

Until all Is Fulfilled, 1

Last Things

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Bible Text: Matthew 5:17-20; Matthew 11:2-14
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Our Scripture lesson is taken from Matthew 5, beginning at verse 17, as I clip on my emergency backup recorder. As you find it there, you might want to read that section from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

(Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XIX, Of the Law of God

III. Besides this law, commonly called Moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances; partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the new testament.

IV. To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, farther than the general equity thereof may require.)

I'm not going to refer to it, but I'm going to keep it there for a couple of weeks. So, Matthew 5, beginning at verse 17, page 1,502. Matthew 5:17.

17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 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. 19 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. 20 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.

The word of the Lord. [“Thanks be to God.”]

May we pray.

Lord, help me as I sum up seven previous sermons and begin a return to a previous series on last things, to be clear and concise; may I make no mistakes in referencing things, but be true to your word and reporting things accurately. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, before I preach this sermon, I want to say one thing. Last Lord's Day, I made a mistake in my sermon. It was only one mistake, and it was a reference to the Presbyterian Church in America. I mischaracterized their position. They have not yet taken a position.

In a Presbyterian church, the way it works is a General Assembly passes an item, it's then sent down to Presbyteries to confirm, and then it comes back to the next General Assembly to be approved.

So, they have not yet taken a position and I want to make that clear, and so I wrote an apology on the website and in the sermon.

And then I want to say one other thing. God willing, a week from tomorrow evening, instead of our study—we've finished the study on “The Presbyterians,” because we've trained officers and ordained them—but we were going to be returning to understanding evangelism.

However, in light of those seven sermons entitled, “Scandalous Texts,” meaning passages of the Bible that cause people to stumble and say, “How could a good God ordain this?” And there are passages like that, and I chose seven, and so what I'm going to do on Monday evening at 5:30, a week from tomorrow, is I will devote the entire study time to answering questions. Of course, we'll pray as well. But I want to answer questions because I'm sure if you look back on all the sermons: “The conquest of Canaan,” “The Curse of the Gibeonites,” “Slavery,” “Stoning Rebellious Children,” and so on and

so on, that you may have questions. (I'm debating having it in here and having it recorded on video, because I think it may be helpful to share with people who watch us on the internet, and we do have a lot of people that watch us on YouTube, on Facebook, and on SermonAudio. So, I may do that in here so we can record it, but I want to answer your questions.

Why? Because when you preach on controversial texts, and when you preach in the time frame that I have now, as over against when I used to preach 45- and 55-minute sermons—that was in my church in Alexandria—45- to 55-minute sermons—I can't complete a thought. And I know a few of you would say, "Well, go on Bob, don't ever cut it short."

Look, I learned this becoming an old man, 76. Yes, it is old. In fact, the local paper referred to a man at 76 and said, "the elderly man." And I learned that someone once said that "The mind can only absorb what the seat can endure."

So, I preach shorter sermons, and much shorter, and some of you think, "What? You preach long sermons." But no, compared to what I used to preach, they're really, really short.

So, you may have questions. I'll try to answer them as best as I can. I am not Pope Francis or Pope Benedict. I am Bob, and I am very fallible, so anyhow. So, with that, without further ado, let's look there at verse 17, Matthew 5:17, where he says,

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets."

Remember this, that the normal way of referring to the Old Testament by the Jews was either, "the Law and the Prophets," that is the Torah, the five books of Moses in the beginning, and the rest of the Bible (Luke 24:27), and sometimes, as things moved on, they added the third section. The third section is included in the Prophets, in wording it this way with two, but the Law and the Prophets actually refers to the Law and the Prophets and the Writings, with the first of the Writings being the Psalms.

And so, in the book of Luke, Jesus refers to the Old Testament as the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, because the Psalms is the first book of the Writings (Luke 24:44). And so, Jews then refer to their Bible, not as the Old Testament, but they refer to it as the Tanakh. The Tanakh, the Torah (Tōrā,

תּוֹרָה), the Nevi'im (נְבִיאִים), and the Ketuvim (כְּתוּבִים), the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, or the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. So, when Jesus is saying here, “Don’t think that I’ve come to abolish the Law or the Prophets,” he’s talking about the Old Testament, which a Jewish person will never call that, and if you ever refer to their Bible as the Old Testament, you have insulted them, and we’ll see some reasons for that later on.

