November 8, 2015

“Jesus and the Law”

Matthew 5:17-20

**FCF**: Confusion as to the place of the Law

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) The King has declared that the Law is connected to the kingdom.

(magnet) We need to embrace this to follow the King.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Jesus has come as the one true king. A counterfeit king usurped His throne and has been exposed. The disordered order is being challenged. The insurrection is being put down. It’s a reality beautifully imaged in our tales. Aslan is on the move. Be gone, White Witch! King Richard has returned. Off with you, Prince John! The kingdom has come. Long live the King!

That said, the news of this reality, beautiful as it is, raises some questions. How is this kingdom administered? Does it have structure? Are there laws which His citizens are to heed?

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 5:17-20

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Grammar is a funny thing. Even the most subtle changes can be worth noticing. Case in point, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins speaking with the Beatitudes in the third person. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit*.” He continues in the second person. “*You are the salt of the earth*.” And then, in our text this morning, we see a shift to the first person. “*I say to you*” and “*I tell you*.” Which marks a shift in intensity that makes clear His sense of authority.

But how can Jesus do this? What right does a Jewish rabbi from Galilee have to speak in this way? He has every right for He is no ordinary rabbi. He is the new Moses, the better Moses, the fullness of everything Moses was, all that he represented and pointed towards.

For Jesus is both the Lawgiver and the King. And the King has declared that the Law is connected to the kingdom. They are not separated but bound together. The King has declared that the Law is connected to the kingdom. We need to embrace that to follow the King.

In order to embrace that, we need to look at this text and consider these three things. First, Jesus’ case for the Law. That is, how He comes down on this. Second, the cause for His case, the reasons for how He comes down. And, third, the consequences for His followers.

1. **JESUS’ CASE FOR THE LAW**

So, first, Jesus’ case for the Law (READ Matthew 5:17). Jesus is making a clarification.

1. *Clearing Up a Misunderstanding*

That is, He is clearing up a misunderstanding, straightening out impressions about Him.

1. General

All could see He was a rabbi. But the way He conducted Himself was confusing. The company He kept was sketchy. And then there was what looked to be His disregard for the Sabbath.

1. Specific

Now He’s laid out the marks of His followers, the citizens of His kingdom, in the Beatitudes. Without any mention of the Law. So, in essence, He’s saying, “*Don’t think by my saying this that I’m saying that, that by my not mentioning the Law that I think the Law has no place*.”

1. *Making Clear His Mission*

So, to clear up this misunderstanding, Jesus then speaks to His mission.

1. Not come to abolish

He has not come to abolish or set aside or dismiss or do away with the Old Testament (that’s what He means by the Law and the Prophets). He has not come to abolish all that. Hardly.

1. But come to fulfill

He has come to fulfill it. “*My teaching does not cancel out the Old Testament. My teaching is the culmination of the Old Testament*.” He is the goal to which it all points. All the prophecies – some of which we’ve talked about in this series. All the prophecies, the sacrificial system, the judicial laws governing the nation that was preparing for His coming, the events and key figures of Israel’s history – His coming brings all this to completion, culmination, and fulfillment.

So, with respect to the Law, to God’s moral commands, Jesus came not to set that aside but to show, in His life and His teaching, the depth of those commands – their full meaning and intent.

Jesus’ case for the Law then is that He came not to abolish but to fulfill the Law.

*Illustration:*

For it all points to Him. The Jesus Storybook Bible puts it like this (READ quote):

No, the Bible isn’t a bunch of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a story. It’s an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It’s a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne – everything – to rescue the ones he loves. It’s like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!

It takes the whole Bible to tell this story. And at the center of the story, there is a baby. Every story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in the puzzle – the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.

*Application:*

Think of how this changes how we read the Bible. These aren’t isolated parts or stand-alone incidents. They are yoked together, moving forward, always pointing to Jesus.

Then think of how this changes how we view Jesus. Imagine these words being said of or by anyone else. Yes, there have been many great figures through the years. Sometimes it takes volumes to capture their lives and contributions. Which is certainly true of Jesus. But not just volumes of books but centuries of events, scores of people, a nation and its laws, the complexity of a sacrificial system to even begin to foreshadow Him. He is worthy of our trust.

The Law is connected to the kingdom. We need to embrace this to follow the King.

1. **THE CAUSE BEHIND HIS CASE**

But why does Jesus say this? (READ Matthew 5:17-18) This is the cause, the rationale for His loyalty to the Law. Which addresses two key questions – how long and how far?

1. *The Abiding Permanence of the Law*

First, how long does this last? Jesus speaks here of an abiding permanence of the Law.

1. The duration

The Law will endure until the end, until the completion of His work – His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return. So the Law will endure as long as the cosmos will last.

1. The explanation

The reason for that is that the Law is an expression of God’s heart, of His character. God does not change. Which means the Law lasts. And its essential place in our lives will last as well.

