

Matthew
Every Stroke Inspired: Embracing Jesus' High View of Scripture (Part 1)
Matthew 5:17-20
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

Today, we begin a new section in “The Sermon on the Mount,” and really the heart of this most famous sermon of our Lord's. Now as we begin this, to make sure we don't get lost in all of the weeds, I want to give you an outline of the entire sermon; this is how it flows. First of all, we've already considered what we really could consider, “The Introduction to The Sermon.” I've entitled it, “The Citizens of the Kingdom” because we've already looked at “The Character” of those who belong to Jesus' kingdom in the eight Beatitudes, and we've looked at “The Influence” of those who belong to Jesus' spiritual kingdom. We are compared, by our Lord, to salt and light. That's who we are; that's who the citizens of Jesus' spiritual kingdom are.

That brings us, today, to the second part and really the body of the sermon. I've entitled it “The Righteousness of the Kingdom.” Here's what those who belong to Jesus' spiritual kingdom, this is what they're like. This is how they live. It begins in chapter 5, verse 17, and runs through chapter 7, verse 12. And, the righteousness of the kingdom, that is, the right kind of living reflected in the lives of its true citizens, demonstrates itself, first of all, in “A Right Relationship to the Scripture.” That's the message of chapter 5, verse 17, through the end of chapter 5.

Secondly, those who are really in Jesus' kingdom also demonstrate “A Right Relationship to God. That's the message of chapter 6. And then “A Right Relationship to Others,” and that's the theme of the first 12 verses of chapter 7. That's the body of the sermon.

The conclusion of the sermon I've entitled “The Dangers of the Kingdom.” It begins in chapter 7, verse 13, runs through verse 27, and the three dangers of the kingdom are “Beware of the Wrong Entrance,” thinking you're getting into Jesus' kingdom when you're not because you

found the wrong entrance. Secondly, “Beware of the False Teachers,” and the reason so many people find the wrong entrance, that is the wrong way to be saved, is because of false teachers who mislead them and misdirect them. And then the third danger is “Beware of a False Profession,” that is, claiming to be a disciple of Jesus when, in fact, the evidence of your life, your obedience to Christ, doesn't mark that reality.

Now, as I said, chapter 5, verse 17, through chapter 7, verse 12, is really the body of Jesus' sermon. And let me show you how He brackets the body of His message. Look at chapter 5, verse 17, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” Now go over to chapter 7, verse 12. This is how He ends the body of the sermon, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Notice that Jesus brackets the body of this sermon with the expression “the Law and the Prophets.” That's because “The Sermon on the Mount” is, in a very real sense, Jesus' exegesis of His explanation of the Old Testament. The proposition or the overarching theme of His message comes in the paragraph that we begin to study today. Let's read it together. Matthew, chapter 5, verses 17-20, you follow along in your copy of God's Word. This is Jesus' own word to us.

Do not think that I came to abolish The Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; But whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now, let me begin by admitting to you that this is a very difficult section of Scripture. In fact, D.A. Carson writes this, “Matthew 5:17-20 are among the most difficult verses in all the Bible.” So let's start by making sure we know what this paragraph is about. Jesus' theme here is clear from a recurring concept. You probably picked it up even as I read it. Verse 17, “the Law and the Prophets.” Verse 18, “the smallest letter or stroke from the Law.” Verse 19, “one of the least of these commandments.” Jesus here is talking about the Hebrew Scriptures—what we call the Old Testament. He was concerned that His disciples might come to a wrong conclusion about the Old Testament once they became His followers.

Now, He is going to explain to us, in verse 18, His own view of Scripture. Lord willing, next week we'll begin to examine that in detail. But I don't want you to miss the fact that Jesus' primary concern in this paragraph is not about His own view of Scripture but about what His disciples' should be; what your view, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, what your view of the Scripture should be. You see, Jesus was very concerned about us. Notice how verse 17 begins. He's talking to His disciples; He's talking to you; He's talking to me, “Do not think.” Jesus wants us to make sure that our own thinking about the Bible is right. He was concerned specifically in regard to two dangerous tendencies. They were present in the first century; they're still present today. One tendency is to think that the Old Testament no longer matters because Jesus has come, and we should essentially abandon it. A lot of Christians ignore the Old Testament in their Bibles. The other tendency is to copy the legalism of the scribes and Pharisees and to miss the entire point of the Old Testament like they did. Jesus is concerned about both of those.