And then he says, “I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Now what does that word fulfill mean? That word fulfill has about six basic meanings (plerōō, πληρόω, BDAG, p. 829), but the basic idea is this. If I owe you money, when I paid the debt, I fulfilled my obligation. It also refers to a sense of establishing something, and it refers to a sense of completing something.

And so, then he says here, he says, notice, “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear,” that’s pretty profound, “not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen.”

Let me comment on that because the King James is more literal, not a jot or a tittle. The jot refers to the Hebrew letter Yodh, Yodh. And Yodh is a tiny letter (י). It’s a tenth of the size of the other letters of the Hebrew alphabet (e.g. א ב ג ד ה). So, our translation gives this meaning of the word, but he says not the smallest letter, the Yodh, and then he says, nor the least stroke of a pen.

Now in Hebrew —one reason I had to start wearing glasses is when I studied Hebrew, it’s hard to see differences in certain letters. For example, the letter “chet (ח)” and the letter “he (ה)” look virtually identical. It’s just there’s a tiny gap between what looks like three sides of a rectangle. There’s a tiny gap on the one side between the one line and the two other lines, and that’s called a tittle. A tittle. And that’s the smallest distinguishing mark between two Hebrew letters.

Now Jesus is telling us something here about the Bible, and it’s really important. The Bible is God’s word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible is true right down to the smallest letter, the Yodh, and the smallest distinguishing mark, the tittle, and Jesus is endorsing that. And this is important, particularly in preaching to churches where people have not been taught to respect the Bible.

For me, I cannot deny the book, but I can tell you, having known ministers and having graduated from a modernistic Presbyterian college, actually called Presbyterian College, where I finished, I can tell you that the professors there did not believe the Bible was true. And so, they passed that on to their students. And that was true.

And a distant cousin of mine was put on trial once, for heresy by the old Synod of South Carolina in the Presbyterian Church U.S., the Southern Church. And they asked him this question, and my cousin was very smart. “Dr. Hay, do you believe in the virgin birth of Christ?”

What do you think Dr. Hay said? He said, “The virgin birth of Christ is a wonderful symbol of my faith.” Hmm.

So, when people raised the question from the floor, trying to draw him out, he simply was evasive. He was like a politician, just being evasive, not really answering the question. Did he believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary?

And the answer to that question is absolutely not. But he had mastered the ability to answer things evasively. Let me say this. Here is a word I learned years ago from one of my elders in Alexandria. He was a physics professor. The word was obfuscation. Obfuscation. What does obfuscation mean? It means to bring darkness instead of light, so that if you catch somebody in something, they’re going to confuse you.

Like magicians, they distract you with their tricks so that they can do what they want to do. And so, word games, tricks, evading the meaning and twisting words, obfuscation, is the way of the heretic. Obfuscation is the way of the heretic.

And so, it’s important that we understand that the Bible is God’s word, and therefore when the Bible says something, no matter whether I like it or not, I’ve got to accept it, and that is the core of my being. That is what I preach and have preached ever since I was first licensed to preach in 1965. I’ve always preached that the Bible is the word of God, and that’s so important.

There are things in the Bible I don't like. Would you like to know the number one doctrine in the Bible I hate? Would you like me to tell you what it is? Hell. Hell. I don't like the doctrine of hell.

I don't like the idea that there is a place or a state of being of separation from God, on and on and on. I hate that doctrine. I really hate it.

In my heart, I'm a universalist. In my heart, I want everybody to be saved. I don't want anybody to go to hell. But if I believe the Bible is God's word, I've got to take seriously what it says. And do you know who taught more about hell than anybody else?

The Lord Jesus Christ and that, I find then, if I'm going to call myself a Christian, I have to accept God's word as binding my conscience, as binding my mind and my soul.

And I'll say one last thing. In an era of incredible unbelief and the removal of absolute standards, we have people being steeped in the idea that there's no authority. I'm struck with that. There's no authority. Who's going to tell me right and wrong?

I'll tell you two things.

One: God has given us his written word. Not all people have read the Bible. Not all people have heard the gospel. Therefore, it's incumbent on me and on you to share that word.

