

# Ambassadors of the King's rule

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[ 0 : 00 ] Last week we looked at the Beatitudes, which introduced to us the King's people, those who are true disciples of the King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who are called by the King to lives of repentance and faith, whose lives are then shaped by repentance and faith. In other words, grace has humbled them. They've died to the world, but grace has also exalted them. They are to live for the King alone.

In other words, we said they had a cross-shaped existence, as described in the Beatitudes. And there are also those, verse 11 and 12, who bear the scars of true discipleship, the marks of the cross as kingdom people in a fallen world.

But you see, Matthew goes on, and Jesus in his teaching goes on, to say it doesn't end there. It doesn't just end with a description of the King's people, a description of discipleship.

The King's people, you see, have a role, they have a purpose. What can that be? What is it? What are God's people for? Well, that's the answer that follows in verse 13 following.

[ 1 : 15 ] The King's people have a purpose, and that is to be the King's ambassadors in the world. Ambassadors of the rule of Jesus Christ.

And they are to be, as he says, the salt and the light in order to bring glory to God. In order that the world sees them and turns to glorify the Father in heaven.

That's what the King's people are for. But what does that mean? What's Jesus talking about? Is this something completely new he's introducing here? Is this something novel?

Well, if we've been listening at all in the studies of Matthew's Gospel we've done so far, you'll know instinctively that the answer to that must be, no, of course it can't be new. It's the continuation, isn't it, of a very old story.

That's what Matthew's Gospel is all about. But it is also, at the same time, something new as well. It's the climax, isn't it? It's the fulfilment of something that stretches right back to the beginning.

[ 2 : 17 ] That's been Matthew's whole message. It's the same story, but it's now come to its climax. God's people have always been his ambassadors, his witnesses in the world.

That's always been the destiny of God's chosen people. But, like so much else that was promised in the past, that was foreshadowed and partially realised in the experience of the people in the Old Testament, now at last, with the coming of Jesus, this too is being fulfilled.

It's coming to its climax. And God's people are to be the ambassadors of the King in the whole of the world. And with the coming of Jesus, that task takes on a whole new meaning.

And that, I think, is the key to everything that follows here in the whole of the Sermon on the Mount. Especially, to the vexed question often, of the place of the commands of God for followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, now that his kingdom has come.

In other words, the place of the law of God. The commandments to live by. We can only really grasp that, the place of these things, if we understand the purpose of that law right from the very beginning.

[ 3 : 32 ] And it has a missionary purpose. I've seen that more clearly, I think, this week than ever before, because I've taken verses 13 to 16 along with verses 17 to 21.

Or 17 to 20. Cut out that paragraph break, that heading in the middle, and it all becomes clear. Verse 17 in our passage here is the key to both the bit that goes before, in verses 13 to 16, and what comes after, in verses 18 to 20.

Verse 17 is the hinge on which all of this hangs. Jesus' coming and the inauguration of his kingdom fulfills at last, it brings to a climax, the missionary purpose of God's law of holiness.

Christ's followers living as salt and light in the whole world, so as to bring glory to God from the peoples of the whole world. That's what Christ's coming brings to climax.

And therefore, we see clearly what the place of God's holy law is. We see how it's fulfilled. When we see that Jesus is talking about his people, his church, living transparently under the rule of the king, throughout the whole world, and teaching others to do that too.

[ 4 : 48 ] Aren't those the words of the Great Commission? Making disciples of all nations, and doing what? Teaching them to obey all that I've commanded you. So the king's ambassadors themselves, you see, are those who are totally under the sovereign rule, under the sovereign command of their king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And because of that, they demonstrate the glory of the sovereign to the whole world. They manifest the presence of the sovereign, of Jesus Christ, in his world.

They carry out and extend the influence of this king throughout the whole world, making the whole realm his. The king's people and their mission is intimately bound up with the king's commands, his law, for the way the king's people are to be.

