

Sermon on the Mount – I Came to Fulfill the Law

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MAIN VERSES

[Matthew 5:17](#) • [Matthew 5:18](#) • [Matthew 5:19](#) • [Matthew 5:20](#) • [Matthew 12:2](#) • [Matthew 2:23](#) • [Romans 6](#) • [Matthew 5:12](#) • [Matthew 18:4](#) • [Matthew 20:26](#) • [Matthew 6](#) • [Deuteronomy 6:25](#) • [Matthew 15](#) • [Matthew 23](#) • [2 Peter 3:7](#) • [2 Peter 3:13](#) • [Revelation 21:1](#)

Shabbat Shalom everybody. Welcome back. We are continuing our series on the Sermon on the Mount. But today for this section of the Sermon on the Mount, I wanted to call in someone I feel is more qualified in the subject than I am. And many of you know David Wilber. He's a friend of mine. He's been a mentor to me in many regards, and he's someone God has used through his many gifts of teaching and apologetics. If you don't know much about David, well, he just graduated with a BA in biblical studies from Charlotte Christian College and Theological Seminary and he's going on for his master's. Not only that, he also received the Zonderman Award for biblical Greek, and he graduated as valedictorian of his class. He also just released a book, or just finished a book, that's going to be releasing very soon, called How Jesus Fulfilled the Law. And this joins many other books that have helped so many in their pursuit of growing closer to God, such as A Christian's Guide to the Biblical Feast, Remember the Sabbath, What the New Testament Says About the Sabbath Observance for Christians, and many more. And so it is an honor to have you here today, David. Please welcome him.

Well, Shabbat Shalom, everyone. Thank you for that introduction, Pastor Matt. I'm so honored and grateful for this opportunity to speak with you all today. It was a blessing to worship with you all and to hear the Torah portion. I was really blessed by that. And I'm excited to share with you guys from God's Word today. Before we get started, can you guys join me in prayer? Heavenly Father, I thank you for today, this day of rest. I thank you for your love and for the gospel message that you sent your Son to save us so that we can have a relationship with you. And I pray, Lord, that the message you gave me to share today will be a blessing to your people, that it will help us to know you better and to live out your ways for your glory. In Yeshua's name, amen.

Continuing the Sermon on the Mount

Okay, so as Pastor Matthew mentioned, we've been going through the Sermon on the Mount, which begins in Matthew chapter 5 and concludes in [Matthew 7](#). And this is a powerful and important sermon preached by our Messiah, Jesus, Yeshua himself. Why is this sermon so important? Well, as Pastor Matthew put it recently, he said the Sermon on the Mount defines the constitution of the kingdom of heaven. And I love that—the constitution. So if you want to know what it means to live as members of the Messiah's kingdom, if you want to know what the constitution is that we live by, read the Sermon on the Mount. Pastor Matthew has already taken us through the first 16 verses of Yeshua's sermon. In chapter 5, we've gone through what are commonly called the Beatitudes—blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek and the peacemakers, and so forth. We've gone through each of those and learned the implications of those blessings and what they mean. We've also learned what it means to be salt and light in the world. And now we turn to [Matthew 5](#), verses 17 through 20. And I would submit to you guys that this passage is the foundation of Yeshua's entire sermon. The entire rest of Yeshua's teaching builds upon this passage.

Dr. Craig Keener, a New Testament scholar, calls [Matthew 5](#), 17 through 20 Yeshua's thesis statement. In other words, this passage serves as a summary of Yeshua's main point or argument that he then goes on to prove throughout his sermon. So this is a very important and foundational passage, and it's also very controversial. Why is it controversial? Well, this passage gives us key insight into Jesus' perspective on the relevance of the law of Moses and how he expects his followers—us—to relate to the law of Moses. And Jesus' perspective and expectation for us in regard to the law of Moses conflicts with some modern religious doctrines concerning the law's relevance or lack of relevance, to be precise.

