

Thinking About the Bible Like Jesus

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[0 : 00] We're continuing in our series on the Sermon on the Mount. So we'll read from Matthew 5 and from verses 17 to 20. Verse 17.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill them. 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.

Therefore, 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.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And this is God's Word. All right, before we look at this passage, let's pray.

Our God, we ask now, that you would help us. Lord, we need your help. Lord, we need you. Oh, we need you. In this hour, we need you to come and help us understand what you have to say to us, Jesus, through this part of the Sermon on the Mount, this really important part.

[1 : 14] So we ask for help. We ask, Lord, for the help of the Holy Spirit right now. And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're, on Sunday nights, working our way through the Sermon on the Mount.

And in this passage, these few verses we read, we're really moving our way toward the thesis, the big idea, the central idea of the entire Sermon on the Mount.

And Jesus is talking to everybody tonight. If you, tonight, are a Christian who has been a Christian for some time and you have never been more sure of God's work in your life and you're in a state where you feel like you're really growing right now, Jesus is certainly talking to you.

And if you are a Christian who is struggling tonight, you know yourself, we've been looking at this in the mornings, a justified sinner, but there's a big emphasis right now on sinner.

You feel like you're walking through it a bit, Jesus is talking directly to you. And if you come tonight not really knowing yet what you think about Christianity and you think maybe, at best, the idea of God is a probability, but you don't know much more than that, Jesus right here in these verses is talking directly to you.

[2 : 26] And what is it that connects all of us tonight, no matter where you are spiritually? No matter where you are spiritually tonight, what is it that connects all of us? And it's that Jesus, in this passage, tells you what he thinks about the Bible.

So this passage is telling you exactly what Jesus thinks about the Old Testament and then also, of course, the New Testament as well. So if you're a Christian tonight, you have to conform your view of the Bible to whatever Jesus thinks about the Bible, right?

So you've got to read the Bible in the same way that Jesus does. And if you're not a Christian and you've come to the Bible before and you've struggled with it or you've rejected it or you've said, I'm not sure that this is really God's authoritative word in this world, at least you've got to come and be willing to see how Jesus reads the Bible.

Because if you're reading it merely through your own lens, through your own subjectivity, and rejecting it, then you've not yet come to deal with the Christian claims about the Bible.

Because what Christians think about the Bible is what Jesus says about the Bible, what He thinks about the Bible. And so in that way, we all, no matter where we're coming from tonight, we need to hear what Jesus thinks about the Bible.

[3 : 44] And so that's what He gives us right here. He tells us, first, what He thinks about the Old Testament, secondly, that He makes sense of it, and finally, He doesn't dismiss a single word in the Old Testament.

He actually raises it to a higher meaning, a higher plane of power. So let's look at that. First, a bit of context first. When Jesus came here in the Sermon on the Mount, He's coming as a teacher.

And in His early ministry, when He started teaching, people called Him Rabbi. And so they're picking up on the language of Second Temple Judaism in the first century.

And there were many people that were teachers in that culture, particularly the scribes and the Pharisees. And so when Jesus came teaching, people were very suspicious of Him because what they did was they compared Him to the scribes and the Pharisees.

And every time Jesus would teach, it would sound different than the scribes and the Pharisees. And so immediately, what did He say already in the Sermon on the Mount? He said, blessed are you who are persecuted.

[4 : 47] And the scribes and the Pharisees were in a position of power, not persecution. And so immediately, suspicion. Blessed are the persecuted, the reviled. Blessed are those who show mercy. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

And this is flipping on its head exactly the thing that they thought of in the lives of the scribes and Pharisees. And so immediately, suspicion. You know, this is a usurper. They wanted to kill Him all the time for it.

And especially, especially, there was a lot of suspicion around what Jesus thought and said and did about the law. So Jesus mentions that here. I didn't come to abolish the law. But there was a lot of suspicion around Jesus' use of the law.

So we think of the law, the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments, the laws in the books of Moses, Genesis to Deuteronomy. There's 613 of them listed from Genesis to Deuteronomy, 613 laws.

