

Sunday, January 13, 2019

This is the next sermon in a series of sermons that I have been doing on the “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5-7. As I mentioned last time, a high-level summary of the Sermon on the Mount might look something like this:

1. Our essential characteristics (what we are) – vv. 5:3-12
2. Our function in the world – vv. 5:13-16
- 3. Our relationship to the law – vv. 5:17-48**
4. Our religious life – vv. 6:1-18
5. Our mundane life – vv. 6:19-34
6. Our relationship to other people – vv. 7:1-12
7. Being doers and not hearers only – vv. 7:13-27

This week and, Lord willing, next week, I plan to focus on the 3rd item above, which I’ve called “Our relationship to the law.” Today, I would like to go over verses 17-20; next week, my intention is to go over the remainder of chapter 5, verses 21-48.

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach [them], the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed [the righteousness] of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:17-20)

A question that might be raised here is, who is He talking to in this sermon? Who is His audience? At the beginning of this chapter, we read:

“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying...” (Matthew 5:1-2)

And then at the conclusion of the sermon, we read:

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes.” (Matthew 7:28-29)

The word translated “the multitudes” in 5:1 is the same word translated “the people” in 7:28. So it would be reasonable to conclude that this sermon was given to teach His disciples, but it was delivered in the presence of a multitude of people and was for their benefit as well. In fact, some believe that beginning at our text today (Matthew 5:17), Jesus began to address the entire crowd. This is no strange thing – the same thing happens with the sermons delivered in this building. The primary audience is believers, but the fact is that in this very room, we have believers and nonbelievers, and certainly we have a wide range of people listening remotely.

Our text for today is the beginning of a new section of Christ’s sermon, and it falls immediately on the heels of His pronouncements of the Beatitudes and that His people are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Now He is fleshing out what that means. How are we to live according to the Beatitudes, such that we are salt and light? The answer is, we are to live righteous lives. We are to obey Him. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). And what is the standard of righteousness? What are we to obey? It is none other than the unchanging, eternal Word of God. If you want to live as salt and light, then you must love and obey His Word. And you can’t do that if you don’t know what it says, and you can’t do that if you don’t give the Word the preeminence that it deserves.

Now there were some in the crowd who were questioning Him. “Who is this guy? Who does He think He is? He’s saying things different than the scribes and the Pharisees. Does He even believe the Bible? Is He going to toss it all aside and start afresh?” He knows what they’re thinking, and in effect, His answer is, “Stop thinking that. I’m not only not going to throw the Old Testament away, I’m here to fulfill it. I’m telling you the law of God is absolutely preeminent, and you must follow it down to the very least commandment. The problem is that the scribes and Pharisees have perverted it and lowered the standards. I’m the Lawgiver, and I’m here to raise the standard back up to what was originally intended. I’m here to show you what righteousness really is. I’m here to tell you what is expected of anyone who is going to call themselves a citizen of My Kingdom.” Then He proceeds to give six examples that follow the form, “you have heard it said...but I say...” In other words, “Here’s how the Pharisees have perverted what the Old Testament teaches...Now I’m going to tell you what it really means.”

To proceed today, I’d like to start by considering a couple questions about this passage:

- What does this passage teach us about the Old Testament, and specifically about the law?
- What does it mean for Christ to fulfill the law and the prophets?

What does this passage teach us about the Old Testament, and specifically about the law?

When Christ refers to the law and the prophets, He is referring to the entire Old Testament, which is a common way to refer to it throughout the New Testament (see Matthew 22:40, Luke 16:16, John 1:45, Acts 24:14, Romans 3:21 as examples). Christ's view is that it is the absolute, eternal, unchanging Word of God. That should also be our view. We don't live out the Beatitudes, and we don't live as salt and light, by trying to figure out clever ways to excuse our sin and nullify the Word of God. We don't live that way by saying that the law of God is worthless – His law is what defines the standards!

