

Jesus on the Old Testament

Jonathan K. Dodson | Matthew 5:17-20 | June 21, 2015

The Beatitudes are profound. They elicit deep responses to God. And Jesus is about to address six different ways we should respond to the Beatitudes. But before he does, he pauses. He pauses to give a critical insight: What we do with the Law & the Prophets, the OT, really matters. It matters for life. It matters for eternity. In a world of fading posts and fleeting sound bites, here are the unshakable truths that order the world. Jesus wants us to see that the Bible has *theological permanence, narrative beauty, personal urgency.*

Authority: Theological Permanence

In 2005, A. J. Jacobs spent an entire year devoted to living the commands of the OT. He wrote a book about his year “living biblically.” He opened the Bible and wrote down as many commands as he could find and tried obey them. He *successfully* wore no clothing with mixed fibers (which meant getting rid of his T-shirts), didn’t cut the corners of his beard, and tried not to lie or covet, which was pretty hard because he’s a journalist in NYC. He also stoned an adulterer...with pebbles. While Jacobs learned some things, and gained a sense of reverence, he concluded what works best is “cafeteria religion,” picking and choosing what you want to believe from the Bible. He was *unsuccessful* in understanding the Bible; he missed the critical principle. Similarly, many Austinites select cafeteria religion, picking and choosing what they like, saying it was written by men and therefore can’t be trusted. If they give the Bible credit, they favor NT saying things like, “I like Jesus but not the God of the OT. My God would never judge or kill.” But do you notice how this is flawed? First, it means that you determine who God is, “my God,” not God determining who you are. Then who’s the God? Second, this is a statement made by men telling men not to believe in man-made statements. It’s circular. On whose authority should we accept and reject certain sections of the Bible? Jesus offers an authority, insisting on the theological permanence of the Scriptures. He doesn’t see it as a fleeting or outmoded. In fact, Jesus has every opportunity to say my teaching is better, throw out that centuries old teaching, but he doesn’t. Instead, he goes out of his way to anticipate this objection: “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*” (17). The Law and the Prophets refer to the two genres of writings that bookend the OT (Law, Historical Writings, Wisdom, Prophets in order of the LXX). He’s using this shorthand to say the whole OT has permanent value (cf. Luke 24:44). How permanent? As permanent as heaven and earth, “*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*” (18). The iota is likely a reference to the tiniest Hebrew lettering, a yod, looks like a suspended upside down comma. The dot is probably a reference to grammatical markings or the curve of a letter. What’s his point? *The OT has permanent value, authority, down to the fraction of a letter.* Jesus uses his authority to recognize the authority of the OT. In fact, this word “truly” is the word, “Amen,” which we use at the end of statement or prayer. It’s a way of saying, “Make it true, Lord.” Jesus puts it at the front to say, “This is true!” without even asking God. By doing this he’s saying his words have power to declare what’s true, who God is, and what to do with the OT—it has theological permanence and cannot be broken (Jn 10:35)., *I Hold the whole Bible in High Regard (And so should you). So if you don’t like the OT, or want to reject*

*portions of it, you have to also reject Me. Not only because I say it has permanence but because I'm the **fulfillment of OT** (and if he isn't, the whole book is a sham, but if he is, it's the true story of the world.)* That's something we can't blow off. Take it or leave it, no in between. Now, there's certainly room to doubt and struggle with this, but do that. Don't make doubt an excuse. Doubt your doubts, test your beliefs, read the OT. Don't build straw men. Now, if Jesus is saying Scripture has theological permanence, down to the letter, do we need to follow Jacobs and do all the commands of the OT?

