

# Matthew 5:17

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Several years ago there was a young woman from Australia who was going to do some medical internship in Manila and she was put in contact with me.

! She was from a church down there and when I picked her up at the airport I will never forget what she told me. The first thing she said was, Hi James, it is so good to know that I have family here. And that is how I feel being here with you today. I bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters in Manila at our church, Pilgrim Community Church.

They are seven hours ahead of us and so they are well into the Lord's day as we are beginning our time as well.

I would like to read to you again from Matthew chapter 5 and reading verses 17 to 20. So if you have your Bibles please turn with me in Matthew chapter 5.

[ 1 : 13 ] And let us listen now to God's word. Here the Lord Jesus is speaking. He says, 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 the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Thus far the reading of God's word. Let's speak to God. Not so long ago, in one of our rooms at home, there are only two, the room where my wife does homeschooling with our daughter, the light got busted.

[ 2 : 46 ] So it was one of those donut-like CFL lights, you know, the old style. And so I had to replace it because they needed it the next day to do homeschooling.

I went to the hardware store, bringing with me that donut light. And to my surprise, I was told, Sir, this is already obsolete.

We no longer sell this model. And so he proposed. He said, but sir, I can sell you this one. It's an LED one, which will last you very long.

But you're going to have to do some tinkering to install it. It's very easy, he said. Very straightforward. And I trusted him. And I bought the lamp. And I went home.

And I tinkered. And I connected it. I screwed it on. And when I switched the power on again, behold, darkness.

[ 3 : 50 ] And so I tried again. And after a few tries, finally, to my satisfaction, the light came on. And so I was in this room. My wife was in the other room with the kids.

And in my excitement, I called her and I said, I fixed it. And it's an LED light. And so it's going to last forever.

And without skipping a beat, my six-year-old daughter, who was with her, hollers back at me and says, No, Papa. Only the Word of God lasts forever.

And so I got schooled by a six-year-old that night. And this morning, I'd like us to hear what the Lord Jesus Christ has to say about the enduring significance of the Word of God.

Now, this is important because up to this point in the Gospel of Matthew, so far, he has not said anything about the law. And in the first century Jewish ear, this would have seemed very curious indeed.

[ 4 : 57 ] You see, for the official religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees and the scribes, the lawyers, well, the law, or some derivative of it, was all that they taught.

It was all they could talk about. And so you have Jesus, this unofficial religious teacher, teaching, but hadn't mentioned anything about the law.

So him mentioning it here, in this place, is very significant. And we need to hear it out. How did the Lord Jesus view the law?

Could it be that he was a softy on it? He was quite relaxed about it? Well, no, not at all. In fact, Jesus affirmed the lasting significance of the law.

Do not think, he says, that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. Here in this section, Jesus teaches the exactness of the law.

[ 6 : 08 ] It is enduring, and it is unbending. And he, he says, has come to fulfill it. All of it. Today the word of God is teaching us that because Christ has come to accomplish the law and the prophets, Christians now have in him a renewed life and relationship to God's enduring laws.

I have three points I'd like to consider with you this morning. And I will tell them to you, if you're taking notes. Number one, accomplished, not abolished.

Okay? Accomplished, not abolished. The law is accomplished, not abolished. Number two, an unbending code of life. The law is an unbending code of life.

And number three, an exceeding righteousness. Okay? Now, boys and girls, you should have been given a sheet that we use back home.

And I'm very thankful that your church has agreed to print this. This is something that we use at home. So, I have three key words I'd like you to write down.

[ 7 : 26 ] Now, those of you who are too young to do that, mommy and daddy can help you to write these key words. And the reason I'm giving you these key words is so that when you go home, when you have family worship, or in the car, on your way to lunch, you can ask daddy, you can ask mommy.

So, daddy, what did James mean by these words? Okay? So, these are the three words. Are you ready? I want you to write them down. Number one, the word is fruit.

Okay? Fruit. Number two, this is a really long word, so I'll just give you the short form. Three letters. D and A.

