

AM Matthew 5:1-20 Jesus and the Law:He did not abolish but fulfilled it

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[0 : 00] For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.! Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

! Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

[1 : 13] It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out, trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. But on a stand. And it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others.

So that they may see your good works. And give glory to your Father who is in heaven. 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.

Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

[2 : 37] But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Amen. May God. Well, please turn with me to Matthew chapter 5. We're going to read or study the last few verses in our reading from verse 17 to verse 20.

John Newton, the Christian leader of the 18th century, once wrote to a friend, ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most of our religious mistakes.

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Speaking of the Old Testament in general, what Jesus here refers to as the law or the prophets,

J.C. Ryle once wrote, Let us beware of despising the Old Testament under any pretense whatever.

Let us never listen to those who throw it aside as an obsolete, antiquated, useless book. Much infidelity begins with an ignorant contempt of the Old Testament.

[4 : 26] Much infidelity begins with an ignorant contempt of the Old Testament. And then speaking more specifically about the law in terms of the moral code of the Ten Commandments, he writes, These three quotations from John Newton and J.C. Ryle should alert us to the importance of the subject before us in these words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount.

And I want to point out how the Lord Jesus speaks to us in verse 18 of this passage, where he says, For truly I say to you.

This is a phrase which the Lord uses quite often in the Gospels. In John's Gospel, it's usually termed truly, truly, or verily, verily.

In the other Gospels, Truly I say to you. And when we see those words, they are a clear indication in the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ that he is about to declare something to us which is of the

greatest importance and seriousness.

So it's like a flashing light and it's warning us to pay careful attention to these words.

[6 : 14] He's got something important to say to us. So let us turn to these words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us try, God helping us to grasp the truth revealed to us here in this passage.

Now notice that Jesus is speaking about, in verse 17, the law or the prophets or the law and the prophets. And then in verse 18 you notice he speaks again about the law.

and the law in verse 18 is an abbreviated version of the law and the prophets. And Jesus in these two verses is speaking about the Old Testament scriptures as a whole.

But then you notice that in verse 19 he becomes more specific and he speaks about these commandments. These commandments.

There's a distinction. Sometimes the word law is used in various ways in the New Testament and it's good to understand that there is sometimes a difference in meaning and significance and it depends upon how the word law is used.

[7 : 35] The context in which it is found. The law or the law and the prophets or even the law the prophets and the Psalms all refer to the scriptures of the Old Testament.

You'll remember how Luke records the conversation of Jesus with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and how he opened the scriptures to them and he says and beginning with Moses and all the prophets Moses the law and all the prophets Jesus interpreted to these two disciples in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24 verse 27 and just a little bit further on in chapter 24 of Luke Luke records Jesus coming to meet with all of his disciples and in verse 44 we read then he said to them these are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

So in Luke 24 and here in Matthew chapter 5 verses 17 and 18 Jesus is clearly speaking about the Old Testament scriptures as a whole.

The Jews referred to them as in three parts the law or Moses the prophets and the Psalms or the writings. The law then can be used as a shorthand term to embrace the whole of the Old Testament scriptures.

[9 : 26] But the law can also be used in a narrower sense to refer to the specific commands that God gave to his people through the ministry of Moses. And it appears to be these that Jesus is referring to in verse 19 when he speaks about not relaxing one of the least of these commandments.

So in this passage Jesus refers both to the Old Testament scriptures as a whole and to the specific commandments found in those scriptures. Now what does Jesus say about the law?

He says four things. The first is this Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you I solemnly declare to you until heaven and earth pass away not an iota not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Verses 17 and 18. So here's the first of the four things that Jesus teaches us about the law. The law of God remains valid.

[10 : 59] In other words the law of God was not just for yesterday. It is for today and it is for tomorrow. Indeed it is valid until the world as we know it comes to an end.

Not the smallest letter not the least stroke of a pen will disappear from the law. It shall remain intact until all that it speaks about has been accomplished at the end of the world when heaven and earth pass away.

Jesus has a very high view of the law of the Old Testament scriptures and of its commands specifically.

And the law of God is useful in three areas. In the restraining of sin in showing us our need as sinners and pointing us to the Lord Jesus Christ as saviour and in showing us the way of life what God's will is for living a holy life redeemed from sin by his grace and devoted to a life of godliness. And if we read on further through the sermon on the mount that Jesus preaches and that Matthew records for us in chapters 5, 6 and 7 we shall find the Lord Jesus explaining from the law what sin is and showing us the way of a holy life that is well pleasing to God.

[12 : 52] So the first thing Jesus teaches us is that the law remains valid. He hasn't come to cast it aside or to abolish it.

