The Purpose Of The Scriptures
John 5:39-47

Some years ago, my wife and I were blessed with being able to travel to Israel and to enjoy seeing and experiencing first-hand many of the places and the settings spoken about in our scriptures.

While on that trip, I met and spoke at length with some young Hasidic Jewish men from New York who were traveling to Israel on a two-year educational sabbatical.

I learned that these were dedicated young Jewish men who planned to spend their time in a "Yeshiva" devoting themselves to the study of the Torah and the Talmud, learning Jewish law and Rabbinic traditions and dedicating much of their time to prayer.

The young men would be immersed in a religious way of life where Torah study, prayer, kosher food, Shabbat observance, Jewish holidays, and a local Jewish community can become the normal rhythm of life.

The intent of it all was that these young men would then bring all that they had learned back with them and put it into place in the communities they would live within here in America.

And yes, there seemed to be something very good about all that these young men were doing. I especially observed some of them as they would be gathered together in their Yeshivas and study rooms in some of the buildings that we would visit during some of our tours, especially in the City of Jerusalem.

And yes, these young men seemed to be so dedicated to all that they believed that their efforts would accomplish for them.

But unfortunately, as I read the words of the Lord Jesus and I consider these words given to us here in these scriptures, I know that there was something very important missing from all that those young men were doing. Those words in verse 39 of John chapter 5 again,

> 39You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. (John 5:39)

I can recall one of those young men that I spent some time talking too. He was so enthusiastic, and so committed to this exact belief, that by studying and by giving a life commitment to all that he would learn in the Torah and the Talmud, he would surely not only live well while here on this earth, but especially have an eternity with God in heaven.

And that was exactly what the Lord Jesus was warning the Jews of His day about.

Oh dear friends, it is so easy to get this wrong, to use and to misuse the intent of these blessed words of God. They are all "Good Words", very "Good Words", but with only the slightest twist and turn of these phrases, we can get them wrong.

Listen again, because these simple words of the Lord Jesus are some of those very words and phrases. Listen . . .

> [39]You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, [40]yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:39-40)

Considering all that has been said so far, first about the young men who traveled to Israel for a time of dedicated study of these scriptures, and then also, these and other words like them that the Lord Jesus commanded about these same scriptures, what are we, what are you and I supposed to believe and to do with these precious words?

Here, the Lord Jesus was asking a question that I would like for you and me to ask ourselves today, "What is the "purpose" of the Holy Scriptures supposed to be in the life of a believer, in your and in my life?" "What was God's purpose in giving these scriptures to us? What should these scriptures be accomplishing in your and my life?"

The Jews of Jesus' day believed that it would be through rigorously following each and every precept of the "Law" that God would reward their efforts and grant them eternal life in heaven.

And now even in our day, as I consider those young men who were planning to immerse themselves in their religious studies, they seemed to have the same misguided beliefs.

But here in these words of our scripture text, the Lord Jesus is telling them then and telling you and me now that it is not by simply following every jot and tittle of the law given in these scriptures that a person will gain eternal life. It will instead be through knowing and believing in and surrendering our souls over to the One that these scriptures are revealing to us, the Lord Jesus, that we will gain eternal life.

And yes, for many of us more seasoned Christians, this subtle difference in what these few words of scripture are explaining to us is easier to understand and to accept. For most of us, this truth has been drilled into our understanding for most of our Christian lives.

The words given to us in the Book of Romans that tell us that, "we are no longer under the law, we are under grace", are well understood and accepted in most all of our modern day church settings.

But of late, as I have observed the teachings and the behaviors of many of our "churched" people, those who faithfully attend and participate in what we have accepted to be dedicated evangelical churches, I am often given pause to wonder what some of their beliefs about these scriptures really might be.

May I pause here for a few moments and give what I have come to accept as some of the best understanding about what I (we) ought to believe about these scriptures. And I believe that the Westminster Confession of Faith expresses those thoughts well. And I would like to paraphrase some of those thoughts for us here today.

In Psalm 19 and in other scriptures like them, we are told that nature itself and the works of creation and providence manifest and declare the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, so clearly that it leaves mankind without excuse. But with that being so, they are not sufficient to give us a knowledge of God and of His will, which is necessary to bring us to salvation.

And because that be so, that we need more, through His great wisdom, God has been pleased to reveal Himself, and to declare His will to us, by also committing His truths into writing which we now have in these Holy Scriptures.

And as we are so well told in 2 Timothy 3:16,

> [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

And folks, for this reason, because the words of our scriptures are not simply the testimonies of men, given to us through their hands and minds, they are not simply their thoughts and their ideas. as so many within the unbelieving world have want to believe. But these words truly are the "breathed out" truths of God. And we really must trust and understand and believe that to be so.

And as you and I do truly surrender our hearts to the Lord Jesus in salvation, God's Holy Spirit with confirm that truth to us and we will believe it.

And we are especially cautioned within God's words to never simply pick and choose some of the truths He gives to us. His desires and His plans for us are best fulfilled as we receive and then put into practice the "whole counsel of God". His truth has so many possibilities and applications within it, that unless we employ it in its fulness, we will miss out on many of its joy-filled results.

But another caution is also to always be observed and followed and that is that we be ever so careful not to add our own personal thoughts and ideas into the mix of god's precious words of truth. Yes, the Holy Spirit will give us thoughts about how to apply His truths, but we must be so very, very careful never to add anything to His blessed scriptural truths. That was one of the failures of the religious leaders of Jesus day, they added "traditions" into the requirements of the Law, corrupting its meaning.

And folks, whenever in doubt about the meaning of one or another of God's truths, the scriptures themselves will interpret them for us. We must search the other scriptures to find our answers. Simply put, scripture interprets scripture, they are inerrant and infallible and are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life.

