

“Jesus and the Bible”

The Way of Jesus

September 6, 2020

Downtown & Lexington

Today’s passage in Matthew 5 is a difficult one for modern hearers. But it’s vital if we’re going to walk in the way of Jesus. Simply put: **To follow Jesus faithfully, we need to see God’s Word the way that Jesus did.**

Everything in the Sermon on the Mount hinges on this. We’ll never become salty salt or light in the darkness without God’s Word. We’ll never embody Jesus’ upside-down values without it. Since this passage is a little difficult, we’ll walk through and break it down, and then we’ll land on some takeaways for us.

Matthew 5:17

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

The “Law and the Prophets” is shorthand for the entirety of the Scriptures at that point, that’s the entire Old Testament.

Also, the word “*abolish*” is καταλυω - *katalyo* which can mean “destroy, tear down, or deconstruct.”

I kind of wish he said He did come to abolish the law. That would mean we’re off the hook. But He says the opposite. I didn’t come to abolish the Law. I’m not here to deconstruct God’s Word or start us on a trajectory where God’s Word doesn’t matter and we become our own authorities.

And remember... He’s talking about the Old Testament here. So any notion you have of “Well the OT is old hat. God was kinda angry in the OT, but then hippie teenager Jesus came and kind of helped God chill out.” No. Jesus says that’s not what I’m about. We’ll come back to what it means that He came to fulfill them. For now, keep going.

Matthew 5:18

For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

The phrase “*for truly*” can also be translated “truly, truly” or “verily”. It’s the Aramaic word *amen* which comes from the Hebrew word for truth. This combines solemnly and truly. Like in our courts when someone says, “I solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

We often say amen at the ends of prayers - “That is true”. More formally and historically it meant - “So it is, so be it, may it be fulfilled.” If you say Amen after someone else talks, you’re saying, “Yes that is true, and I’m taking that into myself.” ... Jesus says Amen at the beginning of His statement. “What I’m about to say is a big deal. It’s solemnly true and you should take it into yourself.”

And He amps up the seriousness again - “*until heaven and earth pass away*” it’s their equivalent to how we might say “until hell freezes over”. In other words, *never*. Jesus’ start here is, “Solemnly truly... NEVER... will an iota or a dot pass away from the Law until all is accomplished.”

Dot and iota - jot and tittle in the KJV. Jot is *yod*. It’s the smallest letter in the Hebrew language, the size of a comma. Tittle is a serif... Like the little line that crosses an f. He’s saying not even every word or letter. But even every little part of each letter. I’m not here to do away with any of it.

“*Until all is accomplished.*” Jesus says not only are the Scriptures true. It’s all coming true. The box score of last night’s game between the Heat and the Bucks can be true... But it’s not coming true. He says it will all be accomplished. He’s saying this is how God is running the universe. Nothing in this Book won’t happen. Every prophecy will come true. Every promise will be fulfilled. Every warning and threat will be carried out in full. Every single command will someday be obeyed because someday, “Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” **Jesus’ view is that God’s Word is both true and coming true.**

Jesus’ view of the Scriptures is astronomically high. He sees it as divine. He sees it authoritative. All of it. Every dot and iota. His life’s goal and purpose is accomplishing and fulfilling it.

Matthew 5:19

Therefore [In light of that high view] whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

In context, the word “*relaxes*” comes from the Greek “*lyo*” and it is the root of the word abolish we saw earlier in v. 17. It means “loose, break, or unbind.” When they took off their sandals, they would *lyo* their sandals.

So think about this. Commands exist to bind and guide like guardrails on a road. If you tear those down, if you treat God’s holiness as no big deal... What does He say? you’ll “*be called least in the kingdom of heaven.*” But if you do them, you’ll be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

- Is he saying that if you treat God’s law in a low manner, you’ll get into heaven, but you’ll be kinda JV with a different colored robe and a back row cloud... A smaller student model plastic harp that won’t ever stay in tune right?
- Well, surprisingly, that could be what He’s saying... except for the harp part... There are passages that describe rewards in heaven that correlate to how we live here on earth.

But it’s unlikely, because Jesus has been just talking about how the kingdom of heaven is here, it’s at hand. So what Jesus is most likely saying is, if you don’t take the Scriptures seriously, you’re putting a ceiling on your ability to experience His kingdom here. Now. You’re handicapping your own joy. Limiting your spiritual vitality and relationship with Jesus.

And when He says, “*and teaches others to do the same*”... don’t think you’re off the hook if you aren’t in a teaching situation like I am right now.

There are two problems with that:

Problem #1. We teach with our lives. Our kids, our neighbors, our co-workers, they see and observe how seriously we take God and His Word. They see what’s important to us.

