

“Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.”

The readings for today are Leviticus 19: 1-2, 15-18, Psalm 1 and Matthew 22: 34-46.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

¹ *The Lord told Moses² to say to the community of Israel, Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.*

Holiness is the key theme of the book of Leviticus, the word holiness rings like a refrain in various forms throughout the book. The word “*holy*” appears more often in the book of Leviticus than in any other book of the Bible because in the book God wanted the people of Israel to be totally consecrated to Him and this meant that they had to be holy or be without fault. This holiness was to be expressed in every part of their life, to the extent that all of life had a certain ceremonial quality about it. Because of who God is and what He has done, his people must dedicate themselves fully to him and this is true of all people of faith. God wants us all who believe in Him to be holy and this means that we are to ¹⁵ *Be honest and just when you make decisions in legal cases; do not show favouritism to the poor or fear the rich.* ¹⁶ *Do not spread lies about anyone, and when someone is on trial for his life, speak out if your testimony can help him. I am the Lord.* To be holy means not being a gossip, God’s Word, the Bible, specifically instructs us not to be a gossip. This means for us as Christians, to always keep confidences, honour other people’s *business* and keep their secrets. Do not be a *spreader of lies* or a dispenser of gossip. It is easy to get caught up in gossip, but we must consciously not take part in it or if we hear any not to spread it further. Also to be holy means: ¹⁷ *Do not bear a grudge against others, but settle your differences with them, so that you will not commit a sin because of them* ¹⁸ *Do not take revenge on others or continue to hate them, but love your neighbours as you love yourself. I am the Lord.* ‘*I am the Lord*’ at the end of each of these commandments is reminding us that the instruction is coming

directly from God and therefore we should listen and obey, He is telling us that we are not to hold grudges. As men and women of faith we are reminded by the Bible not to hold grudges but instead we are to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. What this means is that we are to let go of anything that you have against anyone and get the peace of God. For if you hold onto strife, a grudge, the bitterness that comes with it does not give you heartfelt peace so let go and let God deal with it, let Him take away your burden, your pain or anger and rest in His everlasting love, grace and mercy.

The command to love your neighbour as yourself was quoted by our Lord Jesus Christ and if Jesus instructed us to do this then we are duty bound to do it, we must imitate Christ in our lives if we are to be holy. In Judaic society the stricter Pharisees from the school of Shammai added to this command by saying what they thought it implied – “Hate thine enemy”. But Jesus’ reaction to “Love your enemies” was in line with the true Old Testament teachings and was more in line with the middle of the road Pharisees. Even the hard-headed Pharisees knew what was right but did not act upon it, hence Jesus reminding them what to do. As Christians what we also need to be aware of here is that the word neighbour does not refer to the person who lives next door to you but means anyone with whom you come in contact with in your life.

We then move on to the book of the Psalms and in this case, it is for the most part a book on prayer and praise. It speaks to God in prayer and it also speaks of God in praise and we see that quite clearly from this Psalm. For at the core of the theology of the Psalm is the conviction that everything in life and how we live that life comes from and lies with God.

This Psalm reminds the faithful that we must live righteous lives because sinners have no place among God’s people. It is a Psalm of faith and to live a life of faith means that holiness must be a faithful response to God’s revealed (and written) directions for life, which is the path that leads to blessedness. It is a Psalm

of commitment, commitment to living a distinct and holy lifestyle. If we study and apply the word of God to our lives, then we will live a happy life.

Happy are those who reject the advice of evil people, who do not follow the example of sinners or join those who have no use for God.² Instead, they find joy in obeying the Law of the Lord, and they study it day and night.³ They are like trees that grow beside a stream, that bear fruit at the right time, and whose leaves do not dry up. They succeed in everything they do. By meditating on the word of God and obeying his commandments the righteous man will live a good life where the blessings of God will fall upon him, like a good tree bearing fruit. Psalm 1 promises prosperity to those who delight in God's law (His precepts and instructions) and who meditate on His Word day and night. In other words, those who give God and His Word first place in their lives can expect to prosper in every way.

