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Series: The Sermon on the Mount
Message: Christ & The Word

Transcribed Message
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Matthew 5:17-20

An estimated 2 million sailors died while at sea primarily because of malnutrition and disease related to malnutrition. In fact, it was in 1499 that Vasco de Gama lost 116 of 170 of his men on a voyage. Magellan lost 208 of 230 crew in 1520. It wasn't until 1795 that a commodore by the name of Peter Rainier realized that there was a problem and he stockpiled his ship with citrus fruits. He embarked on a four-month journey to India. When he got there, he had not lost a single man to malnutrition or disease related to it. It turns out that it wasn't just three meals a day that these men needed. It was the vitamin C that they needed every day. That's why, boys and girls, moms and dads, we are to eat our vegetables every day. I try to do that every day. Yes, I do count ketchup and French fries as a part of my regimen. So we know the importance of vegetables. It's called the principle of essentialism. What is it that is absolutely essential for physical health? Vitamin C is absolutely essential for physical health. When you take the principle of essentialism from the physical world into the spiritual, we're asking what are the essentials for spiritual health?

So here we are. We get to embark this morning on this first Sunday of the New Year in asking this question. I think Jesus helps us understand the answer when He said in Matthew 4 and verse 4: "Man does not live by bread alone, but he lives by every word that comes out of the mouth of God". My question to you this morning as we start off this New Year is how important, how essential is the Bible to you in your daily life? I think we could put the answer to that question into three categories. We could look at category number one and we can conclude that the Bible is just another book. It's got a lot of hard to pronounce names. It's got a lot of hard to believe stories. There are wise sayings in there but it really doesn't have any impact or influence. Category number two would say I know the Bible is important. At least, it seems like my pastor thinks it's important because he's always talking about it and reading it and quoting it. I don't

always understand so I don't always read it. Category three might very well be the Bible is the most important book in the world. It guides me in everything I do. I try to read it every day.

So when you look at that and you answer the question which of those categories do you most likely fall into, I hope not category one because category one is basically the view of the world. It is the perspective of the world. The Bible isn't essential at all. The Bible has little influence, little impact and therefore it is not valued by the world. The category number two I fear includes a lot of the church. I say that because we know we live in a time within the body of Christ when there is this incredibly high lack of understanding and knowledge of the Bible. We know in our head it's important but the reality is it doesn't always make it into the doing. Category number three might be the one who said that I make every effort to get God's Word into my life on a daily basis. So when you think about those three categories and the three answers to those maybe you don't fit nicely into any of those categories. Maybe you fall somewhere between two and three. You know it's important but life just keeps coming at you and it keeps you from really being in the Word the way that you want. It crowds in and it crowds out the Word.

Let's look at what Jesus would say in answer to this question. The essential value of the Word of God in our life. We are looking this morning again at the Sermon on the Mount and we want to see this morning that we believe that the Scriptures are vital and important for life because that's what Jesus believed and taught. He taught and He believed that the Scriptures are vital and important for life.

We've been gone about a month out of the Sermon on the Mount. So let's do a quick review. We've looked through the first 16 verses which has taken us through what we call the Beatitudes and the similitudes. As we've done that, we've said this is the Sermon on the Mount. It is first of all the life of Jesus. This is the life of Christ. This is how Jesus lived out His life. We don't have to ask the question I wonder what Jesus would do. We can turn to the Sermon on the Mount and beyond that of course and we could say this is what Jesus did. This is what Jesus valued. This is how He lived out His life. It's right there for us to read and to see.

Secondly, it's there for us to pattern ourselves after. This is our calling. So this is the life of Jesus, yes, but this is also our life. This is our calling as a Christ follower. This

is an example that we're to be following. How is it that we live out the life of Christ? We pattern ourselves after the very words and works of Jesus. We conduct ourselves in His example.

Thirdly, this is the life we're to live before a watching world. It's a life as we've seen just in these first 16 verses – a life of incredible contrast to the way the world lives. This is an extraordinary calling that God gives to us described to this point as we're going to see every step of the way as we work through the Sermon on the Mount. This is a different kind of life than the world lives. We live it openly before them because we're called to be salt and light.

Let's see this morning how that looks with regard to this matter of the central value of the Word of God. It is first of all then Jesus's view of Scripture. What was Jesus's view of Scripture? That's what we want to look at this morning. We can answer it in three ways. The first one is Jesus believed in the fulfillment of Scripture. We're in Matthew chapter 5 and we'll pick up at verse 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." This section of verses, verses 17 to 20, is a very important group of verses. It would be easy in some respects to read through these verses and not realize how important these four verses are. Right now I'm considering that we're going to come back to this again next Sunday because we're going to be taking a little different approach to these verses this morning. But these are not only very important verses, they're very difficult verses. Thousands of pages have been written on what exactly Jesus is saying in Matthew 5:17 to 20.

