

## Matt 5.33-48

Before we dive in...

- Who wrote the book of Matthew?
- Why do you think that? Did someone tell you? Why do you trust them?
- 5.17 - “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
  - What does "fulfill" mean?
  - Matt 2 - [16] When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. [17] Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: [18] “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more .”
  - Jer 31 - This is what the Lord says: “A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more .” [16] This is what the Lord says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded, “declares the Lord. "They will return from the land of the enemy. [17] So there is hope for your future,” declares the Lord. “Your children will return to their own land.
  - Where is Ramah? Eleven miles north of Bethlehem, on the other side of Jerusalem! If this were a Prediction, Jeremiah got the wrong town.



- The passage in Jeremiah turns into an occasion for joy... but there was no joy in Bethlehem.
- The translation of "to fulfill" is lekayem in Hebrew (le-KAI-yem), which means to uphold or establish, as well as to fulfill, complete or accomplish.<sup>2</sup> David Bivin has pointed out that the phrase "fulfill the Law" is often used as an idiom to mean to properly interpret the Torah so that people can obey it as God really intends. The word "abolish" was likely either levatel, to nullify, or la'akor, to uproot, which meant to undermine the Torah by misinterpreting it.
- What does "fulfill" mean?
- Similar to the word for adultery today, where most of us think we know what it means.
  - Moichea, either transliterated in Jerome's [Latin] translation or twice "adulterate", and then in 1385's first English translation by Wycliffe as "avowteria."

## I. OATHS 33-37

33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

- A. What does this have to do with profanity, or cursing?
  1. Nothing. Rather, it discusses invoking GOD'S NAME (or substitutes for it) to guarantee the truth of what one says.
  2. Jesus: MY disciples should be a people of such integrity that whatever they say is absolutely believable and dependable!
- B. Deep integrity
- C. Essenes... Josephus "everything they speak is more forceful than an oath" (travel with no baggage, but not without armor)
- D. Relate Randy's MOBY DICK example (two screen prints down below)
- E. ...end 33-37

to your word. Just let your yes be yes and your no be no; anything else comes from the evil one." In other words, I want you to have an integrity that runs so deep that nothing you could say would add anything to your simple word.

I want you to think about our language. One of my favorite words in English is "really." I'll tell you a story and you'll say, "Really." Meaning, maybe what I told you was true and maybe it wasn't. Jesus wants to put that "really" out of business. When I say something you don't have to say "Really?" or "Is that true?" because it's always true. There are times when integrity is easy, but integrity really proves itself when it's hard. I have a test that I give to my students to find out if they have integrity. I'm pretty sure they don't, but it's important that they know they don't.

My students are very harsh and very critical of public figures who get in trouble and then try to lie their way out of it. And so I got to wondering whether my students would do any better. So I tried to create a dilemma where I was pretty sure they would lie. And here it is.

While I'm telling this story, I want you to sit in the class with them and imagine you are there, squarely in the middle of this dilemma and answer for yourself. What would you do?

I tell my students the following story.

Suppose it's your last semester at school, and you're getting ready to graduate with a degree in accounting. You have a person who's ready to marry you. You have a job lined up with one of the few accounting firms that's still left in the world. Life is perfect. And then you get the dreaded call from the registrar's office. You're one course short of graduation. You complain. You cry. You try to negotiate, but if you don't know this you should: it is easier to negotiate with a terrorist than it is with a registrar. You finally just give up and say, "What do I have to do?" You

have to take an English class. So you take the only English class that fits into your schedule, early American literature.

The first thing you read is *The Scarlet Letter*. Have you read *The Scarlet Letter*? It's a fascinating book. It is all about sex but still manages to be deadly boring. Leave it to a Puritan to take the most salacious of possible topics and make it boring! After you get through that loser, you read *Huckleberry Finn* and you're delighted about that because you didn't know it was literature. Then you get to the poetry. None of it rhymes. The great thing about poetry is that it's short. You're not doing great but you're managing. And then you come to the last assignment in the course, which is to read the great American novel, and everyone knows this is *Moby Dick*.

