

*A state patrol officer noticed a vehicle on the interstate doing 24 miles an hour, so he pulled the car over to make sure everything was all right. When he approached the driver, he discovered that it is a nun. The officer asked, "Excuse me sister, but are you alright?" She replied, "Oh, yes officer, we're just fine. Was I doing something wrong?" The officer said, "Well sister, you were traveling way under the speed limit, and I was concerned that you might be having car trouble or something." "But officer", the nun interrupted, "I saw a sign about a mile back that said 24, and I know I wasn't going any faster than that." Chuckling, the officer said, "Sister, that was a state highway route marker, this is State Route 24, not the speed limit. The speed limit signs have an MPH at the bottom." "Oh, now don't I feel foolish!" replied the nun. "That's ok" said the officer, but please try to be more careful, I would hate to see you get hurt."*

*Then as the officer turned to say good-bye to the nuns in the back seat, he noticed for the first time that they were all trembling and quite pale. "Sister, what is wrong with your friends? Can I escort you to a hospital?" "Oh, no, they'll be all right. We just turned off of Route 135."*

This nun did not know the rules of the road, and this morning, Jesus is going to explain to those who had questions about His knowledge of the rules, that He knows them far better than anyone might ever think.

So, here's the setting. Jesus is up on a hill somewhere near Capernaum, and He's preaching His *Sermon on the Mount*. Jesus began with what we call the *Beatitudes* where His focus was on the character of those who would follow Him in the kingdom, and then using this teaching about character as a springboard, Jesus said to His listeners, "*You are salt*" and "*You are light*" – using these two metaphors to describe the godly influence His followers were to have in this world so that they might draw attention God.

In His sermon, Jesus goes right to the heart – to the core, He's focused on the *inner* person, whereas the other teachers of His day focused on the *outer* rules – and there were a lot of them.

If you remember back in **Exodus**, at the foot of Mount Sinai, Moses and the people of Israel were given the Ten Commandments. These were God's moral standards, declaring from His point of view what is right and what is wrong – but unfortunately, over time, God's moral standards were misinterpreted and misapplied by His people who focused solely on the letter of the Law and completely disregarded the spirit behind it. The Jews turned it into an external

thing – they turned it into a *religious system* – a system of man-made rules and traditions that grew into the hundreds over the years – rules and traditions they elevated to the standard of Scripture, and sometimes beyond.

So, as times changed, when they were presented with new situations, when there was a problem, when they thought there was a gap in God’s Word, the religious leaders would create more rules and more traditions – rules and traditions that pushed God’s moral standards into the background – rules and traditions they stacked up on people like heavy bricks, and of course, no one could question, doubt, or challenge what these religious leaders were teaching because they allegedly represented God

In those days, Judaism became a *system* of rules and traditions where the line between God’s Word and man’s word became so blurred that no one could tell the difference. Judaism had become a *system*, without any heart, without any thought about character, and without any life.

Jesus is teaching unlike anyone else, and these are average everyday people who had been brought up in this *religious system* – told what to believe and told what to obey were listening, and as they were listening, they were thinking,

“Where are all the rules?” “There has to be rules to be righteous.” “Is Jesus against the rules?” “Is Jesus against Scripture?” That’s what they’re thinking.

Well, as we will see, Jesus was not against Scripture, instead, He’s against what they did to Scripture. He’s against the misinterpretation and the misapplication of Scripture. He’s against what they had added, and subtracted, and substituted as Scripture, and now Jesus is going to set the record straight.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 5** and we will begin with **verse 17**,

**Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.**

If you notice, Jesus begins with the words “**do not think**” indicating that’s exactly what they’re thinking. The people who were listening were thinking that Jesus was against Scripture, and with those words Jesus was saying to them,

*“I know exactly what you are thinking.” “You’re thinking I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets.”*

Now what does Jesus mean by **the Law or the Prophets**? Well, if you remember, Moses wrote **Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy**. These first five books are referred to by the Jews as *the Torah – the Law*, and in this context, the other remaining books fall under the category of *the Prophets* for it was common for the Jews to see any writer of Scripture as a prophet.

So, when Jesus mentions *the Law* or *the Prophets* – it's a short-hand way of referring to Scripture – what we call the *Old Testament*. Jesus is talking about Old Testament Scripture as a whole, and I want to share an example of how He used it.