Let's try and grasp that this morning by focusing on three things. First of all, the purpose of God's mission to the world through his people. And that's going to involve us ranging through the story from promise to fulfillment through the Bible.

First the purpose, but then the picture that we have here in verse 13 to 16, of God's mission through his people. And then verses 18 to 20, the power for that mission of God's people.

[ 6 : 05 ] Purpose, the picture, and the power. Let's start with the purpose of God's people. In the broadest sense, the story of God's people right throughout the history of the Bible is the story of God's wonderful missionary purpose, isn't it?

The purpose of salvation for all nations. First of all, promised, and then progressively realized and fulfilled all the way through the history of the Bible. And brought to a climax in the coming of Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

That's the story of the people of God. It's one great covenant promise of God's redemption, unfolding and coming to fulfillment. That's what the Bible's all about. And one of the most important things for us to grasp is the place of the law of God.

The commands of God, the instruction of God for his people, how they're to live. The place of the law in that missionary purpose of God. So, question.

What's the purpose of the people of God? Answer. It's to be the vehicle of God's glory, his light, his salt to the world from the beginning and in a climactic way with the coming of Jesus.

[ 7 : 16 ] And the end of the ages that we live in. Question two. What's the purpose of the law, the commands of God? Answer. To serve that missionary purpose of God's people.

To display God's holiness and his glory in the flesh, in real people, in the world. From the beginning but all the way through and coming to a climax with the coming of Jesus and his New Testament people of God indwelt by the spirit of the risen Jesus Christ.

You see, from the very beginning God's commands for his people, his commands for their holy living serve as the purpose of his mission.

Of his mission of salvation to the ends of the earth. Now, we need to do some what we call biblical theology here. Just tracing this through the story of the Bible from beginning to end.

But let's just think for a few moments about that. Think back right to the very beginning. Jesus says, remember, I've come, verse 17, to fulfill the whole of the law and the prophets, the whole Old Testament.

[ 8 : 20 ] So let's go right back to the beginning, the law, the Torah. Let's go back to the book of Genesis. What happens in the Bible right at the very start? God creates Adam. Why does God create human beings?

To be his image in the world. To display his glory to the universe and to the heavens above. To be his viceroy, his ambassador, the very image, the one who represents God in God's creation.

But what happens? Well, of course, his image was defaced in the disaster of the fall, wasn't it? Not destroyed completely, but defaced. So does God abandon his plan?

Does he abandon his world? Does he abandon his purpose of glorifying the cosmos through his image? Or we might think so, but no, he doesn't, does he? He sets in motion his great promise and plan of redemption through the seed of the woman.

He calls Abraham, doesn't he, a little bit later on? Abraham's chosen to be the father of the faithful. Genesis 12, through you and your seed, all the nations of the world are going to be blessed.

[ 9 : 27 ] Isn't that what he says to Abraham in chapter 22, verse 19 of Genesis? Don't turn it up. I've chosen Abraham, he says, why? That he may command his children and household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.

Keeping God's commands. Why? So that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he's promised. You see? God's holy law, God's holy instructions, life according to his commands, serving the promise of God.

The promise of salvation for the whole earth. When we come to Moses, we have a great leap forward, don't we? After the great redemption of God's people out of Egypt, after God has constituted them as his people, what does he do on the mountain?

He gives them the law, the commandments. He calls them his own chosen people, chosen out of all the nations of the earth. Why? Exodus 19, 6. To be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, treasured possession among all the people.

What are they to do? Well, let us shine God's glory among the nations, aren't they? And that's why he then goes on to give them all the commandments. Live like this and you will shine the glory of God to all the nations.

[ 10 : 44 ] God gives his law to his people in the context of world mission. It's very explicit in the book of Deuteronomy. It might just be worth turning up this one cross-reference. Very important.

In Deuteronomy chapter 4, just when Moses is on the brink of the promised land after the 40 years in the wilderness, just before he's about to give the largest exposition of all God's instruction for life in the land, he prefaces it with this.