We are living in an age where people don't like what the Bible says so they think they can change it according to their whims and desires. They treat the Bible as a "living document" that changes according to how society and its mores change, and that we should be allowed to reinterpret and redefine it to accommodate whatever the prevailing sin of the time happens to be. Jesus says the opposite of that here – He says that till heaven and earth pass, not one jot or tittle will pass from the law until every bit of it is fulfilled (the "jot" is the smallest Hebrew character, and the "tittle" is a single stroke of a character, like the line that distinguishes between an 'E' and an 'F'). He did not come to abrogate it – He came to fulfill it. It is just as binding now as it ever was, down to the very least commandment. It was so binding, in fact, that Christ Himself was placed under the law:

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” (Galatians 4:4)

How we relate to this law of God determines whether we are considered the least or the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. How we treat the law of God is a big deal. He is saying that He didn't come to destroy it at all, but if you destroy just one part of it, you will be called the least in the kingdom. This is heavy hitting. The idea here is not simply that you have sinned, but that you have loosened the law and made it less binding than God says it is. If we water down, or lessen, or ignore, or nullify, or justify, or explain away the least commandment, and teach others to do so, we will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. This could mean that the people in the church who do this are held in the lowest esteem by Christ and His people, or that you are cast off by God as a worthless person who is not useful to Him, or you are barred from entering the gates of heaven and the inhabitants thereof will look upon you as the lowest of the low. Whatever the case, I don't want to have anything to do with being called the least in the kingdom of heaven, and the solution to that is to raise the Word of God up to the standard that God requires. Don't justify your sin.

What does it mean for Christ to fulfill the law and the prophets?

At this point, you might be thinking, “But what about all those laws in the Old Testament that we don’t follow anymore? Like the dietary laws? Or the sacrifices? How can you tell me that not one jot or tittle of those laws will pass away until all is fulfilled, when we don’t have to follow those laws anymore?” To answer that, we need to talk a little bit about the law of Moses and what it means to fulfill that law. This law is commonly divided up into three types – moral, judicial, and ceremonial. A single precept in the law may not fall neatly into just one of these categories – there can be overlap. But generally speaking:

- **Moral laws** are those principles that apply to all men in all places at all times. For example, “thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13). It doesn’t matter who you are, where you live, or what time period you live in, murder is wrong. (And in fact, as we’ll see next time, there’s a lot more to that than just the physical act of murder – it includes even being angry with your brother without a cause, etc.)
- **Judicial laws** are those laws that were in effect during the existence of the theocracy of Israel, to regulate day-to-day behavior. There is always a foundational moral principle underlying these laws, but the specifics of them applied to that nation at that time. For example, “If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.” (Exodus 22:1). Obviously, the underlying moral precept here is that you shouldn’t steal, and if you do, you ought to pay restitution. The fact that a stolen ox is worth five oxen in restitution, but a stolen sheep is worth only four sheep in restitution, was a thing very specific to the Jewish nation at that time. That was the specific way in which the general principle was codified to regulate that aspect of the day-to-day life of those people. Once the theocracy of Israel ceased to exist, the judicial law ceased to be in force. The moral principles underneath the judicial law, however, are still just as valid as they always have been.
- **Ceremonial laws** are those laws that applied to the religious worship of God in Israel. These laws also always have a foundational moral principle undergirding them. The ceremonial laws were symbolic in nature – the New Testament calls them a “shadow of good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1), and include things like the priesthood, the tabernacle and all of its furnishings (door, altar, laver, candlestick, shewbread, incense, veil, ark of the covenant), sacrifices (burnt offerings, meat offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, trespass offerings), the feasts (Passover, unleavened bread, firstfruits, weeks, trumpets, atonement, tabernacles). For example, “And thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me alway.” (Exodus 25:30). Among other things, this represents that Christ is the Bread of Life. This law, and all ceremonial laws, ceased to be in force when Christ rent the veil in twain (Matthew 27:51) because the body (that is, the body that was casting the shadow) of all these things was Christ. When Christ came and did His

work, the shadows were no longer necessary. But the spiritual and moral truths behind these laws are still valid.