Challenging Modern Doctrine

A few years ago, there was a prominent megachurch pastor named Andy Stanley, and he infamously declared that Christians must set aside the law of Moses or the Old Testament. The word that he used was unhitch. We need to unhitch ourselves from the Old Testament. And around the same time, he had written a book on the topic in which he states that the law of Moses, quote, has no say in the life of a believer. None. So, according to Pastor Stanley, the law is entirely irrelevant to Christians. Now, he has been widely criticized for making this statement. But unfortunately, a lot of modern Christians share this perspective, and maybe they wouldn't use those words, but they kind of assume or believe, well, that's the Old Testament. The Old Testament, it doesn't really matter to us. It's not really relevant to us as Christians. We

have the New Testament. All those commandments in the old law are obsolete. Jesus fulfilled them, right?

Well, [Matthew 5](#), 17 through 20 directly challenges these types of antinomian or anti-law ideas, as we'll see. In the strongest terms possible, Yeshua affirms the ongoing relevance of the law of Moses in the lives of his followers. And, of course, amen, right? As Messianics, we love this passage, and for very good reason. This passage supports so much of our theology regarding the Torah. But as we go through this passage today, I want to encourage you guys to let Yeshua's words challenge you. So often I think we treat the Bible as just a tool for proving ourselves right. We treat it as a weapon sometimes to use against other people that we disagree with. And there is a danger when we do that of closing our ears to what God's Word is actually saying to us personally. I've been guilty of this. There's nothing wrong with arguing theology, of course. It's literally my favorite thing to do. But we should be aware of this danger of focusing so much on how we can use the Bible as a tool to support our beliefs and our positions that we close our ears to what God might be saying to us. And so today, we're going to be going through each verse of this passage and talk about what it means, and then we'll discuss some implications that this passage might have for us as Christians and Messianics today.

A Polemic Against the Pharisees

I want to state up front that I think this passage and really much of Yeshua's sermon that we've been going through and that we're going to be continuing to go through, this sermon and this passage is best understood as a polemic against the religious leaders of Yeshua's time, namely the scribes and Pharisees. Yeshua, throughout his sermon, especially in this passage, is contrasting what he wants his followers to be like with the scribes and Pharisees. He wants his followers to surpass or exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, as he goes on to say in verse 20. And so we'll talk more about what that means a little bit later, but let's go ahead and dive into this passage beginning in verse 17. I'm going to hit you guys with a lot of information today. I hope that's okay. All right? Matthew did mention that I was the top nerd at my school, so that kind of comes with the territory.

Do Not Think I Came to Abolish

So Yeshua begins his statement about the law with a commandment, all right? It's a commandment against wrong thinking. Here's what he says: [Matthew 5](#), 17, "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." 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. Okay, so Yeshua starts off his statement about the law with a command. He commands his listeners not to think the wrong thing. What are we prohibited from thinking? We're prohibited from thinking that Jesus came to abolish the law or the prophets. The fact that Jesus gives this commandment implies that some people thought he did come to abolish the law and the prophets. The denial assumes the existence of the thing that is being denied, okay? So who was thinking such a crazy thing—that Yeshua came to abolish the law and the prophets? Well, Matthew tells us.

As we continue reading in Matthew's gospel, we see that the scribes and Pharisees are constantly accusing Yeshua and his disciples of disregarding and abolishing the law. For example, in [Matthew 12](#), when the disciples are plucking grain on the Sabbath casually, as they're walking, the Pharisees accuse Yeshua of disregarding the Sabbath. In verse 2 of chapter 12, they say, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." So they're accusing Yeshua and his disciples of disregarding the commandment. Yeshua, of course, goes on to then defend his disciples. He says that the Pharisees have condemned the innocent. His disciples were not actually breaking the Sabbath. But already you see the kind of political, polemical nature of what's going on here. And that's what's setting us up in [Matthew 5](#), 17 through 20. Yeshua's addressing this right here in the first statement that he makes about the law. He's setting us up for all of these conflicts that are going to follow in Matthew between him and the scribes and Pharisees. This is a constant issue between Yeshua and his disciples and the religious leaders of his day. So Yeshua's statement on the law in [Matthew 5](#), 17 begins by refuting these accusations directly. He says, do not even think—despite what these guys are saying—do not even think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets. Well, this raises the question: What are the law and the prophets? It's a reference to the Hebrew scriptures or the Old Testament.

