

# Christ and the Law

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Date: 01 September 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] The scripture reading is taken from Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 31 through 34 and Matthew chapter 5 verses 17 through 20.

! Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

My covenant that they broke, that I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. Matthew chapter 5 verses 17 through 20.

[ 1 : 33 ] 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.

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.

Here ends the scripture reading. Thank you very much, Joan. For this morning, after three months, we are pausing our sermon series in Genesis, and we are returning to our sermon series in the Sermon on the Mount.

[ 2 : 47 ] And as we pick up the Sermon on the Mount this morning, we come to a transitional point in the Sermon on the Mount, which is Matthew 5 verses 17 to 20.

And from these four verses, we're able to see that people were confused about the mission of Jesus. Some thought that because of the radical teaching of Jesus, that he was opposed to what was written in the Old Testament, in the law and the prophets, and that he was seeking to abolish them.

And so Jesus clarified his mission and assured them that he had not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them.

In particular, Jesus said these words about the law in verse 18. 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.

Now exactly what did Jesus mean in these words? What did he mean to teach about the law in these words? Or to put it another way, how are we to relate to God's law today in light of what Jesus says in these verses in the Sermon on the Mount?

[ 4 : 29 ] These are important questions today because although Jesus clarified his, he clarified our relationship to the law 2,000 years ago, this relationship is still misunderstood by a lot of people.

And so with the Lord's help this morning, I will seek to answer these questions about our relationship to the law. Let's take a moment first to pray.

Father, we ask that you would draw near to us and meet us as we open your word. Lord, would you speak to our hearts, Lord, and bring understanding about what Christ taught concerning the law and our relationship to it.

I ask, Lord, once again, that you would help me to faithfully proclaim your word to your people. And I pray that in all that is said and done, you will be glorified.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, these four verses can easily be passed over when we read the Sermon on the Mount.

[ 5 : 41 ] And the reason is they're different from the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. But they're critically important to understanding the Sermon on the Mount.

If we don't understand what Jesus is saying in these four verses, we will not understand the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, and especially what he goes on to say in verses 21 to 48 of chapter 5.

What Jesus says here is essential that we understand it if we're going to understand what he says in verses 21 to 48, which he will begin to share right after verse 20, but then really for the whole of the Sermon on the Mount.

And so for our remaining time this morning, I want to consider these four verses by making two summary statements. The first statement is this.

Christ fulfilled the law. At this point in the Sermon on the Mount, having taught his followers about the character of the citizens of the kingdom of God, that's the Beatitudes, and having shown them their unique purpose in the world, which is to be salt and light, Jesus, at this early point in his public ministry.

[ 7 : 14 ] He turns his attention to clarifying his mission because there were people who misunderstood what his mission was. They misunderstood what he came to do and what he didn't come to do.

And so in verse 17, Jesus says what he did not come to do. He did not come to abolish the law or the prophets. And he also states what he came to do.

He came to fulfill them. He came to fulfill the law and the prophets. Jesus underscores the point in verse 18 by saying, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

An iota is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And a dot is the smallest mark that you'd find on some Hebrew letters that would distinguish one letter from another one.

Jesus says, essentially says, the law of God will not change in even the smallest way, in even the slightest way, until all is accomplished.

[ 8 : 34 ] Now, strictly speaking, the law refers to the first five books of the Old Testament. And, well, that's Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and the prophets would refer to the rest from Joshua up to Malachi.

So the law and the prophets, when we say them together, that's the whole of the Old Testament. Now, imagine for a moment that you were a good Jew who had been taught the Old Testament, and you were seated at the feet of Jesus, and you heard him utter these words.

These would be very radical words. They would also be hopeful words because at this time, most of the Jews had lost hope that God would ever fulfill these promises that he made in the Old Testament.

There was great despair and discouragement that these prophecies and these utterances and these promises that God had made would ever be fulfilled.

And now you have this Jewish rabbi, this upstart, this person who's just come on the scene, and he's saying something totally different. And he's saying it authoritatively.

[ 10 : 05 ] He is making these statements and saying authoritatively that all the promises of the Old Testament will be fulfilled and they will be accomplished.

