

You'll remember that the way that we are approaching our teaching during these first 4 weeks in May is that we are looking at the life of Moses and the history of the Israelite nation and then I'm comparing that, or I'm bringing in particular teaching from Paul's letter to the Romans and just marrying those two together seeing how Paul's teaching to the Roman Christians connects with the life of Moses and the history of the Israelites particularly as they're in Egypt and as they moved towards gaining their freedom.

In our series looking at the life of Moses we've reached the point where because Moses killed an Egyptian who he saw beating some of his fellow Israelites, Moses had to flee, he had to leave Egypt and had to start living as a shepherd in Midian, in the nation of Midian. And whilst tending the sheep for Jethro his father-in-law Moses sees a most strange apparition such a weird thing. He sees a bush that seems to be on fire and yet as he looks in it it doesn't burn up. Moses is understandably intrigued by what he sees, and so he goes to investigate and moves closer to the to the Bush. And there God speaks to him, as says to him: "Take your sandals off because where you are standing is Holy Ground." God goes on to say to Moses, "I have seen the misery of my people in slavery and I am sending you to bring my people out of Egypt!" Moses makes all kinds of excuses why he's not the right person for this job; but eventually he agrees to return to Egypt.

When he arrives, he soon goes to Pharaoh and asks that the Israelites be initially allowed so time to worship God in the desert. But Pharaoh refuses and he tells the people because of Moses' interference that the people are lazy and they must now make their quota of bricks without being given any straw which was a staple requirement to make bricks back in those days. So Moses' interference has angered Pharaoh so much, he says "Right, make the same number of bricks, but we're not giving you straw! Collect your own straw but don't let the number of your quota of bricks drop." Of course the Israelites are obviously upset with what Moses has caused. But what then follows is a test of wills between Moses, on the one hand as God's mouth piece, and Pharaoh on the other, as an archetype as an arrogant hard-hearted earthly leader. An archetype is a typical example of a type of person. So Pharaoh here is an archetype, a typical example of an arrogant hard-hearted earthly leader. This battle of wills of course over into the ten plagues that God promises to bring upon the Egyptians; the only way for the Egyptians to avoid these plagues is for Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery. Now before each plague Moses asks Pharaoh to do this: to release the people. But Pharaoh refuses and therefore each plague strikes. But interestingly as Pharaoh sees the devastation wreaked upon his people a number of times during the plagues Pharaoh repents and promises to release God's people. If we were to look at Exodus chapter 8, chapter 9 and chapter 10, in each one of those chapters at least once if not twice Pharaoh repents and says "Please, hear my prayer; ask God to forgive me. I will let God's people go." And so Moses calls off the plague – he speaks out on behalf of the Egyptians and the plague stops. But, as soon as that happens Pharaoh hardens his heart again and breaks his promise and refuses to set God's people free.

So, I think the Themes that we see in this part of Moses' life and the history of the Israelites here are Pharaoh's attitudes of sinfulness, of hard heartedness, of spiritual arrogance; and this is where I think today's passage from Romans chapter 5 verses 12 to 21 connects with this part of Moses' life and the history of the Israelites. Pharaoh had numerous opportunities to stop being hateful and cruel, but he chose not to take them. When he saw the consequences of his refusal Pharaoh was initially sorry and asks for God's forgiveness, but as soon as the plague was lifted he went back

to his brutal vindictiveness ways. Let me read the passage from Paul's letter to the Romans and we're looking at Romans chapter 5 verses 12 to 21; in my Bible this passage is entitled: "Death through Adam, life through Christ".

[Reading Romans 5:12-21]

That's one of those passages where Paul is setting out a legal argument. As a Pharisee Paul learnt how to argue and how to present arguments in ways that would be persuasive particularly for other Pharisees and other people who are learned in the Old Testament scriptures. And so for us such arguments as we have presented in those verses, they come across to us as quite detailed, perhaps over detailed, and they are quite complex because we're used to arguments being set out much more simply, but I want to try and just take out some of the key points of what Paul's trying to say to the Christians in Rome but also say to us through those words. Paul here talks about the law being related to Sin and Death. Now this might seem confusing to us: why would God's Law be related to Sin and Death? Surely God's Law should lead us to life? Let's look at it.

In actual fact, in order to understand this connection between God's Law and humanity's Sin and Death (spiritually) we need to grasp God's original purpose for the Law.

Firstly, the Law made people aware of their sinfulness, the Law made people aware of their sinfulness. It's as Paul says in verse 13: "Sin is not taken into account when there is no law." In other words, Sin could not be quantified, could not be identified easily, until the law gave definitions of what Sin looked like. That's what the Old Testament Law, that we have in particular in some of those very early books of the Old Testament, that's what they did: they gave definition to what Sin look like for the Israelite people. And so Paul says Sin is not taken into account when there is no law; therefore, it *is* taken into account when the law is introduced, in other words it can be identified because the law has given a definition of what Sin looks like. God's intention was that faced with so many old testament laws (and see Leviticus if you don't believe me as to how many there are); the idea was that faced with so many Old Testament laws the only conclusion people would be able to reach was that they were sinners. We also need this reminder; as Paul tells us earlier in this very letter to the Roman Christians, he says in Romans chapter 3 verse 23 "All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." But do you remember last week? I said each one of us carries just a small part of both the weight of God's glory and the burden of Sin. Actually, we carry these collectively. We carry them corporately as a human race not individually. So, the Law made people aware of their sinfulness.