Okay? D and A. And then the last word I want you to write down is the word extra. Okay? So, those are your key words. You're probably not going to understand a lot of what I'm going to say today, but those key words are going to be your guide when you go home.

And mommy and daddy, it's your duty now to listen carefully. Because the children are going to come home and ask you about this. Okay?

[ 8 : 35 ] So, let's look at the point in turn. Number one, accomplished, not abolished. Now, boys and girls, the word I gave you was the word fruit. A flower that is cut from the plant, we know, dries up and dies.

But a flower that blooms and matures on the plant eventually grows into what it's meant to be. In most cases, a fruit.

And Jesus here is saying that he has not come to abolish or to cut down the law, but to fulfill it. In Jesus, the law finds its ultimate meaning and fulfillment.

Have a look with me in verses 17 and 18. He says, the Lord Jesus says, 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. Friends, the law and the prophets here encompass the whole Old Testament.

[ 9 : 47 ] When Jesus says, the law and the prophets, he's talking about the whole Old Testament. The law pertains to the first five books written by Moses. And prophets is the shorthand for the rest of the Old Testament.

And Jesus here is saying that he has come to abolish none of it. He has come to fulfill all of it.

Notice in verse 18, he says, not an iota, now that's the smallest letter in Greek, not a dot, not even a dot, will pass away from the law until all is accomplished.

Here, Jesus was simply saying that the prophet, what the prophet had long ago affirmed to be the youth by date. Is that correct?

The youth by date of the scriptures. The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of God will last forever. Isaiah 48. Now, we are used to the language of Jesus coming to fulfill the prophets or prophecy.

Isn't that how we're taught? Old Testament, promise. New Testament, fulfillment. Right? And so, we're accustomed to thinking of Jesus as fulfilling prophecy.

[11:07] 2 Corinthians 1.20, Paul writes, for all the promises of God, find their yes in Him. But, here's the question. What does it really mean that Jesus had come not only to fulfill the prophets, not only to fulfill prophecy, but to fulfill the law?

That's where I'd like us to turn our attention this morning. How does Jesus fulfill the law? Now, we already said that the law is the first five books of the Bible.

But, more specifically, the law here points to the moral law as summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments, Shorter Catechism 41.

We must see here an important parallel between two public men, two Adams, who each stand as representatives of other men.

Jesus has come as the last Adam to succeed where the first Adam had failed. Adam had disobeyed God. Adam has broken God's law.

[12:18] And, Jesus has come, he says, to perfectly obey and fulfill the moral law. Recall with me Adam in the garden. God created Adam in his own image and gave him two commands.

A positive one and a negative one. The positive command was be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth. Have dominion over the creatures.

What was that? Adam was made in God's image and God was essentially telling Adam, Adam, what I want you to do is to go out into the ends of the earth and fill it with my image.

Adam The negative command was do not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There will be a consequence. For on that day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

And we know how the story unfolds. Adam ate and he died. And because he was a public man, our catechism teaches us that the covenant being made with Adam not only for himself but for his posterity, his descendants, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression.

[13:41] Shorter Catechism 16. And this is why the Bible teaches that Jesus had to come because the first head, the first public man had failed.

Jesus had to come as the second Adam, the head of a new humanity. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Romans 5.19 In Jesus the whole law is fulfilled. In Jesus positively, Jesus obeys the law to the very last jot and tittle.

It's interesting, isn't it? The way he puts it, he says, for I truly, for truly I say to you until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass away from the law until all of it is accomplished.

And that's what he has come to do. He has fulfilled it to the letter, to the dot. As the Redeemer, Jesus had to obey in three ways.

[14:58] I'll give that to you. The first way, he had to obey his father's sending of him to the world to save sinners. Second, as a human being, he is truly human.

he had to obey the moral law impressed in his heart as the image of God. And thirdly, as a Jew, he had to obey all the positive commands and laws in the law of Moses.

This encompasses the ceremonial law as well as the civil laws. And all this, he did perfectly. but that's not all.

What does it mean for Jesus to fulfill the law? It's not just for him to actively obey. Negatively, Jesus fulfilled the law by suffering the penalty and consequences of the sin of Adam and of all those he came to redeem.

