Why do I need the Bible?

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[0:00] If you have your Bibles, you can turn with me back to Matthew chapter 5, verse 17, page 969! of the Church Bible. And we're going to ask ourselves the question today, why do I need! the Bible? We have a big aim for today. My big aim is that you and I would love the Bible, that we would understand every time we read the Bible or hear it, we are encountering God.

It gives us an opportunity to hear the voice of Jesus. It's the place where we go to discover truth and grace, that the Bible unfolds God's great story of salvation with Jesus as hero and climax. It's the one book that gives shape to our lives. My aim is that, and my prayer is that our church worship, and every time we pick up the Bible by ourselves, it would be with a sense of joyful duty. But of course, to say that is to recognize that there are big barriers to overcome.
There are, as ever, the distractions that would keep us from the Bible. We have that issue with our diet, where we'd rather consume something else. Perhaps when we open the Bible, we come with a sense of distrust. Can I really trust God's character or God's promises? Or maybe, and maybe especially if we're new to the Bible, we open it and we get a bit disorientated, a bit lost, what's it all about? How do I make sense of it all? So our big idea from the text is that we would let Jesus teach us about this question, why do you and I need the Bible? That we'll learn together that because Jesus has fulfilled God's law, and he loves God's law, his followers can now love it and obey it too.
So in a sense, this is a Q&A; session with Jesus about the Bible. And here's our first question, how should we read the Bible? And our answer is we should read it seeing Jesus as the fulfillment, as the point, as the destination. Hear what Jesus says in 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. Now we might be familiar with these words, but we need to hear again how radical this teaching is. Jesus, as it were, picks up the 66 books of the Old Testament and he says, no, the 39 books of the Old Testament, we can include the 27, the New Testament, he says, these books are all about me. I am the center of God's story. I am the source of God's wisdom.
I am the one who has prophesied. Jesus' point is that he is the Lord God, and as such, the Word of God points to him. The Bible reveals Jesus' character. It speaks to us of the character of God. Jesus is God.
The Old Testament speaks to us of the commands of Jesus. They're the commands of God, and Jesus is God. And the Old Testament reveals to us the covenant love of Jesus, because Jesus is God.
[3:42] So it's really important when we read that we don't put a gap between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. The God of the Bible is unchanging, and Jesus reveals himself to us.

And Jesus' notice says, I have come to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. So there's already an accusation. This is quite early in Jesus' ministry. There's an accusation that Jesus is anti-law.
He seems to be working on the Sabbath. The law of Moses says rest, but Jesus is doing miracles, and miracles sound like work. So is he anti-law? And Jesus says, no, I've not come to abolish the law.
I've come to fulfill it. Or I've come to fulfill the law. In the sense that when we read about Jesus in the Gospels, we are invited to understand, ah, now I understand God's Word. When it teaches me to love God and love my neighbor, now I see it perfectly in Jesus. Now I understand the law because Jesus fills it full. He fulfills it too in the sense of being the climax to which the story is pointing to.
An old English preacher used to say that just as all roads in England eventually, one way or another, lead their way to London. So all of the Old Testament eventually leads us to the Lord Jesus.

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[5:15] We read every theme understanding that that theme is fulfilled in Jesus. Here's another way perhaps that we can think about it, and it's kind of timely. We're going to use the image of wedding vows. Okay, so tomorrow we'll have a wedding. And at the moment when wedding vows are made, the engagement has been fulfilled. Because the destination or the purpose of an engagement is always the marriage. And of course when marriage begins, that's not the end of the love story, but it's a new phase of that story has now been reached. Now think about that in terms of what Jesus is saying.

In God's story line of salvation, which is part of what the law and the prophet speaks to us about, where God says, I will be your God and you will be my people, the coming of Jesus presents the climax of that great story. It's a new demonstration of God's covenant love as Jesus' body is broken and His blood shed so that our sin can be forgiven and we can be restored to life with God. He is the Son who comes to rescue His bride. He is the one who offers Himself to save us. He completes the story of God's covenant love. Jesus has come to fulfill the law and the prophet. Let's take just three examples of how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. Just to help us to think about how to read the Bible. There's loads more that we could choose from, but one theme that we get right from the beginning is the theme of the seed, the promised seed, this child who would be sent. To Adam and Eve there was the promise of a seed who would come and he would undo the curse. One would come who would defeat evil and death. That's Jesus.

