

Title: Don't miss the point!
Text: Matthew 5.17-20
Theme: The Bible points us to Christ.
Series: Matthew #22
Prop Stmt: Since Christ is the hero of the Bible, we esteem every detail of the Word!

Read Text:

When discussing the Bible's teaching on a matter it is common to hear one say, "Well, there are different ways to interpret that." As if every view is an option and it is up to the reader to figure out which one suits him best. Just because there are different interpretations does not make them all valid. In these four verses, Jesus is telling us how we are supposed to understand the Bible and it is clear that it is NOT up to you to interpret it however you want. In fact, he points out that the official interpreters missed the entire point of the Bible. Jesus is explaining in these four verses how we are to interpret the Bible and then he gives us six examples to show us what he means. Jesus is saying that everything in the Law and the Prophets (Old Testament) is important. But, it is not important for the reasons that you think. I am going to reveal to you the real reason why the Old Testament is important and this reason will help you see how incredibly important it really is. In fact, the Old Testament is even more important than you have ever realized!

But, this teaching from Christ does more than just help us look back upon the OT with understanding, joy and appreciation. It points forward. This statement helps us understand what life in his kingdom is about. Therefore, the sermon this morning has two points. 1) How does Christ help us to understand the Bible? And 2) How does Christ help us to understand his kingdom? These words of Christ are really critical to helping you pull all of the pieces together. They are really incredible. Let's dig in.

1. **How does Christ help us to understand the Bible?** (17-19)

A. **Christ is the hermeneutic of the OT.** (17)

OK, what on earth does that word mean? Hermeneutic refers to how you view things. You have a grid, a lens, a filter through which you process information. That filter is your interpretation. As followers of Christ, the Bible is our lens by which we view ourselves and our world. But, unless we understand the Word correctly, we will not view ourselves and our world correctly because we will not be using the Word correctly. That is what was going on with the people around Christ. He is going to point out to them the fact that they had missed the point of the Bible. Some of the commands by God were in place to prepare the people for the coming of Christ. Those commands were no longer necessary. They were good commands, but were no longer relevant. That does not mean that he has come to abolish the law. He has come to fulfill it because (don't miss this) Christ is the hermeneutic of the Old Testament. How does Christ fulfill the Law and the Prophets? He shows us how he does that.

a. The Law points to Christ.

Because we are people of the New Covenant that was established by God with us on the basis of the death of his Son, Jesus Christ, it is easy to ignore the Old Covenant. It is easy to assume that we really do not need to spend much time reading or understanding the Old Testament because that was for Israel and we are the church. That is dangerously untrue! Here is why.

Jesus is making a very important statement here and he starts it with a very strong emphasis because he does not want to be misunderstood. He is saying to make no mistake that he has NOT come to abolish or do away with the Law. Put that out of your minds. The Law is good. It is the same thing that Paul says later on in Romans. The Law is good. The Law is helpful and needful. But, the Law, itself, is incomplete. But that was the purpose of the Law. The Law was designed to help people understand that they had a need that they could not fix. But, what did people do with the Law? They missed the point of it! There were so many different interpretations of the Law revealed in the different rabbinical schools. And along comes Jesus and says, you guys have missed the point. I AM the POINT!! I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill fill the Law.

As far as the standard of the law itself, Christ is the only one who has ever kept the law. In that sense he fulfills the law. As far as its purpose, the law reveals that we cannot keep it and that we need a Savior. The law therefore points to our need of a Savior and in the life of Christ we see the only one who could keep the law and therefore rescue us from our sin. The law includes all of the sacrifices for sin, that demonstrated how serious and costly and all-consuming of an issue sin really is. Christ came to bring all of those sacrifices to their destination point when He offered himself as the final sacrifice.

b. The Prophets point to Christ.

Christ distinguished between the Law and the Prophets because the Law was a reference to the Torah (Pentateuch), the first five books of the Old Testament. The Prophets referred to the rest of the Old Testament. By the way, this statement made it clear that Christ viewed the entire Old Testament as the Scriptures. He is also making it clear that when the prophets wrote, they were writing the story of Christ. Christ was the one who was going to make all of the promises of the prophets come true. And now, here he was, on the scene and sitting on this mountain with a group of people around him and he is saying that the Old Testament is all about me. I am here. I am here to fulfill them.

