

biblestudy: june 2023

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series

June 4, 2023 Text: Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 14; Matthew 5:17-20 “God Speaks to Us Through the Law”

I read and re-read and re-read these verses from Matthew. Jesus is going to bat for keeping the law. The Pharisees and the scribes were known for being sticklers for keeping the law and now He is saying that His followers should do better at keeping the law than even the scribes and Pharisees. In light of some of our Lord's encounters with those who argued for keeping every detail of the law, this surprised me.

Then, it dawned on me. Jesus said He came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17)—that is, to do what the law was intended to do. He said to the crowd: “...unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). The kingdom of heaven breaks through when God's people do what the law was intended to do.

And what was that? What was the law intended to do?

The commandments of God were designed to create a world of justice and well-being. When we do those things that create justice and well-being for all, we shall have fulfilled the law. Obedience to God's intent brings blessings for the obedient ones (Deuteronomy 28:1-2).

The commandments of God were to create communities and relationships of love (Matthew 5:43-48). The commandments of God were to make for a world of truth (Matthew 5:33-37). The commandments of God were to touch even our personal relationships (Matthew 5:27-32). The commandments address our giving (Matthew 6:1-4), our prayers (Matthew 6:5-14), our anger management (Matthew 5:21-26),

So, our Lord invites us to focus on what the law, the commandments, intend to do. Sometimes, that may look like ignoring or breaking the law; it is, however, getting done what God intends in giving us the commandments: love in relationships, justice in distribution, healing for the broken, care for the needy. The question becomes “How do we get that done?” Jesus answered that question in His ministry.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Three Months with Matthew* (Abingdon Press), Justo González wrote: “...Jesus claims that He came to ‘fulfill’; the law and the prophets. This is much more than obeying or following them. It means Jesus Himself is the fulfillment of the law and prophets.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, help me do Your will...”

June 11, 2023 Text: Malachi 3:1-4, Luke 7:24-35 “God Speaks to Us Through the Prophets”

The job of a prophet is to prepare the way. (Luke 7:27, Malachi 3:1, Isaiah 40:3, Luke 1:76).

Any questions? Questions like, “Uh, what does that mean?”

We often think of a prophet as someone who can predict things. That's not really their role. Sometimes in order to help God's people prepare, a prophet may say what is going to happen if things keep on as they are going now. That's to help us prepare for a better tomorrow. A prophet can announce what God's intention is so we can work to align our lives with God's purposes.

Malachi was writing at a tough time in Israel's journey. The people no doubt got excited when the prophet said that God's messenger was coming. “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple” (Malachi 3:1). Hooray! It may be the bottom of the ninth inning, but we are going to win the game!

But Malachi offers a caution. When God comes to make things right, the children of Israel will have to be made pure (Malachi 3:2). Oops. I thought I could just keep on as I have been doing, but part of God's good future is cleaning up the mess I have made and indeed cleaning me up.

Jesus saw John the Baptist as a kind of prophet, a forerunner who would point to the messianic victory (Luke 7:27). Hooray! The Messiah is here and He will make things right! Oops. When John the Baptist points ahead to God's triumph in Christ, he says that in order to prepare for that victory we have to repent! (Luke 3:8). John even calls our kind of folks “a brood of vipers” (Luke 3:7)!

We don't always get it right and the prophet tells of a God who forgives. We sometimes find ourselves in affliction and the prophet tells of a God who comforts. We choose up sides and leave some persons out of the game and the prophet speaks of a God who demands fairness and justice. We may even feel alone and the prophet tells us of a God Who has come to be with us. Amen! So be it!

What Someone Else Has Said:

Reinhold Niebuhr (*Leaves from the Notebooks of a Tamed Cynic*, Living Age Books) wrote: “The prophets of religion are always martyred by the religious rather than by the irreligious.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Open my heart to Your prophet...”

June 18, 2023 Text: Ezekiel 37:1-10, Ephesians 2:4-7 “God Speaks to Us Through Visions”

Suppose I told you that I was so angry with you that I was going to knock your head clean off. You might well understand my fury, but I doubt you'd expect that your noggin would be removed from its secure place on your neck. I was just using an image to express my anger.

Now imagine that I have invited you to drive with me to visit my niece in Idaho. “How far will we be on to road?” you ask. I reply, “Driving from North Carolina to Idaho is like driving from here to Timbuktu.” (Actually, it is 2,358 miles from my house to hers; it is about 5,668 miles to Timbuktu in Mali.) My description of the trip was just as way of saying “It's a long way.”

I was so emotionally stirred at that movie that I used 14 boxes of Kleenex. You know that I am using an image to make a point.

We use these kinds of visions and exaggerations to make a point. Sometimes, biblical writers do the same. What they write is no less true even though it is in the language of descriptive images.

