

Sermon on the Mount (2) (16.9.1983)

by Nigel Lee

Nigel Lee's sermon emphasizes the vital role of Christians as salt and light in a decaying world, highlighting their influence and the importance of engaging with society while fulfilling the law through Christ.

Duration: 1:02:13

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-14, Matthew 5:16-20

Topics: "Jesus Teaching"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal story about his son participating in a race and winning. He relates this to the pride that a father feels when watching his son succeed. The speaker then transitions to the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, highlighting the importance of repentance and confession of sins. The sermon then delves into a discussion about the law and how Jesus came not to destroy it, but to fulfill it. The speaker emphasizes the need for a clean conscience and character, which can be achieved through acceptance of Jesus as Savior. The sermon concludes with a reminder to let our light shine before others, while also cautioning against doing works of righteousness for the sake of recognition.

Transcript

We're going to read two paragraphs. Matthew 5 and 13. You are the salt of the earth.

But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

Neither do men light a lamp and put it under the bushel, but on the stand. And it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do and teach them, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Dear Father in heaven, we pray that you would give us understanding of your word, light in our own souls as we ponder for the next 45 minutes or so. And not only understanding, O God, but a desire to obey, to walk wisely according to your word, according to our understanding as we hear the sermon of the Lord Jesus afresh. Dear Father, for his sake we pray it.

Amen. You remember how the sermon started with the Christian on his knees before God, crying out in utter despair at self, and before we had reached the end of yesterday's paragraph, he was even being persecuted. A man so weak, so broken inside, so despised by the people around, and now the Lord is saying a quite amazing thing.

You people, you people, the Greek is tremendously emphatic, you, you broken, despised, easily persecuted, poor folk, you are the very salt and light of the whole earth, the entire world. You are the people who will preserve the human race from rotteness, from beginning to go rotten and from stinking. It's quite extraordinary, isn't it? The meek, the poor in spirit, those who are more concerned about righteousness than happiness.

People who are hungry to know God. Those folk, far from being irrelevant in this tough, bustling, commercial, pushy world in which we live. They are the very people who are preventing the whole thing from going irredeemably rotten.

People like you, folk in your home town and your home village area. You are the ones that stand out and preserve the entire human race, says Christ. Actually, when you consider the influence of Christians down through the years, you see how that has been proved to be so.

Christians, despised, nameless folk very often, humble people living in their own homes, and yet by their example, by their creativeness, by their character, have had a tremendous impact. Think, for instance, of the history of mental health care in Europe, the area of the world I know most about. I was over last weekend in Ireland, and it is an interesting thing that the history of decent mental health care in Europe began in Ireland, and I'm glad no one laughed at that.

It was the Quakers who set up special homes, marked out to this day in the west of Ireland by being surrounded by certain kinds of fuchsia, red bushes, and people who would otherwise have been locked up in great pens. The mental home in London, the Bethlehem Hospital as it was known, was the place where fathers used to take their families on Sunday afternoon to laugh at the loonies, because they despised them so. Just watch, laugh.

And yet it was the Quakers that began to gather folk with mental distress, depressive illness, into homes where they could be given good food, pleasant music, understanding, an atmosphere where scripture was taught. It was the beginnings, the rudimentary beginnings of worldwide understanding and care for the mentally handicapped. Who were doing it? The Quakers in the 18th century.

Think of, I mean if you want to carry on with Ireland, think of the way in which the Irish preserved education in Western Europe in the 7th, 8th, 9th centuries. Christians, in a sense. Men, brave men, going and preaching, setting up communities where there could be the study of the word of God.

600 hospitals in India, started by the Christians. People, you probably don't know the names of, I shouldn't think you know the name probably of even one person who started a hospital in India. And yet there are hundreds all over the country.

The leprosy healthcare in the world is almost entirely in the hands of Christians, still to this day. The impact of ordinary, compassionate Christians down through the years, in terms of reforming in the factories, in child labour schemes, in the agricultural progress that's being made in some third world areas. It is entirely through the Christians.

It is a fulfilment of these words. The Lord says you are salt, you are light. Now for a start we notice that salt must be different from that which surrounds it, else why use it? Salt by its very definition has to be different from the surrounding substance.

And the characteristics that are laid out for us in the first 12 verses of this chapter mark out the difference. The major use of salt in the first century and has continued in some parts of the world up till today is as a preservative. And Christians have gone into factories, gone into schools or businesses and they have acted as a moral preservative by the character of their life and their words and so on.

Christ is saying, look my friends, my disciples, the first thing you must understand about this world is that it's going off. It's putrefying. It's going rotten.

And without Christian influence, down to the centuries, there would have been absolutely nothing to prevent fallen man from wreaking a terrible, terrible, bloody havoc upon his neighbours and in society. It's the Christians, by their example, that have slowed down that process. In Colossians 4 verse 6, Paul says that your speech is to be seasoned with salt.