The second thing that he says in this passage is that he has come to fulfil the Old Testament scriptures the law and the prophets.

Verse 17 I have not come to abolish them I've come to fulfil them or as Sinclair Ferguson sometimes says he has come to fill them because what we see in outline in the law and the prophets in Jesus we see the fullness the fullness but how does Jesus fulfil the law and the prophets let's think about this for the bulk of our time this morning and to help us do so let's consider four areas in which Jesus fulfills or fulfills the law first area in which Jesus fulfills the law is in his teaching what do I mean by this well what I mean is this

Jesus brings out the real significance of God's commandments isn't it interesting that his opponents the scribes and the Pharisees accused Jesus of not keeping the law of abolishing the law but as a matter of fact it wasn't Jesus who was abolishing the law it was these religious teachers who by their traditions had buried the law out of sight they in effect by their traditions and by their man-made regulations they had in effect abolished the law their traditional interpretations of the law weakened the law's power to search our hearts and to expose our inner motivations and if you go on to read the rest of

Matthew chapter 5 where Jesus makes these contrasts between you've heard that it was said he's not referring to the Old Testament there he's referring to the traditional interpretations of the Old Testament scriptures taught by the scribes and Pharisees with what the Old Testament actually taught as understood and explained by the Lord Jesus you will see that it is the Lord Jesus who if you like releases the lion of the law out of the cage in which the scribes and Pharisees had imprisoned it and that lion is now free to pounce upon our secret thoughts and motives and tear to pieces our foolish assumptions that we are able to keep the law in our own strength in the hands of [16 : 44] Jesus freed from the shackles of the scribes Pharisees traditional interpretations the law exposes us it searches us it exposes us it pierces our hearts it enters our consciences it awakens sin it allows us to see what sin is in the light of God's truth and holiness and if you read the rest of especially Matthew chapter 5 21 to 48 you will see exactly that Jesus scrapes all the detritus off the law he holds it up he proclaims it in order to show men and women their true character and to show them their need of a savior beyond themselves so

Jesus fulfills the law in his teaching and in his doctrine he Jesus Jesus is the true guide for us all when it comes to teaching the will of God for our salvation when it comes to explaining how we are to understand the law and the prophets of the Old Testament scriptures he is the great prophet he is the great interpreter he is the great expounder of the mind and will of God he in fact is the great prophet whom God promised through Moses to raise up in Deuteronomy chapter 18 and verses 15 and 18 and 19 we should really turn to that passage because it is so important in the flow of biblical teaching and theology Deuteronomy chapter 18 Moses says to the children of Israel the Lord the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you from your brothers it is to him you shall listen just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire anymore lest I die and the Lord said what they have spoken I will raise up for you a prophet like you from among their brothers and I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him and whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name I myself will require it of him Jesus not the scribes and

Pharisees is the great prophet of God who speaks with the authority of God the very words of God there is no other prophet but Jesus Christ that we are to follow and give our allegiance to he is God made manifest in the flesh God dwelling among us the prophet of God isn't it interesting that at the end of the sermon on the mount having preached all of these things the reaction can you imagine Jesus being in this pulpit preaching the sermon on the mount and after the service there are television news camera crews outside and as you leave the building they come up and put a microphone in your face and they say well what did you think of that and you say well it was different it was different he preached in a way that well really we haven't heard before he was so completely different from the way our religious teachers speak to us that's the point isn't it they were not sent of

God they were not teaching the words of God they were not true explainers of the law of God but Jesus was and because of that there was a power and an authority in Jesus words which the

people recognized and they were able well able to make the distinction he is not like the scribes and the Pharisees and when Jesus finished these sayings the crowds were astonished at his teaching for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes Jesus is the one we're to follow he fulfills the law in his teaching and then secondly he fulfills the law in his life and in his actions look at the

[22 : 35] Lord Jesus where do we find him we find him in the gospels of Mark Luke and John and in those gospels Jesus Christ is revealed to us he is made known to us what do we see we see the law of God worked out in flesh and blood before our eyes in life and in the actions of this man behold the man cast your eyes upon this man says Pilate at the trial of Jesus Christ and three times in that trial Pilate said I find no fault in him at all here is the perfect man and Peter preaching sometime later to the household of Cornelius the Roman centurion beautifully summarizes the three years of

Jesus ministry in simple language Acts 10 verse 38 he says God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed! by the devil for God was with him and we are witnesses of all that he did and what Peter and his fellow disciples witnessed was a man whose life showed them the real meaning of the law the law was embodied in the life and works and ministry of Jesus I want you to think for a moment about the contrasting lives of the scribes and Pharisees on the one hand and that of Jesus on the other the gospels don't tell us an awful lot about the personal lives of the Pharisees but what we are given is the impression that they did not bring much joy into the lives of the people who followed them why not why was that because obedience to the law for the Pharisee was a heavy difficult burdensome! task and their ministry placed heavy burdens on the shoulders of their followers and this is one of the reasons why later in Matthew's gospel Jesus uttered these woes against the scribes and the Pharisees and condemned them and you'll find that in Matthew 23 verse 4 he says they tie up heavy burdens!