2 Corinthians 5.21, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[16:18] Returning to our text, we see then that Jesus takes the proper view of the law as God had intended it. Now, the Pharisees, they were very, very, how do you put it, enterprising when it comes to their interpretation of the law.

Pharisees created a whole system of external man-made commands to interpret the limits and the terms of the law according to their interpretation. But this only obscured the true meaning, purpose, and demands of the law.

The law was, is, and will always be exact and unbending.

It's not like after the fall, Jesus, you know, God curved the grade. No, the standard's the same. The law remains exacting and unbending.

And that brings us to my second point. The law is an unbending code of life. Now, boys and girls, the word I gave you is DNA. That stands for deoxyribal nucleic acid.

[ 17 : 37 ] I don't want you to write that down. DNA is basically the code of life. It is the smallest part that makes us up.

Makes, yeah, makes us up. And there's a sense in which the law is the DNA, or the code of life, of humans made in God's image.

Obedying the law is quite simply another way of expressing what the chief end of mankind is. Our catechism teaches us to obey the law as we should is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Now, look with me in verse 19. 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. Whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The law is an expression of the very character and nature of God. When God made man in his own image, this entailed man being, in a limited sense, like God, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

[ 19 : 00 ] Adam was originally created with obligations to God, simply because he was a creature, simply because he was made in God's image to reflect this image.

The moral law was not an add-on to his existence, but was rather part of his very DNA. And so with or without positive commands, with or without covenant, Adam owed God worship, loyalty, and obedience.

And so do we. The law was written in Adam's heart as an unbending code of life, as it is written in our hearts as an unbending code of life.

The point of this is to say that the law, being a reflection of God himself, could never therefore be relaxed or done away with. We will have to deal with that reality, you and I, because we are made in God's image.

God's law is written in our hearts and is exacting to us. It is unbending to us. It tells us how we ought to live. And this is Paul's point, isn't it, in Ephesians chapter 2.

[ 20 : 24 ] Recall the order of things as he expresses it in verses 8 to 10. He says, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of work, so 8 and 9, but we leave out verse 10, which is so important.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, what did he say? For good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Good works then, is a matter of God's design. God made us to glorify him and to enjoy him forever. God made us to do good works. No wonder all other religions they would not deny doing good because that's the impulse of our hearts.

We were created to do good works. The problem is sin has killed us so that we're no longer able to meet God's righteous requirements.

But we still want to try. We still want to do it. Good works is a matter of God's design, not of how to obtain rights standing with God.

[ 21 : 46 ] Paul is very clear about that. He says, it is by grace you've been saved through faith, not by works. But you shouldn't stop there because then you would fall into the trap of thinking, oh, now I'm saved, I can do whatever I want.

No. By grace you've been saved through faith, not by works. But later he says, for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works. We're not saved by good works, we're saved to do good works.

Good works is a matter of proper function. Therefore it matters how we relate to the law. It matters how we teach the law.

It matters because while the law is by no means a way to life for the dead, it is by all means the way of life for the living.

In Christ the believer is restored to his or her creational design so that now by the power of the Holy Spirit they can begin to really obey the law and to please God to walk in newness of life.

[ 22 : 55 ] Friends, the law, the moral law is in our DNA. It speaks to us of how we ought to be. Sin, however, prevents this in us.

And so there lies the problem. God made us for himself. Our chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever. But as long as we remain outside of Christ and in the Adams family, we will remain sin ruined monsters who have only the penalties of the unbending and exacting law of God to look forward to.

As little children in Sunday school were made to memorize the most popular verse in the Bible, John 3, 16. There's another verse in John chapter 3, I think that it would do us well to teach our children to memorize and that's verse 36.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not believe, obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

We come now to our third point, an exceeding righteousness. The key word I gave you, boys and girls, is the word extra.

[ 24 : 24 ] What does extra mean? It means something that is not part of the package that is additional or outside of it. So, if you go to a chippy shop and order yourself a nice battered fish, that is all that you're going to get.