We can summarize this paragraph like this. Here's the point of the verses we just read together. “A true subject of Jesus' spiritual kingdom, that is a person who's redeemed, a person who's been regenerated, who's experienced the new birth, a true subject of Jesus' spiritual kingdom

must have a right relationship to the Scripture.” We will have a right relationship to the Scripture, it won't be perfect, we have to grow in our understanding of this, but we all embrace the Scripture. If you're a Christian, you've embraced the Scripture because it was the Scripture from which you embraced the Gospel. At the very beginning of your Christian life, you embraced the reality of the truth of Scripture. But what exactly is a mature right response to the Scripture? How are we, as believers in Jesus Christ, to think about and treat the Word of God that we hold in our hands today? Jesus is going to teach us exactly how we should think and treat this Book. Now this is such a monumental text that, let me just prepare you for the fact that it's going to take several weeks to adequately cover it. We won't move this slowly through the entire “Sermon on the Mount,” but this text is the heart of “The Sermon on the Mount,” so we're going to look at it in great detail. Let me give you a roadmap of where we're headed.

First of all, in this paragraph, Jesus identifies “Three Responses to Scripture” that should characterize every genuine believer. Three responses that should mark you and how you think about the Bible. First of all, verse 17, “You Must Affirm Jesus' Relationship to the Scripture.” Secondly, in verse 18, “You Must Adopt Jesus' View of the Scripture.” And then thirdly, “You Must Apply Jesus' Diagnosis with the Scripture.” By that I mean this, Jesus is going to say, “Look, the way you treat the Scripture says everything about you, and you need to accept My diagnosis,” Jesus says, “of how you treat the Scripture and the state of your own soul.” Are you a strong believer? One who's great in the kingdom of heaven? Are you one of the least or are you not in the kingdom at all? Verse 20, “How you respond to and treat the Scripture is an accurate diagnosis,” Jesus says, “and you need to apply that diagnosis with the Scripture to your own life.”

Now, He points out a fourth response in the rest of the chapter. It's not part of our paragraph, but let me just give it to you as a bonus. The rest of this chapter tells us we must “Act on Jesus' Teaching of the Scripture.” In other words, He says, “Here's how I want you to obey the Scriptures in light of what I'm going to explain to you.

Now today, I just want to consider the first response that you and I, as disciples of Jesus Christ, should have toward the Scripture, and that is this, “Affirm Jesus' Relationship to Scripture,” affirm Jesus' relationship to Scripture. Look at verse 17, He says this, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” Now, in the first century, the expression, “the Law and the Prophets” was shorthand for what we call the Old Testament. Now, let me back up and give you just a little thumbnail sketch of what we're talking about here. We're talking about the books that form what theologians call “The Old Testament Canon.” Now, don't be surprised at that word ‘canon.’ The English word ‘canon,’ with one ‘n’ in the middle, not two; we're not talking about the artillery piece, the English word ‘canon’ comes to us through the Latin from the Greek word ‘*kanōn*,’ and originally the Greek word meant ‘a straight rod or ruler,’ often marked into units. In other words, it's like our rulers that are marked with inches or feet if you have a long enough one. That's what it meant originally, but in time, it was used not only for the ruler, but for ‘the series of marks that were on the ruler,’ and that led it eventually to refer to “a definitive list or series.”

Now, when we use this word of ‘The Canon of Scripture,’ we mean two things. We mean “a list of the books acknowledged to be inspired by God,” and “Therefore, those books that serve as the rule or standard of our belief and practice.” Let me say that again. “When we use the word ‘canon’ in this sense, we're talking about ‘A list of books acknowledged to be inspired by God,’ and ‘Therefore, those books that serve as the rule or standard of what we believe and of how we

live.” When Jesus preached “The Sermon on the Mount,” don't miss this, when Jesus preached “The Sermon on the Mount,” there was already a definitive list of books that were accepted as inspired by God.