The Law, Prophets, and Writings

It was common to refer to the Old Testament canon of the day as the Law, Prophets, and Writings, the Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim. And that reference is often abbreviated as just the Law and Prophets, but it's a reference to the Scriptures. In this context, according to several scholars, these terms—law and prophets—are not just a general reference to the scriptures. These terms also carry a legal connotation. So Yeshua isn't talking about abolishing the law's existence. He is talking about abolishing the law's legal authority. He did not come to abolish the authority of the law or prophets.

What Does It Mean to Abolish?

Okay, this raises another question: what does it mean to abolish? Well, abolish is the Greek word *kataluo*. According to BDAG, a Greek lexicon, this word means to cause to be no longer in force, to do away with, or to annul. So in other words, Yeshua says that he did not come to nullify or make void the legal authority of the scriptures.

What's interesting about this word—abolish or *kataluo*—is that there are several first century Jewish texts from around the same time Matthew was written that use this Greek word *kataluo* in reference to the law, confirming this meaning of abolish: make void or nullify. For instance, 4 Maccabees is a first century Jewish text. It describes the events of the Maccabean revolt, when the Jews were suffering persecution and oppression under the Syrian Greeks, and we commemorate the Maccabean revolt during the festival of Hanukkah. Well, in 4 Maccabees, chapter 17, there is a passage that characterizes Antiochus. And Antiochus, remember, he was the main villain of the story of Hanukkah. He was the one oppressing the Jewish people. It characterizes Antiochus as, quote, "...the tyrant who wished to abolish, *kataluo*, the way of life of the Hebrews." So here we have the same word that Yeshua uses in [Matthew 5](#), 17 to describe the efforts of Antiochus to prevent the Jewish people from observing God's commandments. He came to abolish their way of life, it says.

Also, earlier in 4 Maccabees, in chapter 5, there is an account of Antiochus attempting to compel the priest Eleazar to eat pork. So he's trying to force this priest to eat pork, and Eleazar, the priest, refuses to eat pork, and he insists that eating unclean meat, quote, is an abolishment of the law, *kataluo*, okay?

Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, also writes about the oppression of the Jews under Antiochus. And in his work, Jewish Wars, he writes that Antiochus, quote, put pressure upon the Jews to abolish, *kataluo*, their ancestral customs, leaving their infants uncircumcised and sacrificing swine upon the altar. So here we see from these other first century Jewish writings written in Greek that the same word *kataluo* has this implication when it's used in reference to the law—the implication of denying the law's authority.

Those who abolish the law and prophets disregard the commandments of scripture and encourage others to disregard them as well. And so the immediate context in Matthew also supports this meaning. Two verses later, Yeshua uses the word *luo*, which is related to *kataluo*. And like *kataluo*, *luo* also has the sense of nullify or abolish. He says: "Whoever relaxes or breaks, depending upon your translation, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of

heaven." So here, the word relaxes or breaks is the Greek word *luo*, which is related to *kataluo*. So again, you have this idea of abolishing the law, which is connected to breaking or disregarding the commandments and encouraging others to disregard them as well.

This is what the religious leaders are constantly accusing Yeshua of doing. And in response, Yeshua commands his listeners not even to think that he came to do such a thing. Unlike Antiochus, Yeshua did not come to disregard the commandments of the Torah or teach others to disregard them.

What Did Yeshua Come to Do?