They tie up heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on people's shoulders but they themselves are not willing to move a finger to lighten them but what a contrast that is to the Lord Jesus Christ when we look at Christ and we look at his life and look at his teaching and look at how he acts as the friend of sinners the law of God was not a burden on Jesus shoulders rather as we were teaching the children it was written on his heart it's interesting that from the earliest days of the Christian church believers have seen Psalm 40 verse 8 as being fulfilled in the Lord Jesus these words I delight to do your will oh my God your word your law is within my heart think about that for a moment

[26 : 31] I delight to do your will I delight to do your will and then think in contrast of the Pharisees and scribes this burdensome duty to do the will of God what a misery I delight to do your will your law is within my heart in other words Jesus enjoyed doing God's will he loved God's commandments he rejoiced to obey his father it was his meat and drink to him my food he says is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work so we see the law fulfilled in his teaching we see the law fulfilled in his life and then we see the law fulfilled in his death when we think of the death of Jesus on the cross we should think of how he died to save us from the penalty of sin from sin's curse

Jesus took the place of sinners sinners who had broken God's commandments the Bible teaches us that any breach every breach of the law of God demands the death penalty the soul that sins shall die the wages of sin is death cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them and so at Calvary at the cross we see in the clearest possible way the real meaning of the curse and judgment of God's broken law at the cross

Jesus cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me and that cry of God forsaken this pierced the thick darkness of that good Friday afternoon and it teaches us this this is the penalty of the broken law being forsaken by God being accursed receiving the wages of sin which is death separation from God the wrath and judgment of God experienced how fearful and terrible a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God in judgment that's what the cross teaches us but Jesus' death teaches us something else about the law in fact two further things about the law which we don't really have time to explore here but let me just briefly mention them the writers of the New Testament saw that the death of Jesus brought an end to the ceremonies of the law the daily weekly and yearly sacrifices by the death of Jesus these were fulfilled in order to be done away with they had served!

their final sacrifice never to be repeated sacrifice for sin the letter to the Hebrews teaches this in great detail and I commend that letter to you for your own study but not only were the ceremonies of the law fulfilled in the death of Jesus so as to be abolished or done away with or superseded but so were those regulations and statutes that governed Israel as a nation These were no longer relevant to the church as the people of God drawn out from every nation of the world so the church going forward was not to be governed by the same civil code that governed the people of Israel in the land of Canaan that aspect of the law the civil law as we call it as well as the ceremonial law was fulfilled by Jesus death in order to be done away with he fulfilled it but we must move on to think briefly of the fourth way in which

[31 : 36] Jesus fulfills the law Jesus fulfills the law in the lives of his people how does he do this!

We've already mentioned it today in the service by writing it in the hearts of his disciples through the ministry of his Holy Spirit do you remember the great promise of the new covenant that God made in Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 31 to 33 34 this great promise lies at the heart of this wonderful action of God he says there I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts this is what God is going to do and as Paul teaches us in Galatians chapter 5 verse 16 as men and women of the spirit who have received a new heart from the spirit in regeneration as we walk by the spirit we will fulfill the desires of the spirit and no longer fulfill the desires of the flesh or to quote

Paul's words in Romans 8 verses 3 and 4 we begin as newborn Christians indwelt by the spirit with a heart that loves God's law we begin to do what the law requires the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit how important it is for us to grasp this God's law think of it no longer an external rule that we find to be a terrible burden but God has given us a new heart and he has also remarkably put within us the same spirit that dwelt in the Lord Jesus Christ and enabled him to perform his work that same spirit has been put in us and our new heart is committed to

God and to God's ways and the Holy Spirit empowers us to do in fact to will and to do according to God's good pleasure isn't that the first discovery that a new Christian often makes before he became a Christian he had no taste or relish or delight in God's law but now that he has a new heart like Jesus heart he says I delight to do your will oh my God your law is within my heart so here are the four ways in which the Lord Jesus fulfills the law I've not come to abolish it I've come to fulfill! How? In his teaching in his life in ministry in his death and in the lives of his disciples and then very quickly points three and four the third thing that Jesus says in this passage about the law has to do with the spiritual nature of the law what do I mean by this well look at verse 20 for I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven what is Jesus teaching us here he's teaching us something about the deep spiritual nature of the law and the righteousness associated with it he's telling us that the standard of righteousness of his kingdom goes way beyond the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees and if you were to go on to read the verses that follow in