But he goes further. He says that he himself will accomplish and fulfill them. And that's a profound statement and radical by any measurement because Jesus was saying that the entirety of the Old Testament, all of its commands, all of its promises, that it was more than just God's word to his people and God's promises to his people.

Jesus was saying, it is about me and I have come to fulfill it all. It's a bold claim to make. But what was Jesus saying?

What did Jesus mean by saying that he was going to accomplish, he was going to fulfill all of the law and the prophets?

And he came to fulfill it. That was his purpose. Let me try to explain. The entire Bible is about one story.

[ 11 : 31 ] The whole Bible is about one story and that is the story of redemption. The story about how God created man, how man fell, and how God planned and fulfilled his plan to redeem man back to himself.

The Old Testament contains the promise and the seed of that plan and the New Testament contains the fulfillment and the fruit of that plan.

And so in the Old Testament, there's this promise of a Messiah and prophecies about this Messiah and what he would do and what would be done to him.

Jesus was that Messiah. We find the earliest promise of this plan of redemption in Genesis 3.15, shortly after Adam and Eve fell into sin, where God makes this promise, speaking to Satan, who had seduced Adam and Eve into sinning.

I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring and he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

[ 12 : 44 ] Jesus fulfilled Genesis 3.15 when he died on the cross. He bruised Satan's head in the sense that Satan was defeated and Satan bruised his heel in the sense that Jesus suffered agony and death on the cross.

But he rose again from the dead on the third day. And those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament and the variety of books in the Old Testament and the things written in them, you're probably wondering, how did Jesus fulfill certain parts of the Old Testament, like the Ten Commandments, for example?

Or the moral laws, the ceremonial laws, the ethical laws that God had given to his people to obey? How did Jesus fulfill them?

Well, for example, when we think of the Ten Commandments and also the related ethical laws, when God gave the Ten Commandments and all the ethical laws, he knew that they could not be obeyed by those to whom he gave them.

He knew that. God knew that it was impossible for fallen, sinful people to fully obey what he requires.

[ 14 : 20 ] Because if we are even very, very good, if we are almost perfect, that's not good enough for a holy and righteous and perfect God.

Because anything less than perfect obedience does not meet his standard. And we see this truth coming out very, very clearly, how God's people could not keep his commandments.

through the prophets, through the writings of the prophets. The prophets were like God's prosecuting attorneys. The prophets reminded God's people of what God required of them and pointed out the many ways in which they had fallen short.

And the prophets called them into account for their disobedience. But the prophets did more than that. Not only did the prophets point out their disobedience, the prophets promised redemption.

They promised redemption on God's behalf. And a landmark example of how the prophets did this, how they promised this redemption, how they would go between calling them to their sins and calling them to account, but then at the same time promising them that God had a plan, a plan of redemption.

[ 15 : 47 ] One of the best examples of that is in Ezekiel chapter 36, verses 22 to 27. It's projected for you. This is where the Lord spoke to Ezekiel to speak to the children of Israel when they were in Babylonian captivity.

Therefore say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God, it is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you profaned among the nations to which you came.

And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness.

And from all your idols, I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

[ 17 : 11 ] And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes to be careful to obey my rules. In verse 22, the Lord says that he was about to act.

When did he act? When did God act? When did he act to redeem his people from bondage and sprinkle clean water on them and give them a new heart and a new spirit?

When did he do that? When did he put his Holy Spirit within them to cause them to obey his statutes, to cause them to be careful to obey his rules?

Brothers and sisters, God did that when he acted through his son, Jesus the Messiah. When Jesus ascended Calvary's hill and became a substitute for sinners and gave his life as a ransom for many, God acted.

And through that act and because of that act, when Jesus ascended into heaven, he and the Father sent the Holy Spirit to live in God's people, to empower them, and to enable them to obey God.

[ 18 : 29 ] Now, at the time that Jesus uttered these words in Matthew 5, 17 and 18, this fulfillment, the fulfillment that I just referred to, it hadn't taken place yet.

