

Foundations: OUR GUIDE
Matthew 5:17-20 (AFBC 2/12/17)

Last Sunday, we began a study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We're doing this as part of our Foundations series. Last fall, we looked at the Ten Commandments as being foundational to our faith and lifestyle. Now we turn to the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew, and the foundational teachings of our Lord.

Most of us have given some thought to the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. Maybe we have questions about how the laws we find in the Old Covenant are affected by the concept of grace that we find in the Christian Gospel.

Some Christians are quick to say that the old laws don't apply to us, because Jesus Christ set us free from the law. Others, however, not only insist that they still apply, but try to enforce them in the same ways the Hebrews did under the old covenant.

So we still struggle a bit with this, but try to put yourself in the place of those who first heard Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. When these teachings of Jesus were brand new, I promise you those who heard them had lots of questions.

They didn't have the New Testament, but they did have this new teacher; and some of them had deep concerns about Jesus' message and how it related to what they had been taught before.

Not everything they had learned had come from the Scriptures, though—from what we call the Old Testament. They also had lots of tradition that had grown up around God's laws—interpretations by the Scribes and Pharisees which, as the new Teacher would point out, were not always in line with what God intended.

All these things were troubling them when Jesus sat on a hillside and began to preach. The Beatitudes were the first surprise. They didn't sound like anything they'd been taught before.

Some on the mountainside that day had begun to think that Jesus might be the Messiah; but what He was saying sounded nothing at all like the leader they had been told to expect. To be sure, He was no revolutionary—not in a political sense (as they expected). He even encouraged them to be peacemakers, of all things!

On the other hand, they did notice that Jesus had a bit of a rebellious streak. He didn't always keep the rules. He would heal people on the Sabbath—there was a law against that. And if he was hungry, he would pick grain, even on that holy Sabbath Day.

Also, Jesus would talk to folks that all the “really good people” regarded as unclean and off limits. That was simply unacceptable to those who made it their purpose in life to keep the letter of the law and to criticize and condemn anyone who didn't.

Considering this, there was probably nothing in this entire sermon that surprised people any more than what Jesus said in our text for today—and this may be true for us as well. So I invite you to listen now to Jesus' words in **Matthew 5:17-20**:

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 I 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. 19 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. 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.

There is so much here in these verses that we must try to understand if we're to get the connection between the Old Testament and New, between the Law and the Prophets and the teachings and ministry of Jesus. So what are we to make of this?

1. First, **Jesus affirmed the Scriptures as “Our Guide.”** Our theme for this series of messages is “FOUNDATIONS.” In keeping with our theme, I invite you to think about the Bible as God's Guidebook for us. Through this teaching, Jesus puts His stamp of approval on the Scriptures as foundational to our faith.

“I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” He says; and then He adds, **“...not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” (Matt. 5:17b-18)**

Let's begin, then, by acknowledging the deep respect and appreciation that Jesus had for the writings that the faithful in that day referred to as "the Law and the Prophets."

When He was only twelve, he amazed the scholars in the Temple with His knowledge of the Scriptures. Jesus knew "the law and the prophets" well, and He affirmed their trustworthiness.

As Christians, and especially as Baptist Christians, we love the Bible, respect the Bible, and seek to teach and preach its truths. Some have accused us of worshipping the Bible. We don't, although I understand why people might get that impression.

We do make it our aim to know and understand what the Bible says because we believe it to be God's word for our lives. This church affirms the Baptist Faith and Message statement about the Scriptures adopted in 1963. Look at what it says:

"The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. It reveals the principles by which God judges us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ."

Ex 24:4; De 4:1-2; 17:19; Jos 8:34; Psa 19:7-10; 119:11, 89, 105, 140; Isa 34:16; 40:8; Jer 15:16; 36:1-32; Mat 5:17-18; 22:29; Lu 21:33; 24:44-46; Joh 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Ac 2:16; 17:11; Rom 15:4; 16:25-26; 2Ti 3:15-17; Heb 1:1-2; 4:12; 1Pe 1:25; 2Pe 1:19-21

Do you see all those Bible references after the statement? In Baptist life, those are more important than the explanation which precedes them. Holy Scripture is always more important than anything you or I may write or say about it. And among those 29 Biblical references is the passage that we have before us today--where Jesus Himself affirms the Scriptures.

We can't really claim that we are followers of Jesus if we don't accept the Old Testament--Jesus didn't give us that option—not if we are true to His teachings. And what Jesus says here is consistent with what we see elsewhere in Scripture. **II Timothy 3:16**, for example: **"All Scripture is God-breathed and is**

useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

So we teach, preach, and train each other in God’s word; and when necessary, we use it to correct and rebuke one another as well. You may have a textbook from a class you took in school that you have held on to for years in order to refer back to it when needed. Well, that’s the Bible’s role in our spiritual lives. We need its wisdom and guidance daily. It is a trustworthy guide.

When you go to Bible Study this morning, know that you are directly descended from folks who were willing to suffer and die when necessary in order to be true to the teachings of this Book.