To Abraham the message came that a seed would be sent who would be God's way of blessing the nations, who would bring the nations into life with God. That seed is Jesus. David was told about a son who would come, who would be the true king and he would reign forever and he would reign in perfect righteousness and gather his people to himself and that king, that seed is Jesus. So he fulfills that theme. Jesus also fulfills the whole sacrificial system. As John the Baptist tells us, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So now we read about the Passover and we understand it that for people who were slaves to be set free, they needed to paint blood and be covered by the blood of a sacrificial lamb so that judgment could pass over. Now we look at the cross and we understand Jesus is our true Passover lamb sacrificed for us. Jesus is also the great high priest. Just as the high priest would serve and make sacrifice, Jesus is the great high priest who sacrifices nothing less than himself. And Jesus continues to serve as our high priest. He carries his people into the very presence of God and he ever lives to pray for us. Another really important theme that Jesus fulfills is this promise of the sending of the Spirit. So the Bible is really clear from Old Testament, New Testament, the great problem that we have as people is the problem within our hearts. It's the problem of sin that makes us both unwilling and unable to love, to trust, and to obey our God. And we need that sin to be removed and we need
God to do a new work in us to give us new life. And there is this promise in the Old Testament that God would send his Messiah and his Messiah will be the means of establishing this new covenant. And within the new covenant what God is going to do for his people is he is going to put a new heart in us, take away a heart of stone to give us a heart of flesh that is able to love God. And he's going to put his own spirit within us so God's going to come and live within us. And he's going to write the law on our hearts in such a way that now the people of God can truly obey. And Jesus came and he was filled with the Spirit and he now sends the Spirit. And so he fulfills that promise too. And thinking about that one in particular explains why as Jesus begins to teach, he talks about that greater righteousness, a righteousness that surpasses the Pharisees. Not just an external surface level obedience. Jesus by sending the Spirit makes it possible for us to obey God from our hearts. So how then should we read our Bible? So imagine the next time you go to pick it up. Or what even more is going to motivate us to pick up our Bible to read it.

Let me give you two words. We should read our Bible with expectation. There's a great children's storybook Bible with the subtitle, Every Story Whispers His Name. And it's a great Bible that's showing how all the great stories, all the great characters, or even all the great failures in one way or another point towards Jesus. So read with expectation, expecting to both meet with and to hear from Jesus in His Word.

[11:17] Read the Bible looking to discover how is Jesus the true hero of this story? How is He shown as the great law keeper? How is He the promise maker and promise keeper?

Pray for help to see Jesus, to worship Jesus, and to obey Jesus as we read the Bible. So we read with expectation but also read for excavation. Okay, now we're thinking about digging. Two senses come to mind.

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One we excavate in order to dig for gold. The Bible speaks about itself as gold. So we read our Bibles with great care. We read prayerfully. We read studying it and looking to meditate on it so that we would find the Lord Jesus Christ and His good news as our great treasure. We're invited to dig for gold. But also, when we think about excavation, we dig down to lay a solid foundation for our lives. As we get towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses that picture of the wise man who builds his house on a rock. And that rock is Jesus and His Word.
So we need to learn to get rid of the shifting sands of building on our own sin or our own desires or living life our own way in order to build on the solid rock of Jesus and His Word. Because you and I need to know His truth.
We need to know the promises that He makes. And we need to know God's great love for us in Jesus our Savior.
[13:10] So today is a great day to pick up our Bible and read. Today, if you haven't done it for a while, is a great day to renew that practice. And there's heaps of resources up the back there to help you and I to dig in so they could discover and delight in Jesus. So that's our first question.

How should we read the Bible? Our second question is this, why should I obey the Bible? Why should I obey the Bible? And again, Jesus would teach us we obey because God's Word is unbreakable and permanently valid. Verse 18, Jesus says, For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.
Okay, I'm going to guess that the majority of us in the room, we know the idea of paying for things in installments. And maybe we bought our car on higher purchase or we've got a mortgage for our house or we've used Klarna to pay up our shopping. And if we've ever paid in installments, we know that once payment is made in full, the company can't expect anything else. We are free from that debt.
So here's the question. Since Jesus has said he has fulfilled the law, and the Bible teaches that he fulfills it both in the sense of giving perfect and full obedience and meeting the demands of justice for law-breaking by dying as if he were a sinner in our place on the cross, since Jesus has fulfilled it, why should we obey it? Or to ask the question that is often asked, are we now free to live as we please?
Is there no law left for us except for the law of love? And so we need to listen to Jesus again in order to get this right. John Newton, the hymn writer and pastor of many years ago said that the Christian relationship to the law is maybe the biggest struggle that we'll have in the Christian life.
[15:25] We're always going to be tempted either to a form of legalism where we're thinking, oh, if I do this obedience well, then God will be more pleased with me, or we'll be tempted in the opposite direction to lawlessness or license or since Jesus has forgiven me, I can do whatever I want. So why should you and I obey the Bible? What does Jesus say? Notice verse 18 begins, for truly I tell you. This is a phrase that says, okay, here I am speaking with authority and it's time to listen up. And he makes it clear that none of the law will disappear. Not one letter, not even a little squiggle of a letter will disappear until heaven and earth disappear. So this is Jesus' way of saying God's law is permanently valid until the end of history.

