

“Why We Know God Wants to Bless Us”

Matthew 5:17-20

Each year we choose a theme based on Scripture and this year our theme has been ‘Listen to Him’. God broke into the disciples lives when He audibly spoke these words about Jesus to emphasize they [and all people] need to listen to what Jesus was saying, since He is the Son of God.

So we’ve been doing that off and on looking at different things Jesus said about prayer, about what’s important, about the Kingdom (His first words) and about encouragement. This summer we’ve extended this to listen to the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ here in Matt. 5-7. Prior to this Jesus was preaching and teaching ‘Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand’, healing sicknesses and casting out demons as He travels throughout Galilee. Large crowds were following Him. They like what they hear. In Mark 1:27, after Jesus casts out a demon we get a sense of what this was like;

1:27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

This is the context of the Sermon on the Mount; Jesus’ authority vs. the religious leaders’ authority. At the end of the message in Matt. 7:28-29 the people respond,

²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Nowhere is this clearer than in this transitional section in 5:17-20. If anyone had not been listening to what Jesus had been saying in vv.3-16, I’m sure you could have heard a pin drop after v.20. Because vv.17-20 was a direct challenge to the religious’ leaders’ teaching and false authority. And we’re going to see Jesus actually declare His deity here.

Before we look at these 4 verses we need to review what Jesus has just said. Jesus just finished telling these people that God wanted to bless them. And this was refreshing news to the people because they were taught by their spiritual leaders that if you have a disease or a physical impairment or are poor then its obvious, God hasn’t blessed you and that you won’t be part of His kingdom.

But Jesus comes along and gets everyone excited by saying the Kingdom is near and the kingdom is available now to those who recognize their spiritual poverty and are willing to believe in Jesus to the point where they are persecuted for it. And that the meek inherit the earth, not the proud and powerful. And those who are pure of heart (not just pure of hands and face) will see God. And those who hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness, (not self-righteousness) will be filled and satisfied.

And this is all sounds wonderful, but there’s these questions that everyone probably wants to ask but are afraid to ask and that is, *‘Excuse me, Jesus, but who are you to say these things? Because this isn’t what I’ve been taught. My synagogue leaders tell me other things. They even quote Moses, David and the prophets. Are you replacing them? How do we know what You are saying is true? It sounds too good to be true.’*

Jesus knows all this of course so He 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. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

How do we know God wants to bless us? How do we know what Jesus is saying is really true? We know what Jesus is saying is true because

Jesus is Upholding the Authority of All God's Word **(5:17-18)**

It is not a new teaching at all. It's what God always meant to say but the religious leaders glossed over the Word of God in some places, explained it away in other places and even replaced it with their own rules in other places so that the truth was obscured and covered up so that the people didn't know. Times haven't changed much have they. We have all kinds of religions in the world, confusing some people who just think they are essentially the same and that God has many names and they all lead to the same place.

Or even in many so-called Christian churches you might hear messages where God is love, love, love and just wants what's best for you and you're all wonderful and will end up in the kingdom. But that's not what Jesus says. Why does He matter? Because He's God's Son and He can't lie and He only tells us what the Father shows Him (John 5:17-23). If that's true then God must have told Jesus to tell us to *'Enter through the narrow gate for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.'*

That's later in the Sermon on the Mount (7:13-14) and these verses here in 5:17-20 are leading us toward corrective teaching. Jesus is going to explain what Moses, David and the prophets really said. So, no this is not new teaching in that Jesus is saying something opposite of what the Law and the Prophets said. Instead of abolishing it Jesus said, I have come

To complete all of it (v.17)

It's sad that the religious leaders had so distorted the Old Testament teaching that Jesus has to assure them that His teaching isn't new. That's what God actually said! So, Jesus is upholding the authority of all the Word of God and He claims His authority over the Word by saying 'I have come to fulfil it.' Fulfil means to complete to finish. Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old and New Testaments – some of which has been fulfilled and some of which has not. Some of the Old Testament is fulfilled by predictive prophecy but other parts of it are fulfilled by Jesus because now we understand things more fully than we couldn't before.

Normally, God's spokespersons would announce 'Thus says the Lord' before they shared what God said through them. But Jesus isn't a prophet, He is God's Son, co-creator of the world, Saviour of the world and author and finisher of our faith. By declaring He had come to fulfil it, He was stating He was the Messiah. That's why Jesus would say, as He does here in v.18, 'Truly I say to you' or 'Verily I say unto you.' That word 'verily' is the Greek word 'amen'. It means 'this is true; listen up'.

Sometimes Jesus doubles it, Truly, truly I say to you. He's making an announcement. He's trying to grab people's attention. So not only was Jesus here to fulfil all of God's Word He also claimed it would be fulfilled

When He says so (v.18)

¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

When heaven and earth disappear, as we know it, then it (all God's Word) will be complete. Technically we should say when God says so because Jesus admitted even He didn't know the day or the hour set by God when He would return and fulfil all God's plan (Matt. 24:36). But Jesus is claiming His deity by saying 'Truly I tell you', as if He is the voice of God. He knows these things because He is the Son.