For those of you who don't know this, *Moby Dick* is eight hundred dense pages about whaling. You're from Kansas. Whales haven't been an important part of your life. You're thinking they're not going to be. You're thinking, *I've been a good sport up until now, but I am not reading Moby Dick!*

So you begin to prepare otherwise. You first of all read the Cliff Notes or the Monarch Notes, because you figure whoever writes the notes would understand the book better than you would have anyway. But you don't stop there. You watch both movies—the one with Gregory Peck and the one with the Star Trek guy. You're not expecting to get an "A" in this class or on this test, you just want to get your "C" and get on with your life.

You come to the test, the final test in the course, and this idiot of a professor has put only one question on the final test.

That question on the test—the one and only question—is this: Did you read *Moby Dick*?

And if you answer that question truthfully, you will get a zero on the final. You will fail the course. You won't graduate. You won't get that job you've lined up, and that person who

was going to marry you is probably not going to marry a loser like you.

Would you tell the truth in that situation?

I've given that dilemma to students for years. It's really interesting. Some students I didn't think could think at all suddenly became theologians. Oooohhh. They think God is timeless so I can say I read the book, read it later, and it will be the same to God! Ninety-five percent of my students say in that situation of course they would lie and then begin to explain to me why that would be the right thing to do. Melville's dead. It's a victimless crime. God wants me to marry that person. He wants me to get that good job so I can give my money to the poor. I'm strongly suspecting that the five percent of the people who say they wouldn't lie are probably lying about that. Isn't that interesting?

What about you? What would you have done?

For most of us, when it comes down to it, if the cost is high enough, our integrity is for sale. But if we go through the rest of our lives deciding whether we're going to tell the truth or not based on cost benefit analysis, we're going to lie a lot. I don't know if you've noticed, but we've got an integrity crisis in the world.

When Jesus comes along and says I want you to have an integrity that runs so deep that when you say yes it always means yes and when you say no it always means no—that is teaching that would revolutionize the world.

I heard a well-known Christian speaker in chapel at a school far away, and I was really excited about hearing him. He got up and said he wanted to talk to us about integrity. You know I really got excited because I'm an ethics teacher.

The speaker began by saying, "Okay, we're going to talk about integrity." He said, "I talked to the three most successful

people I know, and I asked them, "To what do you attribute your success?"

All three of these highly successful people said the same thing: integrity. They attributed their success to integrity. The speaker was very excited about this correlation, but I was not happy. Why? What's the downside to what he was saying? How could I be so negative?

Sitting on the front row I thought, *Oh, you will never recover from that.* Because you've told the students the right thing but given them the wrong reason for doing it. You've told them the reason they ought to have integrity is because it leads to success. Anybody can have integrity when it leads to success. The question is will we have integrity when it leads to the cross?

So Jesus says there's no point in swearing. You need to be so much like your Father in heaven that yes means yes and no means no and truthfulness is our way of life and the reason we're not going to cheat on the *Moby Dick* test is this: because we're not that kind of people. We're people who have been formed from the Sermon on the Mount and we understand this. Yes has to mean yes and no has to mean no. At least that's Jesus' opinion.

I think you see how difficult it is. If the stakes are high enough to fudge the truth when it doesn't really seem as if there's any difference, and if we make our decisions based on cost benefit analysis, there's going to be a lot of dishonesty. One of the things I'm really curious about is, Do you think that integrity is something you can "sort of" have? Not according to Jesus. He says our yes should mean yes and no mean no. At some point we've got to decide if we're going to tell the truth because that's what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. And even in situations where it may cost us enormously, yes means yes and no means no, because that's what Jesus calls us to do.

## II. RETALIATION 38-42

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

- A. Different sources have different sub-titles for sections in scripture. Which is the better sub-title in this case: Retaliation, or Servanthood?
- B. How effective are courts? Does the court system in the USA reduce violence?
  - 1. Randy: "There is something in the heart that laws and courts can never fully address or deal with effectively. This doesn't render the courts useless. But it does render them limited."
- C. Lex Talionis - "eye for an eye" Legal principal to LIMIT violence, not promote it.
- D. Jesus: not just a Limit, but Zero!

