

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes June 28, 2006

Matthew 5:17-20

17: *"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets;
I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

18: *For truly, I say to you,
till heaven and earth pass away,
not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law
until all is accomplished.*

19: *Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so,
shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;
but he who does them and teaches them
shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

20: *For I tell you,
unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Discussion Notes:

Intro: How do you feel when someone challenges your way of living and thinking? Especially if you've been thinking and living that way all your life, reinforced by leaders & teachers you trust? This is what Jesus is addressing in this part of his sermon on the mount.

Context:

- Early part of Sermon on the Mount:
 - "Seeing the crowds," he sat on the mountain surrounded by disciples, and spoke to "them";
 - "Beatitudes"
 - "You are salt ... light"

"Think not..."

- Why is he saying this?
 - Either he noticed some raised eyebrows or just knew. But why?
 - Mt 7:28-29 *"...the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes."*
 - He was challenging how they were being taught!
 - Need to jump to verse 20 to understand this background, but first:
 - What if Jesus were speaking to a crowd today: what would he encounter?
 - In general: nominal interest in "righteousness";
 - Amongst Christians: confusion over "righteousness."
- (vs 20) What is the *"righteousness of the scribes & Pharisees"*?
 - What was righteousness in the OT? (religious obedience to the will of God)

- But what entails “religious obedience to the will of God”?
 - Psalm 15 or 24: clean hands & a pure heart. Is this all?!
 - NO: there were both external & internal requirements:
 - External:
 - A member of the People of God
 - Have received the sign of the covenant;
 - Obedience to law & the prophets (moral, legal, ritual)
 - Internal:
 - Conversion of heart!
 - Faith; repentance; fear of God; love of God & neighbor.
- ∴ The “righteousness of the scribes & Pharisees”? Hyper-externalism
 - Doing the works of the law to such a perfect degree, that one is essentially guaranteed salvation because God owes it!
 - Led to a relaxation / even abolishment of the internal expectations.
- And ∴ Jesus’ reemphasis of BOTH aspects of righteousness may have seemed a contradiction to what the people have usually been taught; so they may have thought he was calling for a relaxation / abolishment of the external rules & regulations. But he wasn’t ...

“Think not that I have come...”

- Here he is eluding to his eternal mission/ his incarnation.
- Remember that he is primarily speaking to his disciples, those have been drawn closer to follow him; though the crowd may not understand, the disciples will receive more data & the Holy Spirit.

“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets

- “Abolish” = put down, annul a law
- “the law and the prophets” = All the authoritative writings / Scriptures (OT)
- In general: all their authoritative moral, legal, and liturgical regulations.

I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.

- An amazingly bold assertion!!!
- As he will say in the next verse, this does not mean that his coming bring them to an end;
- “Fulfill” is the same word used often in Matthew to fulfill prophesy. Everything in the Scriptures pointed to Him and is fulfilled in Him. And as the Supreme lawgiver, he has come to reveal the full intention of the law & the prophets; to correct the imbalance, the confusion, & by his death & resurrection, to realign their (our) obedience by grace with God’s will.
- Those who interpret Jesus THRU their understanding of “Paul” have a major problem with this!
- But rather, we must interpret Paul thru Jesus:
 - Romans 8:1-4

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

- What, ∴, does he mean by “fulfill”? *Essentially, this he explains in rest of sermon!*

**18: *For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away,
not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.***

- A solemn authoritative important statement (1st time in Matthew);
- Not “It is said...” but “I say to you ...”
- Ok, has this all ready happened? Has all been accomplished?
- Some say Yes, on the cross” & so emphasize a faith alone interpretation of Paul;
- BUT “heaven & earth” are still here! Accomplishment here means the end of time / second coming!
- So NO: not even the smallest letter / pen stroke of the law has passed.

**19: *Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so,
shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;
but he who does them and teaches them
shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.***

- Therefore, important not to take it upon yourself to teach that obedience to the law no longer matters!
- We must be careful not to interpret Paul to mean that he is throwing out the Law! He admits in Acts 24:14 that he did not mean that the Law no longer applies to Christians: (“But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets...”). Rather, given his own background (a Pharisee among Pharisees emphasizing the legal / external aspects of the Law) now after his conversion he shifts the balance to re-emphasize the need for internal conversion of heart based on salvation by grace through faith; walking by the Spirit; exhibiting the gifts and fruit of the Spirit. Only then will our obedience to God’s law have true meaning.

**20: *For I tell you,
unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.***

- Not calling them to overreact against externals & only emphasize the internals,
- Rather their righteousness is to EXCEED! How? ... stay tuned for the rest of the Sermon.