But there's a second word from God, and that's what we might call natural law. Natural law. What do I mean by natural law?

I mean this: the Bible teaches clearly and unequivocally in Romans 1, that every single human being knows there's a God without exception (Romans 1:18-20). Not only they know there's a God, but they have a basic latent intuitive sense before experience that the true God is God (Romans 1:21).

And there's something else, Romans 2 teaches us that God's moral law is stamped on the soul of every single human being. You know right from wrong. The most benighted savage in the most benighted part of the entire world, has a conscience. If you're a human being, you have a conscience and that human conscience reflects God's moral law, the Ten Commandments.

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them, Romans 2:14-15)

So, everybody knows right from wrong. Everybody knows there is a God who will call us to account. We all know that. That's what I mean by natural law. It's written on the heart of man. Every human being has it.

Well, why don't we all agree? The reason we don't is because when our first parents sinned, our consciences became corrupted and through a culture, through civilization, over a period of time, you can harden your heart over and over and over again, and Scripture warns us about hardening our hearts (Romans 1:21, 32; 1 Timothy 4:2).

So, we have natural law. All men everywhere know there is a God who will hold us into account for our sins, and all men everywhere know the basics of the Ten Commandments. It's written on the heart of man. And you can see it, for example, in the rhythm of life.

What is the rhythm of creation? It's a seven-day cycle. People have experimented with different kinds of weeks, a 10-day work week, a 5-day work week, but the point is instilled in the nature of a human being is a 7-day cycle. We need to work six days; we need to take a break. If we don't reboot the computer once a week, you're going to get a lot of viruses in that brain that are going to mess up your thinking. So, we have to get a break. How we do that varies from one culture to another. If we are following God's written word, we need to know that that is related to gathering together with other believers (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:25).

Now that's a long explanation of something, but let's look at here at what Jesus says, and he says that not the smallest letter, the Yodh, not the smallest distinguishing mark, the tittle, will disappear from the law—notice the last statement, “until everything is accomplished.” Until everything is accomplished.

Now, that is a huge issue, and we want to begin to explore it today. Turn with me, if you will, to the gospel of Matthew 11. Matthew 11 and we find something quite striking here on page 1,513. Now, this is about John the Baptist, Matthew 11, and John the Baptist is in prison. Why? Because he touched on politics.

Do I ever touch on politics? Yes and no. I never will endorse a politician. I did it once or twice in my first congregation. I regretted it, but I will say that I touch on political issues. I touch on issues of right and wrong. I touch on things that politicians may stand for or stand against. So, it's impossible to preach the Bible without having certain amount of political application, but I don't preach politics.

Now John the Baptist was called by God to denounce Herod because of what he had done, and the end result is he's thrown in prison. While he's in prison, he sends his disciples to the Lord Jesus, because even though he knows that Jesus is the Messiah and had identified him as such.

When we're in times of discouragement, and being downcast, and isolated from others, we begin to have doubts. I had a friend who, referring to the pastor in our denomination who was imprisoned in Turkey, and he talked about how he was downcast and how this and the struggles.

I had this young preacher say, "Well, he was just immature." I'm going to tell you this, you may be as old as B. R. Hughes, or you may be as young as Iona, whether you're really young or really old, and no matter how mature you are in the faith, if we can isolate you from other Christians—Andrew Brunson was isolated from other Christians in solitary confinement. When you're isolated, the devil has a field day with your mind, throwing doubts into your mind. What increases our faith? It's being in fellowship with other believers. It's listening to his word preached. It's reading his word. And Andrew Brunson didn't have any of those means of grace, and so he's in isolation.

Now here's John the Baptist. He's in isolation. And even though he knew Jesus was the Messiah, even though he knew that Jesus was his cousin, he's having doubts and he sends his disciples,

"Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"
(Matthew 11:3)

Now look at verse 4, “Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see.’” How do we know that Jesus is the Messiah? Here it is. These are all prophetic things, foretold the Messiah would do these things as in Isaiah 61 (Isaiah 61:1-3).

He says in verse 5,

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.

What’s Jesus saying? Jesus is saying he’s fulfilled the law. He has fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Isaiah 53:7; John 1:29, 36). He is the fulfillment of those prophecies about a son of David who would be the Son of God who would fulfill these prophecies, complete them (Psalm 110:1-3; Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44; Romans 1:3-4; Hebrews 10:12-14). And so, he tells him that.

