

BC art. 25; Heb. 10:1-18; Mat. 21:1-17; “The Lamb and the Ceremonial Law” I. What Has Been Fulfilled II. What Remains

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is the point of Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter?

Specifically- why was it necessary for Jesus to suffer and die during this specific week? Taken together, these events not only serve as the context in which Jesus died and rose again, we can also see the great work of fulfillment taking place as well! Growing up as Gentiles, there are many rites and ceremonies in the Jewish world that are foreign to us. But today we are going to see how Jesus came to fulfill these OT rites and ritual- and specifically on Palm Sunday we see the Lamb of God presented for sacrifice to take away our sins. Here we have to distinguish between different uses of the word, Law. As we read in BC 25, we are specifically looking at the ceremonial and symbolic use of the OT Law which has been fulfilled in Christ. It is important for us to understand how the ceremonies of the OT law fit in our lives- because there are some who would argue that the OT has no place in the church- that the OT is outdated and not important. There are others who would place such an emphasis on the OT that they still want to have priests and sacrifices continuing today. This evening we consider this theme: Jesus Christ is presented as the Passover Lamb who would take away our sins and preserve our lives. The OT ceremonies are like a picture- a portrait that reveals the identity of the promised One in shadowy form.

I. What Has Been Fulfilled

Our article begins by saying that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased at the coming of Christ, and that the shadows have been accomplished so that these rites and rituals must be abolished among Christians. What, then, are these ceremonies, rites and rituals that must be abolished? There are 4 main types of rituals and ceremonies in the OT. 1. Holy persons such as Levites, high priest, the procession of David kings, and other unique offices of the OT. 2. Holy places such as temples, tabernacles and holy cities like the earthly Jerusalem. We could include holy travel and pilgrimage here as well. 3. Holy things such as Nazarene vows, alters, candlesticks, the Ark of the Covenant and priestly robes. 4. Holy Seasons such as Passover, feast, New moons and the year of Jubilee. All these holy persons, places, things and seasons find their fulfillment and completion in Christ so that no longer have a continued use and practice in the NT church. Think of all the washings,

purifications, shedding of blood and sacrifices- these are all part of the shadow that we read about in Heb. 10- they are now abolished or cease to be needed because they were fulfilled by Christ. As Hebrews teaches- the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins- but Christ did this- finished the work of atonement once for all. And since it was completed, no more blood needs to be shed! The shadow of Heb. 10:1 is like an outline- the tracing lines that set the general picture on the page. But Christ in the NT is the vivid colour that brings the picture to life! So what then is the shadow that we find in our reading from Matthew 21. What events, locations and objects are present which Jesus is fulfilling and in fact bringing to an end? Well, we can consider the mode of travel and location. Jesus came into Jerusalem- the holy city of old- riding on the back of a donkey. This is a fulfillment of Zechariah 9 as well as the kingly office held by David and Solomon his son. Added to this, the very words that were spoken and song that the children sang were also fulfillment of OT prophecy. As Mt. 21:9 repeats- Hosanna in the highest- Save us O king- blessed he who comes in the name of the LORD- is a fulfillment of II Sam. 14. And the little children in v. 15 take up this same song- but in the very singing of the children- the words of Psalm 8:2 are fulfilled. But there is one aspect that we may not remember- one object that Jesus is fulfilling that we may have overlooked. As you will remember, Psalm Sunday marks the beginning of what is called the Passion Week. This is the beginning of Jesus last week before His death- and the conflict between Jesus and the religious rulers intensifies until they hand him over to be crucified. But all of this takes place against the backdrop of the first Passover and the celebration of what is called the Pesach. As you will remember, back in Ex. 12, when Israel was liberated from Egypt, the last plague was that of the death of the firstborn. In order to save their own children, the fathers had to kill a Passover Lamb and smear its blood and the doorposts of their home. In that way, the blood of the Lamb secured the redemption necessary- blood literally saved them from death. And as John first tells us in John 1, Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. But how does this Passover Lamb- and the death of Jesus on Good Friday- relate to Palm Sunday? Well, as Ex. 12 reveals, the lamb that was to be killed on Passover was selected on the 10th of the month of Nissan. So it is on the Sunday before Passover, that the Israelites needed to select their lamb. They would keep this lamb until its blood was shed on the 14th of the month. So here we find ourselves on the very day in which the heads of the household are busy securing their Passover Lambs- when behold who should

come riding into the city? So what we have taking place in our passage is this- the Lamb of God is presenting Himself to the people of Israel! What Jesus is here fulfilling is the very selection and presentation of the Passover Lamb! The humble and lowly servant coming to His own- although His own rejected Him. The very lamb that would be inspected by the priests- as Jesus would be put on trial. The very lamb that must be spotless- as Jesus would be declared to be without guilt! I find no fault in this man- Pilate would say. The very lamb who would have his blood shed to stave off death- as Jesus would have His blood shed for the complete forgiveness of all our sins! The very lamb whose body would be broken to serve as food for the people- as Jesus would have His body broken to feed our souls. This is the Lamb that is coming! The Lamb who presented Himself on Palm Sunday! So Jesus enters Jerusalem as the sound of bleating lambs fills the air. Every household needed a lamb- but after this day- after this coming sacrifice, no other lambs would be needed! You see, the little lambs would no longer serve a purpose after the true Lamb of God had come! As Col. 2:17 says, the festivals, new moons and Sabbath day- these were a shadow of things to come. But now that Christ has come, the shadow has passed away! Christ is the substance of the ceremonies; and now that we have Christ, these ceremonies are no longer needed! In fact, the very Temple itself- along with the entire city- would soon be destroyed- their use no longer needed! Jesus not only kept the Passover with His disciples, He embodied the Passover in His flesh! Who would want to hold on to a picture when the person in the picture was present? As I said in the introduction, the ceremonies and rituals of the OT form a picture that points to the coming one. Now that we have received Jesus, these portraits have been fulfilled. That is why candles and robes, incense, lambs and blood are no longer a part of our services. Being the end of the law, means that Christ is the goal or purpose of the law- the focus and meaning of the Law was to point to Him- and is now contained and completed in Him! As I Cor. 5:7 summarizes perfectly, Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed!

