

Love and Law

Psalm 51:1-12

John 6:24-35

The people of Israel were no different from you and me. They were constantly looking for signs. Stub your toe getting out of bed? It's going to be a bad day...Find a euro coin in your jacket pocket? It's your lucky day! For the people of Israel, the problem was they had difficulty discerning what was and was not a sign...So it is with people who rely on signs and miracles rather than the Word of God.

Jesus said, "an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign." (Matthew 12:39) But we all do it. We attach significance to events in which, in reality, there is no significance.

There is a beautiful story of Robert Bruce, who was crowned king of Scotland in 1306. Bruce, after being routed by the English, was confined on the island of Rathlin, off the coast of Ireland. To pass the time, Bruce watched a spider trying to fix its web to a beam on the ceiling. The spider failed six times. "Now shall this spider," said Bruce, "teach me what I am to do, for I also have failed six times." In the seventh attempt, the spider succeeded in fixing its web to the beam. Bruce took it as a sign, gathered a handful of followers and returned to Scotland. After a series of successful campaigns, he won the battle of Bannockburn in 1314 after which England acknowledged the complete independence of Scotland.

And it was all because of a spider. In fact, to this day, to kill a spider in Scotland, or wherever the superstitious Scots may be, is still supposed to bring the offender all kinds of bad luck.

Now, I need to warn you. It would be very risky for you to start making your decisions on the behavior of spiders that you might find in your cellar, or yard, or definitely anywhere around the church here! Spiders are just spiders. Robert Bruce could have gone back to Scotland and been defeated soundly by the British. Signs are notoriously fickle. They are for superstitious people. They are not for Christians.

And yet . . . we keep making the same mistake as the people of Israel . . . and every other people on earth. Looking for a sign. Oh, sure, we sometimes make it as if we were kidding...but how often do we see a sign or omen in things that occur around us?

It's interesting. Jesus had just performed an extraordinary miracle--the feeding of the 5,000. That's been a part of our topic for the last couple of weeks. I know it's time to move on, there is SO much Bible to cover, but I want to take one last pass at this reading before we continue.

Anyway, you would think that this incredible event would have convinced the people that He was the one they had been awaiting. But it was not enough. That is why God doesn't reveal himself in signs and wonders. They are never enough. We always seek more.

We find ways to explain away even the most dramatic acts. The rising of the sun each morning, the gentle opening of the flowers in springtime, the birth of a new baby--these ought to be evidence enough for anyone to accept belief in a Creator, but they are not. We always clamor for more.

Now the people wanted a sign that Jesus was the Messiah. "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?" they asked. "What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

OK, hang on a minute! What in the world does THAT mean?

It means that faith in Christ does not depend on signs and miracles. Faith in Christ is an inner assurance that whatever comes, God is with us. Hear that again: Faith in Christ is an inner assurance that whatever comes, God is with us.

Faith in Jesus Christ is rooted in God's love. Do you know that God loves you? The truth of the matter is that most of us THINK that God loves us, but we are not sure, too often we are a step or so from really believing. And if something should happen to tip the evidence one way or the other, then that's the way our faith will turn. Or, perhaps when we look deep inside we can't help but wonder HOW God could love us!

Corrie ten Boom was arrested in Holland for sheltering Jews from the Nazis. She was transported to a death camp in Germany. She was subjected to all manner of humiliation and torture. She watched her sister die there in that camp. And yet later Corrie ten Boom would write, “However deep the pit, God’s love is deeper still.”

What an amazing testimony of faith. Could you do that? Is your faith that strong? You see, many, if not most of us, are insecure about God’s love. If things are going our way, if the children are healthy, if the house payment is made, if things are going well on the job—well then yes, God is with us.

But let sickness come, or financial adversity, or an attack of the blues for any reason, and then we begin to doubt. We start looking for a sign. Has it all been a mistake? Is God really with me? Or worse yet, Have I done something to separate myself from God?

Christian faith is rooted in God’s love. That is an absolute. The Old Testament character Job experienced all manner of grievous misfortunes. He lost his health, he lost his children, he lost his great wealth--and yet he was able to cry out, “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him . . . “(Job 13:15)

Later he exclaims, “Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another.” (19:23-27)

That’s faith. Not dependent on external circumstances but on an internal assurance. Christian faith is rooted in God’s **love**.

Christian faith is also rooted in God’s law. We live in a lawful universe. We drop a book, and it falls to the floor. I guarantee it is going to happen! Why? The law of gravity. We drive a car off a ledge and we smash into the canyon floor below. Does a Divine hand reach out of the clouds to stop our fall? It could happen, I suppose. Anything is possible with God. But it is not likely. We live in a lawful universe. And what a magnificent universe it is.

Do you understand that creation works the way it does because God structured it to obey certain laws?

It is a creation of order, even if we don't always understand how or why.

That is why we can expect the sun to rise tomorrow morning at just the time it is supposed to. If it did not, every molecule in the universe would likely be affected. We simply are foolish when we ask God to suspend any of His laws even for a minute. Life upon this earth depends on those laws. Intellectually I think all of us understand that.

And yet, we still pray, "Please, Lord. Don't let it rain on my daughter's wedding." We would be better off praying, "Please, Lord, regardless of the weather, help me to have a positive attitude so that I can radiate the kind of cheerfulness that will make this a great day for the people I love."

Christian faith is rooted in God's **love** and God's **law**. That includes God's moral law. Someone described us long ago as people who "sow our wild seeds and then pray for a crop failure". That's not the way life works, unfortunately.

Yes, God is a God of grace and forgiveness, but there are laws governing human behavior, just as there are laws governing the rising of the sun. When we run afoul of those laws, people suffer. We can be forgiven. We are still admitted to paradise on the last day, but that does not change the fact that sin brings suffering.

Christian faith is rooted in God's love and in God's law. **Most important, Christian faith is rooted in God's revelation.**

Christian faith is not a philosophy. No one sat down and thought this stuff up. Christian faith is rooted in the revealed God. When we could not reach up to God, God reached down to us in Jesus Christ. What is it that distinguishes Christian faith from every other religion and philosophy of life? The most important thing; the person of Jesus Christ. We believe that indeed He is the bread which came down from heaven.

We share the Hebrew Bible--which we call the Old Testament-- with both Jews and Muslims. What makes us unique is that we boldly claim that in Jesus Christ we get a definitive picture of God, the fulfillment of all the prophets of old.

This is what God is like! We exclaim: Jesus is God in human flesh. It is an extraordinary claim, but we stake our lives upon it.

We cite the words of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”

This is what sets Christians apart. We may forget it in times of crisis or when it’s convenient not to remember, but this is our faith. We may wish to ignore it when it involves beggars or refugees, but it is our faith. There are plenty of things done in the name of the Christian faith and plenty of people who would use selective scripture to attempt to defend their beliefs, but this is our faith.

We believe in Jesus. We are not looking for signs or free food. We believe. We believe He is the Son of God, given to us as the ultimate sign of God’s love for us.

We believe that what He says is true. He is the bread that came down from heaven to feed our souls. He manifests God’s LOVE and sets forth God’s LAW.

We ask no more than to live for Him.