Last year I read the book [\*The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries\*](#) by Rodney Stark, published by HarperSanFrancisco in 1997. I was intrigued by the subtitle, as it's a question I often wondered about. How did Christianity dislodge classical paganism and become the dominant faith of Western civilization? I had my own theories, of course, but it was fascinating to read [a non-Christian sociologist's analytical perspective](#) on the matter. (At the time of publication, Stark identified as an agnostic, but in a [2007 interview with Massimo Introvigne](#), he said that he now identifies as an "independent Christian.")

Stark's research led him to the following conclusion:

*Christianity did not grow because of miracle working in the marketplaces (although there may have been much of that going on), or because Constantine said it should, or even because the martyrs gave it such credibility. It grew because Christians constituted an intense community, able to generate the "invincible obstinacy" [against paganism] that so offended the younger Pliny but yielded immense religious rewards. And the primary means of its growth was through the united and motivated efforts of the growing numbers of Christian believers, who invited their friends, relatives, and neighbors to share the "good news." . . .*

*Let me state my thesis: Central doctrines of Christianity prompted and sustained attractive, liberating, and effective social relations and organizations.*

*I believe that it was the religion's particular doctrines that permitted Christianity to be among the most sweeping and successful revitalization movements in history. And it was the way these doctrines took on actual flesh, the way they directed organizational actions and individual behavior, that led to the rise of Christianity. (208, 211)*

In his elaboration of this thesis, Stark proposes the following reasons for Christianity's rapid growth in the first few centuries of the Common Era.

## **#1 -- Christianity radically and attractively redefined the God-to-man and man-to-man relationships.**

Christianity teaches that God is a God of universal and self-giving love, and that obligates us to love not just those who belong to our family, country, or religion, but *all* people, even if that means disadvantaging ourselves.

Something distinctive did come into the world with the development of Judeo-Christian thought: the linking of a highly social ethical code with religion. There was nothing new in the idea that the supernatural makes behavioral demands upon humans—the gods have always wanted sacrifices and worship. Nor was there anything new in the notion that the supernatural will respond to offerings—that the gods can be induced to exchange services for sacrifices. **What was new was the notion that more than self-interested exchange relations were possible between humans and the supernatural.** The Christian teaching that God loves those who love him was alien to pagan beliefs. [Ramsay] MacMullen has noted [in his 1981 book Paganism in the Roman Empire] that from the pagan perspective “what mattered was . . . the service that the deity could provide, since a god (as Aristotle had long taught) could feel no love in response to that offered.” Equally alien to paganism was the notion that because God loves humanity, Christians cannot please God unless they love one another. Indeed, as God demonstrates his love through sacrifice, humans must demonstrate their love through sacrifice on behalf of one another. Moreover, such responsibilities were to be extended beyond the bonds of family and tribe, indeed to “all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:2). These were revolutionary ideas. (86, emphasis added)

Such teachings provided a moral order based not on reason or self-interest, but on mutual obligation and sacrifice. The beauty of these virtues is in part what attracted new converts to the faith.

One implication of the above is that **Christianity provided social services that the government did not.**

At a time when welfare and social security and health care plans did not exist, the church was essential in providing such aid. They looked after not only their own, but those outside their community as well. The Roman emperors recognized, however reluctantly, that Christians filled a role that they were not effectively filling. And individuals were attracted to the security the church afforded and likely curious about what it was that inspired such generosity.

