

Title - Jesus' Fulfilment of the Law.

Reading - Matthew 5: 1-20; Colossians 3: 1-6

WELCOME

Welcome and thank you for joining us here at Kings Norton Baptist Church on this the Lord's day - I hope you all are remaining well.

Today is Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was sent to those in the upstairs room. Jesus had ascended into heaven and the disciples and others were together in constant prayer. The event is recorded in Acts 2:1-5.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Jesus promised another comforter - and the Holy Spirit gave them power. They were empowered to go from that room and preach the gospel, in Jerusalem, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

This was the birth of the Church. And the same Holy Spirit is God's gift to us when we accept the Lord Jesus Christ into our lives.

Let us commit this time to the Lord in prayer - Sovereign God, Lord and Heavenly Father, I thank you that we can have this time together in and around your word. I pray that the words of my mouth will be the words you would have me say. I also pray that the ears of the hearer will be opened and that the Holy Spirit will encourage us to accept your word and give us power to live by it day by day. I ask this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

In this short series looking at Jesus' sermon on the mount, we have arrived at four verses that on the surface might, to some, seem confusing or difficult to understand. The verses in question are from Chapter 5 verses 17-20, and are concerning the law. The law of Moses and the prophets. We take this by definition as being the whole of the Old Testament. We know that Jesus held the Old Testament scriptures in very high regard.

In Matthew 21:16, the disciples ask Him...

"Do you hear what these children are saying?"

"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?"

He is quoting Psalm 8:2. As God in human flesh, Jesus speaks with final authority. His testimony regarding the Old Testament is loud and clear.

But before we look at these verses in a little more detail let us recap on the passage to date.

The Sermon on the Mount was taught quite early on in Jesus' earthly ministry. It is recorded in Matthew's gospel and parts are mentioned in Luke's gospel chapter 6.

Whilst we know there was a crowd involved who were listening in to Jesus' teaching, the lesson was first and foremost to the disciples and therefore by implication, us.

Jesus begins with a list of what we call 'The Beatitudes' and one commentator, helping us to try and understand what these mean, suggests that we should, 'be of this attitude'. Jesus is talking about an internal heart characteristic, how we behave and our attitudes in our day to day lives. And as I said previously they are not attitudes we can attain by our own efforts and hard work but we must rely wholly on the Holy Spirit for power.

G. Campbell Morgan, pastor of Westminster Chapel, said that the Sermon on the Mount is the "Great Manifesto of the Kingdom". The Kingdom of God is expounded by Jesus, He presents and explains the Kingdom of God in detail.

We must remember that the Kingdom of God is His reign both in the present and in the future. The Psalmist records in **Psalm 103:19**:

"The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, AND his kingdom rules over all."

Another way of expressing it is, 'The present existence of the Kingdom of God, is the Lordship of Jesus in the lives of those who acknowledge Him in repentance and faith.

The Beatitudes themselves confer no honour, they have nothing to do with possessions or service, the 'blessing' is granted wholly on character; and that is, as mentioned previously, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God's purpose for humanity is a **blessed condition** AND a **happy consciousness**.

More recently we examined the verses (13-16) which dealt with 'Salt and Light'. In essence Jesus was talking about being different. Salt in its purest form when added to say crisps, changes the taste and makes them more palatable. We, as Christians, are **in** the world and we should be making a difference. However, we are clearly warned that we must not lose that saltiness. If we become **of** the world then we are of no use to God, we have effectively lost our saltiness.

We are also encouraged to be light. Jesus is the light of the world, we are to be light in the world. Verse 16 says,

'In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.'

To exemplify this, the missionary William Burns was leaving Scotland for China. People said to him, "so are you going to China to convert the Chinese?" "No!" Burns replied, "I'm going to China to glorify God." Good deeds and glorify God, what a privileged!

So moving on then to verse 17, which reads,

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."

