

Matthew 5:17-20

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[0 : 00] Matthew 5, 17-20. Matthew 5, 17-20. We're going through a series! Where you know a part of the Bible so well that you think that there's little more that it can teach you.

And then suddenly your eyes are opened and you are shocked. That's what I found with these verses. Let me read to you verses 17-20.

Jesus said, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law of the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them. Truly I say to you, it is on heaven and earth, they pass away, not an iota or dot, they pass from the Lord until all is accomplished.

Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the 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. Two subjects. First subject, Christ and the Old Testament.

[1 : 30] The second subject, Christ in you, or Christ in me. The Sermon on the Mount, it is the longest sermon that we have of the Lord Jesus that he gave during his earthly ministry.

And it's really important that you understand what's the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is not telling you how to become a Christian. The Sermon on the Mount does not tell you how to be saved. If you look at the starting Sermon on the Mount, it is he sat down and his disciples came to him.

The Sermon on the Mount is to men and women and boys and girls who are already Christ's disciples. The Sermon on the Mount is teaching how do you live as disciples of the Lord Jesus. As a Christian, how you are to behave. It's much like Exodus 20, isn't it? I am the Lord your God and brought you out of the land of Egypt. I have redeemed you out of slavery. Therefore, you shall have no other gods before me.

The thrust of the Sermon is because you live, you are this, do this. The Sermon is not do this and live.

[2 : 42] And what we found at the start of Matthew 5 is that Jesus showed us the great characteristics of somebody who's part of the Kingdom of Heaven. It's somebody who's been changed. Somebody who's been changed inwardly.

There's something that has happened to them inwardly and now they live differently outwardly. It's clear in the Beatitudes because he is so different, he lives loving the law of God and the Son of God.

And he is persecuted for righteousness' sake. He is persecuted for loving the law of God and he is persecuted for my sake.

The second verse is 11, verse 10 and 11. Because he loves the Son of God. The Christian does not fit in with the world because she is a disciple of Christ, a follower of Christ.

And we saw last, well we saw two weeks ago that that's where the love is, isn't it? that we are the soldier of the earth, we are the light of the world. And the world doesn't like that.

[3 : 53] Verses 17 to 20, now what is the connection between what has gone before? The connection is this, our Lord has already shown there's a great difference between being a true Christian and adopting the religion of the scribes and Pharisees.

There's a great difference between that. The people to whom he knew, the only religion that they knew was the religion of the scribes and Pharisees.

And our Lord had already explained that true Christianity was not like that. No well. True Christianity was not like that.

But as our Lord explains, he's going to say some things which on the face of it may appear as if he's setting aside the Old Testament. He's not doing anything of the sort.

But on the face of it, he appears as if Jesus is saying true religion is nothing like what you find in the Old Testament. And our Lord is saying, he is saying I'm not going to set aside the law or the prophets.

[5 : 00] And therefore some explanation is going to be necessary because questions are going to arise in people's minds. Look at verse 17. He says do not think. Why does he say do not think? He says do not think because the probability is that we're going to think this.

Do not think. As he's speaking Jesus of Nazareth is setting aside the Old Testament they think and he attacks the scribes and the Pharisees and he shows that true religion is very different.

And they would think as they listen he doesn't believe the same scriptures as we do. That was the impression they would get. And so before our Lord launches in on this attack of the Pharisees and the scribes he makes a few explanations.

And the first is about himself and the Old Testament. So that's the first point. Verses 17 and 18 we see Christ and the Old Testament. There's three things to see here.

First of all in verse 17 Christ did not come to dissolve the law. In verse 17 do not think that I come to abolish dissolve the law or the prophets.

[6 : 11] I have not come to abolish them. The word there means to take something to pieces. You've got an old clock that starts working and you think I'll have a go at fixing it.

So you take the back off you take the word with that and you don't know what you're doing and you don't know how to put it back together again. That's not what our Lord came to do with the Old Testament.

