JESUS CAME TO FULFILL THE LAW

Matthew 5:17-30

Key Verse:5:17 “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.”

In Jesus’ time Jews believed that when the Messiah comes, he will set aside Moses’ law and bring new law. But today Jesus said that he didn’t come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. Let us study what Jesus meant that he came to fulfill the Law.

First, Jesus came to fulfill the Law.( 17-20) Look at verse 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.***” Here the Law indicates the five books of Moses. The Prophets are not only the books of major prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, but also of the 12 minor prophets in the Old Testaments. Therefore, the Law and the Prophets indicates the entire books of the Old Testaments. Jesus’ teaching with authority and power challenged the Jews. It sounded new and somewhat revolutionary to them. But Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the Old Testament, but to fulfill them. Here the word ‘fulfill’ (*pleroo*) in Greek has several meanings such as, ‘complete’, ‘accomplish’, ‘bring out the full meaning’, and so on. Jesus himself and his teaching is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testaments. The entire Scriptures, 39 books of the Old Testaments, from Genesis to Malachi talks about Jesus and points to him. Therefore, Jesus is the focal point of all the Scriptures. Without Jesus we cannot understand the Old Testaments and we cannot interpret them properly.

Let us study more about the meaning of the word “fulfill (*pleroo*)” First, Jesus came to complete the requirements of the Law and the Prophets. This means that Jesus completed the incompleteness of requirement of the Law and Prophets. The Law itself is good and flawless, but it is completed when it is obeyed. Because men failed to obey the law, the law remained incomplete. For example, the effectiveness of the law is complete when it is obeyed. When you drive 40 miles per hour before the sign of speed limit 30 miles, the law remains incomplete by your violation. Men failed to become righteous by keeping the Law. The Bible says that there is no one righteous, not even one. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Ro 3:11, 23a) Jesus satisfied the requirements of the law, which is perfect obedience to the law, through his death on the cross. Jesus made what was impossible with men possible. Jesus enabled us to become righteous not by observing the Law, but through faith in him. When Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished”, he meant that he completed the work of justification and redemption through his death on the cross. Suppose the penalty of your violation is more than millions of millions dollars, are you able to pay the penalty? Impossible! But Jesus paid it all by his own blood so that you can be free and live happily and joyfully throughout your life time. Praise Jesus!

Next, Jesus came to accomplish the spirit of the Law and the Prophets. Here the word ‘accomplish’ is interpreted ‘achieve’ rather than ‘finish.’ Jesus came to achieve the goal and spirit of the Law and the Prophets. What is the spirit of the Law? The spirit of the Law is love. God is love. God gave Moses’ law to his people as the expression of his love. The Israelites were lawless people. They had been enslaved for 400 years under Pharaoh in Egypt. God gave them the law through Moses in order to teach them how to live as the people of God. The goal of the law was to make them into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Ex 19:5,6)This is possible when they love God with all their hearts, with all their souls, and with all their strength. (Deut 6:5) Jesus accomplished the spirit of the law on the cross. He loved us and died for us. He died not for his own sin, but for our sins.

Jesus also accomplished the eschatological redemption. All the Scriptures predict the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Even Abraham longed to see this Messianic kingdom. Jesus preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Jesus brought God’s kingdom on this earth. He established his kingdom with his death and resurrection. His kingdom has expanded continually from generation to generation. He will come again as the Judge among the living and the dead. He will accomplish God’s ultimate purpose for the world, which is to establish the Messianic kingdom, through his chosen people including you and me.

Lastly, Jesus came to bring out the full meaning of the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is the treasure of heavenly wisdom. Jesus unveiled all the mystery and secrets of the Old Testament. Jesus is the one who would be born as an offspring of a woman who would crush the head of the serpent. (Ge 3:15) Jesus is the garment of skin which covered the nakedness of Adam and Eve. (Ge 3:21) Jesus is the ark of salvation for those who trust and obey God’s warning. (Ge 6:18) He is the one through whom all peoples on earth will be blessed. (Ge 12:3) Jesus is the ram which was burned as a sacrifice offering in Isaac’s place, (Ge 22:13) and Jesus is the new Jacob who raised the twelve tribes of Israel. (Ge 35:11) Jesus is the tabernacle where sacrificial system for atonement was designed, (Ex 25-27) and Jesus is the high priest who intercedes between God and sinners. (Ex 29-30) The blood of the flawless lamb is the preview of the blood of Jesus for atonement of all men’s sin.(Lev 17:11, Heb 9:22) Jesus is the essence and the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments. …Jesus is the suffering servant who was pierced for our transgressions in the book of Isaiah, (Is 53:5) and he is the hope of his people in the book of Joel, and the sovereign ruler who judges the whole world in the book of Amos, and so on.

Jesus is the answer for all questions in the Bible and the password which opens the window of the kingdom of heaven. (Jn 14:6) Jesus did not come to defile the Scriptures, but to confirm and validate them. Furthermore, he reveals God’s divine will for this world, which is world salvation. John 3:17 says, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Jesus also said, ‘…I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (Jn 10:10b) Jesus came to reveal the secret of the kingdom of heaven. He explained the kingdom of heaven with many parables. The kingdom of heaven (God) is the main theme of Jesus’ preaching and the culmination of his ministry.

