

Matthew 5:17-20 “Fulfillment”

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Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

I do love when it starts to look like Christmas, just doing that around here. I love the excitement of the decorations and the songs and all of that this time of year.

And inevitably, as all of this starts, somebody is going to say to you, if they haven't already, you need to remember the reason for the season. In other words, they want to say, you need to remember why Christmas, because it's not all about lights and presents and stockings, is it, kids?

My kids are always telling me it's not about the presents. That's not what they're usually saying, but they remember that that is true, that it's about something more than all of those things, isn't it?

We celebrate it at Christmas, Jesus. The word Christmas actually means the coming of the Christ, the promised Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures.

[1 : 1 1] Jesus was born in Bethlehem about 2,000 years ago, and it's that event, that time, that first Christmas, that I'd like us to ask why about during this Christmas season.

Why did the first Christmas happen? Why did Jesus come to earth? Whatever you believe about Jesus, why did he say that he came?

I want us to listen to the Christ himself tell us why Christ came, why Christmas. That's what we're going to do this Advent season. You might be surprised how much Jesus talks about this, how many times in the gospel accounts he says, I came to, or I've come that, or the Son of Man came so that.

I think you're going to find as we look at some of these reasons that he came, that your celebration of his birth will be fuller and more joyful.

And that is my prayer for these few weeks together in God's word. The first answer to why Christmas that we'll look at is found in Matthew chapter 5.

[2 : 2 8] Matthew 5, where Jesus is beginning his famous sermon on the mount. And he clarifies here one reason he did not come, as well as one really important reason why he did.

Let's listen to Jesus answer our question in Matthew 5, beginning at verse 17. Sitting on a mountain, likely overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus said to his disciples, 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 Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. This is God's word.

[3 : 45] Let's ask for his help as we study it together. Father, your help is what we have asked for all morning. We continue to stand in need of it.

We especially want to hear from you. Not from a man. Just as we, that first Christmas, needed God to break in. We need you to speak by your spirit and your word.

So would you do that clearly and would you give us ears to hear and hearts that are willing and eager to rejoice, even to repent, to change.

Do that work in us by your spirit, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Early in our marriage, I decided to bake Christy a cake for her birthday.

So now it's important for you to know that Christy is an excellent baker. She is fantastic and there is no way in the world that I would try this now.

[4 : 51] I know better than to try this, but I told you this was early in our marriage and I hadn't learned much yet, okay? So be patient with me. And plus, I had a lot of hope because I knew this was a great cake.

She had made it before. It looked beautiful. It tasted just right. And I had her recipe. What could possibly go wrong?

I knew how to read. I knew how to follow directions. I really don't think that I confused the baking soda and the baking powder, although they really look a lot alike and they both look like flour.

I mean, there's a lot of stuff that can go wrong there. I think I used the right pans that seemed to fit in there. I even called her for help a couple of times.

You know, there were things like, how soft is softened butter? I mean, exactly how soft does it need to get? And is it salted or unsalted? And how do you know? And I don't know.

[5 : 49] I thought I got it right. But in spite of the perfect recipe, in the hands of an imperfect chef, the cake did not turn out the way that it was designed or that I had hoped.

I wish I had taken a picture of it to show you so you could appreciate just how bad it was. But I saw this one this week on the internet, and it just looked really familiar. Honestly, this one's holding together a lot better than mine, but the angle at which it is leaning is like exactly the one.

When I carried it out to her on the plate, I had to tilt it so that it stayed on the plate when I walked out. Have you ever made a cake like that? It was rough. Now, I want you to know something important.

I still ate the cake. There were plenty of good things in there, right? But it wasn't the same. Even with her recipe and her advice, it didn't come out the same as when she was there personally baking the cake.

Somewhere in my imperfect use of the perfect recipe, the beauty and the sweetness of the cake got lost. Christy would have to come home, follow the recipe the way it was meant to be followed, bake the cake for herself for us to experience its fullness and perfection.

