

Goals – Accomplish, Not Abolish

“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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Matthew 5:17-18

Goal setting. Setting goals can be very beneficial for life. It's useful to have those desired outcomes and achievements that give direction. However, personally, I find goal setting quite challenging. When it comes to selecting the right goals, it's difficult to have the right timing, the right balance and the right consistency. Sometimes, I have the right goal in mind, but it's not the right time to make it happen. Other times, my goal is either too easy or too hard for my capabilities. Then there are times that I have too many goals and can't prioritize which goals to pick and stick with. More often I find myself abolishing goals rather than accomplishing them. Maybe you can relate?

Now, there are good examples around of how goal setting works well. Productivity books and tools are in abundance. Our society has numerous individuals who have worked hard to attain their goals: athletes – like those in this weekend's Super Bowl or this year's winter Olympians; business experts who climbed the ladder of success one goal at a time (personally, I think of the staff I get to work with here at Emmanuel, regularly we meet to refine goals for ministry at Emmanuel and their experience and gifts inspire me to continue to improve my goals); and family members who've identified and clung to goals that saw them through years of turbulent trials. These and many other examples demonstrate what it can look like to accomplish goals rather than abolish them.

To this brief list, I'm going to add one other person, Jesus. You see, in our Gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus makes a comment about a goal that He has. He 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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”** (Matthew 5:17-18) As Jesus teaches, He makes it clear to His followers that everything that has come before Him in God's words to His people still applies. He's not getting rid of it.

This goal statement is massive to say the least. Jesus has eliminated any buffet style look at Genesis through Malachi and taken on the whole course. The commands and promises in what we now call the Old Testament are extensive: from “the promised seed of the woman” in Genesis to the descriptions of the Messiah to “day of the Lord judgements” in the latter prophets. These all give Jesus' goal depth and weight that no one else could accomplish. Whether it was Adam, Noah, Abraham or the twelve tribes of Israel, these sinful people ended up abolishing far more than accomplishing what God commanded.

On top of this loaded past, Jesus revealed how His goal poured it on in the present. Commenting on the Law and Prophets, Jesus described the true intensity of what those words demand. Initially, in the response to the temptation to relax and bend God's words, Jesus shared that not even the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was enough. And in that day, the scribes and Pharisees were the best of the best at trying to follow God's words. To this reality, Jesus added greater detail as He would go on to teach that hatred was a form of murder, lust was a form of adultery, divorce wasn't God's plan, vows were to be taken seriously, revenge on enemies wasn't God's way, all culminating in the back-breaking command for perfection like the heavenly Father is perfect. Jesus highlighted how far people were from accomplishing God's goals and how easily they had been abolishing them.

In the words of Jesus' goal, it wasn't only about the past and present, this goal had the future in mind as well. Qualifying His goal with the passing away of heaven and earth, connected these accomplishments to the Last Day – that day when the final judgement would be rendered. So, the timeframe for Jesus' goal wasn't merely a week, month or year, it was for eternity. And in that timespan, it's far easier for us to imagine that more would be abolished than accomplished, but that wasn't what Jesus had in mind. The fullness of the Law was to remain in effect.

This weekend, Jesus' goal statement leaves us in a challenging spot. I think that we're here in this place because we would say that we're for and on Team Jesus. Yet, to be Team Jesus, means that we share

the same goal. And to share this same goal brings up the dilemma that you and I can't begin to achieve this goal. When it comes to God's goals, our lives have been far more about abolishing His goals than accomplishing them. Even with the best of intentions, we come up short to what is expected. All our attempts to do our best, while they can be nice in the eyes of the world, don't cut it in God's eyes. His goal isn't merely that we try. His goal is that all be fulfilled and accomplished.

It's a real predicament in which we find ourselves, a predicament that every listener of this Sermon on the Mount and all of Jesus' words experiences. Do we keep on living in our pseudo-spiritual goals building upon the shifting sands of our own bending of God's words? Or do we cling to Jesus' words in all their weight and force, building upon the rock that He has established as goals for Christian lives? Going with our own version of spiritual goals, mirrors the Israelites, scribes and Pharisees back in the day. Our lives can look good with great achievements, but those accomplishments become quite hollow because of everything we're abolishing to attain them.

The only place for us to turn is Jesus. He is where authentic, Christian goals begin and end. Not only did He accomplish His goal, but He also did it for you and me, so that we truly could be on Team Jesus. His timing was right for in the fullness of time He came to save all of us born under the Law so that we might be adopted as children of God. His balance was perfect, as both God and man, He carried out what was needed to pay for our sin and to earn the righteousness that escapes us. His priorities were unwavering as He did His Father's will enduring the shame of the cross for the sake of the whole world. Graciously, our Lord and Savior has credited us with achieving His goal when our own timing, capabilities and priorities keep us far from meeting His goal.

And claiming Jesus' accomplished goal as our own accomplished goal isn't insincere. It's the reason He came. It's the gift He wants to deliver. Resurrected and ascended, Jesus, by Word and Sacrament, abolishes our sins and replaces them with His own accomplishments. He desires His people, you and me, to be washed and cleansed, fed and nourished, forgiven and restored, so that His accomplished goal might fill our lives with peace and free us to care for the lives of those around us.

With His accomplished goal given and credited to us, He shares a new goal for us as we continue to engage in this world in which He has placed us. He says to us, **“... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”** (*Matthew 5:16*) Because of what Jesus accomplished, we get to point others to what He has accomplished. Our actions seek to show what Jesus has already done for us not what we're trying to do for Him. Our deeds are intended to praise and honor God not merely bring us praise and honor.

The beauty of our new goal from the Lord is that it has the right timing, balance and priority for us. This goal is perfect for us every moment of our life. As ones forgiven and redeemed by Jesus, all our seconds, minutes and hours are moments He will use to shine His light through our lives. As ones freed from the Law through Jesus, He will show us how to serve our neighbors from our heart and not merely that one good deed for the day. As ones bound for eternity, He will use this new goal to guide and direct our other earthly goals for His glory.

So, this weekend, as you're watching the Super Bowl or Olympics celebrating with family and friends, remember that seeing the best commercial isn't your only goal, the Lord has given you the goal to shine His light and it can be done even at those watch parties. This week at work and school, remember that your only goal isn't to put your head down and get through the week, the Lord has given you the goal to look up and look out for those whom you can serve from a heart restored and filled by Jesus. In the months to come, as you plan your future goals, remember this goal to glorify our Father in heaven which will help guide and direct the choices that you make. In Jesus, our goal is clear, by His mercy and grace may our whole life reflect this goal until He returns. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan