

The Power and Authority of the Word 2-15-04

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. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, 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. ¹⁹Anyone who breaks 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 practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For 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.
Matthew 5:17-20 (NIV)

We have just finished looking at the Beatitudes. We looked at Jesus' perspective of the truly blessed life, the life that lives before the face of God. His view is very different from the way the world in general sees things. People who see the world with this perspective become the salt and light of the world. I've tried to emphasize the fact that we are not just looking at one great man's opinion, but the very perspective of God, our Creator.

The Law that Jesus is referring to is the first five books of the Bible; and the Prophets are the writings of the Prophets of Israel. The Law was given to Moses by God. The history, up to the days of Moses, was carefully passed down oral tradition. Some of the Law was given directly by God to Moses. The rest was a historical account of the Children of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and entrance into the Promised Land. The Prophets wrote over a period of about 1000 years. They predicted events that were eminent at that time, and also distant future events, some of which are yet to come to pass.

It seems that Jesus' view of what the Law and Prophets said was so different from the religious authorities' view that people thought He was ignoring their sacred Scriptures. (John 8:5) In our passage for today, Jesus set them straight. He said He had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, which is what He was accused of, but to fulfill them. They had never considered such a thing, because they did not have the Author's perspective. Think for a moment of the depth of what He was saying. If He was there to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, then He was what the Law and the Prophets were all about. We find this to be exactly what Jesus taught when He rose from the dead. On the road to Emmaus, He showed the two downcast men that He was the main subject from Genesis to Malachi. (Luke 24:27) Jesus is the subject of the whole Bible. When you read your Old Testament, look for Jesus. It's all about Him. Actually, everything is about Him. (Colossians 1:16) (See classes on Jesus in the Old Testament)

How did Jesus fulfill the Law? He is the Tree of Life in the Garden. He took the curse of sin and its wages that was placed on man after the fall. The curse of thorns He bore upon His head. He was the ultimate sacrificial lamb. He's the Ark of safety in the coming flood of God's judgment on the world. He is the King of the people of God, heir of the Throne of David. He is the promised Messiah that the prophets all looked forward to. He is the rock that quenched the thirst of Israel in the wilderness and the

Commented [notes1]: ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"
John 8:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.
Luke 24:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹⁶For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.
Colossians 1:16 (NIV)

rock of Daniel 2. He is the coming Lion of the tribe of Judah who will deal with all that will oppose Him. He will set up an eternal kingdom and rule and reign in righteousness forever. You see, He's not abolishing the Law and the Prophets but fulfilling them.

So, what are we to do with all those health laws about food and ceremonial worship? They were an instructor to bring us to Christ, our real food and drink and our real worship leader. (Galatians 3:24,25) He kept all the Laws that you and I could never keep, and He kept them according to the Spirit in which God gave them. Fulfilling them once and for all, He had them nailed with Him to the cross. He nailed them (lived them perfectly) and then nailed them! (Ephesians 2:14-15a) I don't think it was possible for those in earshot of Jesus' voice to understand the implications of what He was saying. But it is possible for us today, especially with the revelations that were given to the Apostle Paul to help us understand it. The Law and the Prophets were all about Him and are fulfilled in Him. Some estimates put the number of prophecies fulfilled in Jesus' life at around 300. The odds of that are astronomical. There are predictions yet to be fulfilled. Just as He fulfilled hundreds in His first coming, so He will fulfill the remainder when He comes again.

¹⁸I tell you the truth, 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. It will be accomplished in detail. When you read the Old Testament, read it with excitement, because you are reading predictions that have been fulfilled and those that will soon be fulfilled. Not one detail will be left undone. It is easier to dissolve the universe than to keep a tiny part of the Law from coming to pass. That ought to change your excitement level when you read the end-time prophecies. The universe was framed by the words of His mouth. (Psalms 33:6) It is no wonder then that every word is so certain to be fulfilled.

You can't separate Jesus from the words in the Bible! People try to all the time. They think He was a good moral teacher. Wait a minute. If that is all He was then He was a lying deceiver. Right here He is telling us that this book is all about Him and that He believes every bit of it and knows that it will all come to pass in detail. There is no getting around that! Jesus and the Word are inseparable.

