

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.Ivor J.W.Oakley (2-7-2000 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

**Matthew 5:17-18**

Additional Bible Reading Luke 24:13-32

**Fulfilment of Law and Prophets**

Introduction

We come now to a new stage in the Sermon on the Mount. So far, Jesus has given a description of Christian character in the Beatitudes. Then he spoke of the influence the Christian should have in the world, as salt and light. Now he is going to show the way in which God's people are to live in the various relationships of life, and how they are to show the righteousness which he requires of them.

But before he gives the details, he gives basic principles. In the verses before us, Jesus is emphasising that everything is in harmony with God's previous revelation in preliminary form in the Old Testament. And we are not to imagine what he taught was entirely brand new. His teaching, and indeed his life, death and resurrection, were the culmination and completion and fulfilment of all that had gone before.

Jesus wants us to remember the importance of the Old Testament still, as we see it in fulfilled form. He stresses its permanence in essential teaching. **I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them** (Matthew 5:17). He came to bring it to completion and draw out its full meaning. **Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished** (Matthew 5:18).

There is always a problem for the preacher, preaching to people at different levels of Bible knowledge and understanding. Some people do not know the Bible well enough to see the preacher's point. Others think what he preaches is elementary and superficial. Others are not satisfied at all. Now I shall assume a fair amount of Bible knowledge and show how it fits together, because it is possible to have lots of disconnected bits of Bible knowledge but not see it as a unity. Then I shall try to apply what is said to show bearing on all our lives.

The Law and the Prophets

This is a short hand phrase for the whole of the Old Testament, which was in three sections, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Law – Genesis to Deuteronomy – containing ceremonial, civil and moral laws. The Prophets are in two groups: The former prophets – Joshua through to 2 Kings; The latter prophets – Isaiah through to Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets. These prophets taught and applied the Law. They were forth-tellers and fore-tellers. The remaining group (of the 24 Books in the Hebrew Bible, not 39 as we have in our Old Testament) – Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Esther, Nehemiah – are called "writings", but are not always mentioned. So the term "Law and Prophets" covered it all.

Jesus did not come to destroy but to fulfil, draw out their full meaning, complete, perfect, be their true end and purpose. “The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed”. The Old Testament is the bud, the New Testament is the flower. The Old Testament is the blade; the New Testament is the full ear of corn.

Christ confirmed the Old Testament; he put his seal of authority on it. He accepted it all, not just part of it, as God’s word. What was essential to the Redeemer must be essential to the redeemed. Never ignore, or treat the Old Testament lightly.

### How Jesus Fulfilled the Law

Firstly he obeyed it throughout his ministry, as hints in the Gospels make clear. He loved God and his neighbour, observed the Jewish feasts, kept the Passover. When the woman touched the hem of his garment in Matthew 9:20, the reference is to the blue tassels which were a reminder of the Lord’s commands (Deuteronomy 22:12; Numbers 15:38,39). The Lord obeyed God’s Law to the minutest details. He also fulfilled the Law in his death, when he paid the penalty for sin

Then he developed and drew out and completed its true inner meaning.

- (a) Ceremonial Law. The details are in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Laws about sacrifices as atonement. We do not keep them now because they were fulfilled in Christ, the perfect complete atonement of which the Old Testament sacrifices were only shadows. He was the perfect sacrifice, the perfect priest. This is fulfilment c.f. Epistle to the Hebrews.
- (b) Civil Law. For Israel as a nation. Laws about servants, agriculture, dress, theft, damage, strangers, witchcraft. But Israel is no longer a nation as it was in Old Testament times. Jesus said **the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit** (Matthew 21:43). That new nation is the Christian church, says Peter, **a holy nation, a people that belong to God** (1 Peter 2:9). The old nation of Israel is at an end. Its civil law is completed and fulfilled, although its underlying principles of truth and compassion still live on.
- (c) Moral Law. 10 Commandments are still valid and still relevant. “New morality” says there is no need for law, only the law of love – which means different things to different people. The Ten Commandments were summarized by Jesus as love for God and neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40). But Jesus deepens their meaning (to be seen later - not only murder, but also hatred; not only action, but also desire and motive). We are meant to live like that. But we don’t. **Sin is lawlessness** (1 John 3:4). Shows us we need a Saviour. Then when saved, he sends Holy Spirit into heart that we might obey.