Did Ezekiel walk around in the desert and spot all those bones (Ezekiel 37:1-10)? Did Paul write about people who stopped breathing only to have breath restored (Ephesians 2:4-7)? God has made use of these visions to reveal to us a truth.

To say, as this lesson title does, that “God Speaks to Us Through Visions” is not to say that every revelation from God is vision. As H. Richard Niebuhr wrote in *The Meaning of Revelation*: “It remains true that Christian faith cannot escape from partnership with history, however many other partners it may choose.”

If one of these divinely inspired visions shows me a new world, do I live my life in accordance with what God has revealed? In Acts 10:9-16, there is an account of a vision that comes to Peter, urging him to eat ritually unclean food. It puzzled him greatly (Acts 10:17). He kept thinking about it (v. 18). Then, he has a life experience that challenges the common view that Jews should not deal with Gentiles (v. 28) and boom! The vision now made sense!

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As Peter himself says, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34). Yes, sometimes God speaks to us through the extreme images of a vision!

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *One -Minute Insights for Men* (Harvest House), Jim George wrote: “God stands ready to give you wisdom...

and when you don’t understand what is happening, you need to wait, trust (God), and rest in (God’s) care.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Speak to me as You will, O Lord...”

June 25, 2023 Text: Psalm 51, Colossians 3:16-17 “We Speak to God Through the Psalms”

Take a look at Psalm 51:1. Translators search for a word that describes God’s attitude toward us. The King Jams Bible calls it “lovingkindness.” The New International Version puts it “unfailing love.” The Common English Bible words it “faithful love.” The New Revised Standard Version renders it “steadfast love.” Today’s English Version says “constant love.” The Contemporary English Version has “always merciful.”

We live in a culture that argues that folks ought to get what they deserve. “Not so,” says the psalmist. If we get what we deserve, we are doomed. Tradition says that this psalm was written by David after he had stolen Bathsheba from her husband. (Read about it in 2 Samuel 11.) No wonder he pleads for mercy that he clearly does not deserve. Do I make that prayer?

Notice that the psalmist not only begs for forgiveness, but asks that that forgiveness clear the decks for a new start. Psalm 51:10 asks for a “new and right spirit within me.” When that newness comes, I shall share that good news (v. 13).

What God desires, the psalmist affirms, is not our getting all the religious details exactly right (v. 16). What God desires is a humble spirit (v. 17), open to walking in some new fields. The Common English Bible gives an example of that humility: “Deliver me from violence, God” (Psalm 51:14). This might well be not so much a prayer

for protection from violence as it is a prayer that others will be protected from me. (Perhaps David is thinking of his murder of Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband.) When Paul reflects on the psalms, he says it will move us to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:16-17).

When God sees the changed heart, it is time for the people of Israel to recover from the exile in Babylon and to return to practices that now come from a “broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17-19).

What Someone Else Has Said:

Leslie F. Church (*The Early Methodist People* (Parthenon Press) quotes John Wesley: “A Methodist is one who has ‘the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him’; one who ‘loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength.’ God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul...He is therefore happy in God. The reason of this happiness is his assurance of forgiveness. ‘He cannot but rejoice, whenever he looks on the state wherein he now is: ‘being justified freely, and having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “O God of unfailing love...”

Biblical References - May June July 2023

MAY

May 7, 2023 Text:

Exodus 20:8-11 “The Sabbath as Communal Practice”

May 14, 2023 Text:

Psalm 23 “Sabbath as a Palace in Time

May 21, 2023 Text:

Matthew 12:1-14 “Participating in the Sabbath”

May 28, 2023 Text:

Luke 4:16-21 “Celebrating the Sabbath”

JUNE

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“God Speaks to Us Through the Law”

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JULY

July 2, 2023 Text:

James 1:2-8 “Asking for Wisdom”

July 9, 2023 Text:

James 3:1-12 ”The Wisdom of Self-Control”

July 16, 2023 Text:

James 3:13-18 “Wisdom as a Gift from God”

July 23, 2023 Text:

Corinthians 1:10-25 “Responding to Wisdom’s Call”

July 30, 2023 Text:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 “Wisdom and Discernment”

Happy Father’s Day Dad!

Thanks for believing in us,
cheering us on, and loving us.

Love from your children



Quotes from John Wesley

FAITH:

“Saving faith is a sure trust and confidence which a man has in God, that by the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he is reconciled to the favour of God.”

GRACE:

“God’s command to “pray without ceasing” is founded on the necessity we have of His grace to preserve the life of God in the soul, which can no more subsist one moment without it, than the body can without air.”

LOVE:

“The love of God, poured into the heart by the Holy Spirit overflows in goodwill, mercy, kindness, forgiveness, conciliation to those who are friends and those who are opponents, even to enemies, and therefore the love of Christ loves without exception and without excusing.”

GOOD:

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”