

Matthew 5:17-20 - Part 1

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[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word and turn with me to Matthew chapter 5. Our text for this morning is Matthew chapter 5 verses 17 through 20.

! Before I read that, nine weeks ago I had intended to begin a study of Exodus 20 with a particular concern for the place of the law in the life of the law.

Of the Christian. And this was a oft-used cross-reference text for that very study. What is the place of the law in the life of the Christian?

In my studying, I discovered broad disagreement on the matter. So, we decided to call an audible a week before I was meant to begin that, on Friday in fact, before we were meant to begin that series, and begin a series on Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, knowing full well that we would arrive at our text for this morning and be pressed once again to consider the place of the law in the life of the Christian.

This morning, we will only have time for the beginning of that consideration, but I promise that we will work it out together in the coming weeks.

[1 : 24] So, let's read together Matthew chapter 5 verse 17 through 20 in order to begin this first part of our study. Beloved, this is God's Word to us.

It was written for His glory and for our good. And we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Verse 17 and following.

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. Before I proceed to say anything concerning today's text, I want us to be reminded that this most famous of Jesus' sermons was aimed primarily at His disciples and was about what their life in the kingdom of heaven was to look like.

[2 : 51] Recall back in Matthew chapter 4 and verse 17, Matthew records, From that time Jesus began to preach saying, this is Matthew's summary of Jesus' preaching, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And then at the beginning of Matthew chapter 5, we see that Jesus, seeing the crowds, went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him, and He opened His mouth and taught them saying, and then we launch into the Beatitudes.

While His primary audience are the disciples, we cannot lose sight of the fact that there were crowds. The image in my mind is that Jesus who is escaping to teach a primary audience.

So He's getting away from the hubbub and the noise in order to teach His disciples. But as the crowd begins to gather around Him and this teaching, He also has to pick up the matter of teaching others who are gathering to hear this most astonishing of sermons.

So He's also speaking to those outside that closer and inner circle. We get a clue of this in the very end of this sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 27 and verse 28.

[4 : 14] Matthew records, And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching. So there are crowds, and they are hearing what's being said.

And then Matthew tells us why the crowds were astonished in verse 29. For He was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes.

This is what was so amazing about Jesus' teaching. He taught with absolute authority. And this made Jews seeking to evaluate Jesus very nervous.

They were concerned with what He thought of the law and what He thought of Moses and the prophets. So Jesus, speaking to His disciples, has said some incredible things in verses 3 through 16 of chapter 5, which we've been considering over the past nine weeks.

He has told them that citizens of His kingdom would be about the work of turning this upside-down world back right-side up. That they would be a people marked by spiritual poverty, sadness over their sin and the sins of others, meekness, a longing for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking.

[5 : 48] That they would bring preservation and light to the world and that they would be hated for it. Recall Jesus' themes throughout the Sermon on the Mount of human flourishing.

Who is the blessed man? Human and whole person righteousness. Less what you do and more who you are.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day had so manipulated God's law with the rabbinical, scribal traditions meant to interpret the law but served rather to obscure it, They were only concerned with the outward, the tangible and imposed impossible burdens on others and quite frankly on themselves.

They were the very definition of legalists. Making themselves appear righteous, righteous in their own eyes by asking others to conform to them.

And this was a great issue of their day. To give you some flavor of it, I'm going to read you just a bit of commentary from John MacArthur's commentary on this very text. Where he writes, The rabbis, And this was a tradition.

[7 : 21] They had many written sayings. They're called the traditions. Interpretations of the law. The rabbis looked through the scripture to find various commands and regulations.

And to those, they would add supplemental requirements. They're often called hedge laws. To the command not to work on the Sabbath, they added the idea that carrying a burden was a form of work.

They then faced the question of determining exactly what constituted a burden. They decided that a burden is food equal to the weight of a fig. Enough wine for mixing in a goblet.

