

The Law and the Prophets Fulfilled

Matthew 5:17-20

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Introduction:

Today, as we continue our study of Matthew's gospel,
I want to remind you of where we are.

Back in chapter 4, Matthew summarised what Jesus did at the beginning of His public ministry in Galilee.

In 4:23, He refers to a teaching/preaching ministry and a healing ministry.

Matthew 4:23: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people."

This is an introductory statement.

After this, Matthew gives us an example of each of these ministries.

In chapters 5 – 7, which is where we are,

he gives us an example of Jesus preaching ministry in the Sermon on the Mount.

In this sermon, we get an idea of the kind of preaching Jesus did all over Galilee.

In chapter 8 – 9

Matthew gives us a look at Jesus' healing ministry.

In the Sermon on the Mount, we have just recently finished a detailed look at the Beatitudes, which is the first section in Jesus' sermon.

Last week, we looked at the transition Jesus makes in His sermon as He moves from the Beatitudes into the section on the commandments.

This transition is found in Matthew 5:12-16.

I showed you how it is the **bridge...**

from the Beatitudes to the second section of Jesus' sermon where He speaks explains the true application of God's commandments.

In this transition, He shifts from the indicative to the imperative...

from the declaration of what we are by His grace (salt and light)

to what we ought to do (light your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Now if vs 12-16 are the bridge into the next section,

Then Matthew 5:17-20 is the ramp that brings us from the bridge to the section of the commandments...

In other words, these verses introduce us to the section on our duty,
the obedience to which Jesus calls us as His disciples...

How we are to let our light shine before men.

Jesus introduces this section by telling us that He has not come to do away with what has been spoken before by Moses and the prophets, but to fulfil it.

In Matthew 5:17,

“the Law” refers to the first five books of the Bible that Moses wrote which the Jews call the Torah...

and “the Prophets” refers to all the Old Testament books that come after that.

Both of these words are sometimes used more narrowly and you have to watch the context...

For example, sometimes the Law refers particularly to the commandments,

Jesus even allows the term to swing over into this meaning in this passage, but as it is used in v. 17, it refers to Genesis – Deuteronomy.

There is a sense in which God says everything in these first five books of Moses that He has to say...

and then the prophets simply take that and apply it to their own generations...

There is a sense in which Jesus does the same thing.

There is something marvellous and new that happens when Jesus comes,

but it is really nothing else than what God had declared that He would do in the writings of Moses...

and reaffirmed that He would do in the writings of the prophets.

This morning I want to look at three things from Matthew 5:17-20:

Jesus wants you to know that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets

Jesus wants you to know that He is the One who came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets

Jesus calls you to examine your own relationship to God’s law.

So let’s begin with the first point:

I. Jesus wants you to know that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.

A. It has always been a problem that when abuses are being corrected in religion, some people will think it is a revolution rather than a reformation...

1. A reformation is when there is a return to the truth (things are reformed)
But a revolution is when attempts are made to overthrow the old and start something new.

Jesus states very clearly that that is not his purpose in v. 17!

Matt 5:17: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.”

Because Jesus was correcting abuses in the way the people in His day understood the Law,

there were some who mistakenly thought He was doing away with the Law and the Prophets.

They equated the current mis-interpretation of the Law with the Law itself.

2. There are two kinds of people for whom this is always a problem—revolutionaries and traditionalists.

a. First, it is a problem for revolutionaries.

- 1) These are people who **want** something new...

There are always those who ready to overthrow the existing order and start something new.

Sometimes, they don't even care what the new thing is just as long as it gets them out of the old way.

Paul ran into men at Athens like that:

Ac 17:21: For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

- 2) This is a very common problem in our particular society.

a) I don't know if you have ever noticed it or not,
but whenever a man is running for public office in our society,
he never says,

“I am going to do things just like my predecessor. He was such a wonderful leader that I want to continue all his policies”

You even see this within the same party—

Paul Martin promises that he is going to do things very differently than Jean Crechen.

b) You see this in more than politics!

More often than not,

when children in our society get to a certain age,

they decide that they want to do everything differently than their parents.

They don't want to build on a heritage, they want to start all over again with something new.

This has not always been the case—

There have been times when children wanted nothing more than to be identified with their parents.

And what is worse, you even see this in churches!

Someone has pointed out that the most tiring tradition in North American Churches is the tradition that says,

“We are tired of the traditional church, we have a radically new way of doing things...”

