

God's Law Accelerating Revival

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[0 : 00] 34 and verse 19. When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes, and the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahicham, the son of Shaphan, Abdon, the son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary, and Isaiah the king's seventh, saying, Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found, and so on.

If you heard claims to a revival, and at the same time said, but there's no involvement at all of God's law in any of this, you would immediately be suspicious, I would hope.

Because every genuine revival that's ever taken place has involved the law of God bringing conviction of sin and getting people to think about themselves and their relationship to God.

That, of course, comes from the scriptures. When the scriptures are expounded, when God blesses his word, when the law of God makes its own impact upon our souls, it brings to light our own sinfulness and God's holiness at the same time.

And this was a wonderful discovery, a very significant discovery, one of huge significance in the time of Josiah the king. He had set about reforming the nation of Judah after a long, long period of decline.

[1 : 29] And as he had set about this reform, this regeneration, if you like, of the nation, especially the way in which they related to the Lord and to the Lord's house.

We've come here in this passage to look at how the house of the Lord, the temple of the Lord that had been left and neglected and gone to great ruin, was being repaired.

And in the course of being repaired, they found this book of the law. This is what was reported back to the king that they had found. And the Hilkiah answered, said to Shaphan, I found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.

He gave the book to Shaphan. He brought it to the king. And when it was read in the king's presence, the king tore his clothes. And that is always in the Old Testament, a sign of coming to realize your sinfulness, your defilement before a holy God.

This is what the effect was of this book being read to the king. And that was passed on through to the people as time went on. Now, it's significant.

[2 : 41] It probably was, we're not told exactly what this book was. Most of the commentators feel it was either the book of Deuteronomy or a portion of the book of Deuteronomy. Because as the chapter goes on and Huldah the prophetess brings a message back to the king, it's clear that some of the directions that were given in Deuteronomy are very fitting here.

Because the Lord had said that if they departed from him and forgot his ways and took up the ways of the pagans, of the heathen, then they would come under the covenant curses that are set out in the likes of Deuteronomy chapter 28.

So we can't be sure, but there's certainly some indication that it would have been a section of Deuteronomy or the whole of the book of Deuteronomy. In any way, that was the effect it had. It was very much a case of giving acceleration to the work that had already begun of renovation and repair, not just of the temple, but of the community.

And that really gave the acceleration to that work, this discovery of the book of the law and its interpretation or meaning. Josiah had taken over the kingship after a long, long period of not just neglect, but sometimes vehement, evil hatred of God by the likes of Manasseh.

Manasseh, and then following Manasseh, you have Manasseh's son Ammon, who also did not walk in the ways of the Lord and did what was evil, as Manasseh, his father, had done at the end of the previous chapter.

[4 : 17] So after a long, long time, many, many years, this book of the law had been misplaced. It was a discovery, a rediscovery of this book.

It had obviously been lacking. How it had gotten lost, we don't know, but really it just seems to have been sheer neglect. Because when you put the law of the Lord aside, and then you take up other things in its place, obviously, the more they entered into the ways of the pagans and the heathen and the people of Canaan, the more the law of God was neglected.

And the more the law of God was neglected, the more they themselves became steeped in idolatry. It always happens. They don't actually get rid of the law of God and find neutrality.

They'll find something very different, very opposite, put in its place always. And it's similar to the context that we ourselves are in today. We've had a long, long period of gradual decline spiritually and morally, really going back to the late 19th century, if you like, when the ideas that came to be full-blown evolution and an emphasis on human ingenuity and human wisdom, when all of these things began to really be promoted, misuse of scientific discoveries against the ways of the Lord have themselves come to bring us to where we are today.

I need not tell you that we are in a dire condition. You can say in a sense, if we can think metaphorically, that the law of the Lord, by and large, of course, we're thankful for all the groups that meet like ourselves that are seeking to be faithful to the Lord and seeking to reach out with the gospel.