Why are you to keep the law of God? Deuteronomy 4, 5. See, I've taught you statutes and rules as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land you're entering to take possession of.

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, surely this great nation is wise and understanding.

For what great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call on him? And what great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I've set before you today?

[ 11 : 49 ] Why God's law? To shine the holiness of God in the sight of all the peoples. That they might say, who is a God like this? The God of Israel. You see, that's the purpose of God's people, to be missionary ambassadors to the world.

That's the purpose of God's commands, to serve that purpose of mission. Right back from the beginning in the Torah, the law, in the days of Moses.

You get the same thing all the way through the prophets too in the later Old Testament. One of the clearest is Isaiah who talks about this a lot. Don't turn these up, I'll just read them to you. But in Isaiah chapter 41, verse 8, he calls Israel, God's people, my servant.

The offspring of Abraham, you are my servant, he says. What are the servants to do? The purpose is to shed God's light to all the nations. But of course, there's a problem, isn't there?

Isaiah says, well, Israel, my servant, is a blind servant, Isaiah 42, 19, who is blind but my servant, a deaf as the messengers of Israel. He sees many things, but he doesn't observe them.

[ 12 : 56 ] The Lord was pleased for his righteousness sake to magnify his law, to make it glorious. But this people plundered and looted and worse. Instead of a glorious witness to the one true God, what happened?

God's name is despised because of them. Remember in Romans chapter 2, verse 24, Paul quotes Isaiah 52, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

Instead of being a witness among the Gentiles to God's glory, they scorn God. Why? Because of the way you live. Because you've abandoned God's missionary law.

That's clearly borne out all through the history of the Old Testament. We know it, don't we? Apart from a few high points, like during Joshua's conquest or 1 Kings 10 when Solomon's kingdom was established, apart from a few high points when Israel really did shine to the world.

It's a pretty grim story, isn't it? The story of non-mission, of disobedience, of failure. Ultimately ended in the exile, didn't it?

[ 14 : 02 ] God had to take his missionary people right out of the land because they were utterly failing to be what they were made for. Well, surely that was the end. You would think so, wouldn't

you?

But no. No, Israel is a holy missionary people shining God's glory to the world will not be cast away completely, will not be abandoned.

God has a promise and that promise won't fail. So, in Isaiah, in all of these chapters speaking about the servanthood of Israel, Isaiah mysteriously speaks about two Israels and two servants.

On the one hand is the servant people who are just blind and disobedient and not shining for God.

But on the other hand, he talks about the servant who would at last fulfill the destiny of Israel.

We read all about it in the servant songs, don't we? Isaiah 42 and 6, I've called you my servant in righteousness. I'll give you as a covenant to the peoples, a light for the nations.

[15:05] Even clearer in the second servant song in Isaiah 49, you are the servant in whom I will be glorified. What will the servant do? I'll bring Jacob back and restore Israel.

But not only that, I'll give you as a light to the nations that my salvation might reach the ends of the earth. Isaiah 53, the fourth servant song, my servant will act wisely.

He will sprinkle many nations. Do you see? God's true servant, his Messiah, will do what his people could never achieve. He would truly be the one who brings the missionary light of God's glory to the ends of the earth, to all the nations.

But, crucially, don't miss this. That's not the end of God's people's mission. The promise in Isaiah is that God's people also, at last, will be bound up with their Messiah in that great mission.

So, in Isaiah 61, the servant says, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. But he goes on to say, but you, my people, will be called the priests of God.

[16:23] You will be called the ministers of our God. Or in Isaiah 43, in 10, he says, you are my witnesses and the servant that I've chosen.

Does that ring a bell? Acts chapter 1, verse 8, when Jesus said to his disciples, you are my witnesses. You will be to the ends of the earth.

Paul, in Acts chapter 13, applies these words of the servant to himself and the New Testament missionaries. The Lord has commanded us to be a light to the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

Do you see? The purpose of God's people is bound up with the climax of the coming of God's true servant, Jesus Christ.