They insisted that it was not what the King said that mattered most, but what the Bible says; not what the Pope, or President, or denomination, or preacher says, but always first and foremost what the Bible says. God may use any number of people to help us understand it, but ultimately it’s our responsibility to apply its truths to our lives and to the decisions we make.

Baptists got their start when a group of devout believers finally had access to the Bible in their own language. They began studying the Book for themselves.

We baptize only believers today because they discovered that when the Bible speaks of someone being baptized, it’s only after they have professed faith in Christ.

We baptize by immersion because they later discovered that to be the true meaning of the Greek word “baptizo”—“to plunge beneath.”

And when Paul described baptism to the Christians in Rome, he likened it to being dead, buried, and raised to new life. It’s not that we believe that baptism by whatever mode saves us. It just seems right to us to baptize the way Scripture teaches.

Again, we’re simply trying to be true to the Bible—including what it tells us about Jesus. Remember that last line in the Baptist Faith and Message that says, **“The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.”**

A few years back, some of the brethren chose to “monkey around” with that statement. They removed that sentence about Jesus,

expecting the rest of us to just go along in “monkey see, monkey do” fashion. We didn’t—some of us didn’t--and here’s why:

2. The Scriptures affirm Jesus as Lord. God’s word teaches us that Jesus Christ is Lord over all creation, Lord over the lives of all those who put their faith in Him, and He is Lord over the Bible.

If something we find in the Bible seems to be in conflict with what Jesus said, then Jesus always takes priority. The Bible is true and trustworthy, but Jesus is “The Way, the Truth, and the Life.” Christ is “Lord of all.”

Next Sunday, we’ll learn more about this as Jesus says over and over, “You have heard it said,” followed by a quote from the Old Testament; but then He adds, “...but I say unto you...” putting a new spin on the old message.

The scribes and Pharisees were right about this: what Jesus said was blasphemous...unless...Jesus is Lord over even the Bible.

This is precisely what Jesus was announcing when He said:
“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.”

The Pharisees had grown very comfortable in a religion that had been reduced to “following a list of rules.” They were convinced that this made them real good people—sort of like the fellow who felt so proud of himself when he boasted, “I don’t cuss, I don’t chew, and I don’t kiss...girls who do.” Just follow the rules!

Jesus insisted that a right relationship with God is about far more than just keeping a set of rules. He didn’t discount the importance of God’s Laws--the Ten Commandments and so many others found in Scripture.

Jesus didn’t ignore them, break them, or in any way tear down what God had built up over a period of centuries. He came, instead, to FULFILL these laws—to finish the job; to bring what God was doing to its intended completion.

Think of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount as a mighty Oak Tree. Those Old Testament laws, then, were like the acorn God planted so that expansive tree could eventually grow. God’s ultimate intention was the oak tree, but the acorn was necessary to the process.

Or compare the teachings and the saving work of Jesus Christ to higher education. No amount of college and graduate school eliminates the need for elementary, middle, and high school—right? If we're in college, we shouldn't need to return to sixth grade, but we should also remember what we learned back then!

Both the mighty oak tree and the completed subject matter are the fulfillment of something begun long ago. 'I'm not destroying the Old Testament,' Jesus said, 'I'm fulfilling it--completing it.'

Teachers are familiar with the concept of "the essential question." When they prepare their lessons, they want to make sure they don't miss the essence of what they are attempting to teach.

Well, the Bible is our God-inspired Guidebook for living. And the central question it addresses is this: "**Who is Jesus?**" That's the MOST essential question of all. If we are to experience life in all its fullness, we must get this right. Who is Jesus Christ?

God, through His word, gives us lots of help with the answer. Teachers will often begin a class by telling their students what it is they want them to learn. Next, they teach the lesson.

Finally, they review what they've taught to see if the students got it—if they learned what they were supposed to learn. Let's relate this to the Bible:

1) So much of the Old Testament writings, the Law and the Prophets, point us toward the Messiah, the Savior who is to Come--when God decides the time is right.

2) In the New Testament, the Gospels tell us the story of Jesus, the Christ, the fulfillment of all that God had promised. The laws, the prophecies—they all find their completion in Jesus.

Now, as the Apostle John told us, "**the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth.**" (John 1:14) The lesson is delivered. It's perfectly complete.

3) And then the rest of the New Testament is here to make sure we get it—that we are learning what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, that we know how to live as part of His Body in this world, the Church. We devote our lives to understanding and fulfilling God's plans for us.

Jesus affirms the Bible as our Guide, as God's word for our lives—truthful and trustworthy. And then the Bible, in turn, affirms Jesus as Lord—the fulfillment of God's plan: the only One who can save us from sin and give us eternal life.

The whole Book, God's Book, points us to Jesus, the Savior. He is Lord of the Bible, and Lord of life!

But the crucial question for us is "Who is Jesus in my life? Who is He in yours?" Do we know Him today as our personal Savior? Have we placed our faith in Him as our Lord?

If you haven't, will you do so now? If you've lost your way, He will be "the Way" for you. If you don't know what to believe, He will be your "Truth." And He will be your trustworthy Guide to lead you into Life everlasting.

If Jesus Christ is not all of this for you already, put your trust in Him now. Everything in this Book points us to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Trust Him. Follow Him.