What were those books? Well, the books in the Jewish canon of the first century contained exactly the same content as our Old Testament today. Now, the Jews listed those books and counted them differently. We have thirty-nine books in our Old Testament, but they originally had only twenty-four. That's not because it was different content, but because they simply counted them differently. For example, we have 1 and 2 Samuel, they had Samuel. We have 1 and 2 Kings, they had Kings. We have 1 and 2 Chronicles, they had Chronicles. We have Ezra and Nehemiah, they had Ezra/Nehemiah. We have the Twelve minor prophets, they saw those as a single unit. So they counted them differently, but it was exactly the same content as what we call the Old Testament today.

So, here's what I want you to understand about that. The list of books that belong to the Old Testament canon of Scripture was permanently settled long before Jesus came. That's the common view even of Jewish scholars. For example, David Kimchi, who lived in the 11 and 1200s AD, and Elias Levita, who lived in the 14 and 1500s AD, two extremely influential Jewish scholars, both taught that the final collection of the Old Testament canon was essentially finished by Ezra at a meeting called “The Great Synagogue,” 400 years before Jesus Christ, 400 years before. Even writers in the first century, for example, the secular writer, Josephus, a Jewish general in the first century who wrote a history of the Jewish nation for the Romans, he is talking about the Hebrew Scriptures, and he includes the same content in the Hebrew Scriptures of the first century as the books in our Old Testament today. And he argues that the

Hebrew Canon was essentially completed during the reign of Artaxerxes, the 400s BC, corresponding to the life of Ezra.

In fact, most Jewish scholarship, and I think the Old Testament itself, points to Ezra as being the one under whom that Old Testament Canon was finalized. The books that had already been accepted as inspired were simply affirmed by “The Great Synagogue” under Ezra. And Ezra is a likely candidate for several reasons, but let me just show to you, his credentials. Go back to Ezra, chapter 7; Ezra 7, and look at verse 6, “This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD (Yahweh) God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD (Yahweh) his God *was* upon him.” Look at verse 11, “Now this is the copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, (the one) learned in the words of the commandments of the LORD (Yahweh) and His statutes to Israel.” And the people understood and respected this. Go over to Nehemiah, chapter 8. When the people of Israel get back into the land of Israel after the Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah 8, verse 1-3:

And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD (Yahweh) had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square...from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

And he opened the book, he read it, he and the priest explained the book of the law of God to the people. These were his credentials. Ezra wrote the book that bears his name. He probably

also wrote Nehemiah as well, although much of Nehemiah comes from the personal journals of the governor, Nehemiah himself. Ezra and Malachi, think about this, Ezra and Malachi, the one who wrote the last book of our Old Testament, they were contemporaries. And Jewish tradition says that they were part of that “Great Synagogue,” a gathering that lasted somewhere between twenty to fifty years when they would meet, and they collected, and they preserved the Scripture.

So here's the big picture I want you to get. The Old Testament canon, the list of books accepted as inspired by God, by the people of God, “That canon closed by c. 400 BC,” 400 years before Jesus. The people of God were united in accepting that as God's Word. Now in the New Testament, those books that we refer to as the Old Testament or the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly in the Gospels, are identified in these ways. Sometimes the entire Old Testament is called “The Law.” I'm not going to take you to the text, but you can look them up if you're interested, “The Law.” (John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; 1 Cor. 14:21). Sometimes, it's called “The Law and the Prophets.” “The Law,” meaning the first five books of Moses; “The Prophets,” meaning the rest of the Old Testament. And sometimes it's broken up into the threefold Jewish division, and one time it's called, this in the New Testament, “The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms,” speaking of those three divisions. But here's the point I want you to get. During Jesus' lifetime, the exact books of the Old Testament, in the Bible you hold, were already universally accepted as the inspired Scriptures.