Have you ever seen those banners that beauty queens were identifying their title? Miss Michigan, or Miss America? I wanted to buy my one daughter one of those that said, "Miss Understood" because she was constantly saying, "Dad, you don't understand what I am trying to say." And I was saying – "No, I understand perfectly what you are trying to say, but you just don't want to listen to what I am telling you."

Well, in this case, everyone had misunderstood the Old Testament and Jesus was telling his audience that they had misunderstood it. He knew that this was going to jack them up.

So, he was assuring them that he did not come to destroy it, but he came to carry out its intended purpose. **HE WAS THE REASON FOR THE ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT!** That is a bodacious statement, unless it is true.

Luke (chapter 4) tells us about a time that Jesus was in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. As was his custom, on the Sabbath, Jesus read the Word in the synagogue. He read from the book of Isaiah a text about the Messiah, and he handed the scroll back to the attendant and then told the people, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” They wanted to kill him! But it’s true. The Bible is all about him. This means two things. 1)

B. Every single word matters. (18)

Every single word of the Bible matters because it originated with God. But, there is even more to it than that, though that it is enough. Every single word matters because God designed everything to point to Christ. It is all about Christ. The Word was given to exalt Christ. To discredit, deny, demean, any single aspect of God’s Word is ultimately demeaning and discrediting Christ.

a. Christ is affirming the doctrine of inerrancy.

What do I mean by the doctrine of inerrancy. I mean that every single word that the writers of the Bible originally recorded were directed by God with such exact precision that these men wrote down every single thing that God wanted them to write down and that every single thing that they wrote down was without error. It was and is completely true.

Christ had a high view of the Scriptures. He believed that every word of the Scripture “*came from the mouth of God.*” He believed that “*your word is truth.*” (Jn. 17.17) Jesus said that until heaven and earth pass away, that neither an iota (the smallest letter in the Greek language that refers to the smallest letter [yod] in the Hebrew language nor a dot will pass away. That word “dot” refers to the small stroke of a pen that distinguishes the Hebrew letter for “b” from the Hebrew letter for “k”. Jesus is saying that every letter that God directed to be recorded is going to be fulfilled. And Christ said that the Law and the Prophets (Old Testament) were given by God, established by God and are to be viewed and accepted as such.

It is critical that we regularly affirm this truth and other truths that form our statement of faith. A local church recently revised their doctrinal statement on the Bible because some in the leadership no longer believe in the historicity of Genesis 1-11. They believe that it is possible that Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark, the Tower of Babel, were simply legends that the early writer of Genesis adopted from the culture and gave his own spin on them so that they helped make the point that Israel’s God was better than the other gods. This view is ultimately devastating to the gospel. People will say that where the Bible speaks about matters of faith and theology it is true, but where it speaks about matters of science and history that it...well...it ought to be taken with a grain of salt. If

you deny the doctrine of inerrancy, you will not necessarily be a heretic, but your children will be and your grandchildren will be atheists. In this single statement, Jesus is affirming, the literal historicity of the creation of the world by the word of God, Adam and Eve, as the two original and literal persons, Noah and the Ark and a worldwide flood, and the Tower of Babel.

By the way, we (the elders) are having every Sunday Morning Adult Bible Class go through a series of studies over the next 10 years, part of which is Bible Doctrines. We want every member of our church family to understand these issues, not only for godliness in your own life, but to protect the doctrinal integrity of this congregation. We are one generation away from losing the gospel if we do not protect it. We protect it, by maintaining a high view of the Scriptures in our belief and by preaching and teaching the Word when we gather together.

Our doctrinal statement: *We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as verbally inspired of God, and inerrant in the original writings, and that they are the supreme and final authority in faith and life.* (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; Acts 17:11; and Isaiah 8:20)

b. Christ is affirming the truthfulness of every word.

Christ preached the Bible, taught the Bible, obeyed the Bible, memorized the Bible and quoted the Bible because he believed every word of the Bible. This is consistent with what he said earlier to Satan. “*Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*” (Matthew 4.4) Christ is affirming the truth because truth is powerful. God’s Word does not need our help. We do not need to add entertainment or other things in order to try to enhance it. Anything that is added to the Scriptures will only take away from them. When we fear that this is not enough, it is only because we do not believe in the integrity and the power of God’s Word like Jesus does.

