
Title: The Sermon on the Mount and the Old Testament (Part 1)

Text: Matthew 4:23-8:1

Speaker: Chad Richard Bresson

Introduction

I am convinced more than ever that a proper understanding of the Sermon on the Mount is fundamental to New Covenant Theology. This study has been a blast. There are things here in this text in Matthew that I've seen for the first time. And I've become convinced that much of the error surrounding this passage occurs simply because people don't allow the text to speak for itself.

The Sermon on the Mount's Old Testament backdrop is as controversial as it is colorful. If the Sermon is the most argued about passage in the scriptures, one fundamental reason is the wide diversity of opinion regarding its place in redemptive history. How one understands this Sermon's relationship to the Old Testament has a fundamental impact on just about every facet of the Christian experience, from one's understanding of redemptive history to how one worships on Sunday to how one relates to God, brothers and sisters in Christ, the unbelieving neighbor, and the world at large. Simply put: a Christian's view of the Sermon's relationship to the Old Testament is bound up with his or her self-identity and worldview.

That the Old Testament and the Old Covenant have an interest in the Sermon on the Mount we will treat as a given here. One need look no further than those statements found in chapter 5 which theologians have labeled "the antitheses". All six of the antitheses are predicated in Old Testament law. Each of the "you have heard it said" statements employs an Old Testament quote before moving on to the "but I say to you" addendum, the interpretation of which has enflamed so much controversy. There are other quotes and allusions to the OT in the Sermon, but the so-called antitheses are certainly the most notable.

More important is Christ's statement in Matthew 5:17, where Christ says "**do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.**" Here Christ brings the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament to bear on the entire Sermon. And it is this statement, **I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets**, that gives rise to the antitheses in the verses following, which themselves arise from the Law of the Old Testament. So the Old Testament not only provides context for the Sermon on the Mount, it's actually being quoted in the Sermon on the Mount.

The question then becomes, how does Christ understand his own Sermon in the context of the Old Testament? And the second, closely related, is how does Matthew understand Christ and His sermon in the context of the Old Testament? Before those questions can be answered, the structure, context, and purpose must be considered.

The Structure of the Sermon

While proposals for the Sermon's structure are as diverse as the interpretations of it, I'm of the opinion that its structure can be fairly easy to ascertain, while at the same time, making sense of the structure is a little more difficult.

Introduction: 4:23-5:1

Beatitudes: 5:2-10

Salt and Light: 5:11-16

I have come to fulfill: 5:17-20

Antitheses: 5:21-48

Father who sees in secret (Lord's Prayer): 6:1-18

Laying up Treasures: 6:19-24

7 imperatives: 6:25-7:23

Those who hear these words of mine: 7:24-27

Conclusion: 7:28-8:1

I am not convinced that the Sermon can be easily sectioned into 5 books of Moses, as some commentators have proposed, much like some have proposed that the book of Matthew is also divided into 5 books (although there seems to be a "panel" structure to Matthew following along the series of "when he had finished" statements... 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1). Nor am I completely convinced that a chiasm is present here in the Sermon on the Mount, although there are tell-tale signs of one. Both the introduction and conclusion have parallelisms, as do the Beatitudes and the wise man/foolish man parable. There is also parallelism with the "Law or Prophets" of 5:17 with "Law and Prophets" of 7:12. At the very least, the introduction and conclusion make the Sermon very easy to section off from the rest of the book of Matthew, especially when the conclusion includes the first of the "when he had finished" statements.

If this is a chiasm, then the midpoint of this sermon, its "climax", is 5:48 (unlike many chiastic proponents who see the Lord's Prayer as the point of the climax). And there are a couple of reasons why this makes sense: it is reflective of not only a recurrent theme in the Sermon (5:6, 5:20, 6:33, 7:23 - in reverse), but also the main theme of the Sermon (5:20). 5:48 is the imperative form of the main theme found in 5:20... the necessity of having a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Thus the righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees, the righteousness the blessed man hungers and thirsts after, the righteousness we are to pursue, the righteousness that sets itself over against all lawlessness, is to *be* perfect, even as the Father in heaven is perfect. Like much of the Sermon that reveals an indicative-imperative rhythm, 5:48 is the imperative form of what is stated in the indicative form in 5:20.

Structure of Matthew: Perfectly finished

Not only does 5:48 sit at the center of the Sermon's thrust, it is unpacked throughout the rest of the book. The greek word for "perfect" is the same word used in the literary markers that set off the 6 panels in Matthew: "finished".

Let's look at those statements:

7:28-8:1: "And when Jesus **finished** (perfected) these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,... when he came down..."

11:1: "When Jesus had **finished** (perfected) instructing his twelve disciples, he went from there to teach and preach in their cities."

13:53-54: "And when Jesus had **finished** (perfected) these parables, he went away from there, and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogues, so that they were astonished."

19:1: "Now when Jesus had **finished** (perfected) these sayings, he went away from Galilee...and large crowds followed him, and he healed them there."

