sin was reserved for the Son of God acting in His capacity as the Lamb of God.
 - ◆ What the Mosaic Covenant failed to do through the blood of animals was achieved through the institution of the New Covenant by the blood of the Lamb of God.
 - ◆ The ritualistic Passover lamb and the ritualistic Atonement goat were personified in the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.
Hebrews 10:5 *Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; (that body was the Lamb of God) 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, my God.'" 8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. 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.*
 - ◆ Through Jesus Christ, we see God fulfilling His side of the Covenant promise of being the Israelites God and by making provision for their sin and their faithlessness.
 - ◆ Back at Sinai, God made this promise, ***I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people (Leviticus 26:12).***
 - ◆ This is part of the reason why Jesus had to be ***"born under the law."***
 - ◆ Jesus did come and walk among them and be their God, or tabernacled with them in order to make them His people through the forgiveness of their sins.
 - ◆ But as only God can make atonement for sin, and subsequently offer forgiveness for sin, Jesus had to be God in the flesh.
 - ◆ This is precisely what the writer to the Hebrews says as we read earlier.
 - ◆ **Hebrews 10:10** *And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*
 - ◆ So we see God not only acting as their gracious God but also making provision for them to be "His holy people" through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
 - ◆ It was never God's intention for the Mosaic Covenant to make the people holy as that would be salvation by works.
 - ◆ As mentioned in an earlier session, it would be the height of arrogance to think we; the created could attain the holiness or image of God through our own efforts.
 - ◆ This is why a faithful God provided the gift of His Son to obtain salvation for all and in the process fulfil His side of the Mosaic Covenant agreement on behalf of Israel.
- But wait, there's more to the story.**
- ◆ Back at Sinai, the Israelites promised to obey God. We know how that turned out. They were a long way from becoming His holy people.
 - ◆ So again, in order now to fulfil the covenant from the side of the people, a human (an Israelite) had to faithfully live up to the righteous requirements of the law.
 - ◆ We have already discussed how at Jesus' baptism, He assumed the role of representing mankind in living the perfect life we are unable to live.

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- ◆ Here again we see this same principle being applied to the nation of Israel.
- ◆ This is another reason Jesus had to be born under the law as Paul stated in Galatians 4:4-5.
- ◆ If He was to redeem those under the law by His faithful obedience to the law on their behalf, He had to live under those conditions as a faithful Israelite.
- ◆ This is why throughout the period prior to the Last Supper and the institution of the New Covenant with His death and resurrection, Jesus faithfully fulfilled and obeyed the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant.
- ◆ He was circumcised the eighth day, presented to the priests for purification after His birth, attended synagogue, kept the seventh day Sabbath and worshipped on the prescribed Jewish Holy Days.
- ◆ Jesus by living up to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant, allowed God to impute Jesus' obedience to His people Israel.
- ◆ But don't make the mistake of thinking Jesus only fulfilled the requirements of the Mosaic Law.
- ◆ Not only did He faithfully obey the law of Moses, but He faithfully obeyed the higher ideals of the kingdom of God primarily outlined in Jesus' teachings in the sermon on the mount and His parables.
- ◆ It was this aspect of His obedience such as His healings on the Sabbath that caused such conflict with the religious leaders in Jerusalem.
- ◆ The well being of a human, healing on the Sabbath day, took precedence over a ritualistic law (Luke 13:10-17).
- ◆ Jesus obeyed the Mosaic Covenant as God intended it, not according to religious tradition.

So to summarise, we see Jesus acting in his capacity as God faithfully offering Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of His people, and acting in His capacity as man faithfully obeying the requirements of the law on behalf of the people.

- ◆ By doing so, He faithfully fulfilled the Mosaic covenant from both the side of God and the side of man, ***I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people (Leviticus 26:12).***

But there was another aspect of the law Jesus came to fulfil.

- ◆ These were the aspects of the law that pointed directly to Him as the Messiah.
- ◆ Jesus Himself made this point.
- ◆ ***John 5:39 You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me,***
- ◆ ***Matthew 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 fulfil them."***
- ◆ Jesus was referring to these two aspects of the law He came to fulfil.
- ◆ He fulfilled them in the sense He obeyed the Law of Moses perfectly on behalf of the Israelites, and He fulfilled the role of the Messiah who was to introduce the New Covenant to which the Mosaic Law testified (Jeremiah 31:33).
- ◆ Paul too referred to these ritualistic aspects of the law that testified about Jesus.
- ◆ The early church struggled with the role the Mosaic Law was to play in the life of the church.
- ◆ Some Jews continued to keep the Law of Moses and insisted the Gentiles also observe them (Acts 15).
- ◆ Paul and the writer to the Hebrews went to great lengths to convince these "Judaizers" as they came to be known, that Jesus was the fulfilment of these aspects of the law and therefore there was no longer a need to observe them.
- ◆ ***Colossians 2:16-17 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.***
- ◆ As we have already discussed there were many aspects of the Mosaic Covenant that were the archetype or shadow of the New Covenant reality, the Passover Lamb, the Atonement goats, the Sabbath rest, etc.
- ◆ Paul recognised it was taking away from and demeaning to the sacrifice of Jesus and the grace of God to continue to focus on the "shadow" after experiencing the "reality" of what those shadows represented.
- ◆ Hence his strong language on the subject in his epistles condemning those who insisted on "shadow" observance (Galatians 1:7-9, Galatians 5:12).
- ◆ Nothing should be, nor needs to be added to the saving work of Jesus Christ, especially not our own righteousness.

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- ◆ As Jesus said on the cross, ***"It is finished!"***
- ◆ He had accomplished everything He needed to do to secure our salvation.
- ◆ Red flags and alarm bells should go off any time someone wants to add something to those terrifying moments Jesus willingly submitted Himself to leading up to and experiencing death by crucifixion.
- ◆ When it comes to our salvation, in gratitude to our Savior, our entire focus needs to be on Jesus Christ and Him alone.

So the reason Jesus was born under the Law was so He could fulfil the Mosaic Covenant from both the side of God and the side of man.

- ◆ He literally fulfilled Leviticus 26:12, ***I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people***
- ◆ In the same way He became the living embodiment of those aspects of the law that pointed to Him as the coming Messiah who would introduce the New Covenant with His own blood.

Now we come to the primary reason for Jesus joining us in our humanity.

- ◆ If the incarnation was a humiliating event for God, imagine submitting Himself to the ordeal of the crucifixion.