

Thy Word Above All Things

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[0 : 00] Well, we belong to a family of churches called Reach South Africa. You may or may not know that. Reformed Evangelical Anglican Church in South Africa.

It used to be called Caesar Church of England in South Africa. That's maybe how you still know it. But I wonder if anybody here knows its motto. What is the original motto of our denomination? Anyone? God's Word above all things. Thank you. Or, Thy Word above all things. Now think about that. That's the motto of our denomination.

Thy Word above all things. What do you think about that as a motto? Over the years, many have criticized the denomination for actually being too Bible-obsessed.

Our sermons are longer than other denominations, typically. Some churches you go to, their sermon is 10, 15 minutes here. That's 30, 40 minutes. The Bible is the center of what we do in our services.

[1 : 05] And some have said that perhaps that's too Bible-obsessed. And that we focus on our relationship with the Bible more than our relationship with God Himself.

Is that true? What do you think? Well, think about your relationship with the Bible. What is your relationship with the Bible? With your Bible? Think about your Bible, that book.

Whatever color it might be, whatever cover it is, whatever translation it is. What is your relationship with that book? It's a weird question. What is your relationship with the book? But how do you get along with your Bible?

How familiar are you with what's inside it? What do you feel about your Bible? How does it make you feel? Or would you rather, like those people say, actually just focus on your relationship with God?

That's what's important. What is it for you? Well, this morning we're going to see that those two things, your relationship with your Bible and your relationship with your God, are not different.

[2 : 15] In fact, Jesus wants to convince the people that He's teaching here on the Sermon on the Mount, that unless you have a good relationship with the Bible, you can't have any relationship with Him.

And you see, He's talking to people here in Matthew 5, who thought that their Bible, the Old Testament, didn't apply anymore to them, because now Jesus was here, and they could just listen to Him.

That's what they were thinking. And the people He was gathering around Him were these peasants, these fishermen, not the highfalutin theological teachers. Some of them were there, kind of listening to what He has to say, checking Him out.

But most of the people were the people who really found the Bible hard work. And they were so relieved that now they've got a rabbi who they can just follow and listen to, and they don't have to listen to, you know, they don't have to go into their Bible like these Bible scholars do.

And He, here, in this very important few verses in Matthew 5, warns them of the danger of that thinking, and gives them at least four reasons why the Bible still needs to be above all things in their lives, and why the Bible needs to be above all things in our lives as well.

[3 : 36] And so let's see what these four reasons are. Firstly, He says, because the whole Bible is actually about Him. The whole Bible is about Jesus. Look at verse 17.

Don't think that I've come to abolish the law or the prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill them. When He says the law and the prophets, that's kind of a Hebrew-Aramaic way of saying the Old Testament, what we call the Old Testament.

They didn't know it was the Old Testament, because they didn't have the New Testament yet, so they called it the law and the prophets, or sometimes the law, prophets, and writings. But that's

what Jesus is talking about. They're scriptures.

They're Bible, which is our Old Testament. And He says here that He has come to fulfill their Bible. And that means to complete, to achieve, to fill it full, what it is all about.

To cap it off, to make it whole. That's what the word fulfill means, that He's come to complete what their Bible is all about. And what that means is that the whole thing, the whole Old Testament that He was talking about, which is quite a chunk of our Bibles, right?

[4 : 59] It's kind of probably two-thirds of the length of your Bible. And what He's saying is that the whole thing is about Him. The whole Old Testament.

Now, if you look at it, it's a lot of different authors from a lot of different times talking about a lot of different things. But what Jesus is teaching us here is that that whole thing is one unified story about Him.

Okay, so just as the New Testament, we know, is all about Jesus, looking back on Jesus and His life and His teaching, in the same way the whole Old Testament is all looking forward to it.

And so that's how you can understand your Bible. It's in two parts. And in the middle, really, is Jesus, the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All of the New Testament, everything that comes after them is looking back on them and helping us to see the significance of them for our lives.

And everything before that is looking forward to it, is looking forward to Jesus. Now, if that is true, what that tells us is that every single page in our Bibles, not just in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament as well, will help you to know Jesus better.

[6 : 20] Every single page in this book is here to help you to know Jesus deeper and better and have a greater vision of Him and love Him more.

Not just the New Testament, but the Old as well, which let's admit we don't often understand and read as much.

But it's all there for the same reason, to point you to Jesus. And many don't realize that about their Bible, especially their Old Testament. Now, I think for many people, many Christians as well, reading the Old Testament is kind of like walking around in a dark room where you can't really see what's in it, and you're kind of going very tentatively, very slowly, then you bump into something and you don't quite understand what it is.