And what did they say about Him? The scribes and the Pharisees accused Jesus over and over again of libertarianism. You know, of taking the law, the Old Testament laws, and playing fast and loose and rereading them.

[5 : 54] And they were worried about how He treated the Sabbath. They were worried about the fact that He was going out and He was eating with tax collectors and sinners, which by their interpretation of the law was not acceptable.

And so people were always saying, Jesus plays fast and loose with the law. They were suspicious. And Jesus responded. At one point He said, the Son of Man came eating and drinking.

He came sitting down with tax collectors and sinners and everybody's saying, look at Him, a drunkard, a glutton. And then what does He say? He says, yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.

Now when He said that, He was talking about Himself. And He's saying, look at me and the things I do and you will see not the abolishment of the law, but the fulfillment. He says, wisdom will be justified by her deeds.

Watch the deeds of wisdom, my deeds, and you will see one who has received the law in exactly the way it was meant and has lived it out in exactly the way it was meant to be lived.

[6 : 52] And that created a deep suspicion, libertarianism, everybody said. Jesus says, with great wisdom and skill here, I have not come to abolish the law.

I have come to fulfill it. What does He mean? First thing He means, Jesus first tells you what He thinks about the Old Testament. Here, now in verse 17, when He says that, do not think I've come to abolish the law or the prophets.

That's what He says. Notice that. I've not come to abolish the law or the prophets and the prophets. I've not come to abolish them. I've come to fulfill them. That little phrase, the law and prophets, is something you've got to pay attention to because the research we've been able to do on this phrase in the first century in this realm of what was called Second Temple Judaism, the religious culture of the first century where Jesus lived, the law and the prophets was a shorthand to mean the entire Old Testament.

So sometimes people come to this passage and think Jesus is saying, I didn't come to abolish the Ten Commandments. I came to fulfill them. Yes. But here, when He says the law and the prophets, He's actually talking about the whole Old Testament, not just the law, not just the 613 laws in Genesis to Deuteronomy.

And, you know, whoa. Chapter 7, verse 28, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, everybody looks out when He says stuff like this and says, it says, they were astonished because He spoke like one who had authority, not like the scribes did.

[8 : 19] So the scribes were receiving the law and interpreting it for the people. He comes and says, I came to fulfill the entire law and prophets. They would have known in the first century what He means by that.

He means, I came to fulfill the entire Old Testament, the law and the prophets. So in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, the Hebrew Bible originally composed has three sections to it.

The first section is Genesis to Deuteronomy, the law. That's the short word for it, the books of Moses. And in the second section of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, it's called the prophets.

And in our English Old Testaments, we think of Joshua as the beginning of the historical books. But Jesus would have thought differently. The first century, they thought differently. Joshua was the first prophet.

And there's three sections. There's the law, there's the prophets, and then finally, the Psalms or the writings. And that's because the Psalms are the first book of the wisdom literature, the very end of the Hebrew Bible.

[9 : 17] And when the King James Bible was translated after a guy named Jerome translated the Bible into Latin, some of the things were rearranged, right? But the way Jesus received the Bible, it was in three sections.

Law, prophets, Psalms, or writings. And here, he's just giving you shorthand. He's saying, I came to fulfill the whole law and prophets, meaning the entire Bible. That's the way they would have said it. Like we would say the scriptures or something like that.

And that means, well, what does he say? Verse 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 fulfilled, all is accomplished.

Iota is a little, is the smallest Greek letter. And so it's just a little squiggly. And dot, he's referencing there the smallest Hebrew letter. It's called a yod, and it's just a little squiggly as well.

And you see what he's saying? He's saying, I'm so serious about the Bible that all the letters, the letters matter to me. The yods and the iotas matter to me too. And all of it will be fulfilled.

[10 : 20] All of it will be accomplished. When he came at the beginning of his ministry to the synagogue, he opened the Isaiah scroll. And he read from it. This is the beginning of Mark. And what does he say?

