

The Fulfillment of the Law

Matthew 5:17-18

Three primary points

1. God's law had purpose
2. God's law has been fulfilled in Jesus
3. God has purpose for our obedience to Jesus

Read Matthew 5:1-22 & 27-28

May want to turn to and mark Romans 7

Just a quick refresher on the OT sacrificial system. In order to atone for the sins of the people, a blood offering was required. This began in the garden with the shedding of blood so that Adam & Eve's bodies could be physically covered. When God gave instructions for the tabernacle and later the temple, one piece of type of furniture was missing and that was a chair or a place to sit. This is because the sins of the people needed constant atonement. Sacrifices had to continually be offered and the priests never sat down. It took multiple priests to carry out this duty.

Ultimately when we look back on the law, the law was designed to teach us how truly sinful we really are. God in his sovereignty never looked down at humanity and said "I think they can do this. I think they can follow my commands." He knew we couldn't. Yet what we see throughout Jewish history and particularly at the time of the coming of Jesus is a setting in which the Jewish religious leaders had convinced themselves and to some extent the people, that one could completely keep God's law and thereby earn righteousness; earn salvation. For some people this may have seemed futile, and they just gave up because they saw that they couldn't do it and for others unmerited self-righteousness!

GOD'S LAW HAD PURPOSE

When we think of the law, we probably first think of the 10 commandments. We could stop there. That would be a good cliff notes version of the law. Jesus actually distilled it down further when he simply summarized it by loving God and loving others (Matthew 22:36-40). In essence, if we could have kept God's law perfectly, we would not have needed Jesus. Why then would God give his people a set of rules which he knew not only could they not keep, but would miserably fail at, and then command them to follow that law to perfection? Let's look at that question.

Here's the ending. God gave the law to point to Jesus. God didn't give the law as plan B or C. He gave the law as part of his ultimate plan A. God doesn't have a contingency plan because he doesn't need one. God knew what he was doing and the law served the exact purpose God intended it to. It pointed to Christ. That's easy for us to see, but let's cut those early Jewish

believers some slack. When Jesus was preaching what we now call The Sermon on the Mount, this was revolutionary. They didn't see the law as the method God was using to point them to the coming Messiah; they saw the law as their path to righteousness and salvation. But Paul, who remember, was one of these Jewish leaders, on the other side of knowing Jesus Christ, tells us in Galatians 3:24:

So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. Galatians 3:24 (ESV)

In Romans 7:7-10 & 22-25a he is even more specific on this matter:

7-10: 'What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

22-25: For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!' Romans 7:7-25a (ESV)

What Paul is telling us here is that the law actually taught us what sin was! The purpose of the law wasn't to save us. The purpose of the law was to teach us how lost and hopeless we are. In fact, if you look back contextually at the time it was given, what we would call the Mosaic covenant, God laid out all these rules so that His people would know how to live amongst heathen nations that worshiped a plethora of false gods and idols.

But what happened is that sinful men took something God made in his perfection and distorted it to make it something that it wasn't. By the time Jesus begins his ministry in the mid to late 20's AD, the Jews not only had the original law as given to Moses, but they had written laws about the law and then laws about those laws! They had distorted and twisted the law into something that God never intended it to be, and then the religious leaders took that burden and placed it on the shoulders of the people, all the while in their own minds, adhered to it perfectly!

Then Jesus showed up.

GOD'S LAW HAS BEEN FULFILLED IN JESUS

At the beginning of Matthew Ch 5 we see Jesus in the early part of his ministry teaching some revolutionary ideas. These ideas were radical. They were completely counter cultural.

Remember that the Jews, like much of the world at that point in history, were under Roman rule. And they despised the Romans. At the same time, the religious elite played politics with the Romans and vice versa. The Romans used the religious leaders to keep the Jewish people in submission, and the religious leaders, even though they disliked the Romans, appreciated the authority and cooperation they were given by the governing authorities. If you were a Pharisee or a Sadducee, then you lived comfortably. If you were a commoner, then probably not so much.

The narrative of the day would have been “blessed if you adhere to the law and are righteous”. Jesus taught “blessed are the poor in spirit”. The narrative of the day would have been “blessed are those who are elevated to positions of honor and authority”. Jesus taught “blessed are the meek”. The narrative of the day would have taught “blessed are those who zealously oppose the oppressor (particularly Rome)”. But Jesus taught blessed are the peacemakers.

