



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13

# SERMON ON THE MOUNT

JESUS AND THE LAW | MATTHEW 5:17-20

The Old Testament transports us into a strange land with exotic customs far removed from our daily experience. While the Hebrew Bible fits neatly into its time and place, it feels a little awkward in ours. Sometimes it is hard to understand, and we struggle with its meaning. Sometimes it is quite clear, and we still struggle to square much of what we read in the Old Testament with the grace we find in the New.

So what do we do with the Old Testament? For some, the answer is obvious. They dismiss the Old Testament with a quick that-was-then-this-is-now wave of the hand. They find comfort in Paul's declaration, "We 'are not under the law, but under grace (Romans 4:16)'" Others are not so sure. If God is timeless and unchanging, except for a few rituals, dietary restrictions, and animal sacrifices, most, if not all, of what God required in the Old Testament should be binding on us as well.

When we come to the Sermon on the Mount, we find that Jesus has an extraordinarily high view of the Old Testament. He is committed to the smallest letter and the least stroke of a pen. So we cannot afford to wave it off. Yet something happens to the Law in the hands of Jesus that takes us beyond checking boxes and going through the motions.

Jesus not only ushers us into a new relationship with God, but he also introduces us to a new relationship to the Old Testament Scripture. He takes us beyond the letter of the Law into the heart of the Law. He introduces us to the vision of righteousness God had in mind all along.

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## JESUS AND THE LAW (vv. 17-18)

<sup>17</sup> *“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. <sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

1. The Law and the Prophets are shorthand for the whole of Hebrew Scriptures (or our Old Testament). Philip Yancey fondly refers to them as “The Bible Jesus Read.” Paul has the Old Testament in mind when he reminds us, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17).” Jesus taught his disciples that the entirety of the Old Testament pointed to him (John 5:39-40; Luke 24:25-27; 44-49). While many of us would minimize the Old Testament story, Jesus sees it as foundational to his story and our story as well.

To fulfill means to “bring to fullness.” What are some of the ways Jesus brings the Old Testament into its fullness?

2. What happens when we minimize the Old Testament story?
3. What happens when we fail to read the Old Testament in the light of who Jesus is and what he has accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection?
4. Describe how Jesus fulfills the Law for us?
5. Describe how Jesus fulfills the Law in us?

## US AND THE LAW (v. 19)

<sup>19</sup> *Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

1. What do you think Jesus is referring to when he talks about “the kingdom of heaven?”

2. According to Jesus, what constitutes “greatness in the kingdom of heaven?”
3. The Old Testament clearly requires that the people of Israel not wear blended fabrics, plant hybrid seeds, or crossbreed their cattle (Leviticus 19:19). Yet we do all of those. Mark tells us Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19). So we set aside some of the Old Testament purity laws, and so does Jesus. How do we square that with the fact that Jesus tells us, “Anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands... will be called least in the kingdom of heaven?”
4. How can we take Old Testament purity laws seriously, without following them to the letter?

## THE PHARISEES AND THE LAW (v. 20)

<sup>20</sup> *For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

1. The Pharisees were a reform movement in Israel that were deeply committed to the smallest letter and the least stroke of the pen. They would have applauded Jesus’ teaching on the Law, but often challenged his behavior. From what you know of the Pharisees, how would you describe their approach to righteousness?
2. While Jesus describes those who are “least in the kingdom of heaven” and those who are “great in the kingdom of heaven,” the Pharisees do not even make the cut. Jesus tells us, “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Why would the Pharisees, in spite of their devotion to the Law, remain on the outside looking in?
3. How can our righteousness possibly surpass that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law?