



## **Matthew 5:17**

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.

### **Reflection**

Jesus’ preaching is turning the world on its head. You can imagine Peter, Andrew, James and John sitting there in rapt attention hanging off his every word and that’s

not even to mention the crowds surrounding them. Those within earshot are leaning in so that they don't miss a word and those just out of earshot are pressing forward, craning their necks to try and hear Jesus. No-one has ever spoken like this, not before or since, no-one has taught with such authority, taught with such clarity and in a language that everyone could understand, from fisherman to Pharisee. The crowds are amazed. Jesus is turning the world on its head with his words.

To understand today's passage we need to remember that Jesus was a Jew, and Peter, Andrew, James and John were most likely Jewish, and many in the crowd would have also been Jewish. Also remember that Matthew's gospel is also directly particularly at Jewish readers. And

so far we've seen that Jesus isn't only turning culture on its head, he's also turning expectations about the Jewish Messiah on their head which would have raised questions and concerns in the minds of the Jews that had come out to hear him preach.

And so Jesus, great preacher that he is, puts voice to the question that is on many people's hearts as they listen to him preach. He knows what they're thinking and so he says in today's passage: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.'

Now when Jesus says 'the Law and the Prophets' he simply means the Old Testament. It's an abbreviation for the Old Tes-

tament which was often broken up into the Law (the first five books of the bible), the Prophets (all the prophetic books) and the Writings (the Psalms, Proverbs and the other books.) Sometimes Jesus says 'the Law and the Prophets' other times he says the 'Law and Prophets and Psalms' but when he does, he means, like others in his day, the whole of the Old Testament.

You can see why his hearers would have been concerned. After all Jesus is far from what they expected God's great king to be. They were expecting an all-conquering warrior king like king David to come and take the fight up to the Romans. And yet the picture of God's kingdom that Jesus is so compellingly painting with his words is so very different to what the Jewish religious leaders had prepared them

for. It's also likely that if not yet then very soon the Jewish religious leaders would be trying to poison the people against Jesus. So Jesus reassures them with these words 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Old Testament, I haven't come to abolish it, I've come to fulfil it.'

Jesus is going to unpack this statement for us in the remainder of Matthew chapter 5 right through to Matthew 7:12. In these chapters he's going to teach his disciples and us the true and deeper meaning of the Old Testament, taking parts of the Old Testament law as examples and going much deeper, showing God's intention behind the Law, and then he's going to sum it all up in Matthew 7:12 (which is the third most famous part of the Sermon on the Mount, behind the Lord's Prayer and

the Beatitudes.) Jesus will complete this next section of his sermon and sum up the whole of the Law and the Prophets with what has become known as the Golden Rule, Matthew 7:12, 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.' We'll be looking closely at this verse in a few weeks' time.

But for now, Jesus hasn't come to abolish the Old Testament, far from it, he's come to fulfil it, because it's all about him, it's all pointing to him. All the prophecies are pointing forward to him. That's what Matthew has been showing and that's what Jesus is now is telling us. Next he'll go on to demonstrate it to us in the Sermon on the Mount when he shows us his great wisdom as a teacher of the Old

Testament by getting in behind some of the key teachings of the Old Testament and showing us God's intentions behind the laws. He's about to talk about murder and adultery and divorce and oaths and revenge and poor and needy and many other parts of the Old Testament Law, only he's going to blow them out of the water by showing people God's deeper intentions behind the laws. He's not changing them or redefining them, he's explaining the full extent of them, and as people realise how exacting they are they're going to see that there's no way to keep them. So their only hope of salvation isn't through the Law it's through what Jesus is going to do on the cross. And that's how Jesus will go on to fulfil the Old Testament laws. When the Law is properly understood, it's clear that no-one can keep it, and so ev-

everyone everywhere is in desperate need of God's grace. That's the ultimate purpose of the Law, to expose our desperate need of grace, which is only found in Jesus, and that is how Jesus fulfils the Law.

## **Think**

Now if all this sounds very complicated for you then it is a great lead in to our question today. How well do you know the Old Testament? Deep familiarity with the Old Testament lends such a richness to how we see Jesus. Matthew has been desperately trying to show his original Jewish audience and us how much deeper and bigger and more satisfying the gospel is when we understand its deep foundations in the Old Testament. How well do you know your Old Testament? Because



if you've spent all your time in the New Testament, if the Old Testament is just a hazy kind of introduction to the New Testament, then can I tell you you're really missing out? Take yesterday for example, that life-altering sermon illustration by Jesus, you remember, Christians are the light of the world, a city on a hill. Now of course this stands on its own legs, it's a profound illustration. But to a person with intimate knowledge of the Old Testament there's a far richer vision to behold. A person who's familiar with their Old Testament sees not just a light in the darkness and a city on an indiscriminate hill but Zion, the new and glorious Jerusalem, God's holy city, filled with the true Israel, Jew and Gentile alike, with Christ reigning over David's city, raised up as the tallest of all mountains, dispensing the blessing of God's salva-

tion to all the nations of the world. A light to the world coming out of the Jewish nation, a blessing to every nation on earth, and a final and glorious fulfilment of God's foundational promises to Abraham that were given at the inception of the Jewish nation and now come to final fulfilment in God's promised Messiah who had for so long been the hope of the nation. If any of this is new to you then perhaps think this morning about how you can unlock these riches by growing in your knowledge of the whole bible.

## **Pray**

Then spend some time praying. Thank God for his great plan of salvation that has been progressively unfolding throughout the pages of the Old Testament and through-

out human history since the time of Genesis 3. Thank God that his great plan of salvation has found its fulfilment in Jesus who came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. You could also pray for Jewish people today, that they might step out of the darkness and into the light and see how Jesus, far from breaking people away from Judaism, actually came as the fulfilment of the promises to the Jewish nation. And finally pray that God's Spirit who lives inside you and me would give us a growing desire to know God's word more deeply, especially those parts of the Old Testament that we're yet to closely explore.

There's so much to think about and pray for, so please do so now. Jesus will continue along these lines in tomorrow's talk and so we'll pick this up again then.