

Sermon – God’s law written in our minds and on our hearts

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Christ Church, South Nutfield

17 March 2024

I became a Christian at the age of 17 at school. As a teenager I used to swear a lot- my vocabulary was limited and somewhat dirty. As a new Christian I tried to stop swearing but I really battled. I knew it was inappropriate and not what Jesus wanted or the Bible taught. A mentor at the time suggested that I pray so I did and I was amazed to find, almost the next day, that I was “cured”. I have always thought back to that little miracle as being the Holy Spirit at work within me – changing me from the inside when I could not change myself.

In the past 7 to 8 months since Karen died, I have thought about many things. During this season of Lent, a time of reflection, we are minded to recall the work of Jesus for our salvation. I have been thinking about the ultimate destination to which we are all headed.

The book of Revelations, the last book in the bible, in chapter 21 says: *Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. I am making everything new!’*

Now I have a problem. What would this new earth look like? What would living on this new earth be like? It is very clear from Jesus himself that resurrection will be physical. We will not be floating around as angels in the clouds. We will be in a new, recreated physical universe. All the dead will be raised and those who choose to avail themselves of Jesus’ grace will populate the new earth. There will be no pain or sorrow or death. That means that in the new earth we can only do good, there will be no sin in the new creation. But will we still be human? Will we have the one key characteristic which makes us human - free will?

Now I know that the New Testament warns us in many places that we cannot know the details of the future which awaits us. As the apostle Paul says, “now we see as in a mirror dimly, then we shall see face to face”! However, I think that the scripture passages set for today, from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah and John’s gospel, give us some amazing insights.

In Jeremiah 31:33-34, God promises a new covenant with God’s people, stating, *“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”* This passage signifies a profound shift from the old covenant given to Moses, which was written on tablets of stone – basically a list of “Thou shalt and thou shalt not” – or else!!, This is a new covenant characterized by an intimate, personal relationship with God.

This prophesy of Jeremiah’s was of a future covenant – the Hebrew records indicate that Jeremiah said this about 626 years before Jesus was born. We believe that Jesus ushered in this new covenant. During the Last Supper, Jesus institutes the sacrament of the Eucharist, where He takes bread, blesses it, and gives it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body" (John 6:22-71). He also takes the cup, blesses it, and gives it to them, saying, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Through the Eucharist, Jesus establishes the new covenant in His own body and blood, fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah by allowing His followers to intimately partake in His sacrifice and receive the grace of forgiveness and communion with God.

Jesus explicitly connects the Eucharist with the forgiveness of sins. His blood, symbolized in the wine, is the blood of the new covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins, fulfilling God's promise in Jeremiah to forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more.

Additionally, in John's Gospel, Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit, who will dwell within believers and guide them into all truth (John 14:16-17, 26; 16:13). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit fulfils the prophecy of Jeremiah by enabling believers to have an intimate relationship with God, where His laws are written in their minds and on their hearts, guiding them from within.

In John 12:26, Jesus says, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me." This verse speaks to the present reality of discipleship, where those who serve and follow Jesus will be with Him and honoured by the Father. This passage also points to the future when Jesus' followers will be with him.

In the current epoch of "present, but not yet," we experience the tension of already being part of God's kingdom through Christ's work and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, yet still awaiting its full consummation. We have received the benefits of the new covenant through Christ's sacrifice and the presence of the Holy Spirit, yet we await the final fulfilment of God's kingdom when Jesus returns.

This I believe provides a bit of clarity in the dim mirror through which we see our future in a new creation. In Jeremiah's prophecy God promises "*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*" Now you and I know we are not there yet – we struggle with our spiritual lives day by day. We are aware of our imperfections, that we fall short often. We know that we can come to Jesus to receive forgiveness – but we are not there yet.

But when we are raised from the dead and populate a new earth, God's promise through Jeremiah will be completed, it will be fulfilled. Then God's law of love will be fully written on our hearts, our minds will have been fully transformed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. We will exercise free-will in the new earth. Just as God has ultimate free-will which is according to God's nature, we will have free-will which will be in accord with our renewed and redeemed nature. Just as God by nature cannot sin, we will by nature and free-will never choose to sin. Redemption will be complete, brought by Jesus' sacrifice, and there will be no sin, no tears, no mourning, and no death. A nice place to be with those we love, for ever!

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Jeremiah 31: 31-34

John 12: 20-33