

Day 19
Law-Abiding Citizens?

Matthew 5:6 (TLB) "Happy are those who long to be just and good, for they shall be completely satisfied.

For Jesus' audience, obeying the Law was the means to a blessed life. That is what they were taught, that is what they knew, and that is what most of them pursued. "Righteousness must be obtained by obeying the Law. We have to be Law-abiding citizens. We are no good; we are not just or righteous if we do not obey the Law of Moses." So, Jesus tells them to hunger and thirst after righteousness. They had no problem with this specific beatitude; after all, they wanted to be righteous. But then, Jesus does what Jesus does so well. He makes a statement that profoundly changes what they understood about righteousness. Their righteousness has to be better than the religious leaders who they thought were perfectly righteous.

Jesus makes this statement during His sermon, and what preceded that statement seems to create some confusion for them. Jesus said, **"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. 18 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."** (Matthew 5:17-18 NIV)

So the Law is not to be abolished, but it is to be fulfilled. Heaven and earth will disappear, but not the smallest letter of the Law. Is Jesus saying, "For you to be righteous, you'd better obey the Law better than the religious leaders"? Does it mean we have to pray more than they did, fast more than they did and give more than they did? Think about it this way, laws are made for a two-fold reason; first, to protect the innocent, and, secondly, to punish those who break the law. The law is a safeguard for the law-abiding person and a punishment for the law breaker. The law reveals the wrong. Paul writes and says, **"Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins."** (Galatians 3:19a NLT)

Is there something wrong with the Law? No! The Law is perfect. So what is the problem? We are the problem! **"So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin."** (Romans 7:14 NLT) No matter how hard we try to obey the Law, the best we can do is to obey parts of the Law, not all of it. Partial obedience to the Law does not suffice. **"For Moses writes that the law's way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all of its commands."** (Romans 10:5 NLT) So we have a spiritual dilemma: We have to obey all of the Law perfectly; every part of the Law; nothing can be left out. The problem with us and the Law is that the Law needs perfection, yet we are imperfect. No matter how hard we try, we just cannot do it. No wonder Paul exclaimed, **"Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** (Romans 7:24-25a NKJV)

If we truly grasp the depth of our problem and the absolute amazing gift that we have received through Jesus, there will be no need for any outside motivation to keep us hungry and thirsty for His righteousness. The Law Giver has become our Law Fulfiler so that we might become His righteousness; a righteousness that far exceeds anything we could accomplish on our own. Can we boast and brag about it like we have seen in the Pharisees? Absolutely not! **"Can we boast, then, that we have done**

*anything to be accepted by God? **No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. 28 So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. 29 After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. 30 There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. 31 Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law.**" (Romans 3:27-31 NLT)*

We fulfill the Law by faith. Our faith in Jesus' works of righteousness allows us to operate as people who have completely obeyed the Law. In Jesus, we have fulfilled everything the Law demands, even though we could not obey it ourselves. Jesus has become our Perfect Substitute. Jesus has become our Sacrifice. Jesus has become our Sabbath. Jesus has become everything the Law demanded, and we have received perfect righteousness because, through Jesus, we obeyed the Law. **The legal requirements of the Law are fulfilled in Jesus and we are now in Him, so, in essence, we fulfilled the Law by being in Jesus.**

When the Father looks at us, He sees perfect law-abiding citizens. Because He looks at us through Jesus, the Perfect Law Abider, and we are abiding in Him...

Reflection and Prayer:

- **When you see what Jesus did for you, what does it do for your spiritual appetites?**
- **The power of sin is broken in your life. What sin are you still allowing to have control over you?**
- **Take a moment and confess it...be transparent and completely vulnerable before the Lord. It's not like He will be surprised by what you confess.**
- **Thank the Lord for the freedom He has given you, and praise Him for the fact that He has become your righteousness.**
- **Walk tall because you are complete in Jesus and continue being hungry and thirsty for His righteousness.**