

Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law

Matthew 5:17-30

Key Verse: 5:17

“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.”

Jesus was baptized by John and tempted by the devil. Then he began his public ministry preaching, teaching, calling his first disciples and healing the sick. To his disciples, in the hearing of the crowds, Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7. This could be the most famous sermon Jesus ever spoke. Some regard it as a collection of Jesus’ greatest ethical teachings, a new law of the kingdom of heaven. The Sermon on the Mount is certainly well-known. Even many non-Christians have heard: **“turn the other cheek,” “love your enemies,”** and **“do to others what you would have them do to you.”** Last week we studied the introduction to this sermon, beginning with the 8 Beatitudes—**“Blessed are...for theirs is (or, “for they will be”)...”** So who are the blessed? How did Jesus describe or characterize them? **The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted because of righteousness.** Jesus then said to his listeners: **“You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world...”** Throughout his sermon, Jesus speaks of God, the Father in heaven, the kingdom of heaven, and what it looks like for a person to be righteous before God, not merely in action but in inner attitude, thoughts and desires.

In this passage Jesus continues to expound the standards of righteousness in the kingdom of heaven. Are you righteous? On what basis? Are you pursuing righteousness or are you complacent with where you are spiritually? In this message we will hear Jesus' teaching regarding two of the Ten Commandments regarding murder and adultery. By Jesus’ standard, the world is full of murderers and adulterers. May the Lord stir our souls and help us to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

I. A Surpassing Righteousness (17-20)

This second section of the Sermon on the Mount begins in verse 17. **“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.”** When people heard Jesus, his teaching sounded new and full of power and authority. Jesus spoke about God with confidence and conviction, unlike anyone they had heard, except perhaps John the Baptist. Perhaps

Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law

some leaders were beginning to worry that Jesus did not hold to the Jewish Scriptures in the Old Testament, and that he planned to abolish them. So did Jesus disregard or negate the Old Testament? Not at all! For example, to defeat the devil's temptations, Jesus simply quoted Bible verses out of love for God.

Then what did Jesus mean when he said that he came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets? How does Jesus fulfill them? He does so in 4 ways: **(1) Jesus fulfills them by his perfect obedience.** Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life (Heb 4:15; 2 Co 5:21; 1 Pe 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5). Adam failed to keep God's commands. We also have failed to keep all of God's commands. We all have sinned. Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, kept God's commands perfectly, since he loved God and people perfectly. **(2) Jesus fulfills all of God's promises.** 2 Corinthians 1:20a says, **“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.”** For example, God's promise to Abraham to bless all nations through his offspring is being fulfilled through Christ. Also, God's promise to David to establish an eternal King was fulfilled in Christ. Jesus Christ will return in glory, just as God has promised. **(3) Jesus fulfills the temple sacrifices.** God required blood sacrifices in the temple for his peoples' forgiveness of sins. Through the death of Jesus on the cross, Jesus became the Lamb of God, whose blood takes away the sins of the world. So Acts 3:18 says, **“But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.”** Jesus is both the Lamb and our Great High Priest who intercedes with the holy God. **(4) Jesus fulfills the meaning of God's words to his people.** The word fulfill also means 'complete.' Jesus completes God's word by explaining the true meaning of it. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, **“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”** Jesus taught and lived out the full and complete meaning of God's message to the world. Jesus was more than a prophet; he is the word of God (Jn 1:1). Jesus is God's final, supreme message to the world. Heaven and earth will pass away; but Jesus' words will never pass away.

Jesus did not neglect or minimize God's word in the Old Testament. Look at verse 18. **“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.”** We often make typos when we write a paper or sermon. So spell check can come in handy for us. Jesus declares that there are no typos in God's message to us in the Bible. Jewish scribes did not use correction liquid. So if they found a mistake in their copy they would burn the copy. These days many people regard fiction novels with more interest and

Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law

enthusiasm than the Bible. Many people spend much time reading newspapers, internet blogs or Facebook, while spending no time at all in Bible reading. How about you? How is your interest, enthusiasm and reverence towards the Bible? Do you read it like a treasure-hunter and scholar, or like a boring homework assignment?