He had come to do that. He had started to do that by his birth and his life. But he had not yet gone to the cross. But he did fulfill it.

And in fulfilling it, he fulfilled all of the Old Testament. Now, you don't have to take my word for that. We can listen to the claim of Jesus himself.

Listen to what Jesus says in Luke 24, verses 25 to 27, at the end of his ministry, he met two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

They were discouraged after the crucifixion because they did not believe in the resurrection, that Christ would truly raise from the dead. And this is what Luke records for us in Luke 24, verses 25 to 27.

[ 19 : 40 ] And he said to them, Jesus said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

And beginning with Moses, that's the first five books of the Old Testament, and all the prophets, that's the rest of the Old Testament, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

And then Jesus goes further that Luke records for us in chapter 24 and verses 44 to 47, where he speaks directly to his disciples.

And this is what he said to them. These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you. While everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

So it's just a different way of referring to the whole Old Testament, law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled. And he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem.

[ 21 : 14 ] So from the lips of Jesus, at the end of his ministry, he said, I fulfilled it all. Brothers and sisters, we would have a less than complete and sufficient salvation if Jesus has not fulfilled it all.

If he has not fulfilled all of the law and all of the prophets. Now as wonderful as it is to explore how Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets, that's not the point that Jesus is making in these four verses.

And part of the reason it's not the point that he was making was because he had not yet fulfilled it. Instead, Jesus is making the point that we find in verses 19 and 20.

His point was that obeying God's commands is more than just surface outward obedience. That's the point that Jesus was making.

And the way we know that that's the point that he is making is how verse 19 starts, therefore. 17 and 18 really is just to lay the foundation for what he's going to say.

[ 22 : 34 ] And so the point that Jesus makes is in verses 19 and 20. And what we see Jesus doing in verses 19 and 20 and certainly beyond that is he magnified the law.

He magnified the law. And here's the, here's the startling thing about this. Even before the law was magnified, it was an impossibility to fulfill.

when Jesus could have left it right there and no one could have fulfilled it.

But Jesus goes further. He magnifies it. And this is my second and final statement. Jesus magnified the law.

Didn't just fulfill the law, but he also magnified the law. look again at what he says in verses 19 and 20. Therefore, whoever relaxes one of these, sorry, one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

[ 23 : 55 ] 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.

Brothers and sisters, if we're not sobered by verse 20, if we're not even to some degree filled with some kind of a holy fear in verse 20, we don't understand what Jesus said.

rightly understood, verse 20, should really terrify us. So what is Jesus saying?

Jesus is saying that not even the least of the commandments is to be disobeyed. And one of the things we should see right away is that not all the commandments have the same weight because Jesus talks about the least of the commandments so there are certainly greater commandments.

And so the greatest one is that we love the Lord our God with all of our hearts and all of our soul and all of our strength. But Jesus says not even the smallest commandment is to be relaxed in its demands.

[ 25 : 18 ] And brothers and sisters, what Jesus does is he highlights our tendency to relax the laws of God, to relax what God requires of us.

How easy is it to say, oh, God doesn't really mean that. Or God can be meaning that. And we break God's commandments, we appease our consciences by relaxing them, by reducing the strength of them and the demand of them.

But notice in verse 19 that Jesus links his disciples rank in the kingdom of heaven to their obedience and how they teach others to obey.

He says, you'll be least in the kingdom of heaven if you are relaxing these commandments and you teach others to do the same. Our rank in the kingdom of God is not based on our Bible knowledge.

It's not based on our outward piety and how spiritual we look. It is based on obedience to God's word. Now, the Pharisees in Jesus' day, they were the iconic examples of relaxing the demands of God's commandments.

[ 26 : 47 ] And so, in verse 20, Jesus uses them as an example. He says, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

God's commandments Now, this was a startling statement because to his disciples and really all of the Jewish society, the Pharisees were the, they were the holiest in the society.

they were the ones who sought to keep the law of God to the letter and they even added some 600 other laws that they came up with to show how zealous they were and how meticulous they were to keep and apply the word of God.