II. What Remains

But what use is the OT for us, then, if its ceremonies are no longer needed? Although the pictures have been fulfilled, they are still a faithful- although shadowy- form of revelation. So the continued and abiding use of these symbols is found in the truth and substance of these ceremonies. In other words, we do not repeat and continue them- but we do still read and benefit from them. As Christ makes clear in Luke 24:44, all of the OT

was pointing to Him. Jesus fulfilled the OT Ceremonies and rituals- why then do we still remember Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter? Why do we still have the OT- why should we study Exodus 12 if Jesus is the finally and perfect Passover Lamb? Well, there is still a good use for these OT signs and seals- in fact we can grow in our love and appreciation of Christ's work as we study them. So then, when we read the Psalms or the prophets or the Law, we must remember to interpret them in and through Christ. As it has been said, the OT is Christ concealed, the NT is Christ revealed. But both the OT and NT are part of God's revelation. And although we are no longer under the tutor- no longer under the guardian and school master of the OT Law, we do not forget what that guardian taught us! So we do not need to repeat the Passover every year- we do not each go and gather our spotless lambs to be sacrificed. Rather, we build upon that history and apply what our first teacher taught! It is not that the OT and NT are in conflict, but the NT builds upon the Old. Thus the Law and Prophets still have a proper use and place in our church! As Christ, Himself said in Mt. 5- He came not to abolish- not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. So as our BC article continues, the testimonies of the OT must still be used to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives. First to confirm us in the gospel. Although the OT is summarized as the Law, we are remiss if we think that the OT has no gospel in it. There is a definite thread in the OT that pulls us towards Christ and His work of grace on the cross! The gospel cannot be missed when you see the covering of sin with the blood of animals- with the intercession of the priest- with the death of the representative. The washings, the miraculous healings and provision, the blessings promised from God to the people. These are not only pointing towards Christ- but teach us about Christ and His work of the ministry. Take the two goats present on the Day of Atonement in Lev. 16- one offered and consumed as a sin offering and one sent into the wilderness to take away the sin of the people to make atonement. The rich and merciful work of Christ could not be completely explained with just one sacrifice- with one office- or one piece of furniture in the temple. The Passover Lamb who blood being shed secures both life and deliverance- forgiveness and eternal blessings! But it would take all the offerings, the entire temple and all its furniture, and the three offices of prophet, priest and king- - the entire OT- all of these were needed to give a proper picture of what Christ would do for us on the cross- as our prophet priest and king- and yet the entire OT was but a shadow! To prove

this point- no Passover Lamb ever came back to life in the OT! The fullness would only come in Christ! So great is our Saviour- so powerful and manifold His work!

And the second use of the OT listed in our BC art. is that we might have our lives regulated. Why did Jesus need to die as the Passover Lamb? Because of our sins- He died to take away our sins! So the OT Ceremonies do function as a source of humility- to remind us of our need for salvation! But in this there is also good news- a lamb was offered! Blood was shed- life was spared! But there is also a positive call to faith and obedience!

To put this another way- Jesus died once for all! There is no longer any shedding of blood for forgiveness!

But- we too are called to take up our cross and follow Jesus in Matthew 16! Although Jesus is the only perfect and final Passover Lamb who was offered once for all- it is also true that we are called to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice of praise in Rom. 12- to offer yourself – your body as a living sacrifice that is pleasing to God! So even in these ceremonies and rites in the OT we can find the call to faith and obedience as well! Obedience that flows from a heart of gratitude and thanksgiving. Even though the OT ceremonies are only a shadow- they are a shadow of Christ! And as we see Christ, we catch a glimpse of who we are called to follow and a hint of what we will become!

To conclude, understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testament is important for us as Christians. The OT sainted needed to place their faith and hope in the coming Lamb of God- that Messiah who would take away their sins. As Hebrews 11 teaches, they also lived by faith! So now we in the NT know the name of this Savior- Jesus Christ our Lord! The ceremonies began to teach and train God's people- preparing them and setting the context in which the Christ child would come. As Jesus said in John 5- all of the Scriptures bear witness to me. After Christ, the Mosaic institution and rituals have been fulfilled and are no longer to be practiced. That is why we no longer have priests who sacrifice lambs on Passover. These are finished in Christ! The Ceremonial Laws, as fulfilled by Christ, have ceased to be practiced but remain important for our lives in their substance and truth. Scripture is united in its revealing one Savior for our deliverance- The Lamb of God who presented Himself as the One sacrifice who would take away our sins! May our hearts be filled with gratitude that the old has passed away, and that the new has come! As John saw and the children sang- behold the Lamb of God- blessed is He who comes in the Name of the LORD!