The Lord has not come to destroy it or to disintegrate it. The Lord Jesus did not come to render the Old Testament useless. Our Lord has not come to do that.

Look at the first 17. He says do not think that I come to abolish the law or the prophets. When he speaks of the law and the prophets that's the whole of the Old Testament. It's an umbrella phrase for the whole of the Bible.

I have not come into the world to set aside the Old Testament. To take it to pieces. To dissolve it. To abrogate it. That is not by purpose all. No matter how you may hear me preach.

[7 : 14] It's not the case. So if our Lord has not come to set aside the Old Testament, what has he come to do? Has he come to explain it?

Has he come to expand it? Has he come to interpret it? Has he come to reinterpret it? What's our Lord's attitude to the Old Testament? We're going to get to the 17.

I want us to stick as close to the text as we can this morning. The second thing he's come to do is to fulfill it. Don't think I've come to abolish the royal prophets.

I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. What does fulfill mean? It means to complete. It means to bring to full fruition, to consummate.

I've not come to set the Lord aside. I've not come to do away with them. I've come to consummate them, to fulfill them. And so you see, the whole of the Old Testament is a whole process of revelation which is building up.

[8 : 20] And so as you read through the Old Testament, you get a more and more complete picture of what God is like, and what his ways are, and who he is.

is partial isn't it? It is incomplete. It's perfect, but it's incomplete. And you need someone to fulfill it, to complete it, to bring it to its climax, to its conclusion.

And our Lord Jesus is that fulfillment of the Old Testament. Think of an arch, and you're building up the arch of both sides.

But it's not complete, is it, until you put the keystone in the middle of the top. That holds the whole of the arch together, and all the other bricks only have meaning such as they lean up towards that keystone.

It's the keystone which makes the whole structure. And our Lord is saying, I've not come to break the arch down, I've come to fulfill it.

[9 : 29] I've come to be the keystone in the arch, I've come to consummate it. That is his attitude in the Old Testament. And of course, as you read through the New Testament, more and more that becomes clear.

So in the Old Testament, there is the ceremonial law, there's the sacrifices and the offerings. And our Lord has come to discontinue that. But he's not come to set aside and say you don't need to bother that at all.

It's a really important distinction to say the old sacrifices. Well, we don't have to sacrifice a bull or a ram or a duck today. The old priesthood of the Old Testament is no longer necessary.

The old tabernacle, the old tabernacle and temple, we finished with that. Not strictly speaking, Christ has abrogated those things or set them aside.

he discontinued those things because they are all fulfilled and summed up in him. All those things are patterns that were fulfilled in Christ.

[10:39] All those offerings, all those sacrifices, they were meant to actually lead us to Christ. They predict Christ, they teach us about Christ.

And so now Christ has come, we don't want to go back to shallow land. Those things are no longer necessary, they are discontinued. It doesn't mean that the Old Testament laws have been set aside in the strict sense.

In fact, as we read through Leviticus, after Christ, we see that the whole of Leviticus has got a deeper meaning for us than it didn't have before.

That each passage and each sacrifice and each offering, has a significance that we didn't see until Christ came and fulfilled it. And so therefore, our Old Testament as we read it, is pregnant with meaning.

Until Christ came, they were faint pictures of what would come. And people messed up when they were on earth, they were all about. It's very important to understand this.

[11:44] Christ did not come to set aside the Old Testament, but to fulfill it. It's the same with the judicial law, you know the civil laws. In your Old Testament, they were laws, weren't they, for Israel as a nation.

Israel was a nation that lived within certain geographical boundaries. And so there were laws about what would happen if your bull walked into the road. There were laws about landmarks to remove them.

There were laws about footpaths. There were laws about who could pick corn in your field and who couldn't. there were laws about which relative would have their name first on the will.

There was a whole host of judicial laws. And what Jesus is announcing here in Matthew's gospel is that he has fulfilled all that. Because he's taken away, hasn't he, all the Jewish privileges that belong to them as a nation, and he's given them to the people of God, a nation that he's called from every tribe and time and nation.