Last summer I preached to a group of a couple of hundred college students in a church on the campus of U of M. What am I going to say to these students who are smart, sophisticated and have obviously already achieved some academic significance by being accepted in this school? How am I going to keep their attention when they have been raised on video games, instant gratification of technology and the unlimited options of the Internet? Seriously, I am reading from a book that has no pictures, parts of which were written 4,000 years ago. Do you think they will listen to anything that I have to say? For 50 minutes I preached on prayer from the book of Isaiah. No videos, no pictures, no dramas, just the Word. This summer I was asked to come back. But, before I got up to speak, a girl got up and gave a testimony about a very personal sin that she had struggled with for over 10 years. In her story she related how last summer she was listening to this sermon on prayer from some guy, (she didn’t know who he was) and how something that I said was used by God to literally change her life. I preached for another 50 minutes from the book of Exodus on “Who is the LORD?” I preached theology for 50 minutes. I preached doctrine for 50 minutes to college students who listened intensely and at the end when it all back to Christ, and we saw again that he is the goal of it all, we were all

impacted. Student after student spoke of the power of the Word in their lives that night. Christians will starve if the preachers do not simply preach the Word and replace that with topical series as the steady diet for the congregation. We do not preach the Word because we do not trust its power. The truth is, everything else that we do to enhance it, or make it relevant only waters it down. Jesus knew the power of the Word. Jesus believed in the power of the Word. And in this statement he is affirming the truthfulness of every word. Everything else is inferior.

C. Every commandment is important and must be understood and applied as it relates to Christ. (19)

Note the word “Therefore.” Everything that Jesus says in this verse, has to be understood in light of what he has just said. The word “therefore” connects them. In other words every commandment that is given in the Old Testament IS important. We are to treasure the entire Bible, including the Old Testament. But, we must understand these commandments and apply them as they relate to Christ. Some of the commandments are no longer in place because their purpose has been fulfilled. They were put into place to prepare people for Christ – and He came. Some of the commands, like the dietary laws, and the clothing laws, and the farming laws, and even some of the Sabbath laws were given to teach the people about the foundational concept of recognizing that they are different than the world. God was not primarily concerned that they did not make garments with two different types of cloth as much as he was concerned that they understood that they were his people who were to see themselves as being different than this world. All of this was in preparation for when his people would not be in one nation, but would be one people in many nations all over the world. We are distinct. We are not distinct in nationality or ethnicity. We are distinct in belief. We are distinct in holiness. We are distinct in values. We are distinct in mercy, grace, truth, love, hospitality, generosity, hope, in faithfulness, in integrity and morality. This is how the apostles understood and applied these Old Testament laws to the church, so do we.

This statement corrects a few things. 1) Scribes and teachers of the law (then) divided up the law into two sections. There were the “light” commands and the “weighty” commands. The “light” were the “not-so-serious” ones like tithing on the vegetables from your garden, while the “weighty” were the “biggies” like murder and idolatry. Jesus is saying that they are all important and that you dare not teach that some are able to be ignored.

Look again at v.19. Is Jesus teaching that there will be various levels of honor in his kingdom? Some will be called “least” and some will be called “great”. Looks like it to me. On what basis are some called “least” and some called “great?” It is based on how accurately you lived and taught the Bible to others. If you blew off some of God’s commands because you reasoned them away, or you justified your disobedience of them in such fashion as well as taught others to do the same, recognize that Jesus is telling you that this is a serious matter. The way that we handle the Scriptures is very important. That is why we have to be careful that we interpret the Bible the way we are supposed to.

Jesus is saying that we have to read the Bible through the lens of Christ. The Bible is all about Christ. We have to see the purpose and the place of the Law and the Prophets to point to and reveal Christ. If we do not interpret the Old Testament that way, then we are missing the point. This is how Jesus interpreted the Old Testament. This is how he taught us to interpret the OT. It is all about him.

Luke 24.27; Luke 24.44-47. Now, the disciples understand the purpose and the theme of the entire OT. Christ is the hero. Christ is the point. This is how we must interpret them and we have to understand the commands and exhortations of the New Testament in view of Christ as well. This means that those who want to ignore the OT are wrong, just as much as those who try to enforce all of the laws of the OT now are wrong.