There will be a day when Jesus returns and the world is made new and everything is accomplished. In the new creation, when the believers in Jesus will live in a glorified state. When our love, our worship, and our obedience will be perfect. We'll have no more need of the law. It will be so tattooed onto our hearts that we will forever be unable to break it. But until that day, we need to know the law and obey the law. Why do we need it? It's all about its purpose.
What does the law reveal? What is the law's purpose? Well, to understand that is to recognize that the law reveals to us both the character and the will of God. It's as if God writes down for us, this is what I value. These truths in my word, they reflect my heart. So God says, be holy because I am holy.
The law also shows the character of us as people. The law functions as a mirror and that mirror serves to expose our spiritual flaws when we look deeply inside it. The law is the equivalent of that ultraviolet light that shows the moral bacteria and infection that we have. But the purpose of the law is also to reveal the character of salvation. Because when we read the law, we find within it the story of God's gracious rescue. And we discover that God provides sacrifice so that we can be forgiven and restored.

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And when we read the law, we understand that God's goal is that he would be our God and we would be his people in restored relationship. So the law is good, its purpose is good. To know God truly, to know ourselves truly, to find the true way to be saved and brought home, we need to read and to obey God's word.
[18:44] For us as Christians, we need to obey the Bible. Again, think about what this has to say for our worship. Again, to borrow from the image of a marriage, if a wife says to a husband, this matters to me, this idea, this thing, this is important to me, a good husband will say, well, if you value it, I value it too. So when God says, my word and my law matters to me, we value it to show that we value our God. But we also absolutely need it for our lives. Think about our everyday lives. Think about our work.

If we're busy at home, we're doing routine tasks, we're dealing with family issues, we need a constant supply of God's grace, God's wisdom, God's patience, God's love. If we're at work and we're working with people with a very different value system than us, or we're surrounded by office gossip or the pressure to cut corners, then we need to know and to do God's truth and God's justice and to pursue God's will, even if that's costly. Or in the world of education, where we're surrounded by social media use which can be profoundly unhealthy, or where people like to pick on differences in others. We need lives that are built on what does God say is right? What does God say about other people? What does God teach about how to speak? Think about our witness too. Remember what we're saying to the boys and girls, we are image bearers reflecting God's glory to the world. When people look at a Christian, they should be able to see that God is like this. We become living Bibles to a watching world, and so we need to be Christ-shaped. Christ came to do the law. We want to be obedient too.
What about if you're here today and you're not a Christian? I would suggest that you also need to obey God's law. Not in that sense of trying to earn God's approval. That's not how God designed the law to work. You and I can never be good enough to earn God's approval. But we do all have a responsibility before our Creator and our King. So what is the obedience that Jesus wants you to give to Him today?
It's the obedience of repentance, of turning from sin and turning to trust in God. It's the obedience of faith that trusts that He can forgive, that He would bring you into life with God through trusting in Jesus.
For all of us, when it comes to the question of why do I need to obey the Bible, it's really important for us to recognize that Jesus is the one who has obeyed perfectly and obeyed perfectly where we have failed. He is the one who truly loves as the good neighbor. He is the great friend and He is the Lamb of God and the perfect sacrifice. Our third question is this one and it's related. How should I feel about the Bible? That's an important one for us to think about together, I think. And again, the answer Jesus would give to us is that we should feel that the Bible is good and for our good.
There's an Old Testament professor in the States called Jay Sklar. He teaches Old Testament and every year he asks his class the question, he says, how do you feel about God's law? And he invites them to say whether they feel positive when they hear about God's law, negative or a bit of a mixed bag response. And most of them, and it reveals the honesty in the class, most of them feel a negative sense towards the law.
[23:03] For some of us, we hear the word law and instantly, well that sounds restrictive. I quite like the message of freedom without limits. That sounds really attractive. Law, well that sounds like it's restricting my freedom. Other people perhaps, we've been brought up in certain Christian backgrounds, we hear the law and we think, ah, I want to avoid legalism. I don't want anything to do with rules. I had lots of extra rules imposed on me and it was really suffocating and it wasn't good, it wasn't gospel. And so the law can sound really negative because it was used perhaps as a, as a control method. I wonder if you can sympathize today or identify with that class when we hear God's law, it can sound kind of negative. How does Jesus say we should feel about God's law? How does he say we should feel about the Bible? That's really important for us to hear. Before we sort of dive into what Jesus says, first we need to recognize, this is a general principle that right restrictions will always tend towards flourishing.