You say, “Well, wait a minute, Tom, what about the Apocrypha?” Well, let's talk about the Apocrypha for a moment. The books that we commonly call that today that are included, for example, in the Catholic Bible, they were included in the Septuagint. Now, stay with me; a little history, but it's important. The Scriptures were originally written, primarily in the Old

Testament, primarily written in Hebrew, a few chapters in Aramaic; but by the first century, most of God's people didn't speak Hebrew, and so it was translated into Greek, the common language of the first century. That translation, which happened a couple hundred years before Christ, is called "The Septuagint." That's the Bible of the first century because most people couldn't read Hebrew, so they read this translation. Now, in the Septuagint, the Apocrypha is included, but those books were not considered to be inspired. Let me give you a clear example. This is from Josephus again. Josephus had and used the Septuagint, the Greek translation, but he writes this of the Jews, "We have not tens of thousands of books, discordant and conflicting, but only twenty-two." He takes the same content as our Old Testament, gathers it into a different number of books, only twenty-two, "containing the record of all time, which have been justly believed to be divine." That's what he says about our Old Testament.

Now, he writes this about the Apocrypha, "From Artaxerxes to our own times, a complete history has been written (He's talking about the Apocrypha.) but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets." In other words, he says, "Malachi was the last prophet. There have been no more prophets, and so what those people wrote that's called the Apocrypha isn't deemed worthy of being considered equal with what was written by the prophets of God." "Josephus argues that nothing had been added to the Scripture since 400 BC, and Malachi, the last Old Testament author." You say, "Well, what about the New Testament? Does the New Testament have anything to say about the Apocrypha?" It does—by its silence! Think about this, "Jesus and the Apostles quote from the Old Testament as divinely inspired by God over two-hundred-ninety-five times, but not one time does the New Testament refer to the Apocrypha!" So, what you need to understand is that Jesus' comments, back in our text in Matthew 5, Jesus' comments here

are about the inspired Scripture that they had at that point in human history. Of course, the Apostles had not written the New Testament at that point, so He's talking about what we call the Old Testament.

Now, keep your thumb there in Matthew 5, but turn back to the table of contents in your Bible. Most of your Bibles have a table of contents. I just want you to look at the table of contents and find the portion that's identified as the Old Testament. Take a look at those thirty-nine books identified as the Old Testament. Friends, that is exactly what Jesus is talking about in “The Sermon on the Mount.” It was exactly the same content as our Genesis to Malachi. And here's the crucial lesson you need to get; Jesus our Lord explicitly endorsed those thirty-nine books, the canon of the Old Testament, as the very words of the living God. That's why we believe the Old Testament. Go back to Matthew 5 and look at verse 18. Here's what Jesus said about those thirty-nine books, “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or (pen) stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” That's what Jesus believed about those thirty-nine books you hold in your Old Testament. Lord willing, we'll examine that more carefully next week.

But for the rest of our time today, I want you to go back to verse 17 because in verse 17, Jesus makes two assertions about how we, as His followers, must think about the Old Testament Scripture. The first assertion is negative, don't think like this. The second assertion is positive, do think like this. Let's look at them. The first assertion Jesus makes in verse 17 is that “He did not come to *Abolish* the Old Testament.” He says, the first half of the verse, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets.” You'll notice Jesus begins the verse with a command, “Do not think.” The Greek word for ‘think’ here has a couple of nuances. It means our normal English usage, it means ‘to form an idea about something, to think.’ But the other nuance of this

Greek word means ‘to believe a commonly held idea.’ So Jesus here is telling His disciples not to form or believe an idea about Him that was apparently commonly held in the first century. Specifically, a flawed idea about His relationship to the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets. Now, there's no record in the Gospels that Jesus' enemies ever accused Him of denigrating the Old Testament.

But later, they would level this very charge at the Apostles. Turn over to the book of Acts, chapter 6; chapter 6, and verse 11:

Then they secretly induced men to say (of Stephen), “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and *against* God.” (and God’s Law, verse 13). And they stirred up the people. (verse 12); (Verse 13). They put forward false witnesses who said, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place (the temple) and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and (He will) alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.”