⁴ But evil people are not like this at all; they are like straw that the wind blows away.⁵ Sinners will be condemned by God and kept apart from God's own people.⁶ The righteous are guided and protected by the Lord, but the evil are on the way to their doom. Here the Psalm is reminding us that God's own people are those who honour God and live their lives according to His will, not their own will but God's will. This means that in every human relationship his people will faithfully fulfil the obligations that this special relationship with our God entails, remembering that power and authority of whatever sort, domestic, social, political or religious should be used to bless and not to exploit. So, to be holy means we must be a blessing to others, yet the world will always try to trip us up to stop us being a blessing, and we see this in the Gospel reading.

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they came together,³⁵ and one of them, a teacher of the Law, tried to trap him with a question.³⁶ Teacher, he asked, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?

³⁷ Jesus answered, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.³⁸ This is the greatest and the most important commandment.³⁹ The second most important commandment is like it: Love your neighbour as you love yourself.⁴⁰ The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments.

Jesus was clever, he knew that the Pharisees were trying to trap him, as God incarnate he could see into their hearts and knew their ways. So, he answered them with an important answer, one which they did not expect, but one which summed up all the law and the prophets and again showed the wisdom of God in action. In focusing on the two halves of the Ten Commandments i.e. duty to God and duty to our neighbours it offers a wonderful foundation for good living in response to God for us today. By summing up that duty as love, it goes beyond the specific requirements of the law and takes us instead to the God-like attitude which must underlie them. This can be seen by the words used: the word love is not the Greek verb 'phileo' which expresses friendly affection, but 'agapao', the commitment of devotion that is directed by the will and can be commanded as a duty and it is our duty as Christians to show God's love to our fellow man and woman, regardless of who they are, what position in society they have, what colour they are and what sexuality they are, we are to show God's love to all and by doing that we show them that we are Disciples of Christ.

⁴¹ When some Pharisees gathered together, Jesus asked them,⁴² What do you think about the Messiah? Whose descendant, is he?

He is David's descendant, they answered. ⁴³ Why, then, Jesus asked, did the Spirit inspire David to call him Lord? David said,⁴⁴ The Lord said to my Lord: Sit here at my right side until I put your enemies under your feet. ⁴⁵ If, then, David called him Lord, how can the Messiah be David's descendant? ⁴⁶ No one was able to give Jesus any answer, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Jesus is warning us about judging his mission as seen and understood from a human point of view. He is telling us that we must concentrate on his heavenly or divine message, in other words we are to open our eyes and see Jesus, we are to recognise him for who he really is, God incarnate, God made flesh, The Son of the Living God, our Lord and Saviour. This means that each one of us should aspire to live a life devoted to his life and teachings and to spread his message of salvation to all. We are called to be holy, which means imitating Christ in our words, our actions and in our prayers. Always we are to ask for His guidance and strength to carry out His will. We must show God's love to everyone we meet, and we must pray for all whom we meet, by doing that we are showing and doing our duty to God, we are trying to be holy.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father you call us to be holy, to read the Bible, to study your Word and to live our lives according to your teachings. We know Father that we struggle to do this and so we ask you in Jesus name to guide us with your Holy Spirit to help us do your work here on earth and be a blessing to those around us in your name.

We thank your Lord for your teachings and for the examples of faithful upright men and women in the Bible, we also see that they were human just like us, prone to making mistakes but recognising them and coming to you always for forgiveness and asking always for your help so that they can do your work here on earth, today Lord we too seek your forgiveness for our wrongdoings, for our selfishness and seek your strength and your guidance once more. We know we make mistakes and so we ask you to cleanse, renew and uplift us with your Holy Spirit today and grant us your peace.

Helps us Lord to be Holy, help us to always look towards Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, Your Son. Help us to emulate him in our

lives and grant us the wisdom and strength and courage to stand up and shine brightly in this dark and hostile world. Let us be a shining example of faith as we pray for all those around us, for wisdom for governments and leaders. For strength and compassion for the emergency services workers and carers in our society. For endurance and perseverance for us all as we continue to struggle against Coronavirus, and in Jesus name we pray for a vaccine and for Covid 19 to go away. Help us to follow the instructions given by our health experts and government so that we can do our bit to stop the spread of the virus and as Christians Lord, help us to continually pray for healing of body, mind and soul for those around us. You know Lord even before we struggle to pray who needs your help and so we open ourselves up to you today, come Holy Spirit come, and helps us be Holy. Amen.