26:1: "When Jesus had **finished** (perfected) all these sayings, he said to his disciples..." Don't miss the word "all" here... there is an intention of Matthew to show that the finality of Christ's perfection of his work and teaching is coming.

Most of the main elements of 4:23 and 7:28 are present in the rest of these literary markers (the words or thoughts of "finished", "he went", and "teaching/preaching", "healing"). Listen to 4:23: "(Jesus) went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease... great crowds followed him". 7:28: "the crowds were astonished at his teaching", 11:1, Jesus "instructed" and "went to teach and preach", 13:53-54, Jesus "taught them in their synagogues" and "they were astonished", 19:1, "large crowds followed (Jesus) and he healed them...".

The first thing we can say is that these markers are completing what was begun in 4:23. Understood in light of the fulfillment talked about in Matthew 5:17, these literary markers point to an ongoing progressive fulfillment in the ministry and teaching of Jesus Christ. What was started in 4:23 is continued and "perfected" through the rest of the book... this "perfecting" of what was started in 4:23 has everything to do with "being perfect, as *His* heavenly Father is perfect, with a "righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees". What was started in 4:23, and is being perfect throughout the rest of the book has everything to do with perfecting the righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees, a righteousness after which we hunger and thirst. This perfecting throughout the book of Matthew has everything to do with providing kingdom citizens with the satisfaction of our deepest longings, cravings, and appetites (Charles Dennison).

Thus, the theme of Christ's righteousness is tied to the unfolding of the events of the book of Matthew, especially in regards to those literary markers, the teaching of Christ. 5:48 helps provide interpretive context for the series of "finished" statements.

One final note about 5:48. It too has an Old Testament backdrop. We will say more about this later. But not enough attention has been given to Christ's use of Leviticus 11:45 in the Sermon, especially with 5:48 sitting at the point of the chiasm like it is.

The Context of the Sermon

The immediate context of the Sermon is found in Matthew 4 verses 23ff. In fact, there is such fluidity between these 3 verses and the Sermon, one would not be mistaken to think that the entire Sermon canopy begins in 4:23.

Matthew 4:23ff... this is what Jesus Christ proclaims to his people through His Word:

And he went throughout **all Galilee**, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout **all Syria**, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great **crowds** followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. Seeing the **crowds**, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. "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. 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. Therefore 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, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the development of the Sermon on the Mount as an important passage for understanding the New Covenant, little attention is given by commentators, pastors, and

theologians to the passage immediately preceding the Sermon. And this is unfortunate, for it is there that we find the historical and theological context for the Sermon, as well as allusion to its Old Testament underpinnings.

The first thing we can say about this immediate context is that Christ has the ear of the whole Jewish world. The whole world is his stage, even if it is Israel who is the intended audience. Note the parallels: "he went throughout all Galilee" and "his fame spread throughout all Syria". These two are simultaneous events. As Christ does one, the other is being accomplished. And note the language as to *who* takes note of Christ "going" all over Galilee and his fame being spread through all of Syria: "great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan". North, East, West, and South... this is a description of what had been the land of the twelve tribes of Israel. Even as Christ's fame has spread beyond the borders of old Israel, Israel itself has taken notice of this one named Jesus.

The second thing we must note is Christ's activity... and this becomes important as we consider the Sermon and its relationship to the OT. Verse 23: "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." This activity that has Israel's ear, is threefold: teaching, proclaiming, and healing. Much, much more could be said about how this threefold activity of Christ unfolds throughout the rest of the book of Matthew. And there will be more to say about how this activity drips with Old Testament significance and fulfillment. But, what we need to see at this point of our discussion, is that it is this activity that leads into Christ's ascent of the mountain to deliver his Sermon. Christ ascends the mount to teach. What he delivers is the gospel of the kingdom, and in bringing the gospel of the kingdom to his people, brings healing to those who have ears to hear. And he does it in didactic, unilateral or unidirectional, and incarnational form. Christ teaches the gospel of the kingdom in dialogue. Christ preaches the gospel of the kingdom in unidirectional monologue. And Christ incarnates the gospel of the kingdom in healing the sick. That threefold activity consumes Christ throughout the course of his life on earth.

The third thing of note here are the "crowds". Not only do the crowds provide a linchpin between this last part of chapter 4 and the Sermon on the Mount, but the crowds also provide a bookend to the end of the Sermon. Notice the language: "great crowds followed him..." and "seeing the crowds".... And chapter 8 verse 1: "great crowds followed him..." What we have leading into the Sermon in the immediate context is a total engagement of Israel with this phenomenon named Jesus. What occurs here and throughout the rest of the book of Matthew hasn't been confined to one subgroup of Israel. It hasn't been relegated to a select few. This Person from Galilee has gathered and united Israel with his proclamation of the kingdom.

And the last thing to note is the content of that proclamation: the gospel of the kingdom. More on that in just a moment.