We'll probably take two runs at these verses, but the first thing that we want to see is Jesus is affirming the fulfillment of Scripture. There can be no doubt that He is stating a promise for us here. That promise that He is stating is that He has come to complete, He has come to fulfill the Scriptures. He has not come to abolish them or to abandon them, but rather He's come to complete them, to fulfill them. You can see how easy it would be for the religious leaders of Jesus's time to think that He had come to abolish the Scriptures. When Jesus talks about the law and the prophets, He is talking about the whole of the Old Testament. That is the way Jesus would reference the Bible of His day. The Bible of His day was the law and the prophets. It was the Pentateuch of

Moses and the prophets that really was just the way of summarizing the whole of the Old Testament. And as Jesus lived out His life and as He taught, you're familiar enough to know that it appeared to the religious leaders that He was throwing stuff out, that He was doing things that weren't in keeping with their understanding of the law. Now their understanding of the law had been corrupted greatly. They had added all kinds of human tradition to the law. And so, yes, Jesus was disruptive. But He makes it clear here that while it's easy for them to jump to the wrong conclusion that He's come to just wipe it all out, He says that He has come instead to fulfill it. He has come to realize the promises of the Old Testament.

Now what are the outcomes of that? What's the significance of Jesus saying He hasn't come to abolish the law but instead to fulfill it? There's a couple of things that seems to me we should take into account. The first one is this. The Old Testament is more valuable to us than we sometimes realize. There's a lot more value to the Old Testament than we sometimes give credence to. We love the New Testament as we should. We love the things that are revealed with regard to the culmination of the work of Christ and all that introduced. But Jesus is saying to us don't overlook the value of the Old Testament Scriptures. Those were the Scriptures of our Lord. Those were the Scriptures that He read and taught and communicated to people. We, looking back and seeing the fulfillment of what Jesus is talking about here, have a far greater understanding of the Old Testament or at least it's there for us. We have the potential to have a far greater understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures than any Old Testament saints ever had because we get to look back in the rearview mirror. We get to see how all these things fit together. We get to see how it is that God is working.

It reminds me of the effective communicator who before his audience says that he is going to tell them what he is going to say. And then he tells them that. And then he reminds them of what he's just said. To me, that's what Jesus is saying in this verse. He is saying that the Old Testament foretells His coming. That's the promise that He gives, that all the Scriptures are going to be fulfilled in His coming and in His life and in His work and in His teaching. Then He came. Then He told us all about it. This is a startling thing. Jesus is claiming here to be the focal point of history. He is claiming that His

coming, that His life, that His words, that His works are really the apex of human history. That is what He is laying claim to here.

This causes me then secondly to say this: the Scriptures come alive when you look at them Christologically. All that word means is talking about the study of Christ. The Old Testament Scriptures come alive when you look at them through the lens and the viewpoint of Christ. There's lots of ways to read your Bible. You can actually pick up your Bible and read it just from the standpoint of history. You can read your Bible just for the sake of information gained. You could read your Bible formatively. You could read your Bible thematically. You could read your Bible on a sociopragmatic level. But to really understand the Bible, Jesus says you need to understand the Bible by looking for Jesus.

I've got a book in my office on the shelf in my section on the Bible. Do you know what it's called? *To Understand the Bible Look For Jesus*. That's actually the title of the book. He just goes through the entire Scripture and shows us at every point how it is that the Scriptures point to Christ. If you are like me and you've started off on your reading through the Bible for the year, then you've already read Genesis 3. Isn't it amazing that in Genesis 3 and in verse 15 it says: "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." Now you can read that all day long, but do you know what it is saying? It's the first preaching of the gospel. It is the first preaching of the gospel that takes place in Genesis 3:15. It's looking down through the corridor of time and it says Satan is to bruise the heel of Jesus. But Jesus is going to crush the head of the serpent of Satan. That's what Jesus is talking about. He is talking about the fact that the Scriptures are to be fulfilled in Him. He's talking about the fact that as far back as Genesis 3:15, the Holy Spirit has worked into the Word an unfolding story about the coming of the Savior.

Do you remember our five words that tell us everything we need to know about the Bible? Time for a quick review at the beginning of 2018. Remember you can understand the entire Bible in five words. The whole of the Old Testament falls under the word "anticipation". The whole Old Testament is waiting for Jesus to come. You get into the Gospels and it's about manifestation. He is here. You get into the book of Acts

and it's proclamation. Go tell everybody that He came. You get into all of the epistles of the letters and it's about an explanation about what we've just said. Then, you get to the last book of the Bible in Revelation and it is consummation. That's what Jesus is basically saying in 5:17. It all culminates in Him. It all comes about because Jesus believed that the Scriptures are fulfilled in Him.