[36 : 07] Matthew chapter 5 you would see illustrated what Jesus means by a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees but let me briefly say that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was skin deep it was on the surface it was superficial it was external it was outward but Christian righteousness is different it is real it is sincere it is genuine it is deep it is thorough it is to be a heart conformity to the law of God and that means that our obedience to the law is not to be merely external and ceremonial but it is to be real it is to be spiritual I love that illustration that the Lord uses in Matthew 23 where he pronounces a woe upon the Pharisees and scribes who take this dirty cup it's dirty on the outside and on the inside but all they're concerned about is cleaning the outside they're not concerned about the filth on the inside

Christian righteousness cleanses the outside of the cup and the inside of the cup and this is the practical fulfillment of the law that marks Jesus disciples they understand what Jesus means when he takes up the law and he explains it in this spiritual manner and they are keen to see their hearts as well as their outward lives changed to become holy clean and pure in the light of the law's teaching and that brings us to the fourth and final thing that the Lord says about the law in these verses and that is about the role the law has in marking out those who please God and those who do not the law has this distinguishing function

Jesus says where do we learn about this well look at verse 19 therefore Jesus says whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the

kingdom of heaven that's very important that we do not misunderstand what the Lord Jesus is saying here but to grasp his teaching clearly he is not reversing his earlier teaching in the sermon on the mount that we enter into the kingdom as those who are poor in spirit who mourn for our sin and who hunger and thirst for righteousness in other words we enter by God's grace not because of our own merits we have no merit in the sight of God we are sinners and we are saved by grace Jesus is not reversing that earlier teaching no no rather he is teaching us that our attitude to the law of God is an indication of our attitude to God himself so let me be as plain and clear as I possibly can here what Jesus is teaching us as this if we treat the law lightly and teach others to do so as well in other words if we have a settled attitude of opposition antagonism rebellion to the law of God we are demonstrating we are showing that we are strangers to the promise of the new covenant in Christ and that the law has not yet been written upon our hearts but if we love and keep even the least of these commandments and encourage others to do the same in other words if we have a settled attitude of obedience and submission and resignation to the law of God this is a sure mark that we love Jesus Christ and we belong to his kingdom and are indwelt by the same spirit that indwelt him so let's be clear the law is not the basis on which we merit salvation but the law does provide a test to distinguish between those who belong to the kingdom and those who are on the outside so we finish our study of this passage this important passage I said it was important at the beginning and it is important vitally important it has to do with life and death issues here is the real test of whether we have been born again or not if we have been born again [41 : 45] God's law has been written on our hearts by the spirit and we obey it joyfully if we have not been born again we can make a pretense!

at living the new life but eventually the mask will slip and we will despise at least some of God's commandments perhaps what Jesus refers to as the least of these commandments will despise and it won't be long before we encourage others to do the same and thus we'll be excluded and shut out from the kingdom of God do you remember in first John the apostle John describes sin as lawlessness lawlessness but the Christian turns away from sin he turns away from lawlessness to a life of law keeping cleanliness purity

Jesus like obedience to his father in the words of the apostle Paul at the end of Romans 3 where he expounds the great gospel doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone and at the end of that chapter he says do we nullify the law by this gospel of grace he says no no way it's the opposite we establish the law we honor the law far from overthrowing it we establish it and that is in keeping with Jesus teaching here in this sermon on the mount has the law been written on your heart by the

Holy Spirit and do you delight in it the way Jesus delighted in it if you cannot answer that question with a yes then I would encourage you to seek the Lord while he may be found and to call upon him while he is near that you might be given grace to forsake your ways that you might turn to the Lord and receive from him not not only a new life but a new heart in which his law has been written it only comes from him it's a gift of his grace none of us deserve it but it can be had for the asking go to God through Jesus Christ and ask him to give you a new heart and to take away your old heart let us pray our heavenly father we thank you for our savior the Lord Jesus Christ we would be in an awful terrible place had you not loved this world and gave your only begotten son we would be perishing and in hell forever but instead we have received everlasting life and we enjoy fellowship with you as we walk in the spirit and look to our savior for our health help and strength we pray that these words spoken today might encourage us to see the great privileges that you've given to us as believing people help us to walk in your ways may we not grieve your holy spirit forgive us forever doing so oh god cleanse us and keep on cleansing us through the blood of christ from all sin and help us to walk in your ways that we might keep your loss honor your name and be a good and effective witness to the world around us hear our prayers for christ's sake amen oh oh oh