[7 : 11] Y'all, that's why Christmas, okay? Jesus came not to follow a recipe for a cake, but to fulfill the Old Testament Scriptures, stories, predictions, prescriptions, promises whose meaning needed not to be done away with, but filled out, embodied personally, in the one who really knew what they meant, the one that they all pointed to.

See, there were many imperfect chefs who were given God's Word, some just preferring to ignore the recipe altogether and do things their own way. Some who, like me, religiously followed the recipe to a T while missing the heart, but all following short of what God meant for them, what God required of them, none of them measuring up to that perfection.

And so what happened was Jesus couldn't stay at a distance. He couldn't just stand far off and give advice for following the recipe, for knowing how to live. He had to come to embody in himself its fullest meaning, to fulfill, as he says, the law and the prophets.

That's shorthand for the whole Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, 39 books written over centuries, he comes to fulfill.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones calls this the most stupendous claim Jesus ever made. That it's all about him. That you look through page after page and story after story, and Jesus says, it's about me.

[9 : 07] I'm gonna fulfill all of it. Every promise, every requirement of God's word, I will fulfill. Does Jesus love the Old Testament?

There's a lot more about his life in the New Testament, isn't there? Does Jesus love the Old Testament? You better believe he does. Every iota, every dot, every one, he says, he will fulfill, he will himself embody its deepest and fullest meaning.

We're gonna look this morning at both the promises and the requirements. Okay? Mostly the prophets connected to the promises. Mostly the law books connected to the requirements, but honestly, there's some overlap both ways.

But we're gonna see both of those, and along the way, why Jesus coming for this fulfillment is so wonderful for us.

So necessary and so absolutely life-bringing and joy-bringing for us. Let's look at this together. First, how Jesus fulfills all the promises.

[10 : 24] This one honestly is a little easier to understand, I think. Most estimates see over 300 Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Jesus.

Already six times in the first few chapters of Matthew, he said, all this took place to fulfill what was said through the prophet. So many of those 300 are historically, independently verifiable across hundreds of years.

Some of those very direct, specific promises, like the promised Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. But many of those promises where fulfilling the promise means Jesus is revealing what it could even look like for something to happen.

What it could look like, for example, for God to be with us, Emmanuel, that a virgin could be with child. Jesus embodies the longing for a righteous king on David's throne who pursues justice for the poor, who pursues peace for the nation.

As Jesus goes to the cross, we grasp the fullness of something we could only have seen very dimly. The prophet Isaiah writing that the Lord's servant would be a man of sorrows.

[11 : 57] The promised king, a man of sorrows? How's that going to work? It wouldn't have even made sense to many, but we're told he'll bear our griefs, he'll carry our sorrows, he's even going to be smitten by God himself.

How's that possible? And Jesus goes to the cross and we start to see. Jesus himself lays out for us the full meaning of the blood of the lamb in the Lord's supper.

The Passover feast had this lamb with blood and it reminded God's people of his deliverance from bondage into relationship with himself by the blood of the lamb.

It was a grace for God's people in Egypt, right? And it was a foreshadowing of the grace of God for his people in sin that Jesus himself would bring when he showed up in person to lay down his very own life through his death on the cross and we said, behold, the lamb of God.

All of God's promises, yes and amen in Jesus. All of them. Jesus came so that all of those promises given to all of those generations of God's people repeated from father and mother to child and grandchild generation after generation would not be empty promises.