So the Jewish laws have been rendered inoperative. And yet, as you read them, the great principles continue in the Christian church.

[12:55] We can see that. And it's Christ who's done that. So as you read through the Old Testament as a Gentile Christian, all those judicial laws of the Old Testament, because you are united to Christ, they have immense significance.

And they have great teaching value for you, because Christ has not come to set aside the Old Testament, but to fulfill it. And of course, when you come to the moral law of God, the Ten Commandments, our Lord certainly hasn't come to set our side, just like some of the things that are said today.

What do you see in the Gospels? You see the Lord Jesus fulfill that law in his own perfect life. He fulfilled that law to the utmost.

he kept the moral law of God perfectly, and he lays down that law as the pattern of life for believers. Not to save them, but the moral law was never intended to save them. But it is a pattern of life which you are to live. And in a wonderful sense he has lived, and the moral law takes on a new glory for Christians.

[14:10] because you know, don't you, that you cannot keep God's law. But you also know one who has kept it.

And so the moral law of God, they drive us to flee from our sin, and to flee to Christ, and Christ has fulfilled the moral law. And it's as if we take the Ten Commandments from the hands of Christ Sunday by Sunday.

And it fills the Christian with wonder and worship. So Christ is teaching in verse 17 three really simple points. That he's not coming to set aside the Old Testament.

Number two, he's come to fulfil the Old Testament. And the Old Testament has a significance which it didn't have before the coming of Christ. B.B.

Warfield talks about the Old Testament as a room where all the furniture is there, but the lights are off. And so you're in the room but you can't see fully what's in there. And Christ comes and he switches the lights off and suddenly you see the beauty and the glory of what is taught there.

[15:18] And the third thing that this verse teaches us is this applies to the smallest details of the Old Testament. And this is really important. Look at verse 18. For truly I say to you, until heaven will pass away, not my goat, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

the Old Testament was written in Hebrew from right to left. And it has a small letter, like a kind of inverted comma.

not one of those will pass away until all is fulfilled. The Old Testament was translated into Greek. And Greek has a little letter, I, that is written under the line.

It's so small you can't only see it. But not one of those is to be rendered useless or set aside. Not one of them is to pass away until all be fulfilled.

Every little letter, Jesus says, every little mark has significance. even the finest detail. And I've not come to the side of the side.

[16:25] I come to the side. The tiniest detail is significant. And our Lord is teaching this thing very clearly in verse 18.

Can you see it? Our Lord is teaching concern for detail. As part of the mind of Christ. God is to us. And there are many people today that think concern for detail in the Bible is legalism. Some of you might think that being so concerned about details in the Bible is called orthodoxy.

But if you're like that, it's because you've not entered into the mind of Christ. Because Jesus is teaching that the smallest detail of the Old Testament has significance. And that says to you and I that there is nothing in this book which is meaningless.

Nothing. Every little mark, every little detail is significant. But he's not come to set it aside, he's come to pull for that.

[17:31] Can you see what Jesus is doing? People are going to come to him and they're saying, by your teaching Jesus you are setting aside the Old Testament. And Jesus said before he said anything about the Pharisees and the scribes and their religion that the whole of the Old Testament has got his stamp of approval on it.

Every part of the Old Testament is approved by Christ. Now we need to stop here and just try and make some applications. The first thing I think that it speaks to us is about the inspiration of the Bible.

The Bible is a book we believe that is breathe out by God. What you often hear today is that there are people that teach that Jesus Christ, he inspired the ideas that are in the Bible and the ideas of the Old Testament.

But the breath of God, the inspiration of God doesn't extend to the words, the literal words. That the words maybe are expressed in ways that we would accept today, but the ideas behind them we accept.

And so the ideas were expressed maybe in ways that we wouldn't today, but actually we're okay with the ideas behind it. But here is what Jesus is teaching, verse 18. Jesus is teaching that the very way that the words were written down is exactly the way that the ideas of God and the will of God wanted them.

