

Luke 24:13-49 “Faith and Duty: What the Scriptures Primarily Teach” Sept 18, 2016

Last time Joel focused us on the first question of the Shorter Catechism:

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

It’s all nice and good to say that our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever,
but how do you figure out how to do that?

That’s where we turn in questions 2-3:

Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

A. The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,[3] is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.[4]

Q. 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God,[5] and what duty God requires of man.[6]

It’s tempting to think that the catechism is dividing everything into “thinking” –
what man is to believe concerning God –
and “doing” –
what duty God requires of man.

But that would be to forget what we have just learned in question one:

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

Neither thinking nor doing is ultimate.

Rather, the ultimate thing is to glorify and enjoy God.

Or, to say it another way –

to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

So, as we think about what we are to believe and what we are to do –

we must never forget that faith and practice, the knowing and the doing,
are *both* rooted in the fundamental orientation of our hearts and lives
toward God.

Tonight, my text is the whole Bible.

After all, we are asking the question “What do the scriptures principally teach?”

And the only way to answer that question is by looking at the whole Bible.

If the word of God, which is contained in the scriptures
of the Old and New Testaments,

is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him,

then we should be concerned to know what it is

that the scriptures principally teach!

Jesus himself gives us our outline in two passages in the gospels.

First, in Luke 24:25-27 –

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!
Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things
and enter into his glory?”

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,
he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

In other words, Jesus himself points us to the scriptures
as the rule for how we should glorify and enjoy God –
and Jesus also shows us
that we should expect all of the scriptures to teach us about Jesus.

And second, in Matthew 22:36-40, when the lawyer asked him
“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

Jesus answered,

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment.

And a second is like it:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

So we should expect all of the scriptures to teach us to love God and neighbor.

Since Jesus divided the OT into “the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” –
we will look at the OT under those three divisions.

1. What Does the Law of Moses Teach?

The Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy)
are all about *beginnings*.

You have the beginning of the world in the Creation.

You have the beginning of sin and death in the fall.

You have the beginning of God’s covenant – with Abraham,

the beginning of Israel – in the Exodus,

the beginning of the central sanctuary – in the Tabernacle,

the beginning of the sacrificial system – and the priesthood,

the beginning of the holiness codes –

the laws that will distinguish Israel from the nations,

and the beginning of the prophetic tradition

that will continue throughout the Old Testament.

Jesus refers to the Five Books of Moses as the *Law* of Moses.

Do you normally think of Genesis as “law”?

The Hebrew word for Law is *torah*.

Torah can be translated “law” or “instruction” or “direction.”

Even the narrative sections of the five books of Moses are *torah*.

They give instruction – they give direction –
as to what we are to believe concerning God,
and what duty God requires of man.

a. Creation, Fall, and Redemption (Genesis)

The Five Books of Moses teach us how the Christ would suffer and enter his glory.
You see this even in the earliest chapters of Genesis.
Immediately after the fall into sin, in Genesis 3:16,
God promises that the seed of the woman
will crush the head of the serpent –
but with that promise is the statement that the serpent will *crush his heel*.

The redemption of humanity will be costly.

And already in Genesis 15, there is the beginning of the idea that *God himself*
will bear that cost.

When God calls Abraham and sends him to the Promised Land,
he cuts a covenant with Abraham.

“Cutting a covenant” was a common practice in the ancient world.
The two parties to the covenant would cut the animals in half,
and then they would walk together between the animals,
as if to say, “May I be cut in half, if I do not keep my covenant.”

But after Abraham has cut the animals in half,
God puts Abraham to sleep
and God alone passes between the animals,
thereby demonstrating that God alone is bound to fulfill this covenant.

You can see here clearly what we are to believe concerning God.
But what duty does God require of man?

You see that in Genesis 17 –
where God calls Abraham to “walk before me and be blameless”

Yes, it is true that God alone is bound to perform the covenant.
There is nothing that we (or Abraham) can do to fulfill the covenant.
And yet – because of what God has done in his covenant faithfulness –
therefore we are called to walk faithfully before him.

So in God’s promises to Abraham we see
“what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.”

b. Redemption from Slavery (Exodus-Numbers)

But in many ways Genesis is the back story for the Exodus.
Genesis does not exist as a separate book – outside of the five books of Moses.

The story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

is a story designed to explain how Israel winds up in Egypt.
It is a story that is oriented toward the Exodus.

Because in the Exodus God demonstrates his faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
In the Exodus God identifies Israel as “my son, my firstborn.”
And he calls his son out of Egypt and brings him to himself at the holy mountain,
Mt. Sinai.

