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ADDRESS Sunday 22nd October, 2023

+David, OSJ (Wales)

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

In today's gospel reading of Matthew 22:1–14, Jesus tells of a parable concerning a wedding feast. Unlike most wedding feasts, this one involves a king and his son, some bad tempered or difficult to deal with invitees, cold-blooded murder, the destruction of cities, and a ragtag and bobtail group of afterthought guests.

Most surprising of all is the end of the story. After all the guests have assembled, the king spots a man without a wedding garment and orders that he be shown the door. Actually, his words are more severe: "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 22:13).

Granted, this ending adds some narrative kick to the parable, but is there more that Jesus wants us to see?

Perhaps we should retrace our steps a little. This parable is the third instalment in a series of rebukes directed toward the Jewish leaders. In the context, Jesus has been teaching in the temple following his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The chief priests and elders, with continued annoyance even resentment by his popularity with the people, interrupt his discourse and demand that he give one good reason why he has the right to open his mouth on their territory (Matthew 21:23). In response to their rudeness, Jesus tells the Jewish leaders, "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits" (Matthew 21:43).

This prediction is illustrated in our parable as the original invited guests — representing the chief priests and Pharisees — lose their place at the royal buffet. The king then sends his servants to invite anyone who will come. The servants do just that, and Matthew notes that the newly invited guests are a motley crew, made up of “both bad and good” (22:10). This observation creates the tension that will be resolved in verses 11–14. Note already, the king finds a man at the feast not wearing a wedding garment. Was this a special kind of tunic, fringed with lace, perhaps, and lined with pockets full of rice and birdseed for the newlyweds?

Probably not. More likely, a wedding garment was a nice set of clothes used for special occasions, much like we would wear “church clothes” on Sunday morning. If this is the case, then the guest without a wedding garment is an underdressed attendee, like a man appearing at a funeral in beach shorts and flip-flops. The gesture would be offensive, a sign that the guest is oblivious to the significance of his invitation.

This explains the king’s swift action, and it brings us back to the point of the parable. Jesus had said that the kingdom would be taken away from the Jewish leaders and given to a people producing its fruits. The wedding feast is an open invitation, but there is a dress code. Everyone is welcome at the table, but the table changes us. Or, to keep with the imagery of the parable, it changes our clothes. If it doesn’t, then we aren’t truly guests. We’re wedding crashers, and our lot lies outside of the laughter and light. “Many are called,” says Jesus, “but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14).

From this parable, I think Jesus wants us to see three things. First, the gates of the kingdom are open wide. Salvation is not based on ethnicity, education, income, popularity, ministry position, personality type, cultural savvy, athletic ability, or attractiveness. For this reason, we should be very careful not to assume that the people most fit for the kingdom are those who look most like us. Second, though the gates of the kingdom are open wide, the kingdom still has gates and we must enter through them.

The kingdom imposes conditions on us. We must bear its fruits. We have a particular kind of clothing to wear to the feast. In the words of Paul, we must put on, “as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility,” and the like (Colossians 3:12). A bitter and unforgiving heart is as much out of line for the Christian as a flip-flopping funeral-goer.

Finally — and we mustn’t miss this point — the kingdom of God is a feast.

And we should act like it.

God means to be enjoyed. He is the God of laughter, full bellies, and second helpings. In his presence, says David, there is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). Do you believe that?

Then come. There’s a seat with your name on it.

✠Praise be to Thee O Christ

AMEN

PRAYERS

Let us give thanks to God. Everlasting God, you promised that your presence would always go with your chosen people, the Jews, so we pray that we too may always find you accompanying us on our life journey and that ultimately we would find your deep peace in our lives.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Loving God we hold the needs of our sisters and brothers as dearly as our own needs. Help us to love you with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our minds and to love our neighbours as ourselves. With these commandments before us we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of the church here in the Costa Blanca and throughout the world.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Creator God, we pray for the peoples of the world that they may enjoy un-perverted justice whether they be poor or rich, great or small. We pray that those who use violence and terror to bring about their desires and those who then so readily seek revenge following acts of terrorism may instead pursue all that makes for peace.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Father God, we thank you for our families and friends. We thank you for modern technology which enables us to hear and see them so easily and to keep in touch even though separated by great distances. We especially pray at this time for those friends and family members in the UK as they enjoy a half-term break from schools and colleges.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Loving God, friend of those in need, your Son Jesus has loosened our burdens and healed our spirits. We lift before you for those still burdened, those seeking healing, those in need within the church and the world.

(add names of those requesting prayer)

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Merciful God, your Son Jesus was moved to tears at the grave of Lazarus his friend. Look with compassion on those bereaved and grieving at the loss of a loved one; give to their troubled hearts the light of hope and strengthen in all of us the gift of faith, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

(add names of the recently departed or on Anniversary list)

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Faithful God, at the start of this new week and recognising your trust in us to live and preach the Gospel make us always more ready to please you rather than to seek the praise of the secular world.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.

FOOD AND DRINK TO SUSTAIN LIFE

+David OSJ (Wales)

Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labour. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. Ecc.2:24
One great essential. Lesson in Christianity is that God's order comes to us. In the haphazard. We are men and women, we have appetites, we have to live on this earth, and things do happen by chance; what is the use of saying they do not? "One of the most immutable things on earth is mutability. Your life and mine is a bundle of chance. It is absurd to say it is foreordained for you to have so many buttons on your tunic, and if that is not foreordained, then nothing is. If things were foreordained, there would be no sense of responsibility at all.