Okay, so what did Yeshua come to do? If he did not come to do that, what did he come to do? He says: "I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them." Alright, well this raises the question: what does it mean to fulfill the Law and Prophets? Well, the Greek word used for fulfill here is *plerao*. It has a range of meaning and the precise meaning here is debated among scholars. According to BDAG, the Greek lexicon, depending upon the context, the verb to fulfill—*plerao*—can mean either to carry out, to show forth true meaning, or to complete. So it has a range of meaning, and many people take fulfill here in [Matthew 5:17](#) in the sense of to bring to completion. In other words, Yeshua came to fulfill the law and prophets by satisfying their prophetic predictions. He came to fulfill prophecy. And Matthew does use this word, *plerao*, elsewhere to speak about Yeshua fulfilling the prophetic predictions in Scripture.

In a few places, Matthew describes Yeshua doing things that fulfill what was spoken by the prophets. Jeremiah, Isaiah, and so forth. For example, in [Matthew 2](#), verse 23 says, talking about Yeshua: "And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene." And that word for fulfilled there is *plerao*. He lived in Nazareth so that he could fulfill what the prophets spoke about. So this is a valid definition of the word *plerao*.

People then run with this definition and stretch this verse to mean pretty much the opposite of what it says. Some interpreters say that Jesus fulfilled the law when he died on the cross. He fulfilled what the law and prophets were pointing toward. By dying on the cross, he fulfilled their prophetic predictions. And so now that he has done that, the law is obsolete. It was brought to completion. It served its purpose, and now it's irrelevant, right?

The Problem with That Interpretation

The obvious problem with this idea, though, is it sounds exactly like what Jesus commanded us not to think. He commanded us not to think that he came to abolish the law. And if Jesus' work results in making the law irrelevant, that's basically the same thing as abolishing it. A second problem is that the logic of this idea doesn't follow. Even if we grant this particular meaning of *plerao*—that it means to fulfill prophecy, fulfill what the law and prophets are pointing toward—even if we grant that definition, that doesn't mean the law is now done away with. How does that follow? Jesus' death and resurrection fulfilled the symbolism of baptism, according to Paul in [Romans 6](#), but nobody believes that baptism is now obsolete. So again, even if we grant this definition, it simply doesn't follow that we can now do away with the law.

But the main question that we need to answer is this: Does this definition of *plerao* even make sense in this context? And I would suggest that no, it doesn't. It is a valid definition of *plerao* in other contexts, but that's not precisely what it means here. We can't just take a meaning of a word—one particular meaning of a word that we like—and apply it wherever we want. We have to understand what words mean in context. And so the meaning of fulfilling prophecy doesn't make sense in this context because the context doesn't have anything to do with fulfilling prophecy.

Fulfilling the Law and Prophets

Yeshua makes this statement that he came to fulfill the law and prophets in the midst of a sermon about ethical behavior. This statement that he came to fulfill the law and prophets is right in between his exhortations to perform good works in the verse before, in verse 16, and to do and teach the commandments in verse 19. So I would propose that the sense of carry out or reveal true meaning best fits the context here. That is what *plerao* means. It means to carry out, to bring forth true meaning. And this also fits the parallel in verse 19. Just as *luo*—which we discussed earlier—relaxes or breaks in verse 19, refers back to *kataluo*, abolish, in verse 17, so does and teaches in verse 19 refer back to fulfill in verse 17. So to fulfill the law and prophets means to fully do and teach them. It means to bring out the full meaning of the law and prophets, to teach and to demonstrate how to keep the law and prophets properly. That is what Yeshua means when he said he came to fulfill.

And not only does this meaning of fulfill fit the context much better than the idea of fulfilling prophecy, but it also provides an actual contrast with abolish. Because he says: I did not come to abolish, I came to fulfill. Well, it seems strange for Jesus to contrast the notion of nullifying the Torah's commandments with the idea of fulfilling prophecy. That contrast doesn't really make sense. But it makes perfect sense for Jesus to contrast the notion of nullifying the Torah's

commandments with the idea of affirming them. So in summary—I know that was a long explanation, but this is an important verse—Yeshua did not come to nullify the authority of the law and prophets. He came to reveal their true meaning by teaching and demonstrating how to obey them properly.