[19:08] And the inspiration of the Bible extends to the very words. And so then we should have reverence not just for the ideas of Scripture, but we should have reverence for the way that those ideas are expressed.

The very words in the way that they are put, there is no word in the Bible that's there by accident. there is no word that's left out that should be in there.

Inspiration extends to the words, to the letters, and to the, can you see it, the dots and the iotas. And so that means you and I need to be very careful how we handle the Old Testament. Another thing that we need to say is that the Old Testament which makes up two-thirds of your Bible is not an inferior Scripture.

People describe them, sometimes we describe ourselves, but we are New Testament Christians. It's a bizarre phrase. Because the Old Testament says Jesus is of divine authority.

[20 : 23] That's Jesus' view of the Old Testament. So anybody who belittles the Old Testament also belittles Jesus. Because Jesus said in the Old Testament verse 18 truly truly I say to you until heaven and earth pass away now I will pass from the Lord to all as accomplished.

And so you cannot belittle the Old Testament without belittling the Lord Jesus. And that's so important isn't it? The moment that you belittle Adam or Eve or creation or Noah or Joseph's coat of many colours or Jonah or the floating axe you belittle Christ.

And the moment that you belittle the smallest details the finest points in the Old Testament you've belittled the Son of God. And you've attacked his integrity. And that means that as Christian people we should be taking as much care as we can to get to know the Old Testament.

Because the New Testament says that all scripture is given by the inspiration of God. The Lord Jesus says man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. And so the Old Testament and New Testament they are equally inspired. And they don't carry equal revelation but they are equally inspired.

[21 : 55] And your Christian life will be defective if you cannot and will not study the Old Testament on which Christ has put his seed and approval. Another thing the Lord is teaching us is he's teaching us how to understand the Old Testament.

Can you see that? But he foretold it. So that when you look at the Old Testament you look for Christ. And if you don't look for Christ you'll never understand it.

If you open any book of the Old Testament and ask what does this book teach me about Christ? In what way does this book point me to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus?

In what way is Christ the completion and fulfilment of this? The whole of the Old Testament will leap to life just as it did when Jesus was on the Emmaus road beginning with Moses and all the scriptures.

He went through the scriptures and He expounded to them the scriptures concerning Himself. So that is Christ in the Old Testament. Certainly even more shocking than the Old Testament than you.

[22 : 59] Look at grace of 19 and 20. 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 Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Well Lord it's very simple teaching but it's quite difficult to get or to accept. He's talking about the relationship of the disciples to the kingdom of heaven and he expresses it in terms of their relationship to the law.

He's now showing you and I that your relationship to the law and the Old Testament is your relationship to the kingdom of heaven. He says to you your attitude to God's word is your attitude to God.

God. Because if the scripture really is the word of God down to its finest detail like it says in verse 18 and God has breathed it and here we have a perfect revelation of who God is which is fulfilled in Christ it follows doesn't it that the attitude you have towards God's word is your attitude to God.

[24 : 21] You can know that God is great you can know that God is all powerful but you can know nothing else of God except by his word. And verse 19 is even more shocking than that he says and as far as grading in the kingdom of heaven is concerned and it really is shocking isn't it verse 19 and you might not like it but in the kingdom of heaven can you see this verse there is great and there is less and I think that's a real surprise there's such a thing as great Christians and there's such a thing as those are the least and so here's a man who's confronted with a commandment in the Bible it's only a small commandment it's just a little point of detail and he says to himself but it's just a little thing it's no big deal it's of no great significance

