

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY THIRTEEN

Crucial Truths, Rarely Understood

Matthew 5:17–20

Without the Holy Scriptures we have no standard. The Word of God gives us measuring marks for our lives. “Thy Word is truth,” Jesus said. Without truth, we do what seems right in our own eyes.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAD we been sitting with the crowds listening to Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount, we would have been just as “amazed at his teaching” as they were (Matthew 7:28). In his book, *Simple Faith*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains the reason.

[Jesus] spoke with authority—the all-powerful, invincible authority of the Scriptures. Human opinions no longer mattered, not even the longstanding, rigidly enforced pharisaic rules and regulations.

Are we talking about merely making an impression or being persuasive? No. Webster defines *authority* as “the power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior.” I would use two additional words to describe authority: *convincing force* . . . a force far greater than any human can muster.¹

Jesus was not just any human. He was the Son of God, the King of God’s kingdom. His words flowed like spring water from heaven across the Galilean hillside, and although the people may not have fully understood His identity, they tasted the divine truth in His teaching . . . *and they were amazed!*



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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The scribes and Pharisees, on the other hand, were angered. They accused Jesus of setting Himself above the Mosaic law, of which they considered *themselves* the sole arbiters. In response, Jesus clarified His views on the law and His relationship to it as the perfect law keeper. He also clarified the role of Scriptures in our lives as a light to lead us on the path of His righteousness—a righteousness wholly different than the superficial religiosity of the scribes and Pharisees.

Let's uncover the crucial truths in Jesus' teaching about the authority of God's Word and righteousness and, once again, sit in awe before this amazing Teacher.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Although we can't hear Jesus' actual voice, we can read His words and sense His calling. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Open your heart to hear Jesus' voice inviting you to follow Him and ask the Father to guide you in the way of His Son.

Father, in a world that's lost its way, take me by the hand through the darkness and lead me in the way of Christ. Tune my heart to hear His words clearly and accurately as I learn from Him. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In *Matthew 5:17–20*, Jesus addressed a question that was on people's minds about the purpose of His ministry. "Don't misunderstand why I have come," Jesus said (Matthew 5:17). Perhaps rumors had spread from false charges planted by the Pharisees that Jesus intended to abolish the law. As you read this passage, notice how Jesus corrected their misunderstanding and explained His real reason for coming. He praised God's law and urged His followers to obey it as God intended. We can view this passage under two headings: *Christ and the law* and *Christians and the law*.



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Observation: Christ and the Law, Christians and the Law

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for main verbs and contrasts, such as, “I did not come” and “I came.” We also look for parallelisms and cause-and-effect statements, such as “if you ignore . . . you will be called the least” and “anyone who obeys . . . will be called great” (Matthew 5:19).²

Read the passage again and write down what you see. In addition to contrasts and cause-and-effect, do you find repeated words or phrases? Do you see comparisons, such as Christ’s purpose for coming and the purpose of God’s law? Use the following space to record your observations.

Christ and the Law—Matthew 5:17–18

To what was Christ referring when He said, “the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets” (Matthew 5:17)? How did Jesus correct the misunderstanding that He wanted to “abolish” the law and the prophets?



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The prophets began their messages, “This is what the LORD says,” drawing their authority from God. Religious teachers buttressed their words by starting with “Teacher ‘so-and-so’ says . . .” Jesus, however, bypassed the prophets’ preamble and pharisaic footnoting. Looking at Matthew 5:18, how did Jesus introduce His own words? What was Jesus implying about His own authority by doing this?

Consider the scope of Jesus’ life—from His birth to His death and resurrection. In what ways did Jesus fulfill Old Testament prophecies? The following verses give a few specific examples: [1:21–23](#); [8:16–17](#); [12:16–18](#); [21:1–5](#).

Jesus not only fulfilled messianic prophecies, He also met the Old Testament’s requirement for perfect righteousness. The entire sacrificial system came to fulfillment in Christ when He gave Himself as the once-for-all and for-all-time sacrifice for sin ([Hebrews 9:27–28](#); [10:11–12](#)).

Prophetically, doctrinally, and ethically, Jesus accomplished every “jot and tittle” of Scripture by living His life in harmony with it and accomplishing its grand purpose.³

God cares so much about His Word that not even the smallest letter of any part of the Word of any verse of Scripture will pass away. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Christians and the Law—Matthew 5:19–20

Having upheld the sanctity and authority of Scriptures, even to the tiniest pen strokes, Jesus urged His followers to live under its authority. According to *Matthew 5:19*, what did Jesus say to avoid and to do?

The logical question that follows is *how* do we obey God's laws? Certainly not by following the example of “the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees” (Matthew 5:20). What did Jesus say in *5:20* about the consequences of following their misdirected leadership?

Let's dig deeper into Jesus' warning that our righteousness must be *better than* the righteousness of “the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees” (5:20). What did Jesus mean?