As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: ‘What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. Then what did you go out to see?’
(Matthew 11:7-8)

Look at verse 9, “A prophet? Yes,” he says, “I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,’ now look at this, verse 10.

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.” Look at the little letter “a” there in that verse 10, and look at the bottom of the page, Malachi 3:1. John the Baptist fulfilled that prophecy. The one who is coming, the Messiah, would have a forerunner, would have a herald to go before him, would have somebody making an announcement beforehand, and what Jesus is saying is that John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 3:1. Who did it? John the Baptist.

And then you go on, and he says in verse 11,

I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Now let's think about that for a moment. You know what Jesus is really saying there? He's saying John the Baptist is the last prophet of the Old Covenant. John the Baptist is the last prophet of the Old Testament. Not only is he found in the last book of our English Bibles, Malachi, not only is that the case, but he is the final Old Testament prophet. And notice what he says here: "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist." There's nobody greater than he was. Not Abraham, not Isaac, not Jacob, not David or Solomon.

So, he has no one greater than he. Yet notice after the semicolon, "Yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Now I want you to say something with me. Are you in the kingdom of heaven? Yes, you are.

If you trust in Christ, if you've repented of your sins and cast yourself on God's mercy in Christ, you are in the kingdom of heaven. And notice what he says, "He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). And now I want you to say this. It's going to be hard for you to say. I'm going to say it once and then we'll say it together.

"I am greater than John the Baptist. I am greater than John the Baptist."

Are you really greater than John the Baptist?

"I am greater than John the Baptist because I am in the kingdom of heaven."

That's a striking statement that he says and notice what he says next. He says in verse 12,

"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it."

Now that involves an interpretation of two verbs (*biázō*, βιάζω and *harpázō*, ἁρπάζω), but I'll simply say this: it takes a struggle to become a believer.

Becoming a Christian is entirely of grace and received solely by faith, but faith is never alone, and it's always accompanied by other things, and that's a struggle.

So, he says the kingdom of heaven has been advancing forcefully, and forceful (biastēs, βιαστής) men seize it. He's saying that when we want to really become a Christian, we've got earnestly to strive to reach out for the Lord Jesus Christ. And so that's my understanding of that.

Now notice what he says in verse 13, "For all the Prophets and the Law," he's talking about the whole Old Testament there, what Jewish people call the Tanakh, the Torah, the Nevi'im, and the Ketuvim, he said, "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John." When did the Old Testament end? The Old Testament ended when John the Baptist came.

Then I want you to notice verse 14. One of the huge problems we have when people come to Bible prophecy is the failure to understand how much Bible prophecy was fulfilled in the first century from the time of John the Baptist around 26-27 AD until the end of the temple in AD 70. Wow.

So, this period of time from the coming of John the Baptist roughly around 26-27 AD until the destruction of the temple, is a period of time of great significance and what I want to say is, as I read the next verse, that that's a time of enormous fulfillment, Old Testament prophecies fulfilled. Notice what he says again in verse 14, "And if you are willing to accept it," are the Jewish people willing to accept it? No. But if we're Christians, we ought to be willing to accept it. He says, "he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears, let him hear."

Now notice he says he was Elijah who was to come. Hold your hand there, and let's go back to the end of the Old Testament, the very end of the Old Testament, and the book of Malachi, and we see here these words on page 1,491. Malachi 4:5,

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.

That's a prophecy, isn't it? Notice that Malachi, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said that before the great day of the Lord, the prophet Elijah would come. Jesus says John the Baptist is the prophet Elijah. What does he mean by that?

Did he mean reincarnation? We don't believe in reincarnation. There is not one Iona, I'm sorry, one iota of evidence for reincarnation in the Bible.

What the Bible teaches is that when you die, your non-material part goes either to be with the Lord or somewhere else, and your material part lies in the grave. You don't go somewhere and then come back again and again and again and again.

And you know that's an important truth to maintain because certain cults, I'm thinking of one in a city where I was invited to speak in 2013 on Halloween, believes in spirit children that you create and then they inhabit bodies and so on and then they can work their way up and become gods themselves, and that is a group that calls itself Christian, but really isn't. So, they're not Trinitarian. They believe in multiple gods.