Maybe a pastor will come shine a torch on it and help you to see, oh, okay, I see what that means. But you still don't know what's in the rest of the room. It's too big. It's too dark. Well, you know what Jesus is doing here?

By saying, I've come to fulfill that, He's turning on the light. He's going and turning on the light switch so you can actually look around and see how everything in there is there for a reason and how it's actually a room that has all along been full of treasure in every corner of it.

[7 : 44] Up until now, maybe you've been walking around in darkness and you don't know, but Jesus turns on the light and you realize this room is full of treasure, full of value.

And so read your Bible looking for that treasure. Read your Bible, both the Old and the New Testament, looking for Jesus and you will find Him because that is what it is all about.

That's the first reason the Bible needs to be above all things in our lives because it's all about Jesus. It is there every page to help us to see Jesus and love Him more.

Secondly, the second reason Jesus gives is verse 18. And it's because basically He says the Bible is perfect. It's perfect.

Look at verse 18. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished.

[8 : 50] Look at that. Not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter. What point is Jesus making here? Literally, He says not one iota or one stroke.

Now, iota is the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet. And the stroke, He's referring to the strokes that are on Hebrew letters, the little lines that are on Hebrew letters to distinguish them from one another.

And what He's saying is every single one, the smallest little dots and lines that have been written in the original Scriptures are exactly what God intended to be there.

It's exactly what God sovereignly oversaw to be put on that page. Every single little mark of ink. And so that tells us that even though what we read in the Bible is written by people, you know, Moses and Paul and prophets, it is actually all written by God.

It's all God's Word. He sovereignly oversaw what those people would write down on that page. And He sovereignly oversaw that that would be transmitted and put on paper so that we can have it today.

[10:12] That every single detail in the written Scriptures is what He intended to be there in the original languages, not necessarily in our English translations. That's why we have various translations, because they interpret certain words maybe differently.

But the original Scriptures, which they all help us to understand, those are perfect. There's nothing there in any line or in any word that God did not intend to be there.

There are no mistakes in it. There are no mistakes in our Bibles. Which means that this, think about it, the Bible, the Word of God, this is the only perfect thing we have in this world.

This here, this book that we have, that we may let sit on our shelves, where we may not spend as much time in as we'd like, that there, that sitting on your shelf, is the only perfect thing in this world. It's exactly what God, the Creator of this world, has intended to be written down there. Now, I don't know about you, but that makes me want to read it every day.

[11:34] That makes me want to read it every day. Even though, you know, it's my job to read the Bible, I still want to read the Bible outside of my job.

On a Saturday morning, I wake up and I want to read God's Word, because it is the only perfect thing in this world. I want to start each day, in this broken, fallen world, in this confusing life, I want to start each day with one perfect thing.

And you can, if you're a Christian and you have this. You can start each of your days, no matter what you're going through, with the one perfect thing in this world.

That is reliable. Words that we read, no matter what they are, wherever we read, we know these words are from God. They are here because God put them there.

They are reliable. They bring us truth into our lives that nothing else can. And life and light into our lives that this world can't give us.

[12:39] We get it from this book. It is perfect. And more than that, in these words, Jesus is saying it is permanent.

Not only is it perfect, but it is lasting. Look at verse 18 again. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter, not one stroke of letter will pass away.

Now that's a saying, it's a common saying, until heaven and earth pass away. It's like when we say, until hell freezes over. You know, Jesus is making a point that these aren't going anywhere.

These words, none of them, old or new testament, these words aren't passing away. These words aren't going anywhere. They are still as relevant today as they always have been. What does he mean when he says, until heaven and earth pass away?

Well, he's actually, it's a reference to the very first verse of our Bible. When you start reading it, the first thing you will read is in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

[13:44] Jesus is taking us right back to creation and he's effectively saying that God's laws, God's instructions in this book, every single one of them are woven into creation.

They're in the same category as the things that he made. The solid things, the heaven and the earth, space, the stars, the mountains, the waterfalls, just as God made that, he also made this word and wove that into how this world is built.

His laws are woven into creation. His laws that we find in this book. Just like the law of gravity, you know, the law of gravity is woven into creation.

You can't escape it. There's, there's nowhere that you can go where the law of gravity will not apply.

Now you might think, oh, what about space? Well, you know, the law of gravity still applies in space. Even though astronauts who are in high earth orbits might not feel it, it still applies. It's still there.

Even if you don't feel it. Well, I think in the 21st century, for Christians, I think, we think that a lot of God's laws don't apply anymore.