A false spirituality makes us look good to God to perform a miracle instead of us doing our duty. We have to see that we do our duty in faith in God. Jesus Christ undertakes to do everything a person cannot do. Things do happen by chance and if we know God, we recognise that His order comes to us in that way. We live in this haphazard order of things, and we have to maintain the abiding order of God in it.

The doctrine of the sacrament teaches the conveying of God's presence to us through the common elements of bread and wine. We are not to seek success or prosperity. If we can get hold of our relationship to God in eating and drinking, we are on the right basis of things.

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.*

¹⁸ *For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

¹⁹ *Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

²⁰ *For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Following on from last month’s article, I have delved a little deeper into what ‘the Law’ is so we are clear about what it is and what it isn’t. Obviously this is not going to be a full explanation but hopefully point us in the right direction, and it won’t be without controversy.

Firstly ‘the Law’ is a whole lot more than a list of ‘do’s and ‘don’t’s that if followed to the letter will keep us in God’s good books.

It is inscribed by the Holy Spirit into our hearts; it has always existed and can’t always be explained fully but can be ‘felt’, and therein lies the first problem.

Secondly, 'the Law' is much more than explanation and interpretation of spiritual concepts that are often limited by human language and understanding and experience. The words we read or use aren't always able to convey what 'the Law' effectively want to say to us, and clarification can be needed.

We can talk about how 'the Law' can be understood, interpreted and applied but we will almost always end up speaking in term of 'right' and 'wrong' and judging people in terms of their actions rather than motives. We become judge and jury without seeing things through God's eyes, often seeing nothing more than 'the letter of the law' rather than its intended purpose.

John 8 v1-11 is a very good example.

John 8 v 1-11: A Woman Caught in Adultery

8 Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, ² but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. ³ As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

⁴ "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

⁶ They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. ⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" ⁸ Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

⁹ *When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman.* ¹⁰ *Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"*

¹¹ *"No, Lord," she said.*

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

As Jesus stated, the Law brings condemnation when we try to explain it and apply it whereas it should bring freedom. Instead it ties us in knots and we become bonded slaves to it and instead of empowering and enabling us, it does the exact opposite. We get wrapped up in the detail rather than the purpose and intent. We simply lose sight of God in the complexities of the law and they become an end in themselves. Compassion/forgiveness is forgotten.

'The Law' is intended to be a guide and help, its purpose to point us in the right direction and guide our decisions about our outward actions and our inward purpose. We should not fear 'the Law' but embrace it.

The Two Great Commandments, 'love God', and 'love our neighbour as our selves', is the basis of all 'the Law'. But the minute we begin to expand the application of those principles of love and their practice, and write them down, we enter into a world where failures rather than successes are the guaranteed outcomes. This is not what God intended for us but what we ourselves created, an evil of our own making driven by failure, self-judgement and guilt, often ultimately denying we are still worthy of God's love and forgiveness.

Put simply, 'the Law' cannot be prescribed purely in simple human terms without it bringing failure with it. The fulfilling of 'the Law' is not a process of mechanically obeying 'the Rules' whatever they may be perceived as being, but rather as applying the principles that generated the rules. They are not intended to restrict response and action, but to creatively enable and direct it.

Any fool can follow a rule blindly and apply it but that doesn't mean to say that person is righteous in the eyes of God. It just means they are mindlessly capable of doing as they are told.

Blind obedience is not faith. It never has been, it never will be, and it never was intended to be.

So 'the Law' is not something that is necessarily a list of inflexible statutes, but instead is a series of spiritual principles that can't always be put into words and results in the love of God and the love of neighbour being enacted out in real and practical terms in a 24/7 life.

This makes pragmatically defining 'the Law' difficult in practical terms, and even if it could be written down it, would end up being limiting and restrictive, and end up in being divisive and judgemental. Instead of rewarding good behaviour and attitudes it becomes punitive and legalistic, killing 'the spirit of the Law' itself. That would be of no benefit to anyone and would do more harm than good. That kind of law brings death, not life.

So let's look at what Jesus actually practiced when it came to the 'the Law'. (It may be helpful to go back to the earlier text of 'woman caught in adultery'.)

Primarily, it is 'aspirational' in nature rather than being judgementally prescriptive. It is not something 'we do' but something 'we live', and the driving force behind its observance is not duty or fear but something much greater and much more positive. It focuses on the 'why we do things' rather than 'the how we do those things', and it always should come down to two simple reasons, 'because we love God' and 'because we love our neighbour'.

So when Jesus talks about the fulfilling 'the Law', it is because He has become the embodiment of it and it is without all its legalism. Instead it is complete with compassion, love and forgiveness. That is something very different to the law of condemnation and uncompromising guilt we have come to experience.

Now there are those who have interpreted the opening text (*Matthew 5:17–20*) as Jesus claiming that the old Law has been rendered invalid because it has been fulfilled in his arrival, and therefore no longer applies. I feel the following puts a better argument than I possibly could as this is definitely not the case.

Jesus and the law: an exegesis on Matthew 5:17–20

DAVID WENHAM: SELECTED EXTRACTS

FULL ARTICLE: [Jesus and the law: an exegesis on Matthew 5:17–20 - The Gospel Coalition](#)

V. 17 is itself phrased as a denial of the accusation: 'Think not that I have come to abolish the law....' but there must surely be some slight implication that some people could think that Jesus was abolishing the Old Testament.