- [13 : 29] They wouldn't be left empty but they would in fact come to their full fruition and the one that God had been pointing his people to for generations. The one who, as Sally Lloyd-Jones says, is like the missing piece in a puzzle that helps you see a beautiful picture because every page of every story in the Old Testament whispers his name.
- The baby who according to God's story is the hero that we all need. Every single one of us then and today needs the same hero.
- I pray that every one of you have found Jesus to be the hero of your story. Have found yourself in his story, if you will.
- That he would be the one that enters in to your story and makes all of the painful and confusing and difficult and seemingly hopeless parts of your life.
- He gathers all of them up and makes them fit together for a glorious purpose even when you can't see it. He came for that reason for you because you have painful and difficult and seemingly hopeless parts of your story but you have a king who came to give you hope.
- [15 : 02] The second aspect of Jesus coming to fulfill the law and the prophets is fulfilling all their requirements. This one's a little bit harder for us to understand.
- Jesus explains it more here in this passage. See, it seems that some in Jesus' day were concerned that this new teacher was lowering the bar.
- All this talk of a kingdom of grace where people who were poor in spirit got in. Where the meek were there mourning their sins.
- It sounded to some like he's lowering the bar. It made them wonder if Jesus was shortening the list of Old Testament commands from 613 that were there to something far less than that.
- To a number far lower. Jesus says, by no means. Not at all. He sits on the mountain and teaches like the promised prophet like Moses.
- [16 : 13] Remember Moses, the law giver who came down from the mountain with the law of God. But Jesus sits and speaks on his own authority and he raises the bar.
- Doesn't he? If you haven't read this passage, you'll be certain of this after you do. He shows the full meaning of God's law. Not getting rid of it, but filling it out.
- Don't murder? What about the anger in your heart? Jesus says. Don't commit adultery?
- Yeah. What about the lust in your heart? Jesus says. The rest of Matthew 5 is example after example ending with love not only your neighbor, but also your enemy from your heart because that's how God your father loves.
- And by the way, while we're raising the bar, verse 48, let's just make sure we're clear how high it is. You must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. You still think Jesus has gone soft on crime?
- [17 : 33] No. Has his grace run off the law? We don't need it anymore. No. See, Jesus is taking us all the way to the heart of God, isn't he?
- That's what he's done here as you go through this chapter. The law of God reveals God's perfect character, doesn't it? Which is not merely that God is perfect in the things that he does, the actions that he takes, that's part of it, but truly God is perfect in who he is at his very heart.
- At his core, God is goodness. He is good completely. Perfect goodness from the heart and that is what is required of us.

It always has been for man and woman created in God's image to reflect God's image perfectly. we are required to have lives where without failure, without mixed motivation, without self-interest, from the heart for God's glory, all the time, we are perfectly honest and loving and faithful and forgiving and patient and loyal.

Even with those who aren't like that toward us, it doesn't matter. That's what it means to be children of God, Jesus says, all the time. Jesus fills out the meaning of the law, doesn't he?

[19 : 05] He raises the bar so high. He raises it by going to the heart. It's not a list of things you can check off. It's who you are from the heart and by the way, if you can't outdo the best law keepers of the day, the most careful followers of God's law, you can't even get into heaven.

That's Jesus, not me. That's Jesus. I love the way J. Gresham Machen explains this dynamic. He says, the list-making, externally-focused rule followers actually have a low view of the law because they think they can keep it.

A low view of the law always brings legalism in religion. A high view of the law, like Jesus's, makes a man a seeker after grace.

Is that just a glimpse? I only spent a couple minutes. I went really fast. Is just a glimpse of God's law this morning doing that in your heart?

Is it making you say, help? I couldn't possibly. There's no way I'll measure up. If it's not, you're not seeing how high Jesus raises the bar.

[20 : 35] We should be crying out for grace. Oh, Jesus, where can I find grace? I'm seeking after grace. I can't do this. I'm not enough.

Now listen, you know, and when you cry out for grace like that, Jesus gives grace, doesn't he? Jesus gives that grace in two ways here after he raises the bar. Please don't miss this.

This is so important. If you've understood at all where the bar is, it's so important that you understand where Jesus's grace comes into this. Jesus first then clears the bar that he has raised.

It's the first way he brings this grace. he meets the perfect standard from the heart every time toward his enemies just like his father. He is born under the law himself, Galatians chapter 4, to redeem those who are under the law.

In Matthew chapter 3, he asks John the Baptist to baptize him and they get into this conversation. John's a little uncomfortable, understandably, with baptizing Jesus and Jesus says this is what should happen to fulfill all righteousness, to fulfill, same word as here in chapter 5, fulfill all righteousness.