Unlike the Pharisees Jesus is upholding every jot and tittle of God's Word. Every little dash and dot of the Hebrew will be fulfilled. There are a number of letters in Hebrew that look identical except a little line is added left, right or at the bottom. Or a dot (daghesh) changes the sound of a word, similar to the little line added to an O that makes it a Q. Or the little turn at the end of the C that makes it a G.

So, no Jesus says, this isn't new teaching; this is the real stuff that's been hidden from you. It sounds new because you haven't heard the actual truth of God's Word. That can happen even within Christian circles. Many Christians share how they just assumed evolution was true until they actually read what God's Word says in Genesis 1. Some Christians are never taught about the 1000-year reign of Jesus on earth or the rapture before that or that God still has a plan for Israel. Some Christians were not taught about what the Scriptures teach about baptism, that it isn't for infants that its only for those who have understood and accepted Jesus as Saviour. So when they first hear the actual truth, they are hesitant because it sounds new. New to them because they were never taught it but not new because it's always been right there in God's Word.

This is all great and wonderful but where is Jesus going with this? V. 19,

¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Some translations leave out the word 'therefore' at the beginning of v.19. That's a huge mistake. This is the whole reason Jesus said what He did in vv.17-18. Since Jesus upholds all the authority of all God's Word . . .

We Are Responsible to Obey and Share All Of God's Word (5:19-20)

Jesus issues a challenge to the religious leaders and to all who claim to want to keep and or teach God's Word when He says 'if anyone' or 'whoever'. The word 'annul' means to loose or set free or dismiss. Sometimes the Pharisees were guilty of ignoring certain commandments by adding a condition to it like the swearing of oaths (5:33-37). And so by word and example they taught others

that, oh you don't have to keep that law. What Jesus was saying when He upheld the authority of God's Word was,

We can't pick and choose what we want to obey (v.19a)

'Don't murder' and 'don't grumble' are both commands in God's Word. Yet we are often guilty of the latter but not the former. Or we have no problem obeying 'Do not get drunk with wine' but how seriously do we take the command 'Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

If we're honest, we are guilty at times of showing Pharisaic tendencies when we choose to obey easier commands than more difficult ones. But that's not an option. Jesus says whoever annuls these and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom. The Pharisees taught the people directly what to obey and not, which was their way of making their teaching more appealing and then justified their disobedience! We may not be so bold but when we disobey some of God's commands we teach others by example. Since Jesus says God's Word is all authoritative, we must be careful we ...

Don't justify our disobedience by teaching others (v.19b)

People look at our lives and whether we realize it or not base some of their decisions and life choices on what we model and indirectly teach. Christians make obedience or disobedience choices based on how they see other Christians disobeying or obeying God's Word. That's why we need to be careful to obey all of God's Word. Our negativity, our critical spirit, our questionable behaviour or even choice of language sets an example and some might use our indiscretions or 'minor disobedience' and think 'So-and-so doesn't have a problem with that. I guess I can do it too.'

Don't we feel better about our own sin when we see other people doing the same or worse? But if we want to be called great in His kingdom we need to pursue God's idea of righteousness and

Avoid legalistic righteousness (v.20)

Jesus said something shocking here; he said to be great in the Kingdom of God your righteousness has to surpass the Pharisees. On the surface they would have thought, how can you be more righteous than them? They even tithe their herbs from their garden! They never have stained clothing or unclean hands. They never missed going to the synagogue.

The problem was they did these things to impress people and to look externally righteous. God is the one who establishes what makes us right with Him or not. He looks for purity of heart not purity of hands. He's looking for poor in spirit not proud of spirit. While the righteousness that surpasses the Pharisees may sound almost impossible, when we trust Jesus its actually easier. When we admit we are sinners unworthy of salvation and accept Jesus by faith, we realize we don't have to keep trying to look righteous to impress people or God. We want to obey Him out of a thankful heart. When we strive for internal purity we see the hand and evidence of God now, affirming He is with us and showing us how to live.

Jesus uses these 4 verses to show the people how the righteousness of the Pharisees was all a white-washed tomb. Nice on the outside but dead on the inside. Now He will take some of the more obvious commands that everyone says they obey; like don't commit murder or adultery, don't lie and love others to show them that we're missing the point if we think obeying the letter of the law means we are righteous. The Pharisees didn't raise the righteousness bar, they lowered it without people

even realizing it. They were dunking the basketball on an 8' high net, thinking they were fine, when Jesus comes along and puts the hoop back to the 10' mark where Moses and the prophets had originally said when they communicated God's Word.

Jesus didn't say these things to make life with Him sound unapproachable; He actually said it to show that He is approachable and wants to bless you when you understand what He really says. Don't be fooled by the external religiosity of people, instead see what God actually says; faith in Jesus is what saves you. Not your good works or good looks or good parents. He's impressed when we believe what He actually says and do what He says even if we get flack for it (even from other believers!). He wants to bless us. He will keep us. He wants to make His face shine toward us. He wants to be gracious to us and give us His shalom. The way we receive all these things is when we do what He says in His Word.

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivvet@rideau.net