

An Earthly Relationship with Heaven

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Now, Willie will be continuing in the studies in the Sermon on the Mount later in the service. We're going to be reading in Matthew 5, but before we do that, we're also going to read in the Psalms.

We're going to read part of Psalm 119, which you will find on page 513.

On page 513, we'll be reading verses 33 to 40. So Psalm 119, reading verses 33 to 40.

The psalmist writes, Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things and give me life in your ways.

[1 : 10] Confirm to your servant your promise that you may be feared. Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good. Behold, I long for your precepts, in your righteousness, and give me life.

Then over to page 810 to Matthew chapter 5, reading this morning verses 17 to 20. Matthew chapter 5, I'm reading verses 17 to 20.

Jesus says, And I will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to our hearts and to our lives. Turn with me to page 810, please, and to Matthew chapter 5, verses 17 to 20, and particularly verse 20.

[2 : 46] We're beginning really a new section in our study of the Sermon on the Mount today, taking us through much of the rest of Jesus' teaching, which goes to chapter 7, verse 12.

It's a whole section, actually, that's held in the brackets of chapter 5, verse 17, and chapter 7, verse 12. Look at 5, verse 17. I've come not to abolish, but to fulfill the law and the prophets, says Jesus. If you look over to chapter 7, verse 12, where he sums up all that he said in his teaching with these words, whatever you wish others would do to you, that is the manner of behavior that he expounds all the way through the sermon.

Do that also to them, for this is the law and the prophets. You see, Jesus is teaching with full and with final authority to those that he has called to belong to his kingdom, the heavenly kingdom which has now begun on earth in his presence.

He is teaching them the definitive interpretation of God's word to man from the very beginning. And God's call upon man's life as given in the law and the prophets from the very beginning.

[4 : 03] And then, having set forth the words and the ways of his glorious kingdom from Matthew, chapter 7, verse 13 to the end, he presses home the challenge of his kingdom.

And we'll come to see those verses. He's warning his hearers that these things are not trivial things. These are things of eternal significance. And therefore, a stark choice faces every single human being, according to Jesus.

It is life or death. It is heaven or hell. It is the solid endurance of eternal life. Or it is the almighty collapse and loss forever and ever, like that house that falls in the flood.

And if you have the summary outlines, which I think are, again, on your seats today, you'll see that I'm calling this meaty central part of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, I'm calling it the manners of Christ's people.

Because it is all about what true Christianity is to look like in the daily life, in the ordinary lives of those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 12] The Beatitudes, as we've seen, they give us a sketch, a portrait of the true Christian. They give us the marks of Christ's people, those who have recognized their own spiritual poverty and

have sought, therefore, the mercy of God in Christ through his astonishing grace.

And they find the blessing of God, the acceptance of God, and the promise of his kingdom. Blessed are those who, though they know that they are empty utterly of their own righteousness, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled by God himself through his mercy and grace.

And through the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who comes to bring that gospel of grace. But then, of course, as we've seen, Jesus goes right on to talk about the purpose of his kingdom, people. For we have a purpose, and we're called, says Jesus, to mission. We're called to be salt and light in this world, to be seen and heard clearly as distinct, as conspicuous ambassadors of the rule of Christ.

And we are to be declaring to this world the rule of Christ, and we're to be demonstrating in this world that rule in our own lives, shining the light of heaven's goodness and grace into this dark world.

[6 : 30] There's a beacon to all the peoples. That's our calling. And that's what Jesus means in verse 17 here, when he says, I've come not to abolish, but to fulfill the law and the prophets.

At last, God's chosen people will be the people he has purposed them to be. They will be a light to this whole world. They will bring the saving light of the one that God had promised would come to all the world, to the Gentiles.

They would fulfill, at last, God's promise to Abraham right back at the beginning, that through his offspring, all the peoples of this world would indeed be blessed. And at last time, we saw, at least I hope we saw, the crucial link between the kingdom hope for this world and the kingdom holiness of God's people in his church.

The power of real missionary witness comes from the radical counterculture that is conspicuous and visible among God's people.

And that is born of a radical obedience to the rule of the king, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. It is born of a complete surrender to his unique and ultimate rule and authority in our lives.

[7 : 51] In Jesus, God's final word has been given to man. In the word made flesh. So you remember how the book of Hebrews begins. In the past, as we've been singing, God spoke in many and diverse ways through his servants, the prophets.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, who upholds the entire universe by the word of his power. And so God's rule in this world has come to its climax with the coming of Jesus.

