

**Study Notes: Matthew 5:17-20**  
**April 21, 2024: “The Word on the Word”**  
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***“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. For truly I tell you, 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. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly 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. 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.”***

- After the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus began the body of His message with statements regarding the Law and the Prophets, otherwise known as the Old Testament. Jesus made four statements regarding His relationship to, His understanding of, and the purpose of the Old Testament.
- First, Jesus made clear that He had not come to abolish or make void the teaching of the Old Testament. Instead, Jesus came to fulfill them. Part of the purpose of the Old Testament is to point to Jesus; therefore, He was not preaching a different message, but fulfilling the message that was already spoken.
  - The Faithlife Study Bible explains, “The Greek word used here (translated as “fulfill”), *plēroō*, refers in this instance to carrying something out. Matthew is saying that Jesus performed or upheld that which was required by the law and met the expectations of the predictions about Him in the writings of the prophets. In Him, the Law and the Prophets reached their fullest expression.”
  - The Expositor’s Bible Commentary adds, “Here, Jesus presents himself as the eschatological goal of the OT and thereby its sole authoritative interpreter, the one through whom alone the OT finds its valid continuity and significance.”
  - The New American Commentary notes, “Every Old Testament text must be viewed in light of Jesus’ person and ministry and the changes introduced by the new covenant he inaugurated.”
- Second, Jesus made clear that the Word of God in the Old Testament is enduring and lasting. Every word spoken from God will last forever. Not even the smallest part of any letter will fade away or be nullified.
  - The Pillar New Testament explains the nuance of Jesus’ words, “The *iota* was the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet, but here it is usually understood to refer to the *yodh*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The *little stroke* was probably a tiny projection on some letters (that helped distinguish similar letters). Jesus is saying ‘Not the smallest letter, not the tiniest part of a letter —.’ It forms a very emphatic assertion of the permanent validity of Scripture.”
  - The Expositor’s Bible Commentary explains, “This simply means the entire divine purpose prophesied in Scripture must take place; not one jot or tittle will fail of its fulfillment.”

- Third, Jesus said that no commands of God are to be disobeyed or set aside. They are to be practiced and taught, so that people will obey and do the will of the Father. It is important to note that after this teaching, Jesus would give His interpretation on what it means to live these words out.
  - The New American Commentary explains how this relates to us today, “In short, Christian application of the Old Testament must always take into account both the continuities and the discontinuities with the New Testament. Given this hermeneutic, correct teaching and practice of all ‘these commandments’ (v. 19, almost certainly referring back to the Old Testament law just mentioned) are crucial.”
- Finally, the purpose of the Law and Prophets is to teach us righteousness. The commands are given that we would follow them and live in a right relationship with God and one another. The Pharisees and other teachers did not understand the idea of putting the Word into practice, and therefore, should not be seen as an example. Instead, Jesus would explain what it means to live righteously in the rest of His teaching.
  - The Faithlife Study Bible explains the problem with the religious leaders and teachers, “Jesus points out that not even their righteousness is enough to enter the kingdom of heaven. Some of the scribes and Pharisees were externally ‘righteous’ but failed to internalize the heart of the law. Jesus criticizes this attitude in Matt 23.”