Until Heaven and Earth Pass Away

All right. Now, as if Yeshua couldn't be any clearer in refuting the scribes and Pharisees' accusation, he takes it a step further. After announcing that he did not come to abolish the law, but rather came to fully do and teach it, he says that the whole law will remain as long as heaven and earth exist. In other words, the Torah will not be going away anytime soon. This is what he says in [Matthew 5](#), verse 18. The next verse, he says: "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished." Okay, so what is this deal with the iota and a dot?

Not an iota or a dot from the law. Here, the word iota refers to the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet, and it corresponds to the Hebrew letter yod. In Hebrew, the letter yod is like an apostrophe. It's the smallest letter in Hebrew. And dot refers to the small writing stroke that is used to distinguish similar looking letters. So it's like the nub on the Dalet, right? You have the Dalet and then, if you know Hebrew letters, the Dalet looks like a resh. And the only way to distinguish them is that there's a little nub at the end of the Dalet. So the dot is used to refer to those types of little writing strokes. According to Dr. Noel Rabonowitz, he says, "...the expression, iota and dot, is a metaphor and refers to the smallest detail or part of the Torah." That's what he's saying. He's saying, "...not even the smallest details of the Torah will pass away." None of it, not even the little nub on the dallet, not even that is going to pass away until when? He says quote, until heaven and earth pass away, and quote, until all is accomplished.

The Future Day of Judgment

So when is that? When does heaven and earth pass away? When is all accomplished? According to numerous scholars like Dr. David Turner, Craig Keener, and Donald Hagner, these two temporal clauses, until heaven and earth pass away and until all is accomplished, are essentially synonymous. They're synonymous clauses that refer to the same time or event in the future. So when is that time? When will heaven and earth pass away and all be accomplished? Scripture tells us that this will take place at the end of the age after Yeshua returns and judges the world. Peter writes in [2 Peter 3](#), verse 7, he says that the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. Peter goes on to

say in verse 13 that we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. So this is a future time that Peter's talking about that we're looking forward to. And at this future time, that is when heaven and earth will pass away, which corresponds to the future day of judgment he's talking about. In his vision of the new Jerusalem, John also states in [Revelation 21.1](#) that the present heaven and earth will pass away and will be replaced by a new heaven and new earth. So in Scripture, this time of heaven and earth passing away is connected to this future time when the creation as we know it passes away and is replaced by a new heaven and new earth. We also see this in other first century Jewish writings. Philo, a first century Jewish philosopher, like Yeshua, taught that the whole law would remain, quote, as long as the sun and the moon and the whole heaven and the whole world shall endure, which is very reminiscent of what Yeshua says in [Matthew 5.18](#), right? The whole law will remain as long as heaven and earth exist. Until heaven and earth pass away, not even the smallest stroke, not even an iota will pass from the law. So this was a very common understanding in first century Judaism. And Yeshua's original readers would have grasped this point clearly. They would have understood exactly what he was talking about.

As we see, the entire law remains binding until God establishes a new heaven and new earth after the present fallen world has completely passed away. New Testament scholar David Turner writes, quote, it would be hard to make a stronger statement of the ongoing authority of the Torah than that made in [Matthew 5, 18](#). So the whole Torah will remain until that future day when heaven and earth passes away.

Addressing the Counterargument

Now some have tried to get out of this verse by suggesting that the second temporal clause, until all is accomplished, refers to the Messiah's death and resurrection. So hence, the law will remain in effect, or it has remained in effect from Yeshua's statement to the time of his death. And that was when all was accomplished, so now things can pass away from the law. But New Testament scholars widely reject this interpretation for good reason. Dr. Craig Keener says this interpretation, quote, violates the whole thrust of the passage. J. Andrew Overman is another New Testament scholar. I like what he says. He calls this interpretation, quote, hermeneutical gymnastics. And it's easy to see why this interpretation simply doesn't work. If the clause, until all is accomplished, refers to the Messiah's death and resurrection, then it literally contradicts the first part of the verse, which says that the entire law will remain until heaven and earth pass away. So this interpretation also doesn't make sense with the rest of the passage. Why would Yeshua insist that he did not come to nullify the law, but then go on to say that it will become

invalid as soon as he dies? It also doesn't make sense with the next verse that we're going to read. Yeshua goes on to warn his followers against disregarding the commandments. So if the commandments are about to become obsolete once Yeshua dies, why would he urge his followers to do and teach them and warn them against breaking them? He literally says that their status in the kingdom depends upon whether they keep or break the commandments. Was that only until he would die shortly after? No, that doesn't make any sense.

