

Things That Matter to God: God's Word, Part 2
From the Series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe
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Introduction

We're in part 2 of a series that we started in our last session. Let's do a quick review.

Last time, we started out with an article from Psychology Today. It had the title, "Ten Signs You Know What Matters". It was an article that talked about values. Here's how it started: "Values are what bring distinction to your life. You don't find them, you choose them. And when you do, you're on the path to fulfillment." Although I'm not sure about the path to fulfillment, I agree that we choose our values.

How? In order to choose our values, we need information. In today's world though, we have a problem. We have devices and TVs and radios and newspapers and computers and apps. We get so much information thrown at us, it feels like we're standing in front of a firehose set to full.

How do we get the information we need to choose our values? How do we decide what matters to us? If you want to be a follower of Jesus, then we can summarize what you need to know in this saying:

For the Master to be your Master, what matters to the Master must matter to you.

How do we decide what's important? We try to find out what is important to our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week, we learned the first of the things that we'll discuss in our series. God's word matters to the Master. We learned that by reading from Matthew 5:17-20. We'll revisit that at different times during our discussion.

In this session, we'll expand on the things we learned in our first session. We're going to learn three important things. They all start with the letter "W".

- I. The Wonder of God's Word.
- II. The Work of God's Word.
- III. The Weight of God's Word.

Let's begin with our first point.

I. The Wonder of God's Word

God's Word is wonder-full. It should cause us to feel a sense of wonder - A sense of awe. Why? Let's look at some reasons, starting with what we read last week.

17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." (Matthew 5:17)

The Law and the Prophet are the entire body of writings that we call the Old Testament. These were fulfilled in Jesus. We learn from this that God's Word represents God himself. Every word we read in the Bible comes from God. The Psalms talk about this:

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. (Psalm 119:18)

When we open God's Word, we see wonderful things. What kind of wonderful things?

Cause me to understand the way of your precepts, that I may meditate on your wonderful deeds. (verse 27)

When we open God's Word, we see God doing wonderful things. It's in God's Word that we learn that he created us and all things. The universe, and everything in it. The largest stars, all the way down to the smallest organisms are all part of the wonder of God's creation.

This causes wonder all by itself, but even more:

3 When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
4 what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
(Psalm 8:3-4)

When we look into the universe, we see things that cause us to feel wonder. When we open God's Word, we meet the God who created those things. Then, we stop and marvel that such a being takes the time to reveal himself to us.

As if this was not enough to cause us to feel wonder, we learn something else.

For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:18)

God's word is wonderful because it's eternal.

Here are some thoughts from the prophet Isaiah:

“All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.
7 The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.
8 The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever.”
(Isaiah 40:6-8)

Here’s what Isaiah is saying: Tragically, people come and go. We are here one day and gone the next. Along the way, we change. In particular, people can change their minds.

Is God like that? Does God change his mind? Let’s think about an example of why this is important. We’re told in God’s Word the Bible that if we believe in Jesus, our sins are forgiven. We have eternal life. However, imagine walking up to the gates of heaven one day. You’re ready to go in, but the gates are locked shut. There’s an angel standing by the gate guarding it. He says, “Sorry everybody, God changed his mind -Too bad!”

No, that will never happen. God is eternal and unchanging. God’s word is eternal and unchanging.

God’s word matters to the Master. In it, we learn the wonder of the Creator God who cares about us. As we study God’s Word together, we will learn more and more about the wonder of God’s word. For now, let’s move on to our second point.

II. The Work of God’s Word

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. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19-20)

We’ll run into the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law many times as we work through Matthew. For now, we’ll talk about four things, two of which we know from what we’ve just read.

First, they were major religious leaders in Israel in the days of Jesus. Second, as religious leaders, they should have been righteous, but they weren’t.

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (v. 20)

Jesus is saying here that the Pharisees won't be in the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who wants to be there will have to do better.