It is to have an improving effect. And then you notice too about salt that it needs to be scattered around. It's awful in lumps.

Have you ever had salt in your tea or coffee by mistake? Have you ever had meals cooked and it's been lumpy salt that's been put in and you have lifted maybe a spoonful of soup or something and you've got the salt lump. Sometimes it happens at home. My dear wife makes me late night popcorn and puts the salt on and she's chatting away or something and the salt is going on and more chat and more salt and eventually we eat, well sort of eat the stuff.

I sometimes find this with too many Christians. If they're crowded together too much, it can become awful, can't it? And we need to be scattered out into society. Avoid the Christian evangelical ghetto.

There are some people who are brought up in Christian homes, go to Christian schools, buy all their groceries in Christian supermarkets, go to Christian colleges, work in Christian businesses and are buried among Christian people. They've hardly ever met a non-Christian from start to finish. We are to be scattered around.

I hope during this year you make some really good friends among unbelievers. Some Christians regard it as a matter of sanctification to have no non-Christian friends. It's a disaster.

We need them wherever you go in this coming year. Even if you're going to be working in a home country office, aim at getting some non-Christian friends, people that you can meet with, visit with, talk with, into their homes, get them back into your unusual living situations, whatever that may be. Let's call it a home, yes, let's call it a home.

Be scattered around. The great danger to salt is that it becomes indistinguishable from everything else around. The salt the Lord Jesus was probably talking about might well have been made by evaporating

the water from the Dead Sea.

I don't know whether you've seen the salt pans where they allow a bit of water into a shallow area and then block off the water flow and the sun dries up the salt. It evaporates the water and you're left with cakes of white substance. And this stuff is then chopped up and piled by the roadside for transport.

It would have been carried every week up from the Dead Sea up towards Jerusalem, carried throughout Palestine. Piled up by the roadside waiting for the carts to come and take it. And there are a lot of other minerals apart from sodium chloride in these blocks.

When the rain, the storms begin to fall on that sand it can easily become useless. The saltiness gets washed out of it. It loses its effect.

You're just left with the other minerals. And then says the Lord Jesus, when that happens to that stuff it is useless. Many substances have a secondary use.

I mean you can put some things on the land as manure, secondary use. Eggshells and banana skins and that kind of stuff. But salt that has lost its savour, lost its saltiness.

Jesus said, and they all knew exactly what he was talking about, the only use for that is to throw it on the roads, make it that which can be walked on. Trodden underfoot by men. Stuff becomes useless.

Why? Because maybe in your case, maybe in the case of some of your friends, the storms of life, the batterings, the disappointments, the bruises, the broken illusions have washed out the saltiness in you so that you're no longer in any way different from the folk around. And then its only use was to be trodden down by men. You and I are to have a salty influence, let me even suggest it, in the team.

OM teams have an interesting way of settling to a certain sort of level. Be amongst those on the team that raise the level. The level of love for Christ.

The level of enthusiasm for evangelism. The level of commitment to the prayer meeting. I was mentioning yesterday the January-February problem.

Aim to be salty at that time. Our influence in society is something that we're going to have to think about perhaps more when we leave OM than when we're still with the post. But you go into work, you travel with certain folk regularly, and just by your bearing, the things that you read, the way you talk, you can have an influence upon them that will not necessarily by itself save them, but can cause them to have questions, can prevent them from slithering into cynicism and despair.

You are salt in the earth. You're also to be lights. Lights set alight by the great light of the world.

And the danger to light is that it gets covered up. When you're walking out of a first century home, you didn't just sort of snap the electric light off and disappear. What folk did was they would take the oil lamp out from the little niche in the wall where it normally lay, and they'd put it in the middle of the floor, and cover it up by a tub, a meal tub.

They did that because of the rats, basically. Rats crawling around the house, and the rat might easily have knocked the light out of its niche in the wall, and it could easily have set the house on fire. And so they put it in the middle of the room and just covered it up with a tub.

Some of you will get more used to rats in this coming year than others. They're curious creatures. They are inquisitive creatures.

They're agile creatures. They're very bold creatures. I remember sleeping on the floor in North India.

All of us were lined up in the room, and I was sleeping in my usual position, with my right hand sort of thrown out on the floor for balance, and I felt a sudden sharp pain in the end of that finger. Ooh, it hurt. And I jumped up and snapped the light on, and a rat had bitten off the end.

An enormous great rat was disappearing under some cupboard. Rats can crawl all over you at night. Not generally speaking in Bromley, let me assure you.

Or Manchester. But the rats used to knock the lights over. And so the Lord is saying, you know, sometimes you cover up the light, don't you? You put the tub on it, just to protect it.

But when you come back from wherever you've been that evening, all you do is take the tub off and put the thing back up on the wall, because that's the point of it. You don't light lights to put them under a tub. You light them so that they can give light.

