

Bible Readings

Psalm 119:89-96

Lamedh

⁸⁹ Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.

⁹⁰ Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures.

⁹¹ Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you.

⁹² If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.

⁹³ I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life.

⁹⁴ Save me, for I am yours; I have sought out your precepts.

⁹⁵ The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will ponder your statutes.

⁹⁶ To all perfection I see a limit, but your commands are boundless.

Matthew 5:17-20

The Fulfillment of the Law

¹⁷ "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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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.

Sermon

28-Feb-21

How True Righteousness Comes (Psalm 119:89-96 and Matthew 5:17-20)**Intro**

- We're continuing our **series** on **Matthew's Gospel**
- It would be good to have your **Bibles opened at Matthew 5** - verses 17-20
- Let me **pray** first...

Intro/Context

- I came across this **true story** from Israel - from 1992.
- There were a **group of Jews** who followed strict rules **about** what can be done on the **Sabbath Day (Saturday)**
- Their **apartment caught fire** on the Sabbath
- So, they **telephoned their Rabbi** to see if "*phoning the Fire Department*" **on the Sabbath** broke the rules for "working" on the Sabbath
- You, see **strict Jewish rules** don't allow the **use of phones on the Sabbath** - because that would cause an **electrical current**, which would be considered to be a form of work.
- In the half an hour that the Rabbi took to decide whether it was legal - the **fire spread to two neighbouring apartments** - so three apartments burnt to the ground
- When God gave the commandment:

⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work

- I wonder if that's what He had in mind - that people couldn't put a fire out?

(pause)

- Last week we looked at the first 16 verses of Matthew 5
- **Imagine** what the people are thinking?
- In those 16 verses - **Jesus** has been teaching on this mountain side and He's just given the most amazing teaching in the beatitudes - about how people can be are right with God and approved by God - and about how people are to be salt to others - and a light to others - and **Jesus hasn't once mentioned God's Law in the Old Testament?**
- **People** are perhaps thinking [and perhaps we are too]
- Is God's Law in the Old Testament, in or out?
- How are Christians to think about God's Law in the Old Testament?
- What role does the Law play in Christian life?
- As Christians - we believe Jesus has died for our sins to be forgiven - and we believe Jesus rose from the dead, so we may have eternal life. So, what now?
- These are the questions Jesus deals with in Matthew 5:17-20
- And we will discover

- What Jesus thinks about the OT Law and how we should respond to the Law
- And we'll discover - what our obedience or disobedience to the Law means to our standing before God?

So, this morning we'll answer 4 questions [also in the outline]

1. How are Jesus and the OT Law related
2. How important is the OT Law to Jesus?
3. What should the attitude of Christians be towards the Law?
4. What does Jesus require of us for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven?

So, the 1st question then:

Q. How are Jesus and the OT Law related?

1. How are Jesus and the OT Law related?

- Answered in v17 - Jesus is aware that people might be thinking He has rejected the Law - as He hasn't mentioned it!

[PowerPoint 1-V17]



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.
Matthew 5:17

DailyVerses.net

- He says - **do not think I've come to abolish the Law and Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.**
- Some people might think - **as Christians - God's grace** in sending **Jesus** to die for our **sins to be forgiven** means - we have a **get out of jail card** - and we don't have any responsibility or requirement to follow God's Law
- But Jesus - says - **I have not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets - I have come to fulfill them!**
- We should clarify that - by "the Law and the Prophets" - we mean the **entire OT - Genesis to Malachi**
- Jesus is saying EVERYTHING that's been **written before me** in the Bible - **I've come to fulfil**
- Jesus is reading the **OT as His autobiography**
- Jesus is saying "The **OT is all about ME!**"
- When Jesus uses the phrase "I have come" - that's His Mission
- But - what does v17 mean by fulfil?
 - Well - there was **Jewish expectation** - from passages like Isaiah 2:3 [Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.] and Jeremiah 31:31 ["The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah"] - these passages say that the **Messiah would come and explain & teach things about the Law - more clearly and more**

fully - Jesus does this in rest of Matthew. So, fulfil means - **explaining God's Word more fully.**

- Fulfil also means - that **Jesus completes the Law's requirements** - He **obeys God's Law perfectly** - He **lives the life** that we were supposed to live but couldn't live because of our sinful nature - **Jesus lives His life perfectly without sin** - and He **dies as a once and for all sacrifice for sin** - and He **satisfies God's wrath** - and satisfies the demands of the Law
- And fulfil also means - Jesus fulfils the Law and the Prophets - because the Law and Prophets all point to Jesus - For example, the **family tree in Matthew 1** in the NT - is the **family tree of the promised Messiah from the OT** - and **Matthew says Jesus is the Messiah** - so fulfilling OT prophecies about the Messiah coming.
- Even OT history points to Jesus - so when Hosea 11:1 says: **When Israel was a child, I loved him, out of Egypt I called my son.** That's not only a reference to God calling the nation of Israel out of Egypt and into safety - it's also a reference to God calling Mary and Joseph and Jesus out of Egypt, once King Herod, who wanted to kill baby Jesus, had died. (Matthew 2:15)
- Application - So as we read and learn about Jesus - we are left with only 3 options as author CS Lewis puts it - "**when we look at Jesus – we can only have 1 of 3 conclusions: either Jesus is a Liar, or Jesus is a Lunatic, or Jesus is Lord**".