Look at chapter 18; Acts 18, and verse 13, you see this same accusation coming against the Apostle Paul in Corinth. Acts 18:13 says, “(They were) saying, ‘This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law,’” to the law of Moses, to God's Word. Go to chapter 21, verse 28, same message. Paul is seized in Jerusalem and they say of him, “This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law.” So, this was that of which they accused the Apostles. It's possible that Jesus' enemies leveled the same charge against Him during His own lifetime. I mean, think about it, it makes sense, Jesus really didn't fit in, right? I mean, He wasn't a Pharisee. He hadn't been trained in their schools. He publicly criticized them in their teaching. He took issue with their legalistic understanding of salvation and taught the doctrine of divine grace alone. He hung out with sinners and tax gatherers. He often violated

their traditions, their flawed interpretation of the Old Testament, which they believed was equal in authority to the Old Testament. So, it's very possible that His contemporaries accused Him of tearing down the Old Testament because, from their point of view, He just didn't seem to take the Law of God as seriously as they did. It's possible that even Jesus' own disciples were confused about how to think about the Old Testament. So, Jesus says, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Old Testament.”

Now, the Greek word ‘abolish’ here is a very strong word. Let me give you some definitions from the leading Greek lexicon. Listen to the strength of this word, it means ‘to cause the ruin of something, destroy, demolish, dismantle, to cause to be no longer in force, abolish, annul, make invalid, do away with, annul, or repeal.’ Wow! That's a strong word. It's even used of tearing down a bridge or a wall or a house. It's used of destroying the temple, stone by stone, later in Matthew's Gospel. When this word ‘abolish’ is used of an authoritative text, as it is here, it means ‘to declare it no longer valid or binding.’ Jesus says, “Don't you dare believe the common misunderstanding that I've come to tear down the authority of the Old Testament Scripture, whether it's the Law, the first five books of Moses, or whether it's the Prophets, the rest of the Old Testament. He didn't intend to tear down the Old Testament by His practice, failing to keep it, or by His teaching by undermining its authority in the lives of God's people. William Hendrickson writes, “His ministry was not in collision with the Old Testament, but in harmony with it.”

Now, I suspect you believe that. But let me ask you this, think about this, “As New Testament believers, we love the New Testament, right?” And it's absolutely right that we should, but that doesn't mean that we should not value the Old Testament. The Old Testament Scriptures are as much a part of the Christian faith as the New Testament. They are just as much breathed out by

God, those books, as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Remember Paul's statement about the sacred writings, in 2 Timothy 3, points back primarily to our Old Testament. So let me ask you, and I mean for you to answer this question in your own mind, "Have you, as a Christian, as a follower of Jesus Christ, ever even read through the Old Testament? Is it so unfamiliar to you that you're tempted to think Hezekiah is one of its books? Do you think the Old Testament consists primarily of Psalms and Proverbs?" You know, we lived in L.A.; the joke was that people who live in L.A. and New York think that those two cities meet somewhere in the middle of the country. They're oblivious to the rest of it. Are you like that when it comes to the Old Testament? Do you think Psalms and Proverbs are the Old Testament? Listen, the New Testament has not replaced the Old. They perfectly fit together to form a unified whole. Jesus says in Matthew 13:52, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven (in other words, every scribe who's been redeemed, become my follower) is like the head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

As the Puritans used to say of the Old and New Testaments, "The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed." J.C. Ryle says the Old Testament is, "The Gospel in the bud, the New Testament is the Gospel in full flower." If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, in this text Jesus is saying, "Don't you, for a moment, believe the mistaken idea that I came to tear down God's revelation in the Old Testament!"

This verse makes a second assertion about the Old Testament, and that is that "He Came to *Fulfill* the Old Testament." Verse 17 ends this way, "I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." It's a remarkable statement, but exactly how does Jesus fulfill the Old Testament? Well, Jesus meant three things at the same time, let's look at each of them individually. First of all, Jesus meant this, that "He perfectly explained its meaning in His teaching," He perfectly explained its

meaning in His teaching. This is really clear in the context because the rest of chapter 5 illustrates this very point. In a series of six stunning examples, Jesus shows how badly the Jews had misunderstood their Hebrew Scripture, and He shows how God intended them to understand it.

Let me just show you a couple of examples. Go back to Matthew 5, look at verse 21. Here's example number one, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you..." You see the contrast? Look at verse 27, "You have heard that it was said. 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY;'" and it stops with the act. Verse 28, "But I say to you," that's two of six examples as the rest of this chapter unfolds where He's going to teach them what God meant in the Old Testament Scripture. So in Jesus' teaching then, we learn the true meaning of the Old Testament. Martin Luther writes, "He speaks of that fulfilling which is accomplished by teaching." John Calvin says, "The question here is a fulfilling by teaching." You see, Jesus is Israel's rightful Messiah, the Anointed One, and He alone has the right to provide a definitive exposition of the Old Testament, and that's what He does in His teaching.