Instead of making the second part of the verse contradict the first part of the verse, we should just take the entire verse for what it says. Yeshua declared that the entire Torah will remain in force for as long as the present heaven and earth exist. But wait, there's more. As if he could not be clearer, Yeshua continues to belabor this point. As I already mentioned, he goes on to admonish his followers to be great in the kingdom by doing and teaching the commandments. He says this in verse 19.

The Least Commandment and Our Reward

Jesus warns against relaxing the commandments. What does that mean? As I mentioned earlier, the Greek word for relaxes here, *luo*, is related to the word *kataluo*, which is translated abolish in verse 17. And it means the same thing. Yeshua says that since he did not come to nullify the law or prophets, neither should his followers. Since he did not come to nullify any of the commandments in the law of Moses, neither should his followers. In fact, he goes on to say, as I mentioned earlier, that their status in the kingdom, whether they are great or least, is determined by whether they obey the least of the commandments. So what does that mean? Because that just seems weird, right? Their status in the kingdom. This is a concept that is discussed all over the Gospel of Matthew. And it does not imply that the person who disregards the least commandment, that they're going to be excluded from the kingdom entirely, right? Rather, it has to do with heavenly rewards or lack thereof. In [Matthew 5.12](#), as Pastor Matthew talked about in a previous sermon, Yeshua talks about your reward in heaven being great, right? When you suffer persecution for your faith, your reward in heaven will be great. In [Matthew 18](#), he says that those who humble themselves like children are, quote, "...greatest in the kingdom of heaven." In [Matthew 20](#), Yeshua also says that whoever serves his neighbor will be great among you, and so forth. So again, in the strongest terms possible, Yeshua emphasizes, now honestly, it's harder to come up with an idea of how he could have affirmed the Torah more forcefully and clearly than this passage, right? But he emphasizes the importance of keeping the law of Moses by saying that not even the least commandment is insignificant. If you want your reward to be great, keep the commandments, is what he's saying.

Entering the Kingdom of Heaven

Now, we should note that the person, as I said, who breaks the least of the commandments is still part of the kingdom, according to Yeshua. He's just least, but he's still part of the kingdom. However, that should not give us any consolation because there does come a point where our neglect of the commandments results in us being excluded from the kingdom entirely. And that is what Yeshua addresses next. He says this in the next verse, [Matthew 5](#), verse 20. He says, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." All right, wow. So real quick, what does Jesus mean by righteousness here? In context, this term simply denotes Torah observance. He's saying, unless you're Torah observance, unless your keeping of the law exceeds the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. We see this in the next chapter, chapter 6, where Yeshua talks about practicing righteousness. So righteousness is something that you do in this context. We also see this concept in the Torah itself. In [Deuteronomy 6](#), verse 25, it states that doing the commandments, quote, will be righteousness for us. So righteousness, doing righteousness is connected to doing the commandments. So Yeshua expects his followers to obey the law of Moses better than the scribes and Pharisees. And if you don't, you ain't making it into the kingdom.

The Nervous Verse

Now, this verse makes a lot of people nervous, right? And that's kind of the point. This verse is supposed to make us nervous. Even us Messianics, by the way, all us Torah lovers, it should make us nervous too, as I'll talk about a little bit later. But this verse causes some people to get so nervous that they resort to twisting it to mean something very different. I have read some commentaries on this verse where interpreters say that Jesus could not have meant what he said here. He's like, there's no way he could have meant what he said here. They argue that his point was actually to demonstrate the futility of keeping the law. And so the idea is that he's emphasizing the importance of the law and the validity of the law only to undermine it in verse 20, to say it doesn't actually matter.