You will notice in this verse that Jesus reiterates that He has not come to abolish the law. Repetition in a passage indicates something important; repetition in a verse shows it must be really important.

So the law, which law? Well basically Jesus is talking about the Old Testament scriptures - the law of Moses - the Pentateuch - the first five books of the Old Testament **AND** the prophets, including the major prophets, (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel etc.) and the minor prophets (Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Malachi etc.) and everything in between. All of the scriptures that had been inspired by the Holy Spirit at that point. Don't forget the Sermon on the Mount was preached in a time between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Jesus was not coming to abolish, to get rid of or destroy the law but to fulfil it. For Jesus to fulfil the law, He was going to have to keep every part of the law including the ten commandments and over 2000 pieces of legislation.

Just an aside Deuteronomy 14:21 states ...

'Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk.'

Any suggestions what that might be about? Answer later on!!

He was to keep the statutes of the law, the standards of the law and the structures of the law - Moral, Civil and Ceremonial. Jesus was going to

have to keep the law perfectly. However, that was His purpose from before time began. The late R.C. Sproul said this...

'The entire Mosaic administration of the old covenant was given to point us to Christ. It was adequate to point out the depth of our sin and our need for the perfect substitute, to be the guardian that will take us finally to Jesus, whose sacrifice alone is adequate - indeed, more than adequate - to save us.'

Matthew Henry commenting on these verses says,

'Those to whom Christ preached had an eye, firstly to the *Scriptures of the Old Testament* as their *rule* and therein Christ here shows them that they were right and secondly to the scribes and the Pharisees as their *example* and therein Christ he shows them they were in the wrong.'

Maybe we can imagine that there were two types of people in the crowd. The ordinary people who wanted to see the law abolished which was, in their minds, a yoke that had been placed on them. Then there were the Pharisees whose focus on the law was to show everyone how well they upheld it. The ordinary people could not see how they could keep the law like the Pharisees. Both groups may have been unhappy with Jesus' words.

Remember Jesus is talking to the Jews. The Law of Moses had been around for approximately 1300 years. The ten commandments had been handed down to Moses directly from God on Mount Sinai and you can read the account in Exodus 19-20. The books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy added further instruction about keeping the law, including rules about sacrifices, the organisation of worship, the various festivals and much more.

Deuteronomy 6:1-6 summarise what was expected regarding the law.

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.

Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

And so the passage goes on in more detail. Notice it says in v3 ... be careful to obey!

Now regarding the young goat cooked in its mother milk. This was an abominable act, in the sight of God, practised by the Canaanites and others. So basically don't do as the Canaanites did!

So Jesus was not going to abolish the law He was going to fulfil the law. He was going to keep the law and all its decrees perfectly. We, in the 21st century, are in a great position to look at the history of what happened. We know Jesus' earthly ministry lasted for 3 years and during that time He kept the law perfectly all the way to the cross.

But how is this relevant?

You will have heard the statement, 'There are only two ways to get to heaven - keep the law perfectly yourself or accept Jesus' perfect life and death for us.'

Jesus' gospel of the kingdom does not replace the Old Testament but rather fulfils it as Jesus's life and ministry, coupled with His interpretation, completes and clarifies the meaning of the entire Old Testament.

Christ was indicating that He is the fulfilment of the law in all its aspects.

He fulfilled the Moral Law by keeping it perfectly, none of us have. He fulfilled the Ceremonial Law by being an embodiment of everything the law's symbols and types pointed to. In John 1:29, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus saying,

'The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.'

There are numerous references to the lamb of God in the book of Revelation.

He fulfilled the judicial law by personifying God's perfect justice.

Jesus emphasised the law's deep, underlying principles and total commitment to it, rather than the mere external acknowledgement and obedience. Jesus was not speaking against observing all the requirements of the law, but against the hypocritical, legalism of the Pharisees, which was the outward show to gain favour with God.

Moving on in verse 18 Jesus says ...

'For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.'