- Which do we think?
- The OT is like a shadow of Jesus
- Illustration - if you wanted to talk to someone after church and get to know them - you wouldn't go up to their shadow where they're standing - if you want to know the person - you don't talk to the shadow - you talk to the person. The OT is the shadow pointing to Jesus the person - who is revealed more fully in the NT

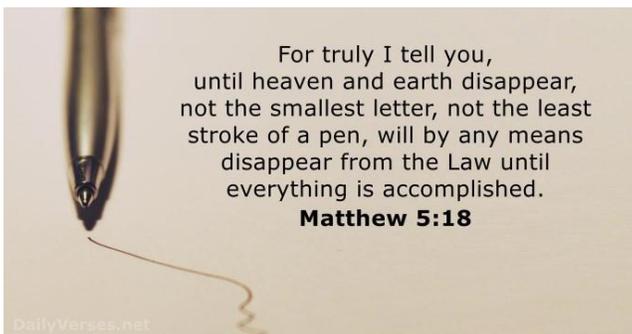
That's the first question, how are Jesus and OT related.

2nd question - How important is the OT Law to Jesus

2. How important is The OT Law to Jesus?

- Jesus answers this question in verse 18

[PowerPoint 2-v18]



- Jesus is saying the OT Law is of the utmost importance
- There is continuity between OT and NT

- OT is foundational - like a shadow linked to the body
- **V18** - is **confirming** the full inspiration of the Word of God - and **confirming** the authority of God and His Word
- **God has breathed His Word** down to the smallest detail - even down to the **punctuation marks** - even down to the **smallest parts of Hebrew writing** - none of it will pass away - until all of **God's purposes** have been **accomplished!**
- Jesus is affirming that the **OT Law continues**
- And Notice v18 begins with - Jesus saying "For **Truly**" I tell you - which means He's speaking the Truth -
- The word here for **Truly** - is **Amen [in Greek]**
- **Usually we say Amen** - after - we pray or say something
- But **Jesus gives the Amen first** - not at the end - showing how much **authority** His words have
- The Bible just doesn't CONTAIN the **Word of God** - IT IS the **Word of God** - every letter/word/stroke
- Notice back in v17 - Jesus says "do not think - I have come to" - the problem we have is thinking wrong about God's Word - that it's just **guidelines**, or that it was **just meant for the Jews** or **for a certain time** - but Jesus is saying it all stands even now
- The **Word of God stands longer** than the World!
- As our OT reading Psalm 119:89 said:" Your **Word, Lord, is eternal!**"

- Application - Do we approach God's Word - as though God is speaking it to us - even down to the punctuation - even down to the smallest detail
- Application - What would our **quiet times be like then?**
- Application - Key to reading OT - is to read it in a **Christ centered way** - by asking ourselves - what does this passage tell me about Jesus - **how do I get to Jesus from this passage?**
- Application - for example, when we read about the **OT laws about animal sacrifices**, do we to see their fulfilment is found in Jesus - as Hebrews 4-10 tells us - **Jesus is superior to angels**, greater than Moses and the prophets, He's our Great High Priest, superior to all the OT priests, the once and for all sacrifice for sin - not like the repeated sacrifices for sin in the OT.
- Application - If we don't read the OT with Jesus in view - we've **missed the point** - and we will **become legalistic** - instead of realizing Jesus has done all that is required in the Law. And it's not down to us to make ourselves right with God - *Jesus has already done it!*

That's question 2 - *How important is the OT Law to Jesus.*

Question 3 - what should the *attitude of Christians be towards the OT Law?*

3. What should the attitude of Christians be towards the Law?

- **Jesus as the Law Giver and the Law fulfiller** answers that in **verse 19**
- As Christians we must still pay attention to the **OT Law** - Jesus says.

[PowerPoint 3-V19]



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.

Matthew 5:19

- Jesus states clearly - anyone who breaks one of the least of these commands or teaches others to break them - will be **called least** - but **whoever practices and teaches these commands** - will be called **great in kingdom**
- Here we have **2 options available to us**:
 - If we break or relax God's commands - and teach others to do the same = we will be called **least**
 - If we put into practice God's commands - and teach others to do the same = we will be called **great**
- Jesus is addressing a problem of His day (and our day too) - where **people loosened or relaxed the grip of God's word/commands** on their conscience and hearts
- **V19 says - 2 things necessary**
 - **Firstly - Practicing God's Word** - albeit imperfectly - **applying it to lives and hearts** - not so it saves us - but because of our heart and

love for Christ - if we love Jesus, we will keep His commands (John 14:15). Not out of legalism - but out of love

- **Secondly - Teach others to do the same** - to honour and follow Jesus commands - **we must be disciples and make disciples** - then we will be called great
- Application: Let's take an example of one of the least of the commands - it's **difficult** for us to know what is one of the least of God's commands - but **let's take the NT verse from Heb 10:25** - **do not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing** [Linked to OT 4th commandment – keep Sabbath Holy]
- How seriously do we take that command?
- Do we relax it or practice it? Are we loosening or honouring that command?
- Are we practicing this command - because of our **heart and love for Jesus?**
- Are we teaching our children and grandchildren - to honour or loosen the command to meet together at **Church on Sunday?**
- God wants us to take His commands seriously

(pause)

- **Good News** - whether least or great - **we're saved by grace** - not by what we do.
- However - it's still **worth us asking ourselves** - what's our heart like towards God's word and His commands?