Let’s move on and talk about Jesus fulfillment of the law. 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. ’ Matthew 5:17-18 (ESV)

Let me point this out. Before Jesus gets into specifics about how to live, how to follow the law if you will, he points out all these attributes about what I would call “heart attitude”. In verses 3-10 Jesus lays out what we call today “The Beatitudes”. Being poor in spirit, mourning, meekness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, being merciful, being pure in heart, being a peacemaker; these aren’t actions, these are heart attitudes. Actions flow from these heart attitudes. And here’s the deal, you could fulfill the law with a right or a wrong heart attitude.

How then does Jesus fulfill the law? He doesn’t come and say, “don’t worry about these rules anymore”. He comes and says “I am the fulfillment of the law”. We’ve discussed this in great detail a few weeks ago when Reggie preached through Hebrews. We see this beautiful picture of how Christ has assumed the role of the high priest and even better, unlike earthly priests, his sacrifice of Himself on the cross was good enough, period. It was so perfect and so complete that Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus finished the work and SAT DOWN! At no point in the history of God’s people had the priests ever completed the work that was done and been able to set down. There was always more work to be done. *But Jesus fulfilled the law. He finished the work.* Just not in the way the people of that time would have predicted.

If we look now in 21-22 & 27-28, He provides specific examples.

21-22 ‘ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

27-28 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ’ Matthew 5:21-22,27-28 (ESV)

In the eyes of man, you could not be a murderer with a peace and a love for a specific individual in your heart, or you could not be a murderer of a specific individual and literally hate them and wish that God would wipe them off of the face of the Earth. Man would say you’ve kept the command either way. You are righteous in the eyes of man. But here in this one sermon, Jesus clearly and plainly turns that upside down. He raises the bar, if you will. You can physically not commit the sin of murder, but if you hate that person, you’ve broken the command! The same with adultery. If you have lusted after another person, you’re an adulterer!

It’s not like this is new knowledge. You see it all over the Old & New Testaments if you’re looking for it, but the problem was that the vast majority of Jews were so influenced by the culture around them that they missed God in the very law that He gave them as a reflection of who He was. God didn’t provide anything in the law contrary to his very nature. Yet man in his sinfulness and rebellion against God had taken something God gave to point us to Him and made it all about us! Sound familiar?

GOD HAS PURPOSE FOR OUR OBEDIENCE TO JESUS

This is the part I would say is the application. We’ve talked about God’s law and its intent and we’ve talked about how Jesus was the fulfillment. Let’s wrap this up with the application of verses 13-16.

‘ “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. ’ Matthew 5:13-16 (ESV)

Jesus tells these people, listening to his preaching, “you are the salt of the Earth”, “you are the light of the world”. He doesn’t say “I am the salt of the Earth” and “I am the light of the world”. Not here. He is, that’s true. John says he is the “light of men”. But he clearly teaches here in these verses that **we** are salt and light. Is this because Jesus couldn’t do this on his own? You better believe it’s not! Jesus completed the work, he finished the sacrifice, he fulfilled the entire law in his life and death, and conquered death and hell in his resurrection. He doesn’t need us; He chooses us to be the primary mechanism by which to proclaim the gospel to the world. When Jesus does this, he’s not sending us out telling us to keep a bunch of rules, no He’s sending us out to reflect His glory to the world around us. He’s telling us in this sermon that the way man approaches God, the way man approaches righteousness is all backwards because we

tend to make it about us, and it's not about us, it's about God. Jesus Himself throughout his ministry pointed glory back to God the Father.

What does it mean then to be the salt and light? It means to follow Christ. And this isn't a shallow go to church on Sunday morning, drop some coin in the plate kind of following Christ. No it you think it's that easy, if you think it's about what you do, you're in the same boat as the Jews of Jesus' day. Their problem was that fulfilling God's law the way God intended the law to be fulfilled, with the right heart attitude was hard, so they made it easy by making rules and regulations that they could point to as a standard of their justification. They made up a bunch of rules which were essentially idols and said "as long as I do all these things, God will reward me". They completely missed the boat. Then Jesus came along:

' "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ' Matthew 23:23 (ESV)

'You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? ' Matthew 23:33 (ESV)

They completely missed Jesus in the very thing that was intended to point them towards him!