So, the moral laws are manifestations of the very character and nature of God. They don't change. The judicial and ceremonial laws have the moral law as their underpinnings and were put in place at a particular time for a particular reason. Specifically, they were created for the nation of Israel to separate them from the surrounding nations, to govern its civil affairs, to worship God, and to foreshadow the Messiah. The theocracy of Israel no longer exists, so the civil law for that nation is no longer in effect. The final sacrifice has been made, so the ceremonial law for that nation is no longer in effect. We may not have to observe the letter of the judicial and ceremonial laws, but the spiritual truth behind those laws has not changed, and we are bound to believe and follow those things. Not one jot or tittle of them has been deleted from the Word of God. They are still there and are useful and instructive to us, and their underlying truth has been explicated and elucidated by the glorious gospel of Christ.

This is important stuff – if you don't understand the law, you don't understand the cross of Christ and what He accomplished there. Christ came to fulfill all that law (moral, judicial and ceremonial) and the prophets. The law and prophets point to Christ and will be fulfilled in Him down to the minutest detail. Arthur Pink has a pretty good description of this: *"Not only was there no antagonism between Himself and Moses, but He had come to earth with the express purpose of accomplishing all that had been demanded in the name of God. So far was it from being His design to repudiate the holy Law, He had become incarnate in order to work out that very righteousness it required, to make good what the Levitical institutions had foreshadowed, and to bring to pass the Messianic predictions of Israel's seers."*

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). Well did Beza say upon this verse, "Christ came not to bring any new way of righteousness and salvation into the world, but to fulfil that in deed which was shadowed by the figures of the Law: by delivering men through grace from the curse of the Law; and moreover to teach the true use of obedience which the Law appointed, and to grave in our hearts the force of obedience." On the dominant word "fulfil," Matthew Henry pertinently pointed out, "The Gospel is 'The time of reformation' (Heb. 9:10)—not the repeal of the Law, but the amendment of it [i.e. from its pharisaical corruptions, A.W.P.] and, consequently, its re-establishment."

"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (v. 18). In these words our Lord affirmed the perpetuity of the Law, insisting that it should never be abrogated. The grass withereth and the flower fadeth, but the Word of God endureth for ever: the Old Testament as much as the New, the Law as

truly as the Gospel. The "verily I say unto you" was the solemn asseveration of the Amen, the faithful and true Witness. Everything in the Law must be fulfilled: not only its prefigurations and prophecies, but its precepts and penalty: fulfilled, first, personally and vicariously, by and upon the Surety; fulfilled, second and evangelically, in and by His people; and fulfilled, third, in the doom of the wicked, who shall experience its awful curse for ever and ever. Instead of Christ's being opposed to the Law of God, He came here to magnify it and render it honorable (Isa. 42:21); and rather than His teachings being subversive thereof, they confirmed and enforced it."

To "fulfill" in v. 17 is the Greek word "pleroo", and means "fill up, accomplish, complete, realize, perfect." Jesus didn't come to remove or change the law – He came to complete and perfect it. Matthew Henry uses the example of a vessel that is partially full of water – Christ didn't come to pour the water out and start over; He came to fill it up to the brim. Henry also uses the example of a rough sketch, and Christ comes to fill in the details and complete the drawing. He came to complete the purpose of those things that came earlier; He was the realization that all those things pointed to.

"Fulfill" in v. 18 is a different Greek word – it is "ginomai" and means "to come to pass, to happen."

Christ fulfilled the moral law by perfectly keeping the standards of God while He walked the earth, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness (Daniel 9:24). He fulfilled the punishments required by the law by dying on the cross on behalf of His people. He fulfilled the judicial law by taking the kingdom from Israel (Matthew 21:43). He fulfilled the ceremonial law by being the antitype that all those things were a type of. He fulfilled the prophets by accomplishing what they had prophesied (and He is not done accomplishing those things yet).