And you have been lit by the light of the world, so that you may be placed where you can give light. This sermon is interesting. At this point the Lord is saying, let your light so shine before men that they may glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Half a chapter later the Lord will say, take good care that you don't do your works of righteousness before men. Seems to be a self-contradiction, doesn't it? Well, we'll leave that for Monday. But the Lord wants you to shine, to gleam.

You are a light. And we know M have been made lamplighters too. You are part of a lamplighting service.

You're going to go into some fairly dark corners, dark alleyways, and there are light lights and don't hide. Light in and of itself doesn't save any more than salt does. This is the judgment that light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

But the light will expose. The light will cause a guilty conscience. The light will make people see themselves so that they may turn to Christ, so that they may come into the truth, so that they may begin to walk in the light.

You are to have that influence. Such folks as Jesus, even in a society that is walking, stumbling along in the darkness, that is going gradually rotten, put there out of God's mercy. You know, God will place you in some very difficult places, some of you.

And you're not going to see revival the moment you get there. And you may not see dozens of people queuing up at your door waiting to get converted. And they may well reject you and harden their hearts and prefer darkness and Christ said that would happen.

But just the act of your going to some of these places is itself an act of mercy on the part of God. Because he's taking light, taking salt into society, into that college or that university class where you may be doing some study. Into that community where you live.

So that your relationships and your behaviour and your ready smile can be seen to be different. So that people can begin to sense exposure in the presence of God. You are salt, you are light.

Let's move on now to the more difficult paragraph of the two we're looking at this morning. It's this passage to do with the law. Think not that I came to destroy the law, I came not to destroy but to fulfill.

We've already learned that the gospel of Christ, the gospel of the Sermon on the Mount, the gospel of the total salvation of your life, not merely of your soul. It's for the poor in spirit, those who are needy, those who are honest about their sin, cut off from God. There's been quite a lot of hoo-ha during these days about making collect calls.

The collect call system, the reverse the charges system as we call it in Britain. Marvellous illustration of the gospel, isn't it? The moment you get cut off from God. Imagine you're here and something goes wrong and you want to get in touch with your parents.

Well, you haven't got any money. How are you going to phone them? You're cut off. They don't know what's going on.

You want to get in touch with your father maybe. And the post office has this system whereby you can reverse the charges so that the people on the receiving end pay. This is what you do.

You phone up the person in the middle, the operator. And they put a question to the people at the other end. Will you accept the charge of a call from Belgium? And the moment the person on the other end says, yes, Belgium, yes, alright.

You're through. They have agreed to pay the price of you being put back into contact with them. God has accepted the charge, the price of men and women like you being put back into communication with him.

That charge was the life of his own son. But that question is put. Will you accept the charge? And God says yes.

God said yes at Calvary. He is willing for you to be back into communication with him. You don't have to promise to work for the post office for the rest of your life.

You don't have to promise never to run out of money again. Never even to leave home. He accepts the charge.

You've been put back into communication with him. That's the gospel. You know that.

You've explained that, I'm sure, many, many times to people on the doorstep. God wants you back in fellowship with himself. And he has himself dealt with that barrier of silence and separation because he has come to speak.

He has paid the price. Now, this raises some very big questions, doesn't it, of course, for the Jews. Matthew is a very Jewish gospel.

It's full of Jewish technical terms. There are over 120 quotations from the Old Testament. Far more than any other gospel.

Matthew is constantly talking about Jewish customs and Jewish habits. And he raises the Jewish question. The Jew will immediately say to Christ, if you talk to them about freely being put back into communication with God, they'll say, but what about the law? The law for the Jew was the most sacred.

It was the highest expression of the righteousness that God requires. Is Jesus just putting aside the law? Has the law become irrelevant to people from now on? Is Jesus, a Jew, doing away with the Jewish law? Now, we know right throughout the Sermon on the Mount that Christ is putting stress on the heart, on the inner man, on character growth. If you become a Christian, and you all have, haven't you? Don't look so doubtful, Alistair.

When you become a Christian, what then is the basis of your relationship to God? Does it now continue to depend upon what you do in any way? This was the problem for the Jew. Christ says this, I came, not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. I want to give just some minutes to dealing with this, because it is so very easy for Christians to lapse back into a legalistic basis of relationship with God.

Think through with me. Jesus alone, alone amongst the whole of the millions of mankind, he alone lived on earth as God wanted man to live. God got so excited at the thought of Christ living there perfectly, one day.

Actually, he did it twice. Have you ever seen God excited? God not able to control himself? There was one occasion when God leaned out of one of the windows of heaven, and said, look, look at my son, my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased. God couldn't keep silent any longer.

I used to be a school teacher. Maybe it shows, I don't know. But I used to watch fathers coming to watch their sons playing football for the school.