Look at verses 18-20. “***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.***” The smallest letter in Greek is ‘*jota’* looks like ‘**’**’ in English. The smallest letter in Hebrew alphabet is ‘*yodh*’, which also looks like ‘’’ in English. Jesus said the end of the earth would not come until even these smallest letters in the Scripture is fulfilled. Jesus confirmed the validity and continuity of the Scriptures. Jesus also urged his disciples to practice God’s commands more than the Pharisees and the teachers of the law did. Pharisees are known as ones of the most righteous people on earth. They said that they had kept 258 commands and 356 regulations in the Scriptures. How could the mundane disciples of Jesus surpass the Pharisees in observing the laws. It seemed to be a mission impossible for them. Jesus warned his disciples not to neglect any of God’s commands, but to respect and practice them as people of God.

Second, do not murder. (21-26) We call 5:21-48 the six antithesis. This is because Jesus’ teaching starts with “you have heard it was said… but I say.” This is not Jesus’ confrontation to the Old Testaments, but reinterpretation of the principle of the Old Testaments. Look at verse 21-22. “***You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister-will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.***” You shall not murder is the sixth Commandment. (Ex 20:13) The Moses’ law forbade homicide and brings justice to those who are responsible for murder. (Ex 21:12-36, Lev 19:16b, Deut 16:18) Men’s life belongs to God because it came from God. Murder is the violation against God’s sole and inalienable right for men’s life. Murder is also the destruction of God’s image in each person. So, the penalty of murder demands capital punishment.

Jesus said that anyone who is angry with his brother or sister is also accountable because anger is the root of murder. Cain’s anger brought Abel’s death. Jesus also forbids insulting others. The word ‘Raca’ is *reka* in Aramaic which means ‘fool’ or ‘empty-head.’ Anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

1 John 3:15 says that anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. This means that when you hate someone, you are actually murdering him or her in your heart. How did Martin Luther teach us about the sixth Commandment? He said in the Small Catechism, “You must not murder. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we may not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need.” Each person is God’s wonderful creation who has the precious image of God. We must respect each of them and love them as we love the Lord Jesus. Amen.

Look at verses 23-24. “***Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.***” Here Jesus teaches us more than to respect others, but to forgive or to be reconciled. People say that loving people is more difficult than loving God. They say “I love God, but I hate you.” So they are not free from anger, hatred, and bitterness at home, at work, in school and even in church. Jesus asked his disciples to be reconciled. Why? This is because we cannot have right relationship with God without having right relationship with others. Jesus said, “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mt 16:19) Therefore, if anyone who have something against others, forgive them now. Be reconciled. And you will enjoy true freedom and joy which comes from the forgiveness of sin and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Look at verses 25-26. “***Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.***” Here Jesus urges his disciples to have immediate action for a judicial setting. In ancient days debtors were jailed until the debts were paid. If they lose an opportunity or timing to settle their debts with their lenders, they were imprisoned until all their debts get paid off. In these verses Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves. When we love God with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our strength, we love our brothers and sisters as ourselves. No matter what happens to us, we forgive, bear, and love. I pray that we all may forgive each other and love one another so that we may be called children of God and establish the beautiful *Koionia* in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Third, do not commit adultery (27-30). Look at verses 27-28. “***You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.***” ‘You shall not commit adultery’ is 7th Commandment. (Ex 20:14) Here what Jesus meant is not a passing glance but a willful, calculated stare that arouses sexual desire. If you look at a woman or a man and enjoy all immoral imaginations with them, you have already committed the sin of adultery even though you didn’t have direct physical relationships. According to Jesus, this is a form of adultery even if it is only “in his heart.” Martin Luther said, “You can’t stop the birds flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.” We should control our eyes and filter our thoughts when we look at others. How to watch is as accountable as what to watch. When we look at a woman with the eyes of lust, we sin. When we look at a woman with the eye of Jesus, she is a precious daughter of God. We need to put on the eyes glasses of purity. Psalm 119:9 says “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.” The Apostle Paul says in Galatians 5:16, “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” When we keep God’s holy word in our hearts and walk by the Spirit, we are free from temptation and fleshly desires of sinful nature.

In verses 29-30 Jesus teaches us the seriousness of causing to sin of adultery. Look at verses 29-30. “***If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell***.” According to Jesus’ standard, no one among us goes to heaven with a sound body. Still, it is better for us to go to heaven with one eye and one hand than to go to hell with a whole body. Sinning is not a joke. Jesus warns those who treat the sin of adultery lightly. There is a serious and fatal consequences of sin of adultery. But Jesus did not come to condemn sinners, but to save us from the results of sin. He bore all our sins and condemnation in his body on the cross and paid the prices of sin which we had to pay. Jesus took away our infirmities and transgression and removed the curse which comes from sin. In Jesus we have salvation. In Jesus we have freedom, and in Jesus we have peace with God.

In today’s passage Jesus said that he didn’t come to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law. Jesus completed the requirements of the law for man’s justification through his obedient death on the cross. Jesus accomplished the spirit of the law which is love. Jesus unveiled the mystery of God’s plan for world salvation which was hidden in the Old Testament. John Calvin said that Jesus is the soul of the law. Without Jesus the law is like a dead body. Jesus fulfilled the law by loving us and dying for us. Amen.