

**THE PLACE OF THE WORD
IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST**

Matthew 5:17-20

Intro: It is usually considered that the Gospel of Matthew was originally written for the Jewish people. After the first 2,000 years of history we come in the Bible to Abram, or Abraham, as he was eventually called by God. And from that point on to and including the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, the OT tells us about God's dealings with the Jewish people. It is not until after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that the purpose of God was extended to the Gentile world. The Apostles were Jewish men.

But never were the Jews considered to be the people of God because they were Jews. There were thousands and thousands of Jews who never had a true relationship with God as their Savior. When our Lord was on earth even most of the scribes and Pharisees were unregenerate men. As a result, the lives of most Jews did not reflect the character of men and women such as those with whom we get acquainted in the OT, men like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Job, David, Isaiah, Daniel, and many others I could mention. The list would include many godly women like Sarah, Ruth, Mary the mother of our Lord, Mary and Martha, just to name a few. But for the most part the history of Israel was not a good history. And it was especially corrupt in the days of our Lord's ministry on earth.

All of this background gives special importance to our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. The Lord's preaching was not the kind of preaching that the people of Israel in the days of Matthew, Mark, Luke (a Gentile), and John were accustomed to hearing.

In the Beatitudes the Lord was not only emphasizing the character of God, but He was point out that the true people of God can be identified by the characteristics mentioned in the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount – in the Beatitudes! The preaching of the Lord was know to be very different from that of the Scribes and Pharisees. In fact, from a human perspective, the different preaching of the Lord Jesus was one of the major reasons that the Lord was crucified.

We have also seen in the Sermon up to this point that it is the godly character of the Lord's people that makes them salt and light in the world.

And both that salt and light were greatly needed in Israel. So Jewish believers in those days were, like our Lord, ministers to the Jews. The Jews were inclined to believe that because they were Jews they were the people of God and thus better than the Gentiles could ever be. They did not understand when the Apostles were commanded to take the Gospel to the Gentiles and preach the same Gospel that they preached to the Jews.

Now we have essentially the same thing in the church today. Thousands of people, yes, hundreds of thousands of Gentiles today (as well as many Jews) think that they are the people of God because they are members of some church. But they don't believe the Gospel. I was just ten years old when I saw the pastor of the church that my folks attended call for the resignation of their new pastor because he believed that if you were a child of God, you ought to live a life that was different from the way people outside of the church lived.

Many of the Jews in our Lord's day considered Him a heretic because His message was so different from the scribes and Pharisees. And the scribes and Pharisees themselves stirred up the Jewish people to reject the teaching of Jesus.

Now as we come to our text for this evening the Lord was beginning to answer what was probably the main objection that unbelieving Jews had against the ministry of our Lord. And that was that His teaching about salvation was a denial of the teaching of the OT.

And it is right at this point that the Lord established a point that is basic truth. And this is, that in order for teaching and preaching to be the truth, it must be in full accord with the message of the Bible. Even Isaiah declared this truth seven hundred years before Christ came to the earth. He said, and you will find these words written in Isaiah 8:20,

20 To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

And when the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Rome, had been teaching that Jews and Gentiles were saved the same way, he referred to a question that he had doubtless heard many times before. In this particular instance it had to do with the idea that circumcision had placed the Jew above the Gentile with God. So the Jews would respond to the preaching of the Gospel and to the Jews' claim that circumcision gave them some advantage with God over the Gentiles, which Paul strongly denied. Their ques-

tion was, “What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there in circumcision?” To which Paul responded, “Much every way: chiefly, because unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom.3:1-2). What were the oracles of God? They are the words of God! What honor God conferred upon the believing Jews because it was through them God gave His Word to the whole world.

So all of our questions about God, all of our knowledge about ourselves, all of the truth that we need to know about salvation – all of this, and much, much more, has been given to us in the Bible, and the Bible was given to us by God the Holy Spirit. And most of the writers of the Bible were Jews. But they wrote not just for the Jews, but for everyone, for Gentiles as well. What greater honor could be conferred upon any people than God has given to the Jews in that it was through the Jews that we have the Word of God.

But how did the Jews get it? Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 answered that question for us. Let me tell you how we got it:

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

Now let us look at our text in Matthew 5:17 through 20.