Milk enough for one's swallow. Honey enough to put on a wound. Oil enough to anoint a small member of the body. Water enough to moisten eye salve.

Paper enough to write a customs house notice. Ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet. Read enough to make a pen. And so on and so on.

[8 : 27] To carry anything more than those prescribed amounts on the Sabbath was to break the law. So out of what I believe would have began as a good intention, a wrong understanding of the law, but a good intention to keep it, these types of burdens had been amassed and built up.

And the religious leaders of the day said, do these things look like us? These outward keeping, this exterior farce of keeping the law, and you will be in God's good favor.

Jesus was not standing for this type of thing. Listen to what he said in Matthew 23 in verse 15 to these very men. He says, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

He points out the very fact that they weren't keeping their own expectations. And then he goes on to say, For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, a convert to Judaism.

And when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. This was the good that these types of expectation were.

[9 : 44] They simply damned people. Matthew 15 and verse 6. Jesus says of these religious leaders, For the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God.

This was the religious world that Jesus is speaking into as he preaches the sermon before us this morning. He is addressing those who would pile up impossible burdens.

But he is also speaking to those who interpreted Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 31, which says, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord.

when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. He is addressing also those who would take Jeremiah 31, 31 to mean that the Messiah would annul the old covenant in its entirety and replace it with a completely new moral basis.

There were many that Jesus was speaking to that were seeking for the Messiah to come and wipe the slate entirely clean. to put away Moses and the prophets and start with a fresh piece of

parchment and write new command altogether.

[11:06] In many ways, these are the people who are on the opposite side of the legalist coin. They're the licentious, the antinomians, the ones who wanted nothing to do with the law anymore.

And he's speaking to both of these crowds, both those who wanted everyone to keep these very carefully put in place hedge laws and those who were exhausted by the demanding hypocritical legalism of the religious leaders.

So it is at this point in Jesus' sermon, as he has already said so much to flip the world on its head, that he makes two audacious claims concerning the Scripture.

So this is your outline for this morning. He makes two audacious claims. Number one, that the Scripture is authoritative. The Scripture authored by God is authoritative.

And secondly, Jesus makes the claim that He is the authority of the Scripture. He says, I am the authority of the Scripture.

[12:21] The Scripture is authoritative. And Jesus is the authority of the Scripture. So first, the Scripture is authoritative.

Jesus says in verse 17, Do not think. Which would suggest that some were thinking. Right? Do not think. Do not make the error of thinking that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

Now, we'll talk a bit about the word abolish in a moment, but first, let's take a look at this idea of the law or the prophets. Now, the Jews of Jesus' day referred to the law in four different ways.

They would use this term, law, in four different ways. First, the Jew of Jesus' day may have said the law and be referring specifically to the Ten Commandments found in Exodus chapter 20, those commands that God etched in stone and gave to Moses on Mount Sinai.

So that's first, the law, the Ten Commandments. Secondly, they could have also used that phrase, the law, to refer to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament traditionally said to have been authored by Moses.

[13:44] We don't know that with great certainty, but traditionally, this is what the Jews of Jesus' day believed, that Moses was the author of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy called the Pentateuch.

Third, this term, the law, was used to refer to the entire Old Testament. It was used very broadly in that sense. And fourth, this term, law, was also used to refer to those rabbinical traditions that I was mentioning previously.

All of those extra interpretations out beyond God's inspired word. This is the teaching that Jesus is referring to in Matthew 15, 6, when he says, for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God.

So, it's used in a lot of ways and it's used very broadly. However, Jesus here says in verse 17, do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

And this phrase, the law and the prophets, Jesus here saying the law or the prophets, used roughly 15 times in the New Testament with slight variation, was always used to refer to the entirety of the Old Testament.

[15:07] To the entire thing. Those that we now have, we know as 39 books of the Old Testament. You see, beloved, Jesus had a very high view of his Bible.