3) Now I want to point out that this continual desire for revolution in everything is a sign of a sick society!

a) Just think about it—you want change because there is something wrong.

Either there is something wrong with the way things are being done.

Or there is something wrong with you—you think changes need to be made when they don't.

If things were the way they should be and you were glad for that—

You would want to build on the past instead of abolishing it to start something new.

If your old car was excellent, you would want a new one just like it!

b) There is a terrible arrogance in our modern society—

We think anyone who lived before us is stupid and has nothing to offer.

We always think we can do things a lot better.

- c) But you can see that this really becomes a problem when you are talking about God's word!

I actually heard a modern evangelist say that if the apostle Paul had known what he knew about techniques for spreading the gospel, Paul would have had many more converts than he did!

There are many who, to various degrees, are always looking for something new and better to make the church grow.

And even worse still are those who have come along and decided to completely change the word of God to suit them better!

They are going to improve upon it!

There is the man who cannot believe the miracles, but wants to hang on to some of the moral teachings.

He denies the virgin birth and the resurrection, and has little time for talking about life after death...

And he denies all the commandments that don't suit him...

But he has much to say about human love and about church unity!

He claims to have a new improved gospel for modern man!

- 4) You can be sure that there were such people when Jesus preached this sermon.

Some of the Jews were quite impressed with the Greek culture.

They thought the Law of Moses could be nicely spruced up with a bit of Greek philosophy and culture mixed in.

Then there were those who were looking for a political revolution.

These persons were interested in Jesus because here was something new!

But Jesus tells them plainly that that is not why He has come.

Revolutionaries still use His name today to support their revolutions.

TRANS> Then you have the second kind of person who sees reformation according to God's word as actually abolishing God's Word.

- b. These have a problem with Jesus because they are traditionalists.

- 1) They don't like Jesus because they see Him as introducing change:

- a) This is what they charged Stephen with when they stoned him:

Ac 6:14: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

Even though Stephen gave a beautiful and lucid defense in which he demonstrated that the only tradition these traditionalists were following was that of always rejecting God's true prophets, they would not hear...

They literally stopped up their ears and put Stephen to silence.

- b) You remember what happened when Hezekiah reformed worship in Israel, tearing down the high places...

Some of the people resisted him because they said,

“This is the way we have always worshipped Jehovah! Hezekiah is tearing down His high places!”

Their traditions had taken the place of the word of God!

- 2) We have that kind of rebellious tradition today as well...

It is found among those who have inherited a way of rebelling against God that pretends to be obedience instead of rebellion.

- a) There are those who consider it rebellion to refuse to pray to the saints or to bow down to images of Jesus or Mary, or to refuse to allow silly rites around a death bed.

They accuse those who oppose such things as being rebels who are fighting against God.

They confuse their own traditions with God's Word, even when their traditions are contrary to God's Word.

- b) But the same thing can happen among Evangelicals as well as Romanists.

Just go into most evangelical churches today and try to reform the worship!

Challenge them about drama or instruments in worship...

People will accuse you of fighting against God.

Brothers and sisters, you must always be ready to reform when you are shown from scripture that you need to reform.

At the same time,

you must be sure that the reform to which you are being called truly is according to scripture.

The great charge of the Roman church against the Reformation was that it was a revolt against God.

But if you study it, you will see that it was rather a return to God.

- 3) The bulk of the opposition that Jesus faced was from the traditionalists... particularly from the scribes and Pharisees who had added their traditions to God's word.

When Jesus did not keep their traditions, they accused Him of being a revolutionary who had come to overthrow the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus emphatically declares that this is not so!

3. But I must add to this that there are some in evangelical churches today who have believed the Pharisee's!

- a. When Jesus starts to expound the Law and says things like,

“You have heard it said, but I say to you...”

they take it to mean that He is correcting the Law and the Prophets, or somehow overthrowing the Old Testament.

If you show these persons something from scripture and they don't like it, they will say,

“Well that's the Old Testament,” as if that were a valid argument!

- b. You must not fall into such an error!

Jesus emphatically declares that that is precisely **not** what He is doing!

He is not destroying the Law the Prophets,

He is only attacking the traditional interpretation of the Law that was current in His day!

Jesus is getting ready to explain the true meaning of God's commandments!

He is going to explain them as they are meant to be understood.

- B. He backs this up by solemnly declaring that the Law **cannot** be changed!

1. It is a very strong statement He makes in verse 18:

Matt. 5:18: “For assuredly, 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!”