Third, the Pharisees were some of the people who diminished God's Word:

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. (v 20)

Why would they do that? Because their hearts were bad. Later in Matthew, Jesus says:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. (Matthew 23:23)

Jesus gives us an example of the kind of things Pharisees did. In the Law, people were told to tithe – to give ten percent of what they earned. The Pharisees followed that particular law. In fact, they followed it with great detail, measuring all aspects of their homes. It was challenging, but do-able. However, Jesus says they missed all the parts in the law that commanded people to pursue justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These were more important.

The Pharisees missed major parts of God's Word because their hearts were bad. This leads us to another thing that matters to the Master: Your heart matters to the Master. How does this relate to God's Word? Here's where we learn about the work of the Word.

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

The work of God's Word is to change our hearts. God's word is: Alive, active, penetrating, and judging. Sadly, the Pharisees, even though they were religious leaders, were not helped by God's Word. They picked the commands that they liked. They ignored others. This is how they taught people. Jesus warned his followers – If you want to enter God's Kingdom, you must do better. You must honor all of God's Word. And you must allow God to use it to change your heart.

God's Word matters to the Master because your heart matters to the Master. And God uses his word to change our hearts. That's part of the work of God's word.

So far, we've learned the wonder of God's Word. We just learned about the work of God's Word. Let's look at our final point.

III. The Weight of God's Word

Remember our Summary statement:

For the Master to be your Master, what matters to the Master must matter to you.

To be a follower of Jesus, you must give his Word **weight** in your life. God's Word must matter to you.

Maybe you're saying, "Well, here I am. I'm listening. That means I'm giving God's Word weight in my life." And that's a good start for which we commend everyone here. But let's dig deeper. Here's the question for us today: If you're here right now, then God's Word matters on some level to you. But, how much does it matter? How much weight does God's Word have **when compared to other sources of information in your life?**

Remember that fire hose we talked about early in our discussion? That's a symbol for all the information we receive on a daily basis. How does God's Word stack up against all the other sources of information that pass by us every day?

Let's look at one of the most important stories in the Bible - The Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Recall that God created Adam and Eve, the first humans. They were perfect. God placed them on in a perfect Garden on a perfect planet.

You know something funny? They were hit with a firehose of information, too. That's right. They had mountains of information flowing past them every minute of the day. Only, unlike today, every piece of information led to the same thing: God is wonderful. Every flower was a beautiful demonstration of artistry. Every animal was a display of amazing design. Every cloud showed God's majesty. Every bite of food was delicious. Every drop of water was refreshing. At that time, the world blew a firehose of information right at Adam and Eve. And every piece of information Adam and Eve received said, "God is wonderful".

But then, another source of information entered the Garden - Another voice spoke to Adam and Eve. The Bible scholars in the audience will recall that God gave only one rule for paradise: Don't eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. You can eat from every other tree – just not that one.

We read about the new voice in Genesis 3.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1)

I’ve spoken about this at length in other places so I can’t revisit the whole passage in detail. (For more detail, see my message, “Life Answers In Genesis - What Went Wrong?”) For now, let’s be reminded that this was the start of what I call the “Three Doubts of the Devil”.

- Doubt God’s Word
- Doubt God’s Power
- Doubt God’s Character

The first thing the Serpent wanted Adam and Eve to doubt was God’s Word. “Did God really say...” The Serpent wanted Adam and Eve to doubt that God had the ability and the willingness to speak clearly to them. If he had such ability and willingness, then Adam and Eve were to question whether God had anything worthwhile to say.

That has been the Devil’s first temptation for every human in the world ever since the days of Adam and Eve. From that day on, the firehose of information started to contain other pieces of information. Most of them suggesting that we turn away from God and follow other voices.

We could spend days talking about this, but I want to highlight a few points in history between the Garden of Eden and today.

Points of History 1

The first point is the initial reaction of Adam and Eve to the words of the Serpent.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.
(Genesis 3:6)

When Adam and Eve started listening to the new voice in the Garden, they started to consider the forbidden fruit. When they did this, three things stood out. It was: 1) Good for food, 2) Pleasing to the Eye, and 3) Desirable for gaining wisdom.

Let’s look at those three things. We don’t have a lot of time. So, I’m going to read these and jump to the practical implications.