And just as Jesus summons is the source and the beginning of all true discipleship, we are his people, nobody else's. So also Jesus' cross now defines the shape of all true discipleship.

Because we are called to walk the way of this king. And this king is the servant king. And that means, friends, that Christians are marked people. Christians are people whose lives are marked by the cross of Jesus Christ.

That is, we are marked by the same spirit of absolute submission to the will of God and to the way of God in this world that we see made flesh in the Lord Jesus himself.

[9 : 12] And that's what living as kingdom people in this kingdom age means for the Lord's people. It's the age of radical obedience to the king himself.

And we see his true nature with absolute clarity in the person of Jesus. That's why Jesus is so emphatic here in verse 17.

He has not come to abolish the prophets, but to fulfill that promise that God's people would at last be a holy people. That they would be a kingdom of priests who will glorify God in this world as he has purposed them to be.

And that's why in verse 18 he honors the law of God and he affirms its abiding validity. And God's call for holiness is binding upon his people until heaven and earth pass away.

Which of course is something that can never ever happen. And just so God's perfect order of what is right and holy and just and true and beautiful. That can never change.

[10 : 16] Not ever. That will never change for all eternity. And so as we see repeatedly through Matthew's gospel, Jesus is deliberately setting himself in continuity with the Old Testament and with everything that has gone before.

And with the whole story of the Old Testament and with God's law and the commands for his people. His instruction for life. And he urges his followers, verse 19, to go on teaching and obeying those commands of God.

Of course, because God's desire for holiness and God's definition of holiness hasn't changed one bit. And Christ's kingdom and Christ's call and Christ's righteousness is a call to true holiness. But of course, Jesus, as well as showing the continuity with all that has gone before, is also showing us the climax. And he is announcing the fulfillment of everything that the law and the prophets pointed to all along.

Because now the new age has at last dawned. And the promised kingdom of God has begun on this earth. And therefore, what that means is that just as the privileges and the blessings for God's people are now greater than they've ever been before in the history of the world, so also the responsibilities of God's people in this world are greater than they've ever been before in the history of the world.

[11:47] Kingdom righteousness, says verse 20, must not be less. No, it must exceed everything that has gone before. And so what follows in verses 21 to 48 of Matthew chapter 5 is Jesus explaining what that greater righteousness looks like in real life, in everyday life.

What he's doing in all of these verses that follow is really expounding and applying the key text of verses 17 to 20 here. And he's showing us with great clarity what that means in our daily lives and relationships as Christians.

He's demonstrating the attitudes and the behavior that the King of Kings expects of those who are going to submit to his rule and be his people. It's the manners, if you like, of those who show his family way and his household way here on this earth.

It's the manners of Christ's true people in this world. And that's what the practice of Christianity looks like according to the Lord Jesus himself. And in showing us this, Jesus is taking us to the very heart, the very heart of what God's law is really all about and has always, always been about. And that is that at its heart, God's law, God's instruction for life is never just about rules and regulations. It's always about relationships.

[13:15] Kingdom righteousness, God's righteousness is all about right relationships. Right relationships with God and with the world and with its people.

And right relationships also with the treasures of this world and with the treasures of the world to come, which are everlasting. Now people I find often find it very difficult, I think, to grasp some of these issues of the relationship between the gospel and the law or between grace and law or between righteousness that's by faith and not by works and so on.

This kind of language can be confusing and can get us a bit mixed up. People say, well, how does it all fit together? What's the relationship between obedience and keeping God's commands, which Jesus keeps telling us we must do?

What's the relationship between that and faith, by which alone we're to be saved? And the Bible tells us that as well. How do we hold these things together? Sometimes the Bible sets forth faith and works in opposition.

We know that. And yet faith in God and obedience to God can't be in opposition, can they? In fact, Paul often calls faith the obedience of faith.

[14:39] And Jesus, as we can see right here, is always calling people to obey God's commandments. So we need to be very, very clear in our minds all about this. And Jesus is addressing exactly those kind of questions here.

In verse 17, he says, don't think I've come to abolish the law and the prophets. Well, obviously, some people seem to think that is what he came to do and was doing. It seemed to some people that Jesus was suggesting disobedience to God because of the way he opposed the scribes and the Pharisees, the way they interpreted God's commandments, especially with controversial things like the Sabbath and so on.

