

Sermon on Matthew 5:17-20 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Jesus fulfills and gives what is necessary.

I don't read as much fiction as I would like. To be taken to another time, another place and witness drama unfold or suspense be quenched. The ability to form the visual imagery in my mind from the words of the page.

What often makes fiction, or any good story, appealing is when something unexpected happens. When there is a plot twist. Too many shifts in the storyline and we can be left confused and agitated, but when an unforeseen surprise seals the story it can stir our emotions, make us laugh with joy, and endear itself to us.

Shifting to real life, our experience can be much the same. An unexpected surprise that changes things can be a tremendous good. Too much, or too many plot twists can leave us exhausted, but just the right change can invigorate our lives. The jury is still out on 2020 by the way...

It is to the ultimate plot twist we turn today in our study of the Sermon on the Mount. Into the old story of God and humanity, our disrespect, and his grace, covenants and signposts, comes a redeemer to set things right. To resolve the tension. To make sense of what had come before and give the way forward. This twist is for us, and all of humanity, really good news.

Jesus in preaching the Kingdom Ethic surprises us with a righteousness that goes deeper than we expect.

Matthew 5:17-20

Jesus fulfills and gives what is necessary.

We are still in the first three minutes of Jesus' sermon to his followers. The outlining of who they are, what they are, and how they are to live in light of their citizenship in his Kingdom which is at hand.

There has been quite a stir in Judaea, a man with authority has been preaching and healing, working the miraculous, speaking of a kingdom that is good news for all that believe. Opinions were forming as to who Jesus was. Some figured he was

another zealot going to attempt an overthrow of the Roman occupiers. Others thought he was a lonely guy a few scoops short of a banana split, ranting and distracting people from what was important.

He comes to this mountain and sits among his disciples and preaches.

He announced the character of those approved by God. What they are as salt and light. And now he pivots - to bring clarity to everything that has been written of God and his people - the word that he fulfills. And he highlights how we, as Christians, interact now with the law in light of who this teacher is.

For our purposes, this morning we want to drill down a bit on what Jesus means by fulfillment and grasp at the new righteousness needed to enter the Kingdom.

1) Fulfillment

Some of the people that heard his teaching wondered if this was a whole new approach to God... that he was set to tear down what came before. Maybe some even hope he will ditch the law. It will be an accusation through his ministry. But Jesus begins his pivot to the law by confronting that perspective.

“Do not think I have come to abolish the Law (Torah) or the Prophets (which essentially means all of Scripture (OT)). I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

Those looking to pin him down finally have an answer. Jesus summed up his position about the law in a single word, not 'abolition' but 'fulfillment.'

Some of us have heard it said that this means the Old Testament way of life is over, that the rules God gave his people no longer apply. Or even a focus on the correct perspective that Jesus has accomplished the teachings for you... But he means something more here.

As he will continue to iterate leading all the way to his cross and after the resurrection, all of Scripture finds its fulfillment in him. It all points to him. All of the prophetic promise stands before the disciples at that moment. The ultimate sacrifice to forgive the sin of the humanity, speaks to them.

As we determine to live under a Kingdom Ethic we too must realize it.

In response to those that had a problem with Jesus healing on a Sabbath... **John 5:37–39** “And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, [38] and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. [39] You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,” (ESV)

John 5:46–47 “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. [47] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” (ESV)

The best interpretation of our text says that Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets in that they point to him, and he is their fulfillment. The antithesis is not between “abolish” and “keep” but between “abolish” and “fulfill.” “For Matthew, then, it is not the question of Jesus’ relation to the law that is in doubt but rather its relation to him!”

This is the surprise. This is the plot twist in our relationship with our Creator.

"Matthew has already begun to develop a theology of fulfillment. In every case that Matthew has used the word, "fulfill" describes something surprising. Fulfillment brings a twist. Who would have thought that "Out of Egypt I called My Son" (Hosea 11:1) would be fulfilled in Jesus' escape from Herod? Who would have thought that Jeremiah was talking about the slaughter of infants at Bethlehem when he spoke of weeping in Ramah? We can't even find the prophetic statement "He shall be called a Nazarene," and yet Matthew says Jesus fulfilled that. In all these passages, the fulfillment is surprising. Fulfillment does not destroy the past, but it does bring in something new. Fulfillment brings the prophecy to its completion, but the completion is not what one might have expected. If Torah and Prophets tell a story, the final chapter has a surprise ending. When we reach the end of the story, we can see that this is where the Law and Prophets were leading from the beginning. But that wasn't where we thought we were headed." Peter Leithart

“For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until it is accomplished.” The Law is sticking around - but Jesus fulfills it by making it’s meaning clear and by obeying it all.