Now look at verse 19. **“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.”** Some people think this verse means that we can break commands of God and teach others to do the same and still get in to heaven. That is not consistent with the spirit and teachings of Jesus throughout this sermon, as we shall soon see. Anyway, would you rather be called ‘least’ or ‘great’ in the kingdom of heaven? If your answer is ‘least is fine with me’ then you need an attitude check. To practice God’s commands and teach others to do the same is what God blesses. This is being salt and light. This is ‘great’ in his sight. Verse 20 bears this out. **“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.”** The Pharisees fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of all they got. They kept prayers rigorously. The problem was that their righteousness did not go beyond external or outward obedience to God’s law. But before you judge them, ask yourself: “How earnest is my pursuit of righteousness, holiness, and God?” **God rewards those who earnestly seek him** (Heb 11:6). Are you earnestly seeking God? Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness, or for something else? What is the proof? What do you spend most of your time, effort and money on? For a while I was faithful to jogging, but not so much to personal prayer and Bible study. So my physical health was good but my spiritual health suffered. More recently, reading for seminary classes takes most of my time. Since starting Matthew’s gospel study, some of our leaders began a meeting to share our testimonies and prayer topics. This is good, as long as we are not habitual or resentful about having another meeting. I repent for my shallow prayer life and personal struggle to apply God’s word in my life. **May the Lord fan into flame in all of us a burning desire to grow in his holiness and righteousness!**

II. Do not be angry with others (21-26)

In the next two sections, Jesus now explains how our righteousness must go well beyond our actions into our hearts and motives. Look at verses 21-22. **“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone**

Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law

who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Jesus knew the Bible very well. Jesus quoted the Ten Commandments, from Exodus 20:13, **“You shall not murder.”** I would hope that no one in our congregation is a murderer. (If you are, please turn yourself in to the authorities and confess your crime. Even to be executed on death row is nowhere near as bad as going to hell.) So you feel pretty good about yourself right now, since you haven’t killed anybody, yet. Hold on. You can’t get off the hook so easily. Jesus says that anger toward another person is similar to murder. What? That’s right. According to Jesus, being angry at another person is a serious sin to God. Actually, anger is the attitude and motive behind intentional murder. Anger is the desire to hurt or harm others or wish evil upon them. It is to be a merciless judge toward another person’s wrongdoing. Remember Cain. When God rejected his offering but accepted his brother Abel’s, Cain became angry and downcast. At that moment, God counseled him to do what is right. But Cain ignored God’s counsel and out of angry jealousy he killed his brother Abel.

The Aramaic word “Raca” means “empty-head” or “good-for-nothing.” In today’s world it would be like calling someone a ‘jerk’ or an ‘idiot.’ Calling someone ‘fool’ sounds trivial in our society. The Greek word is “moron.” The Jewish word for “fool” denotes a morally deficient or wicked person. So it’s like saying, “Go to hell” to someone or wishing that upon them. Whenever we curse others verbally or in our hearts, Jesus says that we are in danger of hell’s fire. So, the evil we wish upon others, we are in danger of receiving ourselves.

Anger is usually expressed through words. Words can build up or tear down. With words, we can praise God or encourage others or plead with them to do what is right before God. In contrast, we can speak careless words that damage, discourage or wound others. Too many divorces and damaged relationships happen because of harsh words exchanged in anger. James 3:8 says, **“No man can tame the tongue.”** So many people have been wounded or have wounded others due to careless words spoken in anger. James 1:19-20 says, **“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”**

Then what should we do? We must be meek and merciful in our relationships. Jesus said, **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown**

Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law

mercy.” When we feel angry, instead of blowing up or speaking words that we will regret, we must repent and ask God’s mercy. Instead of judging or hating someone, we must pray sincerely for God’s blessing on them. One man of God said he learned to say 3 things to keep peace with his wife: “I’m sorry, you are right, pray for me.” Prideful anger prevents a person from being humble, admitting wrong or asking for prayer. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. In addition, we must know that we deserve God’s judgment for our sins but God has not judged us as our wickedness deserves.

Now look at verses 23-24. **“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”** These verses tell us that getting right with our fellow man is an important part of being right with God. **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”** When we are worshiping God, God convicts us of our sins against God and against people. Jesus says we must do all we can do to make peace with others. If you are convicted by this, please don’t get up and leave yet. But do whatever you can to make peace with one you have offended. Please don’t think: **“It’s their problem.”** After studying this passage, two of us were convicted about our poor relationships with our sisters. So we called our sisters right after the Bible study, before leaving the room. Being a peacemaker is not an option but a requirement for every child of God.

Look at verses 25 and 26. **“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”** We are to make peace with Christians and with non-Christians, as much as it depends on us. If we’ve damaged someone’s reputation, we must apologize and ask for forgiveness. If we’ve damaged their property, we must make restitution. If we remain in foolish pride, insisting on our correctness or innocence, we only maintain an enemy relationship. We are to do good even to our adversaries, and humbly and prayerfully seek to make amends. Otherwise, we will have to pay the price for our fault.