If you recall, after His resurrection, Jesus snuck up on two people walking along the seven-mile road from Jerusalem to their home in the village of Emmaus. Now, they do not recognize Jesus – they are kept from doing so until they are ready – so to them, Jesus is just a stranger going in the same direction. Well, these two people were down in the dumps because they thought Jesus was the Messiah, but He's been crucified by the Romans under pressure by their own Jewish religious leaders. Jesus is dead and their hopes are gone with Him – it's all over as far as they knew, but in **Luke 24:27**, we are told,

*Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*

Jesus explained to them, using the Old Testament, that what had occurred – as terrible as it was, was all part God's plan – everything went according to plan, even the suffering and the crucifixion of the Messiah.

So, back in **Matthew 5:17**, Jesus says **“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets (referring to the Old Testament); I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”**

In the Greek, the word for **“fulfill”** is *plēroō* and it means *to make full, to complete, to accomplish*. In every aspect, Jesus fulfills Old Testament Scripture.

In its law, He would perfectly obey it by living a sinless life – and in its prophecy – *“tada”* – here He is just as predicted. Old Testament Scripture points to Jesus, in fact, He says as much in **John 5**, beginning with **verse 39**. Listen to what He says,

*<sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; <sup>40</sup> and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.*

Listen, when put together, in essence, this is what Jesus was saying:

*“I’m not against Scripture, because in every way Scripture points to Me. It leads right to Me. It’s always been headed My way. I’m the fulfillment of Scripture.”*

The Old Testament contains over 300 prophetic references to the Messiah. **What chance did Jesus or any other single man have of fulfilling these prophecies?** This prompted a really smart guy to consider the mathematical probability of one person fulfilling these prophecies.

*Years ago, Professor Peter W. Stoner, who was Chairman of the Departments of Mathematics and Astronomy at Pasadena City College and Chairman of the Science Division at Westmont College wrote a book called “Science Speaks”. In his book, Professor Stoner assigned probabilities to a number of prophecies and then he calculated the odds that one person in the first century could fulfill them by chance. He started with only 8 of these Messianic prophecies and here they are:*

*The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem (**Micah 5:2**).*

*A messenger will prepare the way for the Messiah (**Malachi 3:1**).*

*The Messiah will enter Jerusalem as a king riding on a donkey (**Zechariah 9:9**).*

*The Messiah will be betrayed by a friend and suffer wounds in His hands (**Zechariah 13:6**).*

*The Messiah will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (**Zechariah 11:12**).*

*The betrayal money will be used to purchase a potter’s field (**Zechariah 11:13**).*

*The Messiah will remain silent while He is afflicted (**Isaiah 53:7**).*

*The Messiah will die by having His hands and feet pierced, and His garments divided by the casting of lots. (**Psalms 22:16-18**).*

*Using very conservative estimates, Professor Stoner calculated that the probability of any one man fulfilling just 8 of these prophecies is 1 in 10 to the 17<sup>th</sup> power – that’s 1 with 17 zeros behind it. That’s 1 in 100 quadrillion. **How big is that?** Professor Stoner said, using silver dollars to illustrate the size of those enormous odds – you could cover the state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep. Now, take only one of those silver dollars and mark it with a red X and throw it back into that pile of silver dollars that covers the state of Texas. Then blindfold a volunteer and ask that person to find the marked silver dollar on their first try.*

**What chance would the volunteer have of getting the right one on the first try?** The exact same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these 8 prophecies and having them all come true in any one man.

*Then Stoner took his project a little further and went on to calculate the probability of one person in the first century fulfilling 48 prophecies. That number is 1 in 10 to the 157<sup>th</sup> power. I don't believe there is a name for such a number, and I need to remind you that is only 48 prophecies out of over 300.*

*And in case you're questioning whether Professor Stoner's math was wrong, his calculations were peer reviewed, and their mathematical analysis concluded that Stoner applied the principles of probability in a proper and convincing way, and his findings were determined to be dependable and accurate.*

So, the prophets pointed to Jesus, and this might surprise you, but so did the Law from the very beginning. In **Exodus 20**, after the Ten Commandments were given to Moses and the children of Israel at Mount Sinai – on the heels of that awesome experience, God then tells Moses about the sacrifices that were to be offered. **Why?** Because, at the very onset of giving the His moral standards, God knew man could not keep them and needed to atone for their sin. These sacrifices were merely a shadow of the ultimate sacrifice that was to be made by the Lamb of God.