[6 : 08] But by and large, as we heard in prayer, large swathes of our country, the law of the Lord lies buried under the rubble of collapsed Christianity.

That's where it's found. That's why it needs to be rediscovered. This is what happened in the days of Jeremiah. And we can draw hope from this passage.

After all these long, long years of decline, of spiritual and moral darkness, of opposition to God, of idolatrous practice, the Lord raises up Josiah, an eight-year-old boy.

And that doesn't really seem to be very encouraging to begin with, does it? I'm sure many people might have been saying, well, this is just likely to be more of the same. But it wasn't, because this young boy developed into a reformer.

And he set about reforming the nation and the people and the practices and the house of God. We can draw hope from this tonight.

[7 : 08] What happened? What was the result? What were the consequences of them finding this book of the law and coming to discover its contents? What would it mean for our own people today to rediscover the Bible, to rediscover the law of God, to rediscover these precepts, these principles, these laws, these promises that God gave and has given to us, not just for our individual use, but for national use?

The law of God, the word of God, the gospel is designed for people, not just for individuals, designed for communities, for nations, as our own nation's history testifies.

Although, sadly, that's so much in the past and even despised and neglected in some cases. Well, what would happen would be, first of all, it would restore a consciousness of God to us as a people.

That's what happened here. Restoring a consciousness of God. You see, verse 19, he tore his clothes. Now, Josiah, of course, knew the Lord. He knew the Lord from his young days.

And yet, when the contents of this book were read, his first reaction was to tear his clothes. He came to realize how much they had departed from the ways of the Lord, how much they had bought into the philosophy of paganism, how much they had actually taken that on board and followed that, and at the same time, putting the law of God and the word of God aside.

[8 : 39] He tore his clothes because he realized his sinfulness and the sinfulness of the people. He realized, especially as he sent the message with Shaphan, the secretary, and Asiah, go and inquire of the Lord for me, for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord to do according to all that is written in this book.

Now, Chronicles was actually written for the benefit of those who were coming back from exile in Babylon. So, in the likes of Chronicles, you'll find the history of the people of Judah and of Israel, but it's a history lesson with a purpose so that they will realize why it was such a disaster came upon them, that it was because they abandoned the ways of the Lord, despite the many warnings that God had sent through his prophets.

And now that they're back and beginning to rebuild, the book of Chronicles comes to actually be, for them, a source of much encouragement and a source of much historical reference.

God is not mocked. Whatever God says, we need to take note of, whether it's by way of warning or by way of promises.

Judah had forsaken the Lord. And forsaking the Lord, as we said, does not bring you into a neutrality or into a vacuum, spiritually or morally.

[10:17] It will always bring you into some alternative to God. And, of course, the alternatives to God are usually the ungodly, the ways of the ungodly. That's why you find here the wrath of God mentioned.

Now, the wrath of God sometimes, in fact, very often in history, has not been revealed by a sudden bolt from heaven. The wrath of God doesn't always, in fact, seldom comes in a great thunderclap of judgment.

The wrath of God can take many generations to work itself through. It sometimes is just God saying, if you follow the first two chapters of Romans, you'll see something like that.

It's God simply saying from heaven, well, there you are. You've kept on refusing my overtures, my invitations. You've kept on despising my law. So I'll just let you go your own way.

I'll just let you follow the ways of sin. And, of course, the more that that happens, well, the more that that happens, the more disastrous the situation becomes.

[11:32] And that's what Josiah came to realize. Because the law of God is really a transcription of God's nature.

It is something that reveals to us the holiness of God and our sin in relation to that. And when we take the law of God out of the picture, and we simply say, well, we've got plenty of other things. We don't need that nowadays. We've got plenty of things we can put in place of that. Let's just emphasize love. Let's emphasize love in the way that really you find so meaninglessly put across. Love is love. What does that mean? It means nothing. Love is respect for God. Love is an acknowledgement of his authority, of his will, of his love.

