



# “King of the Law”

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Matthew 5:17-48

Emily Carpenter

Sermon audio and text available at [www.waitara.anglican.asn.au](http://www.waitara.anglican.asn.au)

## Introduction

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(Joel Osteen Video – About Food laws)

On one hand that video is a bit crazy right? I mean do you know any Christians that don't eat pork and shellfish because that's what the Bible says. But on the other hand it does get us thinking about our relationship with the Old Testament law.

I mean how much attention do we need to pay to these laws? On one extreme you've got the guy who says we should follow all the old testament laws, and the other extreme is where we're taught we don't need to worry about the Old testament laws, because we just need to love God and our neighbours right? Or maybe it's somewhere in between where we keep some of the Old Testament laws like the 10 commandments but the rest we ignore. Where do you fit in this spectrum? Is this something that you've been thinking about. If you have that's fine it is one of the toughest questions that we can face as a Christian today. What is our relationship with the Old Testament law?

So today as we look at this part of the Sermon on the Mount I'm hoping to address these questions and ultimately understand a little better how the law relates to us today. But before we get into that, I just want to do a quick recap of where we are in Matthew.

Jesus has started to build up a reputation. He now has 12 disciples, and large crowds following him, and his main teaching has been about the kingdom of God. Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is stopping and teaching his disciples about how to live in the kingdom of God. One of the main things he wants to teach the disciples is that they need

to be different, be salt, be like a light on the lamp stand. I think verse 16 introduces the main idea throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

*<sup>16</sup> "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." <sup>1</sup>*

Last week we actually skipped ahead a bit, but it still fits into the main theme. Last week we saw Jesus teaching the disciples that they needed to be different to the hypocrites with regards to their giving, prayer and fasting.

Next week we'll be looking at how the disciples were to be different from the gentiles and pagans in their attitudes to storing up treasures.

This week we'll be looking at how the disciples are to be different to the Pharisees in relation to the law.

#### Jesus relationship to the Law

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Jesus starts this section by saying

*<sup>17</sup> "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. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."*

(P)Why does Jesus say this? The crowd and the disciples have been hearing Jesus teaching with this new authority, things like blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They may have been thinking, hang on a minute, why aren't you saying, Blessed are the ones who sacrifice three times a week, or Blessed are the ones who give to God 10% of all they own. Combine these teachings with the healing done on the Sabbath. It could seem that Jesus is starting a new set of laws?

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (electronic ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), Mt 5:13–16.

Well Jesus says that he has not come to abolish the law in the sense saying it is of no value, or that it has no status in the lives of Christians, in fact he upholds the law, not even the smallest letter or dot will disappear from the law. Jesus says the law is good, and I have not come to abolish it, in fact, I have come to fulfil the law.

So, how does Jesus fulfil the law?

Jesus claimed that the law and prophets all pointed to him. Jesus is the goal of the law. Jesus is saying, every law, every prophecy, points to me. The law doesn't just mean the 10 commandments that we read, the Law includes the first 5 books of the Old Testament. Everything that was written in our Old Testament points towards Jesus!

So for example

The law prophesies in Deuteronomy 18 that there will be another prophet like Moses. Jesus comes to be that prophet, many other prophets came but there was no other prophet that was like Moses until Jesus came, and he was the prophet who was greater than Moses.

Or how about a more complex example

The law gives us about details about the temple, sacrifices and the priests. They weren't the ultimate way for sinful people to relate to God, but they did show us the pattern, they showed us what was necessary for us to relate to God.

Jesus comes as the fulfilment of the temple, sacrifices and the priests. For Jesus is the place where you meet God, not the temple, Jesus is the sacrifice for the sins of the world, not the bull or the goat, only Jesus is good enough to pay the price of sins, and Jesus is the great high priest who offers up the perfect sacrifice to God in heaven. Can you see how Jesus fulfils everything that the temple, the sacrifice and the priest were pointing to.

He doesn't abolish them by saying forget the temple, priest and sacrifice because they are a load of rubbish. He says the temple, priest and sacrifice they all show you what is necessary

for you to come to God, and Jesus fulfils the law because he says I will be for you the temple, the sacrifice and the priest. So Jesus hasn't come to abolish the law but to fulfil it.

So when we hear people like Joel Osteen saying that the scriptures tells us we must not eat the pig or shellfish because it is unclean? They haven't understood that Jesus has fulfilled all the Old Testament law, even this one. You may ask how does Jesus fulfil the law of don't eat pork and shellfish? I think this is the answer. The law for not eating unclean food was to make Israel different to the nations around them - it was to make them holy. The food laws were there to remind them that they were God's people, set apart. Jesus has fulfilled this law, so that if we believe in his death and resurrection we can belong to God, we are now holy, not because of what we put in our mouths, but what comes out of our heart. And this is how Jesus fulfils the law of don't eat shellfish and pork. We need to understand that Jesus has fulfilled all the OT law, not by removing it, but by fulfilling it.

Jesus continues to teach the disciples about his attitude towards the law in verses 19 and 20. He teaches them about how you enter the kingdom of heaven.

"Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."<sup>2</sup>

#### Pharisees relationship to the Law

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##### 1. Righteousness according to the law.