Jesus says: No; in fact he came to 'fulfil them'—in the sense 'fulfil and so establish'. Jesus came not to denigrate or displace, but to uphold the Old Testament revelation.¹⁴

In vs. 18, 19 Jesus goes on to stress the divine authority of the Old Testament law: as the Word of God it must all stand 'until heaven and earth pass away'¹⁵ or (to describe the same period in different words) 'until all is accomplished'.

Jesus then points out the consequence that follows from this: that to ignore or to teach others to ignore parts of the law will meet with disapproval in the kingdom of God. Jesus' new message of the kingdom of God does not mean the overthrow of the Old Testament law; on the contrary, it is maintained.

Having thus decisively denied the charge that he is teaching a lax attitude to the law and to morals, Jesus in v. 20 goes positively on to the offensive, claiming (on the contrary) that the standards of the kingdom are actually far higher than those of traditional Judaism: indeed you will not even enter the kingdom, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

The verses that follow expound this daunting statement, showing how Jesus' understanding of the law is again and again more radical and demanding than that of the Pharisees: Jesus' standard is in fact nothing less than perfection (v. 48).

To sum up the thrust of these verses then: Jesus rejects the charge that he is a law-breaker who is lowering standards

1. *by asserting his endorsement of the Old Testament and*
2. *by claiming that his standards are actually higher, not lower, than those of the supposedly pious defenders of the law, the scribes and Pharisees.*

The continuing validity of the OT law

If this is the thrust of what Jesus is saying, then there is surely no great problem in reconciling this with Jesus' teaching elsewhere.

There is plenty of evidence of Jesus' high view of the Old Testament as a whole, as well as of the law in particular; he saw it as the authoritative Word of God.¹⁶

There is also plenty of evidence for the radical and demanding nature of Jesus' ethics: going with the gospel of free forgiveness is a demand for a total commitment far deeper than much Jewish observation of the law.¹⁷

¹⁴ Cf. [Romans 3:31](#).

¹⁵ Cf. [Isaiah 40:7, 8](#).

¹⁶ See J. W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (London: IVP, 1972).

¹⁷ E.g. later in the Sermon on the Mount.

So what of those churches who continue to follow in the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees through their historical traditions and canons, the ones for whom the letter of the law is more important than the spirit of 'the Law'?

Do they remain a danger to their members as were the scribes, Pharisees and teachers of the law of old? In truth, it's a simple 'yes'.

Mark 7:7-9

And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do." He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.

The problem is not 'the Law' itself but the application of it and the purpose for which it is being applied. And there is a simple test.

If it is being used as a means of applying of power and control and it restricts individual ministry and falls outside of the scope and application of the 'love God, love your neighbour' framework, then it is a clear and present danger.

If it is applied to open up, support and encourage ministry within the 'love God, love your neighbour' framework, then it is eminently desirable.

The problem is that the power over and control of congregations/church members is often couched in terms that make it appear it is the latter rather than the former. 'The Law' is not being used to set free and enable but exactly the opposite, and one needs to ask why. The answer will not be easy to stomach.

When Jesus said, 'I came to set you free' (Luke 4 v18) he did not mean 'the Law' was being made null and void. What I believe he meant was more on the lines of 'I came to tell you the truth about the Law and what it really means, what it really is, and that will set you free to fully implement and understand what it is to love God and your neighbour, just as God intended'.

'I have not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it.'

Not in man's terms of understanding but in God's.

The prescriptive law as interpreted by the scribes and teachers of the law would ultimately lead to censure, judgement, disillusionment and despondency, and the Gospels amply demonstrate this outcome.

It was too complex and nuanced by the time the teachers of the law had had their way and, instead of bringing people closer to God, it drove them away, it often disowned them. 'The Law' in the hands of the teachers became a powerful tool once they had wrested it away from the Hands of God. It created new social classes that divided society rather than bringing it together – religious elites and those for whom 'the Law' was an unintelligible burden.

It is no wonder that the religious elite had a great mistrust of Jesus, for his teaching was a direct threat to them and showed what they had become.

The Gospels record just how scathing Jesus was of these people, and what the teachers of the law and religious leaders thought of Jesus. The large number of following examples from the Gospels speak for themselves.

Mark 2:16-17

When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?" And hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Luke 5:30-32

The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Luke 15:1-7

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Luke 6:7-11

The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him. But He knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And he got up and came forward. And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?"

Luke 23:10

And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently.

Matthew 26:57-60

Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome. Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death.

Mark 14:53-56

They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together. Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any.

Mark 11:18

The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

Luke 19:47

And He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him,

Mark 14:1

Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him;

Luke 22:2

The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how they might put Him to death; for they were afraid of the people.

Luke 20:19

The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.

Mark 12:12

And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.

Matthew 16:21

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

Mark 8:31

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Luke 9:22

saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."

Acts 4:5-7

On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. When they had placed them in the centre, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"

Matthew 13:52

And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

Matthew 7:28-29

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Mark 1:22

They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

And of course, there is the Gospel diatribe against the experts of the law in Matthew 23-24v2 (New English Translation) – could anything be made more plain?

Seven Woes

***23** Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The^[a] experts in the law^[b] and the Pharisees^[c] sit on Moses' seat. ³ Therefore pay attention to what they tell you and do it. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they teach.^[d]*

⁴ They^[e] tie up heavy loads, hard to carry, and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing even to lift a finger to move them.

⁵ They^[f] do all their deeds to be seen by people, for they make their phylacteries^[g] wide and their tassels^[h] long.

⁶ They^[i] love the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues^[j] ⁷ and elaborate greetings^[k] in the marketplaces,^[l] and to have people call them 'Rabbi.'