- a. This statement is strengthened by several things:

- 1) first, it is strengthened by the words, “for assuredly I say to you.”

It is a kind of oath, using the “amen” to underline it and say, “This is most certain and cannot be questioned!”

- 2) Secondly, this statement is strengthened by the words, “until heaven and earth pass away!”

This is like saying, “until the stars fall from the sky.”

He is saying, it will never pass away.

- 3) Thirdly, the statement is strengthened by the words, “one jot or on tittle will by no means pass away.”

The jot refers to the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet,

and the tittle refers to a little projection on one letter that distinguishes from another letter...

somewhat like the difference between an O and a Q in our letters.

- b. Because it is the word of God, it must stand forever!

The scripture cannot be broken!

Nothing will pass away until all is fulfilled!

2. Okay, but what does Jesus mean by “fulfilled?”

- a. He means this:

The Law is fulfilled when every one of God’s elect people is perfectly loving God!

How can I say that?

- 1) Well, Jesus Himself said that if you sum up the Law and the Prophets; this is what you get:

Matt 22:37-40: ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

TRANS> The Law and Prophets call human beings to love God as He ought to be loved.

- 2) But you must understand that the Law is not made for the righteous...

- a) The Law and the Prophets are written to fallen sinners!

They are written to tell **sinners** how to love God...

to tell the unrighteous how to please God!

- b) How encouraging this is!

The whole human race fell into sin in Adam...

Yet, here is God giving instruction about how we, fallen sinners that we are, may please Him!

It is no wonder that Abraham fell on his face when God came to him and said,

“I am Almighty God, walk before Me and be blameless!”

TRANS> How could it be that **fallen sinful** human flesh could please God?

b. The Law and the Prophets tell you how!

Two things must be done!

1) First, the Law tells you that **satisfaction** must be made for sin!

The Law demands that the sinful soul must die.

Because we have sinned against God, we must satisfy the penalty of sin by bearing God’s curse.

His holy justice must be satisfied; the penalty must be paid in full.

The penalty is eternal death in Hell.

The Law declares that **everyone** must pay it, because all have sinned.

But the Law and the prophets also declare repeatedly that God will accept a substitute to die in our place!

From the time of Adam, God taught His people that satisfaction could be made by the shedding of the blood of a substitute.

As a testimony that God would accept a substitute, animals were offered in place of people.

For Adam and Eve, God killed an animal to cover their nakedness.

For Abraham, God accepted the Ram that was caught in the thicket in place of Isaac.

For Israel at the Passover, God accepted a lamb in place of the first born son.

And such was the whole system of the tabernacle with priests appointed to offer sacrifices for the remission of sin.

Yet, these were only provisional...

They were but animals and God required the death of another human being...

They bore only physical death on an altar made with man’s hands,

they could not bear God eternal wrath and curse.

They were offered again and again because they were only pictures of what was really required.

But by these, God makes it clear that He is willing to accept a substitute to bear His curse.

TRANS> So the first thing the Law tells you is that the full penalty of sin must be paid.

2) The second thing the Law tells you is that you must get a new heart to love God.

It calls you to live a life that is in conformity to the Ten Commandments.

It calls you to be holy as God is holy.

And, because it is written to sinners,

it calls you to turn from your sin to God—to repent.

You must circumcise your heart to love God.

TRANS> But wait just a minute...

3. What good is this Law?

a. If you must pay the penalty for sin and that penalty is eternal death, then the Law condemns you forever...

It will take you all eternity to satisfy this demand of the Law...

And who can provide a substitute that will meet all the requirements?

b. And if you must change your heart to heart that loves God, what can you do?

How can you change your nature?

Can you enter a second time into my mother's womb and be born again with a different nature?

c. Well let me tell you right here and now!

The Law and the Prophets do a whole lot more than merely tell you what is required of sinners who would love God!

The Law and the Prophets contain not only requirements, but also promises!

In fact, promises are foundational to everything in the Law!

- 1) Consider the requirement you have to pay the penalty for sin.

In the Law and the Prophets, God promises that **He** will provide the acceptable sacrifice for us!

The whole sacrificial system was a testimony to the promise that God gave to Abraham when He provided the ram in place of Isaac:

The promise there is that God will provide the acceptable sacrifice.

Gen. 22:14: And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said *to* this day, "In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided."

God appointed the priests with all their offerings to continually testify that He would provide **the sacrifice** for their sins!