He says, today, this reading is fulfilled in your hearing. I came to fulfill it. Isaiah, Genesis, Malachi, all of it. That's what he's saying here.

Now, let me bring this to us, apply it for a moment. That means that whether you're a Christian tonight or not, I think all of us, even as Christians in the modern world, we have difficulty day in and day out coming to the Bible and receiving it and re-receiving it as truly God's authoritative speech to us.

We have trouble with that, receiving it that way over and over again. Let me just say, why do we believe the Bible is God's authority to us, God's word to us? It's not merely because there are 101 and more really good inductive and deductive, empirical and rational arguments for why the Bible is God's word, like the manuscript tradition that we have, like the fact that we know very well that the scrolls we received historically is the very Bible that you're reading in front of you right now.

The arguments for the resurrection, the argument that as soon as this Bible was being written, Christianity transformed the Roman Empire in a matter of 150 years and the martyrs, the apostles who saw him and were willing to give their lives away, all sorts of reasons that testify to the authority of God's word.

[11 : 56] But more important than any of that, the real, why do you believe the Bible is God's word? And here we learn, here we learn that one of the reasons you should is because Jesus Christ himself looked at the Old Testament and said, that's the word of God.

And I've come to fulfill every bit of it. And look, if Jesus Christ rose from the dead in the middle of history and he did, then you've got to believe everything he believed about the Bible.

Yeah? If Jesus Christ rose from the dead in the middle of human history and he did, you've got to believe whatever he believed about the Old Testament. Now that's very important because, second application, because, look, every single one of us needs authority in our lives.

And if you dismiss the idea that God has spoken into the world in an authoritative way through Scripture, if you say, I'm not so sure that that's real, that that can happen, then all you've done is transferred the possibility of final authority to yourself, to your own subjectivity and your own feelings and your own emotions.

Now, we need to hear some wisdom on this. and some years back, Taylor Swift spoke at NYU's commencement at their graduation and this is what she said.

[13 : 19] She said, I know, she said, I know it can be overwhelming to figure out who you're going to be after today, who you have to go and be after you graduate from uni. And she said this, I have some good news for you.

It's totally up to you. Everything is totally up to you. And she said, and I have some terrible news for you. It is totally up to you. Now, for just a little moment, she captured exactly the problem with modernity, the paralysis that's involved in the modern age that says, you are your own authority and that is good news and you are your own authority and that is terrible news.

That is truly terrifying. Utter paralysis. Look, God spoke into the world and that means no matter how you feel about it every day, there is an authority that stands above you.

And the man who changed the world 2,000 years ago is the very same man who looks at this book right here, the Old Testament he's talking about in his time and says, that is the word of God.

And Jesus himself saying, I receive that as the very word of God. If Jesus died and rose again and he did, you've got to believe what he believed about the Old Testament.

[14 : 35] Secondly, he also tells us here that he makes sense of the Old Testament. So, now, the second major point is to say this, is to highlight what he says at the end. I didn't come to abolish the law and the prophets, the whole Hebrew Bible, I came to fulfill it.

And this word, fulfill, I saw one commentator, one translator, said, you could translate it literally by him saying, I came to fill it full.

I came, I came to take the whole Old Testament and fill it full. Fill it full of what? Fill it full of meaning. Another way to translate this word for fill is to say, I came to show you the purpose for which the Old Testament exists.

To fill it full of meaning. To really show you ultimately what it's all about. What he's saying there is that the Old Testament is not in any way just a bunch of laws, 613 laws.

It's not just a bunch of historical chronicles of an obscure people group in the ancient Near East. It's not an endless account of genealogies that don't point you to anything.

[15 : 42] He's coming to say that throughout the entirety of the way of that history, it was always moving and pointing directly to him. That he came to fulfill, to fill it full, to make sense of the whole of it.

Let me give you one example. Genesis 3.15. In the beginning, we did not follow. We did not obey the Lord. We were made in God's image.

