

“Jesus the Fulfillment”

Matthew 5:13-20; 1 Corinthians 2:1-12

“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.” These words ushered in a new era of history: not an era that made the Old Testament obsolete, but an era that brought to completion everything that the Old Testament was about, which is God incarnate in Christ Jesus. The Old Testament was and remains all about Jesus, whether it be the failure of Adam in the garden, or the Exodus from Egypt, or the establishing of Israel, or the ritual sacrifices... all these things find their fulfillment in Jesus, whose life, death, and resurrection are the very apex of history! Because Jesus was to become everything Adam should’ve been as man; and the journey to the Promised Land symbolized spiritual salvation in Jesus; and the nation of Israel was established to reveal the Christ; and the ritual sacrifices pointed to the “one sacrifice for sins” (Heb 10:12). Jesus didn’t come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them... and not just parts of them, but *everything* in them.

The meaning of these words in Matthew are included in other gospels. Jesus says in Luke, “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Lk 24:44); and Jesus says in John, “if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me” (Jn 5:46). The Old Testament is a completely closed book outside of knowing Jesus—there’s no way anyone can possibly read the Old Testament rightly unless viewed through the faithful lens of Jesus. This is why Jews are still waiting for the Christ (Mt 27:22), and this is why Muslims consider God’s chosen line descending through Ishmael rather than Isaac (Ge 17:20-21). Without the One who fulfills the Law and the Prophets, people are still waiting for the Law and the Prophets to be fulfilled. And the Old Testament isn’t abolished, but it remains to prove that Jesus is who He says He is. Only the stubborn and hard-hearted deny that Psalm 22 or Isaiah 53 speak about Jesus. But Jesus fulfills both of these prophecies, just as He fulfills the entire Old Testament... just as He fulfills every writing from God. Jesus is the One the world was waiting for, and now you no longer wait for the fulfillment, but you look back and see the fulfillment in perfect clarity and beauty. And this makes you more blessed than anyone who ever lived before God became man. This makes you more blessed than Adam, more blessed than Abraham, more blessed than Moses, more blessed than David, for Jesus says, “Blessèd are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Mt 13:16-17). All the “heroes of faith” from Hebrews 11 longed for the things that you have—for the things that you today hear in the reading of the gospel! Moses even begged God, “Please show me your glory” (Ex 33:18)... but it wasn’t time for God’s glory to be shown. That time would be 1,500 years later when God was glorified in saving the world by dying on a cross (cf. Jn 7:39; 19:30). And so the writer of Hebrews 11 ends his passage with the words: “all these [heroes of faith]... did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us” (Heb 11:39-40). And the “something better for us” is knowing God’s promises fulfilled in “Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Have you ever stopped to contemplate how privileged you are? How blessed you are to have the very words of Jesus at your fingertips and in your ears? To know that Jesus says, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63)? You’re more privileged, more blessed than anyone! These

words of Jesus are what “prophets and righteous people longed [for],” and now they’re all yours! The faithful Old Testament saints would’ve given all they had for just a few of the red letters you have in your Bible!... because they knew that the fulfillment is always greater than the prophecy. If this wasn’t true, then you’d simply be content to continue in the prophecy... but even the prophets who recorded the prophecies longed for their fulfillment. This is why you stand for the gospel reading. If you ever wondered why, this is why: because the fulfillment is everything longed for, and in Christ Jesus all longings are fulfilled. The promise of forgiveness, the promise of life, the promise of salvation is yours in Jesus who fulfills all the Law and the Prophets.

You’re more privileged and blessed than any Old Testament saint. Martin Luther writes, “You have no reason to complain that you have been visited less than Abraham or Isaac. You, too, have appearances, and in a way they are stronger, clearer, and more numerous than those they had, provided that you open your eyes and heart and take hold of them. You have Baptism. You have the Sacrament of the Eucharist, where... God in person speaks and works into your ears, eyes, and heart. Besides, you have the ministry of the Word and teachers through whom God speaks with you. You have the ministry of the Keys, through which He absolves and comforts you. ‘Fear not,’ He says, ‘I am with you.’ He appears to you in Baptism. He baptizes you Himself and addresses you Himself. He not only says: ‘I am with you,’ but: ‘I forgive you your sins. I offer you salvation from death, deliverance from all fear and from the power of the devil and hell. And not only I am with you, but all the angels with Me.’ What more will you desire?” (AE 5:21). This is what you have—not only according to Luther but according to God—and these things are better than anything the Old Testament saints ever had, because you know “Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

And so Jesus says, “until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished,” which means that the condemning force of God’s law ended with what Jesus accomplished on the cross. You’re no longer condemned, because Jesus—who fulfilled all the demands of the law—has died for you. Rejoice and be glad, for you have the fulfillment of *all things* in Christ, and you have the righteousness that “exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,” which is Christ Jesus Himself (cf. 5:10; 5:11). Amen.

—Pastor Greg Bauch