So Jesus fulfilled the Law. He completely obeyed it in his life and death, and brought it to completion and true meaning. Fulfilled sacrifices and protocol, brought to end civil law, made moral law permanent feature of lives. Deepened meaning and summarized it.

### How Jesus Fulfilled the Prophets

One of most remarkable and outstanding facts about the Bible – exact prophecies about Christ and his life and its meaning, made hundreds of years before, took place perfectly. Virgin birth, Bethlehem, John the Baptist as forerunner, his healing ministry, parables, entry into Jerusalem, cleansing of the Temple, betrayal for 30 pieces of silver, unjust trial, scourging, crucifixion, two thieves, dividing of clothes, thirst, cry of dereliction, no broken bone, associated with rich man Joseph, resurrection, ascension to right hand, outpouring of Holy Spirit, gifts to church. All of these, and more, are fulfilment of prophecy hundreds of years before. Twelve times Matthew’s formula “This .... was done to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet”. Here is one most astounding phenomenon of Bible and one of many grounds for believing in its inspiration. It is incredible that the Jews did not see it. But they were blinded by prejudice.

These facts make it easy to preach the Gospel out of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is full of Gospel truth. We see the wonderful unity of the Bible. Never drive a wedge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. One of dangers of printing the New Testament without the Old Testament, however convenient it may be for pocket or handbag, is that it encourages the idea that because we are Christians we do not need the Old Testament. We do urgently need the Old Testament, though it is important to see it in light of its true end, completion, and fulfilment in Christ. Indissolubly bound together. Never understand depths of New Testament without the Old Testament. Some books, especially Hebrews, are meaningless without Old Testament.

### Conclusion

Finally I want to show how it is possible to use Old Testament Scriptures to throw light on the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel begins with our need because of sin. God’s Law is presented clearly in the Old Testament, 10 Commandments. God wants you to keep them perfectly, in thought, word and deed, every day and every hour. **The soul who sins is the one who will die** (Ezekiel 18:4). **Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law** (Deut. 27:26). Laws show us our need. Here is our ruler, benchmark, standard, and yardstick.

The Old Testament also tells us the penalty. God, as moral governor of universe must set out rules of game and laws of life, and because he is perfection and purity, he is bound to impose penalty for non-compliance and violation. But some Old Testament speaks of God’s compassion. **I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live** (Ezekiel 33:11).

Prophets foretold the coming of one in grace and mercy. Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5), man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, despised and rejected (Isaiah 53). **We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all** (Isaiah 53:6). And as he bore our penalty, he quoted Old Testament scripture: **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” (Psalm 22:1). So, because the one prophesied came and paid the penalty, we can be forgiven, welcomed home, brought back. Is that the end of the story then?

Returning to those 10 Commandments and laws – we are still meant to keep them, not because they will save us for we can never reach standard, but because we are saved.

This is God's will for our lives, and to enable us to do it, God performs a miracle in the heart known as new birth. Promise of New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Law to be written in heart. **I will put my spirit in you** (Ezekiel 36:27). **The righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit** (Romans 8:4). God gives us Holy Spirit and he gives us a love of the law, and power to live by it.

Natural man hates God and will not be subject to God's Law. But the man who has received the Spirit loves God, and loves his law. Wants to please God. When he fails, this grieves and upsets him. Law is no longer on tables of stone outside, but on fleshly tablets of heart. New relationship – Law is within us and not outside us. We are anxious to fulfil the Law, and are enabled to do so.

Thus we find the entire Gospel message in the words of the Old Testament. The Christian delights in the Law (Romans 7), and hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Do we submit to God's word? The Lord accepted it, obeyed, loved, quoted, and knew it thoroughly. Do we know better than he? Do we know the Gospel which the Old Testament foreshadows and New Testament proclaims? Are we forgiven, know the New birth, and the Holy Spirit living within?