

Just Answer Yes Or No

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] I'm going to just lead us in the reading of a psalm before we begin today. I'd like us to read Psalm 115.

I'll do it. I'll do the reading. You can follow along. Just in the quiet almost here as we begin. Psalm 115.

And this translation, which I picked up in one of the few, is on page 456. Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name ascribe the glory for thy true love and for thy consistency.

Why do the nations ask, where then is their God? Our God is in high heaven. He does whatever pleases him. Their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.

They have mouths that cannot speak and eyes that cannot see. They have ears that cannot hear, nostrils and cannot smell.

[1 : 16] With their hands they cannot feel, and their feet they cannot walk. And no sound comes from their throats. Their makers grow to be like them, and so do all who trust in them.

But Israel trusts in the Lord. He is their helper and their shield. The house of Aaron trusts in the Lord.

He is their helper and their shield. Those who fear the Lord trust in the Lord. He is their helper and their shield. The Lord remembers us, and he will bless us.

He will bless the house of Israel. He will bless the house of Aaron. The Lord will bless all who fear him. High and low alike.

May the Lord give you increase, both you and your sons. You are blessed by the Lord, the Lord who made the heaven and earth. The heavens they are the Lord, the earth he has given to all mankind.

[2 : 20] It is not the dead, he prays the Lord, but those who go down in silence. But we, the living, bless the Lord. Now and forever.

Oh, praise the Lord. Father, we thank you that in the midst of this city, in these few minutes together, we meet on holy ground because you are God of the heavens and the earth.

We trust you. We love you. We are very grateful that your word speaks clear, and it has the ring of truth about it.

And we praise you in the name of Jesus. Amen. So I'm going to ask Harry Robinson to come. When we're finished together, we can have lunch and enjoy our time.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much for coming out on such a rainy day.

[3 : 36] It's a great encouragement to see you. We're dealing with that passage from Matthew chapter 5, which has to do with...

Horrible thought that I may have left my glasses somewhere. I'm going to just move around here, I think. Passage which reads as follows.

Again, you have heard that it was said to the men of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. But I say to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no.

Anything more than this comes from evil. Now, Joy Davidman, who was C.S. Lewis' wife, tells a story at the beginning of her book, *Smoke on the Mountain*, of an old missionary.

[5 : 05] He was old, and his message was an Old Testament message. And he met with an African chief in a village where it was said that the natives sharpened their teeth in order to eat the meat that was their main diet.

And he listened very carefully to the old missionary, and the missionary said to him, or the African chief said to the missionary, let me see if I've got this straight. He said, the first thing you're telling me is, I must not take my neighbor's wife. Yes, said the missionary. Or his ivory. Or his oxen. Absolutely, said the missionary. I must not dance the war dance, then ambush him on the trail and kill him. Absolutely, said the missionary. Well, said the African chief. I'm too old to do those things anyway, so being a Christian and being old must be the same thing. Well, now, I think a lot of people feel that about the law and all the thou shalt not's in the law.

[6 : 23] The law is essentially what God has given us to enable us to get where we're going. If you want to get where it is God's purpose, you should go.

He's given you the law as a means of getting there. Now, very often of an evening at the end of the week, we head down to the Tawasan ferry terminal. In order to get to the Tawasan ferry terminal, you have to go through the D's tunnel. And very often, there's a long line up going into the D's tunnel. Some of you may be familiar with it. And there the traffic is in two lanes backed up for a mile waiting to get into the D's tunnel. Now, the law is represented in this situation by a policeman, RCMP officer.

And what the law does then is sit by the side at the junction of the Steveston Road and wait for some frustrated driver to move into the bus lane and go zooming along. [7 : 36] And he waits there for somebody to do this and then he just piles them up at the end and gives them tickets. Now, most people, I think, think of the law that way. You're trying to get somewhere and you're frustrated in getting there so you choose to do something else in order to get there and the law comes along and says, you can't do it.

Now, the true function of the law, as I have thought, lined up in that traffic on many occasions, the true function of the law would be to get down at the front of the tunnel and wave the traffic through so that it keeps going and so that everybody gets to where they want to go rather than sitting by the side of the road and waiting for somebody to step out of line. So I think that if you remember that and then remember that the passage that I've read today has to do with some teaching Jesus was giving under the general heading of himself. He was teaching about himself and saying, I have not come to abandon the law and the prophets. I've come to see that they are fulfilled. that the purpose for which the law was given and the prophets endorsed them, I want to see that fulfilled.