In the prophets, God kept confirming His promise to send the Messiah to deliver us from our sins...

And in Isaiah 53, he makes it clear that Messiah will come and make satisfaction for our sins by the offering of Himself!

It says there that God would make Him an offering for sin,

That He would bear our iniquities...

That God would see the labour of His soul and be satisfied...

That He would justify many.

- 2) Likewise, in the Law and the prophets,

God promises that **He** will circumcise His people's hearts!

He promises it right from the beginning when He tells Eve that He will raise up to her a seed that will oppose Satan...

a people that will no longer be in league with Satan,

but contrary to Satan...

a people who, through union with Jesus Christ, are given a new heart for God!

Later on,

God promises that He will circumcise the heart of His people to love Him...

To Abraham, He gives circumcision to testify that Abraham and His seed will be God's people and will love God.

Deut 30:6 gives the promise directly:

Deut 30:6: And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

And then in the prophets He confirms the promise many times...

Ezekiel 36:26-27 is but one example:

Ezekiel 36:26-27: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.

In Joel 2:28, He promises to pour out His Holy Spirit on them.

In Jeremiah 32,

He promises to put His fear in their heart so that they will be His people and will not depart from Him.

3) Brothers and sisters,

Do you see?

a) Throughout the Law and the Prophets...

God continually promises that He will provide Jesus Christ to take away our sins and to give us a new heart!

b) It seems that every page of the Old Testament is crying out with the glad refrain!

He is coming! He is coming! He is coming!

In Egypt,

He is the Redeemer!

He is the Passover lamb!

In the wilderness,

He is the bread from heaven and the rock from which they drank!

In the time of Joshua,

He is the Captain of the Lord's Army who brings them into the land to serve God.

In the time of the Judges,

He is the deliver who comes to free them from bondage to sin and to their enemies so they can serve God.

In the time of David,

He is the promised shepherd King who will lead them to God.

We could go on and on!

- c) The Old Testament people should have been like little children waiting for a special birthday or a special trip!

The promise was clear—

God would make them His people...

He would enable them to love Him with all their heart and to please Him in every way!

TRANS> The requirements of how we are to love God could not be changed!

But they could be fulfilled!

They could be met!

And God promised in the Law and the Prophets that they would be met!

II. Jesus wants you to know that He is the One who came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets.

A. His words are very clear in verse 17:

“I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.”

- 1. And remember what it means for the Law to be fulfilled:

It means that every one of God’s elect is brought to Love God and His neighbour perfectly.

It means that we who are sinners come to please God in every way.

- 2. And the New Testament tells us that all the promises of God in the Old Testament are yea and Amen in Jesus Christ!

That means that He is the One who fulfils them all!

This is why Jesus could say of Himself that He is the way, the truth and the life...

that no one comes to the Father but by Him!

B. Jesus does not destroy the Law or the Prophets; He fulfils everything!

- 1. In Galatians 3, Paul shows how He fulfils both of God’s requirements for every member of His kingdom...

In Gal 3:13-14, Paul says:

Gal 3:13-14: Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

You see here that both requirements are accomplished by Him.

2. Consider the first requirement.

- a. He redeems us from the curse of the law that tells us we must pay the penalty of death by becoming a curse for us...

He did it when He died on the cross, or as it says here, on the tree.

- b. Because Jesus was the Son of God, He was able to bear God's eternal wrath against sinners when He died on the cross.

He was able to make complete satisfaction for us.

God showed that Jesus sacrifice was accepted by raising Him from the dead.

This is what we celebrate every Lord's Day when we assemble for public worship!

By His offering, we are set free from the wrath and curse of God!

- c. The only change that takes place is in this...

Where in the Law and the Prophets,

the people were instructed to continually offer up sacrifices to remind them of the promise...

After Jesus came, there was no more need for these provisional sacrifices.

The real Priest has come and offered the real sacrifice!

Those traditionalists that wanted to hold on to these ceremonies were in fact rejecting Christ...

They were bringing themselves under the curse of the Law...

Because by continuing the sacrifices, they were declaring that the penalty had not yet been paid!

Instead of looking to Christ by faith, they were relying on the works of the Law...

the offering up of sacrifices and all the rest.

For them, the penalty had not been paid.... they must pay it themselves!

TRANS> But Galatians 3 declares that Christ has borne the curse for us.

Satisfaction has been made for sinners through Jesus Christ.

This is the first requirement of the Law and the Prophets.