In the fourth century, the emperor Julian launched a campaign to institute pagan charities in an effort to match the Christians. Julian complained in a letter to the high priest of Galatia in 362 that the pagans needed to equal the virtues of Christians, for recent Christian growth was caused by their “**moral character, even if pretended,**” and by their “**benevolence toward strangers and care for the graves of the dead.**” In a letter to another priest, Julian wrote, “I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by the priests, the impious Galileans observed this and **devoted themselves to benevolence.**” And he also wrote, “The impious Galileans **support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.**”

Clearly, Julian loathed “the Galileans.” He even suspected that their benevolence had ulterior motives. But he recognized that his charities and that of organized paganism paled in comparison with Christian efforts that had created “a miniature welfare state in an empire which for the most part lacked social services” [Paul

Johnson, A History of Christianity. New York: Atheneum, 1976: 75]. By Julian's day in the fourth century it was too late to overtake this colossal result, the seeds for which had been planted in such teachings as "I am my brother's keeper," "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," and "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (83-84, emphasis added)

The church was also essential in providing nursing care to plague victims, oftentimes at the expense of their own lives. The bishop Dionysius wrote that this was a form of martyrdom. Whereas pagan elites and their priests simply fled the affected cities, some even leaving family members behind, Christian presbyters, deacons, and laymen stayed to provide food, water, and friendship to their neighbors. So after consecutive epidemics had swept through a city, a disproportionate number of those remaining would either have been Christians or pagans who had been ministered to by Christians.

## **#2 -- Christianity treated women better than all the other religions did.**

Those contemporary voices who denounce Christianity as patriarchal and sexist may be surprised to know that within the early Christian subculture, women enjoyed far higher status than did women in the Greco-Roman world at large. They served, for example, as deacons, teachers, church planters, and evangelists, and were given much more honor and respect than were the women in pagan subcultures. Stark quotes several historians of the early church as well as biblical scholars on this issue to demonstrate the consensus that women held positions of honor and authority within early Christianity. Here are just a few:

*This text teaches with the authority of the Apostle that . . . there are, as we have already said, women deacons in the Church, and that women, who have given assistance to so many people and who by their good works deserve to be praised by the Apostle, ought to be accepted in the diaconate.*—Origen, early third century, in a comment on Paul's letter to the Romans

*The Christian clergy . . . took a step that separated them from the rabbis of Palestine . . . [T]hey welcomed women as patrons and even offered women roles in which they could act as collaborators.*—Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*

*Women . . . are Paul's fellow workers as evangelists and teachers. Both in terms of their position in the larger society and in terms of their participation in the Christian communities, then, a number of women broke through the normal expectations of female roles.*—Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*

**Christianity was also the first religion to give married women rights by placing obligations on the husband:**

Christians condemned promiscuity in men as well as in women and stressed the obligations of husbands toward wives as well as those of wives toward husbands. . . . The symmetry of the relationship Paul described [in [1 Corinthians 7:2-7](#)] was at total variance, not only with pagan culture, but with Jewish culture as well. (123)

### **#3 -- Christians regarded all human life as sacred and thus had more children than the pagans did.**

Christians did not practice abortion or [exposure of infants](#); in fact, they passionately condemned such practices. It was common for the Greeks, Romans, and those of other ancient cultures to kill unwanted babies—those who were deformed, female, or illegitimate—by leaving them outside to die from exposure to the elements or from being eaten by wild animals. Christians, though, believe that all human life is precious to God and worth advocating for. They were known to take in victims of attempted infanticide and to adopt children whose families could no longer support them. In this way, their numbers grew.

### **Christianity was open to people of all ethnicities.**

The Christian God is not the exclusive possession of any one people group; he is the world's. His blessings are available to all peoples, regardless of region or race, and devotion to him does not require the giving up of one's ethnic identity. In this sense, Christianity was the most inclusive of all the ancient religions.

*In my judgment, a major way in which Christianity served as a revitalization movement within the empire was in offering a coherent culture that was entirely stripped of ethnicity. All were welcome without need to dispense with ethnic ties. . . . In this way Christianity first evaded and then overwhelmed the ethnic barrier that had prevented Judaism from serving as the basis for revitalization. (213)*

---

In the book Stark also discusses Christianity's rate of growth (including numerical estimates), the demographics of the early church, the direction of its spread and the areas of highest concentration, and the causes and effects of its marriage to the state under the rule of Constantine. I heartily recommend it.

### **III. LOVE YOUR ENEMIES 43-48**

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in

heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

A. 43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ (ESV)

1. From which verse in OT? Lev 19.18 Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.
2. Hate your enemy?

-eof-