We rejected that. And when that happened, when our sin broke the world, the serpent, the personal conscious evil, the serpent, Satan, he was there. And God spoke to the serpent.

What did he say? He said, I will put enmity, I will put war between you and the woman, Eve, between your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head and you will crush his heel.

That's actually the word crush. And boy, I will put enmity between you and her, singular masculine noun, offspring.

[16 : 46] That's important. The singular masculine, the offspring, that is referred to in Genesis 3.15 is a singular noun, one person and a boy, a masculine verb, a masculine noun.

And you see that all the way back in Genesis 3.15 when God said, I will make war between you, Satan, and the offspring of Eve. That singular masculine little boy, one little boy will one day come and you will bite his heel but he will step on your head.

In other words, what happens when a poisonous snake bites your heel? You die because, you know, veins, the blood runs everywhere. You die but in the midst of death it says at the same time the boy will crush your head.

You see, that was all about Jesus. From the very beginning of human history, God spoke a prophecy about Jesus in Genesis 3.15. He came and Jesus fulfilled that and in Luke 24 Jesus is walking on the road to Emmaus and he turns to these two disciples and he says to them, it says that he told them for a long time, what does he say, that the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms were all about him.

That's what Luke 24 says. What is that? That's the threefold division of the Hebrew Bible. In other words, he explained to them before he ascended that the whole Old Testament was about him, always about him.

[18 : 10] So here's a way to think about it. The Bible is not a book written to you. The Bible is not written to you. The Bible is written to people in the ancient Near East. The Bible is written, Matthew's Gospel is written to Jewish people in the first century.

But because God is the divine author of Scripture, because it is God's Word, the Bible is written for you. The Bible, in other words, the Bible is written to you, not originally, but because God is author, it's written for you, it's written to you.

Ultimately, ultimately, the Bible, let me give you a second one, the Bible is not about you. The Bible is about Jesus. But the Bible is about how much Jesus is for you, for you.

The Bible's about you only because it's about Jesus who is for you, who is God with us and for you and for us. Right? And so, I'm going to do something dangerous, very dangerous here.

And that's, I'm going to give you Charles Spurgeon's key to evaluating sermons. And the first key is don't evaluate sermons.

[19 : 14] That's the first key. Boy, ministers are the worst about that, going to other churches and evaluating sermons. Don't evaluate a sermon, receive it, you know, even as much as you can, receive it. But, but, Charles Spurgeon, what he says about evaluating a sermon.

This is from 1859, sermon number 242 of volume 5 of Charles Spurgeon's collected sermons. And this is what he says, a Welsh minister who was preaching last Sunday at the chapel of my dear brother, Jonathan George, told this story.

A young man had been preaching in the presence of a seasoned, mature minister. And after the young man had finished preaching, he went up to the old minister and he said, what did you think about my sermon?

Now that's mistake number one there. And the minister said, a very poor sermon indeed. A poor sermon, said the young man. It took me so long to study it.

Aye, no doubt about that. Why, did you not think my explanation of the text a very good explanation? Oh yes, said the preacher, it was a very good explanation. Well then, why do you say it's a poor sermon?

[20 : 24] Didn't you think the metaphors were appropriate and the argument conclusive? Yes, they were very good as far as that goes, but nevertheless, it was a very poor sermon. Will you tell me why you think it was such a poor sermon?

Because, he said, there was no Christ in it. Well, said the young man, Christ was not in the text. He wasn't mentioned. We are not to be preaching Christ always, said the young man.

Christ was not present in the text I read. We must preach only what is in the text. And the old man said this, don't you know, young man, that from every town and every village and every little hamlet in England, there is a road to London?

Yeah, said the young man. Ah, said the old minister. And so, from every text in Scripture, there is a road to the metropolis of the Scriptures, Jesus Christ.

And my dear brother, your business is when you go to the text and you get in the pulpit, you say, now, what is the road to Jesus Christ? And then you preach a sermon running along the road towards that great metropolis.