[14:58] especially in the Old Testament. But Jesus is here saying, there is never a time and never a place that every word in this Bible won't apply.

There is never a time that God's law will not apply. Because every law God has given reveals how He's, how He's always intended for humans to live.

You know, these Old Testament laws that you might think don't apply because they seem so withdrawn from our culture and our time. That is God. He's revealing something to us in every page, in every law, in every instruction.

He's revealing to us how He has always intended for humans to live. And that doesn't change. God hasn't changed His mind since the Old Testament for how He wants humans to live.

He hasn't changed. That's why Jesus here says His law is permanent and it's perfect. So that's the second reason that this word is so, should be so central in our lives.

[16:13] Especially, well, including the Old Testament as well as the New. God's law. Thirdly though, it describes how God's kingdom will be one day.

That's another reason it's so important and should be so central in our lives because it describes how God's kingdom will be one day. look at verse 19. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. What does He mean by that? Called great in the kingdom of heaven. What He's saying is essentially how much you live in line with God's law, specifically the law in the Old Testament, that's what He's talking about here, will show how fit you are for His future kingdom because His law describes what His kingdom will be like.

Which kind of makes sense if you think about it. If God's laws reveal how He has always intended for humans to live, surely His ultimate plan is for His kingdom to be full of people like that.

Right? God doesn't lower the standard in the New Testament. We might think He has, but He doesn't.

[17:49] He's not like the South African education department. Right? You know what I mean? So when the SA's education department over the years they've seen the matric pass rate lower and lower.

So they decided, okay, to make more matrics pass, we'll just lower the pass mark to kind of, what is it, 30% or something in certain subjects. Now that's not a way to make people learn more, right?

But we often think God has done that in the New Testament. It's like in the Old Testament He gave His laws and then eventually when Israel messed up He was like, oh, it's hopeless.

They're not going to keep these laws. You know what I'll do? I'll make it easier. I'll lower the standard. Make it easier for people to get into the kingdom in the New Testament. That's not what happened by the way. God never did that.

God doesn't lower the standard. And we've got to realize here that Jesus didn't come to lower the standards of the kingdom.

[18:50] God's kingdom will be full of people who love and keep His law that He's communicated from the beginning of time. That won't change. His standards never change.

Are you one of those people? Do you love His law? Can you say with the psalmist in Psalm 19 that we read earlier the precepts of the Lord are right making the heart glad.

The command of the Lord is radiant making the eyes light up. They are more desirable than gold than abundance of pure gold and sweeter than honey dripping from the honeycomb.

Is that your attitude towards God's laws in the Old Testament? You know when you look at those ten commandments on the wall which is a summary of God's law in the Old Testament is that something you're drawn to?

Is that something you love? Do you come to church and look and go wow that's beautiful? I don't think so. We don't tend to do that do we?

[19:59] We don't tend to think that way about God's laws because as sinners we don't like law we're not attracted to law we're not attracted to commandments we don't tend to like these things we don't tend to love God's law why?

Well it's a simple reason because we can't keep them we can't keep it and so we're not attracted to it we shy away from God's law we don't delight in God's law we don't seek the treasure in God's law in the Old Testament because it makes us feel more guilty than we do when we look at God's law it makes us feel more guilty it's like how the dentist makes us feel when he says you should floss you know you know you visit the dentist and he says have you been flossing?

how do you feel? you go oh or maybe like as you know the dentist appointment is coming up you floss for like a week and then you you floss for a few days after that and then you don't again because when he says that have you been flossing?

it makes you feel bad yeah I know I should and that's that's how we tend to read God's law it just makes us feel bad when we hear God's standards for humanity because we know we can't keep it and that's also why the next thing Jesus says here in Matthew 5 is very uncomfortable to hear and

this is the next reason that the Bible should be so important in our lives verse 20 for I tell you unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never get into the kingdom of heaven he's telling the people gathered there why they cannot neglect their scriptures the Old Testament that why they shouldn't put aside the law of God like they think they can you know these people gathered around

Jesus are like oh yay and I don't have to listen to the scribes and Pharisees I don't have to listen to the law anymore I can follow this rabbi he's saying no no I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never get into the kingdom of heaven the standards haven't changed now we don't like to hear that we don't like to hear that obedience to the Bible is necessary to get into the kingdom but it makes sense because if the law of God describes the type of people who are in his kingdom then you won't be part of that kingdom without being one of those people right it makes sense you can't go to a black tie dinner without a black tie you can't dwell in a kingdom of righteousness and love without actual righteousness and love the kingdom are going to be full of the types of people that the law of

