

Matthew 5, 17-19

10th March 2021

May I speak in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus tells His audience who He is and His purpose on Earth. He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. The Law included not only the Ten Commandments, some of which are easily to keep than others, but also over 2,000 verses of legislation found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It is not humanly possible to observe not only the religious laws but also the dietary restrictions in Exodus, and the dress code and the strict agricultural practices in Leviticus.

So, The Law referred to the Torah, which is the first five books of the Old Testament, and The Prophets refers to the rest of the books in the Old Testament. As expected, there are one or two prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament.

He would be born of a virgin Isaiah 7, v.14.

He would be a prophet like Moses, which is Deut 18, v.15.

He would keep the details of the Law, which Jesus did.

He would be a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek, which is Psalm 110, v 4.

Now Melchizedek is worth a closer look. Not to get side-tracked or anything, but Melchizedek is mentioned twice in the Old Testament, in Genesis and in Psalms. He is then mentioned EIGHT times in Hebrews. He has no recorded family, which is highly unusual because the Jewish historians were very big on genealogy, just look at First Chronicles. His name means “King of Righteousness” and he was an actual King, the King of Salem, a city in Canaan. Salem means “Full, complete, safe, whole and peaceful’ it has the same meaning as

“Shalom.” Salem later becomes known as Jerusalem, where the Temple of God the Solomon built would stand.

Back to Jesus.

He would be of the tribe of Judah and the lineage of David, which is Acts, 2, v.30.

He would be born in Bethlehem Micah, 5, v 2.

He would live in Galilee, which is Isaiah 9, v.1.

Jesus is telling his audience that He is the Messiah, referred to in the Law and the Prophets. And also He is pointing out that the entire Old Testament expresses the Will of God, that God will send a Saviour to save people from their sins, and far from being irrelevant and not applying to today, the Old Testament points to Jesus. He mentions that “not an iota, not a dot” will pass from the Law until it is all accomplished, emphasizing its importance. Further, He goes on to say that 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. Some of the Rabbis were teaching that some commandments were more important than others, and tithing garden vegetables, for example, was a light commandment and not committing murder was a weighty commandment. We may think that is obvious and logical and of course God thinks the same, but Jesus says that is the wrong way to look at things, and all the commandments are important to God.

Obedience means total obedience, and only Jesus is able to obey fully.

To quote C F Alexander in his hymn “There is a green hill far away”
“There was no other good enough/To pay the price of sin/He only could unlock the gate/Of heaven, and let us in.”

Jesus says whoever relaxes the least of the commandments will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, “but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Here Jesus tells us something we may not have realized – or, indeed, we might be uncomfortable with the idea. There are ranks in the Kingdom of Heaven. There are ranks in the United Kingdom, namely

King/Queen, Prince/Princess, Duke/Duchess, Marquis/Marchioness, Earl/Countess, Viscount/Viscountess, Baron/Baroness, Baronets, Knight/Dame, and Esquire. I just thought I would list them in expectation of the happy day when we can hold quizzes again. So, those who have mis-understood God's commandments and taught others their error, still have a place in the kingdom of heaven. God does not reject them because of their actions, He does not punish them because they made a mistake, they enter the kingdom despite their human failings.

We may hear or read a personal opinion of someone claiming that the Old Testament is at best irrelevant to Christians' today, or is even a best forgotten bloodthirsty history of a vengeful God, who isn't the Father of Jesus. They are entitled to their opinion, of course, but that is not what Jesus tells us.

God knows the end from the beginning Isaiah 46, v.10, and Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil. St. John's and All Saints are not going to be destroyed, we are going to be fulfilled. Since 1832, the congregation of St John's and since 1882, the congregation of All Saints have been taking communion saying the words "Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread."

So let us pray for wisdom, for guidance, for grace to persevere, and let us step boldly into the future set before us, knowing that God has our backs, He knows what He is doing, there is strength in numbers and God has tasks prepared for each and every one of us, and Jesus will make sure that God's plans come to fulfillment.

Amen.