But no, Jesus says, don't think that. Don't get confused. What you need to understand properly is what true righteousness really is as God sees it and as God wants it.

And what you need to do is you need to see it in much more personal terms than you're doing. It's all about right relationships. The manners of the true Christian, true kingdom people, the righteousness that Jesus is speaking about is, first of all, the evidence of true kingdom membership, evidence that you belong to his kingdom in the first place.

And it expresses the true kingdom morality that God wants from human beings, just as we'll see explained right through the rest of Matthew chapter 5.

[16:03] And that in turn is evoked only by the true kingdom mentality of those for whom the driving force in their earthly lives really is the treasures in heaven, not mere earthly treasures.

So that their whole lives are shaped and driven by the perspective of heaven, by the priorities of the everlasting kingdom of heaven and not of this passing world.

And we'll see that so much in chapter 6. And that's what the teaching here in Matthew 5 and 6 is really all about in a nutshell. We're going to look at it in a lot of detail in the coming weeks.

But today I want to get just very clear on this one critical thing. Kingdom righteousness. The greater righteousness of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus is talking about here in verse 20 is simply the evidence of true kingdom membership in the lives of those who really do belong to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith through his grace.

In other words, it's the evidence that there is, even now on earth, a real relationship with heaven and with God himself in your life.

[17:17] Not the effort of religious observance and ritual done in order to find God and in order to please God. No, it's the evidence that you have found God, that he has found you and that you know him for real through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is absolutely vital for us to get clear right at the very beginning. The kind of radical obedience and holiness that Jesus talks about in the Sermon on the Mount is only possible when we see that it flows out of lives that have been marked by the liberation and the renewal that comes through God's grace to us in Christ.

In other words, we might say this righteousness is the fruit, not the root of real repentance. And fruit like that, real heavenly fruit, comes only from one kind of tree.

That's what Jesus talks about in Matthew chapter 7. It's a tree that is transfused with the grace of God. Only a healthy tree, says Jesus, can bring forth good fruit.

And you'll know the kind of tree it is by the fruit it brings forth. That's the evidence of the kind of tree that it really is. And the kingdom righteousness that Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount is the obedience of faith.

[18:40] It's expressing real heart response to the forgiving grace of God in the gospel. It is not what we might call the obedience of works, which is seeking God's approval by those works.

And which justifies yourself in thinking you have achieved those works and therefore deserve something from God. That's so, so important to understand. That's a vital difference between these two things.

Between the true obedience of faith, which is evidence of a living relationship with God, and the obedience of works, which is just dead human religion. And in fact, therefore, is actually disobedience to the truth of God in the gospel of Christ.

That distinction is so, so important. And I want this morning to help us really get clear on that by trying to state and explain three things about this real greater righteousness of Christ's kingdom. Here's the first thing. First, real righteousness for Christ's kingdom people, that's the greater righteousness that Jesus demands from his followers, is not the dead religion of man, but it's a living relationship with God.

[19:58] Jesus, you see, has rescued the law of God from the realm of religion and religiosity. That is where the scribes and the Pharisees had hijacked it to and taken it captive.

And Jesus rescues the law of God back into the realm of relationship with God, which is where it has always belonged. He's restored it to its rightful place.

He's restored it to the only place where it can be a blessing to man in instructing in the way of life and not a curse to man. That's so vital to grasp that. Religion's place for the law.

Religion's place for the law sees the law itself as everything. And so you live for the law. And therefore the law becomes your master. And maybe the law enslaves you.

Religion is all taken up with rules. But it has forgotten about relationship. And so rule keeping and rule breaking is the whole focus of everything.

[21:01] It's all important. And the emphasis becomes all about ensuring that you can keep the rules properly so that you can feel self-satisfied that you're doing it. Or often, actually, to feel rather self-conscious and depressed because you know you're not doing it.

So, of course, you become very intent then upon the law. Very intent upon working the law somehow to your own advantage. That's the religious mentality. That's the legalistic mentality.

Very quickly, it loses all perspective on the purpose of any rules and regulations. It's the minutiae of the rules and regulations themselves that become all-important and all-consuming.

That's the mindset, isn't it, of the petty bureaucrat. See it all around us in the world today. The nitpicking official who's obsessed with every tiny detail and ticking every box.

