

Righteousness Being Restored
Exodus 19:1-6, Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Slide 1 - Introduction

For the past few weeks, we've been looking at some of the imagery that makes up the song, "*Days of Elijah.*"

We've already looked at the phrase, *These Are the Days of Elijah*, which spoke about boldness in asserting Biblical truth by holding out the hope of repentance and forgiveness.

We looked at John the Baptist who spoke about the true nature of repentance, not merely saying sorry, but the promises of acceptance and forgiveness from God. While last week we examined the Year of Jubilee.

This morning we're going to study the phrase, "*And these are the days of Your servant Moses, righteousness being restored.*"

In one sense, this is an important line because it sums up what the whole song's about... That this is the time of God's restoration, the time of affecting His purposes in the world.

Now, don't be misled here. It's not just about God moving to save people, but God moving to restore righteousness amongst His people.

These two go hand-in-hand since there's no revival of salvation among the lost until there's a revival of righteousness among God's people.

Regardless, this is a problematic verse, and it makes me wonder if the author really knew what he was doing when he wrote this song.

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I believe there are at least two problems. The main difficulty deals with the thought: What righteousness was Moses restoring?

Moses was the one to whom God gave the Law. He was the one who introduced the idea of righteousness to the Israelites.

The stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been passed down to the people of Israel, even while they were slaves in Egypt.

How do we know this, because God was introduced as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

However, if you look at these stories you'll see that there's not a lot of ethical teaching being done.

There may have been one or two points here and there, but for the most part, God just told them to follow Him, go here or there, to worship Him alone, and to trust in His promises.

So how did Moses restore righteousness, or should I say, "*How did God restore righteousness during the time of Moses?*"

Remember, the claim isn't merely that righteousness was established but that righteousness was restored.

So, where was the original righteousness that was being restored? How had it become marred? How was it restored?

As far as we know there was no great falling away from righteousness, among the people that Moses led out of Egypt, that needed to be restored.

So, we need to look back a little further and when we do, we find that there are basically two candidates for this so-called original righteousness.

One is when we go back to the patriarchs, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, in terms of righteous behavior, we don't really have a lot to go on.

We have Abraham's lies in his attempts to pass Sarah off as his sister so he wouldn't be killed. When he did this, he was allowing Sarah to commit adultery or worse, to subject her to rape at the hands of a King.

We have Isaac's favoritism and possible attempts to circumvent God's command as to which of his sons was to receive God's promise.

Jacob didn't do any better in the favoritism department since he ended up with a reputation for being deceitful and crafty. The patriarchs didn't have a great record in the righteousness stakes.

However, they did follow and worship God. They trusted God when it seemed like there were better options available if they'd just abandon Him.

However, when it came to righteousness, Abraham was declared righteous not because of his deeds but simply because he believed God.

Therefore, I believe the content of Abraham's faith might have been the basis of this righteousness that's being restored; to bring the people back to trusting in God and His Word.

That's one idea to bear in mind when we look at what happened in the days of Moses, but that's not the only possibility.

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The second possibility is the righteousness that's associated with the human race before the fall; the righteousness of Eden.

Now this is a bit tricky. Righteousness is not actually mentioned in association with Eden but there're some concepts that work within a definition of righteousness.

The most striking thing about Eden, the thing that perhaps sums it up as the perfect place more than anything else, is the unbroken relationship with God.

That's something I believe God wanted to restore at the time of Moses, His relationship with people.

We'll look at how this was to happen later but for now let's just recognize that a key component of righteousness is a relationship with God.

The other references to righteousness, in Genesis, seems to link it with some kind of ethical behavior where, when contrasted with wickedness and people, people are seen as more righteous due to their actions.

So, we have three ideas of righteousness from before Moses. It comes through faith, it is about a relationship with God, and it has an ethical dimension.

Now we come to problem number two. Any restoration of righteousness at the time of Moses wasn't successful.

If we read the record of the Israelites, it seems to be a never-ending litany of failure.

Think about it. They had just been given the Law and agreed to it, when they set up the golden calf because Moses took too long talking to God.

They always seemed to be complaining and objecting to what God said.

Therefore, they're made to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that first generation all died instead of inheriting the Promised Land.

If the author of our song wanted a Biblical example of righteousness, he seems to have made a bad choice in choosing the days of Moses.

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Those are the problems, so is there is a solution? Well, there are actually two good reasons for looking at the time of Moses and righteousness together.

Now I don't know about you, but when I think of Moses two things spring to mind. The Exodus and the Law.

These two ideas are tied together with righteousness as can be seen in today's focal passages from Exodus and Deuteronomy.

When we look at the Law, we find that it generally has a bad reputation in the church.

Through various interpretations of some of passages that talk about the Law in the New Testament, we get the idea that the Law is bad and, worse still, is irrelevant.

Therefore, we are led to believe that maybe there are different Laws. So, we separate the Law into parts: the moral Law, the ceremonial Law, and the teaching Law.