And as that prophecy is fulfilled, so the ultimate purpose of God's people is fulfilled. That's why Isaiah 60 says, arise, shine, for your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

[17:25] Nations shall come to your light. So rise, shine. You see, the Messiah that was promised fulfills God's people's destiny for them.

To usher in, to usher in the great age of his salvation. But it also fulfills God's promise and purpose in them. To restore them so that they would be, at last, the true lights to the world.

The king shares the glory of his mission with his people. That's the promise. And you see, what Jesus is saying here in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, verse 13, is all of this is fulfilled at last.

Here it is. Here's the destiny of the people of God. All nations proclaiming the glory of God. All nations proclaiming salvation revealed in Christ.

This is the climax. This is the ultimate fulfillment of your calling as God's people. You are now living out and going to live out to the end of the age what Isaiah foreshadowed and promised.

[18:35] That's just what Peter says in his first letter, chapter 2, verse 9. You, you New Testament believers in Jesus Christ, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into light.

You see what Jesus is saying here? That's always been the promise of the law and the prophets.

Verse 17, don't think I've come to abolish all that. I've come to fulfill that. To bring it about.

At last. My people's time isn't over. It's not finished just because I've come and completed my work.

No, it's just beginning. This is the age of salvation.

This is the age when the promise to Abraham is going to be fulfilled to the ends of the earth and you're going to do it. You are my ambassadors. You are the servants who carry my message of salvation.

That's what you're called for. So let your light shine. And you see verses 13 and 16 here and verses 18 and 20 just flesh out for us what that means.

[ 19 : 45 ] What God's purpose for mission looks like for his people. And the age of Christian mission to the world Jesus is telling us is about doing and teaching the perfect way of the king.

That's what real mission is. It's about making disciples. It's about making obedient followers of all the nations. That's Matthew 28 the Great Commission. Teaching them to obey all that I've commanded you.

You see the mission of the kingdom and the lifestyle of the kingdom are utterly inseparable. And that's what binds these two sections together.

Let's look at verse 13 to 16 then which gives us a picture of God's mission to the world through his people. The climax of God's plan of salvation for all the nations comes about through the radical counter-cultural witness of the king's people.

It's critical to see that here that the message of the kingdom is utterly inseparable from the messengers. Verse 13 you are the salt not just the salt shaker. Verse 14 you are the light you're not just holding the light you are the light.

[ 21 : 01 ] See just as Jesus person was inseparable from his message I am the light of the world. I'm not just telling you about the light of the world. So it is for his people.

Don Carson sums it up like this the norms of the kingdom that is the beatitudes worked out in the lives of the heirs of the kingdom constitute the witness of the kingdom. The norms of the kingdom worked out in the lives of the heirs of the kingdom constitute the witness of the kingdom.

You see what Jesus is saying here is that in this instance the messengers really are the message. And we know that's right don't we? In diplomacy and international relations it's all down to the people who are involved as the ambassadors as the emissaries of the nations.

Isn't that right? They carry the will and the purpose of their sovereign or their government but in reality that message is embodied in them. Everything depends on who they are and how they act and how they come across.

Do you remember when Mrs. Thatcher went to meet Mr. Gorbachev and she came back and said there's a man with whom I can do business. See it all hung on Mr. Gorbachev. None of that dismantling of the Soviet system could have happened to anybody else but it was him.

[ 22 : 19 ] The message was embodied in the man. We've seen it just these last few weeks haven't we in the situation in the Middle East in Palestine with the new hope for peace because of the election of Mr. Abbas.

Everybody said and everybody knew that that just could never ever ever happen with Yasser Arafat because the whole cause was so wrapped up with him and he was so rotten to the core.

But with Mr. Abbas it's different. You see the messenger is critical to the message. And the King Jesus the sovereign Lord of all the earth coming to inaugurate his kingdom has put all his trust for his mission in his people.

his ambassadors you and me. It's a pretty scary thought isn't it? Look at the picture though in verses 13 and 14 to see just how big and how scary that is.