Now, if Christ fulfilled these things, why do we have to follow any of the law? Aren't we free from that if it's already been fulfilled? We frequently hear people brush away the eternal principles and precepts of God by saying, "that was in the Old Testament" as if it has been made null and void and the very nature of God has somehow changed. (You know, there are well over 900 Old Testament quotes and references in the New Testament, just over 100 of which are in the book of Matthew). These types of people may claim that the doctrine of grace has rendered the Old Testament obsolete. What they are doing is turning the grace of God into lasciviousness (Jude 4) and saying that because God is gracious, because He is merciful, because He is love, He has therefore given them freedom to break the law of God. That is the antithesis of how a person who has actually received the grace of God would speak. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." (Romans 6:1-2). Grace does not free us from the responsibility of following God's laws...in fact, grace gives us the desire

and the ability and the freedom to follow those laws. The grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (see Titus 2:11-12). Jesus did not die so we could live lives of sin with impunity; He died for the exact opposite reason. He died to “purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14), to create us “in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10), and that “the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Romans 8:4). It is only because He fulfilled it that He has given us the power to fulfill it. It is only by His indwelling Spirit that His commandments are not grievous to us. Otherwise, we have no power in ourselves to desire to conform to His righteousness.

If you come across a person who says we don’t have to obey the eternal moral standards of God, you’re dealing with a hell-bound person who doesn’t understand the first thing about what it means to follow Christ. There is one sense in which we are not bound by the moral law and that is that we are not under the dominion of the law as a covenant of works and subject to its penalty, because Christ suffered that penalty for us and redeemed us from the curse of the law (see Galatians 3). Otherwise, we are still bound to live according to the standards of the moral law (see Romans 6). 1 John 3:4 defines sin as “the transgression of the law.” Sin is never OK for anyone, at any time, in any place, for any reason.

This brings us to verse 20:

“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees*, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20)

This is one of the linchpin verses of the Sermon on the Mount. The rest of the sermon, up through verse 7:12, is basically an exposition of this verse. Any time a verse tells me about something that will keep me out of the kingdom of heaven, I want to know what the verse means. So let us consider a few questions about this verse:

- Who are the scribes and the Pharisees?
- What is the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees?
- What kind of righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees?

Who are the scribes and the Pharisees?

The scribes were the scholarly ones whose business was the Mosaic law – they taught it, expounded it, interpreted it, made copies of it, etc. They were the authorities on the law and those who were particularly well-versed in it are sometimes referred to as “lawyers” in the Gospels. They dealt in the fine points of the law and were used to give answers to difficult

questions that came up in the interpretation of the law. Their entire lives were spent studying the scripture.

The Pharisees were one of four main sects of Judaism that existed at the time (the others being the Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots). They were separatists – they wanted to separate themselves from everyone and everything by creating their own code of behavior (above and beyond the Bible) and adhering to that. They developed a ritualistic, ceremonial, punctilious, burdensome system, and then told everyone that they had to follow that to go to heaven. They thought they were the most pious, spiritually elite group out there, and believed that they, and they alone, knew what it meant to have communion with God. They believed in a Messiah, a resurrection, free will, angels, demons, and that the oral tradition of the Jews had equal weight with the Word of God. They had some representation in the Sanhedrin (which tried Jesus Christ), and were quite popular among the common people. They weren't very politically active, but when they wanted something done, they would be rabble-rousers among the commoners.

The sect of the Pharisees is what modern-day Judaism has descended from, and we don't see this any better than in all the regulations that they have surrounding the observance of the Sabbath (or, Shabbat). I always think of Joe Lieberman when I think about this – he is a murderer (he supports abortion), he is a practicing adulterer (he's divorced and remarried), and he has done whatever he could do to promote the acceptance and glorification of sodomy...but he is too holy to flip a light switch, drive in a car, or lift a pen on the Sabbath, and the trained seals in this country applaud him for how devout and pious he holds himself out to be. There are 39 categories of things that Jews can't do on the Sabbath. For example, they can't cook food, start a fire, put out a fire, touch money, use a telephone, turn a light on or off, tear toilet paper, water plants, pick flowers, write, draw, erase, and they have a complicated set of rules surrounding healing on the Sabbath. This Sabbath business was the pinnacle of righteousness for the Pharisees, just as it is today in modern Judaism.