The moral Law would be things like do not steal, do not murder. The ceremonial Law would be about festivals and sacrifices. The teaching Law would be stuff like, don't wear garments of mixed cloth.

Then we decide that we need to keep the moral Law, but not the ceremonial or the teaching Law.

The problem with this is that the Law can't be divided into discrete sets, they overlap.

Yet Jesus said not the smallest part of the smallest letter was to be taken away from the Law.

This is why there are controversial areas. The most obvious one has to do with sex, in particular homosexuality.

While we might think it's part of the moral part, other groups within the church see it as belonging to the ceremonial or teaching stuff that we can discard.

Yet Jesus didn't say, "Not the smallest part of the smallest letter of the moral Law," He said the Law.

Many people see the Old Testament as being about the Law and judgement, while viewing the New Testament as being about grace, love, and forgiveness, but this isn't the case.

According to Deuteronomy 6:20, when someone asks, "*What's the meaning of the Laws and commandments?*," what was the answer that was to be given?

It was the first thing that God said as an introduction to the Law in Exodus 19:4-6a.

Exodus 19:4-6a, *“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”*

He reminded the people that God saved them from Egypt and called them to be His people. Then He gave them the Law and told them this was how they were to maintain that relationship.

The Law didn’t save them, God did that, keeping the Law was the appropriate response to that act of salvation.

It also provided a means of dealing with sin and error, so that relationship could continue.

It’s in this context that Deuteronomy tells us that keeping the Law is righteousness, but only in the context of where God first saved us.

But again, notice that it’s not a Law of perfect performance but a Law of maintaining a relationship that God had established.

It contained provisions for sins to be forgiven and dealt with, in order that the relationship could be renewed. If this is the case, then what was the purpose of the Law.

If you read the whole of Exodus, you’ll find the purpose of the Law was to restore the thing that God had in the beginning... where God could once more walk with man and dwell with him.

Moses was given strict instructions about rules, how to build the tabernacle and offer sacrifices, and things the people were to do and things the people were not to do.

Why? Because God enjoys seeing people jump through hopes and delights in seeing how far he can make people do more and more restrictive and ridiculous things? No, although some people think so.

God did all this so He could come and dwell in the tent that Moses was instructed to build, the tabernacle, and travel with His people; to once more come down and walk with humanity as he did in Eden.

That's the key to the Law and righteousness. The Law was there to allow God to dwell among His people without destroying them.

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So, what lessons can we learn from this. First, God's goal, in the time of Moses as in the time of Eden is still the same; it hasn't changed: That He might come and walk with us and enjoy a relationship with us.

For us today, it's slightly different. We have the Holy Spirit both to guide and enable us. The Holy Spirit is God come to walk with us and enjoy a relationship with us, but righteousness is still a requirement.

As with Abraham and Moses, righteousness must come with faith. Like the Law, there's provision for sin and Christ has dealt with that, but we still need to repent.

There are standards that must be met. Jesus summed it up in the command to love God and love your neighbor, quoting the Old Testament both times.

But sometimes we need something beyond that. The modern touchstone has become "*What Would Jesus Do,*" but is that enough?

Dallas Willard said, "*Asking ourselves "What would Jesus do?" when suddenly in the face of an important situation is not adequate discipline or preparation to enable one to live as He lived. It no doubt will do some good and is certainly better than nothing at all, but that act alone*

is not sufficient to see us boldly and confidently through a crisis, and we could easily find ourselves driven to despair over the powerless tension it will put us through.”

There are two issues here. First, we need to know what Jesus was really like.

We gain this knowledge through proper Bible Study, instead of the wishy washy image gathered many have from a few half remembered Bible stories and few bits of sermons that were actually understood or remembered.

Secondly, simply knowing what to do is not enough, we need God’s power to do it. God’s willing to provide the power if we’re willing to ask and obey.

Peter Marshall said, *“We are too Christian really to enjoy sinning, and too fond of sinning really to enjoy Christianity. Most of us know perfectly well what we ought to do; our trouble is that we do not want to do it.”*

Slide 6

Conclusions

So, what do we mean, when we sing *“These are the days of your servant Moses, Righteousness being restored.”*

Well, first we recognize that there will be no revival in the world until the church is what it’s supposed to be, which is righteous!

Then we learned that God’s purpose has always been to live and dwell amongst His people.

However, if He was to dwell amongst a sinful people, He would destroy them. Therefore, He has to make His people righteous, which is done through faith and by trusting Him.

Righteousness also requires us to want it and to be willing, with God's help, to work hard and follow His will.

It requires changes in our thoughts and behavior. That's hard, but God gives us the power, if we're willing.

Lastly, if we really want to sing the song with meaning, we're saying, "*God do this in me.*" Moses teaches us that righteousness isn't a requirement of salvation but it's the only acceptable response to it.