

Reading from Matthew 24:1\_14

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came to Him to call His attention to its buildings. “Do you see all these things?” He asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left upon another. Every one will be thrown down.” As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives the disciples came to Him privately. “Tell us” they said, “When will this happen? What will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age?” (4) Jesus answered, “Watch out that no one deceives you for many will come in My Name claiming ‘I am the Christ’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen but the end is still to come. Nation will arise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. (9) Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. This gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.”

Are these days almost upon us? How far should we take the parallels between what

was happening in Israel around 2800 years ago, and what is happening now as we as a nation are rejecting any influence by the standards set by Almighty God in how we manage our lives. Laws enabling behaviour which is condemned in our Bibles have been around for some time but are now being passed with increasing frequency. Current example: Not being allowed to pray for somebody when they request it. A year ago who would have dreamed of such a law coming into force in this fair country.

God’s chosen people, the Israelites had turned their backs on God. Let’s take a look at God’s Rules: Exodus 20.

First, the Preamble: Who is initiating this treaty. “I AM the Lord your God, Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

Then the Conditions.

Condition One: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” Are we any different to ancient Israel in this? “Every man did what was right in his own eyes” is certainly something which happened in the garden of Eden, in ancient Israel, and is happening now. Are we guilty too? I think I will have to put up my hand on that one. How can we best avoid it? My suggestion is to make sure that we know our Bibles well enough that what we judge as right is well informed by what God has plainly told us in His Word.

Can we ever completely comply? Not until the words of that Hymn “May the mind of Christ our Saviour live in me from day to day by His love and power controlling all I do and say” come true for us.

Condition Two: “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of any thing in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them for I, the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of their fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.” Are we any different to ancient Israel in this? They did make their Asherar, Baals and lots of others which most people today have not even heard of and bowed down to them and offered sacrifices to them, but what have we done with the likes of Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Elizabeth Taylor, the Beatles, or for others it might be Beethoven or Bach etc. (I think I have to put my hand up again.) Or we may be enamoured with Billie Graham or some early or recent Belgrave or other convention speaker. It could even be some Biblical character we admire, such as Daniel, Joseph, Elijah, Elisha, Barnabus.... Let’s be careful what position we elevate these people to in our lives. I believe that we are doing the same when we elevate “Mother Nature” or “evolution” to the position belonging to the Creator, The Maker of Heaven and Earth. As we learn more of the wonders of the inner workings of living things which He has designed and brought into being we are meant to give to Him the Praise. Nothing has made itself except as He has first made the living things able to replicate themselves. How much time do we give to hearing these or reading of them when we ought to be “meditating upon His Word by day and by night”.

Can we ever completely comply? Not until we can comply with what the Psalmist suggests, (Ps.37:4) “Delight yourself in The Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.” Does that mean that if I delight in God that he will give me more Vivaldi music (or whatever it is that we are now giving a high place to)? I do not think so. He would give us a greater knowledge and closer relationship to Himself after we have shown that is what we desire. I think we would find our desires changing. Isaiah puts it “Then you will find your joy in The Lord....” (Isa.58:14)

Condition Three. “You shall not misuse the Name of the Lord your God for The Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His Name.” For ancient Israel the misuse might be by the false prophets speaking in His Name when God has not spoken to them, or by using That Name in an oath. Today it is more likely to be an expletive or an exclamation. (When I hear someone using that OMG expression I am tempted to ask “Which God are you talking about?” What do you think? Should I?) Probably better to just follow the example of Jesus, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

Condition Four: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all of your work, but the seventh is a Sabbath to The Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the foreigner who is within your gates. For in six days The Lord made the heavens

and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” No exceptions are spelled out here. That there are some things which must go on is apparent from Luke 14:5 where Jesus asks, “If one of you has a son, or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day will you not immediately pull him out?” And Jesus healed the sick man. He did not make him wait. There are other examples where we do not take this condition literally. A mother does not neglect to care for her child for a single day. As a farmer’s son, I know that the cows must be milked every day. But the principle remains. Man, and other creatures, need rest, and not just whatever we allow ourselves each night. We need a break. Yes, some people need the break more than others but without adequate rest we can wear ourselves out. Likely all of us know of at least one person who has suffered “burnout” and simply become incapable of continuing effectively. Jesus said that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27

Did God need to rest? I doubt it. Did He pause to enjoy what (and who) He had made? Why not? And this break gives us time to pause from our daily routines and enjoy fellowship with Him. In ancient Israel this rest day was either not being observed or other cases grudgingly observed.

Increasingly, we are allowing this time to be eroded. I remember that my auntie used to go to Church on the Sunday morning, have a simple meal and then sit for the remainder of the day, usually with her Bible (AV of course) and a Hymn book on her lap.

No other activity was approved. My parents also rested all afternoon until it was time to get going and milk those cows again. We were a little legalistic about it! I can remember one Summer when the harvesting was in full swing that we worked one particular Saturday up to 11:55 PM. came home to clean ourselves up for Sunday (very necessary) and were back on the job at about 00:30 AM on the Monday morning. We had rested most of that Sunday afternoon.