There at Mt. Sinai, the LORD gives the Ten Commandments.
And the Ten Commandments follow the same pattern:
what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

After all, the preface to the Ten Commandments is this:
“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the Land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.”
You see the same pattern in the Exodus that we saw with Abraham.
God’s saving actions come first.
Then God calls his people to obey him.

The Law is rooted in the gospel – the good news of salvation.

And the rest of the books of Exodus through Numbers weave together faith and practice.
If you’ve ever tried to read the Bible straight through,
you probably got bogged down somewhere in Leviticus.
I remember as a child, I would skip all the legal portions,
and just jump from narrative to narrative in order to get the story.
That’s not a bad way of doing it the first time or two!
After all, the narrative is designed to show us
what we are to believe concerning God –
his mighty deeds in history
(and the regular rebellion of Israel reminds us
of our constant failures!).

But eventually you need to read the legal sections as well.
And there is a *reason* why the legal sections are woven together into the narrative.
Israel’s law is not just an abstract legal code.
“What duty God requires of man” is embedded into the narrative
of God’s mighty deeds in history.

The design of the tabernacle in the book of Exodus
is interwoven with the narrative of Israel’s rebellion with the golden calf.
The glories of the heavenly pattern of worship
are seen against the backdrop of Israel’s most flagrant idolatry.
The wages of sin is death.
We *need* a sacrifice that can pay the price for our sin.

c. Salvation and New Obedience (Deuteronomy)

The book of Deuteronomy closes out the five books of Moses

with the series of sermons that Moses preached at the end of his life.
These sermons, not surprisingly, are focused on the next stage of Israel's history.
They look forward to life in the land.
The central chapters of the book (chapters 5-26)
consist of Moses' exposition of the Ten Commandments.

But the book of Deuteronomy highlights the fact that the *law* cannot save you.
Think about Moses – the man of the Law.
Where does Moses die?
Moses dies outside the land, looking in.
The law cannot bring you into the Land.
The law tells you how to *live* in the Land –
but it cannot get you there!
Who brings you into the Land?
Joshua – whose name means “Yahweh saves” –
Joshua – whose name in Greek is *Jesus*.

2. A Messiah-Centered Story: What Do the Prophets Teach?

In Luke 24, we heard Jesus speak of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms
as the three categories of the scriptures.

Nowadays we often speak of the “historical” books –
but the older way of speaking was the “former prophets” –
the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings...
and the latter prophets,
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve.

It's important for us to recognize that the historical books are *sermons*.
They tell the history of Israel *with a point* –
both in terms of theology (what we are to believe concerning God)
and practice (what duty God requires of man).

And the basic message of the prophets is to tell the story of David.

You could put it this way, the first five books of the Old Testament
are all about Moses and the Exodus.

The rest of the OT is all about David and the Exile.

a. Joshua-Judges and the Disintegration of Israel

Joshua tells the story of the conquest –
how God gave Israel possession of the land
through the faithful obedience of Joshua
(whose name, in Greek, is Jesus).

Judges tells the story of how Israel's deteriorated into idolatry and rebellion.
Yes, God was faithful to raise up judges to deliver Israel – over and over again.
But we need something more than a never-ending cycle of temporary deliverers!

Think of the refrain at the end of the book:
In those days there was no king in Israel –
 everyone did what was right in their own eyes.
How do we fix this?
 When we *don't* believe what we should about God,
 and when we *don't* do what God says,
 then what?
We need a *king* who will do what is right in *God's* eyes –
 one who will lead *us* to do the same.
But the only way to get such a king is for *God* to raise him up.

b. Samuel-Kings and the House for God's Name

And that's the point of the book of Samuel.

Israel has failed to do and to be all that God called Israel to do and be.
 And so God calls the *king* to succeed where Israel has failed.
Up until this point, Israel is called to be the Son of God –
 the one who succeeds where Adam had failed.

But of course, Israel has failed miserably!

Now the king is called to succeed where Israel (and Adam) had failed.

But the first king – king Saul – was a man after the people's heart.
 His story has interesting parallels with Israel's failure in the wilderness.
 Just as Israel had catastrophic worship failures with the golden calf,
 Saul ignores Samuel's commands regarding worship.
 Just as Israel had failed to destroy their enemies in the promised land,
 Saul fails to destroy Agag the king of the Amalekites.
So God rejects Saul – like he rejected Israel,
 and he calls David – a man after God's own heart.
 (and the first thing David does is destroy the Amalekites!)

And in 2 Samuel 7, God makes his covenant with David.