Now, some of you may be thinking, Pharisees, teachers of the law, they're the bad guys, surely it must not be too hard to be more righteous than them. However, in the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were known as moral upright people, they were the hard working,

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (electronic ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), Mt 5:19–20.

middle class family, and they were concerned with the law. They were very careful about NOT breaking the rules, so careful that they had extra rules written around the rules to make sure they didn't break any of the rules. So for example, with the law keep the Sabbath day holy, one of the Pharisee's law were you weren't allowed to look in the mirror on the Sabbath, because if you looked in the mirror you might see a gray hair and be tempted to pull it out, and if you pulled it out that would be work, and you weren't allowed to do work on the Sabbath, and so on the Sabbath, don't look in the mirror. They had hundreds of laws, things you must do, things you mustn't do. Now with this in mind as you read verse 20, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. The idea that your law keeping righteousness could exceed that of the Pharisees was unbelievable. To be more righteous than a Pharisee was beyond human reach.

It's like me trying to recruit musicians for our music band and saying that you can only enter if you are better than James Morrison. Play at least 2-3 instruments at a professional level. Now that's just unbelievable! We won't have anyone playing music on a Sunday well maybe Bruce. But, there are not many people in the world that are better than James Morrison.

It's like that with the Pharisees, it's almost impossible to be more righteous than a Pharisee in terms of keeping more laws than them. It's not about us keeping 371 laws and the Pharisees keeping only 370, it's about something different. So what is it that Jesus is talking about?

Well, Jesus doesn't seem to answer the obvious question? How can we be more righteousness than a Pharisee? What he does is, he gives in verses 21-48 a series of examples which illustrates how the kingdom's righteousness is totally different from the Pharisee's righteousness. There is a complete difference to the Pharisee's righteousness. How is it different?

1. Minimised the law

For the Pharisee - law keeping was that of minimum requirements. They found every possible loophole so that they could obey the absolute minimum. For example why do we

have tax accountants? So that they can find for us what is really required of the tax law, so that we can pay the absolute minimum amount of money to the government. Why do we want to pay the absolute minimum? Because we don't really want to pay tax to the government, so we try to avoid paying tax as much as we can. This is what the Pharisees were like, all their rules were to make life easier to avoid obedience to God's law. In Jesus' examples we see the Pharisees were minimising the laws of murder and adultery to the act alone, they restricted the command about loving your neighbour- to loving certain people only. Can you see why the Pharisees were called hypocrites, they looked like they were law keepers, but in their hearts they avoided the law. They didn't love God with their heart for if they did they would **DESIRE** to follow God's laws to the maximum.

Let me give you an example of two kinds of people. As some of you know I've been studying for the past 4 years, and throughout that time I had to write many assignments. For each subject, we'd have to write a 3000 word assignment, and we would get 8 questions to choose from. As an example - Let me introduce you to person A, they've read through the 8 questions, and chosen the easiest question to answer, then as they started writing their assignment they've chosen to write 2700 words (which is the minimum word requirement), they've done just enough work to get 50%. Here is person B, they've read through the 8 questions many times, can't decide which one because they're all so good, and so decides to ask the lecturer, can I write on all of the questions will you read them and give feedback. They've written their assignments, and they've enjoyed the learning so much, the amount of words in their footnotes is larger than their assignment.

Person A – you can see is doing the assignment because they have to, they are not really writing to learn or be educated, they're fulfilling the minimum requirements to pass. They're aiming to get through what has to be done with minimum effort.

#### Our relationship to the Law

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Well person B – you can see is doing their absolute maximum effort. They are wanting to learn, wanting to grow in their understanding and they're doing everything that they can to get 100%.

Jesus is teaching the disciples to be like Person B. Be a person who loves God's laws, someone who really wants to do what it says and to work out how to live out God's laws in all areas of life. This kind of relationship is totally different to how the Pharisee's relate to the law, isn't it? The Pharisees were people who have many laws because they didn't want to obey the law. But Jesus is talking about being the kind of people who want to obey the law. That's why Jesus could summarise the law into Love God and Love your neighbour. If you really obey the law, then you'll keep the law. This is the righteousness that is greater than the Pharisees. In fact it's so much greater in order to obey it you need to be perfect like your heavenly father is perfect. This seems intimidating for us to today doesn't it? To be perfect like God? I know I haven't lived up to loving God and my neighbour perfectly. But that's why Jesus came isn't it? That's why he fulfilled the law. We can have the hope that when we do break the law, we have Jesus to intercede for us.

When we follow Jesus, we are given a new heart and a new spirit. This is how we can surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees. Desire to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Be perfect... therefore as your heavenly father is perfect – I can't. So what can our response be? Lord Jesus I can't, I won't be able to measure up. But Lord I look at you at that moment when you had nails belted in your arms, and I'm so grateful that you didn't retaliate, but rather and that you stood and took all the punishment for all the wrong that all have done including me, Lord pour out your spirit, do the spiritual heart renovation that I need to change me. When we get to heaven, we will be like our father, perfect.

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” Matthew 5:16

EXPECT. TRUST. PRAY.