I remember some years ago, I went to one of these mandatory child protection training things that I had to go to in the Church of Scotland. I spent a whole day up in Perth in this purgatory of misery.

[22 : 13] And I'll never forget, there was one woman on that course and the 20 pages in the handbook devoted to how to change a child's nappy properly and the number of people required to do it so that you could make sure that under no circumstances would you be accused of any kind of misconduct was just this woman's bread and water.

She was absolutely obsessed with it. And there was so much discussion of all of this that the end result of it all was that the only safe thing to do was to never change that child's nappy in the crash, to leave them filthy and stinking just in case you might have got some rule wrong somewhere that would leave you open to some accusation.

So the whole thing, which is about child protection and welfare, became about child abuse and self-protection. totally lost sight in a morass of legalistic religiosity that all of these rules and regulations, good in themselves, are there to protect children and bless children and help children, not to lead to shameful neglect.

That's the scribes and the Pharisees. That is the religious mentality that's so concerned with the process of law-keeping that the true purpose of the whole thing has been utterly, utterly lost.

And God gave His law to show people the way of living out a life of faithful trust in God, a way of displaying God's loving kindness to this world in response to His goodness and grace.

[23 : 51] But just like the petty bureaucrat, they had domesticated God's law so they could be confident you could tick every box and say you've done it.

That all practices have been duly followed. But no sense of what the whole thing is for. Who cares what's at the heart of it? That's not my concern.

I've done my bit dutifully. I get my bonus. That's the mentality. And of course, because that was their mentality of looking at God's law, they also tried to hedge God's law in and had copious other rules and regulations and oral traditions and all sorts of things that generally did two things.

First, they restricted God's commands. They made them easier to keep in an outward sense, easier to tick those boxes publicly. Some of you who are at the release, the word weekend away, were hearing about how in Islam today, many Muslims will exhibit exactly that tendency, exactly that thing.

So when the month of fasting, Ramadan, falls as it does this year in the middle of summer. If you live in Scotland, especially if you live in the north, like Aberdeen, it's pretty bad luck to fast all during daylight hours.

[25 : 03] So what do you do? Well, you say the rule really means you fast during daylight hours in Mecca and the day's a lot shorter. But you won't do that if it's December Ramadan, will you?

And you live in Aberdeen, you'll say, praise God, it's good to live in Aberdeen during Ramadan.

That's what the Jews were doing here. Everybody can do it. It doesn't matter what your religious strife is.

So they restricted those commands and at the same time, they extended the permissions that the law of Moses gave. One of the classic ones was the permission for divorce, which was there under very certain circumstances to regulate it.

But in Jesus' day, Jewish men had made it so they could marry who they liked and divorce who they liked at the drop of a hat. The Henry VIII view of marriage and divorce, you might call it.

That's what it is. Human religion. That's the hallmark of religion. It's deeply rooted in the hearts of human beings all over this world. And we'll do all we can, won't we, to remove the cutting edge of God's real demands on us, either by adding or subtracting, finding something domesticated that we can manage so that we can feel pleased with ourself.

[26 : 18] I always think also of that, one of my favorite films actually, the Scottish film, Whiskey Galore. Some of you will remember it. The old black and white film with James Robertson Justice and Gordon Jackson and all those.

Do you know that film? If you've never seen it, you must go and see it. It's one of my favorites. It's hilarious. Set in World War II and it's on a Hebridean island called the island of Toddy. That gives you a clue. The whole island is utterly miserable.

Why? Because they've run out of whiskey. And because of the war and the blockade and all the rest of it, none is to be found. And the beginning of the film is all these miserable people going around dragging their heels.

And then somebody comes running into the middle of the town and says, you'll never believe what's happened. There's been a shipwreck off the beach. And guess what the cargo of the boat is? Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of crates of whiskey.

And immediately the island leaps to life. And everybody's gathered. And off they go into the gathering darkness to go out in boats and to rescue this water of life.

[27 : 15] And then, ding! It's the church bell. And everybody looks round. It's the Sabbath, they say.

We can't be taking whiskey off a boat on the Sabbath. And so they turn around and morosely all go home into bed.

And then you see the next whole day, everybody's sitting in the church, wistfully looking out the windows towards the shore, looking at their watches, obeying the letter of the law, but their hearts are somewhere altogether elsewhere.

