

The Law Fulfilled Down

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Date: 24 May 2015

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[0 : 00] I have to confess to you, on Friday night I began to get sick, which is a terrible time to get sick for a preacher, and terrible symptoms too, and sore throat and head fog and cloud, and Saturday's my main day to sort of get that skeleton of a sermon into a full manuscript.

So I hope you will be merciful to me if my thoughts are a little bit scattered, and in return, I'll cut you a deal, I'll be merciful to you in not going on and on and on and on and on, forever and ever and ever.

So there we are. If you've taken away from that that mercy or grace is some kind of trade that takes place, then I'm in big trouble. Okay, our text this morning is in Matthew 5.

I don't know where that is in your pew Bibles. I should have looked that up beforehand. But Matthew 5 from verses 17 to 20.

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.

[1 : 34] 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.

Father, this is the word of heaven. This is the word of the Lord. Let me pray. Well, Father, I pray that you would be with me. That you would guide my tongue to speak what is true.

And speak what will be a blessing to us this morning. I pray that you would clarify this text to us.

And that you would bring some of these very difficult truths to a place of understanding in our minds and in our hearts. And that we would come away better equipped to know and to minister the gospel to ourselves, to our families, to our friends and to our colleagues and so on.

[2 : 44] In your name, amen. Okay, I've got Dayquil in my veins. I've got a hot mug of ginger peach tea. And I've got the word of God in front of me. So we're set. Well, what I want to do this morning is really answer one very simple question.

At least the question is simple. The answer is not at all. And it's the question of what do we do with the law? What do we do with the Old Testament law?

How much of it are we supposed to obey and be under today? And this is a question that is absolutely ancient for Christians, for the church.

And it's one that we see maybe not asked all too much within our own community. But it's one that is asked an awful lot outside of the church.

And hopefully we have a lot of interaction with people outside of the church. And we are apologists for our faith. And this is going to be something that you're going to find a lot of.

[3 : 48] Where people are going to quote to you portions of the Old Testament, portions of the law. And they're going to say, this is your text. This is your Bible. This is a text that you are under.

You're saying that this is the word of God. And that this is life and this is truth. And this is something that you want to live daily. This is your daily bread. This is a lamp unto your feet.

But yet you guys don't seem to follow really hardly any at all of what you call the Old Testament.

And in response you just seem to say, well that's the Old Testament.

That's come and gone. To which they often reply, well what about the New Testament? That's coming on for 2,000 years old now. That's probably had it too, right?

So this creates a pretty interesting and difficult dilemma for the Christian. And what I think we have here in our portion this morning is really the answer to it.

[4 : 48] And this passage just focuses in like a laser beam on what the meaning of the law is in our lives today. So I want to look at that and I want to look more broadly at the Sermon on the Mount and how our text today fits in to that.

So we kind of have maybe three positions on what the law means. We can take one extreme where we say it's all there.

It is the word of God. You know it says the grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our Lord stands forever. We have Jesus' words in here in our portion today.

Do not think I've come to abolish the law of the prophets. I haven't come to abolish them. I've come to fulfill them. We have these statements saying, you know, this is all true.

And so then we have these kind of difficult passages that we come across. And we just sort of try and explain them away and say, well pork. I mean they were told not to eat that because, you know, pork is kind of a dirty meat.

[5 : 56] And, you know, in those times they didn't have the same kind of hygiene. It probably wasn't a good idea. And we try and kind of explain things like that. But that gets difficult for a number of reasons.

Firstly, there are some animals and stuff that they weren't supposed to eat that really aren't that bad at all. They're actually quite safe to eat. Lobster is one that's often mentioned in that regard.

And also you have things where the penalties for breaking them are really bizarrely strict. So like the Sabbath. You break the Sabbath and then you're stoned to death. I mean that seems pretty strange if, you know, this is just this life-giving law that, you know, we should obey today.

I mean should we still be doing that? Or things like mixed fabrics. People come up with all kinds of rules about or reasons as to why they weren't allowed to wear fabrics made of different types of cloth.

And theologians have been very creative over the years about why that may be. But I don't really find any of them all that convincing as to why there is something there that actually makes sense in terms of a moral.

[7 : 09] A reason to love God and love our neighbor in doing those things. That's one extreme. On the other extreme, you have the view that the Old Testament is just done.