III. Do not lust (27-30)

In verses 27-28 Jesus expounds another of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20:14: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has**

Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law

already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Narrowly speaking, to commit adultery means to have sexual relations with a married person who is not your spouse. More broadly speaking, it is to have sex outside of marriage. There are many more adulterers than murderers. If you are in adultery, repent and seek godly counsel. One time on a plane flight and in a Bible talk, a married man admitted to me that he had been unfaithful to his wife and wondered what he should do. He was afraid that if he told his wife, she would divorce him. I counseled him to study the Bible, join a church and when the time was right, with God’s help, to confess it to his wife. May God help him.

Jesus said adultery extends far beyond sexual relations. There is adultery in the heart. A Christian man thought, “Well then, since I've already committed adultery in my heart, I might as well commit adultery.” So he did. Years later, after much misery and torment, he realized how foolish he was. His road to restoration was not easy.

Jesus says that looking lustfully is adultery in the heart. It is a form of coveting and idolatry. What one sees or how one sees things is determined by the condition of one's heart. The Bible warns about making decisions or judgments based on the lust of the eyes or mere appearance. One difficulty we must contend with is that our society puts too much value on image or appearance. There is a saying, “Image is everything.” People spend so much time and effort on their physical appearance but so little time and effort on the condition of their heart. However, 1 Samuel 16:7 says, “**Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**”

Jesus’ standard for purity and righteousness is not only in our actions but in our words, desires and thoughts as well. Jesus warned men not to look at women lustfully. However, our society encourages such an attitude. Men in groups urge each other on to pant like dogs and whistle at pretty women. Women are encouraged by Hollywood to flaunt their bodies with provocative clothing. A word to women here. Apostle Peter says that even unbelieving husbands can be won over by a wife’s pure and reverent life. He says in 1 Peter 3:3-4, “**Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.**” Let me ask single women a question: Would your ideal husband be someone drawn to you mainly by your appearance? I hope not, because unless you are Barbie or Miss America he can always find someone more

Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law

attractive. So, Christian women: please be mindful of what you wear and seek a pure heart.

Even so, Jesus puts the obligation on men to look at women with pure eyes. Jesus' people must control not only their anger but their eyes as well. The eyes are controlled from the heart. **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”** When we seek God earnestly and hide God's word in our heart, we can overcome temptations (Ps 119:9-11). Job 31:1 says, **“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.”**

Sexual immorality is one of the most common means to a man's spiritual downfall. Many men and women of God have effectively ruined their ministries, marriages and lives due to sexual scandal. In Galatians 5:19, topping Paul's list of the acts of the sinful nature are: **sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery.** So Paul counsels in 1Corinthians 6:18-20: **“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”**

Jesus says in verses 29 and 30, **“If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”** Jesus speaks in hyperbole here to shock his listeners with a strong warning. If something is causing us to sin in our lives, we must deal drastically to cut it off and throw it away. A man can choose to keep what causes him to sin, but it will cost him eternally. Many people justify sin saying, “Well, everybody does it,” or, “I'm no worse than anybody else.” That is not an acceptable excuse before God. Jesus tells us to cut off and throw away the causes of sin in our lives. This could mean ‘throwing away’ private time of computer viewing for someone ensnared in the sin of pornography. One young man threw away his drug pipe into Lake Michigan to stop taking drugs. One young woman broke off her engagement with an ungodly man in order to put God first in her life. One person smashed his rock music collection; another stopped listening to pop music and instead converted to Christian songs and sermons. One young man decided never to date but trust God to provide a godly wife for him, and God provided.

Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law

If you feel righteous because you've never killed anyone or committed adultery, then think again. Does your righteousness surpass that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law? The spiritual battle is not merely in your actions. Jesus' standard of righteousness is in the heart. Do you hide anger or lustful desires? Jesus' words should convict you that you are a sinner and cannot live up to God's standard of righteousness. That's the point. We cannot live up to this holy standard by our effort alone. We need Jesus' saving grace. Paul wrote in Romans 2:23-24, **"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."** Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:18, **"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."** We cannot live up to God's high standard by our own effort or power. We need to yield to God's will and receive the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:24-25 says, **"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."** Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Jesus gives us inner righteousness acceptable to God through faith in Jesus Christ and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. May we hunger and thirst for this righteousness every day.