3. Gal. 3 also speaks of the second requirement in verse 14...

- a. We are redeemed from the curse in order that that “we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith!”

“The promise of the Spirit” is “the blessing of Abraham” because it is what God promised to Him when He promised to bless the nations through His seed.

It is the Spirit who changes our hearts to give us new life!

We have the Spirit through our union with Jesus Christ—

We are joined to Him by faith and so given spiritual life.

We are like branches grafted into Jesus the vine.

- b. The work of the Spirit has three distinct stages.

- 1) First, there is what we call **regeneration** or the new birth.

This is when the Spirit not only awakens you to see your need of Christ, but also brings you to turn from your own way to trust in Him.

This is the new heart that God promised to His people.

When Jesus gives it to you, your whole life is turned around from rebellion against God to following Christ.

If you belong to a covenant family, this can happen from your earliest days.

It can also occur when you are older, sometimes in a very dramatic turn around, and sometimes in a more gradual way.

But regeneration itself is not really so much a stage as it is something that happens all at once...

Yet, that does not mean that there may not be many years bringing us up to that point,

or that you will always know just when it has happened.

The thing that should be evident is that it has happened!

- 2) From this new heart comes the next stage in the work of the Spirit—

The process of sanctification.

You enter this stage as soon as you are regenerated.

a) In this stage, you are nourished up in Jesus Christ,
You bring forth the fruit of the Spirit as He feeds you with Himself.
You feed upon Him by faith...

You learn to observe all the Christ has commanded...
to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength...
And to love your neighbour as yourself.

b) Too often believers grow impatient with this stage...
They want it to occur all at once!
But fruit does not grow all at once—

We are called to abide in Christ and to be continually nourished up
in our faith to maturity.

3) Then, finally, there is the third stage, which is glorification.

This is the final stage in the work of the Spirit.

It occurs all at once.

The Bible promises that as soon as we see Jesus, we will be like Him.

This is that glorious moment when we, and all the members of Christ
Kingdom, will enter into that perfect love that the Law and the
Prophets command.

TRANS> So you how Jesus fulfils the Law for His people!

He fulfils the demands of the Law **for** sinners by His suffering and death to make full
satisfaction for our sins!

He has completed this work.

He fulfils the demands of the Law **in** sinners by giving us a new heart to love God...

He will continue this work in us until it is perfected.

I want to make an important distinction between Christ's work **for** us and Christ's work
in us.

Justification is His work **for** us.

In this, Jesus has met all the requirements to reconcile us with God by His life and
death.

We are completely accepted in God's sight.

Sanctification is His work **in** us.

This purpose of this work is not so much to make us acceptable to God (because we already are fully accepted in Christ)...

But the purpose is to fix us up!

We are like an old broken down car that God chooses.

We are completely accepted in Christ and brought into God's house...

But God does not take us to Himself and leave us as an old broken down useless car...

He brings us in and begins to fix us up until we are perfect...able to love Him and serve Him perfectly!

This is His work **in** us.

It is primarily this fixing up work with which Jesus is concerned in Matthew 5:21 and following.

He wants to see us full of the life of God, full of love for God, shining as light in this world!

Now in light of all this...

III. Jesus calls you to examine your own relationship to God's law in v. 19 – 20.

A. The basic question that every one of you must answer is this:

Is God's Law something you want to set aside—

Or is it something you want to fulfil in Christ?

1. We may go back to the Beatitudes again...

a. Look at them!

What do they say?

1) They say, blessed are the poor in Spirit, blessed are they that mourn...

And why are they poor in spirit and why are they mourning?

Because they realise they are not perfected in their love for God!

They are not indifferent about this!

They do not say, "O well, what does it matter, Christ will forgive."

2) Instead they are meek, they turn the running of their lives over to Him!

And they hunger and thirst for righteousness!

They begin to grow in mercy and purity and peacemaking, and they begin to suffer persecution!

Such persons long for Jesus Christ,

They long for the One who fulfils the Law!

The one who establishes a kingdom in which sinners fulfil all the requirements of God's law by faith!

2. Here is the test that Jesus gives:

What do you do with the least of God's commandments?

In Matthew 5:19, He says:

“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.

a. Do you see what relevance this bears?

Your attitude is displayed by what you do with the little things that God wants.

Jesus points out elsewhere that if you are faithful in the little things, you will be faithful in the great things.