The Purpose of the Sermon

We've only begun to note the context of the Sermon in Matthew, and it's probably a little early in the discussion to posit the purpose of the Sermon, at least in the fullest sense of purpose. To flesh out all of the questions regarding the Matthean use of the Sermon and why it occurs where it does in Matthew is beyond the scope of this presentation. In order to get at its purpose, we must ask questions such as 1. How does the Sermon serve the larger purpose of the book of Matthew? 2. What is the purpose of the book of Matthew? 3. Why does it occur earlier rather than later in the book? 4. What is the relationship between the Sermon and chapters 4 and 8 of Matthew, those chapters and events that immediately precede and follow the Sermon? And there are other contextual questions we could ask that would help us understand the purposes of the Sermon on the Mount.

The question we will attempt to contain ourselves to in this presentation is this: 5. How does the use of the Old Testament (by both Matthew and Christ) help us understand the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount? In order to get at "purpose", though, we must begin with the Sermon and its immediate context itself. The structure of the Sermon should serve up for us, a cursory stab at the goals and intent of Matthew and Jesus in the Sermon.

There are four items of note in regard to structure and immediate context:

The good news of the kingdom

Chapter 4, verse 23: *And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.*

The first thing that we want to see is that the Sermon on the Mount is the good news of the kingdom. It contains the gospel. The Sermon unfolds for us just what it is that Jesus is teaching and proclaiming. Look at verse 2: And he opened his mouth and taught them. At the very least, Matthew is linking the sermon to Christ's activity of "teaching" in 4:23. But he also goes to the pain of describing Christ as "opening his mouth", a description that over the course of the scriptures portrays proclamation. So this Sermon is an unpacking of the content of Christ's teaching and preaching (4:17 as well) the gospel of the kingdom.

And this isn't simply the "gospel". This is the "gospel of the kingdom". The Sermon has everything to do with the ushering in of a new world order, a new era. This message was on John's lips in Matthew 3:2, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And Jesus picks up John's message and carries it himself, in Matthew 4:17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This Sermon on the Mount is the message of the in-breaking of a kingdom that is not of this world.

As one who had authority

Just as the beginning of the Sermon helps us see purpose, so too does the end. Verse 28: *And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes. When he*

came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. Much has been written about what this is telling us about Jesus and the Sermon, and we won't unpack that here; but this very last phrase, "great crowds followed him" is identical to chapter 4:25 and the lead-in into the Sermon. Matthew here, among other things, is providing a bookend to the proclamation and teaching of the gospel of the kingdom.

Some commentators would prefer to say that the Sermon constitutes a collection of Christ's sayings throughout the course of Christ's ministry, collated by Matthew to serve Matthew's theology, ecclesiology, and history. But the bookend won't let us go there. "When Jesus finished these sayings" implies the end of an event. It is most likely that what we find in the Sermon does reveal the content of Christ's teaching and preaching over the course of his ministry, especially if one is inclined to believe the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17ff) is not one and the same with the Sermon on the Mount. Even if it is true that this Sermon summarizes Christ's teaching, this Sermon is a singular unit. The bookend, among other things, forces us to conclude that this Sermon is an event. At an early stage of Christ's ministry, Christ delivers this Sermon to a people, Israel, in a singular and very significant *event*. This *event* is important to the life of Israel and to the church in redemptive history.

Thus, the structure not only helps us see the content of the proclamation and teaching of the gospel of the kingdom, but also helps us see the proclamation and teaching of the gospel of the kingdom as a significant event in redemptive history.

An exceeding righteousness

I've already alluded to a series of statements that occur within the Sermon itself that serve up for us the trajectory where Christ is taking both his immediate and extended audiences. These also help form the substructure to the sermon: 5:6, 5:20, 5:48, 6:33, and 7:23.

Let's look at those verses... these statements are all interconnected, helping unfold and unpack the Sermon:

5:6: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. This, not coincidentally, is the center point around which the rest of the Beatitudes revolve. The thrust of the Beatitudes, as blessing upon the kingdom citizen from the mouth of the King, is found in this: the satisfaction for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, a righteousness, the later statements tell us is outside of the crowd's grasp, a righteousness that is not theirs.

5:20: "...unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven". I preached an entire sermon on this a few weeks back, so I would refer you to it [on my blog](#). If there is a thesis statement to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, it is found in 5:17-20. The entire Sermon swings on this question about the kind of righteousness characteristic of the kingdom citizen. This righteousness is beyond the grasp of the kingdom citizen. It is not self-generated. Jesus comes proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, a kingdom that is not of this world, a

kingdom marked by a righteousness that can only come from above. The crowds, who have come from North, South, East, and West in the land of old Israel, lack righteousness. And this Jesus who sits on the mount tells his people that unless their righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees, the kingdom is not for them (chapter 5 verse 20).

5:48: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Not only is this a righteousness outside of their grasp, the demands of the law have not changed. The law demanded complete obedience. 5:48 occurs here as the imperative form of the indicative in 5:20. Those who gain entrance into heaven, must have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. In order to have that righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

6:33: "...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Just as 5:48 functions as an imperative form of 5:20, so too 6:33 functions as an imperative form for the indicative found in 5:6. The thrust of this verse is "hunger and thirst" after the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And it is here that we find the solution/resolution to the dilemma of 5:20 and 5:48. The righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees, the perfect righteousness demanded by God can only be found in God alone, or, more importantly, the One sitting before you on the Mount.