⁸ But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher and you are all brothers.

⁹ And call no one your 'father' on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.

¹⁰ Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one teacher, the Christ.^[m]

¹¹ The^[n] greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

13 "But woe to you, experts in the law^[a] and you Pharisees, hypocrites!^[b] You keep locking people out of the kingdom of heaven!^[a] For you neither enter nor permit those trying to enter to go in.^[d]

15 "Woe to you, experts in the law^[a] and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You cross land and sea to make one convert,^[b] and when you get one,^[b] you make him twice as much a child of hell^[b] as yourselves!

16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple is bound by nothing.'^[a] But whoever swears by the gold of the temple is bound by the oath.'

17 Blind fools! Which is greater, the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred?

18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing.'^[a] But if anyone swears by the gift on it he is bound by the oath.'

19 You are blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

20 So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21 And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and the one who dwells in it. 22 And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and the one who sits on it.

23 "Woe to you, experts in the law^[a] and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You give a tenth^[a] of mint, dill, and cumin,^[a] yet you neglect what is more important in the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness! You^[a] should have done these things without neglecting the others.

24 Blind guides! You strain out a gnat yet swallow a camel!^[a]

25 "Woe to you, experts in the law^[a] and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup,^[a] so that the outside may become clean too!

27 "Woe to you, experts in the law^[a] and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs^[a] that look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of the bones of the dead and of everything unclean.

²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you look righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

²⁹ "Woe to you, experts in the law^[ah] and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You^[ai] build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves^[ai] of the righteous. ³⁰ And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors,^[ak] we would not have participated with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

³¹ By saying this you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up then the measure of your ancestors!

³³ You snakes, you offspring of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?^[al]

³⁴ "For this reason I^[am] am sending you prophets and wise men and experts in the law,^[an] some of whom you will kill and crucify,^[ao] and some you will flog^[ap] in your synagogues^[aq] and pursue from town to town, ³⁵ so that on you will come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah,^[ar] whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶ I tell you the truth,^[as] this generation will be held responsible for all these things!^[at]

Judgment on Israel

³⁷ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,^[au] you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you!^[av]

How often I have longed^[aw] to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but^[ax] you would have none of it!^[ay]

³⁸ Look, your house is left to you desolate!

³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me from now until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!'"^[az]

The Destruction of the Temple

24 Now^[ba] as Jesus was going out of the temple courts and walking away, his disciples came to show him the temple buildings.^[bb]

² And he said to them,^[bc] "Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth,^[bd] not one stone will be left on another.^[be] All will be torn down!"^[bf]

These words may feel as if they are vaguely similar in structure to the Sermon on the Mount in that they may be a compilation of sayings assembled by the Gospel writer, but nevertheless the object and message is made plain.

It seems nothing has changed. In the present times one could substitute the 'scribes', 'Pharisees' and the 'teachers of the law' for the titled and qualified in 'the Methodist church', or 'the Church of England', or any other.

Not only have these communities been guilty of manipulating the Word of God to their own ends, but they have also been guilty of leading their own congregations astray by teaching that which is denied by Holy Scripture.

Not content with taking themselves down the road to Hell they are leading the innocent and trusting with them in their political and controlling games, deceits and lies. They have denied the truth that scripturally defined love limits our behaviours and passions and that there are boundaries clearly stated in Holy Scripture that should not be crossed.

Yes, we have free will as a gift from God, but that is to be used in the context of Godly Love rather than our disordered and uncontrolled passions and desires.

In the end and with the best will in the world, 'the Law' cannot be perfectly outlined and lived through the written words and human interpretation alone, but only by walking closely with God and listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

We know in our hearts what is right in God despite trying to fool ourselves otherwise. This is 'the Living Law' that brings life and salvation as taught by Jesus, not the law taught by man that brings only accusation, failure, condemnation and judgement.

And for those who say Christians have abandoned 'the Law', you need to seriously think again. Jesus did not abandon the law but instead demanded it was fulfilled to that last dot and crossed 'T'.

And you need to think even more seriously as to what you mean when you talk about 'the Law'.

It is much more than a series of legislative injunctions.

Imperfect man cannot contain it, properly understand it, fully express it or even publish it perfectly; it will always be flawed unless interpreted by the Holy Spirit in the presence of God, and will continually be contaminated by sinful and selfish minds that will try to misuse and corrupt the law for personal or corporate gain, worldly authority, wealth and power.

For the faithful 'the Law' too is neither 'a way of life' but it is 'Life' itself.

Jesus did show us/demonstrated/enacted that 'the Law' can be lived in all of its fullness even if it cannot properly be put into words. (Words more often limit real conversation and understanding and never seem to catch the fullness of meaning or intent. You only have to look at how a simple and ordinary e-mail can be misunderstood or misinterpreted to see the reality.)

'The Law' is a living thing that cannot be trapped on paper or legislation and its application will always go much further than the written word will ever be able to go.

The written word is but a shadow of a reality waiting to be illuminated and is no more than a starting point in the journey we call life.

The problem with many in today's church and similarly the ancient teachers of the law is they see 'the law' (whether in the form of liturgy, the sacraments, canon or tradition, etc.) as a destination, an end in itself and nothing more, and therein lies the cycle of failure, accusation, condemnation, judgement and death. It slowly and imperceptively destroys faith, love and active and effective ministry. It becomes its own god and that opens up the possibilities of abuse of power. And for what end, for what un-Godly purpose?