Jesus would fulfill Scripture in all aspects, and as such, He would not cater to a *religious system* of man-made rules and traditions that were lifeless, burdensome, and led people away from God instead of to Him. Then continuing on, in **verse 18**, Jesus says this about Scripture,

**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.**

**For truly** (*in other words pay attention*), until heaven and earth pass away – that's **Revelation 21** stuff – when heaven and earth pass away – it's going to happen – we can't save it – it's going to disappear – it's disposable, and yet – Jesus says, God's Word is not.

Until heaven and earth pass away and disappear, not one single part of the Word of God, not one *jot or tittle* – not the smallest letter or even an accent mark on a letter will pass away until everything is accomplished.

Every word, every letter, authored by God, predicted by the prophets, lived out by Jesus Christ, will come to pass. Jesus says,

*“I have not come to destroy God's Word, I'm here to fulfill it and to free it from the way that it's been misinterpreted and misapplied.*

Now, in this next verse, Jesus says something that would surely grab the attention of His listeners. In **verse 19**, Jesus says this:

**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.**

*An extremely nervous patient came to his dentist for root canal surgery. He was brought into the examining room and made comfortable in the reclining dental chair. The dentist then injected a numbing agent around the patient's tooth, and left the room for a few minutes while the medication took hold. When the dentist returned, the patient was standing next to a tray of dental equipment.*

***“What are you doing by the surgical instruments?”** asked the surprised dentist.*

*Focused on his task, the patient replied, “I’m taking out the ones I don’t like.”*

When it comes to God’s Word, His **commandments**, there are people – *no one here of course* – but there are *other* people who like to pick and choose the parts they are willing to keep and the parts they want to put aside and ignore, but according to Jesus, there’s a lot at stake when it comes to how we handle and how we live out God’s Word – for it will have a bearing on whether we’re called – as He says, **great** or **least** in the **kingdom of heaven** – and please notice that Jesus is talking about those *inside* the kingdom, not those *outside* the kingdom, so in that context, Jesus is not speaking about salvation here, but rather, He’s talking about our eternal rewards.

So, we can’t pick and choose what we like in God’s Word – but with that said, we also need to be reminded that there are parts of the Old Testament – the *ceremonial*, the *civil*, and the *judicial* parts that have been fulfilled by Jesus, and therefore, are not binding on Christians.

For example, animal sacrifice was commanded all throughout the Old Testament and past Jesus’ day as a covering for sin, but when the ultimate once-and-for-all sacrifice was made on the cross by Jesus on our behalf – that requirement was fulfilled and we don’t have to observe animal sacrifice as atonement for sin. Those kinds of things are no longer binding on us as believers; however, God’s moral standards seen from cover to cover in the Bible, which are a reflection of His divine character – a character that does not change, are most certainly binding.



We can't pick and choose what we like in God's Word, and we shouldn't **teach** and influence others to do the same like the religious leaders were doing, for if we do – if we hold God's Word in low esteem, Jesus claims that we too will be held in low esteem in the kingdom of heaven. Greatness, on the other hand, is determined by our view of God's Word and how it is lived out in our lives.

Now, if Jesus hasn't got their attention yet, what He says next most certainly will. In **verse 20**, Jesus says,

**For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

**Who will go to heaven?** Well, in those days, if that question had been asked, the common answer by everybody would have been: "*Of course, the scribes and the Pharisees.*" **Well, who were these guys?**

The *scribes* were the interpreters and the writers of law, they were the scholars – they did most of the teaching, and they were later called rabbis. These *scribes* closely partnered with a Jewish sect called the *Pharisees* who were the legalists – the strict observers of the law – their law. They were concerned with the rules and the traditions – so, the *scribes* were the law-writers and the *Pharisees* were the law-keepers, and collectively, to an average Jew, the *scribes* and the *Pharisees* were considered the ultimate examples of righteousness, and to hear from Jesus – that one's righteousness must **surpass** that of the *scribes* and *Pharisees* – to them, that meant no one could enter the kingdom of heaven.

They thought, "*if these guys weren't good enough (and they weren't) – then no one was good enough*" – and that's precisely the point. **How good do you have to be to get into heaven?** Well, the answer is – even at your very best, you can't get there on your own. You will never, ever be good enough.

According to Jesus, no one, not even the supposed "*cream of the crop*" can enter into the kingdom of heaven – no person is worthy by his or her own goodness – and therefore, everyone needs the Savior – and God's Word (*all of it*) points right to Jesus who graciously offers forgiveness, and exchanges our sinfulness for His perfect goodness. You see, God is looking for perfection, and it can only be found in Jesus Christ.

Good people don't go to heaven, only forgiven people do.

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