7:23: "...depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (or anti-righteousness or unrighteousness). Here, "workers of lawlessness" function as the antithesis for those who are "blessed", hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Again, more on this in a moment.

So... along with the parallelisms noted earlier that help us see some semblance of a chiasmic structure, this series of statements within the Sermon itself function like glue holding the structure of the Sermon together. Further, the repetition of the common theme here points us in the direction of Christ's intended purpose of the Sermon and connect the Sermon to the rest of the book of Matthew.

One of the upshots of this discussion to this point, is this: as much as we want to talk about ethic and the commentators want to posit the Sermon as "ethic" (and for good reason), don't miss the righteousness, the larger purpose the ethic is serving. We would be hard pressed to deny that an "ethic" is being delivered by Christ on the Mount. Some might want to go there. I don't think we can dismiss that thought. But even once we've agreed that there is ethic here, the question becomes (amid all sorts of controversy) is "what kind of ethic?" Regardless, while there is ethic, the structure of this Sermon points us away from coming to the conclusion that *ethic* drives the motivations of Christ (and Matthew) in the delivery of this Sermon and its incorporation into the text of Scripture.

The thought that runs to the heart of intent isn't "ethic" (contra the utilitarian or moralist worldviews that dominate a lot of the commentaries), but "righteousness". In this Sermon, "ethic" serves the purposes of "righteousness". "Ethic" flows out of

"righteousness." Some who have understood this have charged Matthew (and Christ) himself with being "unfair" and even "unethical". Understood as subservient to the righteousness that God requires, this "ethic" becomes most severe, and indeed it is, outside of the One sitting at the top of the mount. But the "ethic" unpacked in the Sermon on the Mount *is* the answer as to what kind of righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees. It begins to form the "content" of that righteousness which exceeds the Pharisees. It's a vicious cycle... in order to have this kind of righteousness, one must live out the ethic. But the only way to live out the ethic, is to have the righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. This "righteousness" dominates the landscape, and even the "ethic" delivered on the Mount serves its purposes.

"Blessed is the man"/"depart from me"

And the last bit of structure to briefly mention is one that occurs in the parallelism already mentioned. I briefly mention it here because I think we must keep this idea in front of us. Without going into all of the elements that make up a biblical covenant, other than the identification of the parties and the promises involved, the most notable elements of a covenant are the blessing and cursing elements. Blessing is promised upon the recipient based on certain conditions, and cursing is threatened upon the recipient based on certain violations of the agreement. We have those elements present in the Sermon on the Mount, raising the possibility that this gospel of the kingdom, this ethic of the kingdom citizens, is laying the groundwork for the New Covenant. What we have in the Beatitudes constitute a "blessing" upon those kingdom citizens whose righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees. And what we have in the judgment of the Day of the Lord (*that day* is a reference to the "day of the Lord") are the curses of the covenant: "depart from me, I never knew you" and "great was the fall" of the house of those "who hear my words and do not do them". Given the fact that Christ completes all the terms and obligations contained in this Sermon, and given the fact that both the blessings and cursings of this Sermon fall on the One giving the Sermon, what we have in the Sermon are the beginnings of Torah and Covenant Incarnate.

End of part one.

Title: The Sermon on the Mount and the Old Testament (Part 2)

Text: Matthew 4:23-8:1

Speaker: Chad Richard Bresson

Section 2

The Possibilities proposed for Old Testament

All sorts of possibilities have been proposed for understanding the Old Testament context for the Sermon on the Mount. Is this a "New Moses"? The prevailing thought for much of 20th century scholarship on the sermon has landed in this camp. Then along came Kingsbury and others who challenged that notion by putting forward the idea that Christ as the "Son of God" provides context for the Sermon. Liberal scholarship has tended toward seeing Jesus as the New, Great Rabbi teaching Israel about his view and interpretation of the Law, come to raise the standard of morality in Israel. Closely related to the view of Christ as the greatest of the Rabbis, is Christ as Wisdom, the one who both teaches and embodies the ancient wisdom of Israel in a fresh new way. And there are other views. Is Christ a New Israel re-enacting the Exodus from Egypt? Is the New Exodus a paradigm for Matthew? Is Christ a New Adam come to restore or renew the creative order? A New Moses come to rescue His people from Egypt? The Son of David come to claim His throne? Is this the Suffering Servant come to provide hope and healing to a nation? All of these ideas have their proponents, and most have some very good exegetical justification.

Then, once we have argued about how Matthew understands Christ in this context (or even how Christ understands himself for that matter), then the sparks begin to fly as we argue over just what Christ is doing with the Law in this Sermon. Is this a recapitulation or reinforcement of the Mosaic law with the ultimate, Divine stamp of approval? Is this reinforcement with the ultimate, Divine interpretation of the Law? Is Christ modifying the Law? Is He superseding the Law? Is he ratcheting up the Law's demands, making it more severe? Is He raising the bar? Is Christ giving us brand new law? Is Christ delivering New Torah in the Sermon on the Mount? Has Christ given us a new book of wisdom? Is Christ giving us a new perspective on the book of Moses?

