



## DEVOTIONAL WEEK #4 - MATTHEW 5:17-20

### Scripture

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. 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. 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. 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.

Matthew 5:17-20 NIV

Watch this Visual Commentary from the Bible Project.

### Context

The message Jesus is giving in the “Sermon on the Mount” on the rolling hills near the Sea of Galilee is revolutionary. He is trying to shift thousands of years of Jewish culture, ceremony, and tradition that many people had turned into something focused only on outward appearances. The interpretation and practice of the Jewish law and prophets had drifted away from the heart of God. Jesus wanted them to understand the significance of the reign of God coming down to earth in him and what this was going to mean for the world. He was laying the groundwork for them to understand a new way of thinking that came from the heart and connected you to God’s heart.

### Questions:

What was the current day’s context for Jesus making this statement in verse 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...”?

What can you point to in the gospel accounts that would give Jesus a reason for saying this? (Hint: read Mark 2:23-27, Mark 7:1-23, Matthew 22:15-22)

What connects this section of the sermon with the previous sections including the Beatitudes? What idea or thread is connecting all of chapter 5?

## **Fulfillment**

Keep in mind that by the time Jesus came to earth and was sharing this teaching, the laws were already more than a 1000 years old and there were questions about what was relevant and what wasn't.

The Sadducees and the Pharisees are debating and fighting over the interpretation and application of the law. The Pharisees were literalists and the Sadducees were setting aside specific laws. Jesus drops a bomb into the arguments of the day saying in verse 5:17 (ESV) "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."

### **Questions:**

What does it mean to fulfill the law and the prophets?

How does Jesus complete or fulfill the Law?

How does his atonement for our sin change how we view the Law?

## **Permanent**

Jesus reveals that there's a purpose for every word, letter, dot, squiggle of the Law and the Prophets and it is more permanent and secure than even the earth and sky.

Read verse 5:18 here in Mathew and a similar thing that Luke recorded Jesus saying in Luke 16:17.

### **Questions:**

What is the overall point Jesus is making?

How does Jesus' teaching about the permanence of the law in verse 5:18 relate to our understanding of grace?

## **Least & Great**

Jesus is encouraging us to place a high value on understanding the law so we follow and seek after God's heart and his will for us. He wants us not only to teach it and give it a voice, but do it.

How does Jesus' teaching about the importance of obeying even the smallest commandments challenge our modern understanding of morality, which often focuses on major sins and ignores the significance of smaller, seemingly insignificant actions?

### **Questions:**

What does it mean to be "least" or "great" in the kingdom of heaven? Where else does Jesus use this concept?

How do you reconcile what Jesus is saying in verse 5:19 about relaxing one of the least of these commandments and what Paul writes in Galatians 3?

## Surpass

I'm sure these were jaw-dropping statements for those listening to Jesus. In fact, I would not be surprised if people even expressed something out loud as they heard Jesus say "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." I'm sure if there were any Pharisees or teachers of the law in the crowd they were probably offended.

### Questions:

Before you answer the following questions on this passage, please read Genesis 15:1-6, Psalm 1, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Romans 1:17, and Philippians 3:1-9.

How do you describe Righteousness before Jesus and how would you define it after the Cross?

What is the Kingdom of Heaven?

What do other gospel writers use for this same phrase by Jesus? What other ways have you seen this translated?

Jesus calls us to a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. What does this mean in practical terms for our daily lives?

How do we strive for this higher standard without it being about following rules and checking off boxes?