

Christ and the Old Testament

Call to Worship: Psalm 19

1st Scripture: Matthew 23:1-36

2nd Scripture: Matthew 5:17-20

Hymn #505- *All the Way My Savior Leads Me*

Hymn #706- *Take Time to be Holy*

Hymn #118- *O Savior, Precious Savior*

Introduction

You may recall, that in my introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, when I sought to give an overview of its content and purpose, I had stated that these verses contain the key to unlocking the entire sermon. This morning, Lord willing, we will come to better understand why I made that comment.

Suffice it to say, for the moment, that these four verses serve as an important bridge and introduction to the second major portion of this Sermon on the Mount, where our Lord will be addressing the erroneous teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees, summed up in several, “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you,” statements. I mention that it serves also as a “bridge,” because, while it does bring us into a second major section, it is most certainly connected to what we have already gone over, in the beatitudes, and in the “salt and light” declarations. In fact, the entire sermon is a unit in this sense, as you will see the beatitudes (which can be classified as a collective prologue, in many ways) opened up throughout the entire course of the sermon.

To this end then, we will seek to break down this section into two major headings:

1) The ministry and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is wholly in keeping with the teaching of the OT.

2) The ministry and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is *not* in keeping with the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees.

And by logical deduction then, we will come to see that the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees, therefore, is not in keeping with the teaching of the OT. That said, our Lord’s main point in this section is *not* to, in anyway, teach that He is changing or adding to the OT, at all. In fact, much to the opposite, He is actually affirming His perfect alignment with the OT, while exposing the wrong interpretation of the OT, given by the religious leaders of Israel. There is no

new Law here, whatsoever. There is simply a proper exposition of some points of the original Law, so as to correct what the religious leaders have marred, while providing an important general principle throughout, that is meant to be applied to all use of the Law. We will come to address this general principle shortly.

I. The ministry and teaching of the Lord is wholly in keeping with the teaching of the OT

Keeping in mind that the Lord (throughout the entire course of His ministry) was ultimately proclaiming a way of salvation (indeed, the only way of salvation) by grace, through faith in Him, it would be easy to understand how the average Jewish individual (especially in light of the erroneous Judaistic foundation, which the religious leaders had built, declaring a salvation by keeping the Mosaic Law), would conclude that the Lord was veering away from Moses, and contradicting the teachings of the Old Testament, with some *new* teaching. When something is corroded to the point that it is hardly recognizable, it is easy to see how that original “something” would be seen as foreign, especially as generations come and go. And this is exactly what had happened when our Lord came to proclaim the truth, at a time when the truth had completely morphed into a very distant falsehood. And so, as we look now at our Lord’s beginning words here, it is very important to recognize and process them, in this contextual light.

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets.” You see, in making this statement, the Lord is dealing with two types of people. First, the religious leaders and those influenced by them, who would have accused the Lord of going against the OT Scriptures, creating some new, novel religion. And second, those who would have gladly done without all law, so that they could live completely free of its demands. Both of these groups were completely wrong, and the Lord wanted His disciples, especially, to understand this.

Now, when He speaks of the Law and the Prophets here, it is important to understand that, just as in all other places where this kind of language is used, our Lord means the “Old Testament.” Obviously, they didn’t have a New Testament yet, and so, the idea of an OT Canon was not even born yet. And so, the Jews would call them the Law and the Prophets, or the Law and the Prophets and the Writings (The “Tanakh” acronym). Implied is the Books of Moses and all of the other OT texts. And so, Jesus is saying that He did not come to abrogate, remove,

change or destroy the OT, in any sense, whatsoever. God's Word is unchangeable, and He had no intention of changing any of it.

