The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:17-20

*"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

* **Jesus did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets.**

The Law mentioned here is the Law that God gave to Israel through Moses when they left the slavey of Egypt and camped at Mt. Sinai. There are at least 613 laws in the Mosaic Law. The Prophets in the Old Testament number over seventy-two (72). Not all of these prophets, including Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha, wrote a book named after them, but all of these existed to tell man of God’s design. The first prophet was Abel, the son of Adam. He was the first to show that God was going to use a lamb to take away the sin of the world.

To destroy the Law would have caused a collapse in the province of Judah as it also was the civil code. Imagine the result in your state if suddenly there were no laws. We already have difficulty when people ignore the laws we have. The Law also had types that were to be fulfilled in New Testament. Jesus on the cross is a type of the lamb slain on the Day of Atonement under the Law of Moses. (Leviticus 16:11-19) Another example is the ark Noah built in which eight souls were save by water. Baptism is the fulfillment of that type in what we are saved when Jesus buries and raises us with Him as we are immersed in water. (I Peter 3:18-21) We need to understand that the people of Judah held the Law of Moses and the prophets in such high esteem, that if Jesus had said He had come to destroy the law and the prophets, he would have lost all His audience. Thus, He need to explain His proper relationship to the Law and the prophets.

To destroy the prophets would have stopped the fulfilment of every prophecy related to man’s redemption through Jesus Christ, the establishment of the church and the return of Jesus as the conquering Messiah. There are about 400 prophecies related to Christ in the Old Testament. If all of these were taken away, our ability to show that Jesus is the Christ through the sure word of prophecy would be lost.

For Jesus to destroy the Law and the Prophets He would have to overthrow a fundamental promise of God. Through the prophet Isaiah God declares, *“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."* (Isaiah 40:8) This promise is repeated in I Peter 1:24. The scripture teaches that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. For Him to destroy the Law and the Prophets would be for Him to make Himself a liar.

* **Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.**

The statement that Jesus did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it has been used by people who teach that we are still under the Law of Commandments given to Moses and to deny the institution of a New Covenant that was for all people and not just for the people of Israel as was the Old Covenant. The Book of Hebrews was written to show us the profound excellence of the New Covenant given by Christ compared to the obsolete and ineffective Old Covenant given at Mt. Sinai. We trust the scripture as given by the Holy Spirit in Acts 15, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians and Hebrews, that we are not under the Old Law.

Why are we not under the Old Law? It is very simple. Christ fulfilled the Law. He came in man’s form to live under the Law. Because in Him dwelled all the fullness of the Godhead, He and He alone was able to live perfectly under the Old Law. Because He lived the Law in perfection, He was able to represent mankind and pay for the sins of all men by His death. He then by His death instituted a New Covenant to replace the Old Covenant. Please study the following: Hebrews 8:7-13, Hebrews 9:11-28.

Jesus fulfilled the prophets. Of the 400 hundred plus prophecies about Christ that we mentioned before, Jesus fulfilled every one of them that related to His life and death on the earth. Some samples include the place of His birth, the place He grew up, how He would die, things He said while on the cross, and a truly important one regarding His resurrection from the dead.

After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus plainly declares to His apostles that “all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning Me.” (Luke 24:44) Jesus says, I fulfill all.

* **Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.**

It is normal for people to ask why the OId Testament is still with us if Christ fulfilled the Law. There are still prophecies that relate to His return, and for this reason the Old Testament is still with us. God even tells us that He still has other purposes in the Old Testament. Romans 15:4 states *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”* I Corinthians 10:11 also comments on this.

Jesus said that until heaven and earth pass away, even the small characters in the Hebrew language will not be taken from the Old Testament until it is all fulfilled. These little characters are called a *“jot”* and a *“tittle.”* Here is what they look like:

This is the Hebrew word for “God.” The second character from the left is a jot. If you look at the third and fourth letters, you will see little marks that help distinguish the letters from other similar letters. In the third letter there is a little mark on the left of the character below the top bar. In the fourth letter is a little mark on the left above the top bar. Both of these marks are called “tittles.” We have them in English as well. Look at the letter “c” and the letter “e.” The horizontal bar in the “e” that makes it different from “c” is a “tittle.”

It is wonderfully significant that God has the determination to preserve His message to us even to point of preserving what some would say are insignificant marks. Not to God! They are evidence of His existence and His intervention in making sure we have His testimony given through the prophets and apostles to be sure we know what He wants from us.

* **Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.**

There is a very popular doctrine taught in churches today that says “As long as we believe that Jesus is our personal savior, it doesn’t matter what we do or how we live. The grace of Christ will preserve us.” We do not argue against the idea that grace is essential for our salvation since none of us can live perfectly. We do stand with Jesus in His teaching that what we do with regard to His word and how we live matters a great deal. Jesus plainly states that if take even the least of God’s commandments, break it, and then teach others to do the same, that our status goes way down. Please don’t take comfort in the idea that some would state, “Well, even if I am at the bottom, I am still in the kingdom of heaven.” Slow down and be sure you read the rest of the story. In this same message, Jesus makes a plain statement that we can claim we know the Lord, but if we don’t do what He says, then on the day of judgement He will say to us, *“I never knew you, depart from Me you who practice lawlessness.”* (Matthew 7:21-23) In Luke 16:10 Jesus teaches that if we cannot be faithful in small things, we will not be trusted with big things. Please do not be trying to figure out what you can get away with regarding the teaching of the Lord. We already know the answer—NOTHING!

* **Whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

This idea is the prelude to what Jesus teaches in Matthew 7:21. There our Lord plainly states that the one who enters the Kingdom of heaven is the one who hears what the Lord says and does it. Why is this such a hard concept for people to accept? My conviction is that the Devil has done an amazing job convincing people that they do not have to do anything to be saved. This idea is totally false. The true idea is that we cannot be good enough to earn our way into heaven. This is absolutely true! That said, the scriptures are abundantly clear that our Lord demands and expects our obedience to what He says we are to do. The whole idea of accepting Jesus as Lord is bound up in the idea that we are submissive to Him and obedient to what He tells us to do. If we want to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven, we need to believe and practice what Jesus says here: Do what He tells us to do and teach others to do it as well.

* **Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**

The scribes and pharisees used the approach of trying to be legalistic and using this strategy to escape responsibilities for their actions. Here are two famous examples. They made sabbath keeping into a ritual that let them justify refusing to help people in need while being willing to rescue one of their own farm animals that had fallen into a ditch. Jesus describes this in Luke 13:15 and Luke 14:5. Jesus also pointed out that the scribes and pharisees refused to help needy parents and blamed it on God because they were paying their tithe. (Matthew 15:3-9) Thus, these people pitted the commands of God against each other instead of making the PERSONAL sacrifice to do both.

They had a heart problem and an earthly mind problem. Sadly, there are lots of people who say they are Christians who play the same game. When we find ourselves in the position of facing conflicting circumstances, inevitably, many Christians will pick one that satisfies the flesh, emotion, or human feelings and put the Father and the Son in second place. Please remember that when we do this, we fall directly under what Jesus says, “we will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

In our next study, Jesus will give us examples of how we need to raise the level of our spiritual walk. We need to fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). Please, may we all honor the Son of God.