To their credit, those whose views that have gained the most traction in the evangelical community have attempted to provide the exegetical support for their positions. Some of these ideas have more warrant than others in the text. In fact, other than the totally "divineless" Great Rabbi of liberal apostates, most of the attempts at understand the Old Testament context for Christ in Matthew arise from thoughts that are present in Matthew, if not the whole of the Gospel Witness in the synoptics and John. So the question isn't really about which one isn't here, but which view or views seem to be best reflected in the text. It is with this last question in mind that we proceed. This is not about proving one thing to the exclusion of all others, but attempting to allow the text to speak to us about the Old Testament context.

Before we move on I will state up front, for those who get really irritated at speakers who leave the main things for last, that what I believe is the context for the Sermon and for the book of Matthew is "the Son who would be King". This isn't to say that the idea of Moses isn't present. This isn't to say that the idea of Rabbi or Wisdom isn't present. But this book moves from David's genealogy to Magi-King to Baby King to the inscription over the cross, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" to "all authority has been given to me".

Old Testament backdrop: use of OT

It would also be really easy to spend a lot of time developing the Old Testament backdrop for the book of Matthew; and in a very real way, one must do this at some point to arrive at the context being used by Matthew in narrating for us the Sermon on the Mount. We are not going to do that here, but we will briefly mention four important details for our study.

The **first** is that Matthew begins his gospel with "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David". It's interesting. This language is almost verbatim from the toledotsin Genesis, leading some to conclude that Matthew is beginning to chronicle here the new creation. I concur insofar as Matthew 1 sets up the birth of Christ as a new beginning, a new era. However, this new creation doesn't begin with Adam, but Abraham, and its trajectory is David.

And David is where Matthew is headed. He develops the genealogy along David's ancestry, and ultimately lands the story in Bethlehem, the city of David. It is here that Magi-kings bestow king gifts to a baby, "born King of the Jews". It becomes hard to ignore the idea that Matthew wants us to believe that Jesus is heir to David's throne and recipient of all the covenant promises that were given to David. Were it not for the fact that Christ ascends a mount to deliver ethical discourse, those who are inclined to see Moses would probably be more inclined to see David here.

Come walk with me through Matthew:

- Matthew 1:1: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."
- Matthew 1:6: "...and Jesse the father of David the king..."
- Matthew 1:17: "So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations."
- Matthew 1:20: "But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."
- Matthew 2:1-2: "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

- Matthew 2:3-5 "When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”"
- Matthew 4:17: "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (More on this in a minute).
- Matthew 4:23: "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people."

From the very beginning of his eyewitness account of the Christ, the Messiah, Matthew is bent on us (and those in the early church) reading his account understanding that this Messiah **is** the Promised King who is the final heir to David's throne.

The **second** detail important for us is found in Matthew 2:15 where Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1, in speaking of Joseph fleeing to Egypt, "out of Egypt I have called my son." Again, much could be said here. But as Matthew develops the story of this new Son of David, something much bigger is in play: Christ as the One who will live out Israel's story as the Son of God, even as Israel was a "son of God" (unlike John's "Son of God, which places Christ's deity in the foreground, and Luke's "son of God" which places Christ as the New Adam into the foreground, here, "son of God" places Christ as the New Israel in the foreground). This Son of God also moves through the Matthean text in a trajectory to the cross where on the lips of the Roman centurion, "truly this was the Son of God".

Matthew chronicles for us that Israel's champion, Israel's incarnational representative, is miraculously brought up out of Egypt, and then... if we were to follow Matthew's narrative further into chapter 3, this Son that has undergone an Exodus from Egypt, then moves through the Red Sea, through the baptismal waters, into the desert where he is tested and tempted for 40 years; just kidding... 40 days; So that by the time we get to chapter 5, this one who has been brought up out of Egypt, through the baptismal waters, in the desert, has now ascended a mountain. And it is on this mountain that one better than Moses beckons Israel to draw near; it is on this mountain that THE Son of David ascends and sits down, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (4:23).

The **third** thing we need to see is that this book not only moves from the genealogy of David to the King of the Jews, and the son called out of Egypt to the Son of God, but also moves from the promised One, Emmanuel, God with us in Matthew 1 to Matthew 28, I am with you always, to the end of the age. The heir to David's throne has come to reside with His people forever, and through His death and resurrection brings it to pass. This Emmanuel not only takes up his residence with Israel, but this Emmanuel lives out the history of Israel as a Son bringing about the justice and peace that Israel could not.

Again, this is not to say that Moses or Wisdom or any of the other typological motifs are being used in Matthew. This is only to say that wherever we turn in this book, especially

in the Sermon on the Mount, we are going to see one or two or three of these being highlighted in the text.

There is a **fourth**, which is related to Christ being the Son of David, that we will spend the next few moments looking at...