There's a second way that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. Not only does he fulfill it by perfectly explaining its meaning in his teaching, but "Jesus perfectly obeyed its commands in His life," He perfectly obeyed its commands in His life. As we're going to see as Matthew unfolds, Jesus never felt compelled to keep the Pharisees' rules and traditions, but He always kept the Old Testament. Matthew 3, if you flip back a couple pages, you remember even in His baptism, Matthew 3:15, Jesus claimed that in doing so, it was part of His entire life of (What?) "...fulfilling all righteousness." John 8:46, don't try this at home, Jesus said to the people around Him, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" I love John 15:10, Jesus just throws this into a

statement. He says, "I have kept My Father's commandments." There is not another one of us here that can say that. "I have kept my Father's commandments."

But I want you to turn with me to Galatians, chapter 4, because here Jesus explains how His perfect keeping of God's Law fits into our redemption through His Apostle, the Apostle Paul. Galatians 4:4, "But when the fullness of the time came (That is when everything on history's stage was just right.), God sent forth His Son." That speaks of pre-existence; He was God's eternal Son. You weren't sent forth, you were born, but the Son of God was "sent forth." He was "...born of a woman," so He was also fully human. But notice the end of verse 4, "He was born under the Law." That is, He was born with a responsibility to obey all of God's commands, just like you were, just like I was. But guess what? None of us ever have. If you want to, you have any question about that, just work your way through the "Ten Commandments" and compare them to Matthew 5, where Jesus makes them all internal. And what you will discover is what I came to understand many years ago, on the day of my salvation, and that is that I had shattered the Law of God, that I had never kept a single command of God, and neither have you, but He did!

Why? Verse 5, "so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." You see, Jesus perfectly kept God's Law. He never had a sinful thought. He never spoke a sinful word. He never committed a sinful act. He was perfect in His obedience, and that meant He didn't need to die for His own sins. That qualified Him to be a substitute for the rest of us who would believe in Him. He didn't deserve to die, but He died. Why? For those who would believe in Him, to purchase our forgiveness, so that God could be just and still forgive the sins against Him. If you're here today, and you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, that's your only hope of ever being right with God. You have shattered God's Law

like I did. You haven't kept a single one of God's Laws, and you deserve the penalty. And the only way that God can be just and forgive you is for you to accept the only way He's provided, the Lord Jesus Christ's—perfect life, substitutionary death, and resurrection. You've got to give up your pride, humble yourself, and cry out for God to forgive you because of Jesus and follow Him.

There's a third way that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament, “Jesus perfectly embodied its message in His person.” That is, He brought its message to fruition in Himself. Matthew frequently uses the word ‘fulfill’ in this way. Some ten times in his Gospel, he refers to something coming to reality in Jesus to which the Old Testament had pointed. Jesus embodied the message of the Old Testament in a couple of ways. First of all, “He fulfilled its prophecies about Messiah.” Turn over to chapter 11; Matthew, chapter 11. A group of John's disciples, John the Baptist's disciples, had come to Jesus, and Jesus answers their question, and as they're leaving, starting in verse 7 of Matthew 11, Jesus makes some comments about John. Go down to verse 10, He says of John the Baptist, “This is the one about whom it is written (in Malachi), ‘BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.’” In other words, He says, “John the Baptist is announcing the Messiah.” And then he says this in verse 13, “For all the prophets and the Law (Again, that's the entire Old Testament.) prophesied.” Prophesied about what? About the Messiah who would come until John came and points now to the Messiah. Do you see what Jesus is saying? It's pretty remarkable. He's saying, “Not only did the prophets prophesy about the Messiah, but the Law prophesied about Him as well.” That means the entire Old Testament prophesied about Jesus. He came to fulfill the Old Testament in the sense that He would be the fulfillment of all of those prophecies about the Messiah. France writes, “We might then paraphrase Jesus' words, ‘Far

from wanting to set aside the Law and the Prophets, it is My role to bring into being that to which they have pointed forward to carry them into a new era of fulfillment.” Jesus embodied the message of the Old Testament in that He fulfilled its prophecies about the Messiah.