[21 : 54] What's Jesus doing? He's being the model Israelite, the obedient human, the child who came to do the will of his father, the ultimate, perfect law keeper.

Listen, you know Jesus came to die and we will get to that in another week, okay? And oh, how important that is. How we need that for our sin.

But he also came to live. And oh, how we need that for our righteousness. We desperately need that.

He saw how hopelessly stuck you were below the bar. He saw you would never measure up. He couldn't just send advice from heaven.

He knew it wouldn't be enough to fix you or me. He had to come to embody himself the fullness of God's law. His perfect, active righteousness fulfills the requirements, the demands of God's holy law for us so that as we are united to him by faith, we actually become the righteousness of God in Christ.

[23 : 07] Amen? It's why John Newton wrote, to see the law by Christ fulfilled. To hear his pardoning voice changes a slave into a child and duty into choice.

He fulfills the law and frees us from its burden, from the bar that we could never reach. What grace, that is amazing grace, grace, the Lord is our righteousness.

The perfect law keeping of Jesus enables us to stand in the presence of the holy God with nothing in our hands we bring, simply clinging to Jesus.

Period. And, there's more grace. Can you believe that? There's more grace than that. It's even better news than that.

Please listen carefully now. I don't want you to be confused. I don't want you to hear what I'm not saying. I don't want you to forget what I just said. We stand clothed in the righteousness of Jesus before God.

[24 : 15] Period. And, Jesus actually lifts us to the bar that he raised and cleared himself.

Come back to the cake with me for a minute. After I make a mess out of things, even with the perfect recipe, right? Christy can come back in, kick me out of the kitchen, get me out of the way, and make the perfect cake.

It'll look beautiful. And, that's great because at the end of the day, we can enjoy a wonderful cake for her birthday and that is so precious and so valuable. But, remember, she's already made the perfect cake before.

It's already there. We have it. What we've learned over the years is that we also take a lot of joy in baking together.

It doesn't go the same way every time, but it gives me great delight to be with her while we make a perfect cake. I mean, while she makes a perfect cake and I retrieve ingredients and I lick the bowls, I mean, clean up, clean up the bowls after she uses them and we together make this perfect cake and I get to taste the sweetness of it along the way.

[25 : 47] The sweetness of the cake itself and the sweetness of being with her. Sometimes we think that Jesus has this perfect cake, this perfect righteousness, perfect relationship with the Father and he's going to give that to us one day which is going to get us around all the requirements of the law, all that stuff and we'll show up in heaven with Jesus' perfect record and it is true.

We show up in heaven with Jesus' perfect record. Praise the Lord. But he lifts us into righteous relationship with the Father as well.

Kelly and I talked about this week, what does that no condemnation look like? Now that I'm not condemned, now that I know that I don't have to bake a cake good enough to get in with God, now that we're already in relationship, I'm now able to live with God in a different way without fear of failure that I might just make a mess of things and he'll never want to be with me again.

I don't have to live like that anymore. I can live without shame of all the opportunities that I've missed. I can live with a new joyful pursuit of God's heart that I've been set free to love more than I even love myself and the things that I want.

I'm a slave changed into a child who wants to be with Dad and be like Dad. Don't you want that? He gives you a new heart so that you want to be with him and like him.

[27 : 33] You're his child. Listen, in this passage, a big part of Jesus fulfilling the law is the life with God from the heart that he lays out.

He spends the whole rest of the chapter doing it. And he wants our righteousness, righteousness, not just his, but our righteousness to exceed the scribes and the Pharisees.

He wants us to long for wholehearted love and obedience so that we see the bar raised high.

He wants us to see that so that we become poor in spirit. Can you feel that? So that what happens when we're down here, when we're poor in spirit, so that we become seekers after grace.