You are the salt of the earth Jesus says. What does that mean? Well in Jesus' day of course salt was primarily used as a preservative wasn't it? To preserve meat from decay and putrefaction.

[ 23 : 34 ] And by implication you see what Jesus is saying is that the world is rotten and decaying and corrupting. Left to itself it will destroy itself. That's a story isn't it?

A human society writes about history. We don't have to look very far today to see how true that is. We like to blind ourselves to that but the reality is that society around about us is not basically good and getting better.

It's basically bad and getting worse. we have to face up to the truth that there are no depths to which even what we might call the most civilised of people can't stoop and sink given the right opportunities.

You just have to read your newspapers. We've had it this last week that awful barbarism in these camps of prisoners of war. The story about terrible abuse of children in care homes.

The story in the church, in this instance the Greek Orthodox church of all these moral and ethnic corrupt things going on. You see the world is rotten.

[ 24 : 40 ] It's rotting. It's rotting socially. It's rotting spiritually. It's rotting morally. And you, says Jesus to his followers, you you are my answer to that.

You have to be a preservative disinfectant in the midst of all of this. You're the answer. That's staggering, isn't it? Not that the life of the church in the world alone can utterly reverse the decay

and the corruption in our society.

Of course it can't. There are limitations. Salt can't reverse something that's already totally rotten. But the church's role, says Jesus, is to preserve the world from its self-destructive tendencies so that God can call out his people by the gospel in the world.

The world needs to be preserved in existence so there can be a mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Think right back to the beginning. God's covenant with Noah. He promised to preserve the whole earth. Why?

So that his promise of redemption could continue. Can't do that. There's no earth anymore. And that's part of our disciples' calling, to be world preservers. It sounds staggering.

[ 25 : 55 ] It sounds almost laughable. But you know, it's not. History itself testifies to the extraordinary power, preserving power, of the gospel of Jesus Christ at work through his people.

Just think back to the 18th century in this country. Serious historians will say, non-Christian historians will say quite openly that the only thing that preserved this country from a revolution of blood like France had was the revival under people like Wesley and Whitfield.

The results of that, following that, were absolutely staggering in terms of social reform, penal reform, the abolition of slavery, all these things that came about through the witness of men like Wilberforce and the Earl of Shaftesbury, the Clapham Saints.

Staggering preservative power of the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ lived out in the people of the kingdom. We're still reaping the benefits of that yet. not just on a national or a global scale that this is true, it's true of individual congregations.

We ought to have a preserving power in the community around us. I know a minister who was for 20 years in a church in a very deprived area of Scotland and when he first went there there was really no gospel witness at all in the church but over those years that place was built into a living fellowship and you know what he told me?

[ 27 : 23 ] He said he had observed over that 20 years a difference in the gardens in the parish. I said what do you mean? He said well to begin with they were just an absolute mess.

They were full of stuff dumped in them. They were rubbish. Nobody cared tuppence for the appearance of where they lived. He said you know during that 20 years we saw a difference.

People began to tidy up their gardens.

People took pride and there was a sort of dignity restored. Now he wasn't claiming all the credit for that but he said I just feel that the presence of the witness of this living church in the midst has had an effect on the community beyond just those who have become Christian disciples.

You hear about it in places where a living church grows in a village and the atmosphere of the place is transformed. That's the salt of the gospel at work.

I guess we need to ask ourselves what difference to the atmosphere are we making in the city centre of Glasgow and our congregation here.

[ 28 : 29 ] It's true also on an individual level isn't it? We're called to live as salt. A little salt can go a very long way. The kind of conversation that goes on in the office where you work or the lab or the classroom or wherever it is.

The effect that honesty and integrity can have in a business or in a firm where you're known to be somebody who won't take a bribe who won't lie who won't cheat.

The difference that can be made in a hospital ward of a doctor who has a certain bedside manner that people notice it transmits itself into the atmosphere all around.