Especially down in the junior teams, you know, the 12-year-olds. And some of the people that we had playing for the school were lumbering, twin left-footed nerks. How they ever got in the team, I don't know.

But in the father's eyes, this boy could do no wrong. I mean, he could let in goals all afternoon, but he could do no wrong. It was everyone else's fault.

Look at my son playing for the school. There was such a sort of fatherly delight in watching his son. You know, I've begun to experience that.

I took my son along to his sister's school sports day. And there was a race, a 50-yard race for the under fives. And they got all kinds of people lined up at the start of this race.

Some kids who could barely walk, some that were in sort of, you know, strings that mothers hold to dangle them. To your marks, get set, go. And my son went, whew! And he finished in one before the others were halfway down the course.

Because he knew that the prize was a sweet or something. I don't know what he got very motivated. I felt terrific.

Because I'd won the father's race. And I thought, oh, like father, like son, you see. Father's, father's pride in watching the son.

Now, it's a fairly healthy thing, so long as he doesn't get out of control. But God, you see, watched his son, Jesus, standing in a line of people. Queuing up before John the Baptist.

For a baptism of repentance from sin. And one after another, people would stand before John the Baptist in the waters of the River Jordan and would confess their sins openly. I've been stealing, I've been beating my wife, I've been fiddling my income tax.

And I want to get right. I believe Messiah is coming. I want to be open and in the light and honest.

I want to repent of these things and be known as a failure. And I want to accept God's mercy. And one after another they repented and they got baptized.

And then Jesus came. And he got down into the water. And he stood before John the Baptist.

And I can imagine everyone on the bank of that river got quiet. What is he going to confess? We know him. Carpenter's son from Nazareth.

And Jesus stood before John in absolute silence. Because there was nothing to confess. And John reversed it and said I need to be baptized of you.

And in that extraordinary moment. Where John and Jesus were facing each other in the water. Jesus taking the place of a sinner and yet without sin.

God got so excited he couldn't contain himself. The Father spoke with a voice that pinged on people's ear drums. That is my beloved son.

With that one I am well pleased. Never man lived like Jesus Christ. We forget you know how difficult it is to live perfectly.

Jesus did. The only one that ever has done. And he was the one who died for you.

My beloved son. Let's look at some scriptures in the New Testament. We read in Galatians chapter 3. Verse 19.

Galatians 3 19. What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions. Until the seed should come.

Jesus. To whom the promise had been made. The law was given up until the time that he should come to fulfill the law.

If you look back in Luke's gospel chapter 16. Luke 16 and verse 16. The law and the prophets were up until John.

From that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached. And every man enters violently into it. They seize the kingdom by faith.

Look in the epistle to the Romans. Romans chapter 10 and verse 4. Romans 10 verse 4. For Christ is the end of the law. Unto righteousness.

To everyone that believes. The end. The goal.

For the believer. The accomplishment and the finishing of it. And in Romans chapter 7. There is that illustration of marriage.

Romans chapter 7 verses 4 and 6. Wherefore my brethren. You also were made dead to the law. Through the body of Christ.

That you should be joined to another. The illustration is of a marriage. And the woman is bound to the husband.

And the husband is bound to the woman. Until such time as one partner dies. They are not free to marry another.

Before the death of that first partner. But when that first partner has died. Then they are set free.

You were married to the law. You were bound to the law. You are under obligation to the law.

But in Christ the law has died. It has been fulfilled. Therefore you are free.

To be married to another. To be married to Christ himself. You are now free.

To be married to him who was raised from the dead. That we might bring forth fruit from that union unto God. But now we have been discharged from the law.

Having died to that wherein we were held. So that we serve in newness of the spirit. And not in oldness of the letter.

Your salvation no longer rests upon what you do. And the acceptance that you enjoy with God. Does not depend upon what you do.

Let me give you a little illustration. Supposing there is someone here this morning. Who got up a little late.

Got you. A little late. I mean very tired.

Very sleepy. And you didn't actually have any devotions this morning. Didn't have any quiet time.

You missed it. You meant to have it. But what with the queue at the toilet.

And the general sort of sleepiness. And you had to go and get breakfast. Because otherwise they would stop serving breakfast.

And then someone interrupted you and talked to you. You didn't actually have any time with God's word this morning. On the other hand.

Sitting beside you is a person. Who effortlessly got up at six without an alarm clock. And they have already had two glorious hallelujah filled hours.

Alone in the presence of God. They have been much in prayer. The glory of God rests upon them.

And there you are sitting side by side. In the meeting this morning. One of you barely got your teeth clean.

You staggered in. And the other one really feels that they ought to be preaching. Because I mean.

Which of you does God love more? Which of you does God accept more? This morning. Today. What do you really feel is the answer to that question.

See that touches you doesn't it. Because actually theologically if we start to work it out. We know that probably it's true somehow.