We certainly haven't learned from our mistakes or the mistakes of the past it seems. Our contemporary descendants of the teachers of the law of 2000 years ago still preach, teach and misunderstand what 'the Law' really is and fail to grasp its whole purpose.

How different this is to 'the Law' that Jesus spoke, the one that brings life and is evidenced by growing and vibrant faith, renewal, rapidly growing worshipping communities, effective outreach and a communal turning to God under the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is not the letter of the law that matters so much as the enacting and outworking of the Spirit of the Law. Nevertheless, there remain clear scriptural boundaries and limits that the Spirit of the Law will not cross. These are already outlined in Holy Scripture and covered in previous OSJ Newsletters, and are non-negotiable and not up for discussion.

Christian freedom is not absence of the Law but the freedom to fulfil every single part of it.

That I believe is what Jesus meant when He came to set us free. And 'the Law' is built on two simple foundational constructs, 'Love God' and 'love your neighbour'. How simple, uncomplicated and easy is that?

Matthew 22:34-40

³⁶ *"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"*

³⁷ *Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."*

³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment.*

³⁹ *And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'* ⁴⁰ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

Post Script:

The one thing I have not covered is the 'ritual law' and what happened to it. A modern version might be 'how we do things in church' but one thing at a time.

There is something that may speak volumes in both symbolism and significance from Matthew 27 verse 51:- the timing is when Jesus cried out with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit at his crucifixion.

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

Why is this significant?

Perhaps one should understand the significance of the Temple curtain/veil.

Christian writer Jack Wellman says this.

The veil was a long, woven curtain that was purple, scarlet and blue. This curtain or veil was for the purpose of separating the Most Holy Place which held the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat. Sitting on top of the Ark was a gold lid. This was the place for the propitiation of sins by the sprinkling of the innocent sacrifice's blood. Only the High Priest could enter this Most Holy Place and only then, once a year on the Day of Atonement.

Propitiation simply means the appeasing of the wrath of God for the sins of mankind. It provided satisfaction for God for the sinfulness of sin. If anyone simply walked behind the veil and they were not the High Priest and they did not do so on the Day of Atonement, that person would immediately die.

It was a protection against a casual act of infringing upon the Most Holy Place which represented the very real presence of God. No one could look at God and live (Exodus 33:20) because He is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29).

The Shekinah-glory that was shining above the Mercy Seat would annihilate anyone but the High Priest and so the temple's veil protected humans from instant death.

The veil was a symbol of the separation of God from sinful mankind. It marked the boundary between God's pure holiness and the wickedness of mankind. It was not possible to go beyond the veil because our sins have separated us from a Holy God. The profane and the Holy cannot be joined together.

The veil was not a small curtain like you see in some movies. The veil was 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and was four inches thick. The veil was so massive and heavy that it took 300 priests to manipulate it.

An important point here is that no one could simply tear the veil themselves. It would take more than human strength to tear it. The analogy is that it took the mighty hand of God Himself to tear it supernaturally and this tearing, which represents the removal of the separation of God and man, could not be done by humans. It had to be done by God alone and that's the point. No one can remove our separation from God but God Himself (Isaiah 59:2).

It is this moment in history that the need for animal sacrifice was ended and many of the **ritual laws** became redundant. Jesus ended this at his death.

With such a monolithic dependency on the organisation and reliance on Temple taxation, etc., needed to maintain the sacrificial system, the implications must have been enormous, especially to the hundreds of priests in employment and who benefitted from and were controlled by its continuance.

In spite of preaching the coming Messiah, one actually arriving would have been disastrous. Jesus as Messiah? That was too much rocking of the boat.

The economic and social impact would have been far reaching to say nothing of the loss of the Temple's political power and religious authority.

Effectively the Temple would have been rendered unnecessary and its power and purpose having been dissolved in one felled blow. It would have been catastrophic, and the socio-economic impact on Jerusalem and its surrounding area would have been immediate.

With this prospect in mind, it is no wonder the high priest is recorded as saying in John 11, verse 50, that *'You do not realise that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.'* It almost hints that the Temple leaders may even have begun to realise who Jesus really was. However, we have no way of knowing as the words of the High Priest can be interpreted in more than one way.

Given the way things turned out and the fact that the Jews found it very difficult to leave behind the concept of the Temple and the Priesthood, and they clung desperately hard to what they had always known and trusted even though things had changed quite dramatically and the truth was out.

Their refusal to accept that Jesus was the Messiah was emphatic and, rather than accept that realisation, a long program of persecution began against those who followed Jesus. The future and position of the Temple was at stake.

In the end though, the sacking of Jerusalem and particularly the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. sealed the fate of the sacrificial system.

It could be interpreted as a retributive act of God but it doesn't quite ring true. After having read Josephus's 'Antiquities of the Jews', I can't help but feel this was a self-destructive final act by the Jews themselves if his account is to be fully believed. But then we must remember Josephus was pro-Roman.

Strange to think that both Jesus and the Temple were destroyed at the hands of the Romans but whilst Jesus was resurrected, the Temple never recovered.

There is a sad and tragic irony to this. However I digress slightly.

For those Gentiles new to faith who wished to express their faith in terms of Jesus Christ, there was no longer a requirement to follow the ritual law laid down by the Jews (for Jesus had fulfilled all the requirements of the Law).

This new group were soon redefining forms of sacramental and liturgical ritual of their own, and trying to come to a commonly held interpretation and expression of their new faith.

The obvious question was do they start afresh or build up on past experience? Just how much do you keep of the past without it becoming a burden?

