

JESUS ON RELATING TO OTHERS (MATTHEW 5:17-48)

Video 1

In the most famous part of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus outlines his vision of how people should treat each other.

It remains hugely influential. Even those who know little about Jesus are familiar with certain phrases: love your enemies, go the extra mile, turn the other cheek.

This familiarity can cause us to miss Jesus' radical vision for human relationships.

We can miss three surprising convictions that Jesus' approach rests on.

Here's the first of them: **to relate to others rightly, we need the Old Testament.**

In verse 17, Jesus says:

Do not think I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets...

He's referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament. The Old Testament is so important that in verse 19 he offers a warning:

Anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven...

It's no surprise, then, that the Old Testament is everywhere in the teaching that follows.

Six times, Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said...

Then he quotes from the Old Testament.

Often, we imagine Jesus to be a free spirit, breaking away from religion.

It's clear that Jesus did have problems with aspects of the religious practice of his day. Yet it's equally clear: his problem isn't the Old Testament.

He believed that these Scriptures contained God's revelation of himself. And he believed they contained God's design for humanity, guiding how we relate.

Left to ourselves, our ideas of how to treat each other are inconsistent and unreliable.

But Jesus knows that in the Old Testament, God has given us guidance.

Which is why, to relate to people rightly, you need the Old Testament.

But Jesus goes further. Here's his second conviction: **to relate to other people rightly, we need Jesus to help us understand the Old Testament.**

The Hebrew Scriptures were ancient by Jesus' day. The Old Testament law was 1500 years old. There were already huge debates on how to apply it to everyday life.

Whole schools of thought had emerged. Rabbis weighed interpretations carefully.

But Jesus' approach is radically different.

He quotes from the Old Testament – then, each time, he says:

But I tell you...

Jesus doesn't use others' ideas. He isn't interested in the history of interpretation. He's clear: only he can faithfully tell you what these ancient Scriptures mean.

Just who does Jesus think he is?

And he isn't finished.

Because here's his third conviction: **to relate to other people rightly, we need to see that our attitudes matter as much as our behaviour.**

Jesus says that God's ambition for humanity has always gone beyond simple obedience to the letter of a law.

The Old Testament commands provided a legal framework for God's people. In fact, these laws continue to shape the legal framework of many countries today.

But Jesus calls for a much deeper application of these laws – one that shapes our deepest motivations and attitudes.

He asks us to look at these old laws with fresh eyes. If we're to relate to people rightly, we must let these commands go deep.

Only then can truly beautiful community emerge. The kind of community that mirrors the God who made us, and who calls us into relationship with him.