

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

May 05, 2024

I. Introduction

- A. **Matthew 5:17-20**, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. [18] For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. [19] Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”
- B. Two weeks ago, we talked about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We ended with **vs 16**, “Let your light shine before men **in such a way** that they may see your good works, and glorify your **Father** who is in heaven.”
1. Though I did not bring this up two weeks ago, I want to point out that **vs 16** is Jesus’ first use of the label “**Father**” in reference to God. Jesus uses this endearing label **16** times throughout His sermon. Though He also uses the name “God” in this sermon, He only uses it **5** times.
 2. It is my opinion that Jesus did this to give us a keener sense of the security, care, love, and intimacy that exists between God and us as we seek to live according to the Sermon on the Mount.
 3. In other words, as we face the challenges of living according to these teachings, we have our loving, caring Father always with us – be He holding our hand, or holding us in His arms, or supporting and encouraging us as we proceed further and further down the path of learning and growing in how we apply these lessons to everyday life.
- C. After telling us we are salt and light, Jesus goes on to inform us that we are to live our life in such a way as to bring glory to God, and that includes (1) living according to the OT Law and Prophets, (2) teaching others to do the same, and (3) having a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.
- D. Pray

II. The Law and the Prophets

- A. [17] Do not think that I came to abolish (*do away with, eliminate*) the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill (*explain and*

carry out their intended purpose). [18] For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished (*God's purposes for the Law in relation to His kingdom and our relationships with Him and those around us*).

- B. These two verses have been understood in various ways, and before applying them to us, I want to talk about three of the ways these two verses are understood and applied to Christian living.
1. It is commonly understood that the OT Law was made up of three parts: (1) the **ceremonial law** (*priesthood, sacrifices, feast / fast days, Temple worship, food, purification rites*), (2) the **moral law** (*exemplified by the 10 Commandments – deals with right relationship with God and one another*), and (3) the **civil law** (*government, business practices, dealing with neighbors, borrowing and lending, etc.*).
 2. From the wording of vs 17-18, we can conclude that the Law and Prophets are just as important today as they were in OT times.
 3. It is also clear that Jesus is not giving us the power to pick and choose which laws we will follow or which prophets we will take seriously.
 4. However, based on Christ's sacrifice for sin, the Book of Acts, and various other NT scriptures, we understand that the OT laws referring to the sacrificial system, circumcision, feast and fast days, and purification rites do not apply to NT believers. For example:
 - a. **Hebrews 10:1-4**, "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. [2] Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? [3] But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year (*not that you are a sinner, but that something has to be done about your sin to be right with God*). [4] For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (*The payment for sin is not the death of an animal, but the death – eternal separation from God – of the sinner*).
 - b. **Colossians 2:13-17** "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, [14] having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross... [16] Therefore no one is to act as your

judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—[17] things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

- c. **Galatians 6:15**, “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”
 - d. According to these verses, it is clear that parts of the Law have been set aside because they are no longer required to be in right standing with God. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus was not talking about these parts of the Law when He said “not the smallest letter or stroke of the Law shall be set aside until all is accomplished.”
5. So what was Jesus talking about? This is where various groups of believers have come up with different views. For example:
- a. Some Christians conclude that Jesus is referring to **some** of the **ceremonial laws** (*feast/fast days, food, Sabbath worship*), the **moral laws** (*exemplified by the 10 Commandments – promotes right relationship with God and one another*), and some of the **civil laws** (*business practices, dealing with neighbors, borrowing and lending*). Seventh Day Adventists and Messianic Jews are examples of modern-day Christians who combine OT Judaism with NT Christianity.
 - b. Smaller, and what we might think of as fringe and theologically diverse groups of Christians conclude that Jesus is including only those laws spoken of in the Gospels and/or the Epistles (*some hold that only the Epistles apply to Christians today*). Others go so far as to believe that **no** OT requirements apply to or are binding on Christians today. They believe the only law governing NT believers is the Law of Christ (*love*). Examples of such groups are the Hyperdispensationalists, the Grace Gospel Fellowship (*group of churches that embrace the Grace Movement*), and the King James only groups.
 - c. However, the majority of Christians believe Jesus is speaking of the **moral laws** (*exemplified by 9 of the 10 Commandments*) and some of the **civil laws** (*exemplified by honest business practices, lending to the poor, replacing what is borrowed and broken or lost*).
6. My perspective is similar to that which is held by the majority of Christians. I believe the OT is as important and as relevant as the NT, but it is to be understood and applied according to the teachings of the NT. It is my opinion that this is how Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, and John used the OT.