The Lord Jesus had been charged with destroying the law and the prophets. Why were the Jews and many of the Jewish people saying this? Well, there were perhaps many answers that they would have given to the Lord. Two of the answers the Jews would have given the Lord were that God had given salvation to the Jews as a reward for doing what the Lord had told them to do in the Law and the Prophets. This was one way the Jews had of referring to the OT – “the Law and the Prophets.” But the Lord would have responded to them, “Do the Law and the Prophets say anywhere that you are saved because you are Jews and because you keep, or observe, the Law?” And the answer to that question is, NO! It was before the Law was given, and before Abraham circumcised Isaac, that “Abram believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” The Law was given to Moses to direct the lives of the Jews, but not to save them. Salvation was by faith, and faith alone, faith in God. We don’t work for our salvation, but we work from our salvation. Jesus was

teaching that, and that was what the Law and the Prophets taught.

But what did the Lord mean when He said concerning the message of the Law and Prophets? It was that He had come to fulfil it. None of the blood of bulls and goats could have saved anyone, but the animals sacrifices looked ahead to the fulfillment of what they promised in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. To cite one example of this, every detail concerning the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb was typical of what would eventually be true of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even Isaiah the prophet predicted the death of the Lord Jesus Christ in those familiar words found in Isaiah 53:4-6 predicted that salvation would come through the Messiah:

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:
yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:4-6).

Even if we go back to the Garden of Eden, we see the provision that God made for Adam and Eve before He put them out of the Garden. He took the skins of animals, and clothed them. Where did the skins come from? Animals were sacrificed to obtain them, probably one for Adam and one for Eve.

John the Baptist preached, "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Where did he get that figure of speech? It came from the Law and the Prophets.

The Law and the Prophets did not teach salvation by works. The teaching of the Law and the Prophets had been corrupted in our Lord's Day by the Scribes and Pharisees to teach that salvation was by works. What was the purpose of the Law? Let me read from Romans 3:19-26 where the Apostle Paul has answered all of these questions:

19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before

God.

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

So the Law was given, not to save, nor even to make men sinners, but to show that they were sinners already and in need of a Savior. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Salvation is not a reward for good works, but a gift of God’s grace, purchased by the death of God’s Son. So He, Jesus Christ, came to fulfill what the Law and the Prophets predicted of salvation.

And then as we come to verse 8, the Lord did a very significant thing. He spoke in the manner of the OT prophets, claiming for Himself the same authority that the Prophets claimed with they said, “Thus saith the Lord, but He claimed divine authority for what He was saying to Himself. And as the Son of God He had every right to do so.

His statement indicates that no declaration “shall . . . pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled.” And then there would be no reason to change it.

Then in verse 19 the Lord went on to deduct from He had just said to indicate that no one has the right to change “one of these least of the commandments,” and every man’s teaching must be judged by whether or not he is in agreement with the Law and the Prophets.

I don't really know, and I haven't been able to find out what the Lord meant when He spoke about those who were least in the kingdom of heaven, unless He meant that it is possible for one who is truly saved to be right in teaching some things about the Law and the Prophets, but not all. But true teachers may not understand all that has been written, but only that which is in full agreement with the OT teaching about salvation can be considered "great." The Lord was such a teacher, and so were the apostles. The scribes and Pharisees were disqualified altogether.

All that was written at the time the Lord came to earth were the books of the OT. And the Lord Jesus put His full stamp of approval on the Law and the Prophets because what they wrote, they wrote under the direct inspiration of God. Now that we have the New Testament, we can say the same thing about the whole Bible. The Lord Jesus gave sole authority to the Word of God for all matters of faith and practice.

What we read about Apollos in Acts 18:24-28 may be an example of what the Lord Jesus was talking about in Matthew 5:19:

24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Notice again the authority with which the Lord Jesus spoke using the words in verse 20, "For I say unto you, . . ."

Entering into or being in the kingdom of heaven, seems to be the equivalent of being saved. True salvation called for a greater righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees. Much that they taught was true, but we

need to read Matthew 23 at this point to see our Lord's strong denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees. It can briefly be stated in our Lord's words, "for they say, and do not" (Matt. 23:3).

What place did the Word of God have in the ministry of the Lord Jesus? It was the heart of His ministry, both what was written in the Law and the Prophets, and additions that He alone had the right to make because He was the Son of God. None of the writers of the NT claimed to have the authority that the Lord did. Their claim was that they spoke additional truth under the authority of the Holy Spirit as well as of the Father and of the Lord Jesus.

Let us be careful that we limit ourselves to the revealed Word in the OT and the NT, and that we expect the same from the teachers that we listen to. In the first chapter of 2 Peter, verse 3, the Apostle Peter said that God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. If we have all things in Christ and in the Word, what more do we need? We will never in this life learn or use up what God has already given us. The tragic thing is that not all true believers are mindful of this wonderful truth.