But secondly, He also did so in that “He was the reality to which all of its ceremonies and its entire sacrificial system pointed.” D.A. Carson writes, “Jesus does not conceive of His life and ministry in terms of opposition to the Old Testament, but in terms of bringing to fruition that toward which it points.” Jesus said this clearly after His resurrection. Turn to Luke; Luke's Gospel, the 24th chapter. You remember these words. Luke 24, verse 27, He says to the Emmaus Road disciples, let's start at verse 26:

“Was it not necessary for the Christ (Messiah) to suffer these things and to enter into His glory? Then beginning with Moses (That's the first five books of the Old Testament.) and with all the prophets (That's the rest of the Old Testament.), He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” (Then to the Apostles who were gathered, down in verse 44.) Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in The Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, (There's that Jewish threefold description of our Old Testament, “all of those things which are written about Me in the Old Testament.”) must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (And what's there?)...“Thus it is written, (verse 46) that the Christ (Messiah) would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Jesus says, “That's what the Old Testament does, that's what it teaches.”

Turn over to Colossians, chapter 2; this is one of my favorite passages, Colossians 2, verse 16, Paul says, “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink (the Old Testament dietary laws) or in respect to a festival (that's the annual feast) or a new moon (that's the monthly new moon festival.) or a Sabbath (the weekly Sabbath) day” (Don't let anybody judge you in how you keep those days. Why? Verse 17.)...those “things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” Now if you have a version of the Scripture with footnotes, you'll notice that the word ‘substance’ is not the actual Greek word, the Greek word is even better, it is ‘body.’ He says all of that stuff in the Old Testament, those ceremonies, they were shadows of the One who was to come, and now the body is here. When you see a shadow, you see certain things about a person, right? You can maybe judge something about their overall shape, but when the body shows up, you don't need the shadow anymore. Michael Wilkins puts it well; he summarizes it like this:

Jesus fulfills all of the Old Testament in that it all points to Him, not only in its specific predictions of a Messiah, but also in its sacrificial system, which looked forward to His great sacrifice of Himself, in the laws which only He perfectly obeyed, and in the wisdom literature which sets forth a behavioral pattern that His life exemplified.

We sang it this morning, “Christ Our Wisdom,” He was the exemplification of wisdom. Jesus' Gospel of the kingdom does not replace the Old Testament, He (Wilkins) goes on to say, “But rather fulfills it as Jesus' life and ministry, coupled with His interpretation complete, and clarify God's intent and meaning in the entire Old Testament.” Jesus says, “I came to fulfill it.”

Now, can I just give you a challenge this week? Let me challenge you to meditate in the week to come, just on this one magnificent verse, “Christ came not to abolish, but to fulfill the entire Old Testament.” He perfectly explained its meaning in His teaching, He perfectly obeyed its

commands in His life, and He perfectly embodied its message in His person. No wonder the Apostle John calls Jesus “The Living Word.” Christian, take a look at that Bible you hold in your hand, that is a complete Scripture. It's held together by a common theme, “God is redeeming a people by His Son, for His Son, to His own glory.” In the Old Testament, the message is, “Here's why you need Him to come, and He's coming, He's coming.” In the Gospels, it's, “He came, and this is what He did when He was here.” In the Acts and the Epistles, it's, “This is what His coming meant,” and in Revelation, “He's coming again!” Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.”

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for our Lord's teaching here. Help us to embrace it. Lord, may we affirm Jesus' relationship to the Scripture as He has taught us here. May it shape our thinking. Lord, this week, help us to meditate on these things this is such a monumental text.

And Father, I pray for those here today who have never been redeemed, Lord, help them to see their only hope is the only One who has ever perfectly obeyed all of Your commands. His life, His death, His resurrection. Lord, may they humble themselves and cry out to You today like the tax collector in Jesus' story. May they cry out from their heart, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner.” And thank You, O God, that You never turn away a contrite heart. We pray for them today that You would work, that You would bring light where there is darkness. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.