Jesus understood the nature of righteousness, which had nothing to do with external living but all with internal. It's not what goes into the person that corrupts him or her; it's what comes out from the inside. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Internal versus External Righteousness

In Jesus' day, “the teachers of religious law” (Matthew 5:20), also known as scribes, drafted rules of religious life to dictate how people should apply the Mosaic laws. They defined what counted as “work” forbidden on the Sabbath, for example, or what was ritually clean and unclean. Their longwinded pronouncements were passed down orally from generation to generation and considered as binding as Scripture.



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While the scribes defined the rules, the Pharisees separated themselves from ordinary life to keep themselves pure and act as judges of everyone else. In the eyes of average Jews, the Pharisees stood on high pedestals of holiness; they were the most righteous among them and the worthiest of entrance into God's kingdom.

Jesus shocked the crowd by teaching that His followers' righteousness must be "better than the righteousness of the teachers of the religious law and the Pharisees" (Matthew 5:20). What was Jesus implying about the *nature* of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? Why was their righteousness *unworthy* of the kingdom of God? For help with the answer, read page 98 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org.

How can our righteousness surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? Commentator John Stott explains, "Christian righteousness is greater than pharisaic righteousness because it is deeper, being a righteousness of the heart."⁴

Two prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, foretold a "new covenant" in which God's people could obey His law from their hearts and not superficially like the scribes and Pharisees. Let's take a brief look at these texts and the new covenant they describe.



Correlation: The Law Written on Our Hearts

Later in His ministry, Jesus exposed the scribes' and Pharisees' hypocrisy by quoting Isaiah. According to [Matthew 15:7–9](#), what fault lines of sin undermined their religious works and brought them tumbling off their pedestals?



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The Pharisees had a “heart” problem that God would remedy in the new covenant foretold by the Old Testament prophets. What did Jeremiah prophesy about the new covenant that makes it better than the covenant God made with Moses (*Jeremiah 31:31–33*)?

According to *Ezekiel 36:25–27*, what makes heart-righteousness possible for us?

The “better than” righteousness of the heart is possible because of Christ’s new covenant with us (Luke 22:20). Christ’s atonement on the cross, new life through His resurrection, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit mark the path to the kingdom of God.

The beauty of the cross of Christ is that it’s able to change a heart given to selfishness and arrogance and lust and covetousness and pride. It’s able to wash it clean through the blood of Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Putting Ourselves Under the Right Authority

How can we move beyond the pretense of external righteousness into a life of holiness lived from our hearts? Pastor Chuck Swindoll sums up his counsel in three words: *respect, obedience, and commitment*.



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- *Our respect for the Scriptures must be absolute, not almost.* When God issues a rebuke in His Word, don't overlook it but receive it as from His loving hand.
- *Our obedience to the Scriptures should be total, not partial.* We must beware the pharisaical traps of rationalizing and covering up our sin behind religious masks.
- *Our commitment to a scriptural lifestyle must be inward and deep, not external and superficial.* Don't dress up your faith to impress others but live it authentically before God from your heart.

Think back to your opening prayer. Did you hear your Shepherd's voice inviting you to a deeper walk with Him that flows from your heart? Righteousness that is better than what the Pharisees could muster in their own strength is not possible apart from Him and His empowering Spirit in you. In what area of your life may the Lord be inviting you to follow Him more closely and obey Him more deeply?

Kingdom-living begins by living under the authority of the King. As you close, affirm your commitment to the Lord as your highest authority and to depend on and respect His Word as your sole guide for living.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Use the following space to pen your own declaration of “dependence” on God and His Word today.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Simple Faith* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 63.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
3. The phrase, “one jot or one tittle” (Matthew 5:18 NKJV), bears explaining. The word *jot* refers to the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, the *yōd*, which resembles an apostrophe. The word *tittle* refers to a tiny projection of a Hebrew letter that distinguishes it from a similar letter, much like the upward projection on an *h* distinguishes it from an *n*. Jesus was affirming the authority and enduring value of all Scripture, even the smallest detail.
4. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 75.

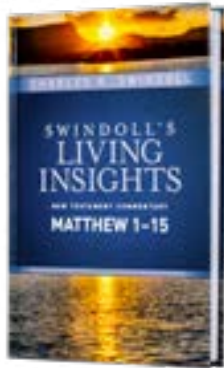


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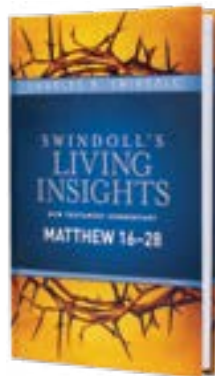
Matthew 5:17–20



Tools for Digging Deeper



Swindoll's Living Insights
New Testament Commentary
Insights on Matthew 1–15
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New Testament Commentary
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For the 2021 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Studies, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

