

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 2

thursday | prayer

Take 10 minutes to pray that God will help you correctly interact with His law: Here's a prayer to get you started: "Go before us, O Lord, we beseech Thee, in all our doings with Thy gracious inspiration, and further us with Thy continual help, that every prayer and work of ours may begin from Thee, and by Thee be duly ended. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

friday | application

Find a section in the Old Testament that connects to the life of Jesus. Better yet, find an Old Testament promise that is fulfilled in Jesus.

Hint: Google "prophecies fulfilled by Jesus."

saturday | journaling

Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:17-20.

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 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.

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. 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.

Matthew 5:17-20

monday | devotional

Two key themes emerge in Matthew 5:17-20. The first is Jesus' relationship to the Old Testament. When Jesus used the phrases "Law" and "The Prophets" he spoke of the entirety of the Old Testament. Thus, this passage offers a glimpse of Jesus' relationship to the Old Testament. Understanding this relationship has huge implications for our understanding of the New Testament's relationship to the Old Testament as a whole and how Christians should interact with the Old Testament.

As followers of Jesus our attitudes should reflect his. For many Christians this isn't the case when it comes to the Old Testament. Jesus could not have been more clear, he did "not come to abolish the Law or The Prophets," but these words are often ignored. Many Christians "abolish" the Old Testament in their theology, and many more do it in their neglect. It takes no study or background information to understand that Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17-20 show the lasting importance of the Old Testament.

But how is the Old Testament important? To answer this question it is good to focus on a key word from this passage: "fulfill." Jesus' relationship to the law is one of fulfillment. The Greek word that the NIV translates "fulfill" can also be defined as "to fill or to make full." While these definitions are not vastly different than the NIV's translation, they do offer us a better word picture. We can all visualize something being filled up.

With this in mind, I think it is helpful to view the Old Testament as a gas gauge. A gas gauge doesn't make a car go, but instead tells us how much gas we have and how much we need. Likewise the Old Testament pointed to what humanity had - a loving creator who made us in his image, but also a sin problem that separated us from him—and what humanity needed—a savior.

My first car was a 1965 Ford Mustang. It looked great on the outside, but didn't work well on the inside. One of its many problems was a faulty gas gauge. When my mom first bought me the car it hovered around a quarter tank no matter how much gas was actually in the car. Because I knew this, I always made sure to have gas in the tank. But one day after I had gone to the gas station, the gas gauge went up. It was fixed...or so I thought. Not long after this I was driving down the road with a gas gauge showing half a tank and my car stopped; I was out of gas. The gas gauge wasn't fixed at all. I needed a new one.

Many treat the Old Testament like a broken gas gauge. It is true that until the coming of Jesus the gas gauge never registered full, but according to Matthew 5:17-20 this wasn't because it was broken, but instead because it was pointing to our need for something that would make us full; it was pointing to our need for Jesus. A gas gauge shouldn't be removed because the tank isn't full. The Old Testament shouldn't be cast aside because it couldn't provide all that we needed for life, but instead it should be held onto because it is essential for understanding Jesus and all that He accomplished for us.

But how did Jesus fulfill the Old Testament? For one, he never broke any of the laws. He was completely obedient to the commands of God. His fulfillment of The Law goes beyond this. He also filled the gas tank by being the realization of the promises made in the Old Testament. Both of these aspects of filling The Law connect to another part of this passage.

There is a second key theme in these verses, righteousness. The most basic meaning of this word, as used during biblical times, is "right relationship." It could be used of a good relationship between a husband and wife, child and parent, or friends. In our context it is used for a right/good relationship between people and God.

At the end of this passage Jesus says an amazing thing, "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." What makes this statement staggering is that the Pharisees (an ultra strict religious group) and teachers of the law had rules upon rules upon rules to help them live in obedience to The Law and The Prophets. Not many people could live up to their incredible standards of piety. To live more righteously than them was virtually impossible, so what was Jesus point? Nobody can make it into Heaven? No. His point was this: You can't fulfill The Law, only he can.

Just as having a working gas gauge will never take away your need for gas, striving to perfectly live out the commands laid forth in the Old Testament will never gain you a right relationship with God...you will fail. A right relationship with God can only be had through Jesus because he fulfilled the Old Testament, and by his death and resurrection, offered forgiveness for all the ways we fell short of fulfilling it ourselves.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 5:17-20 explain Jesus' relationship to the The Law and help us to have a proper perspective of the Old Testament. We shouldn't look for our righteousness in obedience to it, but we shouldn't neglect it either. Instead, we should value the Old Testament for how it helps us understand God and points us to our need for Jesus.

Reflect on this: How do you typically view the Old Testament?

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read these comments write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:17-20.

Charles Spurgeon, "The life, work, and words of Christ are not an emendation of the Old Testament, or an abrogation of it. It stands fast and firm, fulfilled, carried to perfection, filled to the full in Christ.

"Fulfill" translates as Greek word meaning, "be completely filled indicating a completed state. "

Carl Henry, "'What He [Christ] criticizes is not the law itself but contemporary formulations of the law.'"

"Generally, 'the Law' refers to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the OT. More generally however, the law can mean a wide variety of things – a commandment, a principle, an instruction, etc."

"Greatness in the Kingdom of heaven will not be based on one's gifts but upon how one handles the word of God."

"Righteousness" means "being proper or right in the sense of being fully justified being or in accordance with what God requires) is the quality of being upright."

William Barclay, "In many ways the Pharisees were the best people in the whole country. There were never more than 6,000 of them; they were what was known as a chaburah, or brotherhood. They entered into this brotherhood by taking a pledge in front of three witnesses that they would spend all their lives observing every detail of the scribal law."

wednesday | questions

1. Name three ways Jesus fulfilled The Law and The Prophets.
2. Read Romans 3:23-26. How does this help with understanding Matthew 5:20?
3. In what ways have you embraced legalism? In what ways have you embraced immorality?
4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.