Like Jesus has come. The Old Testament is all about law. It's all about kind of suppressive rules and, you know, salvation through works.

And there's nothing about mercy, nothing about grace in the whole thing. And now we have the New Testament and we don't need to bother with any of it. But there you come into the problem of actually there's an awful lot of grace and an awful lot of mercy and salvation in the Old Testament. And frequently our images and our models for viewing salvation is in things like the Exodus. And in God giving the people a land and a home.

You see these stories come to life in the gospel. When you look back at these narratives through that framework. And in the Psalms, you see such grace and mercy come through.

[8 : 19] There is so much that is true about God, true about humanity, and true about the narrative of the gospel and of salvation in the Old Testament. There's no way we're putting this thing aside.

And there's no way Jesus is putting this thing aside. These were the very words he lived by. He absolutely affirmed the entire Old Testament just as he commissioned the whole New Testament. So then we have our sort of third way, which is what most of us generally fit into. Which is where we say, I do believe in the Old Testament. I believe it has a place in our lives.

But we have to just be careful and cautious about what bits we believe and what bits we carry on today. Some bits are true. Some bits carry over into the New Covenant.

Other bits don't. So then you're asked, well, what bits? And then most crucially, how do you know the difference? Who gets to decide what bits do and don't?

[9 : 17] And this has become a real point of focus, especially as we're skewered with questions about, well, particularly within the sexual sphere, about homosexuality and gender roles.

And some of the really controversial stuff that we're kind of skewered with as Christians. It's really hard to defend those things when people say, well, let me read to you some other bits of your law that you've probably read once.

Just to say that you've read the whole Bible and never really looked at it again. This is a difficult issue. And we really need to have a much better answer than I think the answer that we often come up with and give to Christians and non-Christians alike.

We really need to know why it is that there was this law with all of its incredibly heavy commands, often incredibly weird. Can we just be frank about that as we look at them?

At least to our eye, they appear to be very strange indeed. And don't seem to have a lot to do with love some of the time. What's the point in all this?

[10:26] How does our loving and good God have this as part of the narrative of redemption at large? I think we have our answer in this text.

So the first thing I want to say, my first point, if you like, is that salvation does come through the law. This is my first point. Salvation comes through the law, which may seem like a very strange thing to say when we are people of salvation through grace alone and not through works.

That is absolutely true. Absolutely affirm that. But salvation does come through the Jews and it comes through the law. And it actually comes through obedience to the law.

Just not our obedience to it. It comes through Jesus' obedience to it. And what we see in the Sermon on the Mount, for gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who's all about grace and love and mercy, is entirely a moralistic sermon.

There is nothing really about grace, about mercy, unless you really know what you're looking for here, in the entire Sermon on the Mount. And this is Jesus' first big kind of monologue to the crowds, at least as Matthew records it.

[11:40] He's done some preaching in synagogues. But this is his kind of opening proclamation of the gospel to the people, to the crowds, as Matthew records it.

And if you have a red letter version of the Bible, you're being blinded right now with all this red. I think it's probably the only double page spread of all red letters in scripture. This is Jesus' first monologue to the crowds.

And it is all moralistic. It's all about what to do, what to not do. There's not the sort of the gospel preached, as we would put it, and as the New Testament post-Pentecost writers would put it.

What you have here is what to do, what to not do. This is very interesting, and I think we should have our focus on this for a moment here. So let me just run through what I think it says.

It starts at the beginning of chapter 5, and we have what's called the Beatitudes. And this is basically affirming the suffering of his people.

[12:42] Jesus is saying, you're blessed if you suffer in all these kinds of ways. That's what the Beatitudes say. Then it goes on to talk about salt and light.

So it's saying, you're blessed when you're persecuted, but you guys are the richness of the earth. You're the light. You are what is good about humanity. I want you to see that.

I want you to be that. Then it goes on to our portion today to talk about Christ having not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

And then our portion ends with this exhortation. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven.

And the Pharisees, of course, are the sort of pantomime bad guy in the Gospels. And whenever we see the Pharisees come along, we think, okay, now they're going to get it.

[13:37] Jesus is going to school them. And we have to be very cautious as Christians as we do that. Because for the pantomime bad guy, the Pharisees are pretty righteous.

Their righteousness, if you look at it, I don't think any of our righteousness would match up to theirs. That's a pretty humbling thought. The people who Jesus kind of most criticized for the way they lived their lives were probably a lot holier than us.