I don't need to take it seriously at all I keep hearing we just thought about keeping the main thing the main thing and the main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things I can never work out with me really to be honest but that person is here in those they say well it's only a small issue it doesn't really matter I don't need to take it very seriously it's only a small issue there's no reason really why I can't ignore it it's not a big thing it's not that important I can disobey it it's no great significance it's got no bearing on my spirituality I need to bother too much about it I don't want to be legalistic I don't want to get hang out on this I need to concentrate on the main things you can ignore it if you want so he himself he doesn't keep that commandment but he breaks it and

he says to others you don't want to be legalistic about this you know don't worry about it verse 19 whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven he is the very lowest form of christian there is that's what jesus says it's not because he's broken the commandment we all break the commandments but it's because of his attitude to the breaking of the commandments it's not worth bothering about it's no big deal and he tells people the same thing it's a shocking thing but here's a woman here's a woman she's confronted with a detail of the word of god and you say it's only a detail but this passage teaches us doesn't it that even the details in the word of god are of eternal significance and she says i know i can't ignore this because it's been given by god and i can't set it aside and i must try and comply with it and she encourages others to conform their lives to the word of god not just with the big principles but actually the little details of life and jesus says she is great in the kingdom of heaven she is the greatest form of christian and this cuts across doesn't it lots of what you hear involving evangelicalism it's a total contradiction of the emphasis of many churches today the emphasis goes like this concern for detail that's legalism that's pharisaism don't get hung up on the small things in the word of god these things are secondary they're no big deal we can have christian liberty on this but that is foreign to the teaching of our lord jesus christ and it's foreign to the teaching of this verse jesus has no respect whatsoever of all for human taboos he's got no time for human traditions human do's and human don'ts that have got no authority in the bible he couldn't stand them and he rounds on the scribe of the pharisees because they make the word of god no effect through their tradition but when it comes to the word of god jesus says there is no detail there's not a pinprick there's not a point of punctuation that is without significance and those who treat it of no significance because they think it's of no significance are the least in the kingdom of god and jesus teaches you that the greatest christian is the one who has meticulous concern for the finer details of the word of god and he seeks to encourage others he wants others to have meticulous concern for the finer details of the word of god because he knows that god's commandments whether they're great or whether they're small they bind him and they don't only bind him they bind all and so he doesn't just bring whatever his life in conformity to the word of god he wants to encourage others in line two and the lowest form of christian is somebody who's not bothered whether his life is in conformity to the word of god or not and the highest form of christian is one who's concerned and so jesus teaches doesn't he there is gradation in the kingdom of heaven there is rank in the kingdom of heaven as hard as we find that to believe between the greatest and the least and they are measured by their obedience to the word of god and what they encourage in others and i want to say to you that is the consistent teaching of the bible we've just stopped talking about it because we don't like it there'll be some who will be saved by the they'll go through the fire but their lives will just be woodhead and stubble there'll be some that are given ten cities and others that are given seven cities it is the teaching of the bible and your attitude to god's word is your attitude to god that's true not only when it comes to the gradation in the kingdom of heaven but it's also true when it comes to being excluded from the kingdom of heaven so if the greatest and the least christians they're distinguished by their attitude to the law of god you see in verse 20 there are those who will not be in the kingdom of heaven because he says that there are certain people who show by their attitude to the law of god that they're outside the kingdom of god and if the greatest or least believers are decided by their attitude to the word of god can you can you see that the kingdom and the law they are married to one and they're and to be excluded well it's going to be on the same basis and in verse 20 he's speaking about being excluded from the kingdom of heaven verse 19 he says concern for detail is the sign of a great christian but then verse 20 he says unless your righteousness is greater than those who have this unrivaled concern for detail in the strides of Pharisees you won't even see what you can go to heaven you won't interest it's really hot isn't it but it's really important look at verse 20 our lord is not speaking about the righteousness that we have by faith in christ he's not speaking about that when you trust in christ you are given his perfect cloak of righteousness it's put to your account it's imputed to you and you are there for 100% but our lord is not talking about imputation about christ's righteousness being given to you it isn't how do i know that because first of all verse 20 speaks about your righteousness your righteousness and the words your righteousness in the new testament are always put in contradiction to god's righteousness and secondly he's been talking about a righteousness of behaviour and unless it's really obvious he's changed the subject he must be still talking about a righteousness of behaviour and actually the first word of verse 20 helps us doesn't it it says for it's connecting and jesus is

