The Kingdom Life: Matters of the Heart - Matthew 5:17-20 (ESV)
5/18/25
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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. **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. **19** 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. **20** For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

When you think of things in our culture that are controversial, what comes to mind? We might think of things like the conversation around topics like immigration, climate change, sanctity of life, inflation, you can fill in the blank… But, if we stop to think and actually peel back the layers a bit, the most controversial topic really has to do with 2 things: **1) The Bible and, consequently, 2) Who is Jesus?**

Many of those topics we listed are relevant and very controversial to our day (at least in our personal context), but deeper down, these two topics are the most polarizing, especially on a global scale, because these actually inform the rest. They are the issues behind the issues, if you will.

Wars have been fought over the debate about who Jesus is… Even within the church, there is great debate over these two topics. Is the Bible authoritative and, if so, in what way? you will likely not believe that Jesus is who he says he is and that all scripture has always and will always point to him.

Goes from 3rd person Beatitudes, to 2nd person in talking to them about being the salt and light, now he brings the talk inward to himself. Remember, Jesus fully realizes that he has Jewish farmers, blue collar workers, and even peasants in his audience as well as religious leaders of his day.

It is easy to come off of the list of Beatitudes and the metaphor of salt and light and think, “Yeah, I like this Jesus… he is sticking it to the man and telling us to do ‘me’...” But, that is not exactly the takeaway here. Equally prevalent, the Pharisees were listening to Jesus and making a blanket judgment that He could not be a true rabbi because he did not care to follow and obey the OT scriptures…. (ate with sinners, touched the sick, etc.) At the center of that tension and opposition is the suspicion that Jesus is not fully orthodox in his commitment to the Old Testament.

So, the first line, Jesus says, ***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.”*

So, Jesus felt it was important enough of a situation to clarify a few things.

- *Law and Prophets* - A general statement referring to the OT (even though it wasn't called that until much later when we established the NT)
- *Not abolish but fulfill* - Antithesis of abolish is not fulfill, but adhere to or preserve, so why choose fulfill?

How are we treating the Bible? How do we view it?

- A comprehensive how-to manual
- A magic 8 ball
- A lawbook
- Or a mult-genre, multi-authored, grand epic narrative of God's redemptive plan for the world

4 Acts leading up to Jesus:

1) The Garden - God creates all that is, culminating in the creation of man and woman to partner with him in the flourishing of the created order
2) The Rebellion - Man and woman choose to go their own way
3) The Response - God remains faithful to his creation and doesn't give up
4) The Plan - God establishes a people group (Israel) to initiate his plan of redemption and become a blessing to the world, pointing it back to him. ***They done messed up and could not do it…***

So, how does Jesus fulfill all the scriptures?

- Only Jesus could do what the law required… The law required perfection, purity, and satisfactory payment for sin…
- Jesus is not giving his listeners a feel good message nor is he saying to the religious leaders that he has a low regard or standard for the requirements of the law, he follows them to a T, but he is beyond it, he fulfills the requirement of the law in himself!
- In other words, His interpretation of the Scriptures completes and clarifies God's intent and meaning through it. Everything that the Old Testament intended to communicate about God's will and hopes and future for humanity finds its fullest meaning in Jesus. **Jesus didn't come to discard the Jewish scriptures, but he came to display their intended meaning.**

"The Bible is how the authority of Jesus is mediated to his apprentices." - John Mark Comer

This is great news, because every other system or institution or political leader will fail you… You will fail you… I will fail you… Release the burden and the weight on your shoulders…

So, everything from this point on should be filtered through vere 17, everything we do should come from the place of understanding that our Operating System is not from a place of striving

to earn favor or standing or approval from God, but from a place of understanding the deeper meaning of God's Word… the bigger picture.

So, **how do we know what to follow and what not to follow? How do we know what parts of scripture still apply to us today? 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.

