Being Great in the Kingdom

1. FULFILLING THE LAW

Matt.5:17-18 *[17] "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. [18] For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

a. What does Jesus mean when he talks about the law in the Sermon on the Mount? He uses the common distinction between the law and the prophets. He also talks about the law in terms of its commandments (v.19) Here He is speaking of the specific commandments God has given his people to regulate the whole of their lives – moral, religious, social and political. What he goes on to say in 5:21-48 emphasises that when he speaks of the law he is thinking of the commandments God gave to his people through the ministry of Moses.

b. By this stage in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has laid out what belonging to the kingdom of God means and has made some challenging and startling statements. However, what would have also been startling to his listeners would be that He has said nothing about the law and the importance of keeping it. His listeners would be wondering if he was overthrowing the law.

c. He was certainly teaching that entry into God's kingdom was not by merit gained through obedience to the law – He had made it clear that we enter by grace and had not mentioned a single law! But he was not encouraging morally loose lives. Jesus explains the place the law is to occupy in the kingdom of God.

   i **The continuing validity of the law**. The law does three things. It expresses the character of God and His will for man's life. Further it teaches us the true character of man. God's intention for man is that he live in accordance with the law of the Lord. Thirdly, the law teaches us the character of salvation. When we are restored to fellowship with God and live in His will (salvation) we will begin to fulfil his intention. In Paul's words (Romans 8:3-4) the requirement of the law will be fulfilled in us as we walk according to the Spirit.

   ii **The present fulfilment of the law.** If we want to know what the law really means we must look at Jesus and what He does with it because he fulfils, or accomplishes, the law:

   - **In His doctrine (teaching)** He brings out the real significance of God's commands. The Pharisees traditional interpretations of the law weakened its power to search the motives of men's hearts. Jesus makes it clear we are unable to keep the law in our own strength.
   - **In His deeds and lifestyle.** Jesus described the Pharisees demands as putting heavy burdens on the shoulders (Matt. 23:4) But the law of God was not a burden on Jesus' shoulders; rather it was written in his heart. Jesus enjoyed doing God's will (John 4:34) Jesus cry at the cross "My God, why have you forsaken me?" shows the penalty of the broken law and also allows us to see the law in its component parts.

     Jesus death and resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit marked a new era of God's dealing with His people. The ceremonial law was no longer binding on the church because their real meaning was to foreshadow the sacrifice that Christ himself would make.

Heb. 10:11-18 *[11] And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. [12] But when Christ had offered for all time* ***a single sacrifice for sins****, he sat down at the right hand of God, [13] waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. [14] For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.[15] And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,[16] "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds",[17] then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."[18] Where there is forgiveness of these, there is* ***no longer any offering for sin****.*

The church was also not bound by the civil law that governed the people of Israel. e.g. no longer were certain sinners to be stoned but to be handed over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and the sinner's spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

1 Cor. 5:3-5 *[3] For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgement on the one who did such a thing. [4] When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, [5] you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*

1 Tim. 1:20 *By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, [20] among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

The civil law existed to set the people of God apart, to show their distinctive nature. The work of the Holy Spirit in us is what now sets us apart.

2 Tim 2:21 *Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonourable, he will be a vessel for honourable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*

The law that remains is the moral law which Jesus goes on to address making clear that the importance of motive and the attitude of our heart.

- **In His disciples.** Jesus fulfils the law by writing it in the hearts of His disciples through the ministry of His Spirit.

Jer. 31:33 *But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

As we walk by the Spirit, we fulfil the desires of the Spirit, not the desires of the flesh. We do what the law requires and delight to do so.

Gal. 5:16 *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

Rom. 8:3-4 *[3] For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [4] in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

iii **The deep spirituality of the law.** Pharisaic righteousness is skin deep; Christian righteousness is to be real. It is to be true heart conformity to the law of God. Our obedience to the law is not to be merely external and ceremonial, but real and spiritual

Matt. 23:25 *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.*

Matt.5:20 *[20] For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

(For a greater exposition on our relationship to the Law of Moses read the book of Galatians.)

Gal. 3:23-29 *[23] Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. [24] So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. [25] But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, [26] for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. [27] For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave[g] nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

2. THE INVITATION TO BE GREAT

a. Jesus invites everyone to be great in His kingdom by walking in the Beatitudes. A disciple may ask, "Lord, what role can I have in Your plan to transform the earth? How much will you use me in this age? How much in the age to come? We cannot repent of the desire for greatness because God designed our spirit with this longing. We are to repent for seeking it in a wrong way.