By way of contrast, the Sadducees (which is the only other sect mentioned in the Bible) had many views that were opposite of the Pharisees (i.e., no resurrection, no angels, no traditions were to replace scripture). We generally hear about the Sadducees as being the "liberals" of their day, but it depends on the subject matter whether a person would be "liberal" or "conservative." In some ways, they were quite conservative, because if they didn't see it in the Torah, they wouldn't believe it, where the Pharisees were a lot more liberal with how they viewed the scripture because they added their own traditions to it. The Sadducees were wealthy, aristocratic, were commonly the ones who held the high priesthood, and were the majority on the Sanhedrin. They were heavily involved in politics, and took great measures to work with Rome, Herod, etc.

To be clear, “scribes” weren’t a separate sect, like the Pharisees and Sadducees were. A scribe could be a Pharisee, and vice versa. A scribe could also be a Sadducee, and vice versa. But a Pharisee could never simultaneously be a Sadducee.

To the common people of the day, the scribes and the Pharisees were paragons of what it meant to be religious. They were the holiest and most righteous people around, with their great knowledge of the scripture and outwardly devout behavior. It is very similar to how the common people in the Dark Ages viewed Catholic priests, because they read and interpreted the scripture, and then passed that on after manipulating it to conform with their man-made system and beliefs. This would have been a major blow to these people to hear that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees in order to go to heaven.

What is the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees?

I would suggest that after you get done listening to today’s sermon, you go home and read Matthew 23 for a pretty good description of what the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees consisted of. While you’re there, take note that Jesus was not the delicate wallflower who never wanted to offend anyone that people like to portray Him as being; it wasn’t enough for Jesus to just speak positively about the truth – He also spoke negatively and tore down false doctrine where He found it. Take note also that any one of us could very easily shift over into Pharisaical thoughts and behaviors. I think it’s a dangerous place to be if you think, “Those guys over there are Pharisees and I’m just fine right where I am.” The fact is that their type of righteousness is not very far from any of us. For today’s sermon, I’ll just point out a few of the main characteristics of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees:

1. **Intellectual.** They had an extensive head knowledge of the Word of God and thought that their great intellects were synonymous with being righteous. These were some truly smart guys. The problem is that they did not understand the first thing about living the way that God requires us to live.

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.” (Matthew 23:2-3)

They sat in the seat of Moses (that is, they were the authorities on the law of Moses; the deans in the school of Moses), and thought that they knew everything there was to know about every jot and tittle. They were able to tell people what the Bible says. But they didn’t live it. It was academic to them. If the Bible is not read with an eye towards obedience and glorifying God, then you might as well not even be reading it. The purpose is not to give you an intellectual ego boost. Knowing what the Bible says does

not make you righteous. Being able to spout off verses or theological arguments does not make you righteous.

2. **Hypocritical.** Christ repeatedly calls them hypocrites, which comes from the Greek word “hypokrites” which means “actor, stage player, pretender.” They were pretending to be holy, pretending to be righteous, pretending to love God, etc.
3. **External.** Their righteousness was on the outside, but they were rotten and corrupt on the inside. They were far more concerned with the outward ceremonial actions than they were with the moral spirit of the law.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” (Matthew 23:27-28)

“And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” (Luke 16:15)

How easy it is for us to do something because we want to impress another person, without giving any regard to the glory of God. It's not what you do for show; it's what's in the heart that's important. “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins.” (Jeremiah 17:10).

4. **Man-made.** These guys had added their own oral traditions by the 1000s to the law of God, and redefined things according to however they needed to redefine them in order to rationalize their sin and feel holy.