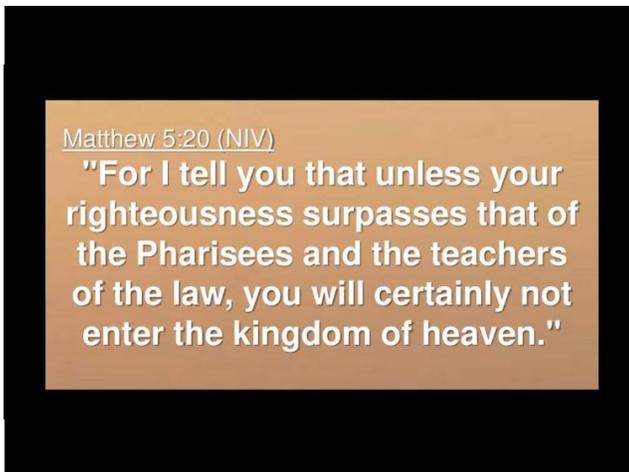
That's **question 3** - our attitude of Christians towards God's Law

Question 4 is - *What does Jesus require of us for entry into His Kingdom?*

4. What does Jesus require of us for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven?

- How do get into the Kingdom?

[PowerPoint 4-v20]



- See v20 - our righteousness has to surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law
- This is a **staggering statement** from Jesus
- The **Pharisees and teachers of the Law** were - **myopic** - **one-eyed** - about the law -
- In Jesus' time there were **613 laws** [From Genesis to Deuteronomy] - 248 positive and 365 negative

- The **Pharisees** and the **teachers of the Law** knew how many Hebrew letters were in the Law - they even gave offerings/tithes of their spices (of dill, mint, cumin - see Matt 23:23)
- Some of the **Pharisees** and **teachers of the law** even memorised the whole Law
- Can you imagine the **people's reaction** - when Jesus said - their **righteousness had to surpass the Pharisees?**
- **Shoulders shrunk down and heads dropped.**
- This is a **colossal mountain** to climb. It's all too hard.
- To the ordinary people - the **Pharisees** were **seen as the only ones in society who kept the law!** They were the **righteous ones!**
- The **people are thinking** - if the Pharisees can't get into the kingdom
- Who can enter the kingdom of heaven?
- Jesus is not criticising the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law for **their concern for the details of the law** - He's criticising the way they **THINK** about the Law
- There are **2 ways** that the **Pharisees** and **Teachers of the Law's** thinking was wrong
 - #1 They thought it was more important to **keep to the letter of the law** rather than the **Spirit of the law** - so for example when it came to the Sabbath rules - they **would not help people** or show

mercy and compassion to people in need on the Sabbath, because that would be "working" on the Sabbath rest day.

- #2 They thought keeping the law was the way into the Kingdom
- We have to be careful of the little Pharisee inside each of us - that says - 'Okay what Jesus means here, is to be more righteous - **I have got to do better** - I have to work harder - I have to memorise more of the Bible - I have to give a tithe every time I go to Coles and buy veggies I have to give a 10th to God'
- That's not what Jesus is talking about
- Jesus is saying to surpass the Pharisees and teachers of the law in righteousness - we have to think differently about the Law
- Remember last week, the beatitude - in v6 - **blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness – for they will be FILLED**
- Jesus is talking about a righteousness that comes FROM God - not from ourselves!
- And Romans 1:17 tells us this righteousness comes by faith - - For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is **by faith from first to last, just as it is written:** "The righteous will live by faith."
- None of us can be right with God - through our own perfect obedience - because we can't be perfectly obedient!
- The Good News is - We're right with God by our faith in what Jesus has done

- **True righteousness comes by the Gospel** (Christ Jesus died for our sins - and we are now right with God - and forgiven) - **true righteousness does not come by us working at it - or by doing - or by obedience**
- **Therefore, we must look to the Son of God - not to ourselves**

So instead, we honour God's Law - not for the sake of the Law - but for the sake of the One it points to - our Lord Jesus

We keep the law - because we hunger and thirst to be like our Saviour, Jesus!

So, as we live out our lives, we walk in faith of our Lord Jesus, and one day we will meet the Father - and He may say - 'you are great in the Kingdom of Heaven - because you took my commands seriously - and He may say - 'well done my good and faithful servant'.

May we all be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let's pray...