That we say, Jesus, where are you? Jesus, I need you. Jesus, I can't be apart from you. I need your grace. He wants us to feel that way so that we will come to him and be safe in his perfect and holy righteousness and say, Jesus, I want to live honest and loving and faithful and forgiving and patient and loyal like you.

[29 : 03] Change me from the inside out. Jesus, change my heart. So practically, when you sin, you now pray differently. You pray when you see the anger, when you feel the lust in your heart, when you see the unforgiveness rising up, you're able to pray, God, thank you for Jesus' perfect life that you've given to me so I'm not defined by this struggle right now.

I love it so much. His righteousness is so beautiful and so also, God, make me more like Jesus. help me live like Jesus from the heart all the time in every relationship.

I told you there's grace for that. Listen, this is God's promise. When we come, when we do that, when we see ourselves low, when we seek after grace, when we come to Jesus, there's a new covenant relationship we enter into with God.

Not only do we get Jesus' perfect righteousness credited to us, but we also exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees because he puts his law within us and writes it on our hearts.

And I will be their God and they shall be my people, Jeremiah 31, 33. It's the same new covenant promise in Ezekiel 36. Notice the parallel, I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

[30 : 47] You will be my people and I will be your God. You hear what he's after? God will be with us by his spirit so that his people who know that he is our God will follow his law from our hearts.

Christmas. That's why Christmas. That's why Jesus came. Jesus bakes the perfect cake and he gives it to us righteousness fulfilled and he also delights, it brings him joy to taste the sweetness of the cake in relationship with him all along the way.

It's what he's like. Picture him holding your hand as you stir so that you're more patient and wait for it to be just right. He's right there with you to comfort you when your anger burns and it hurts.

He's there with us savoring the beauty and the sweetness of God's perfect character as he forms us more and more into his likeness.

In the hands of the perfect chef the perfect recipe yields a perfect cake of his own making praise the Lord and another cake in process that he makes with us and in us to our great joy and our eternal glory.

[32 : 26] Aren't you thankful that Jesus came to fulfill all of the promises and all of the requirements of the Old Testament? Aren't you thankful?

Now one of the requirements of the Old Testament that I haven't mentioned specifically yet this morning was death for disobedience.

That's part of the law. That the Father would turn his face away from sin that it would separate us from God and from life.

Jesus fulfilled that requirement of the law too didn't he? Jesus was separated from God to fulfill what was required of your sin and my sin.

It was on the night that he was betrayed that Jesus took bread he broke it and he gave it to his disciples as I'm ministering in his name give this bread to you and he said take and eat this is my body instead of yours given for you do this in remembrance of me and the same way after supper he took the cup and he said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed instead of yours being shed my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death instead of yours until he comes brother sister in Christ Jesus Jesus was separated from God the Father in your place not so that you could live a life distant from God chasing after your own priorities pursuing your own pleasures it's not why he came he came and was separated from God that you might never be distant from your

[34 : 42] Father that you might live in his presence every day that his ear would be attentive to every one of your cries that your heart would more and more beat like his like the one you're close to let's come together to his table let's meet our brothers and sisters close to the heart of God and live there this week friend if you're here this morning and you don't see in this table the body and blood of Jesus his perfect life and perfect death as your hope then I would encourage you not to come to this table not to come take these elements themselves that's what they represent and you don't want to say outwardly something that you don't believe to be true that's not who you are we would still invite you to come to these tables come we'd love to pray for you come watch observe ask us questions later or stay where you are and reflect but mostly we would invite you in the name of Jesus to come to him to the one who's not demanding you jump over the bar on your own to the one who frees you from the burden of the perfect life and the debt that you owe to your heavenly father but who pays it for you and comes to give you life and life abundantly we'd love to tell you more about him grab any of us we'd love to talk with you let's pray and we'll come to the table together father may we all here see the savior that this table points to and as we come may we get to taste the sweetness of his perfect love perfect obedience endless grace would you be so kind father as to use these common elements for such a holy purpose in our lives work in our hearts even as we eat and drink in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org anti very on the way and how can mana and hem so