From this verse we can deduce that the Law has a shelf life - it will end - but until then nothing will change. Jesus uses words to describe the

smallest of changes that someone might like to make. In the NIV he says the 'not the smallest letter', 'not the least stroke of a pen' which I don't think gives the best picture.

The ESV suggests 'not one iota' and 'not a dot'. Those of you who have used the King James Version in the past will remember 'not one jot or tittle', poetic!

The author has compared the 'stroke of a pen' to small characters, iota is the smallest Greek letter - where in English we get, for example, 'nothing she said seemed to make one iota of difference'.

Jesus is stated quite emphatically that there will be no changes to the law. However, when everything is accomplished, heaven and earth will pass away.

In Matthew 24:35 also repeated in Mark 13 and Luke 21, Jesus states that
'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.'

In 2 Peter 3:13 the author writes ...

'But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.'

And of course in Rev 21:1, John observes ...

'Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.'

The law was a revealing of God's will and therefore stands until heaven and earth pass away - until all is accomplished. Jesus was showing the disciples the danger of neglect, or contempt, of the law. To relax a commandment is to claim authority over God.

Recently, I was marking a student's Old Testament exam and he put a note at the end stating, 'I know it's God's inspired words but how is Leviticus relevant to today's world?' We cannot pick and choose which bits of scriptures we can miss out. By the way, I think I gave a clear answer. Leviticus, in essence, is about holiness.

It's like many Christians who do not believe God created the world in six 24-hour days. If you start dismissing one 'iota', what other 'dot' will you want to put to one side?

It's not just breaking the law but making it void.

When I was young I was a member of the Lord's Day Observance Society - a Christian group actively encouraging young people to keep the Lord's Day special and separate. No football, no shopping etc. Look around today ... need I say more!

Jesus' words in verse 19 goes on to say,

'Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'

Here Jesus is painting a picture showing how the law should be handled and the consequences. It's not just the outward observance of the law but the inward reality of it. Jesus might well be saying in a modern colloquialism, 'talk the talk AND walk the walk.' But more than that, the Psalmist, in Psalm 40 says,

'I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.'

and in Psalm 139, He said,

'Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.'

It is the state of our hearts towards God that brings about the outward show of good works.

In the final verse v20 of this section, Jesus sets a challenge.

'For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.'

But how are we supposed to do this?

Well this where we look to Jesus. We know that we cannot come to God by our own hard work or effort. But because Jesus lived perfectly to the letter of the law and willingly sacrificed Himself on the cross of Calvary, we, by accepting His free gift of grace, have HIS righteousness put on us. It is the only way - because Jesus is the only way.

Jesus fulfilled the law and we know at Calvary He cries out, 'It is finished!' Jesus' active obedience in life and passive obedience in death means that we can meet the threshold and have access to the Kingdom of God.

So as Christians do we need to keep the law? Remember the Civil law has disappeared because the ancient nation of Israel went into exile. The Ceremonial law has been completely fulfilled in Jesus. Which leaves us with the Moral Law and from that there are three views.

Firstly, we are now under grace and therefore we can ignore the law as it is irrelevant.

Secondly, nothing has changed, we relate to the moral law exactly like they did in Old Testament times. In other words the ten commandments should be in the forefront of our lives, just like they were before Christ.

Thirdly, we look at Christ as our perfect example, we love Christ for what he has done in His life and at Calvary for us and therefore we let Him lead us in His ways and because of that we obey the 10 commandments.

I think it is clear which way we should be thinking and living. Also through Jesus' fulfilling of the Ceremonial law, Christ is qualified to be our High Priest, our mediator between God and man, forever.

Hebrews 7:23-25

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

And finally, Col 3: 1-2

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Are you walking with Christ? He has done all the hard work! Do you have a right and humble heart? Or are you like the Pharisees - an outward show, with a proud heart.

Humble yourself before God. Repent of your sin, asking God's forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then you can be part of God's everlasting Kingdom.