That God loves us both equally. But we actually feel wretched and unworthy. If we are in the category of the person who only just got the teeth clean.

God's love and God's acceptance of you is equally the same. Because my friends we are no longer at school. We have come home from school.

Do you remember the difference? Do you remember what it was like to come home from school? You'd spend hours during the day. And you were trying to keep up with the rest of them in the class. And mathematics was horrible.

And you didn't do very well in the test. And it was all a sense of failure and condemnation. But when you got home.

Then you were free. I mean you were accepted as much as your brilliant sister or brother. Sitting around the meal table.

You were all equally accepted. You were at home. You could take your shoes off.

You could play what tunes you liked on the piano. Because it was home. It was a different basis of relationship.

It wasn't a question of doing well in your exams. And pleasing the teachers. You were accepted because you have been brought into a family.

That is the basis of your relationship with God. And God equally accepts and loves you. However you started off today.

And however you go through the year. And we need to have this distinction clear in our mind. Between sin and immaturity.

You're in a family. Now. Supposing we have in a family.

Two children. One is about six months old. And the other is sixteen.

Now the six month old child. Is in the habit of addressing. It's father.

In the following words. It looks at father and goes. That's no problem.

Because that's the way six month old children normally behave. Father actually quite likes it. And the father if you watch them.

Fathers are silly creatures. They probably start making the same noises back. And supposing the father says to the sixteen year old.

Well how was it at school today? And the sixteen year old goes. What was that you said to me son? You see behaviour. That would be entirely acceptable.

In one member of the family. Is not. In another member of the family.

It's not sin. In the six month old child. It's immaturity.

And there are many things in our lives. That are immature. But God knows.

That with time. With the word. With example.

We will grow. The crucial thing is to be quite sure. That you are accepted in the family.

The child's number one need. Is that sense of acceptance. In the family of God.

And you are accepted. In the beloved. The law in your case has been fulfilled.

The full penalties of the law have been exacted in your case. Let me use another illustration. It's really a morning for illustrations.

But I do want to get this home to you. You imagine someone. Who is going to hold up a bank.

And they've got a shotgun. And they ride up to the bank on a small scooter. A fifty cc scooter.

And they park it outside the bank. In a no parking area. You've got yellow lines or white lines.

Or whatever your country uses to indicate. No parking. And they march into the bank.

To rob it you see. In the bank things go a little bit wrong. And unfortunately they kill the cashier.

But they get the money. But while all this has been going on. The traffic warden.

Whatever you call them in your country. The traffic warden is putting a sticker. A sign.

On the front of the scooter. For parking in the wrong place. He's being fined money.

Wrong parking. Anyway you come out of the bank. With a smoking shotgun.

A bag of swag. And you. You climb on the scooter.

And drive off. You've committed a parking offence. And you've murdered someone.

And eventually you're caught. And the country that you live in. Still has capital punishment.

And you are found guilty. And you are sentenced to death. And you are executed.

And along comes the traffic warden. And says here. Where's my money? I find that person.

Ten pounds or whatever it was. I want the money. Uh-uh.

In your case. You have already been executed. The ultimate penalty that the law can exact.

Has been paid in your case. They have taken your file. In its brown.

Card. And written executed across it. Finished.

No more. No further legal obligations. After you've been executed.

The law cannot touch you. Once you've been executed. That's it.

That's finished. Any problems you left behind. To do with income tax.

Or parking fines. Cannot touch you. Because you've been executed.

And as God sees. Every single one of you. You have already been executed.

In the eyes of the law. You do not even exist. Because in Christ.

You have died. Says Paul. Now why am I going on about the law like this? Why do we think about laws and covenants? Why is it necessary to get it straight? What's the point of it? Why don't you just give me.

A little bit more for my heart. A little bit more of a challenge. I mean I come to these morning.

Bible meetings. In order to get another. Squirt of adrenaline in there.

So I can. Keep going another day. What's all this stuff about.

Why do you make me think. At this time in the morning? Well laws and covenants. Are extremely important.

Because they govern your whole relationship to God. Imagine you. Sorry another illustration coming.

Imagine you have a. A rich uncle in California. Who is leaving you. One million dollars.

And a yacht. And a helicopter. And three Rolls Royces.

And a golf course. And two mansions. He's leaving it to you.

You would be rather interested. In the terms of the will. Wouldn't you? I mean.

Does he require you to do anything? Or is he just going to leave it? I mean. Do you have to promise not to get married till you're 25? Or do you have to promise to go on a whim? Or not go on a whim? What actually is tied up? Is it simply free? Do you simply have to wait until he's died? And then get it? Do you have to go and live with him? Do you have to become a Mormon? What do you have to do? The terms of the covenant. Are exceedingly important.

And my friends. If you got excited at the thought of a mansion or two. And a helicopter.