[21 : 32] And he said, I have never yet found a text that had not got a road to Jesus Christ in it. And if I ever do find one that has not a road to Christ, if I ever do find one that has not a road to Christ, I will make it.

I will go over every hedge, I will cross every ditch, but I will get to my master, for the sermon cannot do anybody any good unless there is a savor of Jesus Christ in it.

Jesus came to fulfill the law and prophets. He is the point of the Bible. Lastly, he elevates, he doesn't stop there. Jesus thinks the Bible is God's word.

He says that he is the one that makes sense of all of it. And then lastly, he raises the teaching of the Old Testament to an even higher level, far from what the scribes and Pharisees thought he was up to.

They thought he was being fast and loose with everything in the Old Testament, with the laws, and boy, he doesn't. He raises it to a different plan. So he says here, therefore, whoever, Jesus says, if you relax the least jot, the least iota, the least dot, yod of the Hebrew Bible, any of the commandments, and you teach others to do the same, to relax any of it, you'll be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

[22 : 50] But if you teach everything, you'll be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness is greater, exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not even enter the kingdom of heaven.

Boy, what is he saying? He's saying far, far from being licentious, far from being libertarian about the Old Testament and the laws that were given. He says, I've come to fulfill it and I've come to raise it to a level that the scribes and the Pharisees never did.

And what does he mean by that? You know, he's saying the law to me, the prophets to me, the writings to me are so important that I'm telling you your righteousness must be greater than even the scribes and Pharisees.

Now, he's saying something very radical in his context that would create a lot of anger, a lot of frustration with him. He's saying that Judaism, Second Temple Judaism, as it was being practiced by the scribes and the Pharisees, is not righteous enough.

He's saying all the external conformity to the Ten Commandments, all the practicing and the memorizing, all the laws being obeyed visibly before your eyes, he's saying that is not enough to enter the kingdom of heaven.

[24 : 02] He's saying I've come to say something that radical, that extreme. Now, what does he mean by that? The rest of the Sermon on the Mount is what he means by that. So, you have to come back to really see what he means by that.

But let me give you an example. The very next passage, he says, you've heard the Ten Commandments, you've heard it taught by the scribes and Pharisees, do not murder, but I say to you, if you are even angry, unrighteously angry with your friend, your brother, your sister, then you've murdered he said, you've heard that it was said, don't commit adultery.

And the scribes and Pharisees running around saying, I've never committed adultery. I've been faithful to my spouse. And he's saying, but if you've looked at another person with sexual lust in your heart, you've committed adultery. And Jesus is saying, look, I've come to raise the law to its true level, the level, what, of the heart.

I've come to show you that external conformity to the law is not the full intention of what the Old Testament was teaching. Now, instead, that if you really want to obey, if you really want to have righteousness in your life, you've got to internalize the law.

You've got to begin from the heart and move outward. your righteousness has got to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Now, when he said something that extreme, what was he saying? He's not trying to get you to say, okay, well, if I can get my heart right and I can go out and I can exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

[25 : 25] No, he was saying, look, these guys are doing it as best as any human can. And, look, he was saying every single person in this world is condemned by this.

If you really want to follow the law, try, you can't. That's the point, that's the first point of the Sermon on the Mount. You can't because it begins from the heart and moves outward. And when he said, your righteousness has got to exceed the scribes and Pharisees, he was saying, you need a righteousness that you will never be able to achieve.

You need a righteousness that is not your own. You need an alien righteousness, an outside source, and that takes you right back to verse 17 where he said, I came to fulfill all of it. So, we'll close with this.

His comment, I came to fulfill the law, exists in two senses. Two senses. Here's the first sense. He came to be from the inside out every bit of righteousness that we never were.

That's the first sense of fulfillment. He came to be from the inside out every bit of righteousness Israel never was. The scribes never were. The Pharisees never were. We never were. You never were. I am not.

- [26 : 33] He came to be that. That's the first sense. Let me give you a quote to flesh this out. I got two quotes as we finish from John Calvin. Both of these are from 1534 from John Calvin's preface to the translation of the Bible into French by a friend of his.