Old Testament backdrop: use of OT (Isaiah 9)

While the main body of the book of Matthew begins in 4:17, with the Sermon on the Mount being the first big event in that portion of the book, the verses preceding 4:17 contain an Isaianic prophecy that gives context to the rest of the book, especially the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 4:8-17

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "**Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'**" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"

It would be really easy to limit this prophecy to Matthew's immediate concern, that of Christ's explicit fulfillment of Isaiah in moving from Nazareth to Galilee. Further, it would also be really easy to limit the scope of Matthew's use of Isaiah.

Matthew 4:15-16 quotes Isaiah 9:1-2 nearly verbatim. Christ's move to Capernaum from Nazareth is understood in light of the words of Isaiah: "**But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.**" This One come to save His people from their sins is moving into new territory. Having conquered Satan through testing in the wilderness, this Son come from Egypt is tracing new boundaries, boundaries that include both Jew and Gentile.

But the move to Capernaum is more than predictively noteworthy. Matthew once again uses the word "fulfilled" in quoting Isaiah (see Matthew 1:22, 2:15,23, 3:15, and 5:17). This Jesus who has conquered Satan in the wilderness and is now moving the theatre to Capernaum is one who is filling up to its fullest measure and bringing to fruition the intended purposes of Isaiah 9. In the fullness of redemptive history's climax (Galatians

4:4), it is this child who has been born, this Son who has been given, who is a light to the nations. This Jesus emerging victorious from the wilderness, moving from Nazareth to Galilee, is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace whose government is on His shoulder... bringing justice to Jew and Gentile alike.

This one moving from Nazareth to Capernaum isn't simply one making predictions come true. This promised Messiah, the One who will save His people from their sins, is the promised heir to the Davidic throne, the Davidic heir promised in Isaiah 9. The Davidic anticipation from Isaiah 9 comes to fruition in the One born in Bethlehem, "king of the Jews". It is the One moving from Nazareth to Capernaum, this One who will be identified with the Galileans, is heir to a Davidic throne where the government shall be upon his shoulder, (whose) "name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." This Jesus, moving from Nazareth to Capernaum, is the heir to the throne of David and David's kingdom, of which the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. This beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased, moving from Nazareth to Capernaum, the Galilean is the very same One who not only is heir to the throne of David, but will establish that throne and will uphold that throne with justice and with righteousness from Matthew's time and forevermore. No, this isn't simple predictive history coming true. This is Christ filling up Isaiah 9 to its fullest measure as the One of whom, for whom, and through whom Isaiah 9 was written.

Old Testament backdrop: use of OT (Isaiah 42)

However, more than Isaiah 9 is in play here in Matthew 4, and this becomes important as we move to the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5. In the move from Nazareth to Capernaum, Matthew sees the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the heir to David's throne who will bring justice.

It swings on the turn of a word. Matthew doesn't simply quote Isaiah 9. In the ESV which we use @ Clearcreek Chapel the English word chosen for this passage in Matthew, the right one I think, masks the literal definition which provides "nuance" to the Emmanuel idea in view here. This one coming will not simply dwell among his people, but will "sit" among his people. The word is "to sit", and this phrase isn't taken from Isaiah 9, but from Isaiah 42, where we read, "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other..."

There you have it, right there in the purview of Matthew 4 and ultimately Matthew 5. This Jesus moving from Nazareth to Capernaum, this Jesus who comes preaching and teaching the gospel of the kingdom, this Jesus who takes up residence as he sits among his people is a Covenant given to the people, a light for the nations, giving sight to the blind, and giving freedom to the shackled. This Jesus, who is being followed by great crowds, ascends the Mount and "sits down" among His people.

Matthew's use of Isaiah in chapter 4, pulling in Isaiah 9 and 42 as he leads into the Sermon on the Mount, pushes us to see the Suffering Servant, the heir to the Davidic throne, as the One who delivers the Sermon on the Mount. The language of Isaiah 42 has already set Matthew up for this... the Suffering Servant, the Israel of God (Isaiah 49:3), is the heir to David's throne (Isaiah 9:7). And it's this Davidic heir who will be a covenant, inaugurating a new covenant: Isaiah 55:1 says this: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David." There is so much to be said here but so little time. We begin to hear echoes of the Sermon on the Mount. Those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" will be forever satisfied. The one who has ears to hear, "incline your ear; listen diligently". The Suffering Servant, the Covenant for the People, the One who is wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, the One who was crushed and put to grief, ascends the Mount, sits down on his throne among His people, and begins what will be the making of a Covenant with His people, satisfying their most basic longings, cravings, and appetites.

It is this Suffering Servant, this manna from heaven (Matthew 4:4), satisfying the hunger and thirst of those who seek God's righteousness, who ascends another mountain at the end of the book of Matthew, and as the New David, proclaims to His disciples, that He has been given all kingdom authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). It is this Davidic King, who has been granted all authority in His resurrection, who in Matthew 29 (ha!), ascends to His rightful throne as David's heir.

Sermon on the Mount OT: Rabbi?

