

## King Jesus and OT Scriptures

Matt. 5:17-20

**Intro.** Jorge Rodriguez was a Mexican bank robber who operated along the Texas border around the turn of the century. He was so successful the Texas Rangers put an extra posse along the Rio Grande to try and stop him. Late one afternoon, one of the special Rangers saw Jorge slipping stealthily across the river. He trailed him at a safe distance. He watched as Jorge mingled with people in his village around the town well and then as he went to his favorite cantina to relax. The ranger slipped in and managed to get the drop on Jorge. With a pistol to his head he said, *"I know who you are Jorge Rodriguez, and you are under arrest. I have come to get back all the money you have stolen from the banks in Texas. Unless you tell me where the money is, I'm going to blow your brains out."* But Jorge didn't speak English and the Texas Ranger didn't speak Spanish. The two men had reached a verbal impasse.

About that time an enterprising Hispanic stepped up and said, *"Sir, I am bilingual. Would you like me to act as a translator?"* The Ranger nodded and the man proceeded to put the Ranger's demand in terms Jorge could understand. Nervously, Jorge answered back: *"Tell the big Texas Ranger I have not spent a cent of the money. If he will go to the town well, face north, count down five stones, he will find a loose stone. Pull it out. All the money is behind the stone. Please tell him quickly."* With a solemn look the translator said to the Ranger in perfect English, *"Jorge Rodriguez is a very brave man. He says he is ready to die."*

Is communication important? How about communication from God? Driven by selfish motives, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law had added to / subtracted from / ramped up / and watered-down the commands God had given His people. Their interpretation had so distorted God's will for His people that in **Jn. 10:34** Jesus called them, **"your Law"** or *"the Law according to you."* The average Jew didn't know God or how to be right with Him because their teachers hadn't gotten it right.

Jesus came at a time when confusion and spiritual apathy had reached its zenith. Jesus is the greater prophet God promised to send after Moses. In **Deut. 18:15** Moses said, **The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.** Commenting on his role as God's spokesman **Heb. 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.** So Jesus came bringing new revelation from God...revelation we all must listen to. In fact, Jesus is the Word of God. But new revelation is always viewed with suspicion. One concern that immediately arose was this...How do these new teachings of Jesus relate to the OT Scriptures? How do they relate to the Law of Moses? Did Jesus dispose of the OT and replace it with something else? Jesus knew how confused people were already and He knew these questions would soon arise. Like the situation with Jorge Rodriguez, life and death was at stake.

The verses before us this morning are among the most important in the NT...they are verses every believer needs to understand and get right. In **v.17** Jesus was very forthright when He said, **"Do not think..."** In **v.18** He said, **"I tell you the truth..."** Then **v.20** begins, **"For I tell you..."** At **v.21** Jesus began to confront interpretations of the law that were prevalent and misleading. We'll come back to this passage after Easter, but notice how His correction continued in **vs. 21, 22** - **"You have heard that it was said (v.21)...But I tell you... (v.22).** This same formula is repeated with regard to six OT commands in **27, 28 / 31, 32 / 33, 34 / 38, 39 / and 43, 44.** Here Jesus sought to clear up false ideas and teaching about the meaning of the commands God had given through Moses. So here in **chap. 5** the One who is both author and personification of Scripture, literally breathes out correction and training in righteousness.

And Jesus has every right to do this because He is God Incarnate acting in His role as Prophet, Priest, and King. Listen friends, King Jesus is speaking to us. We must have that sense as we read and hear His word. More than any subject Jesus might have addressed, we need to be clear about the way of righteousness. It's a matter we must get right!

### 1. *Getting it right about Jesus and the OT – v.17*

From the earliest days of Church history, the greatest point of confusion among Christians has been the relationship between the OT and Jesus or the conflict between law and grace. **Jn. 1:17** says, **For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.** Having read that verse, some believe there is no relation between law and grace. As systems by which God relates to man and man to God, they view law and grace as polar opposites. They disregard the OT because they believe it has no value for us today.

When Jesus gave this first sermon, He had not yet been accused of breaking Jewish law. But soon the religious leaders accused Him of healing people on the Sabbath. They were outraged that His disciples ate with unwashed hands and that Jesus befriended tax collectors, sinners and Samaritans! As time passed these violations became the basis for their hatred and charges leveled against Him. Now make a note of this because it's very important...though Jesus violated Jewish traditions, He never violated God's Law! Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God...the one and only man who lived in complete obedience to God without sin. But the Jews were blind to true righteousness. The Scribes had created an elaborate system of rules that filled volumes and dictated every part of their lives. They felt this is what God wanted. The Pharisees were the "separated ones" who professed to live by this system of rules. So when Jesus didn't abide by their system of rules, they claimed He contradicted Moses and showed disregard for God's Law. In their view, this was blasphemy and treason.

