

Scripture records that God's people perpetually struggle to keep God's statutes. Scripture is quite clear that we have trouble living by the rule of grace, mercy, justice and love that God stands for.

But when we see Scripture that urges us to 'keep God's rules' - when we encounter stories of the promise of something better - we can't help ourselves; We are easily convinced that God is like an Olympic judge; giving medals only to those who finish at the top. Our need to win our way through to some cosmic paradise is overwhelming, and we don't mind bending the rules (and twisting the promise) to make sure we get there.

And not only do we imagine - on the strength of the biblical witness - that God is holding space for us in some distant, heavenly paradise, we also learn to despise those who don't, won't or can't believe in the scenario that we pursue with such urgent desire.

We will go to great lengths to convert these 'lost souls' to our understanding of who God is and what God wants. We pray and preach and offer good works as though our souls depended on it, but we lose sight of something along the way...

Yes, we convince ourselves that we are following Jesus' final instruction - making disciples of all nations - and finding and converting 'pagans' became the means to an end for the church (the argument being 'we hold the truth, and it is our duty to ensure that everyone comes to the same conclusion)

But we follow the One who cast no stones. We follow the one who exiled no one - not even the one who would betray him - we follow Jesus, whose modus operandi was invitation, forgiveness and graciousness (not coercion, threats or know-it-all superiority...)

Jesus - who sent his disciples out with instructions: "If the house is worthy, let your peace be upon it." Find out who is 'worthy' Jesus said - though Matthew's gospel doesn't say what worthy means...only that it matters. And if you find those who are not worthy? Kick the dust off your feet and move on.

Worthy. It's what we want to be.

It's a word that carries heavy anxiety in Christian circles

- Associated with obedience
- 'keep my statutes' = follow the rules
- BUT – we choose the way we keep the rules; we choose the rules that matter to us. We make it about obedience and orderly behaviour.
- But Jesus tells his disciples to watch for hospitality.
- If you find it, accept it. If you don't find it – move on.

If we really believe what we profess in the creeds, God has a legitimate and undeniable claim on the whole world; all of humanity - all of Creation.

There is nothing that God does not already treasure.

It is our human foolishness to imagine that we need to judge one another according to our belief. It is we who choose to divide and order society into the righteous and the damned - we spent too much of our time deciding who is worthy and who is not.

We pretend that this honours God, but we have supplanted God. Our selective choosing of which laws we will use to determine who is saved and who is not suggests that we don't trust God to be God. Our manipulation of Scripture, our misrepresentation of Jesus suggest that we prefer to shape the reign of God in human terms - we create paradise that will suit us.

"If you keep my statutes..." says the Lord - statutes that orient us toward a loving, compassionate God, who teaches us to be loving and compassionate ourselves. What does worthy look like? I would suggest that 'worthy' is 'hospitable.' The clue is within the passage - the reference to Sodom & Gomorrah - whose sin was the failure to show hospitality - the inclination to pursue only their own interest (at the expense of the visitor- the stranger - the neighbour. And upon finding no hospitality (Jesus says) 'move on. Don't preach. Don't curse. Don't try to convert. Move. On.

We are called to live in love. We're called to honour God. We are invited to see how much God loves the world, and then cast living reflections of that love wherever we are...The 'casting out', the separating of the righteous etc...

Not. our. Job!

Worthy = hospitable. The reference to Sodom & Gomorrah (what was the real sin of Sodom? Failure to be hospitable) pushes me in that direction.

And the talk of 'statues' and keeping them is another clue. The 'rules' we create around righteousness are really reminders about God's generous grace. God would share Creation with us - an hospitable gesture if ever there was - and then God waits to see if our response is worthy.

Do we share what has been shared with us? Are we welcoming, loving and kind?

Do we care for the stranger, the lonely, the weary? Are we fair? Are we able to resist passing judgement? Are we oppressors or would we be liberators?

Following Jesus is a call to perpetual hospitality – the search for it AND the expression of it. The opportunities are everywhere. And Jesus still shows us the way.