It wasn't hated on the part of God that gave the law to Judah, to the people of Israel. It's not hated on the part of God or of God's people that seek to call us back to respecting and honoring the law of God and following it as far as we can.

[12:41] It's God's kindness that has provided this for us. And it's his kindness that has kept at least a semblance in the mind of some of our people, of the richness of our history as a people who have come to know the Lord and his ways.

You don't need to ask why the law of God is not liked by ourselves in our natural state or by the world in which we live.

It's not liked because it highlights our sin and therefore it highlights our need of change. It highlights our need of being born again. It highlights our guilt before God.

We mustn't, of course, ever leave it at that because even in the use of the law by the Lord himself, very often it brings us towards the gospel, towards the salvation that's in Christ.

Restoring a consciousness of God. And, you know, one of the things that disappears when your consciousness of God, a people's consciousness of God disappears or wanes, one of the results of that itself is a lack of dependence upon God.

[13:52] Here were Israel. Here were the people of Judah. This was the people that had the history of having been saved from Egypt, delivered from Egypt, led by the Lord through the desert for these 40 years.

How could they have managed to go through the desert for 40 years without their dependence on God? Of course, they couldn't. That's why the Lord had led them out so he could depend on himself. But you remember he warned them.

He warned them, and you find it recorded in the likes of Deuteronomy, chapter 6 and verses 10 to 15. Where do you find the Lord actually saying to the people, and this is, of course, before they entered the promised land, on the borders of the land, as Moses spoke to them, or God through Moses.

In chapter 6 and verse 10 of Deuteronomy, this is what the Lord said. When the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you with great and good cities that you did not build, houses full of good things that you did not fill, cisterns that you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant, and when you eat and are full, then take care.

Take care of what? That you do not forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

[15:18] It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him shall you serve, and his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you.

For the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God, lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth. That's what they were told prior to entering the promised land.

That's what they failed to do. Instead, they did go after the ways of the pagans, and so the wrath of God, as promised, came upon them.

You see, we've come to the stage in our national life, in our society, where we really have come to the opinion that we can be perfectly just in having confidence in ourselves.

We don't need the light of this word of God, and especially of the Christian religion or the Christian gospel. We have confidence in ourselves.

[16:22] When you reject God, then inevitably you turn to human ability. In some way or other. And that's what's happened. Now we're in the position of thinking that we can take charge of our own life, and that we can take charge of our death and the circumstances of our death.

We don't see it wrong anymore, by and large, as a society, as a people. We don't see that it's wrong to end the life of the unborn in the womb. We don't see that it's wrong to prepare some proposed legislation for assisted suicide, for euthanasia.

How did we get there? We got there because the law of God was put aside, because we don't live by absolutes anymore.

Instead, it's all relative. It's really all a matter of competing rights. My right versus your right. Their rights versus our rights.

And it becomes a hierarchy, a table, if you like, of competing rights. Something like a league table, where you find the strongest inevitably coming out and tall.

[17:33] The one that shouts the most. The one that has the most clout with government. That array of competing rights is because we've turned away from the absolutes of God's word and replaced them with the relatives of human wisdom.

And we need the restoration of the absolute. It's a crucial matter. However, we must give God no rest until he reestablish a consciousness of himself among us as a people.

That's what this is saying to us. It's very fresh. It's very relevant. It's very applicable to Scotland in 2023.

And we need that God would bring us and bring those who rule over us to rediscover this great book of the law of God, of the word of God, of the gospel.

So it would restore consciousness of God. But also, I think it would restore an appreciation of the law in the Christian life.

[18:50] And maybe that sounds strange. We're just developing the point a bit further. Josiah, then the next chapter, you actually see Josiah keeping the Passover. And the arrangement of the material here is very significant.

Here is the discovery of the book of the law. Here is the reaction of Josiah himself. Here is what he then ordered be done. And that's immediately followed by the Passover.

In other words, the Passover lamb that signified the atonement that was required to atone for sin immediately follows the discovery or the rediscovery, if you like, of the depth of their sin and of their guilt.