They're not unlike the Hindus, who believe in multiple gods and believe in souls coming back in another form. So, if you've been bad in Hinduism, you might come back as a roach. Gotcha. And if you've been good, you might come back as a dog that's a lap dog for some rich person who cares more about their dogs than they care about other humans. That's pretty nice. Okay.

And if you're really good, and really good, you might come back as a Brahman. That's the highest caste in Hinduism. But if you're really, really, really good, that cycle comes to an end, and you get into Nirvana. The point I want to make is that kind of thinking is foreign to the Bible from Genesis through Revelation.

So, he's saying here, he's not saying that Elijah was going to become reincarnated and come back in another person's form.

He's saying that the prophecy regarding the coming of Elijah before the day of the Lord is fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist.

Now, I don't know about you, but if you don't like that, take it up with Jesus because this is what Jesus said. He was Elijah who was to come.

Who was John the Baptist? He was a flesh and blood human being who was conceived by the supernatural power of God when his father Zechariah, a priest, didn't believe the angel Gabriel, and his mouth was struck dumb, and he goes back eventually to his wife Elizabeth, who had been barren, and they produce a child and that child is John the Baptist, supernaturally conceived using natural means. That's John the Baptist. But he is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Luke 1:19-20; Malachi 4:5).

So I want to leave us kind of on this note, because this is the first of many sermons on fulfillment, that the Old Testament has to be interpreted the way the New Testament interprets it, and that's a huge issue, because there are a lot of people that will read Malachi 4:5 and say, "Well, that obviously hasn't happened yet." Well, you're misinterpreting the Bible.

When the New Testament interprets the Old Testament, we have an infallible guide of interpretation. Did Elijah come back? He sure did. And did he get killed? Yes, he did (Matthew 14:3-12).

And did the historical Elijah, who never saw death, but who was ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire, come and visit Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, along with Moses (Matthew 17:1-3), whose body was recovered by the angels (Jude 1:9), so that you have the Law and the Prophets symbolized in Moses and Elijah, actually literally, the historical, actual, literal Moses, and the historical, actual, literal Elijah, actually come and visit with the Lord Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. Who's John the Baptist in terms of Bible prophecy? He's John the Baptist.

The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. 12 But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist. (Matthew 17:10-13)

So where do we go with this as we think now of the Lord's Supper? It's really important that we understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the rituals of the Old Testament. Why did we not bring a lamb here today?

I knew of a preacher, I'd never met the preacher, I'd just heard the story, who one day in a sermon had hidden a lamb behind the pulpit area, brought it out and slit his throat in front of everybody. How do you think the children liked that? Probably boys in upper elementary just loved it, but I think he probably got fired. Why do we not do that?

That's all in the Old Testament, because Jesus, he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Isaiah 53:7; John 1:29, 36). And Elijah, in spirit, John the Baptist, pointed to the Lord Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29, 36).

So, as we come to celebrate Holy Communion today, just a couple of thoughts in wrapping this up. We all mess up. I messed up by misquoting something last week in a sermon, and I tried to make it right. You've messed up in many ways this week. I've messed up in many ways this week.

And what I want to say is this. I don't care what you've done. I don't care what you've struggled with. I don't care what you've yielded to in sin.

If today, on the sixth day of August, the 78th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, ushering in an age that may be the age that is climaxed in the return of Christ—that on this day, August 6th, no matter what you've done, no matter what you've struggled with, no matter what temptations you've entertained in your mind, rather than hitting the eject button, I want to tell you, no matter what it is, thinking of last week's sermon, you are welcome at the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is for sinners. It's for people who come short of being what they ought to be. It's for those who want to be better than they are. It's for those who acknowledge, "Lord, it's not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."

And so, I want to invite you to join me, a fellow sinner, saved by grace, in celebrating the Lord's Supper, because the bread speaks to us of our union with Christ, and the wine speaks to us of his precious blood, shed to wash away all our sins.

May we pray.

Lord, I pray that as we celebrate this sermon, “Christ the fulfillment of the Old Covenant,” Lord, that you would grant that as we eat of this bread and drink of this cup, we may truly be blessed by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit who seals the reality of these ordinances to our hearts. And we ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.