It says they would travel land and sea to make one convert. I don't know if I would do that. Would I have come even all the way to Squamish if I knew there would be one person to preach to?

I hope that I would have that heart for the Gospel that I would have done that. But the Pharisees were, they had it together in many ways.

But, of course, their heart was still nothing compared to what real righteousness looked like. So Jesus says, Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

[14:42] So then he lists about six things, I would say, that are sort of classic sinner sins, if we can put it like that. Because we see Jesus have this kind of dual ministry.

Ministry to the sinners and then to the Pharisees, which is another kind of sinner. But these first six are kind of the classic sinner sins. So you have to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Anger. And he steps up in each of these areas. You've heard that it was said, this, I tell you this. And so he has this anger. You've heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder. Whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. And it goes on. So it's even in the heart. So he takes these areas and says, you've heard that it was said even just this.

This is what the Pharisees do. I'm telling you like this. Lust, the same thing. You've committed adultery if you look lustfully at a woman in your heart. Divorce, oaths, retaliation, loving your enemies.

[15 : 42] He goes through these things and steps up the law. Maybe not what people were expecting the Messiah to do. Maybe not people who have a sort of cursory understanding of Jesus' message.

Would expect to find. He's often not presented as this lawgiver. Then we have verse 48, which sort of sits in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. In chapter 5, verse 48.

You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. So first we're told be as righteous if not more than the scribes and Pharisees. Now we're told be perfect.

Even as God Almighty is perfect. I mean, what an exhortation to come, to tell people. So we have the Messiah coming. He's going to show us the way to salvation.

And this is what he says. You want to know how to be saved? You want to know what the way to salvation is? It's actually really straightforward and simple. All you have to do is be as righteous and as holy as God Almighty in heaven. Simple as that.

[16 : 40] And then he goes on to talk about more kind of Pharisee type sins. Right? So he's talking about giving to the needy.

Not blowing a trumpet and saying, look how much I give. He talks about, this is where we have the Lord's Prayer. And the point of it is, don't have these verbose, lengthy, kind of religious sounding prayers.

But let prayer be something honest and real. Fasting. Don't kind of have this gaunt look on your face. Oh, woe is me. Look how I'm fasting for the Lord and how holy I am.

He goes on to talk about laying up treasures in heaven. Don't be a rich person. We often don't think about that as something sort of classic, simple. Just hoarding and spending all of our money on ourselves at the expense of other people.

He goes on to talk about, you know, just basic, you know, not being anxious. Having faith. Judging others. And he talks about how not everyone who says to me, oh, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

[17 : 46] So these are more sort of Pharisee type sins. And this whole building your house on the rock thing. What that's actually about is not just hearing the word and knowing the word and speaking the word, but doing it.

And we also have here the golden rule. Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. For this is the law and the prophets.

So that is the Sermon on the Mount. And it's a pretty heavy sermon. And it's saying, basically, salvation is going to come to you through the obedience of the law.

This is important as we track the narrative of redemption. Let's return to our portion. Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

So it hasn't been abolished. Jesus is very clear here. We have that in our text. I haven't come to abolish them. But to fulfill them.

[18 : 51] He has come to fulfill the law. Do you notice that it doesn't say, I've come to obey it. I've come to do it. I've come to be, you know, another person. Or not that it would have been another person.

I would be the first person to obey it. And now you go and do the same. And then that's salvation and we're set. He's saying, I've come to get it done. If the law is like a contract to sinners, to God's people from him, saying, I don't need you to just do what is loving anymore.

Because, I mean, that's what you should have done all along. But I need you instead. I have this way of salvation. I am going to burden you with laws.

Law after law after law after law after law. And you have to do what's right on the one. I mean, you have to do that anyway. Everybody has to. That's just expected of anyone. But you also now have this law.

And if you can do this law, if you can make all these sacrifices, and if you can obey all these laws about what to eat and how to be clean and so on, then I will count that as righteousness.

[19 : 59] Nobody could do it. Not anywhere near. They couldn't even be basically nice to each other. As none of us can. But this was the way to salvation. And Jesus is saying, I haven't come to just say, look, that was too difficult.

I'm going to put that to one side and just say, hey, we'll just call it even and we'll say you're free. No, I've come to fulfill that. I am going to be that person of God who will do that and do it on behalf of the whole people of God.