They're put beside each other, these two chapters very deliberately. And that's really always what happens when the law comes to expose their sin here.

Then what follows is the atonement that's set out in the Passover lamb. That is God's answer to the guilt of sin, to the depth of our depravity.

[19:53] And really that's the gospel pattern as well. I'm not saying that what we need as a people is a big dose of the law and that that's inevitably going to bring us to Christ.

Sometimes God works that way, bringing us a sense of our guilt individually or collectively, and then brings us to think of the gospel. But it doesn't always work that way. God has other ways of bringing us to know the truth.

And we are saved by grace. And it's important, of course, we always remember that. That's one of the great burdens of Paul's writings, isn't it? We are saved by grace, not by the works of the law.

We are not justified by the works of the law, but through the grace of God in Christ, we are justified by faith in his name, in the Savior.

The atonement in Christ's obedience not ours to the law is what God receives as a sufficient provision for sin.

[20 : 58] But when you become a Christian, when the Lord brings you to Jesus as the Passover lamb, when he brings you by his grace to receive him, to embrace him, to acknowledge him, to give your life over to him, does the law of God just simply disappear from your life?

Does it continue to have any relevance at all in your life? Of course it does. Not everybody will actually go along with that view.

But if you go back to the Reformed view, you'll find especially John Calvin's view, for example. John Calvin developed, he didn't begin it, but he developed a threefold use for the law of God.

The threefold relevance or threefold use. The first was he described as being a mirror, like a mirror, in which you saw the holiness of God and the sinfulness of your own heart held out to you.

In other words, the law was there to bring you to the knowledge of sin, but also a holy God in relation to that. That was the first use. The second use was the use of a restraint, what Calvin called the civil use of the law, a law for society, a law for people to actually have their lives restrained in order that sin didn't break out or they didn't go headlong into sin as they would without God's law.

[22 : 27] That's why, as we said, the more the law of God is put aside, the more you find the lack of restraint. And Calvin's view, the civil use of the law is one we've simply got to try and get back to and promote and get people to really see that that's why God has given us this law, not just for my life and your life individually to bring us a sense of sin and the holiness of God so it will then be brought to embrace Christ.

It is that, but it's there for people, it's there for nations. There's a civic use, as Calvin said, of the law as a restraining influence, as a restraint, but there's also the third use, which is where it comes into the life of the Christian because the third use, he said, was one of being a guide to us in the Christian life.

Now, he didn't mean by this that you needed to actually obey the law and that by that you then came to be saved. And that's exactly what Paul was arguing against.

But then Calvin said that the law is not irrelevant to a Christian who's been saved by grace because that law still brings to us something to do with the holiness of God.

It gives a boundary to your life. It gives you a guide as to what is and isn't a holy life, especially as the Ten Commandments form the summary of God's moral law.

[23 : 58] Think of when you have to go through an airport. You find a scanner there that you have to actually go through in some way or other and that scanner is there so that it'll show up what you have on your person.

If you're carrying something on your person that's illegal or not allowed to carry through to the boarding of the aircraft, then it's shown up on the scanner and you have to then come back and give it up.

Or maybe it's your suitcase that's being scanned and as it goes through the scanner, it shows up anything there that shouldn't be there. You think of a terrorist coming and terrorist thoughts of a scanner.

Well, that's a huge inconvenience. That's something that really, for a criminal, is an irritation. That rather there be no such thing as a scanner at an airport, that they were free to actually take what they like through.

It's annoying. You wish it wasn't there. Why have this restriction? But then for somebody who's law-abiding and respects the need to not just abide by the law, themselves, but be careful for the well-being of other people, that scanner, that's an annoyance to the criminal is a means of security to the law-keeper, to the person who really wants to be safe when they board that aircraft.

[25 : 28] And the Christian looks at the law of God in that way. The person who doesn't want anything to do with the Christian religion, with Jesus, with the Bible, sees the whole of God's law as an irritation.

