

For Such a Time as This A Daily Devotional Wednesday, July 10, 2024



From Matthew 5:

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall 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.

The passage is from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. He suggests that his presence in the world was not to abolish the law, but rather to fulfill it. Too often, we Christians have attempted to turn Jesus' words into a new law that must be adhered to in a strictly literal manner. Yet, Jesus' very words in this famous sermon seem to suggest an ethic of grace rather than strict observance of the law.

John A.T. Robinson, in his landmark book, *Honest to God*, frames the situation thusly: **'The clear teaching of our Lord' is taken to mean that Jesus laid down certain precepts which were universally binding. Certain things are always right, other things were always wrong – for all men everywhere. But this is to treat the Sermon on the Mount as the new Law, and, even if Matthew may have interpreted Jesus that way, there would hardly be a New Testament scholar today would not say that it was a misrepresentation.**

Instead of seeing Jesus' teachings as 'a new Law' applicable to every situation with every person, Robinson envisions this: **They are, as it were, parables of the Kingdom in its moral claims – flashlight pictures of the uncompromising demand which the Kingdom must make upon any who would respond to it.**

I think that Robinson is correct here. Jesus is not offering a new Law that must be obeyed, but rather a gracious, God-filled ethic that must be enacted with every situation and with every person. The ethics of grace does not produce universal and general responses to the demands of a faithful life, but rather a way of seeing the world through the eyes of a loving God that creates opportunity for response that honors such great divine mercy and grace.

I give Robinson the last word here: **Jesus never resolves these choices for us: he is content with the knowledge that if we have the heart of the matter in us, if our eye is single, then love will find the way, its own particular way in every individual situation.**

Prayer for the Day: (From *the Valley of Vision*)

Eternal God, may all we do be done for the reconciling of the world and for the greater glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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