Like in Genesis 15, God's promise to David is unconditional.
 God himself guarantees that David's son will reign forever.
But like in Genesis 17, God requires obedience from David's sons.
 In an ominous warning, God says that if David's sons rebel,
 he will punish them –
 but he also promises that *he* will be faithful to his covenant.

And the story of the book of Kings explains what this means.

There are three concentric stories in the book of Kings.
The first story is the story of Solomon and the house of David.
 This story begins with Solomon building the temple –
 the house for God's name.

The second story is the story of Jeroboam and the northern kingdom of Israel.
 The second story begins with Jeroboam's rebellion against Rehoboam

(the son of Solomon).

After establishing the northern kingdom with 10 of the tribes of Israel, Jeroboam built shrines for the golden calves at Bethel and Dan (thereby repeating Israel's idolatry in the wilderness).

The third story is the story of Ahab and the House of Omri.

This third story begins with Omri seizing power in the northern kingdom (with some interesting echoes of the story of David!).

Omri's son, Ahab, then builds a temple for Baal in Samaria (just like David's son Solomon had built a temple for Yahweh in Jerusalem).

Then the third story ends with the fall of the house of Omri and the destruction of the temple of Baal by Jehu.

Then the second story ends with the fall of the northern kingdom and the destruction of the golden calf of Bethel by Josiah.

And then the first story ends with the fall of the house of David and the destruction of Solomon's temple by Nebuchadnezzar.

And in the very middle of the book of Kings is the story of Elijah and Elisha.

Their prophetic message – illustrated in their mighty deeds – helps us understand what God is saying through all the prophets.

Israel is going to die.

Israel's hope is *not* in a reforming king, a faithful priest, or a powerful prophet.

There is no way to escape death – no way to avoid the coming exile.

Israel's only hope is that there is life beyond the grave – a return beyond the exile – a resurrection.

Just before the very center of the book of Kings, Elijah raises a widow's son from the dead.

Just after the very center of the book of Kings, Elisha raises a woman's son from the dead.

And it is no accident that Elijah raises a *Gentile* and Elisha raises a *Jew*.

The purpose of this story is to show that the hope of Israel will become the hope of all the nations!

And at the very center of the book, Elijah ascends into heaven.

Israel's hope is that God raises the dead!

c. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve – the Coming Exile

And in various ways, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (sometimes called the Minor Prophets)

all work out variations on this theme.

Think back to what we saw in Genesis 15 and 17.

Genesis 15 said that God alone would be faithful to his covenant.

Genesis 17 said that Abraham must “walk before me and be blameless.”

We saw the same thing at Sinai – in Joshua – and in David.

In one sense, God’s covenant is unilateral – God alone can save us.

In another sense, God’s covenant is bilateral – God requires us to be faithful.

So what happens when Israel fails?

What happens when the house of David fails?

Ezekiel sees a vision of the glory of the LORD *leaving* the temple.

God’s protection of Jerusalem has departed.

Why?

Because of the idolatry of Jerusalem –

because in their hearts they have turned away from the LORD.

What is man to believe concerning God?

The prophets all agree that God will bring judgment upon the rebellious –
and that the problem with Israel (and all humanity)

is that we keep rebelling!

So, in the words of Jonah, “Salvation belongs to the LORD.”

In the end God will have mercy

and he will redeem his rebellious people.

And so therefore the duty that God requires of man is to *repent* –

to turn away from evil and do good.

3. What Do the Writings Teach?

The third part of the OT scriptures – the “writings” (what Jesus refers to as the “psalms”)
includes the Psalms, the wisdom books,

along with Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Daniel, Esther, and Ruth

a. Singing Psalms

What do the Psalms principally teach?

The Psalms teach us how to sing about everything in Moses and the Prophets!

Many of the stories are put to music here –

along with many of the precepts of the law.

But there is something else going on here.

Something happens when you translate story into poetry –

when you translate preaching into prayer.

The Psalms teach us how we fit into the story of what God is doing.

The Psalms are all about David and Israel –

and therefore the Psalms are all about Christ and the church.
Because Jesus is the Son of David who fulfills all that David was supposed to be,
therefore we can sing the Psalms in him.

All the emotions of the Christian life are included in the Psalms:

There are songs of lament and confession –
as we recognize that *we* are not what we should be.
There are songs of anger and pain –
as we recognize that the *world* is not what it should be –
and as we ask God to *make things right!*
And there are songs of praise and rejoicing –
as we celebrate God’s mighty deeds in salvation –
because he *is* making things right in Jesus!