Secondly, Jesus believed in the permanency of Scripture. Jesus believed in the permanency of Scripture. Look at verse 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." For most of us, it is pretty hard to believe that anything could be more permanent than the world we live in. Most people think of the physical world that we live in as being about as permanent as anything they can think of. Yet what does Jesus say? Jesus actually says it's more likely that all of this that we know of as the physical world and the universe in which we live in is more likely to disappear than for the Word of God to not remain. In fact, He illustrates it for us.

Look at the illustration that Jesus gives to us here. It's a little bit unfamiliar to us, but it's very quickly realized as to what He's talking about because He talks about the fact that there's more likelihood that the world is going to pass away before an iota does or before a dot does. Your translation might say that a little bit differently but here's the point. An iota is the smallest Hebrew letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It would be the equivalent of what we would call an apostrophe or a comma. It is that small. It is called a yode. Jesus says that it's more likely that the world would pass away than a yode would pass away from the permanency of Scripture. If that was not enough, He goes even farther to say it is even more likely that the world would pass away than the Word if a dot were to be in some way transitory with regard to the Word of God. A dot as He's describing it here is not a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It's a marking of a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. If you look at the words "fun", "pun", "run", "bun", what is it that separates all those words? You can just work your way across the spectrum there. In every case, it's just what He said. Here is a dot. It's a stroke of the pen. It's just a little bit of the completion of the letter that changes the word. That is the illustration that Jesus gives here for the permanency of the Word of God. It is not enough He would pick the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. He actually says that little tiny stroke that is the

formation of a letter speaks of the permanency of the Word of God. All is going to be fulfilled. All is going to be permanent. This world is more likely to pass away than for the Word to not be permanent in its promises to us.

So what are the consequences of that? Two things. The very words of Scripture are important. That's what Jesus is affirming here. He is affirming the very words of Scripture. We call this the doctrine of inspiration. All Scripture, Paul says, in 2 Timothy 3:16 is given by inspiration of God. Because it is given by inspiration of God, therefore it's profitable for all kinds of things in our life. But the point is all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. That's why when we read our Bible hundreds of times we read the statement "thus says the Lord". Thus says the Lord. Why does it say that? These are the very words that God has inspired and by His Holy Spirit guided the human writers of Scripture to record for us. So He speaks to us in this matter of inspiration.

Matthew 4:4. Man doesn't live by bread alone. What does he live by? He lives by every word that comes out of the mouth of God. Jeremiah 15:16 "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and Your word was like to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart, because I am called by Your name, O Lord God Almighty." Your words were found and I ate them. Do you know what I thought of when I read that? That quote by Francis Bacon. Remember that quote by Francis Bacon. "Some books should be tasted, some devoured, but only a few should be chewed and digested thoroughly." This is the only book honestly that needs to be chewed and digested so thoroughly that every word that God has spoken is of value to us.

I think the second thing that comes out of this statement by Jesus with regard to the permanency of the Word is He's teaching the absolute accuracy of every detail in Scripture. We call this inerrancy. Here you have these two important doctrines about the Word of God that just go hand-in-hand. The one is inspiration. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and that has to do with the process. That has to do with how it is that God gave us His Word. Then this other word inerrancy. Inerrancy has to do with the product.

What do we know about this product? We know Jesus says that it is absolutely trustworthy. If God is the author of Scripture, it cannot be otherwise. God is a trustworthy God and He has given us a trustworthy Word. These two documents are like

the foundation of every other doctrine that we embrace and believe as believers and as a church. These two just go together. They're at the bottom of the building structure of everything that we believe. They just go hand-in-hand. All you have to do is step back and look at history. Every person, every church, every denomination, every school, every parachurch, anybody that has moved away from the Orthodox faith that has been passed down generation after generation by the people of God – every time somebody has stepped out of that circle, do you know where they began? They began right here. They began by minimizing the truths of inspiration or inerrancy. When we anchor ourselves into these two great doctrines, it is a great protection for us because it speaks to us of the very view that Jesus had of the Word of God. That it is permanent. It is unchanging.

That actually leads to a third one. Jesus believed in the authority of Scripture. Jesus believed in the authority of Scripture. Verse 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. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Those were alarming words and we're going to dig into them a little bit more next Sunday, Lord willing. But look first of all at what Jesus is saying.

It's impossible to have an authoritative word without an authoritative Christ. You can't have an authoritative word and not have an authoritative Christ. If Jesus said that every Scripture points to Him, every Scripture is fulfilled in Him, then He is the apex of history. It's all moving toward this culmination that centers around Christ. He is coming. He will return again. If the Word is permanent, it's eternal and it's unchanging. What we have, my friends, is something that is absolute and authoritative to guide our lives, to build our lives on. It's absolute and it's authoritative. We affirm the authority of the written Word based on the testimony and the authority of the Living Word. The Living Word. The Lord Jesus is the one who communicates to us the essential value of the Word, of the fact that it is fulfilled in Him, that it is the basis of authority in our life.