In what follows he will unpack key pieces of the law and give their deepest meaning. He proves it goes deeper than actions, to the heart. Which has been the point all along if the people only had eyes to see it.

Jesus is not a new legislator but a faithful expounder of the law. Where the religious elite (all through Israel’s history) had abused the Law or got it wrong, Jesus restores its integrity.

Israel remained ignorant of the righteousness of God and instead sought their own, not submitting to God’s way.

Romans 10:4 “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (ESV)

This does not mean that we are now free to disobey it. It means rather that acceptance with God is not through obedience to the law but through faith in Christ, and indeed the law itself bears witness to this good news because its goal is Jesus.

The blessed then, those approved by God, live in obedience to the law as Jesus unpacks it - because we belong to Christ. And we will until all is accomplished... when his work and the launch of the Kingdom into eternity are done.

To obey it though Jesus indicates we need something that exceeds what is the prevailing way. We need new righteousness.

2) New Righteousness

Whoever relaxes even the least of these commandments (the Law and all he teaches) will be the least in the kingdom, but whoever does them and teaches them will be great.

To enter the kingdom we need a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders, the teachers of the Law.

This doesn't sound like grace. The Law serving as a guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. But don't lose heart grace junkies, you can maintain your confidence in the finished work of Jesus. This is included. To have a righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees means an understanding of the redemptive righteousness that they didn't grasp, that Jesus will go on to describe.

The scribes and Pharisees approached the Law on the surface, focusing on external impressions. They refused to be poor in spirit, recognizing their need, and they abused the law because of it.

In order to make obedience more readily attainable, they would restrict the commandments and extend the permissions of the law. They made the law's demand less demanding and the law's permissions more permissive. Jesus reverses both tendencies.

Jesus will clarify in the coming verses, this righteousness goes deeper than the surface, it is a heart-righteousness that was promised long ago.

"It was a new heart-righteousness which the prophets foresaw as one of the blessings of the Messianic age. 'I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts,' God promised through Jeremiah (31:33). How would he do it? He told Ezekiel: 'I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes' (36:27). Thus God's promises to put his law within us and to put his Spirit within us coincide." Stott

Those given regenerate hearts.

How does this make us feel? Can we do it? As the poor in spirit, we recognize our need. As those who mourn, we are acquainted with our own sin and reluctance of our flesh to obey. As those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, we wonder if we can live this.

The point is Jesus... it drives us in our need to him. To his grace, his truth. Not merely to a new morality but the right life, to new righteousness in him.

Because this righteousness is deeper, to the heart, we know it can only come from him. This is the plot twist, you don't have what it takes in yourself to enter the kingdom of heaven. And the fulfillment was born for you. His Spirit transforms you to live.

This Kingdom righteousness works from the inside out because it first produces changed hearts and new motivations in those that believe.

Romans 6:17–18 “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” (ESV)

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (ESV)

Philippians 2:12–13 “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed,... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (ESV)

Written on our hearts. God at work in us, for his glory.

Only the gospel goes deep enough to affect real heart change. That Jesus would come to a people that got it wrong, that were wrecked in sin. That he would live as both an example for us and one actively taking our place accounting his obedience to us. That he would face accusation and rejection all the way to death in our place on the cross. By that act giving us his righteousness, curing our spiritual poverty, and remaking our hunger and thirst, for new life, life in him.

This righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees because it is greater, it is deeper... righteousness that is the evidence of the new birth, of those born again.

Jesus not only teaches the Law with clarity, but he also infuses it with power by giving us his Spirit.

John 14:26 “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (ESV)

We don't ditch the law because we have the Spirit, we live the law because we have the Spirit

So now as we approach Jesus' clarifying teaching on the law, we have the hope to live it. To embrace this ethic because **he fulfills it and gives us the righteousness necessary to keep it.**

Open the Depths - Believe in Jesus. Refuse to keep him on a surface level. Aggressively give over yourself to be transformed. Ask for it.

You need not have it together... that's the point.

“O come all you unfaithful
Come weak and unstable
Come know you are not alone
O come barren and waiting ones
Weary of praying, come
See what your God has done

Christ is born, Christ is born
Christ is born for you

O come bitter and broken
Come with fears unspoken
Come taste of His perfect love
O come guilty and hiding ones
There is no need to run
See what your God has done”

He has revealed the way and empowers us for it!

Commend Each Other in it - To grow to understand the good and right way of life - the Jesus way - live it together for others to see. Encourage one another. Walk with one another. Trust Jesus with one another. For yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.

The story is still unfolding. It has been a surprise. What's to come only points back here, to Jesus. From this hope, live with abandon, following his way, with hope in Christ, with new righteousness only he can give.