And **Problem #2.** We all engage in teaching all the time without even realizing it.

If a friend is asking you about career options and you say: “Hey you gotta do what makes you happy.” You just affirmed about 1000 cultural lies in a completely nonchalant way. You didn’t mean to contradict scripture, but you did. Didn’t mean to be a false teacher. But you were.

I'll give you another - a lady in your LG brings up some relational drama, how do you respond? Do you say, "I get it... you gotta get that toxic negativity out of your life." or do you say, "You know Jesus calls us to be reconciled right? To first look for our sin and confess, to honestly confront theirs and to forgive as we have been forgiven"? Either way, you're teaching.

The question is what? Jesus didn't come to abolish the Scriptures. And He says in any way that we do, we're limiting our own spiritual growth... and He lands with the thunderstick.

Matthew 5:20

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Oh this is not good news at all. Do you know how seriously the scribes and Pharisees took God's law? How serious they were about His holiness and righteousness? In Luke 11, Jesus says the Pharisees tithed on their spice rack. These people studied God's Word - every jot and tittle and made serious effort to obey *all of it*.

But Jesus says something's off in their approach -- it isn't leading them into the kingdom the way they think. Which is fascinating. There are actually two ways to relax God's law that are equal and opposite in their ability to make us miss the point and power of God's Word.

1.) Break the letter of the law. This is the more overt and direct way to relax God's law and it's very en vogue. You hear it all the time, "Ok, sure. I believe the Bible, I believe the basic concepts, but we can't believe every part of it. There are some parts we've outgrown. We've made progress. There are some parts that are primitive and out-of-date."

So what you're saying is there are dots and iotas that don't matter... If God knew what we know then He wouldn't have commanded what He did. What arrogance! Cause we're saying with our thoughts and actions that we believe God regrets some of what He's said... that if He was just as smart and advanced as we are then He'd get it... "Oh man. I didn't see that one coming on marriage."... "I'm so sorry, I didn't consider that enlightened perspective on sexuality."

But if you do that, you end up with a God who is ever-changing, never certain... That's no God at all. That's me. I don't want to worship me. I could never worship a God like that.

I'll tell you a sneaky way this can show up. Talking to a friend this week. She said she struggled with the reliability of Scripture. I said, why? She said, "I have a hard time trusting all the people involved. The people who wrote it. The people who canonized it. The people who translate it." Ok. So on one hand that's a humble and Biblical view of depravity. All humans are sinful. Fallible. BUT on another level she was actually discounting God's role in the process. So her humble view of people was camouflaging an arrogant view that ignored God. This Word is God-breathed. That's what Jesus thought. He said the whole thing is divine. It's being accomplished.

2.) Break the spirit of the law. This version is more sneaky in religious environments. It's crazy that Jesus comes after the Pharisees here, right? They aren't breaking the letter of the law. **They LOVE the letter of the law.** But Jesus says our righteousness has to exceed theirs. Why? How?

Well, in their incredible focus on the letter of the law, the Pharisees distorted and missed the heart of the law. They made it all about external, behavioral compliance. When the truth is God's Word penetratively sees so much deeper all the way down to the depths of our heart.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

If you treat God's laws like they're all about external compliance to moral rules, you can almost believe you're following them pretty well. Law says: Do not murder. "Let me see. Do I murder? No. Check!" Law says don't give false witness against your neighbor. Do I give false witness against my neighbor? No. Technically no. Not in any official court settings, no... Check!" But for the rest of this Matthew 5 Jesus unpack how the heart of the law is about much more than external compliance. The heart of the law is about internal transformation.

- So He's going to say, "You've heard it said 'Do not murder.' But I tell you, anger in your heart is the same root problem." I'm after more than external compliance. I care about you being set free in your heart from the anger that owns you.
- Then He's going to say, "You've heard it said, 'Don't commit adultery.' But I tell you, lust in the mind is the same root problem as adultery with your body." He's pressing deeper than external compliance. Because God's Law sees and cares about our hearts.

And the more Jesus presses on this... the more He points to the point of God's Word. Through and through the law is showing us that it is not doable. Just scroll to the end of Matthew 5:48, Jesus says, "*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" Good luck.

So last week we gave families this Kidtown back to school devotional that unpacked Philippians 4:4-7. Includes these nice little doozies - "Rejoice in the Lord... always." Uh-oh. "Do not be anxious about... anything..." or how bout Ephesians 5 - "Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for her..." Any husbands passing that test?

I love this story one of our pastor's, Allen told me about his son Toby. At the prayer and worship night. Toby's got his Gideon's Bible open. Can't read. He's 4. Starts acting like he's reading it: "Chapter 1 - Do not hit. Chapter 2 - Always listen." Had about 12 chapters he rattled off. All very personal and specific rules for Toby's life. So that's awesome. He's listening. He's hearing his dad teach him rules for his life... and he's connecting that to the Bible. So good.