Matt. 5:19 *[19]<u>Whoever</u> breaks [consistently] one of the <u>least</u> of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called <u>least</u> in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever <u>does</u> [consistently] and <u>teaches</u> them, he shall be <u>called great</u> in the kingdom of heaven.*

b. **Whoever:** God invites anyone to greatness, without regard for their outward achievements or the size of their ministry. It will be based on the size of their heart in obedience and love to Him. Jesus revealed a new paradigm for greatness. We are to focus on being great in His sight rather than in the sight of men. This greatness will be fully manifest in the age to come, not in this age.

c. **Does and teaches:** The issue of our place in His kingdom in the age to come is centred on how much we keep and teach the least of His commandments (especially the Sermon on the Mount). Most people's teaching ministry is in twos and threes or tens and twenties. We must talk often about the values of the Kingdom, teaching them in informal conversational ways (and in public settings). We teach them in our homes and home groups, to our neighbours, and in other social gatherings. We share our commitments and insights into the 8 Beatitudes, knowing they are not popular.

d. **The least:** Jesus warned that if we minimize the least of His commandments and teach others to do so, we will be least in His kingdom in the age to come. Many, in the name of teaching on God's grace, promote spiritual laziness, passivity, and a lack of discipline in the grace of God.

e. God invites us to greatness without regard to our outward achievements or the size of our ministry impact. Rather, it is based on the development of our inner man in love, meekness, and revelation or in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit.

f. Obedience in the least or small areas of life depicts a deep and faithful secret life with God. Many believers simply disregard obeying God in the smaller areas of their life like their thoughts and words. They do not want to wrestle through these issues. Over 25 times in the OT, God urged Israel to be careful to obey all of His commandments (Deut. 4:6; 5:1, 32; 6:3, 25; 8:1;11:32; 12:1, 32; 16:12; 17:10, 19; 26:16; 28:13; 32:46; Josh. 1:7-8; 22:5; 23:11; 2 Kings 17:37; 21:8; 1 Chr. 28:8; 2 Chr. 33:8; Ezek. 20:21; 36:27).

Deut. 12:32 *[32] Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.*

g. It is necessary to be found faithful in pursuing 100-fold obedience if we are to receive the maximum blessing of what God has offered us from our obedience in this life. The pursuit of 100-fold obedience includes making **a covenant with our eyes** (Ps. 101:3; Job 31:1), **bridling our speech** (Jas 3:2; Eph. 4:29-5:4), **managing our time** (Eph. 5:15-16; Ps. 90:12) **and money** to increase the

Kingdom (beyond personal comfort and honour) (1 Tim. 6:8; Mt. 6:19-21) as we engage in **communing prayer with the Holy Spirit** (2 Cor. 13:14).

h. Our ministry assignment on earth in this age is like a 70-year internship that prepares us for our ministry on earth in the Millennium. Our primary ministry assignment on earth will be in the Millennium and it will last for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4-6).

i. In the age to come, we will each receive a different measure of glory in our resurrected body, etc. We will all be loved equally by Jesus, but we will have varying function and authority—some of the saints will be called the least and some will be called the greatest.

1 Cor. 15:41-42 *[41]There is one glory of the sun…and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. [42]So also is the resurrection of the dead.*

j. Jesus revealed a new paradigm for greatness. We focus on being great in His sight rather than in the sight of men. This greatness will be fully manifest in the age-to-come not in this age. It will be based on our heart responses not on natural gifting and resources and is thus, available to all.

k. The opportunity for promotion in God's sight is vast and available to all. However, we must pursue greatness in the right way through meekness and servanthood. We also must understand the timing of its release in stages. Its full manifestation will not be seen until the Millennium.

Mt. 20:26-27 *[26] Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. [27] Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave.*

l. Jesus taught on God's invitation for our greatness more than any other man in Scripture. He referred to this vast subject directly and indirectly as He called people to be first, to gain treasure in heaven, or to receive rewards from the Father (which is a major theme in the Sermon on the Mount that is emphasized in Mt. 6:1-20).

Mt. 25:21 *[21]Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.*

Luke 19:17 *[17]Because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.*

3. I SAY TO YOU

"You have heard that it was said ……but I say to you"

a. In the following verses Jesus begins to address the Pharisees approach to the law which made it merely external. He is not dispensing with the law, he is contrasting what has been said by others with what He says.

b. He does not use the phrase found elsewhere is scripture "It is written" but "It was said" therefore not referring to the texts in Scripture but to the traditional teaching of the rabbis. What he actually goes on to do is give an exposition of the law and how to cooperate with grace and walk in the 8 beatitudes by faith.

c. We will look at this next time.