And a million dollars. That is nothing. To what is already written in the will for you.

You and I. Are now inheriting. And will one day. In a far greater measure.

Inherit far more. Than I just described. What are the terms of the will? Do I have to do anything? No.

You simply have to put your trust. In Christ. And accept.

His gift of life. And his spirit to come and take control. Of your life.

And yet so many Christians. Live their life. With new laws.

Observance of Sunday. Or of their daily bible reading. Or of their church attendance.

Or of the frequency with which they lead someone else to Christ. That it actually affects the way God looks at them. And treats them.

Not true. Not true. You are in the family.

You are no longer at school. But what was the point of the law anyway? That's the point of that question. Because that is the next Jewish question isn't it? If Christ is going to live a perfect life.

The infinitely perfect. Dying on behalf of an infinite number of people. Then why did God give the law all those hundreds of years ago? Well.

For two reasons. First of all we must understand that the law never saved anyone ever. Even in the old testament.

The law never saved anyone. It couldn't. It wasn't in its power.

Abraham wasn't saved by the law. Moses wasn't saved by the law. David wasn't saved by the law.

None of the prophets were saved by the law. It couldn't be. Again in Galatians chapter 3. Between verses 6 and 14.

Paul shows from the life and the experience of Abraham. That he wasn't saved by the law. In fact he lived many hundreds of years before the law was given.

And yet he was declared to be saved and righteous by faith. The law was given for two reasons. The first as an ordered social framework.

So that people can live together in a more humane way in society. The second reason why God gave the law through Moses. Was so as to make our sinfulness obvious.

Actually Paul uses the picture of the school. And then coming home and being a son at home. That's why I use it.

The law was a tutor. The law was to point you to Christ. Imagine the law as a mirror.

If you come in from your afternoon off. Yesterday filthy. Dirt all over your face.

And you look in the mirror. Grime and dirt. What do you then do? Do you get the dirt off with the mirror? You start rubbing yourself frantically with the mirror.

The mirror won't get anything off. It will just smear it about. And then make the mirror dirty.

You look in the mirror. And the mirror shows you whether you need to go somewhere else for water. The law shows you where you fall short.

The law is a perfect standard of righteousness. And you will see from the law where you fall. But you go to Christ for cleansing.

For forgiveness. You go to him and he accepts you. Dirty though you may be.

We are no longer under a schoolmaster when we've come to Christ. Scripture is quite explicit. Galatians 4 verses 3 to 7. So we also when we were children we were held in bondage.

Under the rudiments of the world. The childish things. The former elements.

When the fullness of the time came. God sent forth his son. Born of a woman.

Born under the law. That he might redeem those that were under the law. That we might receive the adoption of sons.

Because you were sons. God sent forth the spirit of his son. Into our hearts.

Crying Abba Father. As it comes. As he comes.

So that you are no longer a slave but a son. And if a son then an heir. Through Christ Jesus.

You've got two distinct problems in your life haven't you? The problem of your conscience. And the problem of your character. The problem of your legal acceptance by a holy God.

And that can be accomplished at a stroke. The day the night you get converted. Your conscience can be made clean.

You become Christ. The slate is wiped free. But then you've got your character to start with.

God puts his spirit in you. To start working on your character slowly and gradually. Assuring you all the time.

That father is father. That you are accepted in the family. The law on the other hand.

Only makes your conscience worse. And the law has no power. To enable you to live more righteously.

How then should we regard the Old Testament law? How should we regard large slabs of the Old Testament. That are legalistic. What should we learn.

From Christ when he is sounding rather legalistic. Well the answer to that problem. Lies in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit comes. Dwells. As God's birthday gift.

In you. To enable you. To fulfill the law.

The Holy Spirit. Was your birthday gift. Come Sunday.

It's my daughter's birthday. Her ninth. I've been giving her presents for some years.

It's a very interesting thing. Giving presents to a child. Because whether at Christmas or at birthday.

The giver is basically interested in two things. Do they like the present? But secondly do they appreciate the giver? How often you give a child a present. And he's totally wrapped up in the present.

You give the boy a little football for Christmas. And he tears the paper off. It's a football.

And he goes out in the garden and he spends the rest of the time. Playing with his football. Kicking it against the wall through the windows maybe.

You call him in for lunch. Oh lunch. Because he's absorbed in the present.

People are like that. They forget the giver. And get wrapped up in the present.

God has been giving gifts to mankind. Down through the centuries. And this has been the history of man.

Since the days of Genesis chapter 3. That we take the gifts. And we ignore the giver. People have taken everything that God has given.

The engineering skills. The poetic skills. The musical skills.

The water. The beauties of creation. They have round the world taken the lot and ignored the giver.

And so God now does a new thing. God gives gifts. In which we cannot ignore him.

He gives himself. In Bethlehem. He came as a baby.