We think about that in terms of our bodies. When I restrict my diet, so I eat what's good instead of what's bad. When I restrict the time that I spend awake, so I get enough sleep. When I restrict the time that I spend on a screen, I will be a healthier person. Restrictions lead to flourishing.

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Or if I want to get good at a particular skill, a musical instrument, if I restrict my time, so I focus on learning and practice. There is a restriction, but it allows me to flourish and it's good for me.
So right restrictions lead to flourishing. We also, and this is why we've sang from Psalm 19 and 119, need to recognize that the law is God's good gift. Because it reflects the Lord's values, it is fundamentally good. And by God's design, following God's law is the way of true life.
It should be the goal of our lives to be able to sing, I love your law, I delight in your law, I want to think about it in the midnight hours, I want to practice it in the daytime hours. Now, let's look at verses 19 and 20, where Jesus speaks to the Pharisees. Verse 19, therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. So there was a group of religious teachers, religious leaders called the Pharisees. They were seen by many as the religious elite, but Jesus knows their hearts, and he knows that by and large they do not see the goodness of the law. With the result that they make it their practice actually to set the law aside. They make hundreds and hundreds of extra rules, but it leads them to relaxing the law to make it easier. They limit laws. Let me limit what it looks like to be a good neighbor. Let me limit what it looks like to care for my elderly parents.
[26:08] They limit the law so they can make it a simple tick box exercise. So they're doing that for themselves, but on the other hand they're also making the law this really heavy burden that they're placing on others. There's no grace, it's just law. And Jesus' response to the Pharisees is to say, listen, you teach the law, but you don't understand the law. And you don't practice the law. And you don't love the law as you should.

Because as Jesus says here, our attitude to God's law, well it will reveal our attitude to God himself. What did he say about kingdom greatness? It's measured by obeying and teaching the law. And we're only going to obey and teach the law if we believe it is good and valuable for ourselves and for others.
So Jesus says our attitude to the law, it functions like an ECG for our hearts. It's a test of our spiritual health. Do I see God's word as good because it reveals a good God to me? Do I love and obey God's word because I want to love and obey God? We spoke at the beginning of the battle for our hearts. We're often distracted, I think. Other things can seem much more compelling, much easier to get into than the Bible. Or the challenge of distrust. Will limiting my freedom to live God's way, will that really promote my joy? How can you and I truly love God's word? I think it goes back to Jesus having fulfilled the Bible. It goes back to that reality that Jesus in his work has now sent the Spirit and transforms our heart. And it's through that work of Jesus and the sending of the Spirit that we're now able to understand the Bible the way God meant it to be. So that we're now able to see Jesus as Savior and as central to the story and we hear a message of grace. And as God works that into our heart, it increases our appetite for His glory and for His holiness so that by His grace more and more we would have a sense of joyful obedience as we come to God's word. So Jesus has given us some teaching here to help us to answer the question, why do I need the Bible? What is it that's going to get us setting our alarm clocks 10 minutes earlier? What's going to get us reaching for the Bible instead of reaching for our phones and our scrolling, our news feed? What will make us open the Bible at the end of a tiring day? Or when we feel stuck or we feel full of sadness, what will cause us to turn once again to hear God's good word? It's as we remember what Jesus teaches, that the Bible is good and it is for our good and it reveals our good Savior to us. When we remember that we read to meet with and hear with, hear from Jesus, we read to remember and to learn how to live to please our God and our Savior. And we read because we believe God is good, His ways are good and it's the way to a flourishing life.

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