And then invite anyone and everyone who wants to come and be a part of the people of God to have that salvation through me, through my fulfilling of the law. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law.

People often stop there. But it doesn't stop there. It says, until all is accomplished. What did Jesus do in his life? He accomplished the law. The atonement is not just about what happened at the cross.

The cross was the pinnacle of the atonement. Jesus' work began from day one. His whole life was a fulfilling of the law. It was a doing. It was an accomplishing of that law.

[21 : 13] So we had originally this incredibly narrow escape up ahead of us, miles up ahead. How are we going to get out of the pit of sin? There's technically this one tiny way that we can get up and out.

The law seemed like such a pointless hope until Jesus came along. One man who was able to fulfill and do the law. And he did it. And he's done it.

And now all can be saved if they will come to him and be a part of that people. And I think this is a really important point as we talk about grace.

There is not this big divide between grace and righteousness. That we have, you know, oh, we're now free. And, you know, Jesus isn't talking about doing good things to each other.

He's not talking about works. That they aren't like two sides of a scale that we're trying to balance. That one comes directly through the other. Through Jesus' goodness.

[22 : 16] Salvation comes through the law. That's my second point. My third point is simply this. Morality is not about obeying and doing laws.

As we seek to do good and to be obedient to the word, we're not obeying law. That is not primarily what we're doing. And I think, generally, that's kind of a bad way of thinking about it.

There are allusions to that in the New Testament. We talk about the law of Christ. And I personally think that that is more, not ironic, but, like, this is your law.

Like, do good to others and do good to God. Like, what kind of law is that compared to the law that we had? Morality is not about law.

Let me make that case for you. If you think back to Adam and Eve, and I'll ask you this question. How many laws were there in the Garden of Eden? And you will answer there was one law, not to eat the fruit.

[23 : 22] But then we could ask the question, how many opportunities for sin were there? And you may say, well, just one, because don't eat the fruit. Isn't that why God gave the law, that one law, to Adam and Eve?

So that there'd be a possibility of sin, and so on. And then there could be free choice, and they could choose God. I've heard that said. I don't think it's true. I think there were many, many opportunities for them to sin.

What if Adam had been abusive to his wife? What if they had carved an idol and began to worship it? I mean, anything they could have done would have been sin.

Any of the wrong things that we do to each other, the jealousy or the gossip. I don't know how you would have had gossip with two people in the world. But once they had kids.

But you would have had that. Murder, right? These are all possibilities for sins. Would these have been right? Simply because God had not put a law out to say that?

[24 : 26] God is the holy God of the universe. He is awesome. He is majestic. He is worthy of infinite praise. He is high and lifted up above us. The whole of heaven bows down and worships him.

He is so sacred and holy. And he needs no sign that says that he is holy for him to be deserving of praise. He doesn't need to write it down somewhere to say, I am God.

You must worship me. I am deserving of praise. This is my son. He has given everything to sacrifice for you. You should honor him and praise him and glorify him. He doesn't need to write that down. That is an incredibly shallow view of morality. And it is bad when we as Christians preach that type of morality. Bible says so type morality.

Don't get me wrong. I am 100% for the word of God. It is how we are convicted of what is right and what is true. But it is not ultimately why it is that we do good things.

[25 : 26] We do good things because God is good. This is important as we think about law and what that means to us.

And I think we can say with confidence and with a lot of explanation that there are no laws for Christians. That nothing of the law is binding on us. What is binding on us is that God is holy and he is deserving of worship.

And he is made human beings in his image who are worthy of dignity and respect and love. Those aren't laws. That is just something that is true.

And holiness is simply, well, what Jesus says in chapter 7 verse 12 in his Sermon on the Mount. Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also for them.

For this is the law and the prophets. It is loving others and loving God. Now, do we then throw away our Bible because we don't need law?

[26 : 29] We have this. We certainly don't because our hearts are hard. In heaven we won't be opening our Bibles. And neither will we be exercising any self-control. Because we will just be holy.

We will do whatever we wish, our hearts desires. All of our actions, all of our desires will be absolutely holy and righteous because we will be made clean. We have our Bibles before us today because we don't know how to love our neighbor.

We have no idea. I don't know how to love somebody. That's not in my nature as a sinner. How do I do that? As we become Christians, this is something brand new. This is a very alien concept. How do I worship and honor and glorify God?