And at one minute past midnight, they're all out of their beds and straight out to get the whiskey.

That's religion. But in Matthew 15, Jesus says to the scribes and the Pharisees, you nullify the word of God for the sake of your traditions.

And it's that, it's the traditions of religion, it's the additions, the subtractions, the perversions of men that Jesus is attacking all the way through the Sermon on the Mount, all the way through his whole ministry.

[28 : 32] It's not the law of God itself. What's Jesus' mantra all through Matthew 5? Look at verse 21. You have heard that it was said.

They've listened to the interpretation of the scribes and the Pharisees, but not the real meaning and the significance of God's word. That has been obscured utterly by their religion.

But Jesus says, I say to you, this is the truth of what it's really all about. This is what it's always been about. And so Jesus tells them not religion's place for God's law, but relationships' place for God's law.

Not like religion where the law is everything and you live for the law. No, but where God is everything. And the law is to lead us in life for him and life with him.

God's law helps us to express our right relationship with him that he has called us into by his wonderful grace. And Jesus removes God's law from religion and rescues it for a relationship.

[29 : 44] There's nothing wrong with God's law. The problem is all in whose hands that law is being held. That's exactly what the apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 7.

Do you remember? God's law is holy and righteous and good, but sin has seized the commandment and put it to killing effect. I'll try and illustrate this for you from the realm of rugby.

Now, it's a quite sore subject speaking about rugby the morning after England had just won the Grand Slam and Scotland were soundly beaten, especially when we have so many Englishmen on the staff team who like to rub that in.

But nevertheless, I'll put that aside and graciously try and forget that. But in the game of rugby or indeed probably in any team sport, there are two kinds of referees.

And let me say that the enjoyment of the game for the players and for the spectators rests very largely to a great degree in the referees' view and use of the laws of the game of rugby.

[30 : 47] Some referees are religious referees. They are sticklers for the rules. And at heart, they have a disdain for the players. They see them as a bunch of cheating louts and they're out to stop them at their dirty game every possible chance they can.

They're just living to blow that whistle. And they'll stop the game constantly and there'll be nothing but scrum after scrum after scrum and penalties and so on. They just kill the game. But other referees are relationship referees and they love the game of rugby.

And they live to make that game a great spectacle for everyone to watch and for everyone to play. They are not, not lax on the laws of the game. They know that the laws are essential to make the game great.

And in fact, therefore, they're constantly giving warnings on the pitch. Roll away. Stay back. Hands off. It's all done to keep the ball in play, to keep the game going.

You see the difference? You must have laws otherwise it won't be a game. Both referees have to enforce the law of the game with the whistle. But those two referees will lead to very, very different games of rugby to watch.

[32 : 01] And that's the difference between the law in the hands of religion and in the hands of real relationship with God. The scribes, you see, their focus is all on the whistle, all on when to blow.

Life is for the law. But Jesus, well, he says the focus is all on the goal. The focus is all on the game. The law is to give life. It's to serve the goal. It's to enable the expression of that top class game. And you see, they're poles apart, aren't they?

Poles apart. But it's the same law, all the same. And Jesus takes us back to the very heart of the law of God. What it's all about.

Real relationship with God through his marvelous grace. And expressing the reality of that relationship in a joyful life of obedience. not a life that is just a matter of grudging bondage.

[33 : 00] Not the dead religion of man, but the living relationship with God. That's real righteousness. And second, the real righteousness of Christ's kingdom people is not a contrast with the Old Testament law, but it's both the continuity and the climax of what the law teaches about living to please God, our Father.

Jesus is not against the Old Testament law. He's for restoring it to its proper place in the lives of his people. John Calvin says, Jesus is not a new legislator, but a faithful expander of a law already given.

And so again, there's continuity. Jesus affirms the full authority of Moses and the prophets and the faith that they taught. And he said, that is an everlasting authority for all ages until heaven and earth pass away.

In John 5, he says to them, doesn't he, if you'd believe Moses, you would believe me because Moses spoke of me. In fact, Jesus challenged the scribe.

The scribes thought they were the real Moses men. Jesus says, you're the ones who don't take Moses nearly seriously enough. Read later on in Matthew chapter 15 what he says to them. Read chapter 23.

[34 : 14] He says, you're like a bunch of whitewashed tombs, grandiose on the outside, inside, stinking and rotten at the core. They look good in the synagogues and the religious places.