The Assumption About the Pharisees

He's demonstrating the futility of it because the assumption is that the scribes and Pharisees are super righteous and nobody could possibly keep the law better than them. So it's pointless to imagine that you could even surpass the scribes and Pharisees. We need to stop relying so much on the law, and we need to recognize our need for grace. The apostle Paul is gonna come

around. He's gonna talk about justification by grace through faith, right? And so that's kind of the logic here.

Now, I don't deny the truth of salvation by grace through faith, obviously, but this idea that Jesus was trying to get us to see the futility of the Torah is literally the opposite of his message. He really did mean what he said. He said, if you fail to surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you aren't a member of the kingdom. So, okay, fine. How is it possible to keep the commandments better than the scribes and Pharisees? Are you kidding me? Aren't they the experts? Aren't they super devoted to the law and keeping the law? How can we be more righteous than them?

Well, according to Matthew, the answer is simple. The answer is actually keep the commandments. Actually keep the commandments. Because you see the confusion here—it comes from the fact that people tend to take this verse out of the broader context of Matthew's gospel. We assume that the scribes and Pharisees are super righteous and totally devoted to the law because that's the stereotype. But that is not how Matthew characterizes them. He characterizes them as people who abolish the law. He did not come to abolish the law. It's the scribes and Pharisees that are the ones abolishing the law.

Yeshua repeatedly accuses the scribes and Pharisees throughout the book of Matthew of hypocrisy. It's a major theme in all of these conflicts between him and the religious leaders. He's repeatedly accusing them of hypocrisy. In [Matthew 15](#), he explicitly says that they break the commandment of God. He also says that they make void the word of God. That sounds very similar to abolish, right? To nullify. So there you have this idea that the scribes and Pharisees are the ones that are abolishing the law.

Not Devoted Enough

In [Matthew 23](#), Yeshua says that the scribes and Pharisees, quote, preach but do not practice. And they, quote, neglect the weightier matters of the law. So from Yeshua's perspective, the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is actually not all that impressive, right? They're actually pretty bad at keeping the commandments.

Yeshua's problem with the Pharisees is not that they are too devoted to the law, it is that they are not devoted enough. They lack sufficient righteousness. So when we understand this verse in context, it makes perfect sense. If you're as terrible at keeping the law as the scribes and Pharisees are, you aren't even a genuine member of the kingdom. You can't be as bad as them

and expect that you're a member of the kingdom. So Jesus is not giving some impossible standard here. Instead, he truly expects that his followers will not stoop to such a low.

Actually Keeping the Commandments

You will not be as bad as the scribes and Pharisees. Members of the kingdom, who by the way, are saved by grace through faith by definition, they will be righteous. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, we will actually obey the constitution of the kingdom. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, we will not just preach the commandments, but also obey them, as we see in the previous verse in verse 19. Those who do and teach the commandments. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, we will not abolish the law. We will fulfill it. And we do that by obeying the commandments according to Yeshua's divine interpretation.

He teaches us how to keep the Torah properly as God intended. And that's what we're going to be learning throughout the rest of the Sermon on the Mount is how Yeshua interprets the law, how he brings out the full meaning of the law, how he demonstrates the way to keep it, the way to fulfill it as God intended. So here's the question for you, and it's going to make you uncomfortable. And as I said earlier, that's the point of this verse. But are you sure that your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees? Are you sure?

Assuming Your Own Righteousness

I said at the beginning of this message that we often use the Bible as a tool for proving ourselves right, and that this sometimes causes us to close our ears to what God's Word is saying to us personally. I think that's what the scribes and Pharisees did. They imagined themselves as righteous while closing their ears to what the law was truly saying to them. And they ended up neglecting the law in many ways, abolishing the law, circumventing the law, making excuses to get out of certain commandments by legal loopholes and things like that.

