

The Old Testament Is Fulfilled in Christ

A Sermon on the Old Testament Fulfilled

Sermon The Person and Work of Christ 5 December 2021

Matthew 5:17

Matthew 10:34

Mark 13:2

Matthew 11:28-30

Luke 24:44-48 (referenced)

Today we will meditate on the theme, "The Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ." While the theme is vast in scope, let us meditate on it briefly.

Why do we have to understand this truth that the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ, one may ask? Imagine what your thoughts would be if you happened to view a mystery movie only up to the conventional intermission, or viewed it only after that point. If the plot happened to be much intricate, you would, perhaps, end up being confused or even frustrated. If you are the creative type, you may apply some imagination and guess what the climax could have been, or what led to the climax that you witnessed. That is where we would find ourselves, if we focussed our study of the Holy Book, the Bible, on the Old Testament or the New Testament without dovetailing the narratives found in these two sections. We often recommend to new readers of the Bible that they read the Gospel accounts first, thinking that it would be easier on them. Studying the Bible in parts, therefore, would leave a believer with a skewed view of Christian theology.

Many think that theology is for scholars, or for ordained priests, and that it is out of scope for the laity. I beg to differ. Christian theology is personal. It simply means a person's understanding of God. It also means the extent and manner in which the Biblical pronouncements, covenants, prophecies, and, most importantly, the birth, life, ministry, teaching, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, are understood and believed. Given this line of thinking, each of us may hold our own version of theology, though much of it would overlap, provided we do not stray from the framework of the Word of God. Friends, our Holy Book is like a field of hidden treasures. The more you explore it, the more of the truth you discover.

The Gospel passage for today is taken from the Gospel according to Luke, chapter twenty-four, verses forty-four to forty-eight, read to us a while ago. I read this passage as the summary exhortation of Jesus, stating that He came to fulfil the law, the prophets, and all that is written about Him in the Old Testament. For today's discussion, I would focus on Matthew 5:17, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil," and Matthew

10:34, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

These two assertions of our Lord may sound somewhat paradoxical. The theological ramifications of one's expository conclusions from these two statements are so numerous and complex that discussion becomes fraught with many intricacies of Biblical theology. In other words, it is not easy to bring one's Biblical framework, if it happens to be deficient, straight into Christ's words. For how one understands the law of the Old Testament and its use in the New Testament, and how the New Testament relates to the Old Testament, will in large measure impact the way one understands Christ's words, which in turn reinforces, or reforms, our theological framework. Take, for example, the two great commandments, which we affirm every Sunday: loving the one and only God in the first place, and loving our neighbour as ourselves. The first commandment is embodied in the first three of the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses, and the remaining seven are encapsulated in the second commandment Jesus spoke of. We see that Jesus did not do away with any of the Old Testament laws, but summarised them in their right perspective, setting aside the complex manner in which the Jewish leaders enforced God's law on their subjects.

Therefore, the question before us is how do we stay in line with Scripture when we interpret Matthew 5:17 alongside Matthew 10:34? Christ's "non-abolishment of the law" clause in Matthew 5:17, read harmoniously with what He proclaimed in 10:34, would not mean that Jesus has forsaken His peace-making mission. Rather, His peace-making will include the restructuring and reforming of the Old Testament laws in a holistic and practical manner, as we have just seen.

This would then mean that there are some things in the Old Testament laws that have come to an end — Christ's sacrifice, for example, ends the old covenant system of animal sacrifice. We should therefore go back to His words to learn how to apply the law, so as to get a good idea of how to understand the relationship of the law to Christ, and from Christ to us. With this framework in place, we will learn how His fulfilment works together with His economy, which is primarily one of forgiveness, redemption, and, finally, salvation for His people.

Let us examine the theme in the context of exile and restoration.

The Bible tells us that, despite their residency in the promised land, the people of God continued in a state of exile. In that context, we find that God's favoured people fell in and out of exile and slavery all through the Old Testament. A benevolent "I AM" God would pull them out of the mess they got themselves into, only to find them becoming disobedient and falling into another mess. Ironically, we find them under Roman rule in New Testament times, at the time Jesus was incarnated into this world. Throughout, many attempts were made by prophets and others

to turn the wicked generations back to the ways God approved. But as we read the New Testament, we find that it is Christ's calling to lead the final restoration of God's people. The fulfilment happens in Jesus. Christology, therefore, has redefined spirituality from the perspective of exile and restoration. Let me explain what I mean.

