

Getting the Story of God's Law Right (Matthew 5:17-48)

Jesus switches gears rather abruptly

- A question or accusation about His view of the Law (Cf. unexpected; undeserving; non-elitist)
- Response: **I did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets**, but to fulfill
 - What is He talking about?
 - **Law and Prophets** = The entire Old Testament
 - Jesus **upholds** it as Holy Scripture (see **verse 18**)
 - **Jot/tittle; heaven & earth; all is accomplished**
 - = God's Holy Eternal Word = **Verse 19**
 - Jesus is the **fulfillment** of the whole thing (it finds its meaning in Him) (**v. 17**)
 - The sacrifices; the morality; the prophecies; the imagery, the story

Remember, Matthew has been teaching us that Jesus did not just appear without context

- The story...
- **The same is true with the Law (story) [important for understanding what Jesus is saying here]**
 - At what point of the story was the Law given?
 - **Before** we get to the 10 Commandments (**Exodus 20**), we have a whole book and a half of story (Loving Creation; Sinful Rebellion; Gracious Redemption; Work of Restoration)
 - **Before** God gave Israel the Law He was in **loving relationship** with them and we see a story of blessing, protection promise and fulfillment, and redemption/deliverance (salvation)!
 - **Before** God gave Israel His law, He gave them **Himself** as their redeemer¹
 - **So, when** we get to Mount Sinai, God reminds them of what has happened:
 - “**You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep my covenant...**” (Exodus 19:4-5, NASB)
 - God has acted in grace and rescued and saved them—**then Law (& obedience)**
 - ★Did not give the **Law** before the **exodus** and say **if** you obey **then** I will save you
 - **Precisely the other way around!**
 - He **saved them** and then asked them to **keep the Law in response**
 - He saved the undeserving by grace and then brought order/meaning to their lives
 - Cf. **Ephesians 2:8-10**, NASB

The **Law** was brought to Israel in the context of God's gracious redemption of them

- “**The Law was never intended as a means of achieving salvation but rather as guidance for responding to salvation by living in a way that pleased the God who had saved you.**” –Christopher Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, p. 194
- That is why the 10 Commandments begin with a statement, before giving a command
 - “**I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.**” (Exodus 20:2)
 - That is why when a **Jewish son asked his father** what the Law was all about, the answer was a story—the story of God's **gracious redemption** of Israel because of love
 - The very **meaning of the law** was to be **found in the story of God having saved/delivered**
 - **Deuteronomy 6:20-25**, NIV
 - **Our righteousness** (obedience to the Law) = was never meant to save us
 - **Our righteousness** was a **response** to **God's righteousness** in saving us (☹ earn)
 - **Obedience flows from grace—it does not buy it**
 - **Philippians 3:3c-9**, NASB
 - **No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.** (Rom 9:20, NIV)

= **Forms whole basis for how we understand verse 20**

- I.e. **If you are trying to prove your righteousness and earn your place through the law... you are coming up very short** (assuming question was in effect: What about righteousness from the Law?)

¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament (Second Edition)* (Downers Grove, Ill., IVP Academic, 2014), 194. This whole section of the sermon is indebted to this section of the book.

The story of redemption teaches us that: **Obedience flows from grace (and gratitude for it)—it does not buy it**

This is the right motivation for obedience (as response to God's kindness)

- **Good News** = We do not obey to be loved; we obey because we are so loved!
- And by His love, God has shown that **we can trust Him** with obedience
 - **Deuteronomy 10:12-13**, NIV

Now, **Israel had gotten off track in this story** (as we often do), and were trying to have their own righteousness

- Hence the supposed interruption in the Sermon that started with: **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God** (Matthew 5:3)
- **Verse 20**
 - If that is your standard—you are aiming too low
 - They were concerned with **external observance**—God is concerned with **heart and motive**
 - That forms the basis of the next section
 - Jesus is going to quote to them some of the OT Laws (and tradition) that they would see themselves as keeping and show the how they actually were not
 - **You have heard...**
 - **But I say to you...**
 - **Jesus is restoring the true perspective of the law**
 - Obedience in and from the heart

Now, we are just kind of going to read these and let them be what they are

- They are hard words (but not salvific)
- You will want me to explain them away; you'll have lots of questions; you'll feel uncomfortable
- The areas that Jesus will choose to address are very representative of how life is
 - **Relational strife; lustful looking; unqualified divorce; integrity of word; desire to get even; lame love**
- The alternatives He presents are how He intends life to be
 - **Harmony, purity, lifelong faithfulness, integrity, humility, selfless love**

Verses 21-48

Obedience is really important to Jesus—obedience from the heart (anyone can fake it)

By the time we get to the end, we realize that if we are trying to earn our way into the kingdom, we have no hope

- That is not the plan
 - If that were the plan—we are doomed
 - But Jesus sermon started with **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God**

We are being shown how to live in God's kingdom

- 1. Obedience as a true heart response to grace formed by gratitude, trust and love
- 2. Obedience patterned after God (= thrust of **verse 48; Cf. Leviticus 19:2**)
 - We are (as **God's people**) supposed to **reflect God** (Cf. **Matthew 5:16**)
 - God's grace is meant to provide the **motive for obedience**
 - God Himself is meant to be the **model for obedience**
 - The Law was given to Israel to help Israel **be like their God**
 - Which was **original intent**
 - Jesus, once again is **calling us back** to the way things are supposed to be

So, in your life, where are things the way they are **not supposed to be**?

- Where can you correct that (repent)
- Where do you need to rest in grace (forgiveness)
- Both are possible today
- Jesus is showing us the way... walk in it