“Every Old Testament text must be viewed in light of Jesus’ person and ministry and the changes introduced by the new covenant he inaugurated.”¹

What follows are six examples of how we are supposed to understand the Old Testament and live in view of it today. The result is that we see is that instead of demeaning the law, Christ elevates the Old Testament because he is making it clear that the Law and the Prophets have a much deeper significance than anyone ever imagined. There is so much more going on in the Bible than what these people realized. If they could miss the entire point of the OT, so can we. We have to see the entire Bible as being about Christ.

2. How does Christ help us to understand his kingdom? (20)

A. **You have a problem that you cannot fix.**

Jesus is saying that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven that your righteousness has to exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. Did you hear that? Jesus is saying that even the Scribes and the Pharisees are in deep weeds. Now, I need to point something out that is critical for us. Jesus is saying that the Scribes and the Pharisees are wrong. He is publicly identifying their beliefs and their practices as being wrong and destructive. If Jesus were here on earth today, he would be called a “hater” and would be accused of being judgmental because he is clearly calling them out. But why is he publicly labeling them as sinners? Why is he saying that their beliefs are wrong? Because their beliefs ARE wrong and because they are wrong, they are polluting people’s minds against the message of grace. We have this notion in Christianity that we should never say anything negative about anyone else, or any other religion, or any other lifestyle. We should simply be positive. After all there is too much negativity in the world anyway. If you are negative, people will not like you, they will not come back to your church and you will lose your opportunity to tell them the gospel. So, don’t be negative. Don’t be a hater. Always be nice because after all, Jesus was nice. The result of this is that the church has completely lost her edge because she has lost her voice. Christianity in this country is on the verge of becoming irrelevant because in her quest to be relevant and hip, she refused to give the whole truth. I believe that the church will basically be silent

¹ Craig Blomberg, NAC, Matthew, p. 104.

about the issue of homosexuality. While most churches are not comfortable with it, they do not want to be viewed as being negative or haters, so they will choose silence. Being silent will fit with their agenda of being positive and open to all. It is also a fundamental betrayal of Christ and the gospel. You cannot understand what you are saved to, if you do not repent of what you are saved from. Without understanding both edges of the sword, (the negative and the positive) you have an incomplete message. Jesus gave a complete message. He publicly warned about sin and called out sinners. He taught his followers to do the same because sinful thinking and behavior will erode the message of grace. If we do not protect the integrity of the message of the gospel, then when we reach people, we will have nothing to say to them. We have to warn people about their sin, because their sin will betray them. We would be “haters” if we didn’t. It is like the parent who refuses to punish his child because he “loves” his child too much to spank him. Proverbs says that you don’t love your child, you hate your child. The problem is, you love yourself too much. We love ourselves too much and hate others when we refuse to tell people what they need to hear, even if they do not want to hear it. The Scribes and the Pharisees needed to hear this. The disciples needed to hear this. The crowds needed to hear this. The “works-righteousness” of the Scribes and the Pharisees was a complete and utter failure that was simply a factory that produced pride, bitterness, hostility and hypocrisy. Jesus was threatening to dismantle the factory, which is why they eventually crucified him.

But, the point remains. The Scribes and Pharisees were not good enough. And if they are not good enough then, we are all in trouble. In fact, no one can out-righteous a Pharisee. These guys are off the charts in the rules that they keep. But that is the issue. Christianity is fundamentally NOT about keeping rules. Keeping the rules will never earn you the favor of God. You need a righteousness that does not come from keeping rules.

If the disciples were listening to Jesus at this point, he just blew them clear out of the water. This was so radically different than what they were raised with. This is so radically different than what some of you were raised with. God demands of you a righteousness that you do not have and that you cannot generate. Do you realize that?

This is such an important issue that Jesus gives six examples of what he means. The point in all of this is to learn that...

B. Only Christ can provide the righteousness needed.

The fact that our sin is even worse than we thought is not the entire story. Yes, our sin is worse than we thought, but his grace is far greater than we thought too. We are big sinners, but Jesus is a bigger Savior than we are sinners. As far as salvation is concerned, Christ is the only source of absolute righteousness. As far as ethics are concerned, Christ is the foundation for all ethical truths. There is no morality without Christ.

C. Only Christ enables you to live as you are called.

Christ who saves you also enables you. The Law that condemned you, that showed you your need of a Savior, is now a desire. It is not your taskmaster. It is not your demand; it is your delight.