But, with all of this being said, may we ask again, what do you, what do I truly believe? We may want to believe these words that we have been saying here. But what is it that we truly believe about these scriptures. What are the purposes God has for them within our lives?

I ask us that question again, because Jesus was asking that question that day. And He was not trying to "trick" those Jewish leaders. He was genuinely provoking them to consider the question of what they believed about the scriptures. He said to them, John 5

> 39You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, 40yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:39-40)

The first part of verse 39 has two connotations, one, that these people have already been searching the scriptures to find eternal life. But there is also another connotation, one that commands that they go again and search the scriptures to see if in them there is eternal life.

But Jesus quickly answers His own question, by saying that what they will find is that the scriptures simply point to and tell about Him.

On at least two occasions, Jesus spoke of these and other Jewish leaders as being "blind guides". And on one occasion He said that they were "blind guides" leading other blind men.

If you are like me, you aren't overly generous in your thoughts of these Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day. It's easy to think of them as being wretched and self-seeking. But I do believe that some, perhaps even many of them were truly devoted men, men who diligently studied the scriptures, men who wanted to know the truth. I believe that both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were that kind of men.

But there was still something missing within the souls of so many of the Jewish leaders and within their pursuit of their religion. They had very intentionally been using the scriptures as a rule book, an instruction guide . . . and it's easy to understand why they would do that when they would read verses like Joshua 1:8. Listen,

> 8This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

Folks, there is a subtle misdirection that can easily be taken if these words are rationalized by a person's own limited understanding. Proverbs 3 warns us to trust in the Lord with all our hearts and to lean not to our own understanding.

Only God Himself knows the true intention of the words that He has given. And only He can correctly interpret them to our souls.

So then, for a person to be able to truly know exactly what God intends in His words, that person must have God's own Spirit dwelling in him or her, interpreting each word, each phrase and each precept.

These words that I quote for us so often from 1 Corinthians 2 tell us what our minds need for us to be able to correctly understand these precious words of our Lord. There we are told in verse 10 . . .

> The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. [11]For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:10-11)

Folks, these scriptures come from the Mind of God. And to know the real true meaning of any of them, a person must first be filled with the presence of God's Spirit, and be fully surrendered to His guidance.

That is so evident as we listen to the words Jesus was saying to these Jewish leaders. He was saying to them that they had been searching the scriptures and interpreting them wrongly.

He was saying, "Go back and re-search those words, because in them there is something far greater than a rule book. In the scriptures are thoughts and precepts and ideas that go so much farther than a set of rules. There are words that reveal the very heart, the personality of God. And in them is revealed a "Savior".

And folks, God wants you and me to do the same!

Listen to Jesus in His Words in the Sermon on the Mount as He explained the subtle differences between simple rules and divine precepts. In Matthew chapter 5 He said.

> [21]"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' [22]"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. (Matthew 5:21-22)

And He also said,

> [27]"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; [28]but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

Folks, this is the true heart and the true personality of God being revealed in these words. In these words, Jesus is saying, "I want you to take on the very heart and the mind of God, to let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

As Jesus was speaking to the Jewish leaders here in John 5, He was telling them, "You are leaning to your own understanding and because of that, you are going in the wrong direction. When you search the scriptures you think that it is by rigorously obeying them that you have eternal life, but that is not the point of them at all. You have to read further and look behind the words to understand and see that those words are talking about Me, about the Lord Jesus, and about His Plan for the salvation of your souls."

Again, hind-sight is conveniently twenty-twenty and because of that we find ourselves condemning these Jewish leaders out-of-hand for their foolish beliefs. But we really shouldn't do that, because I know that we are guilty of doing much the same thing.

The greatest danger of trying to live by our own wits is that we have problems remaining within the borders of those rules and guidelines.

Without God's Spirit to guide us, we have a tendency to expand the rules and guidelines to better fit our purposes and our personality. And we don't have to go way outside the lines. We just simply push their borders as we apply our own brand of common sense interpretation to the matters of the day.

We can see an example of that being done today in our American judicial system. The borders of our set of rules, our constitution, are redefined almost daily with each new court case.

The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day were doing the exact same thing with God's laws, interpreting and reinterpreting them, and each time, adding just a little bit of their own ideas into the mix.

And Jesus is saying here in these few words, "Folks, you are misguided in your pursuits. And you are going the wrong way. You are blind guides, leading blind people".

Jesus is saying, "Eternal life cannot be found in following rules of scripture. It was never intended to be that way. The scriptures were intended to be a divine revelation of a person, the Savior and Lord of our souls."

Jesus is saying, "Eternal life is found in Me and Me alone, nothing else and no one else can give eternal life."
1 John 5

> 11And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:11)

The question again that I asked at the beginning of this study, "What is the "purpose" of the Holy Scriptures in the life of a believer, in your and my life?"

The answer is, "The scriptures are simply the revelation of a person, a Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. In Him and in Him alone is eternal life."

And in Him, the words of scripture then take on an amazing power, the power of God for salvation. Romans 1:16

> 16I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16)

And in Hebrews chapter 4, we're told that these blessed words can actually reach inside your and my soul and spirit and "read" who we are . . . and they can reveal thoughts and attitudes deep within us that even we don't know we have. Verse 12,

> [12]For the word of God is living 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)

Folks, these scriptures are not a set of rules. They are a romantic love story between a Savior and His people, a Bridegroom and His bride. And that is the way that I want to see them all the days of my life.

We'll close with one of the best and simplest explanations that God gives to explain why He has given us these precious words of scripture. Listen. These are given in John chapter 20, verse 31, where He tells us,

> [31] . . . these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.(John 20:31)

Pray with me.