All of that you see is the calling of God's people. Notice it's not just a negative thing when we talk about preservatives. Salt is not a kind of sterile antiseptic.

Remember salt gives flavour. Brings out the very best in a dish. And that's what Christian disciples are to be. People who add to something. Maybe it's indefinable but it's just right.

[ 29 : 36 ] Just the thing that brings out the full flavour, the taste. not being in your face and sanctimonious. That's too much salt. Too much salt puts your blood pressure up.

Too much of that kind of Christianity can put people's blood pressure up. Not that. What we need is flavoursome Christianity.

That draws attention not to the salt but draws attention to the flavour of the dish. Brings out the flavour, brings out as Paul says, the fragrance of Jesus Christ. Live like that, Jesus is saying, and people will notice.

And then be prepared always to give an answer for the reason for the hope that's within you. It's not easy though, is it? Because salt also sometimes stings, doesn't it?

And righteousness and wholesomeness by its very presence condemns evil by implication. And that's why verses 11 and 12 are true.

[ 30 : 38 ] That's why often there is persecution, there is slander, there are insults. But even if people are grudging, they do see. It leaves them to look for light, doesn't it?

That brings us to the second image, verse 14, you're the light of the world. And again, the implication is that the world needs light because the world's in darkness, it's blind, it's helpless, it's in fog. And Jesus himself is the light of the world and he says, so too are you because you carry my light within you.

It's a fact. He's not saying be the light of the world, he's saying you are. You're on a hill, you're on a stand. Live like that. Our world is dark, morally and spiritually and socially.

And people are lost, like people crashing about in the dark, they're falling over, they're injuring themselves. We see it all round today in society. Marriages are collapsing.

Ethnic groups are at each other's throats, crashing into each other. Many young people are confused, in a fog, they're disillusioned, they're falling into drugs, into delinquency.

[ 31 : 56 ] Did you see that statistic that said something ridiculous like 40% of teenagers have been in trouble with the law? Isn't that astonishing? In the dark, they're searching for light, they're searching for something.

You go across the road to Borders bookshop and you'll find the philosophy and religion section absolutely full of books offering help, offering light. People are searching in our world, aren't they, for moral consciousness and yet they're utterly confused.

The same people who go on marches against cruelty to foxes go on marches to demand a woman's right to choose to kill the baby in her womb. It's all confused.

There's no light. But you, says Jesus, are the light of the world. You are to show the way and the truth and the life in yourselves. And if salt is the life that though perhaps unnoticed and unexplained, permeates the community and preserves it in flavoursome ways, then light is what penetrates the moral darkness of people's minds.

So that those who have eyes to see will be pointed to the source, to the Father in heaven, to Christ himself, to give him glory. And Jesus is saying, remember, not become this, but you are this.

[ 33 : 18 ] You are lights in the world and for the world, so be what you are. Fulfill your calling as disciples. That's what discipleship means. Jesus calls us to be followers and fishers of men, not just to be listeners.

Life of the kingdom and the mission of the kingdom are absolutely inseparable. That's his whole point here. What Jesus is talking about here, I think, is not so much gospel preaching, but rather what is a prerequisite for that, absolutely essential for that, authentic Christian living.

That really is like salt, stemming decay and rot. That really is like light, penetrating the darkness.

That really is a counter-culture that confronts the world and shows itself to the world.

That points them to wake up to the reality of verse 16, to see God, the Father in heaven. Not drawing attention to ourselves, not being on and off like a flashlight, but rather being like a concealed light that is hidden but lights up and sheds light on the object of beauty.

That's a tall order, isn't it? How on earth can the church possibly do that?

[ 34 : 42 ] How can Christian believers like me possibly hope to have any effect like that? Surely that's just impossible. I can't be like that at all, can you? I can see how Jesus can, his life and his words and his actions.

He was light in life. But me? No, yes, you see, that's what Jesus says. You shall be my witnesses. He, you see, is the light of the world, but he came and he died and he rose and he sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts.