The part that we consider the Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus' day. And I want to show you that. I want you to be able to wrap your mind around. And this is a thing that you can help others with.

How is it that we know this is the Scripture? We can have a great confidence in the Old Testament text because Jesus had a great confidence in the text. If we are followers of Jesus Christ, we believe his words, he said some astounding things about the Old Testament text.

He quoted from every section of it almost countless times. Many, many, many times. He's referencing back, he's referencing back, he's referencing back.

But there's this really, really astonishing thing that Jesus does in Luke chapter 11. And I want you to turn there with me because I want you to see this. Mark, Matthew chapter 5. Turn to Luke chapter 11.

[16:17] And I want to show you the Bible of Jesus' day. Luke 11, and we'll read verses 49 through 51.

Now, I don't want you to wrap your mind into what Jesus is really teaching at this point, but he makes, as a proof to what he's trying to say about demanding justice for the prophets, an

astounding thing that he does here.

So, beginning of verse 49. Therefore, also the wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be charged against this generation.

From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the sanctuary, yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.

So, he's indicting the generation for the blood of the prophets and he bookends the prophets between Abel and Zechariah, right?

[17:36] So, we have Abel who Jesus is claiming was the very first prophet. Most of us don't tend to think of him in these terms. However, Genesis 4.10 and the Lord said to Cain, what have you done?

The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. Jesus says he was the very first martyred prophet.

So, Abel is the one bookend, but then Zechariah? It would be really easy to read passages and I have no idea why Jesus puts Zechariah at the other end. Some of you might be thinking that he's using A to Z.

This was not the alphabet of his day. I am sure that many American Bible readers have made that error. So, why then is Zechariah the bookend?

This particular Zechariah, in fact, the bookend of the prophets that Jesus is here referring to. We see the martyrdom of Zechariah in 2 Chronicles chapter 24 verse 20 and following.

[18:39] So, this is the Zechariah who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. It says, then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest and he stood above the people and said to them, thus says God, why do you break the commandments of the Lord so that you cannot prosper?

Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you. And then verse 21, but they conspired against him and by command of the king, they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord.

Okay, so this is Zechariah in 2 Chronicles chapter 24. If you're with us week, didn't you? Now, chronologically, in real time, the last martyr was Uriah, whose death is described in Jeremiah chapter 26.

Chronologically, so, Abel to Zechariah? Why does Jesus do this? The Jewish Bible of Jesus' day was ordered differently than ours.

Our Old Testament is grouped by literary type. That can be confusing sometimes as you're trying to read through the narrative. You can't read from Genesis 1-1 to the end of the Old Testament and have it make a lot of sense because it's grouped differently than the order in which it was written.

[20:09] Jesus' Bible was entirely different. 1 and 2 Chronicles were one book, the book of Chronicles, and it was written as an overview of Israel's history, so it's looking back over Israel's history, with a particular emphasis on David and the temple.

Rightly understood, the book of Chronicles was at the end of the Jewish Old Testament because it was meant to point us to, and God's people then to, a better David and a better worship that's found in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

That's why it's ordered in that way. Honestly, it's a better order, and it's why our Bible reading plan took us through the scripture in that way. So, in Luke 11, he's speaking to a Jewish audience when he says, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, he knows that they have in their hand, they have been reading and reading taught the first prophet to the last prophet in the text.

You see what he's done? He has now bookended their Old Testament, which is ours, now organized into 39 books and rearranged for literary type, but he is affirming that all of those writers in between were prophets.

This was his Bible. It's incredible. It's an incredible case. Luke chapter 11 verse 49 and following can serve you in that way.

[21:49] So it is this Bible when Jesus says I do not come to abolish the law or the prophets that Jesus is talking about. Now the Greek word here translated abolish is a strong word.

It means to tear down, to demolish, to destroy utterly. It is the very same Greek word that Jesus uses in saying in Matthew 26 verse 61 I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild!