At this point a couple of things should be said about two other ways to see the typology of Christ being put forth by Matthew. The first is this: Many commentators have suggested that, in ascending the mount, sitting down, and beginning to teach his disciples, that Christ here is assuming the posture of a Jewish rabbi who dispenses wisdom, divinely inspired wisdom, with his students. W.D. Davies and others have pointed out that this is not likely, though still part of the imagery here. It's not likely because in Matthew, the only ones who refer to Jesus as Rabbi are the skeptics and unbelievers. Those who are his disciples, other than Judas, assign other titles and labels to Christ, especially "Lord", again a reference to Christ's claim to David's throne. As an aside, the fact that Judas is the only disciple to refer to Christ as Rabbi is a tip off that Matthew is number Judas among those who are not kingdom citizens. However, we must grant that the imagery here, among other things does suggest that of a great rabbi, although I would propose that the Jewish Rabbi is not in view here. Again, keeping the Son of God/Son of David in front of us here, there is one greater than Solomon who sits on that mount, perfecting and fulfilling the Son who is to know wisdom in the fear of the Lord. This is never more apparent than Christ's story of the wise man and foolish man, which has shadow/fulfillment of Proverbs written all over it.

Sermon on the Mount OT: Moses?

The other one we must comment on is Moses. By far, most of the literature and most of the scholarship centers on Christ as a Moses figure, especially in light of the Israel in the Red Sea and wilderness imagery of chapter 3. And certainly, it is hard to escape the image of One ascending a mount, dispensing ethic, and using some of the finer points of the law in contrast and comparison as Christ does in the antithesis of Matthew 5:21ff. Christ specifically interacts with the Law in chapter 5:18. And those like Davies who want to dismiss the Moses imagery are unable to do so altogether because the witness of the text is playing against them. Kingsbury, Cater, and others dispense with Moses entirely, and I find that problematic.

The answer to this problem, is this Moses or is this David, is found in understanding the nature of typology in the Old Testament and how that typology is fulfilled in Christ in the New. Without going off on a rabbit chase about how this occurs, one thing we must keep in front of us is that Christ is the Yes and Amen of Revelation, the All in All of scripture. Very often, the New Testament authors, and Christ himself... in fact, he does this as much as any of them, are conflating and collapsing imagery of the Old Testament into One Person, Jesus Christ. In this sense, we must avoid the either/or trap that seems to occupy so many. It really is a both/and. It is both David and Moses. However, Moses is not the dominant image here. David is. The problem here is that too many do not readily see the dispensing of ethic (again, this is the way the Sermon is commonly portrayed) as an idea attached to a King. Yet over and over again in the Old Testament, especially the prophets, this is precisely connected to the Ruler that is coming... someone who will give wisdom, someone who will promote justice and righteousness. That, among other things, *is* ethic. This coming Ruler is greatly interested in the ethics of His people; it's why He is going to give them a new heart. It's why He is going to give His Spirit and cause them to obey.

For lack of a better term, it is good for us to see here a David-Moses. This is the "son of David", the One born "king of the Jews" assuming the posture of One who has authority, and as the Sermon unfolds, One who has ultimate and supreme authority. Moses had authority because it was he that the Israelites considered to be the giver of the law. Moses was revered because he was assumed to have divine authority (especially after the little spat with Miriam and Aaron). But this Moses on the Mount in Matthew is invested with Davidic authority, the authority of a throne. This David Moses isn't simply giving ethic. This David-Moses is describing the kingdom citizen and the kingdom citizen's life. At the bookend of this sermon Matthew tells us that the "crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority and *not* as their scribes".

This king, this David-Moses comes proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, a kingdom that is not of this world, a kingdom that imposes itself on this world, a kingdom that does not look like the kingdoms of this world. This David Moses comes offering a righteousness that the original Moses could not provide.

End of part 2

Title: The Sermon on the Mount and the Old Testament (Part 3)

Text: Matthew 4:23-8:1

Speaker: Chad Richard Bresson

Section 3 (this is part 3&4 on the video)

Sermon on the Mount OT: Abolish

Remember earlier we asked a couple of questions that are pertinent to the relationship between the Old Testament and the Sermon on the Mount: How does Christ understand himself in light of the Old Testament, and how does Matthew understand Christ in light of the Old Testament? Again, there is much material in just the Sermon on the Mount that could occupy us for hours, so I'm going to simply look at a couple of words that occur in the thesis statement of the Sermon. There is one related question I think will be answered along the way: How does Christ understand himself not only in relation to the Old Testament, but especially the Law? I raise these questions because they are fundamental hermeneutical principles (see G.K. Beale, "Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text?") that will help us understand the gist of the Sermon on the Mount.

In the Sermon on the Mount, we not only have Christ quoting the Old Testament, we also have him ascending the Mount and sitting down. This is no accident. This isn't simply, as some like Davies would have us believe, Matthew writing about an event and couching it in the imagery of a king sitting down on a throne to make us think about David. Matthew isn't simply using crowds following and Christ ascending and teaching "ethic" to make us think about Moses. Christ himself provides Matthew the opportunity to write those things because Christ himself is orchestrating the event to in a way that brings to mind the imagery of David and Moses. The very one who gave the law to Moses on the first mount, the very one who chose David over Saul, is the one who, in the fullness of times, ascends a mount and sits down to teach and dwell among His people.