Secondly the Law was necessary. In the early stages of our development as human beings we all need a moral code to be able to aspire to, a set of principles that we're going to live by; that's what the Old Testament set out - it showed what Sin was, it defines Sin, and it gave the people a structure, a way to a try to avoid living a simple life. And actually that's also what Paul is setting out in verses 12 to 14 of this reading: he's saying that Adam is an archetype, he's a typical example of all human beings. Because you see there's a seed of Sin within each one of us; Adam chose to give in to that seed of Sin and through our natural inclinations and desires, so does each one of us. We all choose to give into that seed of Sin within our lives. And because of this giving into Sin, Death has power and authority over humanity; that is spiritual death which of course brings separation between us and God. But of course we as human beings often spend much of our lives, particularly the first half of our lives, seeking to fight against that sense of Sinfulness, that sense of unworthiness. And so often we try to do that by achieving success and gaining a sense of self-importance. We're usually trying to prove to ourselves, and therefore to God, that we are good enough. In other words, this attempt, these efforts to achieve success and self-importance, they

become our personal salvation project, as Thomas Merton, an American monk, once called it (our personal salvation project). But thankfully life has a way of teaching us important lessons. And this particular lesson, this most important lesson, usually comes through the experience of great love or great suffering. And in fact, if you genuinely love, sooner or later you will suffer for that love. But if we are prepared to face head on the sufferings that life will inevitably bring us, we discover that it is the means by which we actually grow and mature as human beings. So, the Law made people aware of their Sinfulness, and for that reason the Law was necessary.

But also finally, the Law highlights the vast grace of God, the vast grace of God. Our sinfulness has been shown up by the Law, we have attempted to build our personal salvation project, but in the end life teaches us through suffering that actually it is only God's grace that can restore our relationship with him. Verses 20 to 21 of the reading tell us that the Law showed that we were incapable of resisting Sin, and it showed us we were incapable of resisting Sin so that we would turn to God. Verse 20 says "The Law was added so that the Trespass might increase," in other words so that the Trespass, the Sinfulness, might be shown up. But where Sin increased, or was shown up, Grace increased all the more; so that just as Sin reigned in Death, so also Grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Those words tell us that the Law showed us we were incapable of resisting Sin so that we would turn to God. Knowing our Sinfulness can lead us to recognise the extent of God's Grace. He has forgiven us so much in the past but continues to forgive us both and on into the future.

As with most great spiritual truths there's a paradox at the heart of our relationship with God. Even though we now live in Christ, that is grafted into him as a branch can be grafted into a vine, still we fail to keep god's law of love. But I'm more convinced that whether we Sin or not is God's first and foremost concern; after all it was God's choice to give us free will knowing that we would stray, knowing that we would make mistakes. I think God is much more interested in whether we are on a journey of getting closer to him or not, than whether we make mistakes along the way. That's where this relates back into Pharaoh and his attitudes and behaviour: Pharaoh repeatedly chose to harden his heart against God's invitation to start to learn the law of love and apply it to those around him. Pharaoh repeatedly resisted that invitation from God.

I want to finish by sharing a story this week about a 4-year old boy called Brandon. Brandon wanted to do something special for his dad, so he decided to make him breakfast. Brandon, remember, is only 4 years old. So he got the cereal box out of the cupboard, and he got the milk out of the fridge, and he managed to get some of both of them into a bowl. Brandon then poured a glass of orange juice, but he had to pour it again because the first one fell over. Finally he put all of the breakfast on a little tray and carried it upstairs to his dad, not noticing that he was leaving a trail of cereal, milk and orange juice all the way there. He pushed his way through the door into the bedroom and said: "Daddy, I've made you breakfast!" His dad was wise and patient; he recognised his son wanted to show him how much he loved him, so he ignore the mess, and gave his son a big hug for making breakfast.

You see, I think God is like that! We may think that we mess things up so often that we wonder how God can still love us. But God's the one who wants to metaphorically throw his arms around us. I was reminded this week of this wonderful truth, and this truth is the following: the desire to please God does in fact please him! Let me just say that to you again: the desire that we have to please God does in itself please him! So, to whatever degree we try to please God that desire itself brings joy to the heart of God. I invite you to remember that this week when your best intentions of being a better Christian, your best intentions of responding to something in a way

that you think is the right way and you don't quite get it right, remember: our desire to please God does in fact please him!

Let's pray together shall we. Dear Lord God we thank you for the opportunity to worship together as Chris led us. Thank you for the reminder that you are for us. You are for us. And thank you Lord for your word that speaks to us even in these days of lockdown. We pray Lord God that we will remember that it is our heart motivation that you look at and look to, rather than how well we have done, because so often how well we have done becomes a way that we seek to justify ourselves. But actually Lord we want to acknowledge your wonderful Grace offered to us and we want to thank you for it. Amen