

"The Truth About Living Biblically."

Have you heard about a book titled, *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible?* The author claims to have spent a year committed to obeying Bible commands as literally as he could. He lives in New York. He grew a beard, dressed like Moses, and started to eat kosher according to the Mosaic laws. The Bible in the Old Testament commands stoning Sabbath-breakers, so he would prowl around Central Park, looking for offenders. He didn't want to get arrested, so he would stealthily pelt them with tiny pebbles from behind and then look the other way. Of course, it is absurd, and that is the point of the book. He's not a Christian and he wanted to prove that you can't really live Biblically. He wanted to profit off the exercise. The book, *A Year of Living Biblically*, is sort of funny but it isn't helpful in the end because it misses the purpose of the Bible.

This morning we come to the place where Jesus speaks to the issue of the Bible in the Sermon on the Mount. What he says will challenge you. I hope it will inspire you also. ***He tells you that he came to fulfill the Bible's deeper purpose and if you want to follow him you must live biblically by embracing the Bible's deeper purpose for you.***

In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus gives us the truth about living Biblically. There are three elements to it. The first is that to live biblically....

I. YOU HAVE TO TAKE THE BIBLE AS SERIOUSLY AS JESUS.

Look at **verse 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.*

A. We should take the whole Bible seriously because Jesus does.

The phrase, *"the law and the prophets"* in **verse 17** means the whole Bible. In our English Bible, the word *law* is the translation for the Hebrew word *Torah*, which means instruction. The whole bible even in the songs and stories is Torah, instruction for life. In **John 10**, there is a place where Jesus is in a debate, and he says to the Jewish leaders, *"is it not written in your law?"* Then he quotes **Psalm 82**, which is a song, a psalm, it's poetry, but Jesus says it is part of the law the instruction of the Lord. Jesus is talking here about the whole Bible.

Look at **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 (the whole Bible) until all is accomplished.* The “iota” and “dot” refer to the littlest parts. We’ve said before a dictionary can be true if it is accurate. Jesus says something more. He says every bit of the Bible *will be accomplished*. He is saying because it is true its wisdom and warnings will be proved true and right. Its story will be completed and its promises fulfilled.

We should take the whole Bible seriously, and here's why...

B. We should recognize the supernatural nature of the Bible as the revelation of God because Jesus does.

Jesus often tells us that the Bible is God’s Word. When Jesus was tempted, he said this about the Bible, *“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* (**Matthew 4:4**). Jesus repeatedly calls the Bible as Word of God. He does something interesting here in the Sermon on the Mount. He says *heaven and earth* will pass away before the Scriptures go unfulfilled. Heaven and earth mean the whole natural world. When he says, the truths in the Bible are more enduring than the natural world; he is saying it is a supernatural book: God’s supernaturally revealed word.

This is the starting point for living Biblically, and it is beautiful. There have been multiple online articles about the conflicting advice during this coronavirus pandemic. Who’s word do I trust? Whose authority do I acknowledge? We wish we had a source of absolutely trustworthy and authoritative guidance. Well, we don’t have that with all the specific questions about the coronavirus and how to respond to it. But the thing is *we do* have trustworthy guidance about what matters most in all of life. Jesus affirms that the Bible is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. The question is, how seriously do you take it? Is it guiding your life today? Do you see it for the gift it is?

Here’s an interesting observation: Scholars point out that the whole *Sermon on the Mount* comes from a time when people did not own their own Bibles but were committed to memorization. And it is structured in a way that invites memorization. Think of the beatitudes for instance. One scholar commenting on the Sermon on the Mount writes, that the whole sermon is designed as a *“memorable meditation device.”* A *“memorable meditation device!”* If you want to live Biblically, here's an excellent place to start. Take it seriously and

commit it to memory. Start maybe with the beatitudes and build on that.

This is the starting point for living biblically: You have to take the Bible as seriously as Jesus. Secondly

II. YOU HAVE TO SEE THAT THE BIBLE IS FULFILLED BY JESUS

Look at **verse 17** again. If Jesus said, I have not come to abolish the law, but to confirm it, that would mean he is just going to reinforce it. To fulfill it means he will bring change, but the nature of the change will not be rejection or repudiation but fulfillment and completion.

Jesus brought to completion and fulfillment what was called the Old Covenant. This was the covenant God made with his people through Moses when he delivered them from Egypt and formed them into a new nation. The Old Testament law included detailed instruction on a lot of things. **Deuteronomy 23:13** says a soldier needs to carry a trowel with him on the march so he can dig a private latrine outside the camp. Why is it that Almighty God would speak from heaven to give toilet training to soldiers? What if we saw that, not as God being controlling, but as God being loving. God was making a holy nation out of a people who were ignorant and even savage in many ways. God, who created the heavens, is willing to stoop to teach his people whatever they need to know. The Mosaic Covenant gave detailed instructions on what to eat and not eat, who could be a priest, how to offer sacrifice, and many other things. But the prophets, remember Jesus talked about the whole Bible as the law and the prophets, they predicted the day when the Old Covenant would be fulfilled, and God would make a New Covenant with his people.

When Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper, he said he was inaugurating the New Covenant. This is what the author of the book *A Year of Living Biblically* totally misunderstood. The laws given under Moses were for a particular people, time, and place to prepare for the coming of Christ. Once the purpose of those laws was fulfilled in Christ, the only way to honor them was to recognize their fulfillment in Jesus.

This is not repudiation but fulfillment. The bud grows into a flower and finds its fulfillment. The artist's underlying sketch finds completion and fulness in the finished painting. The young girl grows up into womanhood and becomes a mother. The life-enriching experiences of childhood mature and shape the woman and the mother she becomes. Jesus wants us to understand that he isn't retracting the earlier

teachings. The principles and wisdom revealed in them are still true but he brings the old to fulfillment by honoring its true purpose.