Falling in and out of exile, the chosen people of God, time and again, were the result of their being under the yoke of Satan and sin. While the Old Testament narratives are explicit about their physical exile, I see it as a symbolic representation of their true captivity, held captive under the power of Satan. Who else but Jesus could redeem them from such a yoke, and offer a yoke which is easy and light? He assured us of this, as we read in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus shifts the focus of His people from being under foreign rule or political consideration, to a spiritual release and freedom of our souls to spread the Good News in the world, aligning fully with His plan for salvation and the establishment of His kingdom. Matthew's presentation of Jesus, therefore, is of One fulfilling all that the prophets foretold, that He has come to save His creation, His people. But instead of saving them under the old covenant, Jesus is creating a new covenant with a new, redeemed people, who will live by faith in Him in this life and through to His kingdom for eternity. While in the Old Testament this begins with a remnant from Israel, by the end of the Gospel it will include believers from all nations, with people restored and reconciled to their Creator.

Going forward, let us briefly examine the fulfilment of a few of the old covenants by Jesus, through His new covenant.

We see, in God's covenant with Adam, the Almighty God humbling Himself, so that mankind might personally know Him. He gave them clear parameters for living in His presence, but Adam and Eve rejected His wisdom and love, allowing sin to take hold. Despite their unfaithfulness, God remained faithful to them, and, in His infinite love, the great "I AM" promised all humanity victory over Satan and sin, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who would crush the head of Satan but would Himself be stricken for the sake of His people. Please do read the four Servant Songs found in Isaiah, chapters 42:1-7, 49:1-7, 50:4-10, and 52:13 to 53:12. The first song mentions the call of the Servant and His divine nature; the second song moves on to the commission that He will reconcile God and humanity; the third song amplifies His sufferings, blow by blow; and the fourth song mentions His consummation in fulfilling the divine will in His sacrificial death, and His subsequent exaltation. These songs stand as proof that Jesus was predestined to endure sufferings which came seven hundred years later, and, in our

present context, show how Jesus would fulfil the pronouncements God made through Isaiah.

Then we see God's covenant with Noah. God had to sustain and protect humankind. But wickedness and violence had become rampant, so He chose Noah to be like a new Adam on a new earth — not a redeemed Adam, nor a redeemed earth. The new creation of Christ, His kingdom, would be the redeemed earth, yet to come. It struck me to think of this in terms of a baptised earth and a baptised man. God could have wiped out the original creation in total obliteration in the flood. He did not; instead, He performed a baptism, or ritual cleansing, of the earth by water. We may look at this as a forerunner to the baptism by the Spirit that Jesus graced us with. The reason Jesus Himself received baptism was to signify that the baptism of the Creator points to the baptism of the entire creation, as the creation was by Him, for Him, and in Him, and He was in the creation.

God's covenant with Abraham is often understood as a promise of the land of Canaan, and of generations innumerable from his seed. It points us to the new creation of Jesus, the coming of His kingdom without end, one that would bless all nations on earth.

God gave His people the law through Moses, along with the tabernacle and its ritual sacrifices, which all testified to the impossibility of defeating sin and Satan apart from God. The Ten Commandments, engraved on tablets, were placed in an Ark, and the Ark of the Covenant was placed within a movable shrine known as the Tabernacle.

Progressively, the concept of a Temple for God to live in arose.

However, the temples made by man would not stand. Mark reports, in chapter thirteen, verse two, Jesus as saying, "Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Jesus redefined an epitomised temple. The physical temple has ceased to be the geographic centre of worship; now, Christ Himself is the centre of worship. He is the "place," the "tent," the "temple," and the "altar," where we meet God.

We also see God's salvation plan embodied in the Passover, prescribed to God's people on the eve of their exodus from Egypt, and in the Eucharist Jesus instituted on the night before He was nailed to the Cross:

- Sacrifice an unblemished lamb; Jesus is the Lamb of God.
- The lamb must be eaten; Jesus says, eat my flesh and blood.
- Bitterness of captivity; Jesus frees us from the bitterness of sin.
- Flee from slavery; Jesus helps us turn away from sin.
- Blood on the door; the blood of Jesus.
- Twelve tribes; twelve apostles.

If we follow the covenant promises of God, starting from Adam and Eve, and down through history in the genealogies, we see a promised succession fulfilled in Jesus. The glory of Jesus Christ shines more clearly when we see Him in His proper relation to the Old Testament. He has a magnificent relation to all that was written. It is not surprising that this is the case, because He is called the Word of God incarnate (John 1:14). Would not the Word of God incarnate be the sum and consummation of the Word of God written? I leave you with this question to ponder. Amen.