1. *The Inclusiveness of the Permanence*

That’s the first question. How long does this last? But there’s a second. How far does this go? There is an abiding permanence to the Law. And an inclusiveness to the permanence.

1. The images

This is where the images from scrolls come into play. An iota was the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet. The dot was a tiny stroke or part of a letter, setting one apart from another.

1. The implication

The implication being that no part of the Law is to be ignored. None of it will pass until all of it is fulfilled. How long does it last? How far does it go? Jesus’ answer is so unambiguous.

He has the highest possible view of the Old Testament. That’s the cause behind the case.

*Illustration:*

Which is why He speaks of it as He does. Think of it this way. I had a hard week. We had to put one of our beloved cats to sleep. It’s been a draining stretch of days – not just for me but for the other people in our house. Well, think with me here. If I treasure them, how then will I interact with them? Hopefully, in a way that reflects my sympathy and love for them. You see, how we view something or someone affects how we treat them, how we speak to and of them.

This is what we see with Jesus and His regard for the Old Testament, for God’s Law.

*Application:*

(READ Psalm 1:1-3) Understand that Jesus sings this with delight, with all sincerity and feeling. Do we? Do we delight in His Law the way He does? And how would we know?

Well, obviously, we would spend time reading it, studying, discussing, and meditating upon it. And then faithfully and fervently coming to Him in prayer asking, “*Shape me by this*.”

But it would have to go beyond that. To delight in His Law would also mean taking it seriously. And by that, I mean taking to heart the passages that cut against the grain, that don’t go down so easily. The ones that speak of honesty, sexual purity, forgiveness, and generosity.

Taking it seriously by not taking away from it. Or by adding to it. Not crafting our own rules and elevating them as high as the Lord’s. And then insisting others abide by those rules.

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1. **THE CONSEQUENCES FOR HIS FOLLOWERS**

All of which then has consequences for Jesus’ followers (READ Matthew 5:19-20).

1. *For Status within the Kingdom*

Jesus says there are these consequences. First, for our status within the kingdom.

1. Distinction between the commands

It was common at that time to make a distinction between the commands – some were light and others were heavy. Jesus commends that and captures it in a word play here with least and great.

1. Adherence to the commands

He commends that but he also stresses an adherence to the commands. “*Don’t confuse the light and the heavy. And don’t ignore them*.” For stature and status comes in heartfelt obedience.

1. *For Entrance into the Kingdom*

Which takes us from status within the kingdom to entrance into the kingdom.

1. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees

What is the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? The scribes were professional students and teachers of the Law. Pharisees were members of a Jewish party devoted to intense devotion to the Old Testament Law and the traditions that had grown up around it. They were regarded as the most obedient, the most righteous. So this had to be absolutely shocking to Jesus’ hearers.

1. The righteousness of Christ’s followers

Exceeding that? But Jesus is not calling us to beat these folks at their own game. He has something else in mind entirely – not a fixation with external behavior but our heart affections.

He has the highest view of the Law imaginable. The consequences for that? Obedience to the Law will go beyond a mere checklist and be motivated by love for God and for others.

*Illustration:*

Jesus is interested in the motives behind the actions, the why behind the what, the heart. Let me put it this way. My wife went to a function last week and brought home some flowers – roses with baby’s breath in a vase. Very nice. And dead. Cut off from the bush and no life in them whatsoever. Watering them will just delay the inevitable – dried petals and a stench.

Our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. It must be real, alive.

*Application:*

We need to do the right thing the right way for the right reasons. That’s Christian Ethics 101. We need to do the right thing the right way for the right reasons. A couple of examples. So, you’re faithful to your spouse, never cheated on them. Good. But why? Because no one better has come around? Because you’re afraid of the consequences? Or because of love?

You’re trusted at work, never stolen anything. Good. But why? Because there’s never been a clear opportunity? Because it’s too complicated, too much trouble? Or because of love?

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**CONCLUSION:**

Let me take you back to the introduction (READ Matthew 5:1-2). It was a dramatic moment. There’s intentionality in how Matthew describes this. “He went up on the *mountain*” – just as Moses did to receive the Ten Commandments. “He went up on *the* mountain” – a definite article for an unnamed place. He then sat down and opened His mouth and taught them. All of this would have triggered memories of Moses for these first century Jewish readers.

Moses was a beloved figure, remembered not just as a lawgiver but also as their savior, deliverer, redeemer. The one God used in the exodus, to bring them out of bondage, and into the Promised Land. Just as the angel had said of a new and better Moses (READ Matthew 1:21). Jesus came to lead His people on a new exodus, out of bondage, into a greater Promised Land.

And though the deliverance be greater and the redemption more full, the response is still the same. You could even say even more so. Jesus comes to us with his word, statutes, and commands, not to give us a way to earn His love but the means to respond to it. Not as a way to secure our standing with Him but a way to live as those who know themselves to be secure.

The King has declared that the Law is connected to the kingdom – not ceased, separated, discounted, or dismissed but bound and connected. We need to embrace this to follow the King.

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