And also, Jesus wants us to see the Bible as so much more than that. It's not just a rule book for your life. It's more than that. Even in the section that unpacks all the rules, the rules are pointing us to something more than that. It's pointing us to Jesus who fulfills the law.

In Galatians 3:24, Paul tells us the Law was a tutor to point us ahead to Jesus until He came. That's the point of the entirety of the Old Testament. Every word. Every story. Every rule. Every dot and iota is pointing ahead to Jesus. **Jesus' view is that God's Word is all about Jesus.**

This is what Jesus means when He says He came to fulfill it. He's obeyed in every way that we cannot. He's been perfect as His father is.

He's not murdered but He's also perfectly forgiven everyone who's sinned against Him.

He's not committed adultery but He's also never lustfully objectified anyone. No one. Never.

And even metaphorically, He's never cheated on His people even though we have betrayed and abandoned Him for idols, for false gods so many times.

The point of the Law is that we CANNOT, but Jesus HAS. He has fulfilled it in every way we can't and He gifts us the righteousness that we can NEVER attain on our own.

To approach the Scriptures thinking they can make you perfect as you seek to obey them on your own strength is to miss the point of the Scriptures entirely. It's to read them like the Pharisees did.

But if we're ever going to have a righteousness that surpasses the Pharisees like Jesus says we need, we're gonna need some gift righteousness! And when you have that gift righteousness... When you know Jesus has fulfilled the Law on your behalf. It leads you to love God's Word all the more. You get a new heart and a new mind. You start to want to obey God's commandments. You start to love it.

Ok, so here are our 4 takeaways. As we adopt Jesus' view of the Scripture, we need:

1.) Confidence in God's Word- God's Word is *not just true, it's coming true*. It's being accomplished. So I don't have to cower at the intellectual arrogance of a culture that mocks God's law. Massive empires have come and gone and God's Word remains.

Every Messianic prophecy has been fulfilled in Jesus. Every foreshadowing. Every imperfect King and prophet that pointed to our need for a perfect King and prophet. Every symbolic sacrificial system has been fulfilled in Christ. So I can be confident in all the promises of God. I can be confident that God is not unknowing or uncaring in our crazy circumstances of 2020. I can know that I don't need to put my hope in princes and politics because fallible and sinful humans are never going to be the Savior King who ushers in the utopia that we're all longing for.

The things that look on the right and the wrong side of history. It will all come true. One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that God was completely right the whole time.

2.) Humility before God's Word- As Christians, we don't read God's Word like the Pharisees looking for rules to follow to confirm our own awesomeness. We're not looking for reasons to feel superior to others. And we don't read God's Word arrogantly picking and choosing the parts we like. We don't sift through the Scriptures asking "What parts do I like? What parts do I not like?" We let the Scriptures sift through us pointing out the parts God doesn't like. As we search the Scriptures, we let them search us.

And hear me - Jesus is always getting alone to be with God. He's always in the temple reading and teaching the Scriptures. He gets tempted by Satan what does He do? Quote scripture. He gets tested by the Pharisees. What does He do? Quote scripture.

So... if Jesus... the Son of God... read, meditated on, relied on and was led by God's Word... then maybe we need it too? You make time to cash your paycheck, right? You make time to eat. We will make time to feed on God's Word if we believe we need it.

3.) Obedience to God's Word - Years ago I was talking to an older man who was a Christian and I don't remember the details, but I remember him talking about a command and then saying "but it's not like we're really supposed to live like that." I think it was about loving our enemies.

I know this is going to sound simple, but what Jesus is saying here is that he does in fact expect us to obey him. We actually do and say the things he says to do and say. This is part of why so many Christians in America lack saltiness. Way too many don't actually believe that. "Well if you love your enemies... then they'll take advantage of you. that's not practical."

"you can't actually give away a lot of your money, that's not responsible."

What are we even talking about? If we say we *follow* Jesus...hear me...that means we *follow* Him!

And if God's word has come true and is coming true, if every jot and tittle will be fulfilled, if every promise will come true, if every single instruction is to bring us greater, deeper joy in Christ...then why wouldn't we obey him?! He's smarter than us! You either believe you are smarter than God or that he is smarter than you. And I know your opinion based on your life.

4.) Teaching that is filled with God's Word - We're always teaching. The question is what? In our advice, in our casual and nonchalant conversations, are we pointing people to the hope of God's Word? Are we calling people out of the darkness of our modern thinking to agree with Jesus? Are we soaking in God's

Word so we'll be prepared to have His Word pour out of us when people have questions and need wisdom?