You see, a lot of people pretend that they **would** be faithful in big things, but if you are not following God each day in the little things, you don't really have a right attitude...

If you say,

Well, it doesn't matter so much if I think it as long as I don't do it...

You don't really want to please God,

You just want to get by—

You are just pretending that you want to please Him.

b. In verse 20, Jesus mentions the scribes and the Pharisees as those who had rejected God's standard!

1) This was a shocking statement to many who were listening!

The scribes and Pharisees were greatly admired for the very thing Jesus was just talking about!

They even took tithes of the herbs in their garden

They had added a huge list of extra commandments to insure that they did not break God's commandments!

The saying was,

If only two people get to heaven,

one will be a scribe and the other a Pharisee!

- 2) Jesus explains elsewhere, however, that all their traditions were in reality just a way of hiding their contempt of God's Law.

They pretended that they were eager to please Him,

but in fact they used all these outward ceremonies and things to keep God's law from reaching their heart.

And many times, even their outward conduct was reprehensible when it came to showing mercy to their parents and things of that nature.

- 3) Beware lest you use religion as a way of actually avoiding God's commandments—

where you are going through religious duties and not coming to Jesus Christ to receive new life from Him...

Don't be like the seductress in Proverbs who says,

"I have paid my vows, my husband is away, come and let's have our fill of love!"

Her religious duties took the place of a heart to do God's will!

- 4) Of course there are many other diversions besides religion...

Things that are used to distract you from the call to love God...

- a) There is what we might call do-goodism...

You know, people who are busy doing all kinds of acts of service—which are good in themselves—but which are done to avoid facing up to what God really requires of us.

- b) There is the diversion of materialism...

Where your mind is constantly filled with what you want next—your next purchase or your investments or whatever...

Again, not that it is wrong to buy nice things and to plan for them, but it is wrong when these things are substituted for loving God.

- c) There is the diversion of immorality...

Whether it is drunkenness and that sort of thing...

Or sexual immorality...

These things are said to take away the heart!

They are not compatible with God's calling.

- d) Hobbies and sports can be used in the same way...

If you fill your life with these instead of with the love of God, they are just as destructive as any other diversion.

Of course, these can be used in service to God and to the glory of God.

It is when they are used as a diversion that they are a problem.

e) And then there is the problem of excuse making...

Those who say, "I cannot serve God because it is too hard," as if Christ has not come...

Or those who say, "Other people have led me astray..."

"My parents crippled me so that I can't serve God" (as if Jesus does not make the lame to walk)

Or "I do not understand so well how to serve God" (as if Jesus does not make the blind to see)

Or "I have all these troubles in my life so that I can't serve God." (as if Jesus does not calm storms)

B. There are very serious consequences for those who put aside God's Law....

1. Jesus says that if you treat what God says as unimportant—

a. If you loosen up on the little commandments as if they did not come from God...

as if the heart doesn't matter so long as the outside is okay...

or as if there is no reason to bother with those things that are not as acceptable in your family or in your society...

He says you will be called least in His kingdom!

b. This either means least in the sense that you will be cast out of the kingdom on judgement day...

or least in the sense that you will not have as great reward.

There is a distinction in rewards in heaven...

As long as we are here, we are to bear fruit...

The judgement will be the harvest day when the fruit is gathered in to be enjoyed.

Your goal should be to have as much fruit as you can in that day!

2. The consequences expressed in verse 20 are clearly not just loss of reward, but exclusion from the kingdom.

Matt. 5:20: For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

- a. This means exactly what it says.
- b. Jesus is not advocating righteousness by works here...

But He is rather excluding those who are not **pursuing** righteousness by faith.

He is excluding those who act as though Christ has not come and offered us a way whereby we may be restored to perfect love—

He is talking to those who are not interested in the righteousness that He came to give...

but who would prefer to avoid God.

C. What a wretched heart it is that keeps you from this Saviour!

- 1. Why do you run from God's high calling when we have such a Saviour that has come into the world to redeem us?

Will you despise the grace of God?

Will you refuse to love God when Christ has come to make a way for you to love Him?

When He Himself has borne God's wrath and curse for us?

When He Himself has poured out the Spirit on His church so that we might grow up into the love of God?

- 2. Come to Him!

Not to find a way to avoid the Law or to set aside...

Not to find a way out of loving God and doing what He commands...

But to find in Him a way to fulfil all!

Do not think that He came to destroy the Law or the Prophets!

He did not come to destroy, but to fulfil!