7. Therefore, it is important to find the balance between the OT and NT so that nothing from the Law or Prophets – that ought to apply to the NT believer — is diminished, revised, or ignored.
 - a. And why is this important? Because the Law and Prophets clearly and candidly show us ways to a right relationship with God, and right dealings with our fellow man.
 - b. As **Romans 13:8-10** says, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. [9] For this, “You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” [10] Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfillment of the law** (*this statement confirms the purpose of the Law*).”
8. I want to conclude my comments on **vs 17-18** by quoting two statements from Jesus that show the importance of the Law and the teachings of Christ for living the Christian life today, and for the fulfillment of God’s purposes for mankind – in this life and the next.
 - a. In **vs 18** Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”
 - b. And in **Matthew 24:35** Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”

III. Position and presence in the kingdom of heaven

- A. [19] Whoever then annuls (*to invalidate or exempt certain people from*) one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
 1. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day (*identified by Jesus as scribes and Pharisees*) taught and practiced an outwardly strict application of the Law – except when it hindered their ability to benefit financially, or limited their exercise of power, or got in the way of their popularity with the people, or prevented them from removing threats to their positions as religious authorities.
 2. In other words, though they diligently worked at living according to the Law – at least outwardly, they failed to live according to the Law inwardly, and that failure was exposed by their double-mindedness, hypocrisy, and turning a God-focused, God-serving religion into a self-focused, self-serving religion.

- a. Yet in spite of their other failings, the cost of failing to teach the whole truth regarding the Law and the Prophets was not the loss of presence in the kingdom of heaven, but the loss of standing.
 - b. As Jesus said, “Whoever annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”
 3. However, the opposite is also true, “Whoever keeps and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”
 4. The issue here is an issue of faith and values.
 - a. Those who trust in God and value the good of all intentionally and persistently pursue a whole-life, whole-hearted obedience to the Word of God – and teach others to do the same.
 - b. Those who want the benefits of believing in God and value the good of self – even a bit more than they value the good of others – intentionally and repeatedly pursue a partial-life, partial-heart obedience – and teach others to do the same.
 - c. **It is important to note** that God is not requiring obedience for obedience sake (*a form of legalism or mindless Christianity*), but for the good of everyone who is effected by a our choices and behavior.
 5. As **Romans 13:10** implies, the Law was given to promote and protect the good of all – just as the two great commandments are given for the welfare and well-being of all. And the **ALL** here includes God **and** man, God’s kingdom **and** our homes, neighborhoods, workplace, church, and nation.
 - a. Therefore, setting aside one or more of the Laws that God intends us to keep diminishes love, and that opens the door for harm to come to those effected by our failure to keep a particular law or set of laws. And this kind of unnecessary harm to others is what Jesus is seeking to avoid by calling us to keep the whole Law.
 6. I want to add that we teach as much by our words as by our repetitive actions. We may be able to say we have never spoken against or taught anyone to diminish the importance of any commandment. And yet we have done just that if we have communicated by our recurring words and deeds that certain laws can be ignored.
 7. **Once again**, both failure and compliance will have an eternal effect on our standing in the kingdom of heaven.
- B. [20] For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

1. It is my opinion that the rest of the Sermon on the Mount reveals the kind of righteousness practiced by the scribes and Pharisees, and makes plain the kind of righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.
2. For example, each of the “You have heard it was said” statements deal with relationships – and calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves, something the scribes and Pharisees repeatedly failed to do.
3. Jesus’ teaching about giving, praying, and fasting deals with doing religious activities for God’s sake and for the sake of our own spiritual health and growth **rather than** doing them to gain attention and public praise. Sadly, the scribes and Pharisees, though very diligent on the one hand, were self-serving and seeking personal glory in many of their religious practices.
4. The teaching on serving two masters deals with our tendency to trust God for some things and trust ourselves and the ways of the world for other things. When we split our trust between God, self, and the world, we open the door to double-mindedness, spiritual hypocrisy, and turning our religion into something that is self-serving and self-exalting rather than God-serving, God-exalting.
5. Jesus’ teaching on judging calls us to deal with the sinful and selfish behavior in our own life as intentionally, forcefully, and quickly as we want others to deal with the sinful and selfish behavior in their life. We know from the Gospels that the religious leaders, though good at judging others, were frequent failures at judging themselves and dealing with their selfishness and sin accordingly.
6. The teaching about treating others in the same way you want them to treat you is simply another way showing the importance of loving neighbors as ourselves. We see Jesus’ view of the religious leaders in His parable about the Good Samaritan, for it was a priest and Levite who choose to pass by without giving aid.
7. Jesus concludes His sermon by warning about false prophets, warning against being religiously active but not righteous, and warning about the great loss that results from hearing but not living accordingly.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Jesus not only makes it clear that our righteousness must surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, He continues on to make it clear the kind of righteousness that is required to enter the kingdom of heaven.
- B. May we be wise enough to hear what He says, make it our goal, and continue pressing forward toward that goal.