They look good in their religious subculture that they created. But Jesus says, God sees the heart and that heart of yours is rotten. Now, Jesus is the one truly in line, truly at one with the great prophets of old.

There's continuity with all of God's story. But there is also climax. climax. Jesus does give a new and a distinct and a definitive and ultimate exposition of God's commands for our lives because he is God's final word to us here on earth.

And in establishing his kingdom on earth, Jesus, he now restores the law of God to a true place as an expression of responsive faith in God.

But he also adds something new. He adds himself. Jesus, if you like, puts flesh and blood on the commands that Moses had written only in stone.

[35 : 27] Hebrews tells us Moses was a faithful servant. That's Jesus' testimony. But you see, now in Jesus, God himself, God the Son, has come to earth. And so now, here's the thing, now it's impossible to obey God's commands on this earth without direct obedience to the lordship of Jesus Christ himself without following him as our unique lord and master.

That's why all the way through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, but I say to you, and you have to listen, whoever hears these words of mine and does them, he is the wise man who will not collapse in the judgment.

You must listen to me. That's why the voice from heaven in the Mount of Transfiguration said, listen to him, this is my son. And Moses and Elijah are there with Jesus and they are at one in the same message they're speaking.

But what happens? Moses and Elijah fade into the background in the light of the glory of the king who now himself has come. And only one presence now fills the horizon.

It's the Son of God himself on earth. It's a different order altogether. And it brings a different dimension to absolutely everything. Think of a place maybe that you visited where for a long time beforehand you'd seen pictures or you'd read books about it or you'd seen films or you'd heard stories about it.

[36 : 54] But you actually go and visit it yourself. What a difference that makes. I remember years ago when I first went to India for the very first time. What a totally different experience it was.

The pictures just do not do it justice. And to have the smells the sights the atmosphere of the place totally different. Go somewhere like the Taj Mahal you can see every picture in the world of the Taj Mahal there's nothing like standing and looking at that building yourself quite overwhelming extraordinary.

And maybe you've had experiences like that but the thing about it is that once you've had that experience personal experience then everything afterwards counts for so much more.

You'll look at those same pictures you'll look at those films you'll read those accounts and they're fuller and greater they convey so much more don't they because you've seen the thing itself. Well think about a person that maybe you knew about and perhaps you'd read something of theirs or heard things they'd said but then you meet them in person and just what an added dimension that gives to everything.

I remember when I went to London years ago to work for Dick Lucas I knew Dick's writings I'd listened to his sermons I felt I knew the man in his ministry. What a totally different thing when I got to know him personally as a friend when I sat in his kitchen and chewed the fat and discussed things and I still read things he's written and he helps me and I still listen to recordings that he's made but they mean so much more now they're so much fuller and greater because everything I listen to is in the light of the knowledge that I have of him personally.

[38 : 34] And so it is in a sense with the whole of the Old Testament writings the law and the prophets in the light of the coming of the person of Jesus Christ himself. The Old Testament law will never pass away not ever unless the whole of heaven and earth disappears.

But neither will any of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ ever see it again in quite the same way without the definitive personal interpretation and fulfillment that we have of it in the hands of Jesus who is God the Son himself whose law it is to command to us.

And that's what Jesus is saying here in the Sermon on the Mount in fact all through his ministry in the Gospels. Think of the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus later on in Matthew chapter 19 and when he asks Jesus quite genuinely I think well what must I do to inherit eternal life?

What does Jesus say to him? What you know you must keep the commands of God. What does Moses say? And he goes through it all and the man says yes I take that very seriously. And Jesus isn't tricking the man.

He's saying to him that's the right thing. But then he adds something doesn't he? What does he say? He says now you've also got to do one more thing.

[39 : 53] You've got to obey me. Leave your life behind. Deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me which in your case is putting away all that worldly wealth that's holding you back from me and come and follow me.

You see this continuity with Moses biblical faith yes was always about real heart religion and true law keeping was always about expressing real devotion and love to God to be God's true image to be his sons here on earth to shine his truth and his love and his faithfulness and his glory and grace to the world to be what God created his people to be.

And Jesus restores God's law and his commands to that rightful purpose against those perversions of the scribes and the Pharisees. He's at one with the commandment of Moses and the prophets. There's continuity but there is also that great climax. And Jesus is calling his followers to something new. He is calling them to follow him personally because the kingdom has come.

