

"Law"

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Date: 15 September 2024

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[0:00] Good morning. It's good to see you all here. Glad you have joined us for worship this morning. I'm Matt. I'm one of the pastors here. Almost every day, I drive on the Merritt Parkway, and I have noticed something. People have a hard time keeping the law. You might have noticed it.

But guilty is charged. I cannot say that I also. It's one of those things where you know that if you actually go the speed limit, it feels like you're driving dangerously, and so you feel the conundrum. That's not an amen. We need to find something better to amen than that.

Come on. At the end of the service, we'll find something better to amen, I think. So, we have lively debates in our car among my children, my wife, about what are we supposed to do with the law, and this is a question that we not only ask in our civil life, but even more so in our spiritual lives. We ask ourselves the question, what do we do with God's law revealed in the Old Testament? How do we respond to it? See, the problem is that our hearts have an interesting relationship with law. Some of us love the law and love the legalism that comes with it.

Why? Because it gives us a checklist that we can check through, and when we're done, we can say, we are right. We are good, and it feeds our self-righteousness and our ego, and it captures our heart. Now, for some of us, we hate the law. We love freedom. We want to be able to do whatever we want.

We are fundamentally selfish, rebellious, independent people, and sometimes, confusingly, we're both at the same time. So, what do we think about God's law? Maybe you didn't come in here this morning asking about this, but we're talking about it because Jesus has things to say to us about it this morning. If you haven't been here, we are working through Matthew 5 through 7 in the Gospels. This is called the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is proclaiming the nature of His kingdom, the distinctly Christian nature of the kingdom that He is bringing. And we've read through this summer the Beatitudes and what it says about the character of those who are in His kingdom.

[2:53] We talked in the last couple of weeks about salt and light and how that's the nature of those, the nature and work of those who are in His kingdom. And today, we're going to continue in this series.

And we're going to look at Matthew 5, 17 through 20. If you want to turn there in your pew Bibles, it's page 760, Matthew 5, 17 through 20. While you're turning there, I want to remind you that Jesus' audience initially for this sermon was Jewish. And Jesus had come on the scene as this new preacher preaching the gospel, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And some of those faithful Jewish people, a part of the nation of Israel that was founded in large part on the law of God revealed to Moses on the Mount of Sinai after God had delivered them from Egypt, God's instruction to them about how to live as God's people in the nation of Israel. And they're thinking, Jesus, you have said all these wonderful things, but you've not said anything about the law.

How can you be ignoring that? And so, Jesus comes and talks to us this morning. So, I'm going to read this passage, we're going to pray, and then we're going to look at it together. Matthew chapter 5, verses 17 through 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. 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. Let's pray together. Oh, Lord, we look at this passage, and Lord, you have much to say to us in it, and we ask for your help this morning. Lord, I pray, Lord, that the meditations of my mouth, or the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart would be acceptable in your sight. Oh, Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Lord Jesus, we pray that all of us would sit under your word this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So I want to acknowledge up front, reading through commentaries. Everyone admits this is a hard passage, and I'm going to take a particular take at it, and there are godly men and women throughout church history who have probably taken a slightly different take on this, but I hope to at least inspire you to look carefully at the scriptures as we look at it this morning for you to think about what it says to us. Because what I want to say to you this morning is I believe that this text is saying that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament in every way and calls us to follow Him with obedient devotion. So we're just going to look at that. If you're making outlines, there are two points. One is Jesus fulfills the Old Testament in every way, and two,

[6:37] Jesus calls us to follow Him in obedient devotion. So Jesus fulfills the Old Testament in every way, verses 17 and 18. 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. What is he talking about when he's talking about the law and the prophets? Well, it's not just the Mosaic law. The law might refer in a narrow sense to just the law given to him on Mount Sinai. So Exodus 20 through Leviticus and restated in Deuteronomy. It might just be that, but because he expands it and says the law and the prophets, and you can look through the Old Testament and see there are other places where this becomes almost an idiom for all of the Old Testament. So all that the Old Testament teaches us about God. And remember, if you don't know this, the prophets refer not only to the latter prophets, what you think of as Isaiah and Ezekiel and Hosea and Zechariah, but also the former prophets who are actually the history books. Those are called the former prophets in classical description of the Bible. So it actually is describing the whole Old

Testament. And Jesus is saying, I haven't come to abolish that, to put it aside, to disregard it, but I have come to fulfill it. And what does that mean? Well, some have argued that Jesus is saying, I have come to obey all of the law, which in fact he did. He did obey all of the law, but it seems that that's too narrow of definition, and we'll see why as we keep looking. Others argue that he came to give true meaning to the law, and we'll see this in the passages that follow right after this. You've heard it said, but I say to you, where he says, yeah, the law is the law, but there's something deeper there, and I'm going to sort of expand your understanding of it. And again, this is true, but I think not sufficient for what Jesus is saying about what it means that he is the fulfillment of the law. I think what Jesus is saying is, I am the fulfillment of the law because the whole Old Testament, the revelation from Genesis to... what's the last book of the Bible,

Old Testament, Zechariah, Micah, whatever it is. I forgot this morning. Whatever it is, all of those books, they are pointing to me.