The charge has sometimes been made of those of us who have this high view of Scripture is that we are somehow guilty of Bible worship. It's even called bibliolatry, that

those who hold such a high view of the Bible are worshiping the Bible. I don't know about you. I don't worship the Bible. I honestly don't know anybody in my circle who worships the Bible. I worship the one the Lord Jesus who is revealed in this Bible. I think it's very misguided and misleading to say to somebody that their view of Scripture is a kind of a form of bibliolatry, that they're worshiping the Bible. The truth of the matter is the only way we come to know of our human condition, the only way we come to know of God's provision, the only way we come to know of the Living Word is through the written Word. That written Word comes to us with absolute authority. It comes to us giving us a trustworthy word from God. So we worship the Christ of the Scriptures.

Listen to what Jesus said about this matter. I think it's right on. In John 5:46 "For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" If you don't believe what God has said in His Word, how do you believe what Jesus said? They go together.

I think in that same vein of thinking are those people who say I love Jesus. I just don't like the church. I love Jesus and I'm a follower of Jesus. I can't work church into my experience. It is not compatible. Do you know what the truth of the matter is? We're a room full of people who are in process. We're a room full of people who are struggling. We're a room full of people who are trying to figure out life at every level. God says the best place to do that and the best way to do that as the people of God is to be with the people of God. It is not to come up with some saying like I love Jesus; it's just the church I can't stand. I don't think you really love the Jesus that I'm thinking of because that Jesus is the one who came and died and started the church. He is the one in whom all this Word is fulfilled. If we value Jesus, we value the Word. We value Jesus. We value the church.

Lastly, we're not allowed to pick and choose what we want to believe or obey from the Bible. If the Bible is absolute, if it's authoritative, if it's trustworthy, if it is from God, if it is without error, then we don't get to pick and choose the things that fit into our understanding or our worldview or our contemporary culture. RC Sproul, who many of you know died December 14th of last year, made this statement which is just spot on. "When there's something in the Word of God that I don't like, the problem is not with the Word of God. It is with me." He went on to say: "You're required to believe what the

Bible says is true, not what you want the Bible to say is true.” And why is that? I believe it's because the Scriptures are essential to life. The Word of God is essential to life. It is vital to our life. We believe that. We teach that. We proclaim that. Why? Because Jesus believed and taught that the Word of God is absolutely essential in the life of His people.

So what do we take away? What do we take away on this opening Sunday of this new year? What is absolutely essential for our spiritual well-being and health as we venture into a new year? In a world of change, it's never been more important to ground one's life in the unchanging Word of God. My friend, we are living in a world that is changing and declaring and living out things that we could not even have guessed 100 times over just 10 or 15 years ago. It shows no sign of being anything other than more of the same. In that world where it's hard to find anything of permanency, there is that one rock upon which we are to build our life. That rock is the unchanging Word of God.

So I ask two questions as we close. What does that look like in your life? What does that look like in your life? What changes do you need to make to get God's Word into your life every day? If the Word of God is essential for spiritual health, what does it look like in your life? How is that evidenced? I like the beginning of the year. I'm not a resolution guy, but I like the beginning of the new year. There's just something that's kind of invigorating and exciting about the threshold of a brand-new year.

I read a blog a week or two ago where a guy said here are seven things for 2018 for followers of Christ. I share them with you. Seek God. Love others. Pursue holiness. Serve the church. Steward your resources. Share the gospel. Multiply disciples. I liked it so much I put it up all over the church. It is up and down the halls and in the foyer. But it's just like, yeah, that's it! Seven things. Seek God. Love each other. Pursue holiness. Serve the church. Steward your resources. Share the gospel. Find somebody to disciple. Sounds like a plan. And you know what? The reality of those things all begins because we have responded to the gospel. All of that is in response to the gospel and the gospel is what has changed and transformed our lives forever. We want everybody here this morning to be absolutely certain of what that gospel is, that you understand it with clarity, that you've embraced it and believed it, and you've had your destiny changed forever because of it. That's what the gospel does in our life. It changes our destiny forever. The gospel is simply that Jesus came, this one of whom the Scriptures

He came and He lived a perfect life. He died on the cross. He rose again. He did all of that so that I could stop working and trying to earn my way to heaven. He did all of that because what God demands and requires is not just my best efforts, but what God requires is 100% righteousness. The only person who's ever accomplished that is His Son Jesus. When I put my faith and trust in Jesus and what He did, when I believe He did it for me when He died on the cross, an eternal transaction takes place that is mysterious and amazing and life transforming and I'm brought into the family of God by faith in Christ.