So, he wrote a preface to the Bible. Not the best idea, maybe, to write a preface to the Bible, but they did it. And there are some great quotes in it. This is what he says.

Because Jesus Christ has fulfilled all righteousness, he desired in all the right ways that you never will, then this is true. Every good thing is to be found in Jesus Christ alone, he says.

For he was sold to buy us back. He was sold to buy us back. He became the captive to deliver us. He was condemned in our place to absolve us.

He was made a curse for our blessing. He was made the sin offering for our righteousness. He was marred that we might become fair.

- [27 : 44] He died for our life so that by him fury is made gentle. Wrath appeased. Because of his righteousness, darkness turned into light for us.

Fear reassured. Despisal despised. Debt cancelled. Labor lightened. Sadness made merry.

Misfortune made fortunate. Difficulty easy. Disordered now ordered. Divisions united. Rebellion subjected.

Intimidation intimidated. Ambush uncovered. Assaults assailed. Combat combated. War, our war with God warred against by him. Vengeance avenged.

Torment that we deserve tormented in him. Damnation now damned. The abyss has sunk into the abyss. Hell transfixed.

- [28 : 48] Death dead. Mortality made immortal. Now that's why he's Calvin. That quote. But boy he's pointing to Jesus.

Look what is he saying? He's saying that the one who fulfilled all righteousness took on your unrighteousness so that you might receive his righteousness. That's the first meaning that he fulfilled the law.

He fulfilled all of it for you. He fulfilled the whole of it. Desire outward in your place so hell could be transfixed! For you. The second sense the final sense.

One more quote. How did he do it? How did he do it? The second sense he's saying I came to fulfill every bit of it from my heart outward in your place and I came to do it by fulfilling everything the Old Testament was talking about.

That's the second way. He's saying I came to do it by fulfilling everything the Old Testament had always pointed to. And so here's Calvin again same preface. How did he do it?

- [29 : 45] Jesus Christ he says is the new Isaac the beloved son of the father who was offered as a sacrifice but nevertheless did not succumb to the power of death. He says Jesus is Jacob the watchful shepherd who has such great care for the sheep which he guards.

Jesus is the good and compassionate brother Joseph who in his glory was not ashamed to acknowledge and forgive his brothers however lowly and abject their condition.

Jesus is the great sacrificer and elder Melchizedek who has offered an eternal sacrifice once for all. Jesus is the sovereign lawgiver Moses the new and better writing his law on the tablets of our hearts by the spirit.

He is the faithful captain and guide Joshua to lead us to the promised land. He is the victorious and noble king David bringing his hand all by his hand all rebellious powers to subjection.

He is the magnificent and triumphant King Solomon governing his kingdom in peace and prosperity. He is the strong and powerful Samson who by his death has overwhelmed all the enemies.

[30 : 49] This is what we should seek in the whole of scripture truly to know Jesus Christ the infinite riches that are comprised in him and are offered to us by him from God the Father.

If one were to sift through the law and the prophets Calvin says he would not find a single word which would not draw us back to Jesus Christ.

Therefore Paul says rightly that he knows nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Jesus Christ fulfilled everything for you.

Everything. And so tonight you can say I am far more sinful than I'm willing to admit and yet I am far more loved by Jesus than I've ever dared imagine.

Let us pray. Father thank you for the revelation of Jesus the incarnation and how it shows us the truth about the Old Testament. So we want Lord tonight to think about the Bible in the same way you do to read it through the lens of the truth of the one who came to make sense of all of human history Jesus.

[32 : 03] So I ask for some that they would be helped to see the power of scripture because of the power of the gospel. I ask for others that they would be able to see that Jesus fulfills all righteousness in their place and I ask for all of us that we would see that as the new and better Jesus you are the new and better the new and better Moses and David and Solomon Joseph Melchizedek that we would know that you came to redeem us.

So reinvigorate our vision of your glory through our reading of scripture we pray in Jesus name Amen.