Why do I say that? Well, there are a couple of things. One is that Scripture tells us in other places that this is true. Do you remember in Luke, after the resurrection, Jesus is talking to disciples walking on the road to Emmaus, and they're talking about Jesus and how he died and how there's a story of him rising, but they don't know what happened. And he says 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 and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. So the resurrected Jesus came to his disciples and said, hey, all of this, it's all about me. Later in the apostolic witness in 1 Peter, he writes this to the church in Rome in 1 Peter 1. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours, searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory.

So again, there's this indication that the Old Testament writers, even if they didn't know exactly what they were writing about, they were looking ahead and they knew that they were writing about something greater than themselves. And this is what Jesus says. The law and the prophets were great, but they were given to point to something greater, and that something is me. And so he says the Old Testament predicted the coming of Jesus. The Old Testament prepares the world to understand Jesus in his work of redemption. The Old Testament prefigured the work and person of Jesus in lots of different ways. And so Jesus is saying, I have not come to set it aside and to say it has no value, but I have come to fulfill it. That is to say, I am coming to show you all that it points towards. And he goes on in verse 18, and he says, so this is why I'm not saying I put it aside. All of it is important. Not one single piece of it, not one part of what God has revealed will pass away until all is accomplished.

[11:42] Now, it might seem like the easy way to do that is to say, to understand that is to say, okay, so what does it mean that all is accomplished? Well, when the law is finally obeyed fully, that would be a normal understanding. And some people think that's true that it's referring to Jesus. Some people seem to think that this is a future picture of what God will do when he remakes the heavens and earth, and in his redemption, he removes sin and evil from the world, and the law will be perfectly followed because his people will be made new. But I actually think that Jesus is saying something different. The key here is where Jesus uses the phrase law and the prophets in a different verse in Matthew 11. He's talking about, in Matthew 11, he's talking about messengers from John the Baptist and what the relationship is, and they're asking, are you the one, are you the one that everyone predicted? And in verse 13 of chapter 11 of Matthew, Jesus says this, for all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you're willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come, but then he goes on and he talks about himself. And he points to himself again.

And this is, I think, the idea. All the prophets prophesied all the way up to John the Baptist, and what were they pointing at? Jesus. And when Jesus came, the all that was accomplished that's referred to in verse 18 is being referred to. Jesus in his life and his death and his resurrection.

And this then means that it's a restatement of verse 17. It says, Jesus came to fulfill all that the law was pointing to. Now, one of the things that this understanding of these passages does is it deals with a problem that every commentator and every Christian wrestles with, which is, what am I supposed to do with the law of the Old Testament as it relates to me? Do I have to obey it? Do I not obey it? What do I think? And it seems like the traditional understanding of this passage is often, yeah, you kind of need to obey it, but Jesus kind of changes some things, but really you still have to obey it. And if you don't obey it, then you just receive forgiveness from Jesus for that, and then you're fine.

And that is understandable, but it's not actually what Jesus does or the New Testament does with the law. It's much more complicated than that. Let me give you an example of this. Jesus seems to come, let me say this first, Jesus seems to come and he at times changes, at times supersedes, and at times set asides, and at times affirms the Old Testament law. Okay? Change, supersede, set aside, and affirm. He does all of those things. Here's an example. The Sabbath, right? The Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. You must obey the Sabbath. You shall do no work in the Sabbath. The law of Moses gave you all sorts of particular laws about how you can do this and not this, and how far you can walk, and what happens when you're, you know, well, we won't get into details. Anyway, it gives you all these details, right? But in Matthew 12, chapter 6, Jesus is confronted because his disciples picked grain on the Sabbath to eat because they had no food. And Jesus says, what are you, the law is not, the law doesn't constrain humanity in that way. The law was meant as a gift to provide. And he goes on in verse 6, and he says, I tell you something greater than the temple is here, and if you had known what this means, that I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you have not condemned the guiltless, for the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus steps into this situation, and he says, these men are not doing any wrong because they are with me, and I am the Lord of the Sabbath. And it's a radical challenge. And if you keep reading, if you read through the Gospels, you see how much this is a point of contention. But here's the thing, the New Testament doesn't, here Jesus seems to be just setting aside the law. But there's more to it, because when you go to

Hebrews 4, the writer of Hebrews will talk about a Sabbath rest for the people of God, where we rest from our works of doing the law in order to achieve righteousness and a right standing before God, we have a rest from that because Jesus has gone ahead and done what only we, what only He could do in perfectly obeying the law and then giving Himself as a sacrifice for us so that we can enter into a rest with God of our spirits. We have a rest with God of our spirits because we no longer have to strive for our salvation because instead, because of what Jesus done, we receive that. This is the Sabbath rest of God. And this is what the Sabbath points to then from the Old Testament. Do you see how it's complex?