After I left home I used to reserve the Sunday morning, but the afternoon was usually spent exploring the rocky cliffs and beaches mostly between Queenscliff and Lorne. It would be a relaxing time. Sometimes I would sit and read for an hour or so but not all afternoon. No strenuous activities on the Sunday. While we were in Papua New Guinea, the main change was that Sunday afternoon was the time to be with our children, playing with them and enjoying them. And as they grew, the activities grew more strenuous. Now, I am often trying to complete on a Sunday afternoon some of the projects that we always find need doing. Do you have similar memories and experiences?

Condition Five: “Honour your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” I do not know of many instances mentioned in the Bible of children dishonouring their parents but there are a couple of glaring examples where the sons of kings rebelled and attempted to take the kingship from their fathers. What is our situation today? For at least fifty years much of what has passed for entertainment

has portrayed men as incompetent beings who are unable to make sensible decisions. At first, it was the women who were portrayed as being sensible. Later, in films such as “E.T.” they too were portrayed along with practically anybody who had any position of authority in government as being fools incapable of logical thought while the children were the only sensible ones around. And of course the children were proved right in the end.

Increasingly, legislation which claims to address the very real concerns for the few cases where parents really do abuse their children, is blocking what I would regard as both normal and necessary affirming in the truth, and disciplinary processes. The children are the new rulers. Under new laws likely to come into force shortly, they must always be “affirmed” even if that affirmation results in their bodies being mutilated. Normally, doctors are compelled by law to warn their patients of possible negative outcomes to any planned treatments even when those negative outcomes are very unlikely. But nobody is allowed to do that when considering possible sex reassignment therapies for children. I wonder at what age of patient the law flips?

The rules are not in our control, but our conduct is. Are we prepared to be ‘Daniels’?

Condition Six. “You shall not murder.” Not much argument there; provided that is, that we define human life as not commencing until shortly after birth, and finishing before the patient or maybe their relations feels that it is time for them to go. I do not agree with either of those. Regarding the comparisons with the practices in ancient Israel, how much

different is it to take a newborn baby and throw it onto a red-hot surface as an offering to Baal, or to use a high vacuum to dismember the living fetus because we are determined to maintain our chosen lifestyle? Then at the other end of life, most societies have looked after their older relations and frequently other people as well, as well as they could. And we still do that in many cases. But increasingly our ageing folk are reliant on care from people outside their families. There are many and varied reasons for that. I well remember the struggle it was for me when my own mother’s dementia was becoming more severe and we still had three school-age children with us. We ended up deciding that for the sake of these children we had to leave her confined in the locked-in section of the local aged care facility. It was not the dementia which decided me. It was other behaviour associated with her reducing comprehending capability. I have to admit that, although we visited her frequently while we were able, her quality of life, according to our feeble perceptions, was not good through those last four years of her life. It is one thing to ‘pull the plug’ on a machine which is prolonging life past when the end would have come without that machine; quite another to deliberately administer drugs to terminate a life early.

Bills facilitating assisted suicide are passing through our parliaments.

Condition Seven. “You shall not commit adultery.”

The standard that Jesus set on that one is high. Matthew.5:27, 28 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery’ but I tell you that anyone who looks at a

woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Job, the man who “spoke about God what is right”, “Made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.” Job 31:1, Job 42:7. Marriage is a relationship which is special in the sight of The Lord. The pinnacle of human relationships. Not to be messed with.

*There is more that I want to bring out on this and on the following commandments but I have run out of time to find the references to make sure that I am quoting correctly. So... to be continued. But, on to a more logical pausing point.*

How much longer before our beloved Bible becomes a prohibited book? So far, the attacks have been for some time restricted to denying the authority of the Bible as anything more than a collection of ancient myths. Certainly not something to influence the way we live our lives from day to day. And if we try to teach our children that it is a guide to the way they should live, then we are guilty of child abuse and may have our children taken away from us and handed over to the care of people who will re-educate them to a very different standard.

Laws which would criminalise prayer for people who are struggling with an identity crisis have unanimously passed the lower house in Victoria and will shortly be put before our senate. I believe (given that in the lower house nobody dared to vote against it) that this raft of new laws will soon come into effect. Will there be any amendments? I doubt it. Just gag debate and get on with it seems to be the tactics of our present government.

Pray for our leaders. They are pushed this way and that by many interest groups. Christians like ourselves have little input now, especially when there are prominent leaders in some large denominations who are publicly proclaiming opposing views. As the Hymnwriter expressed it, “By schisms torn asunder, by heresies distressed....”

But we must build on the only true foundation\_ Jesus Christ our Lord. What we add to that foundation will be judged. And so will we, by the One Who considers our motives as more important than what we achieve or think that we have achieved.