saying boldly and calmly before the world that unless you have a righteousness of behaviour which exceeds the righteousness of the detailed concerns of the scribes and pharisees you will not have shocking and we must not water down what Jesus is saying here it's really dishonest what some countries do to apply this to the righteousness that is ours by faith in Christ is not what it's talking about what is Jesus saying here Jesus is saying very simply that all people that are unchanged are not in the kingdom of heaven that's the basic teaching now again remember this the whole focus of Jesus is assuming it's not how to get into the kingdom of heaven don't think that that doesn't come into the sermon on the mount at all but he is telling us and the world who is not the kingdom of heaven the whole focus of the sermon on the mount is not how to get in he tells you that in Matthew 18 and John 3 that to be converted you must be born again to be converted you must become like a little child of trust in Christ but our Lord is telling us who is not in and he says every unchanged person is not in and anybody who does not have a righteousness of living which exceeds the righteousness of scribes and pharisees is not in the kingdom of heaven and that's really bold isn't it and that's why at the end of the sermon on the mountain the people that hear this sermon they are absolutely astonished because

Jesus thought them as one with authority and not like the scribes and pharisees let me finish by telling you about these scribes and pharisees that they were really concerned with detail but they were really concerned with detail not about God's word but with details about man's traditions so as you read the New Testament actually you'll see that their religion was a religion of externals and being observant there were certain services they seemed to be religious they were clothed in a certain way they had certain customs they washed their hands in a certain way it was all external they cleaned the outside of the cup Jesus said but they didn't have concern about what was going on inside they were concerned about themselves more concerned than they were about God and others they were satisfied their religion was one which said I've arrived I'm self righteous their religion was one which said you can make it all your own and all they had was religion and they condemned others and they had a great feeling of superiority they looked down upon the bog stranded people who weren't scribes and Pharisees theirs was a religion of no need we could make it of our own they were proud and they were unteachable and they were superior and if you had a stroke to a

[35 : 45] Pharisee about an issue in their life they went to death they got really angry when anything was pointed out for them and they wanted back at! If you don't have a righteousness that exceeds that you are outside the kingdom of heaven and this morning if all you've got is evangelical religion if all you've got is being reformed you're outside the kingdom if all you've got is a system of belief if all you've got is I come to church on a Sunday you're outside the kingdom if all you've got is a concern to be exactly as a Christian or Orthodox if all you've got is a life that passes as respectable you're outside the kingdom of heaven Jesus says the only man or woman's life that will not collapse is the one that hears his word and does it and the great mark of a

Christian is not that he or she has an outward religion that no one can point the finger successfully at the great mark of Christian is that inwardly they mourn over their sin and they delight in the Lord of God and the great mark of the Christian is that she says I delight to do your will O Lord and he realises that not everyone who says Lord Lord will be in the kingdom but he who does the will of Christ Father who is in heaven that person is a man who walks through life aware that they're not answerable to others that doesn't bother him she's a person who realises that they're answerable to God she's not a woman who walks through life conscious that she has no need but the Christian is somebody who walks through life conscious of their great need which is the mercy of God and all of these points our Lord has already explained as the Beatitudes outwardly they might not appear to be superior the world applauds the

Pharisee far higher than they applaud the Christians but measured by God's standards accept your righteousness accept your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees he shall know the kingdom of heaven and our Lord has explained that in the Beatitudes and so we know it's impossible for me to have that change without the new birth it's impossible to have this inward change without God willing in my heart and so where do you start this morning you religious you orthodox you accepted by your peers who are outside the kingdom of heaven the king of heaven says so but if you seek to live by the word of God and to love him with your heart of hearts and love his son the one he gave and if you with the very details in it and you might be thought of odd and sometimes you are thought of a weirdo and you're often thought of legalistic and extreme and

fanatical and unreasonable but there's sincere desire in your heart and a genuine effort to bring your life into conformity with God with the word of God then you're not only in the kingdom of heaven but you are great in the kingdom of heaven let's pray