



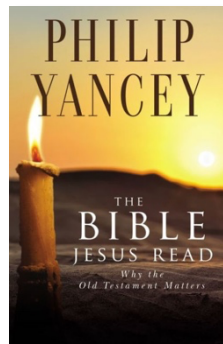
Why did Jesus start with the Law?

Devotional Thoughts for the Week of September 20, 2020
by Ed Green

This is week 3 of our series on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Read through Matthew 5-7 sometime this week and we also invite you to use these reflections to further guide you. This week's sermon and devotional thoughts focus on Matthew 5:17-20.

Day 1: Is It Worth the Work?

Philip Yancey in his book, *The Bible Jesus Read*, asks the question about the Old Testament (OT): "Is it worth the effort?" Most of us, if we're honest, spend a whole lot more time in the New Testament (NT) than the OT. If you look at your Bible, the pages of the NT are probably more worn than those of the OT. Why do you think that is? What are some of the difficulties you face in reading the OT?



There is a lot of talk these days about biblical illiteracy among Christians. That is especially true of the OT. Someone has said that you can't understand the significance of the first verse of the NT (Matthew 1:1) without having some kind of working knowledge of the OT. Reflect today on this question: What would we be lacking if we didn't have the OT? Think of the history (the Story), the stories, the prophecies, the truths about God and his people, etc.

If your knowledge of God's word in the "older testament" is not where you want it to be, what are some steps that you can take to progressively raise your "OT quotient"? If you would like ideas or resources to help overcome some of the difficulties you thought of earlier, and to take those action steps, we would be glad to help you.

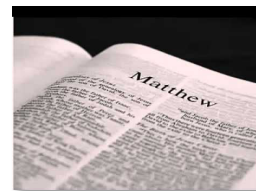
Day 2: Like a Rose Blossom

As William Shakespeare wrote, "...a rose, by any other name, would smell as sweet." In our yard we have several rose bushes. They are a beautiful addition to our landscaping, but it's just not the same when they're not blooming.



Apparently there was a misunderstanding—as Jesus grew in popularity and more people heard his teaching—that he was suggesting that there was no more need for "the Law and the Prophets." That phrase, "the Law and the Prophets," was used to designate the whole of the Jewish Scriptures (our OT), as was the phrase "the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms" in Luke 24:44. Jesus pushes back hard on that charge. In Matthew 5:17 he states that he has not come to do away ("destroy" or "abolish") with them, but to fulfill them.

What does it mean to "fulfill" the Law and the Prophets? Of course, we can think of how Jesus fulfilled many predictive prophecies that are contained in the OT (and Matthew makes a point in his Gospel to call attention to many). But could it be that Jesus was implying more than that? If we read the story of what God was up to through the OT, we discover a forward movement. There is an expectation that begins as early as Genesis 3:15 and runs through the books of history and prophecy, that comes to fruition in the pages of the NT. Jesus makes the claim that he is the fulfillment of that expectation. Just as the rose blossom "fulfills" the rose plant, so Jesus fulfills the OT.



Day 3: Jesus and the Scriptures

Did you grow up going to Sunday School when you were a kid? Many of us did. There were songs, puppets, flannelgraphs (what?!), and lessons from the Bible. And we can still remember them. Luke tells us that when

Jesus was in the Temple at the age of twelve, he was able to converse with religious leaders about the Scriptures, and that they were amazed at his questions and his answers (2:46-47). He had grown up as a part of the community in Nazareth and would have been taught by his

parents, as well as learning what most Jewish boys learned going to synagogue regularly. From early on, he was steeped in the Scriptures.

Last week we read about Jesus' sermon in his home synagogue in Luke 4 and his discernment from the Scriptures about his identity and his mission. Throughout his teaching Jesus demonstrated a knowledge and application of God's word and made it accessible to those who heard him.

At the end of Luke's Gospel Jesus appears to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus following his resurrection. As our friend Brian Pollock says, Jesus shared the best Bible study ever with these disciples as he teaches them, *and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself* (24:27).

The Scriptures played a significant role in Jesus' life. If this is the case, how much more would we, as his followers, do well to follow his example? This is not a "should," but a "why not?" How are you getting God's word into your life?

Day 4: Keeping the Law?

When you were growing up, what were some of the rules that you had to keep in your family? Did they all make sense? How did you do in obeying those rules your parents laid down?

Jesus understood that knowing the Scriptures was not enough. God gave them to us so that they would not only impact what we think, but how we live. Jesus would have known (and had probably memorized) Deuteronomy 10:12-13. *And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?*

Did you catch that? The word of God reveals not only the character of God, but gives us ways in which we grow into that character. The commands we find, both in the OT and the NT, were given to his people for their (our) own good. By loving God, fearing (revering),



trusting, obeying, and serving him, we become the people he desires for us to be. We will discover over and over again, that it's not about "keeping the rules." It's about choosing to live in a particular way that actually has the power to change us and enable us to make the impact in the world that he desires. If you're a parent, you understand that now. If you're not a parent, maybe one day you will. God's word is for our own good.



Day 5: A "Surpassing" Kind of Righteousness

In his day, Jesus had quite a bit to say to and about the religious leaders among the people. Those who were openly religious and pious were often a part of a group called the Pharisees, whose roots go all the way back to the Exile, several hundred years earlier.

They knew the Scriptures front and back, all the laws and the traditions passed down from the fathers. They had a passion for God and for helping others to live right for him. But at some point, many of them got off track. They began to think too much of themselves and their righteousness in keeping the rules. We might say that they became so "heavenly minded to be any earthly good." And Jesus called them on it (see Matthew 23:1-36).

Like them, many of us are "rule-keepers." We live our lives thinking that's what's important, even to God. "If I just do ___ and ___, and check them off my list, then God will be pleased with me." Can you think of some ways you tend to do that?

Jesus called his followers to have a righteousness that exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees. When they heard him, they would have had to pick their jaws up off the ground. They would have struggled to understand what that looked like. You see, he was inviting them to a righteousness that was different, not in degree, but in kind. More than just keeping the rules. Rather, to the pursuit of a life that reflects the very character of their father God. So, the rest of his sermon helps them—and us—see just what that kind of life looks like.