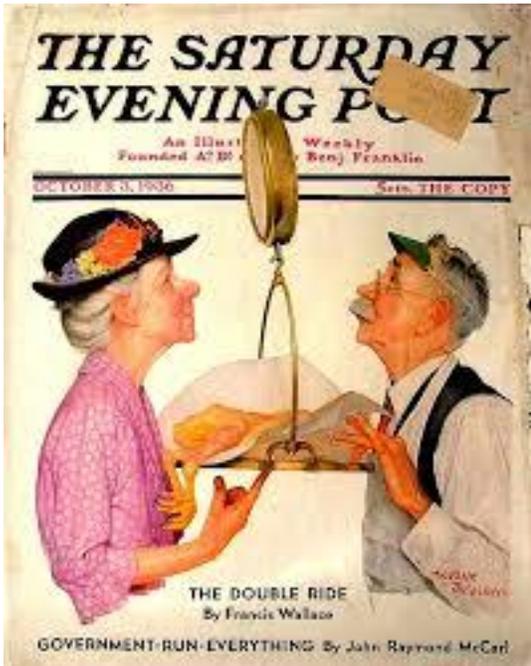


Several years ago, on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post...



Cecil Myers says of that painting, “Both the butcher and the lovely lady would resent being called thieves, but neither saw anything wrong with a little deception that would make a few cents for one or save a few cents for the other.”

Rockwell gives us a picture of how we often seek to live, trying to manipulate life for our own advantage. That’s also how we often view the law: we want just enough of it to protect us from the other criminal, but we are wary of laws that restrict how we have *already decided* we want to live.

### Matthew 5:17-20

**"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 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 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. ESV**

In a study on Kingdom Living, this is a watershed text, at least according to most commentators. When Jesus says, “the law and the prophets,” in its historical context He would have meant the *Torah*, and the *Prophetic Writings*. So we know that Jesus is referring to his perspectives on *all* of God’s revelation - the Hebrew Bible. Because the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, include the 10 Commandments and other laws of God, English translators have translated *Torah* with the word law, but the word Torah literally means “teachings” or “instructions” for moral living.

In this case, Jesus had just taught The Beatitudes, and it was a bit divergent from the status quo. Evidently, some had come and accused him of setting aside Torah for His own ideas. He was being charged with so misinterpreting the Scriptures as to nullify their intent. He affirmed that He wasn’t setting the Law or Torah aside for them or any one, He was in fact “filling them up with meaning,” the actual meaning of the word “fulfill.” How did He do this?

### 1. By his life – satisfied prophecies that predicted the coming Messiah. V17

Showing how Jesus satisfied messianic predictions was Matthew’s purpose for writing chapters 1-4. Jesus came right on time and according to schedule. While he had not yet satisfied the prophecies of his return, in this statement Jesus was expressing that all the Scripture points to Him and that he was honoring the Law as predicted about the Messiah. As the perfect obedient One, he

established the Scriptures and his role as Messiah. But this statement means more than that.

## 2. **He is the ultimate Interpreter of the Scripture.** Vv17-20

This forms a natural segue into 5:21-48. From this point on, He will contrast His teaching with the common understandings of His day. That wasn't to say that everything the unchanging God had said was now null and void. The next segment should not be read as Jesus "antitheses," which does away with or puts him in conflict with His Father's own words in the Torah.

What it does mean is that many of the Torah teachers or Scribes and many Pharisees had so interpreted Scripture that they had lost God's original intention for it. They had put obedience as only an external thing rather than a matter of the heart. **Jesus teaching will stress that Kingdom living is an "inside out" reality.**

No doubt anticipating inevitable criticism, Jesus strongly denies that he is changing the Bible or its use in believer's lives. **Jesus was affirming that the Word of God He had was authoritative and accurate and the ultimate source for all matters of faith and practice! It has remained unchanged since then as well for our guidance and hope!**

We are reminded then that the church does not replace Israel as God's chosen people, and the New Testament does not replace the Old Testament. Jesus interpretation is that those who keep Torah as a means to obtain salvation have only an external righteousness. Obeying the Law or Torah apart from faith cannot grant salvation. Our righteousness must exceed that.

### **The life lessons from this Scripture:**

1. **The Word of God is so much more than rules that restrict, they are guidelines that teach us to be faithful believers.**

We must be people who, because of inward transformation, delight in obedience to the rules of the Kingdom and teach others to do so. The Torah reveals God's heart for morality, no matter how one views its binding nature for the Gentile.

2. **The externals of religion can be good, but basing your faith on externals is not!** That is, if you call yourself a Christian and go to church like a Christian, and dress like a Christian (whatever that is), you are not for those reasons anymore a Christian than to call yourself a John Deere tractor if you were born in a barn. If you hate and reject the rules of the Bible, it's probable that you are not transformed and your righteousness does not exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Just be sure that they are God's rules, not those of the Republican or Democratic Parties, or a given religious culture.
3. **The Word of God is as certain as the air we breathe.** God has spoken all of it and Jesus promised that it will endure. We build our lives on it and let the Spirit shape our hearts through it by His work within us. Until we die, that work must continue. We are to be "learning continually." Don't be afraid of new discoveries of God's Truth or applying it accurately in contemporary contexts. That's what He said right here. Do it and teach others to do it. What does that look like in your world?

Next Study is Thursday, January 31, 2019

Topic is: Anger - Stay Calm and Breathe Deep