It's something that we'd be better without. Just get rid of it. Don't give it to me as something that's recommended or don't present it to me as if it's got any relevance to my life.

But then for you as Christians, you're thankful to God that he hasn't taken away his law, that he hasn't actually come to you and said, that's fine, you don't need that anymore. Just go on your own way and make up your own mind as to what is and isn't right.

Now, for the law-abiding people of God, the law of God is part of their security, part of their guidance, at least, on a safe path.

And that's what you find in so much of the Psalms that we sing, so many references positively to the law of God. The law of God being a means by which the Psalmist's feet are guided on the right path, in contrast to those who are the wicked, who don't acknowledge the law of God.

[26 : 43] And that's why you, as Christians, and I ask as Christians why we can follow the Psalmist in so much of what he says. Psalm 119, just one example out of many, many verses. 119, verse 165.

Great peace of those who love your law. Nothing can make them stumble. Wonderful words. Great peace of those who love your law.

Nothing can make them stumble. What he means by that is as long as they're giving the respect to the law of God, guided by the law of God, even as Christian people who are not saved by works of the law or obedience to the law, they still use the law as a transcript of God's own nature, and they see the law as setting out for them the path in which they walk in following Christ.

Great peace of those who love your law. Nothing can make them stumble. So there's the restoration of the rediscovery of the law of God, bringing back to the people of Judah a consciousness of God, bringing back that consciousness of God by which they would come to be drawn to the Passover and to the partial lamb, and once again have reestablished amongst them that relationship with God that they'd lost.

And for ourselves, as Christians, it has that place where it is still a guide for us, and where we thank the Lord that we do have his law, that he has given us a love for it.

[28 : 24] Let's pray. Our gracious God, we give thanks for the whole of your word, for the word as law and gospel to us.

We bless you that your law brings to us a sense of our own need, that you, O Lord, impress upon our mind our own guilt, our sinfulness before your law, before your eyes.

We thank you for your kindness in giving us the moral law. And we thank you for the way that it has already been fulfilled for your people in the obedience of their saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you, Lord, for his perfect life, for his atoning death, for his resurrection from the dead. And we bless you tonight, Lord, that we can look to him as one in whom we are found acceptable to you, one in whom we truly find our grounding, our foundation for life.

We pray that you would help us to honour him and to honour the way in which we are to walk in obedience to him. Bless to us every aspect of your word, O Lord, whether it be in the promises or in the commands and precepts.

[29 : 41] We give thanks, O Lord, that you give your people a love for you and a love for your word. We pray tonight, O Lord, for those who are particularly needy that we know of, already mentioned before you.

We think especially, O Lord, tonight of those who are to be married tomorrow. We pray for Emma and Donald. We pray for Catherine and Gary. We ask for them, O Lord, as they enter into married life, that your blessing will be with them, that you will be their portion, that you will be their guide, that you will be their protector.

And we ask, Lord, that they may enjoy you as they share together the things of God and the things of his gospel and the life that is in Christ.

We ask, too, O Lord, tonight for Alan Murray and for Annie Mary's sister and for her family as they mourn George's passing. We pray that as they prepare for the funeral here tomorrow, that you be their strength and their guide, Lord.

We ask that you would be pleased to give your comfort to them as they mourn George's passing. And grant, too, your blessing to William Graham tonight, Lord, as he lies in the hospital bed, as he seeks, Lord, still to recover or begin to recover from his injury.

[30 : 58] We ask, Lord, that you would be with him and with Morag, his wife, and with their family. We pray again for his recovery. We ask that your own healing hand may be upon him, that your comforting hand will be with him and with Morag as well.

We thank you that you are able to reach into the innermost recesses of our soul, even when outwardly we may seem largely unresponsive.

Bless him, we pray, and sanctify to them this particular providence, and grant that you would be with them in these days to come and with a wider extended family as well.

So go before us now, we pray. Hear us in our prayer and cleanse us from our sin. For Jesus' sake.
Amen. Amen.