Is there a promise in God's word that you have yet to see fulfilled? It will come to pass. If His words made all you see, what could possibly keep Him from fulfilling His promises to you? Do you need the strength to see you through an ordeal? Look to His promises. He says that those who wait on the Lord will find their strength renewed. They will mount up on wings of eagles and soar. (Isaiah 40:29-31) Do you feel as if God has abandoned you? He promises He will never leave you or forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5) Are you growing weary in your Christian walk, wondering if you will ever grow beyond some of the temptations you face? He promises that He will complete the work that He started in you. (Philippians 1:6) He promises that when you see Him, you will be like Him, for you will see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2) Is the pain of life in a fallen world breaking your heart? He promises that one day He will wipe away every tear from your eyes. (Revelation 7:17) Does it seem like trials just keep coming so that you are becoming exhausted? He says to take His yoke upon you and learn of Him for He is meek and humble and you will find rest for your soul. (Matthew 11:29-

Commented [notes4]: ²⁴Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. Galatians 3:24-25 (KJV)

Commented [notes5]: ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ^{15a} by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. Ephesians 2:14-15a (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ⁶By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. Psalms 33:6 (KJV)

Commented [notes7]: ²⁹He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:29-31 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ¹⁷For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Revelation 7:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:29-30 (NIV)

30) You can be sure that what He promises He will perform. It is more certain than everything you observe, for every physical thing exists because of His word.

All of God's creation must obey His command. He did not give the option of rebellion to physical matter. This pulpit can't refuse to be wood or to defy the laws of gravity. It has no choice. He only gave choice to men and some angels. If God says to a mountain "Go!", it's gone. If He says to your body, "Be whole!", it is healed. If your body is not whole, there is a reason that is for your good that He has not given the command. All matter, time, and space exists at His command, is changed by His command, and ceases when He so wills it. (Psalms 33:6) When He speaks a promise, you can count on it. (Jeremiah 1:12)

¹⁹Anyone who breaks 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 practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For 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.

This was a very hard thing for them to hear. They thought the Pharisees were the most disciplined at keeping every detail of the Law. Therefore, they believed that to exceed that righteousness was impossible. The Pharisees did represent man's greatest effort at pleasing God. The problem was that God wasn't after keeping a set of rules. He was after a heart that was fully His. In trying so hard to keep the guidelines God gave them, they missed the whole purpose of the guidelines. Instead of building and ever-deepening relationship with God, they were building an ever-bigger impression with people. "Look at me. See how good I am. I do everything God asks. Aren't I just the most holy person you ever saw?" (Matthew 6:5) It is just as big a temptation today to strive for the respect of men, to desire others praise for your so-called spiritual attainment. It is a seductive evil that plays on our ego. Jesus will address the problem of their motivation in the next chapter, and give them His opinion of their righteousness in chapter 23.

Is Jesus saying that you have to teach and do all these legalistic requirements of the Old Covenant? It would seem that way until He added this part about exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees. They were keeping the rules. The Apostle Paul said that when he was a Pharisee, he was blameless in keeping the Law. (Philippians 3:6) When Jesus said your righteousness had to exceed that of the Pharisees, He was alluding to something to which the Prophets bear witness. "There is no one on that does good, not even one." (Psalms 53:3)

Jesus summed up the spirit of the law and its requirements with the Great Command to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and our neighbor as ourselves. (Mark 12:30-31) They may have been teaching the letter of the law, but the letter without the spirit ends in a misinterpretation. They may have been keeping the letter of the law like the Apostle Paul, but without keeping the spirit behind the Law, they were just performing a drama, acting in a play. It isn't from a heart right with God, nor is it in line with the heart of God.

Commented [notes13]: ⁶By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.
Psalms 33:6 (KJV)

Commented [notes14]: ¹²The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."
Jeremiah 1:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ⁵"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.
Matthew 6:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ⁶Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.
Philippians 3:6 (KJV)

Commented [notes17]: ³Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.
Psalms 53:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.
³¹The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'
There is no commandment greater than these."
Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)

God is the standard, and that standard is unattainable by man, that is, any man but Jesus of Nazareth. To put ourselves in their frame of mind, we might hear His words in this way, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of Billy Graham, you will never get to heaven." Does that hit home a little more? Now do you realize how they may have felt?

Your righteousness will never be up to par with his, let alone exceed it! I hope the truth of this affects you like it did them. It made them desperate to hear a solution to their impossible dilemma. Are you desperate to hear the solution? We find it in the Law and the Prophets, the very words Jesus just declared He was fulfilling before their eyes. In the Law of Moses it is written, ⁸*Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.* Leviticus 20:8 (NIV) Keep God's commands and practice them. Why? Because He's the boss? Because they get you into heaven? NO! I am the LORD – that is the Eternal God who, in the Hebrew tense says, is making you holy.

