



[3]SAPLING

Law of the land

Sermon – Melville Junction Church

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Introduction

- From Wholeness a place of shalom with God to a lost paradise in which people chose to walk away from God.
- God starts to work through a people to restore that harmony Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- Nation of Israel is rescued from Egypt – through the Red sea and is now wondering in the desert.
- They are living under Gods provision, being led by God and being taught how to be the people of God.
- In the desert, they settle at the foot of mount Sinai where God makes a covenant with His people...**Exodus 19:1-6**
- The nation is growing back to wholeness but it is still a sapling.
- If you look at a baby tree – it is weak, flimsy and tends to bend over and sway with the wind.
- So as a gardener planting a baby tree or a sapling, we usually put a supporting stake in the ground to help the tree grow.
- In Exodus 20 God descends down the mountain and gives the Ten Commandments to the people, He then gives a set of laws to Moses that His people are to follow as part of the covenant.

1. The law was a good gift from God.

- In many ways, these laws acted as a supporting stake does for a young tree.
- **Let's do a quick game...(I give people a set of random commands)**
- Sometimes we feel like the law in the OT is random...something like I just did.
- Something God did for kicks...but if you look at a supporting stake on a flimsy sapling you can see that it has not been put their randomly.
- Let's look at a **seemingly random law...**
 - Like the test for an unfaithful wife Numbers 5:11-20. If you are a jealous husband and you suspect your wife of cheating you take her to the priest with an offering. If she has been unfaithful...the bitter water that brings a curse will condemn her but if she is faithful it won't.
 - It sounds random, but this puts judgement in God's hands, it is a way of protecting the weak (women in those times)...We have seen the results of what a jealous husband can do to his wife in these time...

- **The laws are rigid (strict) but necessary...**
 - Leviticus 20: If you curse your mother or your father – you get put to death
 - If you commit adultery – you get put to death...etc.
 - Has anybody been to Singapore lately...we travelled there a few years back and were amazed at how clean and safe the place was.
 - We did not really take into account that they have some of the harshest laws in the world.
 - There was a time though that Singapore was regarded as one of the most unsafe places to go.
 - Sometimes, strict laws and boundaries are necessary.
 - This time of Israel wondering in the desert was one of those times.
 - The practices of the people in the lands around the desert were detestable to God and God was creating a people for himself, a people set apart from the nations around them.
 - These people were to be a light to the nations around them...not joining in the same practices.
 - So a lot of what was forbidden was the practices of other nations worshipping their Gods.
 - If the stake holding up the sapling was flexible it would not have served its purpose.
- **The laws ensured the survival of the Israelites.**
 - On 2 levels
 - They ensured peace and harmony among the people, agriculture, right living, family and community values, hygiene and sanitation – good things.
 - They were the thing God stipulates...if they obey his commands their enemies will be His enemies...He will go ahead of them into the land.
- **The law directed people towards right living with each other and with God – pointed people towards holiness.**
 - In the same way that a stake supporting the sapling helps the sapling grow in a certain direction.
 - The law brought direction to the Israelites, one of holiness because God is holy.
 - So many of the laws talk about not mixing two types of seed, mating two kinds of animals etc.
 - In the same way, God is holy and does not mix with unholy.
 - If God is to live among the nation of Israel, they are to be holy.
- So that is the first thing we need to understand when we look at the Law of Moses... it was a good thing (like a supporting stake for a sapling).
- Necessary at the time...God continuously calls them a stiff necked people. They disobey His laws even though they are being led by a pillar of fire, they get food from heaven, water from a rock, they walked through the Red Sea on dry land.
- Of all the nations on the earth God has chosen them...They should be celebrating, enjoying closeness with God.
- But they treat Him with contempt, instead of seeing the amazing things that God has done and is doing for them they look at the things they miss from being enslaved in Egypt.
- When we look at the law today, we need to not focus on the seemingly stringent...hard to swallow laws.

- We need to see it for what it is... The Lord, creator of the Universe choosing to dwell among His people.
- The creator teaching His creation what He knows is good for them.
- Don't get caught up in the petty laws and rituals...look up and see the amazing thing that God was doing.