This is further seen, when our Lord then adds, "I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." In other words, the purpose of our Lord's coming was not only *not* to contradict or eradicate what had been established in the Old Testament, but furthermore, He actually came to keep it, to reveal its true intent, and to fulfill everything that was declared in it. Much to the contrary then, rather than get rid of it, He came to ensure that it runs its full course, until God is finished with this creation altogether. Notice, what He follows with, clearly affirms this: "For assuredly (that is, most assuredly; without any inkling of a doubt whatsoever—the word "Amen" is used here; it is meant to be a most emphatic statement of certainty), I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (vs. 18).

Now brethren, these are pretty stark and profound words, are they not? What exactly is Jesus saying here? He is saying that the entire Old Testament (every jot and tittle; the smallest of letters and the smallest marking of a letter; like the dot of our "i" or an accent mark) will by no means be done away with (not even when Christ finishes His earthly ministry), until God destroys the present earth and its surrounding atmospheres! In other words, everything in the OT remains, as long as this world remains, and it will only be laid aside, when Christ returns. Now, sadly, people like Andy Stanley and many others in our day, see little value in the OT, but I think that our Lord would beg to differ here, in the most emphatic of ways!

Now, lest we would miss the application that this bears on the actual use of God's Law and our responsibility to keep His Law; lest we would simply attempt to recognize this, solely in the realm of the theoretical, thinking that this only means that we can always benefit from some observational "learning" about what the Old Testament taught, and not in the actual keeping and applying of God's Law, consider what our Lord says next, speaking in the context of the New Covenant Kingdom of God: "Whoever *therefore* breaks *one of the least of these commandments*, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever *does and teaches them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (vs. 19).

Now brethren, consider what our Lord is saying here. We have an active responsibility to the whole of God's Law, both in personal practice, and in instructing others. And how we

perform this responsibility, affects our position and status in the kingdom of heaven. If there is ever a strong case against antinomianism; against OT Law (that's the context here— the Law and the Prophets, not some alleged “New” Law), the gavel drops with extreme weight, right here!

Now brethren, we really have to think through this, don't we? And we will, but continue to follow along with me here, because the weight of all that is said here, only gets stronger. But, the good news is that, it will get clearer as well. Our Lord's next and final statement, which leads into His expounding the true nature of God's unchanging Law (all the way to the end of the Chapter, in ways, that would have especially confronted some of the grossest distortions of God's Law, put forth by the religious leaders) would have really shaken the souls of His disciples, as well as, the multitudes, who were listening in. Talk about uprooting the largest of oak trees (!), our Lord then states, “For I say to you (note again His authority; not, “thus saith the Lord” or “the Scriptures teach,” but, “I, who am the Lord, and I, who am the very Author and Authority behind all of Scripture”) most certainly tell you this, “that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees (unless it goes far beyond the righteousness of your religious leaders, interpreters and teachers of the Law), you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (vs. 20). “If you neglect the Law, at any point, and teach others to do the same, you will be least in the kingdom, but if your righteousness itself, as a whole, is not greater than the righteousness of the religious leaders, you will not even *enter* the kingdom of heaven, let alone ‘be least’ in it!”

Now brethren, if our Lord were stating this with the accompaniment of modern technology, this would have been a “mic drop” moment! That said, especially this final comment, along with the true exposition of several laws that follow, provide us with the key that will enable us to unlock the whole meaning of this text. Now, to obtain this key, we must first consider what exactly was deficient in the righteousness of the Pharisees, which compelled our Lord to say this. Our first Scripture reading provided some insight that would help us here, but there is more than enough in the immediate context, to provide us with that which we are looking for.

II. The ministry and teaching of the Lord is *not* in keeping with the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees

What was wrong with the righteousness of the Pharisees? Were they not law keepers? Well, in some sense, they were, to a “splitting of the hairs” degree (tithing of dill and cumin and every minute spice, fasting twice a week, when it was only required once a year, keeping all of the Sabbaths, far beyond the actual requirements...etc). But, in all of that, what was the real problem?