Well, Jesus said, you're not to abolish the law, you're to find a way of fulfilling it. Then he goes on to say that not one jot or tittle shall be removed from the law until it is fulfilled.

[9 : 10] Now what that means in essence is that God's presence in our midst which we enjoy in creation is also present with us in terms of the moral law.

How is God present? He is present in terms of this law. And this law finds expression in many ancient codes but one of the most famous perhaps and best known is the Ten Commandments. And that law is given in clear terms so that if you take one for example, the one which I think intrigues people most is this law which says thou shalt not commit adultery. Period. Period. Now, that's the law. That's what God has said and what Christ has enforced. That law is to be fulfilled. That law is not going to change.

There's nothing you can do to change it. It is a law which God has given. Well then our sophisticated society comes on to a law like that and says I regret that I am programmed in such a way that I find that law somewhat inconvenient.

[10 : 42] It doesn't fit me. It's contradictory to who I am. Now, what Jesus says is it's not contradictory to who God is. If it's contradictory to who you are, then one of you has to change.

So, along comes somebody else and says I have personal reasons why I don't like that law and for that reason, though I think it applies generally in our society, I'm prepared to make myself the exception.

So we chisel away at the law. And then we find that actually in adultery I find the greatest fulfillment of my earthly life that I have ever known.

And so we chisel away a bit more. had it. And then we come along and we say it is impossible to keep that law. Any modern rational person must know that you can't keep that law.

And then there is the recognition that that law was put there for some perverse reason to stop me being who I really am.

[11 : 49] And who I really am is blocked by the presence of that law, so I've got to do something to change that law. And so we chisel away at it until finally we've cut right through and it teeters over and it's gone.

So one of the major guideposts that God has given us to get where we're meant to go is crumbled at our feet. And society has learned how to deal with it.

Well you know that that goes on all the time and that's basically how society works. Society says that God doesn't understand who we really are. We understand who we really are.

We experience it. We have to live it. God doesn't know what he's talking about and therefore the whole thing comes toppling down. And there we stand as master of our own fate and captain of our destiny without a sense of where to go because we've knocked down one of the signposts.

Well that's what Jesus is saying when he says that this law isn't going to change and it doesn't matter what you do it's still there. Well what happens next if you take the law and put it down there?

[13 : 08] What takes place next is you get religious teachers to come along and that's what people like me are for and this is what what I what the two kinds of teachers that are represented in the fifth chapter of Matthew they're there.

One of them is expected to somehow relax the law for people. People come along and say well it didn't really suit me to observe that law and can you tell me some way around it please?

And so this teacher over here begins to work on some way around it. Now it's entirely legitimate to ask some religious teacher to tell you how to get around it.

And that's how most religious people like me make their money telling people how to get around the law the law of God how to live with it in a world where it's very difficult to do so.

But Jesus says the person who does and teaches anything that relaxes that law is on the bottom rung. He's least in the kingdom of God.

[14 : 18] The person who teaches it as it is is the greatest in the kingdom. But it's not very popular. And so what people have to do is try and relax it in some way in order that people can live with it.

But Jesus goes on from there and says the reason for this is that I want you to take this person here which is the Pharisee and I want your virtue or your righteousness to exceed that of the Pharisee.

Now the Pharisees had made a life out of observing the law. And they had reduced it to 1,521 handy little aphorisms that you could take with you wherever you went in order to observe the law. But what they had done was in a sense not to face head on into it but in a sense to form some way of deviating past it.

But Jesus said no I have not come for that. I have come in order that your virtue your righteousness will exceed that of the Pharisees.

[15 : 38] Then Jesus goes on to say now do you want to know what I mean by that? Well I'll tell you what I mean by that. The Pharisees say thou shalt not kill. And then they get very technical about what is killing and what isn't killing and when is it your fault and when is it not your fault and when can it be allowed and when can it not be allowed.

Jesus said wipe that all away. I'm telling you to have hate in your heart and call your brother a fool. It's to transgress the law. The Pharisees come along and say thou shalt not commit adultery and then they get very technical about what is actual adultery and when can you be held responsible and when is it possible to do it and not be blamed for doing it and when is it allowable and they went into all that casuistry about it to try and get around the law.

Jesus said I'm telling you that the reason God said thou shalt not commit adultery may be best understood by you if you recognize that what he means by that is that you won't even look at a woman to lust after her.