- Nothing from the scriptures will be void on this side of eternity… one translation says, *"**18** For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, <u>one jot or one tittle</u> shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled…"*
- If all scripture points back to the life and truth of Jesus, then we measure everything up against who Jesus was, the life he demonstrated, and the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, the gospels and the whole NT.
    - *I.e. the teaching of death and the shedding of blood to atone for sin is no longer expressed through temple sacrifices but rather has been "fulfilled/accomplished" once for all in Christ's atonement on the cross*
    - *If someone is sick with disease, we do not have to cast them out of the city… we can take them to the doctor to get healthy quickly (praise God this was the case during the pandemic)*
    - *Eating pork is bad (can I get an amen for maple bourbon bacon! Had that at Nashville Social Club)*

He then says, **19** 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.

Here is the heaven on earth aspect of this statement: Jesus paves the way and gives us the gas to "go", but we've got to get into the car… There is a piece of this where Jesus is saying, I am not calling you to strive, but I am calling you to obedience. I am not calling you to be busier, but I am calling you to something deeper. Jesus does not teach "easy belief-ism." Obedience does matter, but it is that Jesus now gets to the root, the heart, the deeper intention of all it all… why? *This isn't about salvation or identity, this is about recognizing that Jesus made a way where there was no way, he has given us a way to live, The Way.*

- You want peace? Turn to Jesus who is revealed in the scriptures… You want rest? Come to Jesus as he says in the scriptures… You want wholeness? Look to the life of Jesus as lived in the scriptures… You want to see your marriage restored? Look to the teachings of Jesus in the gospels and NT… You want to see a city change? Live like Jesus as shown in the Bible… You want healing from sin and death? Trust in the saving work of Jesus on the cross communicated in the Bible… *When that veil in the temple tore into two from top to bottom in the temple, no longer was there this fragile relationship between God and humanity, where that had to keep coming back over and over and over again to satisfy the requirements of the law…*

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. **24** For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. **25** But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. **James 1:22-25 (ESV)**

Hear my heart and, ultimately, Jesus' heart in this: We do not get to pick and choose which parts of the Bible we like and don't like, which ones we follow and don't follow… James shows us that if we want to live a blessed life, it is done through obedience to our Lord.

But, here is the kicker to this all… in what spirit, and with what perspective do we do this? If any of you are a parent, you know that it is so easy sometimes to pull the "Because I am the boss!" card when your kids asks you WHY or challenges your remarks… It is easy for us to believe that God is a fear mongering, authoritarian God who pulls "I'm the boss card…" But, let's look at our last verse in this passage and I think we will see something quite different:

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

Holy smokes, Jesus. The Pharisees?! They were OCD about the law! They even added extra traditions to follow, just because they could! Here is what I think we miss with this verse when we read it face value. The whole gospel is not that we have to measure up our good deeds to others to determine if we are worthy and sufficient. That's the opposite! Paul tells us that Jesus reminds us that HIS GRACE is sufficient for us!

It was not that you had to do more than the Pharisees or measure up your good deeds against the Pharisees, it was that we are called to go deeper than the Pharisees… *Talk about mistaking the forest for the trees…"*

7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

8

"'These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

9

They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.'"

Matthew 15:7-9 (NIV)

Outside-in righteousness leads to (taken from Rich Villodas):
- Superiority Complex

- Religious self-deception
- Lack of security in God's love

Inside-out righteousness leads to:
- Healthy understanding of who we are/humility
- Intimacy and security in God's love
- Emotional and spiritual maturity

So, when Jesus says unless our righteousness goes deeper than just surface level Christianity, doing and saying all the right things, unless we allow our hearts and minds and lives to be transformed by God himself, we will have missed it.

The next 6 weeks will show us a case study of 6 ways Jesus reveals how his coming brings about a deeper meaning to the scriptures and a deeper faith, The Kingdom Life…

6 "You have heard it was said, but I say…" statements…

It has always been about love, sacrificial love. Love towards God, thus love for the Word of God… and, consequently, sacrificial love for others. This is not easy, but we don't do it in our power. This is where the blessed life comes.

Are you operating from a place of sacrificial love?

So, this is Jesus' invitation… always. A Kingdom Life invitation. Jesus' great prayer he said, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Will you pray that prayer for yourself and those around you this week? "In Carson City as it is in heaven…" "In my home as it is in heaven…"