We see this illustrated later in **Acts 6:11-14** when Stephen was falsely accused and eventually stoned for blasphemy. **Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God." So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."**

So, Jesus knew this conflict was brewing and that it was unavoidable. The confusion and the conflict began in the first century continues. Many feel the OT is irrelevant and useless now that Christ and grace have come. Many who profess to believe in Jesus live lawlessly because they think grace relieves them of moral obligation. Yet antinomianism (or living without law) is as false and dangerous as legalism. Both extremes are contrary to God's truth. Both inflict damage to the testimony of Christ. But don't take my word for it...listen to what Jesus said in **v.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."**

The word **abolish** is translated from the Greek word **kataluo**. **Kataluo** is a strong word used 3x's in Matthew to describe the demolition of a temple. Anticipating the coming controversy, Jesus said He didn't come to abolish, destroy, or tear down OT Law or the prophetic Scriptures...instead He came to **fulfill them**. The word translated **fulfill** is the Greek root word **pleroo** which appears many times in the Greek text of Matthew's Gospel. The word **pleroo** means *to bring something to its intended meaning or conclusion*. So **fulfill** doesn't mean to bring to an end. It means, *"to fill out, to expand, or to complete."* What Jesus meant by **the Law** can be a little confusing, because mention of law in the NT can refer to at least four different things. It can refer to the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT) / It can refer to the Ten Commandments / it can refer to law as a system or principle /

or it can refer to the entire OT. Here scholars believe Jesus was talking about the latter, the entire OT...Genesis through Malachi. That's because whenever **the Law** is combined with **the prophets**, as it is here, it signifies the entire OT.

On sabbatical last fall, Peggy and I assembled a picture puzzle. The puzzle featured a number of hand carved wooden ducks in various stages of production. The wood carver's bench is strewn with tools and wood shavings. Added to the sameness of the wood shavings, the feathers of the duck's wings are all very similar. If there wasn't a picture of the completed puzzle on the box, no single puzzle piece contained enough graphic information to imagine what the completed picture would look like. The project was tedious and time consuming. (A 50 piece puzzle! Can you imagine?...Actually it was 1,000 pieces!) But we nibbled away at the puzzle and chips until the last piece was in place. We had brought the puzzle to its intended conclusion. We pleroo-ed it. We completed the project.

That's what Jesus said He did with the regard to the Law and the words of the prophets. He didn't destroy them, He fulfilled them. In Jesus Christ all the commandments / sacrifices / ceremonies / types / shadows / promises / and prophecies reached their intended conclusion. Viewed alone and in isolation from the others, not one of these items contained enough information for us to know Jesus. But when all the pieces were assembled we see Him in all His glory. We see faint glimpses of Jesus in Moses / in Joseph / in Joshua and in King David. We see Him in the structure and furnishings of the Temple, the priesthood and its services. We're introduced to Him in the prophetic Scriptures and the psalms. When the Spirit of God opens our eyes, the glory of Jesus is everywhere! Amen?

In **Jn. 5** the religious leaders in Jerusalem grumbled because Jesus healed a paralyzed man on the Sabbath. In **v.39** Jesus turned to them and said, **You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me...** In other words, He said, *"When all the OT verses are considered...when all the rules, promises and prophecies are studied...all of those pieces point to Me. In fact, I even came to fulfill God's intention for the Sabbath you've neglected on one hand and legalized to death on the other. In fact, the rest the Sabbath provides for your benefit belongs to those who come to Me."* (**Matt. 11:28**)

Jesus fulfilled the OT at least four ways.