It just won't come into your mind and heart to do that. It will be so alien to you. In fact he said it would be better for you to take your right eye and stretch it out.

That's the dominant eye. It would be better for you to stretch it out to go into life mainly than to depart from the demands of that law.

[17 : 14] And Jesus said well now if you want another one I'll give you a third example. The Pharisees come along and tell you these are the circumstances under which you can give to your wife a divorce.

A right of divorce. A writ. Divorcing. He said I'm telling you that the purpose of the law is to let you know that a man and a woman shall cleave to one another for the whole of their life.

That marriage is the basis of society and that's the thing that has to be done. And then in the passage that we're looking at today he comes along and gives them another example and says the thing I want you to remember is that you're to let your yes be yes and your no be no and there's to be nothing else.

Your speech is to be simple, straightforward, and absolutely honest. Well now you see what happens I think what I feel happens is there's two or three things happen around that problem. One is that we hear that from Jesus and we say well that is totally impractical because that is not who we are. And so people divide on it.

[18 : 36] And some people say I'm going to ignore the whole damn thing because it really doesn't have any practical application in my life. And another person is going to come along and being fearful and anxious and timorous and of a religious nature they're going to become so obsessed with it that there isn't you know that they spend all their time on it.

Then we look out at our society and we say well even though the guy who drinks too much, wenches too much, makes too much money, does too many things, even though we all despise him secretly we all wish we could get away with it the same way he does and we admire him. So we like Billy the Kid or the Great Train Robber or Al Capone these become in a sense the secret heroes of our lives. The guys that live life to the full and enjoy it to the dreg so to speak and go out drinking.

That's the kind of thing that we respect somehow. Those are the kind of people, the lusty, happy, fulfilling, extrovert people that seem to get away with it.

And we suspect that they in fact are right. And the person who unashamedly delights in God's creation, fighting, cursing, loving, drinking, is somehow we think that guy has come closer to what life is all about than anybody else.

[20 : 11] To be fearful to do that on the one hand and too religious to enjoy it on the other hand seems to be a perversion of what life is all about.

Like the Quaker lady who said, I'm having so much fun it must be sin. That sense of anything that's enjoyable is forbidden.

Well, that's how the thing happens. happens. And that's the problem that we have to get around. How do we get around it?

Well, I think the way you get around it is this. And you, you, I think we all need to recognize this. Because I'm, what happens, you see, is that when God puts his law down and says, this is it, and this is how you're to live, we find ourselves over here like this, saying, well, that doesn't fit who I am.

[21 : 17] And the problem then becomes, well, either I've got to make that fit me, or I've got to fit that. And Jesus says this to us.

He says, the really important thing that's going on in this world is not you finding and fulfilling the purpose you have, but God finding and fulfilling the purpose he has.

And he has a purpose which extends to you. And the fulfillment of your life, the maximum enjoyment of the potential of your individual existence is to be found when the purpose of God comes into your life.

That's, that's how life is to be lived, Christ said. But he says, that, I mean, Jesus says that God is at work in us, both to will and to do his good pleasure.

In one, in the, in the epistle to the Hebrews, it says that God is at work in you to make you perfect by working in you what is pleasing in his sight.

[22 : 24] So that your life and my life, in order to find their meaning, must be that arena or theater in which the purposes of God are accomplished.

Now, the purposes of God are accomplished by the free will that we have and the exercise of that free will and that free will coming up against the immutable and unchangeable law of God.

Because this passage ends with the statement, you are to be perfect even as your heavenly father is perfect. God's idea is to bring you to a place of perfection.

How's he going to do it? Well, he's going to do it not by compromising the law, but by saying the law is to be fulfilled and you have to live over against him.

And you're not to use your religious leaders to help you relax the law. You're to come to the place where you are able to face all the consequences of it.

[23 : 35] Well, in this particular passage that we're looking at today, Jesus gives another example of how you come to terms with this law. He says, and what they had done, you see, was that the one thing that you're not to do is to swear in God's name.

You could do anything else. You could swear by this building, you could swear by this city, you could swear by those mountains, you could swear by the sky, but don't come to swear by God. That's why Jesus says to them in this passage, I tell you, if you swear by heaven, it is the throne of God. If you swear by the earth, it's the footstool of God. If you swear by the city, Jerusalem, it's the city of God.

Even if you swear by your own head, you don't have control over that, he said. you can't make one hair white or black. There are bottles by which you can do that, but essentially, you know you're deceiving yourself.

