

Sermon on the Mount

Christ, the Fulfillment of the Old Testament

Matthew 5:17 - 18

In these next passages, Jesus takes a sharp turn - from teaching on a disciple's character (i.e. the Beatitudes, salt and light) to how we live these virtues out, and He does so within the context of the Old Testament law and prophets.

A few weeks ago, we reflected on Jesus' emphasis that His disciples are to be different, not taking the cues from the culture around them. Here, in this week's Scripture, He seems to be saying that they *should* follow the Jewish laws and culture, thereby appearing to take a dramatic shift in His message. To understand why, we must consider how Jewish leaders were teaching and enforcing the Hebrew law.

The Pharisees were responsible for interpreting the law to help the Jewish people live in right relationship to God (i.e. righteousness). However, they often interpreted these laws in extreme measures and enforced them without taking into consideration intent. Jesus, rather, focused on the intent of the law, seeing righteousness through the lens of love rather than strict obedience. We will explore this in greater detail in the next few week's reflections.

Jesus didn't come into the world to abolish, dismiss or overturn the law or the prophets, or even to endorse or enforce them, but to *fulfill* them.

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

(Matthew 5:17 - 18)

What does that fulfillment mean?

As a faithful Jew, Jesus adhered to the Old Testament law and prophets, i.e. the Word of God, which has supreme authority, is absolute and can never be rescinded or reduced. In these passages, Jesus stresses that everything He teaches is in obedience to these Old Testament Scriptures. Fulfillment, then, means to carry out, to give full obedience to, everything that has been stated in the law and in the prophets. In other words, Jesus has come to fulfill the intent of the law by carrying it out in *perfect obedience*, down to the minutest detail. "[H]e humbled himself, taking the form of a slave (to the law)...becoming obedient (to the law) to death, even death on a cross..." (Philippians 2:7 -8) Though He is eternally above it, as Son of God, He came and was placed under the law, as one who had to carry it out.

Reflection Question: In what way did Jesus' obedience to the law – through the lens of love – result in His death on the cross?