So, when the disciples would have heard this, this would have been earth-shaking to them to hear that Pharisees, who were the chief law keepers, would never enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And the question almost would be, well, who can? If they can't, who can enter into the kingdom of heaven? What was Jesus getting at?

[ 27 : 59 ] What was he calling for? If the Pharisees were failing, what was required to enter into the kingdom of heaven?

What was Jesus after? What Jesus was calling his disciples to, was an obedience from the heart. He was calling them to more than just an outward show of obedience, an outward appearance of obedience.

And that's what he's calling us to as well. He's calling us to an obedience from the heart. And what he does is he goes on from this point in verses 21 to 48 to illustrate what this means.

So in essence, what he was doing is magnifying the law to say keeping the law is more than just checking the boxes outwardly. It is what's going on in your heart.

Are you keeping God's law from within your heart? As we progress through the Sermon on the Mount, we'll look at the six of these ways that Jesus magnified the law.

[ 29 : 17 ] But I want us to look just briefly at two of them this morning. We'll jump ahead and look at them, two of them, just to make the point and help us to see what Jesus was doing.

So in verses 21 to 26, Jesus says, not only must you not commit murder, you must resist being angry or insulting your brother.

Because that commandment that says don't murder means more than don't physically put your hand on someone and take their life. What it means is from within your heart, you're not even angry with them.

From in your heart and on your lips, you will not even insult them, not even insult them silently. He says the command to not murder requires even that.

And then in verses 27 to 30, he says you must not only not commit adultery in the physical sense, but you must not even look at a woman with lustful intent because lusting in your heart is adultery.

[ 30 : 34 ] Jesus says it's more than not just touching a woman who is not your spouse. He said it is what is going on in your heart as well, where your affections are, are your affections and your desires moving towards what is forbidden.

It's not enough to say I haven't done that. The Pharisees were good at that. They could say never touch the woman. But Jesus says the law is more than that. And he's saying unless your righteousness is more than I didn't touch a woman, I didn't murder a person, you'll never see the kingdom of heaven.

The law is magnified because it calls for obedience from the heart. And that obedience from the heart, if I'm not angry with my brother, what's the likelihood that I'm going to murder my brother?

If I'm not lusting after another woman, what's the likelihood that I'm going to touch another woman who's not my wife? And that's the way the law is to be obeyed.

It is to be obeyed from the inside out. And that's what the law calls for. It calls for this inward obedience. So Jesus warned his original hearers against reducing God's commandments just to surface outward obedience.

[ 32 : 07 ] He called them to obedience from the heart. And brothers and sisters, he calls us to that as well this morning. So how is this possible? How is this possible for people like you and me who know our hearts all too well?

How do we obey God's commands from the heart? And don't get me wrong, while it is very clear that Jesus is saying to us that we must guard our hearts and we must obey from the heart, I'm not in any way trying to say that it is a nothing if you don't put your hand on someone and murder them or a woman and commit adultery.

Not in any way minimizing those acts at all. But how is it possible for us to be able to obey the Lord in keeping his commands from the heart?

It's possible only one way. It's possible because God gives a new heart in the new birth.

and God puts his spirit within his people. And this is what the Lord spoke through Ezekiel the prophet in Ezekiel 36 which we read earlier verses 26 and 27.

[ 33 : 51 ] Listen to it again. And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and to be careful to obey my rules.

In Jeremiah 31, 31 to 34, the first scripture that was read this morning, the Lord made the same promise to the prophet Isaiah using different words.

Hear it again. Behold the days are coming. The prophet Isaiah, Jeremiah, prophesied these words.

Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

Lord, but this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, declares the Lord, I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

[ 35 : 14 ] And no longer shall each teach his neighbor and each his brother saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, and I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more.

This is the new covenant that Jesus brought about that enables us to obey from the heart, that enables us to live in accordance with the magnified commandment.

So we obey God from the heart because he has written his commandments on our heart, not because we read the ten commandments. Reading of the ten commandments does not enable us to obey God from our hearts.

We obey him from our hearts because he has written his law on our hearts in the new covenant and by the new birth. God writes his law on our hearts and he gives us his Holy Spirit to empower us to live them out.