The Scribes and the Pharisees were concerned with the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law. In other words, they were so consumed with observing the law in accordance with its outward, active sense (even to the extent of making it much stricter, than it was really intended to be), while having no concern for their inward motives and heart. In fact, on the inside, the Pharisees were very wicked, selfish, self-righteous and greedy, having no concern for the two greatest Commandments, out of which, every other command sprouts, namely, to love God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. No, they loved themselves and even used the laws of God, to showboat, so as to draw the attention of the people to themselves, and not God. And they failed to love their neighbor, never extending mercy, but rather, barring sinners into a state of hopeless condemnation, while devouring widow’s houses. They had no compassion toward others and no sincere love for God, and were merely concerned with keeping the outward code of the law. Such a righteousness, though seemingly glorious on the outside, is detestable in the sight of God, and that is why the Lord Jesus here avows that one cannot even enter the kingdom of God, unless they have a greater righteousness than the religious leaders; indeed, a righteousness that proceeds out of a changed heart (through the Gospel), and which, is concerned with the spirit of the law, first and foremost, over and above the letter. And when we work through the six examples, given by our Lord, throughout the remainder of this Chapter, you will find Him, in every case, addressing this very matter. And in doing so, He not only deals with some of the specific ways, in which, the Pharisees have thus misinterpreted the Law, but furthermore, He provides us with lenses, through which, we ought to view all Law. [And all of this falls right in line with the teachings of the Beatitudes—heart issues]

And so, the Old Testament remains fully intact. Our Lord does not nullify it, contradict it or destroy it, but rather, He established it, in its true and intended form. To this end, God is more concerned about the spirit than the letter, principles than details, and content over form. This is why, when the starving David and his men had eaten the showbread (which was designated only for priests), they did not sin. In general, the showbread was only for the priests, but, there is a higher principle in play, which considers the life of a brother, over the letter of the law. And this is why our Lord and His disciples were permitted, by the Law, to pluck heads of grain on the Sabbath. They were not breaking the OT Law, but rather, they were fulfilling a priest-like role, in doing the work of God in preaching the Gospel. [III. I can remember a brother who used even the Sermon on the Mount, in a “letter like” fashion, thinking he was honoring Christ and helping a lost soul. He was giving money to an individual, continually, whom he knew was using it for drugs, because after all, Jesus said, “Give to him who asks of you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.” He failed to wisely discern the spirit of the law and wrongly bound himself to the letter, which was never God’s intention for any of the laws given here—we will especially see this with the, “turn the other cheek passage,” as well]

And so, all in all, we find that the problem had nothing to do with our Lord changing the OT or contradicting it. Rather, it had everything to do with the religious leaders corrupting, changing and contradicting its true intent. The line in the sand did not separate Jesus from the Law of God, rather, it separated Jesus from the misinterpretation of God’s Law by the Scribes and Pharisees. The line in the sand was dug between the true Kingdom of God, ushered in by Jesus, and the artificial kingdom of the religious leaders, orchestrated by their own proud and arrogant hearts. Having these things in mind, will provide us with the key that unlocks this entire sermon, and it is the only way that, especially from a contextual standpoint, this sermon makes sense.

Now, before we close, a huge question must be answered, which deals with an “elephant in the room,” that we cannot just ignore. One might rightly ask the question, “If what you are saying is true, then doesn’t that prove too much, because, how then are we to view the ceremonial and judicial aspects of the Law of Moses?” “Does this not assume that we are then obligated to keep all of the ceremonial laws, and that we are to observe all of the judicial laws of

Moses?” “You can’t take such a strong statement of Jesus’s, and just contain it within the parameters of the Ten Commandments, can you?” “Even some of the laws that Jesus mentions in this Chapter, deal with marriage and oaths...etc, which, at the very least, while moral, are not *directly* mentioned in the Ten Commandments.”