1) “Good for Food” This reflects an attitude. It’s the start of a decaying respect for God and his Word. God said, “Don’t eat from that tree”. For Eve, God’s command was not sufficient. She looked at the fruit on the tree, and it looked like food. Therefore, she reasoned, you should be

able to eat it. Eve was making observations and collecting evidence to prove in her own heart that God didn't know what he was talking about.

There's a problem here: God didn't say, "Don't eat fruit from that tree because it's inedible". He said, "Don't eat it." This action on Eve's part showed that her attitude towards God and his Word were deteriorating.

Here's an important principle: Observations alone, even though they may produce individual true facts, do not always lead to a correct understanding of ultimate truth.

2) "Pleasing to the eye": The fruit looked good. This was a feeling. At this point, Eve had stopped listening to God, and instead, she listened to her feelings. Feelings aren't always bad, but they have a way of changing. Sometimes they change very quickly. In no way are feelings permanent. And feelings are not always connected to reality. Because of that, feelings and emotions are rarely the best way to determine whether information is correct.

3) "Desirable for gaining Wisdom": There is something about knowledge that is very seductive. Knowledge, it is thought, brings power. Power brings importance, or so it is thought. When you have knowledge, you can do things you can't do otherwise.

Now, Knowledge is not always bad. In fact, knowledge in the proper context can be a very good thing. However, as we said, knowledge can be very seductive. In this case, Adam and Eve had stopped listening to God. When the quest for knowledge is dominated by feelings, which can change by the moment, bad things can happen. And things get worse when people who have a decaying respect for God, and who base their decision on emotions, believe themselves to be superior to everybody else.

Let's compare. Adam and Eve were given the words and the command of God. Recall, God is eternal. His Word is eternal. That's one source of information. Then they had another source of information: The Serpent. They had their feelings. Those feelings were coupled with facts that were disconnected from ultimate truth. This gave Adam and Eve and a sense that what they were doing would give them knowledge and power. That feeling made them ***give weight to their own perceptions*** over God's Word. They completely dispensed with the eternal Word and disobeyed. The results were disastrous, for them and for the whole world.

That's one point of history. Let's look at another.

Points of History 2

The next point in history that we need to discuss is the Greek Philosophers. The Greek Philosophers, followed by the Roman philosophers, were a large group. They're complex. I'm not an expert on the whole group. However, we need to discuss two things about them.

1) They largely believed that you could reach ultimate truth by looking around. You make observations of your world and the universe. You apply tools like mathematics, reason, and philosophy to those observations. If you do this, you will eventually arrive at ultimate truth. Note: The Greeks believed you can do this without God.

As we learned by looking at the Garden of Eden, this is a bad idea. If you use observation, you can discover all kinds of things that as individual points of information are true. But, if you then rely on emotions and personal experiences to assemble the facts, and leave God out, bad things happen.

This problem is multiplied by a secondary belief that grows out of this system.

2) The world should be ruled by the Aristocracy

What is the aristocracy? The meaning has changed over the years. Today we understand aristocracy to be people who are born into an over-class. These people are privileged by birth and are placed in charge. In America and much of the western world, we reject this notion.

However, this isn't what the Greeks and Romans intended. They saw the Aristocracy as all the people who could live by the rules they created. The Aristocracy to them was all the people who understood philosophy, high-level mathematics, and science in the form of physics, chemistry, and astronomy. To be a member of the aristocracy, you had to earn it. This of course included them – they were the aristocracy.

There are two problems with this.

1) Based on what we learned from the Garden of Eden, all of this is a bad idea. Mathematics and science are all good when they're guided by a knowledge of God. Otherwise, they become corrupted. People who rely on disconnected facts interpreted by feelings are open to all kinds of bad conclusions.

2) (And this is a bigger problem) This is easily misunderstood. Let me explain: Everybody at some point wants to feel important and special. So, everybody at some point wants to be part of the aristocracy. Every society has some form of an elite group -- The people who are in charge, the people who have power.