I suppose it was inevitable that they would continue to draw from past wisdom and there would be a transition of the familiar and recognisable as they were interpreted in a new light and sense of understanding. It's what I would do.

However, the excesses of the priesthood and the power of the teachers of the law were things that they seemed unable to escape from.

I suspect that some, sensing better opportunity, jumped ship.

There was great power and influence to be had if they personally could take control, an easy matter of creating new laws and bringing communities back under them, a system of inflict and enforce.

St Paul, someone as a recognised hard liner and persecutor of the early followers of Jesus, someone who never met Jesus or walked or talked with him, infiltrated and asserted a position of assumed authority and wisdom amongst the early Christians, and quickly attempted to undermined the authority of the chosen apostles of Jesus and the Jerusalem church to his own ends. (Read Acts for Luke's version of the history of Paul – they were friends.)

I seriously wonder about him.

In my extremely prejudiced view, St Paul remains an interfering and insignificant man who does not deserve the position given him in the history of the church, and instead I see him as a small, disreputable and unrecognised and irritating man seeking power and authority above his station.

A good lie depends on a huge element of plausible truth surrounding it, and whilst there is much that is recognisably spiritual in St Paul's teaching, not all is as it seems. It has to be sifted and winnowed.

Some of his teaching is wonderfully inspiring and has great value but some of it is something else. I find myself wary of his words, simply because Jesus' words are final, all we need, and do not need to be added to. So what is Paul up to?

Deuteronomy 4:2-5

*You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your **God** which I command you.*

Deuteronomy 12:32

"Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

Proverbs 30:5-6

Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

There is good deal of material out there on the internet should you do a global search on the lines of 'Is St Paul the anti-Christ?' Whilst some of it comes from disruptive sources intent on discrediting our faith, we would be unwise to dismiss it all.

Whilst some of this supposed revelation is absolute garbage, there is enough there is enough for us to at least take a seriously prayerful look at any substantiated evidence and draw our own conclusions.

There is enough to rightly ask the question. I particularly draw your attention to the Muslim view of St Paul, not that I entirely agree with this view.

They have different agendas to us and discrediting Christian leaders as a means of discrediting the faith would do their purpose no harm.

For me St Paul falls into the tradition of the 'teacher of the law' and one plainly intent on usurping the authority of the apostles appointed by Jesus.

That alone rings alarm bells for me.

The words of Jesus as recorded in scripture clearly warn us about 'teachers of the law', and whilst we should take note of what they may say, we should not do as they do or aim to be like them or assume their authority is God given without being tested.

However prejudiced I may be about St Paul, I do want to learn as much as I can that is good and holy that will be of benefit to me and others, and if that means accepting some of his teaching, then I will accept and be blessed by that and preach what is useful and necessary.

But what of now?

Unfortunately for us, the cancer of 'the teachers of the law' remains endemic in our churches today. The focus on the letter of the law and a spirit of legalistic and judgemental teaching still exists, rather than the Spirit of the Law, and still presides.

There is seemingly no end to how absolutely petty and nit-picky it can become either.

Matthew 23, v 23

'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.'

I recently heard of an occasion where during a church service the number of minutes prescribed for intercessions was X number of minutes, the sermon X number of minutes, and so on.

I despair. When did clock watchers rule over the ministry of the Word of God?

This is just one example of 'control' for the sake of 'control'. It has nothing at all to do with our faith or responsibilities to ourselves or the communities we serve. It is the pervasive and insidious dry rot of evil that destroys spiritual and Godly Christian life.

I also heard from a young priest that he was told by his then bishop that if he didn't have the right liturgical colours of vestment then he wouldn't be allowed to take part in the service he had been invited to, or offer prayers, read the prescribed scripture or preach the sermon.

Since when was red tape a liturgical colour?

I think this was nothing more than a case of episcopal authority for the sake of episcopal authority and simply unacceptable and unworthy behaviour from someone in this position.

Does this bishop not understand what is more important, that it is hearing the Word that may bring others to salvation, not the colour of robes?

It's time to put aside this kind of behaviour and focus on serving God and community, rather than a small group of insecure and often self-appointed people who need to feel that they should be taken note of even though they presently have nothing of lasting value to offer.

Yes, these people are still worthy of being loved by us and deserve to be treated accordingly as they are still children of God as we are, but this kind of stuff, really?

They need to be shown there is a better and more fulfilling way.....

It all comes down to discerning and understanding and differentiating those things that either support or get in the way of 'loving God' and 'loving your neighbour as yourself'.

Here is the complete essence and basis of the Living Law Jesus preached rather than the law of failure, judgement and condemnation, that is seemingly still being institutionally preached in order to keep the masses in their place.

Anything less than 'love God' and 'love your neighbour' is not acceptable or desirable. This is the basis of the Living Law and anything less than this is unworthy of God, the Gospel we preach, and those we claim to serve.

If any of this resonates with you then please feel free to apply as appropriate.

+Ian

If Jesus was a Jew, why aren't we Christians Jews too?

The simple answer is a combination of politics, history, personal ambitions, and power struggles between both religious groups and their factions and various religious leaders and teachers of the law.

Religion has a lot to do with it, faith not a lot.....

You can read into this confusion whatever you wish and all the opposing factions all make themselves out to be the genuinely misunderstood good guys with everybody else misunderstanding them and their teaching and their intentions, so getting at the real truth is almost impossible.

So what I propose is looking at this in a slightly different way and that is through the teachings of Jesus himself, in particular through the parables.