- **First**, He fulfilled the OT promises and prophecies about the coming Messiah. This is seen in the early chapters of Matthew and details of the Christmas story. There the words **fulfill** and **fulfilled** appear repeatedly. Scholars say more than 300 specific prophecies were literally fulfilled by the first coming of Jesus. He came to the right family / at the right time / in the right place / and in the way foretold. He fulfilled the prophetic Scriptures with such precision His identity should never be mistaken by anyone!
- **Second**, Jesus fulfilled the OT by becoming the perfect and final sacrifice. The Law of Moses demanded the blood of an innocent animal sacrificed to atone for human sin. This provision actually predates the Law and traces its origin to the sin covering provided for Adam and Eve. Yet according to the Law of Moses, hundreds of thousands of animals were slain during the OT era. Yet **Heb. 10:4, 5** says, **...it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for Me;"** God became man in Christ so He might be the perfect, ultimate, and final sacrifice for sin. Jesus accomplished what no amount of animal sacrifices could ever accomplish. In fact, the sacrifice of Jesus didn't merely atone for or cover sin, the cross death of Jesus removes our sin and guilt forever! When John the Baptizer saw Jesus the Messiah, he said, **"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" - Jn. 1:29** In order to qualify as the perfect sacrifice, Jesus kept the Law we couldn't keep. He lived the life we could never live. He then died under the penalty of the commandments we had broken. So Jesus did all of this to fulfill the Law's demands.

- **Third**, the teachings of Jesus fulfilled OT Law and reveal who God is. In **Deut. 18:18** Moses prophesied that God would someday speak through a prophet greater than himself. God said, **I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and He will tell them everything I command Him.** This promise was fulfilled in Jesus. The teaching and the life lived by Jesus flesh out and reveal the full depth of what the OT means. For example...the OT declared that God is gracious and that He is the God of truth. Now listen to what John wrote as a an eye-witness of Jesus - **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - Jn. 1:14** In the person of Jesus Christ, God in spirit and theory became a human being others could see and touch and listen to. **Jn.1:18** says, **No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.** So Jesus expanded the truth about God...He filled in the OT sketches of God with sound, life, color, touch and animation.

As we'll see in later verses, the teachings of Jesus also clarify and intensify the meaning of God's commands. I mean, the Jews had not been taught that being angry with a brother is as evil as murdering him. And Jewish men had no idea that when they looked at pornography or looked lustfully at women they were as guilty as if they had committed adultery with them! We know this now because King Jesus corrected their inadequate interpretations of God's Law. His teachings fulfilled the Law by providing the actual meaning and spiritual intention behind God's commands.

But the main point in **v.17** is this...Jesus came **to fulfill** the Law and the prophets. When that last puzzle piece was put in place, the picture was finished...it was complete. What each individual piece represents and how it fits in was no longer a question. The picture is no longer a mystery. The whole portrait has now been assembled. This is what Jesus accomplished with regard to the OT. All the promises / prophecies / sacrifices / rituals / regulations / and types were fulfilled in Him. We are no longer obligated to keep the 613 rules and ceremonies proscribed by OT Law because Jesus fulfilled them. The holy requirements no person could ever keep in their own strength, were kept for us by Jesus. This is the Good News of the Gospel. It's declared numerous times in Paul's letters. Here is just one verse from **Col. 2:13, 14 - When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.**

## **2. Getting it right about the duration of God's Revelation – v.18**

Another issue where people get off the rails concerns the duration of God's OT revelation. Once again, some who think the OT was only for a select group during a specific time in history. They feel the OT is just that...OLD and outdated. They feel it offers nothing for those saved by grace. So what did Jesus say about that? He said in **v.18 - I tell you the truth, 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.** The "**smallest letter**" in the Hebrew alphabet is yodh which is like an apostrophe. "**The least stroke of a pen**" refers to a serif, a tiny distinguishing mark at the end of a Heb. letter. A serif is like the little stroke that distinguishes a capital O from a capital Q.

So what did Jesus mean? He meant the Law or the Word of God with all of its commandments and prophecies will continue to be valid and relevant until heaven and earth disappear. **Psa. 119:152** says, **Long ago I learned from your statutes that you established them to last forever.** Even though the Bible has been translated, revised, modernized, again and again, the Word of the Lord abides forever.

Despite the battle for the Bible and the many attacks leveled against it, God has promised to protect and preserve even **the smallest letters and the least stroke of a pen**. Why would He do that if the largest part of it was irrelevant and unnecessary? It's very rare for a book to be known much less continue in circulation 100 years after its publication. But since the Holy Scriptures were first printed, the Bible continues to be the world's all-time best seller. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls proves the manuscripts our Bibles were translated from are almost identical to more recently found manuscripts which date hundreds of years earlier.

So God has fulfilled His promise with regard to His message, His revelation. As long as heaven and earth exist, God's Word will remain intact, valid and relevant. No part of the Bible should be neglected / set aside / or disregarded. As long as there's a heaven above and earth beneath our feet we need to pay careful attention to every section / every book / every line / and every word of God's revelation. Remember **II Tim. 3:16, 17 - All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** When Paul wrote this verse, the only Bible in existence was the OT.