It in three days. That strong language of destroy in English is the very same word here translated abolish.

Jesus is saying I did not come to tear down to utterly destroy God's word. Rather what he does and what he does for us in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount and in the rest of the gospel accounts is he clarifies he explains right he helps to get a right understanding of God's law in our mind and in theirs in that day.

In fact there's a pretty stark theme that emerges throughout chapter 5 of this you have heard that it was said but I say to you you have heard he's referring to the traditions he's referring to the wrong interpretations of the law you have heard it was said he'll follow that with something but I say to you and he brings the clarification what the law was actually meant to command us to and you can see this again and again and again chapter 5 verse 21 you have heard it was said in verse 22 but I say to you 27 and then 28 chapter 5 chapter 5 verse 31 this time it was also said then verse 32 but I say to you and then in verse 33 and 34 38 and 39 43 and 44 so he's just bringing he's not abolishing he's bringing a clarification he's helping

[24 : 20] God's people to understand what God's word always meant he had a very high view of the scripture it is authoritative Matthew 4 4 Jesus being tempted by the devil responds it is written man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God he there affirms for us that it is by our very living that the scripture speaks to you and he goes on to say in verse 18 for truly I say to you until heaven and earth pass away not an iota not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished now iota was the smallest letter of the greek alphabet and a dot was the smallest part of a letter in the greek alphabet he's saying the very tiniest portion of it any little bit of it will not pass away until it is all accomplished jesus goes on to say that both doing and teaching the law is of highest importance in the kingdom of heaven verse 19 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 right this is this wealth of information for whole person righteousness and human flourishing right beloved if we want to honor our god and do well in our lives by god's definition of doing well we will be obedient and teach others to be obedient to god's word paul exhorts!

timothy paul's last letter that he wrote read second timothy and just the matters that he presses so much of second timothy is about the scripture itself his last letter written to his beloved spiritual son timothy he says all scripture in second timothy 3 16 and 17 all scripture here paul's referring to what our old testament the law and the prophets all scripture is breathed out by god and profitable for teaching for reproof for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of god may be complete equipped for every good work so paul simply comes alongside jesus and unites with christ in his high view of the bible not only did jesus claim that the scripture is authoritative but he also claimed that he is the authority of the scripture he says verse 17 do not think that i've come to abolish the law or the prophets i have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them we will talk about this quite a bit in the coming weeks but in brief to fulfill as some have suggested does not mean to fill out as if something were lacking right that he fulfilled the law and the prophets by his teaching they were already inerrant already complete already sufficient already authoritative his teaching is clarifying helping us to understand that the word of

God is it links up old and new beautifully together this is not what's meant by this he didn't he didn't fill it out he filled it up he fulfilled it jesus fulfilled the old testament by being its fulfillment all of the old testament points to jesus and he embodies the obedience required by the old testament law and the devotion to god that the prophets called god's people to we're going to have to spend some more time on that a great deal of time in fact on the meaning of this word and we'll get into that next week but for now I want you to turn your attention again to the astounding phrase I say to you so I know I'm skipping a stone off the surface when I simply say Jesus fulfilled that's what he said right the law and the prophets we'll spend much time on that next week but look now at the phrase I say to you who does this Jesus think that he is no one can use language like this no one did use language like this it would have been the greatest of blasphemies!

The prophets would say not I say to you but what thus says the Lord an example in Moses Exodus 11 and verse 4 thus says the Lord I am merely creation I am merely a pin God has spoken let me tell you what he has said Jesus does not say you have heard it said but the Lord says to you but rather I say to you if Jesus is not God this is absolutely the most audacious of offenses to God we never get to say I say to you the power of preaching is found in simply explaining what God has

said I have nothing to add to or take away from this word my job is to say thus says the
[30 : 40] Lord Jesus says I say to you praise the Lord because Jesus is God he has the right to
bring clarity to the law of God and we would all do well to listen to him