You want french fries, I mean chips, you would have to order extra. It's not part of the original order. And Jesus here speaks of a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees. But what does this mean? And can we find this righteousness in ourselves? No. It is extra. It is outside of us. Read with me verse 20. The Lord Jesus here says, For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The law is exacting and unbending and all of humanity, O God, their perfect obedience.

[ 25 : 46 ] I've been quoting from the Shorter Catechism. Let me quote from another catechism, a newer one. In question and answer seven of the New City Catechism, it asks, What does the law of God require?

Answer, personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience. That we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

What God forbids should never be done, and what God commands should always be done. It's a pretty heavy burden, isn't it?

But remember, it's DNA. It's the code of life. It's what we were actually made to be and to do. And so that's the standard.

The law is exacting and unbending that nothing short of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience is what God expects from all of us.

[ 26 : 54 ] Unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, and that's not saying much, really, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is not proposing a new merit scheme here, okay? He's not saying, well, there's another way to get into the kingdom of heaven.

Work harder until you exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. No. He is saying that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is actually the same righteousness that you and I have.

It is the righteousness of sinners, which is no righteousness at all in the final analysis. The littlest sin contaminates us.

This week, I had a chance to sample different restaurants. It's wonderful, isn't it? London is such a cosmopolitan city, and there's just so much internationals here and there.

[ 28 : 05 ] And I noticed that in your establishments there's this sticker, the food hygiene sticker rating. We don't have that. That's why it's interesting.

Now, suppose you were an inspector in that agency and it has come to your attention that one restaurant in central London serves tap water.

And your tap water is good. It's potable, right? Serves tap water with one drop of toilet water in each glass. Just one drop. Would you give them a pass?

Of course not. How about if they said, no, no, no, it's not really just one drop. It's in the whole pitcher. One liter full. toilet water.

One drop toilet water just to make it ours. Would you give them a pass? No.

[ 29 : 09 ] How about if they had huge five-gallon water containers? And let's change it up a bit. They say, no, okay.

It's not one drop from the toilet paper anymore, toilet bowl anymore. It's one drop from the one liter with one drop, okay?

Further diluted. And then we serve people water from that five-gallon container. Will you give them a pass?

Absolutely not. See, the whole five-gallon container is now contaminated.

Even if I gave you five quid, you wouldn't drink that if you knew what was in it. And that's what we are before God.

[ 30 : 06 ] Each one of us contaminated. It doesn't matter if there's a cup of toilet water in you or just a drop. We are utterly unacceptable.

acceptable. The question for us then is where is your righteousness? Have you any acceptable that is perfect righteousness of your own to show for?

And if not, where can you find such exceeding righteousness? righteousness, the kind that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees?

I don't know, maybe the Pharisees are 99% clean water and just one drop of toilet water. Where do you find that righteousness?

It's extra. It's outside of yourself. It's not something we can muster through sheer willpower or performance. It is something that can only be found in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

[ 31 : 21 ] Martin Luther called this an alien righteousness. A perfect righteousness that is extra alien, foreign to us, that comes to us without our efforts.

So what is Jesus saying in verse 20? What does it mean when he says, for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

If we are all contaminated with sin, the toilet water of sin, where do we find this righteousness? let me suggest to you that the one who speaks these words speaks the truth of the exactness of God's law so that hearers might see that it is only he who can completely fulfill it.

unless I, Jesus as it were, is saying, unless I am your righteousness, you're doomed because of your sin, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

But the good news for you and for me is that he has done it. You see, in the final analysis, God will judge each person by works.

[ 33 : 01 ] The question is, whose works are you relying on? On your own best efforts for Christ's? When the supreme judge and almighty maker of all of reality asks you, what or where is your righteousness?

How will you respond? May it be that you find rest in the perfect righteousness of Christ alone.

No humble dress, no fervent prayer, no lifted hands, no tearful song, no recitation of the truth can justify a single wrong.

My righteousness is Jesus' life. My debt was paid by Jesus' death. My re-reload was born by Him and He alone can give me rest.

Let us pray. Thank you.