[23 : 29] God describes and that's why you need to be one of those people if you're going to be in that kingdom now this this might come as a shock to you to hear wait I thought Christians are saved by grace not works now you're saying I've got to be a certain type of person to get into heaven well I'm not saying it I think Jesus is saying it for I tell you unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never get into the kingdom of heaven these are the words of Jesus I'm not saying it and you know when Jesus said these things it would have drawn a gasp from the crowd it shocked them just as much as it shocks us today to hear this unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees what now the scribes and Pharisees they were the best law keepers of the day they were the most religious people they were super religious they would have gone they went to every single effort to make sure that they were keeping all of the laws more than anyone else and now

Jesus is telling these peasants and these farmers and these fishermen you've got to keep the law better than the scribes and Pharisees how on earth how can Jesus expect us to do better than the most stringently religious people but that's that's what he's saying here I'm going to read it again it's shocking unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never get into the kingdom of heaven it's got to surpass what does he mean by that though when he says it's your righteousness must surpass the scribes and Pharisees that word it's an interesting word in the original it can also mean it's got to go beyond it's got to go further than the scribes and Pharisees and so he's not saying that you've got to beat them at their own game of technical law keeping he's not saying that you've got to be better at them than keeping all the technicalities of the law but he's saying something more he's saying you've got to learn to go further than mere law keeping and learn to live out the heart of God's law what God's intent in his law was all along that's what you've got to learn to do which even the scribes and Pharisees with all their religious law keeping couldn't do which means you can be the most religious person that's ever lived you can keep the laws perfectly you can do all the right things you can come to church every

Sunday read your Bible every day and you still might not have the righteousness that you need or become the person that God has always intended for you to be in his law because it's got to go beyond law keeping righteousness has to exceed and go beyond just keeping rules that's what Jesus is saying here it's got to reach the real intent for us that God's intent for us all along and Jesus is effectively saying I've come here so that you can be that type of person not a person who can keep the rules but a person who can keep the heart of God's law that's what he means when he says back in verse 17 I have come to fulfill the law that's actually a very comforting verse I have come to fulfill the law you can't but I have come to fulfill that law

I have come to bring about God's intent now by the way he's not saying oh don't worry I'll keep the law so you don't have to no that's not what he's saying what he's saying is I have come so that you can be the type of person God has always intended the law to point to I have come to bring about God's intent that is expressed in his law God's goal all along what is that goal what is God's goal God's goal all along has been to create a people who love what he loves God's goal has been to create a people who love his law who love it from the heart without needing to be told to that's what God has always intended to create a people who love his law and obey it without needing to be told it's what the prophets spoke of when they said that

God would write his law on their hearts that's what it meant he would create a people who actually learn to naturally live out God's intent and will in this world as Paul said in Titus 2 verse 14 he gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession eager to do what is good that's a very important verse you see we mistakenly and I've got to warn you against this type of thinking it's quite common in Christianity today we mistakenly think Jesus came to keep God's law so that we don't have to the Bible says otherwise the [29 : 39] Bible teaches us Jesus came so that we can keep God's law you see the difference it's very different Jesus didn't save us so that we don't have to keep God's law he saved us so that we can none of it has passed away none of it doesn't apply Jesus came to transform us so that we can love God's law and that we would be eager to see it happen in our lives and that we would actually have the power to do it now we won't we won't do it perfectly we will mess up and that is why Jesus went on to die on the cross for our sins to pay for all our mess ups to pay for all our lawlessness all our failures not so that we can sit oh it's fine now but so that we can grow and become law abiding people so that we can grow and become the kind of people

God wants us to be as Titus 2 14 says to redeem us from lawlessness to redeem us from not keeping the law think about that you're not just redeemed from your sin but you're redeemed from lawlessness you're redeemed from a life that is not lived God's way so that you can more and more grow into the type of person God's law describes is that you this morning because that is what being truly saved will result in love love love love love love love for his word and a desire to become the type of person it describes is that you do you have that desire let's pray
Lord we thank you for your words Lord Jesus ascended to heaven at the right hand of God coming back one day we thank you that the first time you came you said these words to us and that they are in our Bibles for us to read thousands of years later because these words are life and truth and light we thank you for revealing to us that every word in this Bible is trustworthy and true and perfect and it applies to us and we thank you for showing us in your word Lord the type of people God that you have always intended to populate your kingdom oh Lord we want to be those people we want to be those people we want to love your law we want to say with the psalmist that it is more valuable than great treasure and sweeter than honey
Lord give us a heart that loves your law and transform us Lord so that we may keep it in Jesus name Amen