The Psalm teach us how to sing the story of salvation and our hope in Christ –
in the same way the wisdom books teach us the fear of the LORD.

b. Learning Wisdom

In many ways, Proverbs is the foundational wisdom book.
Proverbs 1-9 provides the paradigm for wisdom,
as the father teaches his son the path of wisdom.
The Song of Songs provides a different relational model
as the Bride sings of her Beloved to her friends.
And Ecclesiastes – well, Ecclesiastes is just a little bit odd.

We like Proverbs – the wise father who teaches wisdom to his sons.
We blush a little at the Song of Songs –
the beautiful Bride who sings of her glorious Beloved.
And when we turn to Ecclesiastes, Zack Eswine says it well:
“Ecclesiastes sounds like a crazed man downtown.
He smells like he hasn’t bathed – looks like it too –
and as we pass by he won’t stop glaring at us and beckoning to us
that our lives are built on illusions, and that we are all going to die.” (5)

All attempts to understand life and death “under the sun” are doomed to failure.
The answer will only come from God.
And the book of Ecclesiastes will end where most of our lives will end –
before God brings his final answer.

What should we believe?
What should we do?
Fear God and keep his commandments –
glorify God and enjoy him forever.

But then there is Job.
Job endures horrific suffering *at the instigation* of God.

Job's friends all try to apply traditional wisdom to his situation.
But traditional wisdom doesn't work here.
Job is the innocent, suffering servant of the LORD.
God says of Job at the beginning (Job 1:8),
 "Have you considered my servant Job,
 that there is none like him on the earth,
 a blameless and upright man,
 who fears God and turns away from evil?" (1:8)
Job is the innocent, suffering servant of the LORD.
His faithful endurance through suffering
 shows us a picture of what Jesus will do.
Because he suffers, he is able to intercede for his friends –
 a point that Hebrews will make about Jesus!

c. Understanding History

The rest of the writings – Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Daniel, Ruth, Esther –
 help us to understand what God is doing in history.
Like the Prophets, they are *sermons* as much as histories.
Most of these books come from the period *after* the exile.
What does it mean to believe in God – when things aren't the way they should be?
When the world is turned upside down,
 what does faithfulness look like?

Faithfulness trusts that God will do what he has promised.
And in the fullness of time, God *did* what he had promised!

4. What Does the New Testament Teach?

a. In the Fullness of Time (The Gospels)

The gospels tell the story of Jesus –
 and how he fulfilled all the Law and the Prophets and the Writings.

Jesus recapitulates the story of the Old Testament in his own life.
He is the Israel who is called out of Egypt.
He is the Moses who speaks the word of God on the mountain.
He is the Joshua who brings his people into the Promised Land.
He is the David who defeats Goliath and overthrows his enemies.
He is the Solomon who builds the temple.
He is the high priest who offers the sacrifice.

And yet, Jesus is *more* than all these.
 After all, Moses always said "thus says the LORD."
 Jesus says, "I say to you."
 David says, "The LORD said to *my Lord*" (Psalm 110) –
 thereby making the Messiah David's *Lord*.
 (and what father ever called his son "Lord"!)
Abraham saw my day and was glad.

Jesus declares that one greater than Solomon is here.

Yes, Jesus recapitulates the whole story of the Old Testament
because that is what *God* must do to take all of humanity's sin upon himself.
He must become the one who succeeds where David failed –
who succeeds where Israel failed –
who succeeds where Adam failed.

All of the sin of humanity that was fastened upon Israel
is now fastened upon Jesus – the Son of God –
so that all of humanity might be redeemed in him.

What are we to believe concerning God?
What duty does God require of man?

You can summarize this in the conclusions to the gospels of John and Matthew!

John tells us that he wrote his gospel
“so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31).
Matthew concludes his gospel with the Great Commission:
“make disciples, baptizing them
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

b. The Obedience of Faith (The Apostles)

And that is the same message that the apostles flesh out in their epistles.

The first of all the epistles is the book of Romans.
And Romans is book-ended by Paul's phrase “the obedience of faith.”
You can summarize several of Paul's epistles in the following pattern:
Who Christ is and what Christ has done –
and therefore who *we are* in Christ,
and what that means for our lives.

We saw this same pattern this morning in the book of Titus,
“the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,”
[there you see the sovereign grace of God in salvation]
training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,
and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,
[there you see our response to God's grace]
waiting for our blessed hope,
the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness
and to purify for himself a people for his own possession
who are zealous for good works.” (2:11-12)

Only God can save – but when he acts to save his people,
then his people become zealous for good works.

Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

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