He says, you can't do that. So that whatever you say, you say as before God. So he said, what you must do is to simplify the whole process and let your yes be yes and your no be no.

[24 : 51] And anything else, he says, comes from the devil. You remember that Scott Peck has written a book called The People of the Lie. And Jesus in John chapter 8 says, your father the devil was a liar from the beginning.

And if you think about it even a little bit, you'll know that lies are a much more useful way of getting from point A to point B as far as our life is concerned. And we use them all the time.

We recognize them all the time. Just as there were for the Pharisees in those days. So we have a pattern of lies which we accommodate within our society and we know when they're happening. Now there are some times when it's important and essential that you tell the truth. Then we take you into court and we put a Bible in your hand and say, do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.

And you say that and presumably it's a great sin if you don't. So I don't think it's a matter of very great importance to people in our society anyway because lying and accommodation of the truth to the particular situation and the particular results you want is something we do all the time.

[26 : 02] And so Jesus says that what you've got to do is get down to the point where your yes is yes and your no is no. And the Puritans did that in that they wouldn't take an oath in a courtroom.

You had to take their word for it or not at all. I don't think that that's what's demanded by Christ but what he says is that he wants communication to be honest.

Now I want to confess to you that the person I find it most difficult to be honest with is my wife. And in order to deceive her I use moods, feelings, deceptive words, I pretend anger, I hide jealousy, I disguise hurt.

All those things I find myself using. All the time. It's just become a pattern and a tradition. And it gets to the point where you simply can't fall. And I know lots of people of my age and stage in life who can't possibly go for a walk with their wife simply because it will just erupt.

Because you know you're lying, she knows you're lying, and what happens? You cannot get to the place of being really honest with each other. It's very difficult. That's why I think counselors are at a premium today to try and help us be honest with the people around us.

[27 : 25] Deal with the issues that have to be dealt with. It's very difficult to do. Because we have learned lying. I mean, I know in my own life that I like to tell people what I think they want to hear.

And that has nothing whatever to do with the truth necessarily. I find it very difficult. And so that the work God has to do in me in order to let my yes be yes and my no be no is a great deal of work indeed.

And my attitude has got to be that either I am open to letting God do that work in my relationship to those around me, or I simply will not let him do that work.

That's why when you get somebody like Mother Teresa interviewed on the television, her yes tends to be yes and her no tends to be no and she bowls over a whole continent simply by speaking the truth.

We're not used to that. We don't know how to handle it. I aspire to be an open book to my wife, but then when she reads it, I get angry with her at what she's read there.

[28 : 36] It's a very difficult thing to do. And that happens with my friends all the time. And I can't open up as I would love to open up, and I really need a great work of the grace of God going on in my life in order to be able to open up in that way.

Jesus, as a word, is a remarkable word. It is easy, I suppose, for 99% of the people in our society to drop a brick on their toe and say, Jesus Christ.

It's very easy. But then, get down on your knees, follow your head and close your eyes and say, Jesus Christ.

See how easy it is. It's remarkable, isn't it, how our words are very useful if we try and bring them from the heart.

God. And that's why I think Paul says, in Romans chapter 10, if you believe in your heart and confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, if you believe in your heart and confess with your lips, if you can get a direct connection going between the reality which you know in your heart and the thing that you say with your lips, Jesus says you'll be saved.

[29 : 59] in other words, that is a sign of the grace of God at work in you when you can do it. When you can do it before God, when you can do it before your friends.

And that's why it's necessary for our lives to be open to the thing that God wants to do in us. What God wants to do in us is bring us to the place where we are sufficiently honest with ourselves and with the people next to us, that we can let our yes be yes and our no be no.

That seems very simple, isn't it? But that's the fulfillment of the law. And there's no amount of swearing on the Bible, swearing by this, swearing by that, swearing by the other thing, that can take the place of that kind of simple honesty.

God wants to do it before. And it opens up to us the fact that what Christ is saying in this Sermon on the Mount is that in the matter of killing or adultery or divorce or the way we speak, there are vast areas in which God has to do a redemptive and healing work in our hearts and lives.

The thing that we have to do is decide whether we're going to be willing to be open to let him do it or not. God has that work to do, and it is his purpose to do it.

[31 : 34] We decide whether we're going to let him do it or not, or whether we're going to slowly hack down the law and then wonder why we're lost.