The spirit of the perfected, vibrant, flavoursome, winsome humanity that Jesus was. And he's put that into us so that we shine with his light.

And that's what verses 17 to 20, you see, are speaking about. They speak about the power of God's mission to the world through his people. The life of God's missionary ambassadors to the world is lived by the power of radical obedience to the king's rule.

[ 35 : 52 ] Countercultural lives are lives that are lived in total submission to the king himself. self. That's what it means to have this kind of witness. That's what he's saying. It was William Booth, the

founder of the Salvation Army, who said this, the greatness of a man's power lies in the measure of his surrender.

And Jesus is saying countercultural lives are empowered because their lives lived in total surrender to the command of the king, the Lord Jesus himself.

See, in verse 17, he's saying, don't think for a minute that I've come to abolish the law and the prophets, the missionary role of my chosen people who live in holiness, who are obedient to my law and not the pagan law.

Don't think I've come to abolish that just because I've fulfilled the law, just because I've lived as the perfect human for you so that God can accept you. Don't think that you've no longer got any role. No, I've come to fulfill this. What was the promise of the new covenant? I'll put my law in your heart. My spirit will be within you.

[ 37 : 03 ] Jesus, the true light of the world, came as the perfect, the wonderful, the attractive, the holy son of God, so that in the triumph and ascension of his glory, having won salvation for his people, he would send his spirit into the hearts of his people, to bring back Jacob, his people, to make them into a holy, a renewed missionary people who can witness to the ends of the earth.

At last, they would carry God's light to all the nations. At last, they would fulfill his great missionary purpose, the purpose of God's law right from the beginning, the purpose of serving the promise of gathering all nations to be the children of Abraham.

And that's why he says in verse 18, you see, that God's holy law, his commands that mark out his holiness within his people and among his people, that they'll last forever. It'll last till heaven and earth passes away.

It'll last until he's accomplished everything. Until he's accomplished that great purpose of mission.

Indeed, we are now living in those days, the days of climax, the missionary days.

The days when the gospel goes to all nations, to all the world, to fulfill that purpose. This is the climax. It's not an age of jettisoning holiness and righteousness. It's an age of the fulfillment, of greater righteousness, surpassing righteousness, a deeper, more radical obedience, a total submission to the king who's not speaking from heaven, but who's now here, speaking himself.

[ 38 : 44 ] That's why verse 19 says, it's not a time for loosening up on God's commands. It's a time for doing his will, obeying the king, and teaching others to obey him too.

Whoever relaxes, looses, the least of these commandments and teaches others to do that will be called least in the kingdom. But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great.

We're not abandoning God's commands to be his distinctive people. Nor can we teach other people to abandon God's ways.

No. Nor are we to teach them but not do them like the Pharisees did. They taught it all but lived differently. No, says Jesus, you have to do the Lord's ways.

That means you have to obey the king in the surpassing way. It was never like this before. And you're to teach them. That's the great commission. Teaching all in the whole kingdom of heaven.

[ 39 : 44 ] Not just in the land of Israel now but to the ends of the earth. Mission, you see, is about obedience. It's about obedience to the king. It's about bringing all the earth under the rule of God, our gracious saviour king.

It's about obedience to Jesus' words and his commands. That's what the whole of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount is about. But I say to you, live like this.

Chapter 7, he says, not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom. But who will? The one who does the will of my heavenly father. The one who listens to these words of mine and does them.

These are the true disciples. These are the true ambassadors. That's what bears fruit. That's how you recognize them by their fruit. And the fruit of this is the mission of the kingdom.

Teaching obedience to all the nations. You see, the mission to bring all nations to the obedience of the king of Jesus is empowered by that radical obedience at work in the ambassadors of the kingdom.

[ 40 : 51 ] The church. That's the righteousness that far surpasses anything of the Pharisees and the scribes, the great experts in the law. Yes, law keeping in the minutiae was their speciality.