Remember, as the philosophers envisioned the aristocracy, it was a group that you had to work to be in. You had to demonstrate knowledge, and the ability to process knowledge. There are legitimate ways to do this. In modern societies, we have something called "higher education". Colleges, etc.

But there are also ways to fake this. Here's where the fire hose comes in. Every person on the earth today is faced with massive streams of information coming at them. That information comes from a number of sources. Some of the sources are giving out information because they

want something from their listeners. Those people don't just give out information - ***They give information with a sense of status.***

These people say things like, "Oh, I'm so glad you're hear listening. I can see that you're one of the people who (wink, wink) gets it. You understand. You're not like all of the (roll eyes) other people".

When these people say things like this, they're giving a gigantic hint: Because you're listening to them, you're part of the aristocracy.

We all need to watch for this!

Points of History 3

There's a third point in history that we need to visit. It's the day that God spoke to Moses. Moses wrote down the things that God said. That started the writing that we call the Law and the Prophets - The writings that Jesus spoke about. Eventually, the collection of writings grew into what we have today, our Bibles.

In the Bible, in the Word of God, we now have an unchanging source of information. We have eternal truth. John quoted Jesus as saying, "Your Word is truth" (John 17:17)

This means that God has given us something that is not equal to other sources of information. It's certainly not lower than all the other information in the world. God's Word must be given the preeminent place in our lives. It's first. God's Word is to be given the most weight of all other information sources.

But here we run into a problem:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (I Corinthians 1:18)

The world looks at the message of God's Word, which includes things like the cross of Christ. It sees "foolishness".

Do you know what that means? It means if you accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ, if you accept God's Word the Bible as the primary authority in your life, you risk you place in the Aristocracy. In fact, you will likely lose it.

Whether someone has earned their place in the aristocracy with education, or whether they just imagine that they belong, the message is loud and clear: Something important is about to be taken away.

That's one reason why Jesus warned about honoring the entire word of God. That's why Jesus warned about ignoring or belittling any of it.

I have seen people over the years, for whom their place in the aristocracy, again, whether earned or imagined, is everything. They come to church. They listen. But it's as though they have a special lock on their brain. There is a little mechanism in their head that I'll call the "aristocracy alert". When they hear things in church that they think will threaten their place in the aristocracy, that lock slams into place and protects them.

In some cases, they stop listening. In some cases, they shake their heads. In some cases, they shake their fists. Blood vessels pop out in their necks. And they shout out, "You don't bring up that topic in this church, Pastor. That offends the smart people, the aristocracy!"

And sadly, at that point, many church leaders relent. Why do they relent? I think there are two reasons. First, they are made to think that if they pursue the whole Word of God, it will cause their church to be torn apart. Second, many church leaders fancy themselves to be part of the aristocracy. They don't want to give up their place, either.

Then everyone goes home. We turn on the TV. We turn on our devices, our phones, our computers, our whatever. We sit in churches and listen to 30 minutes of Bible. Then we sit in front of our devices, the firehose of information, for 30 hours.

When we turn on our devices, they tell us: "Thanks for coming back." "Thanks for hanging around with the aristocracy."

- The informed ones.
- The cool ones.
- The funny ones.
- The smart ones.

When we do this, we shut off your brain and let the fire hose fill it with information.

Friends, what gets the "weight" in your life? God's Word, or your devices?

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

What matters to the master? God's Word matters to the master. We want to understand that, so we've looked at three things today.

The wonder of God's Word.

God's Word is eternal, and it represents him and his thoughts for us.

The Work of God's Word.

God's Word is what he uses to change our hearts.

The Weight of God's Word.

For our hearts to change, we need to give God's word weight in our lives. It must be preeminent over all other sources of information. Giving it that weight is hard. If we put God's Word first, we risk our place in the aristocracy. Are you willing to do that?

Jesus gives a warning and a promise:

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. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19-20)

I want to see everyone who is listening today in the Kingdom of God. I want you all to be called "great" in the place. Let's ask God to help us to honor his word. Let's give it the weight it deserves.

Why? Because God's Word matters to the Master.