This separation between Judaism and an emerging Christianity was forewarned but the warnings were almost universally ignored, or not publically admitted or recognised. Maybe a case of 'too little, too late'.

So no surprises when, after the death of Jesus, things begin to fall apart and Christianity surfaces first as a sect in Judaism but quickly spreads across the Gentile world and finds its own religious expression and identity.

There are lots of possible interpretations. You could say that:-

1. Christianity was the natural successor to Judaism

2. Christianity was the rejected child of Judea that found favour with God and those rejected by Judaism.

3. Christianity was a completely new version of Judaism created by a renegade radical Jew

4. Christianity is God's mission to the Gentiles (non-Jews) in partnership with His mission to the Jews

5. Christianity is God's mission to the Gentiles (non-Jews) separate to His mission to the Jews.

Or whatever other ideas you may have. Everything is possible. The only thing that does not change is 'God', He remains the same all the way through.

So let's see what the parables reveal to us. There is no particular order but each gives another clue to the answer. Like a jigsaw, the more pieces that go together, the clearer the picture becomes. Will there be enough pieces?

Parables are like onions in that they can be interpreted in different layers and I'd like to dig a little deeper than the first layers and delve into other more or less obvious but possible interpretation.

To begin, I've grouped similar texts together from Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospels to show how important and significant this key text is. Jesus was speaking to a predominantly Jewish audience and his words, spoken out of genuine concern and Godly love, should be understood in that context.

Matthew 9:17

Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

Mark 2:22

And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”

Luke 5:37

And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.

Significantly, the theme is ‘old’ and ‘new’, two clear states of being.

Could these texts almost be a prophetic?

Could they be indicators of ‘new harvests’, ‘new workers’, ‘new wines’?

Could they be suggesting that the old wineskins/old wine of Judaism and the new wineskins/new wine of emergent Christianity can’t be mixed without the possibility of destroying them both, although both can co-exist separately and independently?

Hold this thought in the back of your minds as we look at other texts.

Matthew 9:16

¹⁶ “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.

A similar but nuanced thread to the previous three texts, if you excuse the pun.

Is this hinting that the repair using new material can't always be successfully be implanted into the old without the risk of further destruction or damage should the new pull away from the old? It would certainly be risky.

Is it suggesting that rather than keep repairing an old garment to make it serviceable is the better way, or is it hinting that a new garment is the obvious answer to the constant need for repair?

Is this again prophetic in the sense of:

1. the compassionate and forgiving ministry and teaching of Jesus would pull away from the traditional but legalistic and judgmental but in need of repair teaching of the Law, and that further damage and separation was inevitable,
2. or that a new fresh start was required, that the old had run its course and was becoming beyond repair so new was required,
3. or that it was going to all end in tears? There are lots of possibilities.

Just another jigsaw piece to add into the pile before the picture begins to reveal itself.

Luke 13 v 6-9, NIV

13 ⁶ Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig-tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, "For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig-tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?"

⁸ "'Sir," the man replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig round it and fertilise it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

The fig tree was a symbol of wisdom and spirituality.

That which does not produce fruit will be 'cut down'. That does not mean to say it won't have had the care, nurture and attention it needs, even perhaps more than it deserves. But what it is doing though is taking up resources, time and effort, that could be used more effectively and productively.

A warning to all of us that no matter how big or green or lovely or important we look in our own particular vineyard, that we risk being cut down/being removed if we produce little or no fruit.

It is clear that this parable is applicable to the individual as well as the corporate.

It is also a warning to us as Christians that the same rules apply to us and we should not fall into the trap of thinking that although we are God's chosen, we are exempted from pulling our weight and delivering.

Matthew 20 v 1-16: NIV

20 *'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius^[a] for the day and sent them into his vineyard.*

³ 'About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the market-place doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." ⁵ So they went.

'He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"

⁷ "'Because no one has hired us," they answered.

'He said to them, "You also go and work in my vineyard."

⁸ 'When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first."

⁹ 'The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² "These who were hired last worked only one hour," they said, "and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day."

¹³ 'But he answered one of them, "I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

¹⁶ 'So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

It's not about the reward at the end of the day but getting the job done, and if other workers are brought in to assist then that is up to the landowner, just as is what their reward will be for bringing the harvest in.

The warning is to those employed first (the Jews, God's chosen people) is they weren't the only ones who might be chosen, and if there is the need or they aren't up to the job, then others will be brought in or even replace them.

This is explicitly demonstrated in verse 14, 'take your pay and go' is very specific. In the context given, it is nothing less than getting the sack.

Matthew 22v 1-14: NIV *The parable of the wedding banquet*

22 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² 'The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

⁴ 'Then he sent some more servants and said, "Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet."

⁵ 'But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸ 'Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find."

¹⁰ *So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

¹¹ *'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He asked, "How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?" The man was speechless.*

¹³ *'Then the king told the attendants, "Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

¹⁴ *'For many are invited, but few are chosen.'*

In this parable, those invited first shun the hospitality of the king in favour of their own personal interests rather than their responsibilities to their king.

On being asked again by the king's servants, their pleas were rejected and responded to in many different ways ranging from ill-treatment to murder. It certainly mirrors the way the Jews often responded to the prophets.

The king's response to this rejection of his hospitality to his most favoured subjects was simply wiping them off the face of the earth for their offence.

As a result, all the lowly and previously rejected were called to take the places assigned for others at the wedding feast. Another people you might say.

Those that gratefully accepted the king's invitation responded by dressing respectfully and appropriately for the celebration, other than one guest who found himself ill-prepared, then as a consequence rejected and ejected. A lack of respect never goes down well.