They'd invented 248 commands and 356 provisions attached to the ten commandments. How can you exceed that? Well, Jesus says it's very easy.

You get to the heart of it all. You get to the purpose of it all. If the purpose of God's law is to serve his great missionary purpose to the world, to bring all nations under his saving rule, then people who really grasp that purpose are the ones who really grasp the heart of the law.

The ones who have got really to the very heart of God himself. The ones who are truly missionary people. Theirs is the deep and true righteousness that exceeds everything else.

Because it's understood God's grace. They've understood their own spiritual poverty. And it's experienced God's grace and mercy. And it's issued in love and gratitude that so hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

[ 42 : 08 ] So hungers and thirsts for God himself that it joyfully obeys. All that he commands. And we'll go to the very ends of the earth to share that with others.

You see, that's true heart righteousness. That's the power of all true mission. And it's possible only in people who have understood that and been transformed themselves by grace.

And the rest of the Sermon on the Mount simply explains and explains what all that means in the nitty gritty of day to day life. Jesus penetrates the very heart of God's commands for holiness.

And he shows how they must be lived out from within. From within changed lives and changed hearts. Because that's the power of God's mission in the world. Let me just close by saying this.

Our attitude, friends, our attitude to the words and the commands of Jesus will tell us whether we really are the King's people or not. Whether we've grasped his heart, whether we've really embraced his mission or whether we've just never really got it at all.

[ 43 : 22 ] So ask yourself this. How do you react to the commands and directions of the Lord Jesus Christ? The person who's just willfully irreligious will say, well who cares?

Why should I do what Jesus says? I don't care. I reject him. That's very plain. But you know the religious person, the moralist person, you may say, well I'm obeying these deep down because I want to win approval.

And God will have to accept me. And they've also totally misunderstood the Gospel. In fact what they've done is, what the scribes and the Pharisees do, they've domesticated God's law and made it achievable by certain set commands and shibboleths that they can do, make themselves feel as if they've achieved.

You know friends, the danger is we can live, we can be Christian people, but we can in fact live as religious slaves. We can live just as practical religious moralists, even within evangelical churches. Ticking the boxes and dotting the I's and crossing the T's of all the evangelical parts of subculture, the shibboleths, the prohibitions, the demands. We can do all of that, we can have still totally missed the plot.

[ 44 : 47 ] What Jesus is really on about. Matthew 5, you see, teaches us that the true disciple looks to Jesus and his radical demands and grasps their own spiritual poverty.

But they hear the words of Jesus saying, blessed are the poor in spirit. And they've grasped hold of the mercy of God in Christ. And they know that kingdom inheritance that only comes through the gospel of Jesus.

And now they hunger and thirst after righteousness. They hunger and thirst after God himself and they desire to be like him. And they want the world to see him. And the world to know him.

And the world to be like him too. And so when Jesus commands us to take up our cross and to follow him, to slay ourselves and to live only for him, to radically obey him wherever he takes us, they rejoice.

And they love to obey, even though it costs them everything. Because his spirit is now enlivening their inner being.

[ 45 : 56 ] His desires have become their desires. His light has become a burning, shining light within them.

Obedience to the king drives the mission of the king. And that mission is the glory of our Father in heaven. So let me ask you this morning, are his commandments, as the hymn says, your happy choice?

Has love made obedience sweet for you and not burdensome? If so, rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For yours is the kingdom.

If not, friend, you haven't grasped it yet. You haven't got it. So as the hymn also says, look to Jesus. Because mercy flows through him alone.

And if you allow him, he'll shine the light. And he'll open your heart and he'll make you understand.  
So that you joy and rejoice in every command of his.  
[ 47 : 10 ] And his yoke to you seems suddenly not a burden. But the lightest, kindest, most  
beautiful thing in the world. And in coming to him you'll find rest and peace for your souls.  
worthy. So he wants to be coule of God. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.  
Let's pray. Let's pray.