All the ancient promises of a Savior and a king who would come to save us were about Jesus. Every hero points to the ultimate hero. Every surprising reversal, all the stories, where it seems hopeless but darkness turns to light and goodness wins over evil, pointed to the cross and the resurrection. Every revelation that emerges in some story about human nature that requires grace, every revelation about God's nature that gives grace, contributes to a stream of stories that converge on Jesus as the true Savior. Every law that established a standard from which we always fall short clarified our need for someone to pay the debt of sin we can not pay. Every ceremony and sacrifice that acknowledged the holiness of God and created a longing for a Savior who would bring a lost humanity back to God pointed to Jesus. Jesus' sacrifice for our sins is the one sacrifice to which all the others pointed. He is the true priest who fulfills the ideal of every human priest. He creates a new nation that transcends physical and ethnic boundaries. It no longer exists as a civil government or state with a detailed legal structure. There is a New Covenant and a new normal in relationship to God and it is all centered on Jesus.

If you want to live biblically, you have to be about Jesus. You can't just be about getting lessons, principles and wisdom from the Bible. You have to be about the Bible's focus, which *is* Jesus. As we put it in the little book, *A Very Different Life*, you have to live life *with* Christ, find life *in* Christ, live life *for* Christ, and then live life *like* Christ. The question to ask about every issue is how does Jesus and his grace teach and empower me to live here and now. What would Jesus have me do in this trial or with this responsibility, in my marriage and in my challenges? How can I find strength in him and know and follow him?

So 1st) We have to take the Bible seriously like Jesus, and then 2nd) We have to see the Bible is fulfilled in Jesus. He's the center of the story. `All of this leads to the third truth about living biblically.

III. YOU HAVE TO LIVE THE BIBLE IN LIGHT OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF JESUS.

Verses 19-20, *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. These statements would have forced the listeners to think deeply about what Jesus meant. Here's why, what he seems to be describing in **verse 19** is exactly what the Pharisees were famous for. They were known for scrupulous, meticulous, attention to the details of *all* the commandments. They checked every box. How do you get a righteousness that exceeds that? The answer is you do not exceed that by trying to do the same thing but just doing it slightly better. The beatitudes already dispelled that idea by focusing on the inner person and not merely outward actions. No! What Jesus was saying was that to enter the kingdom of heaven, you need a different and better kind of righteousness.

There are two aspects to this. First...

A. You need the gift of righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus.

The Bible says there is a righteousness that exceeds that of the most careful religious rule-keepers. It isn't based on your In **Philippians 3** Paul talks about how he himself had been a blameless Pharisee, but then he says an amazing thing. He says this, **Philippians 3:7-8**. *But, whatever gain I had, (He means here all the good things that I had done that I could claim as my righteousness) I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss (He became poor in spirit) because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.* There is a place in the Old Testament (**Isaiah 64:6**) that says *all our righteousness is like filthy rags, like a polluted and soiled garment.* If we take the Bible seriously like Jesus, you have to take that seriously. Paul came to see that, and that's why he counted his righteousness to be rubbish.

In **Philippians 3:9** Paul continues and says *I want to gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.* When you turn to Christ in poverty of spirit, trusting in him as the one who lived a righteous life for you and died to pay for your sins and rose again to be your Savior, God declares you righteous for Jesus' sake. You are placed in Christ in God's eyes, God looks on you and sees, not the filthy rags of your flawed life, but the flawless righteousness of Jesus and you in him. There is freedom and power in that! *Through faith in the gospel, Jesus clothes us in his righteousness. He does this, not so*

that you can be dismissive of your own pursuit of righteous living but so that you can be empowered for it by grace and love.

B. You need the deeper righteousness that comes from following Jesus.

As those who have received God's gift of righteousness in Christ we can begin to reflect the deeper righteousness of Christ. The full understanding of what Jesus means is going to get clearer as we go deeper into the Sermon on the Mount. He gives us six examples. Each one begins with the phrase, *you have heard.... but I say to you.* He is going to use that formula to talk about 1.) anger, 2.) adultery, 3.) divorce, 4.) oaths or vows, 5.) retaliation or fighting, and 6.) loving. In every case he says, I am not calling for a more relaxed view of God's commands but a more profound view of what God desires. At the end he says, *be therefore be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

The first use of the word *righteous* in Matthew is in **Matthew 1:18**. It says, when Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant, and knew he was not the father, Joseph, being a *righteous* man did not want to put her to shame and so he resolved to put her away quietly. The idea is he had a legal right to make an issue of it. But he was righteous, meaning he cared for doing the right thing. He cared for her. He didn't ask what do I have to do now, but what is the best thing that I can do? What question do you ask in the issues of life? In marriage and friendship, in the places you work and the places where you are tested? Do you ask, like the Pharisees, *"What box do I have to check off to feel good about myself and okay about what I'm doing?"* Or do you look at the grace God gives the poor in spirit and say, *I want to be salt and light in this world for him. I want to hunger and thirst for righteousness, I want to be perfect like the Father in heaven is beautifully good.* You know you will never perfectly attain that, but are you willing to thirst for it and aspire to pursue it for him? If so that is a righteousness that is different then and deeper then the Pharisees.

Conclusion

Look at the love of God revealed in the gospel that gives you a gift of righteousness you could never hope to earn or deserve. In poverty of Spirit, receive God's love through faith in Jesus and then live *all in* for him. The truth about living biblically is that you can not just approach the Bible legalistically. You have to take it seriously like Jesus, you have to see it fulfilled in Jesus, and you have to live it in light of the righteousness of Jesus.

Amen