And the moment you are born again into the kingdom. God gives himself anew to you. In the Holy Spirit.

So that with the gift you cannot ignore the giver. Because he is the gift. And the Holy Spirit has come.

In order to enable you. To fulfill the demand of the law. Now the illustration that Paul is using.

When he is talking about these rudiments or beggarly elements. The word is various in your translations. Is this.

This is the illustration. You imagine when you were a kid. You used to play what? Monopoly? Maybe some of you still do play Monopoly.

You used to play with little bits of post office money didn't you? As a kid it was great fun. Buying houses. Buying streets.

Learning about rent. There wasn't any value in the money. I mean you couldn't go and buy a train ticket with Monopoly money.

But you were learning. About the real thing. In a childish form.

And so much in Jewish background and Jewish ritual. Is actually training for the spiritual reality. That we now have.

All these ritual washing laws. The Jew had to wash up to the elbow. Certain number of times before a meal.

What was the point of it? I mean God isn't. So worried about whether we have germs floating around our elbows. When we eat spaghetti.

The whole point comes out in the New Testament. When he starts to talk about spiritual cleansing. Being clean in what you do.

Clean. In how you treat other people. Like the business of circumcision.

Jews were tremendously bound up with. With the external ritual of circumcision. And yet in the New Testament.

Christ will talk to you about the circumcision of your heart. Not your flesh. Your heart.

Your inner nature. The Jews were immensely legalistic about the observance of the Sabbath. God was more concerned.

To bring them into the reality of spiritual rest. Resting from their works. In life as a whole.

All through scripture you see. The Old Testament. Sets out the childish game by which people learn the adult reality.

If I may put it that way. Children play with all kinds of things. And then eventually.

It becomes the adult reality. Oh may we live in the light of the adult reality. To understand what God is saying to us about cleanliness of character.

And mind. Resting from those tensions that come from legalism. And the accusation of the evil one.

You've come into the new covenant family. Turn. Finally.

To Hebrews chapter 10. Hebrews chapter 10. The Lord wants these disciples as they listen to him.

To understand. That they are not under the law if they have put their trust in him. Yet God the Holy Spirit is entering in.

In order that they might fulfil in adult form. Those obligations of character and life that were laid out. In more childish form in the Old Testament.

In the Jewish traditions. Hebrews 10 verses 16 and 17. The writer to the Hebrews also thought it was worth bothering about covenants and laws.

Quoting Jeremiah. This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days says the Lord. I will put my laws on their heart.

And upon their mind also will I write them. Then saith he. And their sins and their iniquities.

Will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is. There is no more offering for sin.

This is your covenant relationship with God. What is a covenant? It's a legal document isn't it? With a long dangly red seal at the bottom. And it has been drawn up by lawyers.

At great expense. Now who is the greatest lawyer in the universe? It's God himself. God knows a thing or two about laws.

Because he's been giving them down through the centuries. And he has drawn up this covenant relationship that we are to have with him. I want you to notice it's terms.

I will put my laws on their heart. And their mind. That's the first thing.

When you become a Christian God by his spirit comes in and begins to. Bring pressure on you. To live righteously.

To live uprightly. That's number one. But then secondly.

He assures us subsequently that sin and iniquity will be remembered no more. It's not the other way around. It's not first I give you forgiveness then I give you law.

First I will impress my laws on your mind. Then secondly and subsequently I will assure you of forgiveness. We have a relationship with a forgiving God that is absolutely secure.

Our relationship to him does not depend on law keeping in any way. Imagine you are about to get married you men. And you want marriages in my mind because I have to go to my sister's tomorrow.

So let me use this illustration. You as a young man are planning to get married. And you are wondering what wedding present to give to your new wife.

And you decide that you will give her a cookery book. And so you go and get a nice cookery book. There are various glossy popular ones on the market.

And you get this marvellous cookery book full of tasty looking pictures. And you wrap it up and you give it to your wife. For a wedding present.

And you accompany it with these words. Wife this is how it can be done. This is how it's going to be done.

In fact I've given you all the instructions there in the book. And on Tuesdays I'm going to have what's on page 43. And on Thursdays please I'd like page 92 regularly.

Every Thursday 92 I shall look forward to that. And so on you see. Wife I think I ought to let you know that.

I've done my side of the bargain. I've married you. I've given you the cookery book.

And if you don't fulfil your side of the bargain. I shall be consulting my lawyer about divorce. Now if you give that wedding present with that little speech.

Before the wedding. She might think that the bargain wasn't so good after all. And there comes a crucial moment in the service where she's invited to say yes or no.

And she says no. Maybe I shouldn't tell these kind of stories. But it does happen sometimes in the early days of a marriage when the wife is just beginning to learn to cook.

That things don't always turn out just as the picture in the book. And the instructions of Mrs. Beaton or whoever it was says that it can be done. And she lovingly offers up these ignorantly made cremated nightmares.