Well brethren, my answer to these questions is actually simple, but must be followed up, with a bit of explanation. First, again, the principle all along, has been a principle of observing the spirit of the law, over the letter. That is why the Apostle Paul, indeed, uses the law of Moses, to advocate giving financial support to pastors. Recall there, which law of Moses he brings forth: “You don’t muzzle the ox, while he treads out the grain.” Now, this certainly had a legitimate, “letter of the law” dimension, addressing the proper care for animals that worked for you. But again, the bigger principle is that you provide for those, physically, who seek to serve you, spiritually. But secondly, and to this same end, I want to suggest that “yes,” we are responsible for the application of all of God’s laws, never as a means of salvation, of course, (which was never the case for Israel either), but as a principle of godly living, in Christ’s kingdom.

Well then, ought we to put an altar up here, and begin sacrificing animals and grain offerings...etc. Of course not. “Well, why not?” Because our Lord Jesus Christ, in Himself, provides that sacrifice for us; His perfect and complete sacrifice, once for all time, at the cross. He, as the perfect God-Man, actually and literally fulfilled (in one shot), everything that those animal sacrifices and the entire sacrificial system as a whole, had offered for the people of God. In fact, they only continued because they never met God’s standard for our atonement. Indeed, Christ is the “better” substance, to which, all of those sacrifices and ceremonies pointed. And so, as the people of God continually came before God, only through the mediation of Aaronic priests and with unblemished offerings, we in fact, do better than the Israelites, because we come to God through the Perfect, immovable High Priest, through His once for all time sacrifice, as He lives to continually intercede on our behalf. Christ is presently in God’s heavenly tabernacle, interceding for us, so that, we can come to God continually (in His Name). You see, the mediation and the High Priestly intercession still takes place for us, only in the better and perfect, heavenly tabernacle, made not with the hands of men, but by God Himself. And so, we still keep

the ceremonial law, in this respect, indeed again, in a better and more perfect way, because that which was once shadows, has now become the real substance.

And what of the laws of separation? What of the dietary laws and not mixing two different materials of cloth and plants...etc, which served to teach the Israelites holiness, and which, distinguished them from the heathen nations? Are we still responsible for them? Well, once again, the principle of separation remains the same for us, only it has come to its complete and mature form. The substance that once cast the shadows has arrived [Read 2 Corinthians 6:11-18].

And what of circumcision? Having fulfilled His plan with Israel, and since the Christ has arrived and the kingdom of God is now to be introduced to the whole world, God's intention for separation by this sign has now been fulfilled, and now, a people of all nations are to receive the circumcision of the heart, while identifying with Christ in baptism, fulfilling the ultimate and limited design of *physical* circumcision.

And what of the moral Laws? The rest of Chapter six addresses the general principles to be applied, in the keeping of the moral laws, showing us that all along, God has been concerned with the spirit and the heart, over and above the letter and the outward actions.

And so, all in all, brethren, not one jot or tittle is destroyed. Indeed, everything reaches its ideal state, as individuals are brought into union with Christ. God's design comes to fruition, exposing the corrupt and defiled religion of the Pharisees, while revealing our Lord's true agreement with the Old Testament, down to the use of every jot and tittle. Was this radical to the Jewish audience, to whom, Jesus was speaking. Absolutely, because they were reared into a Judaistic system, which had corroded the true intent of *God's* kingdom, beyond recognition. [Romans 8:1-4; Jer. 31:31-34]

III. Conclusion

Friends, let me conclude by asking you one question, that ultimately, only you and God can answer. What is going on in your heart? What are the motives that drive what you do? You see, its not merely what you do on the outside, that God is concerned about. He's concerned about the inner you; your thoughts, your desires and your true motives. And here is the key

principle that we all must come to grips with. Who you are when you are alone; who you are in your thought life; who you are in the inner man, which is invisible to the naked eye...is who you *truly* are. And that is what God is ultimately concerned about. You can do a lot of “good things” and be heading straight for hell, because your motives are ultimately self-serving or impure. That’s why the beatitudes are so important, in pulling back the curtain for us, to see, what exactly the true people of God look like.

And such a heart can only be formed, by being united to the Lord Jesus Christ! [The Gospel!!!].

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25