How is this good news? Because Jesus fulfilled the law through his life and death and for those who surrender their lives to Him as ultimate King and Savior, they have that same righteousness imputed upon them. We don't have to keep every rule perfectly every time, but we do have to fully surrender to Jesus. By grace, through faith in Him, we can throw that rule book out the window. That doesn't mean we have a free pass, no it Jesus just made it harder by making it simpler. He tore down all the "rules" constructed by man to show self-righteousness and just taught us to orient ourselves rightly to God and to man, and He also taught the standard wasn't doing or not doing the right physical act but having the right heart orientation towards both God and man at all times. Oh this is much harder than keeping a book of rules!

The problem with the 21st century church is that we've added a lot of stuff to what it means to be a Christian, or we've completely distorted what it means to be a Christian. We've fallen into the same trap. We've got our perfect attendance for a year in Sunday School badge, we've got our tithed every week badge, we've got our never committed any of the major sins badge, but we've made the same mistake as the first century Jews. We've made a bunch of rules that make us feel better about ourselves and gotten off mission. Or we've got another group who have watered down the gospel and made it about self or prosperity or one-sided love. God wants me to be happy, so he wouldn't give me these desires if he didn't intend for me to act on them. Seriously, think about this. The gospel in many western churches is so distorted it's not even the gospel. When you have a pastor say that "Easter is more transcendent than the resurrection....", we've got serious problems! When you've got pastors bringing in droves of

people looking for their best life now, we've got problems. This is not the take up your cross daily and follow me gospel that came from Jesus.

Many of you are thinking, "this is bad". But guess what, it's been bad for millennia. It's been bad since the fall. It's actually been worse at other times in history. I'm not trying to make light of what is going on around us, but I am trying to encourage you that God has and always will be on His throne. I also don't want to pull any punches here. There are attacks ongoing at the foundations of what it means to be a Christian. We are on a collision course between two vastly different worldviews, and to quote Reggie a few weeks ago, "if you think wearing a mask is persecution you're not gonna survive what's coming." Oh I'm not trying to be discouraging, but I am trying to encourage you that this is nothing new and it has NOT taken God by surprise.

But do let me warn you. Please, please do not fall into the same trap as the Jewish leaders that Jesus preached against so vehemently. Don't align yourself with political ideologies. That doesn't mean that we don't participate in politics or self-governance. We should be involved in the process. Twenty years ago you used to see these little cloth bracelets with "WWJD" on them, "what would Jesus do." There are some churches that you would sell more bracelets with "WWTD", "what would Trump do" than WWJD bracelets today. We can't allow ourselves to be so distracted by the world around us that it causes us to take our eyes off of Jesus.

The church cannot afford to get off mission. If you get off mission, then you are allowing the enemy to win. Don't allow yourself to get lulled into complacency because you are "OK" according to the current Christian culture. You won't be judged about how well you've behaved according to the current Christian culture. You'll be judged based on how well you followed Jesus. It's been very easy to have one foot in the church and one foot in the world in America, but it's becoming more difficult to do so. Some of you need to make that decision. Why? Because in the average church, it's not unreasonable to think that quite a few folks have been straddling the fence. You've been lulled by a false gospel that tells you if you do certain things enough of the time that you're "good enough". But Jesus demands complete and utter surrender. Jesus commands total obedience. And in case you missed it from his sermon in Matthew chapter 5, it's not just a physical act of obedience, it's a total reorientation of the heart towards Him.

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If you're setting here this morning and you have surrendered your life to Christ, praise God. Have joy in the turmoil you see around you because that means you are going to have more opportunities to be salt and light to the world around you. As the darkness closes in because lights are growing dim or going out, your light will be even more of a beacon to those around you. But if you're setting here today and you have never surrendered your life to Christ, you've been trying to work your way into God's favor, you don't know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then don't let this opportunity pass you by. Jesus set the bar high. He set the bar so high that no human could keep up, but then because of his vast love and grace and mercy paid

the price so that you wouldn't have to reach that bar, no He will lift you up, carry you over, and then let you share in the reward.

Prayer

CG Questions:

- What was the intent of the law?
- How had the religious leaders distorted God's law?
- What parallels can we draw for our own religious experiences today?
- How did Jesus fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17)?
- What is Jesus' "standard" for obedience to the law?
- In light of Jesus' standard, how do we attain righteousness before God?
- What "laws" have we set up in our own lives that need to be torn down so that we don't lose focus on Jesus?
- How does Jesus call his followers to live (Matthew 5:13-14)?
 - What are some practical ways we can do that this week?