The rewards of not putting God first or loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, being, are made evidently clear – the consequences of which are a self-inflicted rejection and exclusion from the presence of God.

But the bulk of the parable message is that however important you think you are, or however secure you think your relationship is, if you don't measure up, then you will lose your place and someone lesser perhaps but more deserving will be both honoured and delighted to be offered your place instead.

Luke 14 v7-14: NIV Jesus at a Pharisee's house

14⁷ When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honour at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸ 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹ If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, "Give this person your seat." Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, "Friend, move up to a better place." Then you will be honoured in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹ For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

This parable highlights the importance of not relying on your own assessment of your position and importance, because if you don't measure up to reality then you will find yourself humbled and very publically put in your place.

This can apply both individually and corporately of course.

Luke 12NIV v35-47: NIV Watchfulness

³⁵ *'Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,* ³⁶ *like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.* ³⁷ *It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will make them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.* ³⁸ *It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or towards daybreak.* ³⁹ *But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.* ⁴⁰ *You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.'*

⁴¹ *Peter asked, 'Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?'*

⁴² *The Lord answered, 'Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?'* ⁴³ *It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.* ⁴⁴ *Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.* ⁴⁵ *But suppose the servant says to himself, "My master is taking a long time in coming," and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk.* ⁴⁶ *The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.*

⁴⁷ *'The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows.* ⁴⁸ *But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*

This parable is about doing what is expected, taking our responsibilities seriously and 'being ready' whatever the time needed, for if we don't, we shall be held to account, receive just punishment and 'be cast out'.

It also deals with abuse of power and position (v45), and the reward for such behaviour (v46). Something we should take note of – it still applies today.

John 10 v16: *King James Version*

¹⁶ *And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

A straight forward warning to the Jewish listeners and to the disciples.

You are not the only ones out there and I will bring you all together as one, and not necessarily in the way you expect.

Luke 21:24(b) KJB

24 *and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*

A chilling warning of what was to come. Jerusalem (whatever symbolic significance that implies, whether spiritual or physical) will fall to/come under the control of the Gentiles, so don't think you are invincible or that God will defend you because of your disobedience.

And a very significant moment in the ministry of Jesus.....

John 12 v 20-24: Jesus Predicts His Death

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. **“Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.”** ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³ Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

The following explains the significance of the text better than I could.

But now, in response to the request of these Greeks to see Him, Jesus announces ([John 12:23](#)),

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Why? What was the significance of these Greeks and their desire to see Jesus?

The answer is that these Greeks signalled a turning point in which the Jewish people have rejected Jesus as their Saviour and so now the gospel would go out to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Salvation would now be proclaimed to the whole world.

This worldwide scope of the gospel was telegraphed in [John 3:16-17](#),

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the

Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”

We also saw it in [John 4:42](#), when the Samaritan people told the woman who had met Jesus by the well,

“It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Saviour of the world.”

The gospel came to the Jews first, but now that they have largely rejected it, the message goes out to the whole world.

(Excerpt) [Lesson 66: We Wish to See Jesus \(John 12:20-24\) | Bible.org](#)

The example parables are by no means exhaustive when it comes to presenting an argument to say that the Christian faith was a natural and predicted progression from Judaism should the Jews not come up to scratch when it came to their understanding and application of ‘the Law’ enshrined in the two Great Commandments, ‘love God....’ and ‘love your neighbour....’.

All the warnings were in place in these teachings of Jesus, and the rejection of those teachings culminated in the crucifixion and subsequent resurrection of Jesus and brought about

1. the emergence of a believing Christian community within Judaism

2. their subsequent rejection, persecution and expulsion by the Jewish religious authorities
3. and the formation, growth and spread of an independent Christian Church in which there was no longer any requirement to be subject to Jewish practice and tradition.

There was no attempt to be 'the new patch on the tear of an old garment' or to try and be a 'new wine in an old wineskin'. We are from 'another fold' and whilst we can respect our Jewish roots, we do not need to be Jews, but embrace our own expression of our Christian faith.

Judaism continued to survive in spite of the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD by the Romans, but it survives independently of Christianity even though it shares many of the same roots.

Jesus remains a stumbling block to the Jews (1 Corinthians 1 v 23) as always, and to admit Jesus was right about so much in his teachings and his ministry would be an admission that he was unjustly accused and crucified by the Jewish religious authorities acting both unlawfully and in their own personal interests. Even Pilate stated Jesus was innocent of the crimes he was accused of (see John 18 v 38, 'I find no basis for a charge against him'.) Such an admission might change everything, but I doubt it will come.

Lastly, I would suggest that the same parables used in this article give us as Christians a warning that is equally as applicable to us as it was to the Jews 2000 years ago.

We are still capable of making the same mistakes, and we are still subject to the same teaching – it is not just something aimed at the Jews. It is aimed at and applicable to all people of faith and their religious communities.

If we don't get our act together then we will share the same fate.

With this in mind I will draw upon one last parable.

Consider this:- is this another example of the prophetic nature of the parable, the older brother being Judaism and the younger brother being Christianity?

Is this a warning to us, a kind of pre-emptive morality tale, as in the present times we do seem to be squandering our scriptural and spiritual inheritance by following our own self-destructive path rather than faithfully waiting on God and applying ourselves to His Will?

Is history about to repeat itself?

If we have any doubts, any concerns, we need to act now for none of us knows when our master will arrive, and I for one do not want to be found lacking in any matter.

Luke 15:11-32: NIV The Parable of the Lost Son

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

³¹ "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"