2. How do we make sense of OT law today, which laws do we obey and how do you decide?

- Let's take Leviticus 19:18 for example...love your neighbor as you yourself. This seems like a good law to follow.
- In the next verse though it says...Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.
- Is the one in and the other out, how can it be if they are next to each other in the same passage.
- The problem with OT law is that we tend to treat it differently to others scriptures, we either ignore them (although the NT says all scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness).
- Or we make arbitrary distinctions between moral law, civil law and ceremonial law which does not actually exist in the OT.
- The main thing we need to do is to look at it in the context of the story that it is been told in.
- As we do for all other scripture.
- In this case the law is given to the nation of Israel as covenant between God and Israel...to make them his treasured possessions.
- Later on in the story the covenant and the law is repeated in Deuteronomy just before they enter the promised land as the laws that are to govern the way the Israelites live in the land.
- The law is specific to a people for a purpose.
- We read the law as those who are no longer under the Mosaic covenant...thus not bound by the laws of that covenant.
- But there are universal principles at work here, these universal principles will often be related directly to the character of God and His holiness, the nature of sin, the issue of obedience, or concern for other people.
- Exodus 23:1-9 gives us some laws about justice and mercy...the specifics may not be applicable to us but we know that Gods heart for his people is to be just and to show mercy to one another including our enemies etc.
- Leviticus 20:24-26 Says that God has set them apart from the nations therefore they should make a distinction between clean and unclean animals...they should be holy because God is holy.
- God is holy – that does not change...God expects his people to be holy...
- The nature of sin remains the same, God commands one thing – the people do something different (choose away from God)
- In Exodus at Sinai, God comes down the mountain and speaks the Ten Commandments to the people...
- The people are so afraid of God that they ask Moses to talk to God – they will listen to Moses.
- So Moses goes up the mountain for 40 days to receive the rest of The Law.
- While he is up there, the Israelites make a golden calf to worship – saying here is the lord our God who brought us out of Egypt.
- Do they have an attention deficit? The 2nd command God gave was “You shall not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything...”
- Its sounds ridiculous but I think we do the same thing today...let's explore that a little bit.

3. How does our understanding of OT law relate to us now?

- We are under a new covenant – in Luke 22 Jesus says “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you...”
- Jeremiah 31:30–34

³¹ "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

- So under this covenant we will know God, His laws will be on our mind and written on our hearts.
- Our sins will be forgiven, He will be our God and we will be his people.
- Holy Spirit is given to us to lead us into all truth...(John14:16-17)
- We know right from wrong in most situations
- C.S. Lewis says talks about a moral code among people...we have a sense of right and wrong, justice and injustice.
- From children to adults – across all cultures this code is remarkably similar.
- It is a code that often goes against our “survival of the fittest” instincts.
- It is a code that often encourages us to put ourselves in harm’s way for the sake of somebody else.
- To be fare we often go against that moral code...
- To share or not to share.
- To be fare or dishonest.
- To be compassionate or to be selfish.
- This starts to get interesting...because I see this moral code in Christians and non- Christians.
- The laws of God on people’s hearts and minds...the thing that concerns me though is that sometimes the non-Christian seems to live by that code more than the Christian
- I think that in some way – by not fully understanding the lessons of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers
- We forget who God is, His holiness, we forget about covenant and what it means to be in covenant with this God.
- Think about some of the decisions you had to make this week.
- A voice inside of us tells us that this is the right choice and that is the wrong choice.
- We know truth but did you follow that truth.
- Because if we follow that truth...all of us start to live in step with the spirit of truth.
- This world will be transformed.

- Sometimes I think we can be like the Israelite nation, complaining about the things we left behind in Egypt.
 - **Sex**
 - **Drugs**
 - **Rock and Roll**
- We can be so busy focussing on what we have left behind and the “so called rules” that we forget to be amazed.
- Amazed that the creator of the universe chooses you/us to be His people.
- That He makes it possible for us to be in relationship with Him.
- That He has rescued us from slavery – and lets us live in freedom.
- That He is showing us the most amazing signs and wonders...life is an adventure with this God of ours.
- What is he going to do next, where is He going to take us...how is going to provide our daily bread.
- It is an exciting adventure let’s not get stuck on the small seemingly petty things.
- The Israelite nation gets taken to the edge of the promise land but they have not yet learnt to trust and obey God...these are His people but they have not understood how amazing this is...
- Spies go into the land, when they report back they say the land is wonderful, flowing with milk and honey as promised...But there are giants in the land, the nations are too strong, the people will kill them and take their women and children...
- They have been so busy grumbling to even remember how God rescued them from Egypt, provided for over 600,000 people in the desert with no resources.
- Only 2 of the spies Joshua and Caleb saw the situation as God sees it. They understood what it meant to be the people of God.
- They were the only 2 of that generation who will enter the Promised Land 40 years later...
- This is how they reported back...

"The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸ If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

- Let’s be those who come to understand our relationship with God like this.
- Prayer