What does he then do? You see you have a relationship that's secure. The Lord doesn't say right come into my kingdom. You're saved you're forgiven.

There's the New Testament. Now get on and keep it and woe betide you if you don't. You are saved.

Forgiven. That is true of you. You are welcomed in the family.

But the basis upon which God has given you principles, instruction, the New Testament. Is to help you grow up within the family to be like your father. It's a matter of character growth within the family.

You're not under threat to get thrown out. I will write my laws on your heart and then I will forgive you. God promises to put his Holy Spirit into us.

To enable us to fulfill all righteousness. Christ has come and died so that we are no longer under any legal obligation. Imagine.

This is my last illustration. Are you leading prayer? Sorry. Imagine there is a man who owns quite a large estate.

He's a bachelor. And he has a housekeeper. She is employed to look after him.

To sweep the house. To cook the meals. To do everything that's necessary around this large house.

Nice young girl employed at a rate of whatever it is. \$600 a week or something. To look after the place.

And this man gives this housekeeper lady. A list of 20 things. Approximately.

That she has to get done every day. And in the morning before going out to work. He writes out this list of the things that he wants done today.

Hands it to her. Says goodbye. She gives him his hat and gloves.

Out he goes to the car and off to work. And he expects them to be done when he gets home in the evening. That's the way it is.

He is the employer. But in course of time. This man falls in love with this housekeeper young lady.

And the relationship gets warmer and closer and deeper. And then eventually they marry. And his friends at work are watching this.

They come back from the honeymoon. And now the lady is still living left in the house. And the fellow goes off to work.

In the morning. And his friends start inquiring. Is she alright? Is she doing alright? Have you given her the list of things to do? The 20 things.

On the paper. No, no, no. Says the fellow.

I didn't give her a list like that. Surely. She could be at home with her feet up on the best polished table.

Eating your best chocolates. Doing nothing. Just wasting her time.

Surely you've got to give her a list. Surely. And this newly married man says no.

She will do far more than 20 things. Just out of love. She doesn't have to be given a list anymore.

It's now a wholly different motivating force that's working within her. The house has become hers. We have become one.

She wants. Not to work for payment. She wants to work for love.

And out of love for Christ you grow. Out of love for him you get up in the morning and seek his face. Out of love for him you go out in evangelism.

It's out of love for the one who is your heavenly bridegroom that you grow. It's not legalism. Your relationship with him is secure.

The Lord has said I have become one with you. Indivisibly one with you. And you are to grow up as wives do, husbands do.

They grow more and more like each other in some ways. Simply because of closeness. Christ has already been identified with us.

We are to grow now to be identified with him. And this will result, my friends, in real righteousness. It is the inevitable result of becoming a Christian.

And so Christ will say at the end of the passage we read, Look friends, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not even enter into the kingdom of God. Unless God so gets hold of you, and works into your love life, and illuminates your mind, and causes you to want to grow like him, to want to fulfill these characteristics. Unless that happens, the inevitable result of your spiritual matrimony with God himself, you won't even enter the kingdom of God.

That is the great goal towards which God is working. The whole of the Christian life, the whole of God's purposes for mankind, it's all a love story. Can you read the first three verses of Genesis chapter 12, and just listen to God proposing marriage to Abraham.

Abraham, why don't you leave your home and come and live with me? Why don't you let me change your name? Why don't you come away and become a partner with me in the things that I want to do here in this world? And there will be children. And I will look after all of you. And I will protect you.

And I will make your name great. It's a marvellous marriage proposal. The story of the world seen from God's eyes is as a love story.

And you've come into that. Oh may God grant us to grow in love for the Saviour. Assured of our relationship with himself.

Increasingly righteous in character, because the Holy Spirit is applying his word and the deeper understanding of his law to our hearts. In the rest of chapter five, there are five particular areas where God's Spirit wants to take control. The area of anger.

The area of lust. The area of faithfulness and trustworthiness in how you speak. Your attitude to people who do you wrong.

How do you relate to enemies? Those five areas, God's Holy Spirit will come in and reapply the law to cause you to become more like the God who said, I am perfect, therefore be ye perfect. That's the goal. Let God so motivate you through love, that you go on towards perfection.

Amen. Now Father, sometimes our sense of your purpose is, it's so small. It's so lacking in vision and breadth and perspective.

Oh God, warm our hearts through your word to yourself. That day by day, it just be a love experience with yourself. So that you one day, don't just lean out of heaven, but split the heavens and come.

Come for those that have been waiting and watching for your appearing. Come to be united in an even deeper way with your people. Your people who have learnt to love you, yet without seeing you.

Oh God, may it be true of each of us. This weekend, when we have perhaps a change of pace, and a little free time, that love may grow, that righteousness may grow, that we might please you, the great giver of the law of love and liberty. In Jesus name, Amen.

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