Story: Narrative Coherence

Jesus says he has come to fulfill Scripture not abolish it. How so? There's so much to the OT it's impossible to explain how he fulfills Scripture in one message, but we can look at it in a couple ways. Types and Shadows. First, the Law functions as a **shadow** of Christ. It is often broken down into several categories: Moral, Ceremonial, and Civil, with the moral law still applying, "Thou shalt not kill," and the ceremonial and civil laws not applying. Even if we accept this, it doesn't mean they have theological value. The moral laws are what Jesus later calls the "weightier things of the law" (Matt 23:23). But even the lighter things have value. For instance, Jacobs' practice of not wearing mixed clothing was meant to convey a value for purity, separating good and evil. Israel was to be a light to the nations and practice civil codes that signified the human need to be delivered from evil and gain purity before God. So, in a sense, Jesus is fulfilling Israel's mission who lost their salt and hidden their light, and is creating a new, reconciled people to be salt and light! Jesus comes along and says whoever hopes in me will be purified (1 John 3:3). Or take **Deuteronomy 23** says those who have nocturnal emissions or need to eliminate waste have to go outside the camp. Seems awfully picky. But you need to know that this is in the context of war. When Israel goes to war the ark is taken from the temple and placed in the midst of the people, making the camp, the temple of God. And in the temple of God there can be no impurity; we should focus the mission at hand. So latrines and sex happen outside the camp. How is this a shadow of Jesus? Jesus says he is the temple of God, and what we do with our bodies is *in his presence*, and should be holy. Which is picked up in 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul suggests a season of sexual abstinence to devote time to the Lord. Jesus is holy and has called us on mission! *The lighter things are not binding, but they have permanent theological value, and fit into a bigger narrative about the world. Jesus has come to overthrow evil and impurity and to initiate forgiveness and renewal.* Second, there are **types** in the OT. These are **persons, events, and institutions** that are fulfilled by Jesus. *Here's where you start to see some of the narrative beauty of Scripture.* There's a first Adam and a second Adam. Where the first Adam fails to obey God, the second Adam succeeds in perfect obedience (Luke 3; Rom 5; 1 Cor 15). The first David dies and fails to secure peace in the kingdom, but the second David, born in the line and city of David, rises from the dead to secure peace and the kingdom of God (2 Sam 7; Luke 1-4). In our passage, Jesus acts as 2nd Moses. He climbs on top of a mountain, opens his mouth, and teaches the Law. He cites Exodus 20, "thou shalt not kill or commit adultery," and expands on this teaching. When he is finished with his sermon, the crowds are astonished at his teaching and marvel at his authority (7:28-9). They feel the theological permanence and sense the narrative beauty of his words. Like when an artist sings *from the soul*. You know it's not just words on a page but authentic and true. Jesus teaches the Word and he *is the Word*. The fountain of authenticity. Jesus is the better Moses,

the better, David, and the better Adam. He draws the whole biblical story together as the better Word, the true King, and the perfect Man. As for **institutions**, the entire sacrificial system points to Jesus. Jesus is the better and truer temple, but to enter into his presence, we need a better living sacrifice. Here comes the spotless Lamb slain for the sin of the world (Jn 1). How do we escape our bondage? Jesus takes us on a 2nd exodus **event**. He rescues people in slavery from the bondage of sin and death and guides them into the promised land never-ending glory *via* his exodus through death and out into resurrection life. He is the lasting exodus. Add to this the prophecies, the citations, the allusions and you begin to see the Bible, not in bits and pieces, but as a stunning, narrative whole that turns on the person and work of Jesus. **Jesus is better is an understatement but a true statement.** Every single page in the NT quotes, alludes, depends on the OT so much that Richard Hays says we cannot understand the Gospels unless we read them backwards, into the story of Israel, and likewise we cannot understand the OT if we do not read it forwards into the climactic narratives of the Gospels. Have you ever read a novel, stood back, and marveled at how the author keeps the characters in view, the plot coherent, and actually transports you with her narrative? God has done this, not with one book but with 66, over 1600 years, multiple authors, cultures, and times and put it all together in one, stunning, coherent whole. If you don't marvel at the Bible you should. Be amazed by its authority, stunned by its beauty, and submit to its truth. You must reckon with the fact that your view of the Bible reflects your view of Jesus, and Jesus affects how you view the Bible. Don't hold onto the privileged view of tiny Self. That's a gamble. Open yourself up to the word that cannot be broken, and to the Redeemer who was broken for you. Jesus isn't trying to pull one over on you; he's trying to pull you into the true story of the world.

Response: Personal Urgency

How should we respond? Jesus says none of Scripture will pass away until all is accomplished. How is it accomplished? It is fulfilled in him and accomplished through us. By God's grace we are new Israel, a multi-ethnic people, the Church sent on his mission to be salt and light. He's inviting us to participate in what he is accomplishing. How? By living righteously in his Story. The alternative story is heart-breaking, "**For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**" We *respond* by living in line with the kingdom, living righteously. But because of Jesus we are also made righteous. You get it and pursue it in Christ. How? As the better Moses Jesus is the Law that condemns us but as the better Adam is the one true Human who saves us, who keeps the law where we fail, and if we'll put our hope in him, not in our performance, he'll credit his performance to us. He'll put you in Christ, with all his benefits. See, it's not about being on the right side of history, but the redemptive side of history. And the only place we get this narrative is from the Bible. Jesus on the OT and Jesus in the OT. Teach and do this and you'll be truly great. If you don't, if you relax God's word, pick and choose, Jesus says, you'll be among the least and maybe not even in the kingdom at all. We all need Christ in the Word, a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees, and you need Christ on the Word, who guides you into righteousness. *Jesus in the Bible and on the Bible. Read it. Study it. Memorize it. Love it. Counsel it. Do it. Bind it around your neck & write it on the tablet of your heart. When you're cut, bleed it. It's an eternal word, theologically permanent, narratively coherent, personally urgent. It's the true story of the world.*