[17:21] And how it can't seem to be that verse 18 of chapter 5 of Matthew is saying, oh, well, you guys just, you just need to keep the, you need to continue to keep the Sabbath until some future thing. It seems like Jesus has already shifted the ground.

There's more. I'm going to just, yeah, I'm going to skip through the next two slides, Josh. In the book of Hebrews, it also says, Jesus comes and He says, there's a whole ceremonial law and you know what? There's a priest and there's a temple and there's a sacrifice and Jesus says, I'm all of those things. I am the priest who offers a sacrifice. I am the sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world. I am the temple. And when this body, this temple is destroyed, it will be raised up in three days to create a new temple of God spiritually among the people of God. And so the Old Testament law is fulfilled in a glorious and beautiful way through Jesus. And so when Jesus says, I've not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, and none of it will pass away until it's accomplished, Jesus is saying, this is all pointing to me. And so now when we look back at the Old Testament, we don't look at it as the rules that we have to follow to be accepted by God, but we look at it through the lens of Jesus so that the whole

Old Testament, one of the major questions we ask is, what does this say about Jesus? Jesus, and his work of redemption, and how this points us to the work of the cross.

If you're wondering, Pastor Matt, I have no idea how to do that. I have no earthly idea. Let me point to you, one of the people who's done great, there's lots of good books on this. One of the persons who's done great work on this recently is a woman named Nancy Guthrie, who's produced a whole series called Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament. And it's seeing Jesus in David, and seeing Jesus in the Pentateuch, and seeing Jesus in the prophets, and it's a great series. She has on her website just a summary.

Actually, I found this on an article. I'll send it out in the weekly newsletter next week. An article. Here are seven ways in which the Old Testament prefigures or points us to Jesus.

[19:52] The Old Testament reveals problems that only Christ can solve, like judgment and expulsion from the Garden of Eden and lack of fellowship with God. The Old Testament gives us a promise that only Christ can fulfill, like how do we regain the presence of God with us?

The Old Testament tells us about a need that only Christ can meet. How can the blood of goats and bulls atone for the sin of humanity? They can't. Only Christ can. The Old Testament gives us a pattern or a theme that only comes to resolution in Christ. The kingdom of God is a mess in the Old Testament. It's never what we all want it and long for it to be. They knew it as well. Jesus comes and he says, I'm going to bring a kingdom, and when my kingdom comes, and your will, my will is done on earth as it is in heaven, it will be all that we long for and all that we know it's supposed to be. The Old Testament is also a story that comes to its conclusion in Christ. The big picture of the creation, fall, redemption, glory, the centerpiece of it is Jesus. He is the Redeemer. He is the one who will bring the glory.

He is the one who was there from the beginning. The Old Testament shows us people who prefigure an aspect of Christ. So Jesus is the greater king from the line of David. He is a greater prophet than the prophet Moses. He is a greater priest than the priests of Melchizedek, and so on and so forth. The Old Testament gives us events or symbols that picture an aspect of who Christ is. Think of Noah's ark, the boat through which God's people are saved through the storm of judgment. Or there are times when the Old Testament gives us a revelation of the pre-incarnate Christ. Every once in a while, someone shows up, and you think, in the Old Testament, you're like, who is that? It doesn't seem like an angel. It doesn't seem like a human being. Well, Christ seems to show up every once in a while in the Old Testament. That was a quick summary of that.

I refer you to the Nancy Guthrie's books and her website for more information on how to start thinking about how do I read the Old Testament? Because in the end, Jesus gloriously and powerfully fulfills all of the Old Testament. And He is the center and the lens now through which we read it.

And it's not that the law doesn't matter at all, right? The law points us to Christ. But some might be thinking, well, if that's true, so now I have Jesus and I can do whatever I want, right? So I don't have a law. Isn't that going to lead to Christian antinomianism and just doing whatever we want? Well, no. Because there's a second part to this passage. Let's keep looking at verses 19 and 20. Jesus says this, Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so 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. Now, you may have guessed this already, but when I first read this and about halfway through my sermon preparation, I thought, oh, this is continuing on.

[23:54] Okay, so we need to keep the law. We need to do better at keeping the law because that's what it says. If we relax the law, then we're no good in the kingdom. But if we keep it, then we're good in the kingdom, right? But that doesn't seem to make any sense. Even though the ESV rolls it together and says this is all one paragraph, I actually think there's a transition.