I've never done that before. How do I do that? We can't just do what we feel is right because our insides are corrupt and wicked. If our wills were good, we would have no problem.

But our will and our desire has been for evil and our lives reflect that. That is why we have to exercise self-control. It is not the ultimate goal of holiness to be really self-controlled.

[27 : 30] But it is this halfway step until we are fully sanctified in heaven. It is not our ultimate goal to memorize rules and passages of scripture and put them mechanically into practice.

But as sinners, we kind of have to do that a bit because we don't have it naturally in our hearts. So that is why we come to scripture. It is because we don't know how to be nice to one another that we come to our scriptures.

But what we don't do is come to it as law. It is very different to how the Israelites had to come to it. Our yoke is easy. Our burden is light. It is not so for the Israelites. They were bound by this. If they didn't do it, they didn't have grace.

We're in a very different situation here. So what does that mean for us as we look back at the Old Testament? Is there anything at all? I mean, if we take the Ten Commandments, for example, surely we can say that they still apply today because we shouldn't murder, right?

[28 : 40] We shouldn't murder because murder is an awful thing to do to somebody. That is why we should not murder. We shouldn't commit adultery because that is an awful thing to do to somebody. We shouldn't dishonor our parents.

We're taking it in spirit and in truth. We're taking it for what it means, not for what it says. We don't quibble about words and about letters.

We're interested in what it means and in putting it into life and into practice. People often ask about the Sabbath. What does that mean? It means don't get obsessed with your work.

Don't be trusting in your own ability to make a living. Taking a rest is a good thing. That's why we do it. We don't take it to that extreme where if somebody is dying and we can heal them, that we don't heal on the Sabbath.

That's why Jesus' practice of the law was so bizarre to so many people because he wasn't following it in this rigid letter-like way. He knew it in spirit.

[29 : 43] He was the law. Do not think I have come to abolish the law of the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. 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.

Praise be to Jesus because all has been 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. So we're back around, in a sense, to where we started.

Even though we do not have the law as binding on us, we have something so much greater than that. And we actually, again, in the Sermon of the Mount, we have something that is step up from the Old Testament in terms of how strict it is.

In terms of anger, as I said, in terms of lust, the idea of sin in the mind is a kind of a strange concept to many religions.

[30 : 53] Particularly his teaching on divorce is incredibly stepped up. Moses gave them a weaker version of that because their hearts were hard. We have been given the spirit of God.

We have been given the ability to know right from wrong. We have been given the newness of life in our hearts to actually go and do what is right. To obey real law.

To actually do nice things to one another. It's so much more free than anything that they had. And that is an incredible truth. That we are free to do what is good.

We are not free to do what is bad, but we are free to do what is good. And that is an incredible freedom. And I urge you to revel in that freedom and to take that freedom and to enjoy that freedom.

Because no longer do we have to see this tension between doing what we want to do and doing what is right. The spirit of God has allowed us to see that morality is not a weight around our neck.

[31 : 54] It is something that is good and life-giving and desirable. And if you cannot understand why a certain sin is not something that you would want to do, you need to fix that.

If you come to any kind of sin and you say, I don't want to do this. There is something that has gone wrong in terms of not doing what is right.

It is all life-giving. It is all good. And it may be contrary to our immediate animalistic sinful urges and desires and lusts.

But it is not contrary to what is ultimately wholesome and pleasurable to us in the long run. That's an incredible thought.

And I think we need to be clearer about that as we preach the gospel to our friends and neighbors. Probably a good time for me to stop right there.

[32 : 52] I hope that that passage makes a little bit more sense to you. As we have a savior who has not come to say morality is nonsense. Or that the rest of our previous Old Testament law is just going to be thrown away.

But one who has fulfilled it. One who values and teaches and commands goodness. And one who has nevertheless provided a way for us to be saved.

And if you are not a Christian this morning, I urge you to consider what we have in Christ. There is nobody like Jesus. There is nobody who has actually completed what is right in his life.

And who can stand before God the Father and say, I am pleasing in your sight. I have done what is good. And these are my friends. These are people who have repented of their sin.

They know that they are not good. They know that they are not like me. And through them they are going to be saved too. That is what we have in Jesus. And that is our hope. Let me pray for us.

Thank you.

[33 : 52] Son, I do. Thank you. Bye. Bye. Bye.

Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Come on. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.

Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.