Now I'm not sure this is coming up in anyone's mind but certainly as I prepared I thought it might come up in some people's mind. What about the fourth commandment? what about keeping the seventh day?

[ 36 : 51 ] And I guess it's because in 36 years of pastoral ministry it's a question that has come up a whole lot whenever we talk about the law. And the other nine commandments are not in doubt.

Nobody is around saying well I think you could have idols. But there are people who say well we're not bound to keep the Sabbath day in the Old Testament requirement that was given to the Jews.

And I agree with that. And if you believe that this morning, if you believe that the Sabbath is still binding on believers today to keep it, to worship on it, do no work in it, rest and worship the Lord, I know I don't have the time this morning to try to persuade you otherwise, but here's what I want to do.

I want to point you to a sermon that we did when we started the Genesis series. It's a sermon titled The Rest We All Need.

When we came to the Sabbath day for the first time, when the Lord created the Sabbath day and sanctified it, the sermon addressed the Sabbath day and whether it was binding on believers still.

[ 38 : 16 ] So that sermon is the rest we all need. The text is Genesis 2, 1 to 3, and we also looked at Hebrews 4, 1 to 11. The date of that sermon is the 2nd of October 2022, and it's on the church's website.

If you have questions about this, I encourage you to listen to that sermon and certainly reach out to me if you have any questions. But let me conclude.

At the beginning of the sermon, I pointed out that in these four verses, these four verses that we have considered this morning, that Jesus uttered these words of Jesus, these words of Jesus also help us to see why Jesus came, but also why he had to come, why Jesus needed to come.

In verse 20, Jesus said, for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of God.



The righteousness that Jesus is calling for in verse 20 speaks about salvation and eternal life. That's what entering the kingdom of God really means.

[ 39 : 50 ] It's about salvation. And this righteousness that Jesus is talking about is a righteousness that no human being on his or her own can ever attain, even with the new spirit that God places within us.

And even with the Holy Spirit that God places within us, this righteousness that God requires to receive eternal life, to enter into the kingdom of God, none of us within ourselves, in and of ourselves, can attain to that righteousness.

None of us. us. And it doesn't matter how close we come to it, if we fail, we all fail. None of us, in and of ourselves, could attain to it.

And Jesus knew where he was going. Jesus knew that verse 20 was not going to be the last thing that he said. The whole point of Jesus was to get us, to get his original audience, but to get us as well, to the point where we recognize that we are utterly hopeless to attain this righteousness that is required for eternal life on our own.

This righteousness, even this deeper obedience, if we come to deeper obedience, if we are obeying the Lord from the heart, brothers and sisters, we're not going to do it perfectly.

[ 41 : 23 ] God requires a perfect righteousness. The righteousness that he requires is not an earned righteousness, it is an inherited righteousness.

It's what theologians refer to as imputed righteousness. It's a righteousness that is given to us.

It is a righteousness that comes to us through Jesus Christ based on his substitutionary death on the cross for sinners like you and me.

Only Jesus can give us this righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees, and it is a gift. It is an amazing gift, and it is the only way that we can enter into the kingdom of heaven through receiving this righteousness and trusting in Jesus who provides this righteousness.

And so this morning, if you have not trusted in Jesus, you don't have this righteousness. And without this righteousness, you will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

[ 42 : 42 ] And so I say to you this morning, come to Jesus. Come to Jesus and receive forgiveness for your sins and receive this righteousness that cannot be earned, but that is given to sinners like us as a free gift.

And if you do, you will inherit the kingdom of heaven. Lord, I pray the Lord will help us all to just consider where we stand this morning.

And may we trust in Christ alone and the righteousness that he provides. Let's pray. Father, would you give assurance to all those who put their faith in Jesus that with that faith in Christ comes a righteous garment that's acceptable in your sight and gives us access into the kingdom of heaven.

And Father, I pray for those who do not know Christ. Would you have mercy on them? Would you save them, Lord? Would you help them not to trust in their own righteousness, but to trust in the righteousness of Christ alone?

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's stand for closing song.