“He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with [their] lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching [for] doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, [as] the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, [It is] Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; [he shall be free]. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his

mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.” (Mark 7:6-13)

We are not guiltless here. We have all come up with our own standard of righteousness in order to rationalize sin. “It’s alright for me to do that because that’s my personality,” for example. If we’re on the fool’s errand of trying to achieve our own righteousness, that’s really all we can do, because we can’t stand up against God’s standard on our own.

5. **Partial.** They only followed the commands that they wanted to follow. They followed the ones that they could handle. They followed the ones that were easy for them. But they ignored the most important ones.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” (Matthew 23:23)

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” (Luke 18:11-12)

We are all guilty of this one, too. We can say, “I don’t get drunk. I don’t fornicate. I’ve never been involved in grand theft auto. I don’t celebrate pagan idolatry like Christmas. I’ve never killed anyone. I pay my taxes. I have short hair. I go to church each week. I tithe. I read the Bible. I do some street preaching. I do some stuff to help spread the Word on the Internet. This is my checklist of things that make me righteous, so as long as I can check all these off, I’m OK.” All the while, though, we’re involved in other, far worse sins, and even these things that we think we’re doing right are attended with sin.

6. **Self-centered.** They thought their righteousness was all about them, and that they didn’t need God. You’ll note that in the Pharisee’s prayer that I just quoted above, the Pharisee basically thanked God for how great he has made himself by his own works.

The scribes and Pharisees were all about external religion. They didn’t understand the law. The law is extremely important because it defines the standards of God’s righteousness, but they didn’t understand that the law is spiritual. Though external behavior is important, it is only important insofar as it comes from a pure heart: “*The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*” (1 Samuel

16:7). God didn't give the law to show us how great we are when we happen to obey some of it. That's how the Pharisees looked on it – they actually thought they were keeping the law because they kept some of the letter of it, but they completely missed the spirit of it (see Romans 7). No, He didn't give it to show us how great we are – He gave it to show us how corrupt we are. He gave it so we would realize that we could **not** keep it. Paul calls the law a "schoolmaster" in Galatians 3 – it was the thing that was to show us how inadequate we are and that we can't be righteous on our own, and that our only hope is faith in Christ. And this brings us to our next question:

What kind of righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees?

Of course, there is only one kind of righteousness that will do, and that is the righteousness of Christ. The imputed righteousness of Christ. I've said it before, and I'll say it again, but don't grow numb to it – it's a vital truth. If you don't understand it, talk to one of your loved ones about it. That's the kind of stuff you ought to be talking about anyway. It is the imputed righteousness of Christ. It is the righteousness that results in the King's daughter being all glorious within and clad in clothing of wrought gold without (Psalm 45:13). It is the righteousness that comes only through faith in Christ. Jesus said elsewhere, "no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6).

Most of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount fleshes out this concept of our righteousness having to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. If you haven't realized it yet, you will quickly discover that the righteousness that is required is not the product of human will or the natural human heart. This is a righteousness that can only come from God. It is His righteousness (see v. 6:33). This is the righteousness we read about in Romans 3:22, Philippians 3:9, 2 Corinthians 5:21. This is the righteousness that a redeemed person has. This is the righteousness that a born-again person has. If we are Christ's, that means He has died for us, AND He has given us a new nature which causes us to desire to live a righteous life by glorifying and obeying Him because we love Him.

Many say this Sermon on the Mount is meant to show you your utter inability to be righteous on your own; that you CAN'T have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees on your own. If you don't go through this sermon and eventually conclude, "I can't do this on my own," and if you don't burn in your heart with desire to meet these glorious standards that Christ lays down, you're not thinking right! "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24). But thank God we have a Savior! He is sufficient to provide all the righteousness we need, and He has given us His Spirit to dwell in us and enable us to fulfill the righteousness of the law and be spiritually minded, which is life and peace (see Romans 8). I love you. Amen.