As Messianics, we read [Matthew 5](#), 17 through 20, and we think we're good. Because, yeah, this verse rocks. It basically confirms that everything I'm doing is right, that we love the Torah, we keep the Sabbath, the festivals, and the food laws. [Matthew 5](#), 17, that's like a mantra. You did not come to abolish the law. And so, often, we assume that we're righteous. But the scribes and Pharisees also assumed that they were righteous. And Yeshua said it wasn't good enough.

The Whitewashed Tomb

Although the Pharisees claimed to uphold the commandments, they were hypocrites who disregarded the commandments. In [Matthew 23](#), verse 17, Yeshua says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." Are you claiming to be righteous or Torah observant while trying to find ways to disregard the commandments? Do you merely appear righteous on the outside while hiding secret sins? You might be able to fool some people who look at your outward righteousness, but Yeshua sees. He sees what's in your heart. He sees what you do in secret.

I just gotta say, this assumption that we are good, this assumption of righteousness among people who look righteous—literally some of the worst people I've ever met have been religious people. There was a famous Christian author and speaker named Ravi Zacharias. He spoke at various academic institutions. He was widely known and widely respected. He spoke at international forums. All the while, for years and years of being widely respected in ministry as a famous Christian author, he was having affairs and engaged in sexual abuse, including rape.

And this was all hidden from everybody. Nobody expected, nobody expected this. There were some rumors here and there, but they were all quickly dismissed because we're like, it's Ravi Zacharias. He's righteous, right? He talked about Christian morality and all of that, and the importance of Scripture and of living our lives according to God's commandments. But then there was a thorough investigation into these allegations, and it turned out that there was a lot of evidence supporting them. And so the guy was a whitewashed tomb.

All the Commandments Still Apply

What do you have going on in your life? What commandments are you breaking? Because Yeshua said they all still apply. This is our passage, right? We love this passage. We love using this passage to support our theology. But whoa, all the commandments still apply. Am I actually keeping them? Is my righteousness good enough according to Yeshua's standard? All the commandments still apply.

And by the way, this expectation not to be a massive hypocrite like the scribes and Pharisees—that's just the bare minimum of what Yeshua expects of his people. He calls us not to just be least in the kingdom, not just to be the bare minimum. He calls us to pursue greatness in the kingdom. He calls us to be people of integrity, honesty, trustworthiness, sexual purity, mercy, and to be peacemakers and to love our enemies, to not hate people. We're going to be learning a

lot about Yeshua's standards for his people as we continue going through the Sermon on the Mount.

And so, I encourage you guys to take the constitution of the kingdom seriously. I don't know where you guys are today. I hope that my explanation of [Matthew 5](#), 17 through 20 has encouraged you. It really is an awesome passage that confirms so much of what we hold dear as Messianic believers. But I also hope this passage has prompted you to consider where you might be falling short of Yeshua's standard for us.

The Question I'll Leave With You

I would encourage you to examine yourself, your heart, and your intentions. Are you truly wanting to live the kingdom life? This is the question I'll leave you guys with today. Are you truly wanting to live the kingdom life? Or are you just interested in putting on a religious show so that you could appear righteous on the outside while being full of lawlessness on the inside?

Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for your word. I thank you, Lord, that even as we learn and we grow and we study your words and we're passionate about your words, your word is alive and active. Your word still speaks to us. It still meets us where we are. Wherever we are on our journey, you meet us, God, through your word. And I'm so grateful. I'm so grateful, Lord, for your grace, for your love, and for your mercy that you forgive us when we do fall short, that you empower us to live lives of holiness and righteousness. Lord, I ask that you help us to see where we are falling short. I ask that you have mercy on us and that you help us to live lives that are worthy of your kingdom. In Yeshua's name, amen.

Let's sing the Shema together. Shema Yisrael Adonai Luv Adonai Echad Baruch Shekevomah. Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity. And may the Lord bless you and keep you.

Closing

May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you peace. In Yeshua's name, amen. Amen. Shabbat shalom, family.

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