But notice the specific promise in **v.18. ...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.** The specific promise Jesus made is this...nothing in the Bible will disappear and everything will be accomplished. If the Bible is the Word of God, (and it is) how could it be otherwise? Though you and I engage in plenty of idle meaningless chatter, God isn't like us. In **Isa. 46:11b** the Lord said, **What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.** The Bible is the revelation of who God is and what He has purposed to do. Since God immutable or changeless (**Mal.3:6**) and the Bible is the word from His mouth, His revelation is eternal and cannot change. So unlike any other volume in print, all that is written in this book will come to pass. You can count on it. By this affirmation, Jesus assures us the OT possesses permanent validity as the Word of God. This is the second point we need to get right!

### **3. *Getting it right about the expectations concerning Christ's teachings - v.19, 20***

**Anyone who breaks 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 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.**

The big question that swirls around the interpretation of this verse centers on "What is meant by the phrase, **these commands**?" Those who say believers are obligated to keep every command in the OT use this as a proof text. But this view contradicts a lot of teaching in the NT. A better interpretation is that Jesus was referring to the commands and teachings He gave and was about to give. The phrase, **these commands** looks back on the Beatitudes and forward to the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. It looks ahead to all of Christ's teachings whether given directly or given through His apostles.

But as we finish, notice Christ's expectation concerning these commandments. The expectation is that every command (even the least of them) will be kept by every member of Christ's kingdom. Who told you it was easy to be a Christian? Who ever said, "Pray a few words, raise your hand, or come down to the front when the preacher extends the invitation and you're as good as in?" Maybe the Jews of Jesus day weren't the only ones to get it wrong. Jesus expects us to embrace His teachings and to obey His commands. Yes we are saved by grace alone, but the Law of Christ is expressed throughout the NT. To see the expectation of Christ's commands, glance ahead to **v.48 - Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

But if we ended the message right here and now, we wouldn't have it right. We need to hear and understand the meaning of **v.20. 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.** Nobody was as religious or zealous about rule keeping than were the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. Nobody tried harder. Nobody was more knowledgeable or devoted. Nobody looked the part more than these men. Yet Jesus said, he expects a **righteousness** that surpasses theirs. This is like saying you have to be more devoted than Martin Luther / more evangelistic than Billy Graham / more knowledgeable than Dr. John MacArthur / and more separated than Bob Jones I, II, and III! If your righteousness doesn't surpass theirs, you're out. **You will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

Do you know what Jesus did in this verse? He eliminated every one of us including the most pious. He eliminated the saintly type with Sunday School pins from head to toe. The fact is this...and it's the life or death point we all **must** get right...righteousness doesn't come by rule-keeping. It doesn't come by scrupulous devotion to God's Law. The expectation is perfection and we've all fallen far short of that goal.

The righteousness required for entrance into Christ's Kingdom comes only one way. It comes by trusting King Jesus who kept the Law we couldn't keep. You see in **v.17** Jesus said, He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. He fulfilled it not just for Himself...He fulfilled it for you and for me. He set us free from obligation to the strict demands of the Law by keeping it perfectly for us. Then on the basis of faith, He credits His obedience and His righteousness to our lives so in the sight of God, our performance is as perfect as His was. This is grace.

But we need an answer for **v.18**, because there Jesus insists the Law of God abides forever. The answer is found in the terms of the New Covenant. Though spoken to Israel about something God will do for them in a coming day, these are the terms of the New Covenant entered by all who trust Christ to save them today. **Ezek. 36:25-27 - I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.** Instead of obedience to laws that are external, God promised to do something revolutionary and new. He promised to give remove hearts of stone and give us a new heart and a new spirit. And notice, God's Spirit within will enable us to follow God's decrees and keep His laws.

So let's get this right. Jesus didn't abolish, the Law, He fulfilled it. He removed our obligation to OT laws and ordinances. Yet the law of God is eternal just as God is. It isn't obsolete and it hasn't been replaced. The fact of the matter is that Jesus expects perfect compliance...perfect unfaltering obedience. In all honesty, we know what that means. It means we're out. It means we're excluded from His kingdom. But there's good news...God has provided righteousness not by human effort, but by simple faith. The way of righteousness is declared in **II Cor. 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Are you in Him? Have you trusted God to forgive and justify you on the basis of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? In **Gal. 2:15, 16** Paul wrote, "**We...know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.**"