Do you get the impact of that? It doesn't say to keep the Law to be holy. That seemed to be the way Israel read it. It is telling us we should do what God instructs, for He is the One who is setting us apart for Himself. He is holy. There is no way that a holy, righteous God as perfect and wonderful as He is, is going to allow something as vile and corrupt as man into His presence. But God loves man. He loves you individually, so what He must do is make you holy. He longs to have you in His presence, so He will make you holy.

It seems strange to me that they didn't get it. This is no obscure verse. It is repeated seven times in Moses' books. It seems like God likes that number. And if they didn't get it in Moses, they could always find it in the Prophets. ⁶*In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.* Jeremiah 23:6 (KJV) Where do we find the righteousness we need to be in the presence of a holy God? We find it in the Lord our righteousness. And this verse is repeated too.

God is the One who makes us holy. The Lord is our righteousness. And if that wasn't clear enough, Isaiah prophesied, ⁵*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* ⁶*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* ¹¹*After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.* Isaiah 53:5-6,11 (NIV)

Isaiah spelled it out. Someone was going to take our punishment in our place so that we could be right with God. The Messiah bore your iniquities. He made you justified with God. It's the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. It's our righteousness in Jesus exceeding that of the Pharisees. It's your righteousness in Jesus exceeding Billy Graham's (except that he too has the righteousness of God in Christ). It is the reason we can confidently know that we are going to be welcomed in heaven, able to stand before a holy God without fear of judgment. People wonder why we are so into Jesus. It's because we realize what He did for us and how much He loves us. It's because we realize that in Him we have the righteousness of God, so that one-day we can stand before God, made holy. This is the main thrust of Jesus' teaching in this passage.

I want to go back now and look at a minor point. In verse 19 Jesus said, "Anyone who breaks 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 practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:19 (NIV)

Remember that the Apostle Paul said that if we are led by the Spirit, we are not under the Law. "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." Romans 7:6 (NIV)

We are to serve the very Spirit that wrote the Law. The laws couldn't deal with every situation in every time and circumstance. The Spirit always tells us what the heart of God is. If we encourage someone to disobey the Spirit of God, we are going to have a lower standing in the kingdom of heaven. If we teach anything other than love of God and neighbor, upon which it all hangs, (Matthew 22:40) we'll be the least in the kingdom. If, however, we teach the love of God and neighbor, obedience to the Spirit of God, we'll be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

That is a shock to some people, but it is a clear teaching of Jesus. Some folks think we can live any way we want, teach anything, with our life or with our words, and expect to be in the highest place in heaven. Scripture clearly teaches that we will not all be the same in heaven. How you live now, what you teach others now, and your obedience to the Spirit of God today affects your standing in eternity. I don't understand that completely, but Scripture declares again and again that truth. (Luke 22:25-27)(1 Corinthians 3:8)(Matthew 16:27) We aren't saved by our works; but how we respond to the Spirit of God after we are saved will certainly affect our eternity. There will be a least and a greatest. Jesus said so. It has to do with how we respond to God's word, the words that framed the universe, the words that Jesus fulfilled. It has to do with His great command to love God with our all and our neighbor as our self. How are you doing? Your entrance into heaven may be secure because Christ fulfilled the Law for you, but what about your place in eternity? Eternity is a long, long time. Don't you think it would be best to obey God's word like the rest of creation does? Even more than that, we have the opportunity to obey willingly, joyfully, and with appreciation for His loving instruction.

Are you letting that Word that will endure forever speak to your heart? Are you valuing it as the eternal word of God? Do you cling to what the Spirit of God speaks to your heart when you hear a sermon, or have a Bible study, or spend time in His presence? Is His word your command, or do you find yourself taking it lightly and letting it slide? It does affect your eternity. It is the Word of the Eternal God. When we don't yield, we do so to our own loss. Let the Word live in you richly by the grace of God! (Colossians 3:15)

Commented [notes19]: ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Matthew 22:40 (KJV)

Commented [notes20]: ²⁵Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.

²⁶But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.

²⁷For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. Luke 22:25-27 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ⁸Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. 1 Corinthians 3:8 (KJV)

Commented [notes22]: ²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. Matthew 16:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Colossians 3:15 (NIV)