Jesus says, therefore, and I think his transition is to something new. And when he refers to these commandments, I don't think he's talking about what has gone before, that is verses 17 and 18, referring to the Old Testament law, but I think he's talking about what comes after. And so verses 19 and 20 should be seen as the header to the next section of teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

And what happens there? Jesus says, you have heard it said, but I say to you. Not just murder, but anger and hatred. Not just adultery, but lust in your hearts, and so on and so forth.

Jesus comes as a new lawgiver, as a greater lawgiver, the one who has the authority to rule in his kingdom. And he says, the Old Testament points to me, so now listen to me.

And I think verse 20 supports this. I don't know if you've thought about this. Verse 20 where it says, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

[25:39] Now, do you know about the Pharisees? They were really good at law keeping. They knew the 248 commandments and the 365 prohibitions that make up the 613 laws of the Old Testament. And they kept them.

Jesus himself affirmed this, you tithe mint and dill and cumin. They did all the details of it. They kept the particulars of the law with zeal. And Jesus says, that's not enough.

John Stott says, the difference of the righteousness of the Pharisees and the Christian is not one of degree, but one of kind. Pharisees practiced external righteousness, outward conformity to the law.

But Jesus says that true following of the law is internal as well as external. Jesus is not saying, you have to out-Pharisee the Pharisees.

It's not about keeping the law better than they are. It's about keeping my words, keeping my commands, obeying me. This is the kingdom that I am bringing. And it will have a different character, a different kind of righteousness. In fact, a greater righteousness. Not merely external righteousness of conformity to the law, but a whole life transformation. Souls that are made alive, hearts that are made new. Not freedom from obedience, but obedience that comes from love and devotion to our Savior. And of course, friends, this is exactly what the Old Testament predicted.

[27:32] Remember the passage that Tom read earlier in the assurance of pardon. Jeremiah 31. 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. I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people.

Or think about what he says, what the prophet Ezekiel says in Ezekiel 36, where he says, I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses.

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.

And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. So Jesus says, I have come to fulfill the law.

It is about me. And so now what does life in my kingdom look like? It looks like following and obeying me and my words.

[28:53] It raises questions for us as we think about how we relate to Jesus. Some of us have that legalistic tendency.

Jesus, just tell me what to do. And he comes back at us with love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. And then let the whole New Testament fill out what that love looks like in countercultural ethics and in self-sacrificing service to others.

In standing for truth in a gracious way, etc., etc. So many different ways. Jesus says, I've come to bring a new kingdom to you.

Don't fall back into the legalism of the Pharisees thinking you can justify yourself. But also, don't fall into the thing, Jesus loves me, I can do whatever he wants, and by the way, because I'm justified by grace, not faith, I'm still covered no matter what I do.

Because here's the thing, that's true and it's not true. It is true because only Jesus and the righteousness that he gives us can ever make a standing, give a standing before God where we can have the forgiveness of sins and the reception of his forgiveness and reconciliation with him and a renewal of a relationship with him.

[30:27] And only through Jesus can we have that. And there's nothing we can do to earn or to achieve that. But the New Testament says, those who understand and receive this gracious gift of righteousness are then set free from the law of sin and death, from the power and slavery that our hearts are in to sin, and we are freed finally to live rightly before God.

And friends, why would we want to go back and eat in the mud puddle when Jesus has given us a banquet of righteousness for us to pursue? We don't obey the law because it's the law.

We love Jesus and we follow after him and he shapes and he transforms how we live. And we read the New Testament to give us clarity on that, and we read the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus to enrich and fulfill our understanding of it.

And so we don't have a law that makes us right with God, but we have a Savior and a King and a Lord to follow in every part of our life.

Friends, do you obey Jesus and all of his commands? Have you let him be the Lord of every part of your life, even at great cost?

[31:56] Have you become comfortable with external religion, with a life that's not filled with Jesus?

Have you, out of weariness or selfishness or even despair and self-condemnation, given up trying to live a life pleasing to God because you see that you fail?

Friends, Jesus comes and he says, I am the perfect law keeper. I am the perfect sacrifice. I am the deliverer and I am the new law giver.

Come to me. Come to my kingdom and my righteousness. Humble your pride. Forsake your selfishness.

And come to me. And you know what, friends? The Bible promises that when we know Jesus more, we will love him more.

[33:01] And when we love him more, we will obey him more. And when we obey him more, we will become more like him. And we will delight then to know and obey and worship Jesus in an increasing fashion.

And so know that we are a part of his kingdom. Friends, this is distinctive Christian living. Let's pray.

Lord, as we have looked at this word, Lord, we are challenged. For our hearts are often prone to wander, prone to leave the things that we ought to love, to follow others.

Oh, Lord, we pray. By your spirit, renew in us, Lord, our desire to know you, to follow you. Lord, put in us, Lord, a renewed spirit and a new heart.

Lord, we pray you would help us in these things. We pray this in Jesus' name.