That new age has dawned and the stakes are therefore now so much higher because these last days of God's judgment God's final judgment have begun here on earth. And Jesus is calling for a radical kingdom lifestyle for these last days.

[41 : 20] And now we've got greater revelation than Moses or the prophets ever brought because we have had experience of God himself in person in the person of Jesus Christ.

We've had direct personal command and direction from God himself on this earth for the greater righteousness he requires of us. And it's living that out and it's only living that out that is evidence that we really do have a true relationship with God himself.

That we've met God that we know him that he knows us. That we have already in our lives now a real earthly relationship with heaven through Jesus Christ the Savior God himself.

You see the real righteousness that Jesus is talking about here for his kingdom is not at all in contrast to the Old Testament law. It's in absolute continuity with it. And it is the climax of the greater righteousness that the law and the prophets pointed to all along.

And so thirdly what that means is that the real righteousness which is evidence of a true entry into the kingdom of heaven that must always mean unique and ultimate allegiance on this earth to the Lord Jesus Christ and him alone as our Savior and God.

[42 : 53] And that's the answer to the rich young ruler's question. It's the answer to anyone who's asking the question well what must I do to have eternal life? It lies in the answer to another question. Whose ultimate rule do you recognize in your life?

Because that will tell you and only that will tell you whether you do have a right relationship with God the Father in heaven. Because it's only by living under Jesus personal direction and control. It's only by buying the knee to him as unique Lord and Master of your life. It's only that that gives evidence that your relationship with heaven's kingdom is real.

That you have a real knowledge of the one true and only God the maker of heaven and earth. Only if you bow to Jesus. So what does that mean for you and me?

What does it mean for someone of Jewish background like that rich young ruler or like any Jewish person in the world today who knows the law of Moses and who keeps the law of Moses? Well Jesus says exactly what he said to that young one.

[44 : 05] Yes. Honor Moses. Obey Moses. Moses pointed Israel to Jesus though and now that Jesus has come as king and lord in the house where Moses was but a servant the question is do you submit also to him who is king and lord of that house?

Jesus says come and follow me. Do you do that? Hear him says the voice from heaven. And you must come and know Jesus Christ or you cannot know God the father in heaven at all.

That is what the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob says. Now friends don't be confused. There's nothing anti-semitic in saying something like that. There is no other way to the kingdom of heaven for any Jew today but than to buy the need of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the most anti-semitic thing you can do in this whole world is to refrain from sharing the one true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with the Jewish people with the physical descendants of Abraham. Do what Moses says says Jesus but come and follow me. What if you're a Muslim today? Well you will honor Moses as one of your prophets, as one of those who has a great book, a holy book that you revere.

[45 : 32] But the question is do you also submit uniquely to Jesus, to Esau as your Lord and King and Master, as the final authority when he says, but I say to you, follow me, do what I say, you must do that if you're to find righteousness with God in heaven.

Only that will open the kingdom of heaven to you. There is no other way to paradise for you than through Jesus Christ, the only Savior.

Maybe you've got a church background in this country. You've always gone to church. You've been like the scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus day. You've been good and moral and law abiding and Christian in your outlook.

But you have to hear, you have to hear Jesus when he says that real righteousness is not at all about merit, it's about fruit. And it's about fruit that grows out of a living personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

You can be outwardly righteous, you can be as fastidious as the most pious Pharisee Jesus says, and it doesn't interest me at all. But real kingdom righteousness?

[46 : 56] Well, it's just listening when Jesus says, but I say to you, leave that behind, deny yourself, stop doing that that you know is against what I want for your life, and repent and come and follow me, and let me tell you what to do, and let me guide and direct every part of your life in this world from now on.

and real righteousness is obeying him when he says it to you, just because it is him who says it to you, because you know that he has the words of eternal life, because you know that Jesus alone is the author of life, and that his words to you are spirit and they are life.

And when that's you and your life, that's evidence of a real earthly relationship with heaven. That's evidence of a real relationship with almighty eternal God, through Jesus Christ, God the Son.

So let me ask, how do you feel when Jesus says to you, but I say to you, live this way? That's a question for us to ponder this week.

Let's pray. Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, grant unto thy people that they may love the things which thy commandest and desire that which thy dost promise, that so among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found.

[48 : 55] Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.