Again, much ink has been spilled on the central thought of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:17-20. Entire movements and denominations are born and die over how this passage is interpreted. And to be honest, this presentation isn't going to solve an issue that has divided the church since Christ ascended to David's throne.

Of all of these issues that arise out of this passage, I want to briefly mention one and then look at the second. The first is what to do about the word "abolish". At this point, I'm really going to cut a lot of scholarship and debate off at the chase to suggest that when it comes to both "abolish" and "fulfill", we must take into account the point in redemptive history in which the statement occurred, even as we must take into account the point in redemptive history and revelation into which Matthew writes. The latter occurs much later than the former, and we must consider both if we want to get it right.

This is not a lightmatter. Even some who see Torah Incarnate in the Sermon on the Mount, especially Davies, Gibbs and Lloy, interpret Christ's statement here as reason to affirm Christ's reinforcement of the Law in the New Covenant. They stumble of the New Testament's use of Old Testament law. And indeed most of the Reformed world in which we move and reside takes Christ's statement about not abolishing the law as a transcendent universal statement, good for all times, all ages, all people everywhere.

The question is this: is this how the rest of the New Testament understands Christ's relationship to the Law? The answer is no. For time sake, I really think the key to understanding "abolish" and the reality for us today is found in 2 Corinthians 3, Hebrews 8-9, and Ephesians 2 (the latter I believe is the defining statement about the abolishment of the law). If 2 Corinthians 3, Hebrews 8-9, and Ephesians 2 are saying what we affirm here then to be saying, what do we make of Christ's statement, especially since the scriptures are not contradictory. At the end of the day, what we're affirming (something I pressed back against for a long time) is that Christ says "I have not come to abolish" and in fact, in his death and Resurrection indeed did abolish the law.

There are two ways to answer this dilemma, either of which may be true at the same time. The first is to understand Christ's statement as non-universal and confined to that period of time in which the statement occurred redemptive-historically. At that point in Christ's ministry, his purposes did not included the abolishment of the law, although it isn't too long into the Matthean narrative that Christ proclaims himself to be Lord of the Sabbath. While at that time Christ's purposes were not to abolish the law, before it was all said and done, this is precisely what he had done. Christ is not being deceptive. He is merely affirming that as long as His ministry continued, by and large, He was going to submit himself to the law as under the law. I realize that's a point that not all of us agree on, but I believe this is one of the answers to the dilemma because of what I believe to be true about the word "fulfill", which I'll get to in a minute.

The other way to answer this dilemma I think is more fundamental, more basic to what we are proposing in New Covenant theology. And that's that there's a sense in which the law and the prophets, even as the Old Testament has been abrogated as obsolete, has been subsumed in the One who filled it up. There is a sense in which the law and the prophets, the Old Testament, has not been made obsolete because those types and shadows now find their home in the One who brought all of their meaning to fruition. This doesn't mean there hasn't been a change in form or hasn't been a change in the way that we relate to the Old Testament or the law. It simply means that the Old Testament "lives on" so to speak in the Person who fulfilled it, and in that sense, we can say the Law or the Prophets have not been abolished.

This is also the answer to a fundamental question posed by those in Covenant Theology: how is it that David and other OT writers referred to the law as eternal, especially if we are going to insist that the law has faded away, been made obsolete, and has been abolished? There are places in the Old Testament where David and the prophets make reference to an eternal covenant that has been made with Israel, and their context for the statement is the Mosaic Law.

If the Mosaic Law has been abolished (Ephesians 2:15, 2 Corinthians 3, Hebrews 8-10, Galatians 3-4), how is it that it can be said to be eternal (also see Romans 3:19)? Much of Reformed theology, especially from Calvin onward, affirm the Mosaic law as still in force, in part because of some of the statements about the covenant being eternal. The three categories (civil, ceremonial, and moral) were invented as a means of dealing with this issue (they're dubious attempts to "exegete" them from scripture notwithstanding).

The answer is that the Law, not in its form, not in its Old Covenant stipulations, but in its essence, that which revealed the eternal character of God, lives on in a Person who has filled up the law to its fullest measure. And it's interesting, on that point about the Law being Incarnate, Gibbs and Lloy and a host of others, do agree with us. The One who originally penned the law and wrote the law to begin with continues the Law in His Person, even as the terms and the form are changed in the New Covenant. The law has faded away and become obsolete, because the One who fingered the original law on the first Sinai has filled it up to its fullest measure. But as I argue in just a moment, this filling up the Law in the fullness of time is progressive; that filling up will not be complete until after Christ's death and resurrection. Since it is progressive, there is a sense in which Christ can say, at this point in redemptive history, he has not come to abolish the Law. Such abolishment will not occur until his death and resurrection have been accomplished.

Christ is law Incarnate, and eternally so. I bring this up because I don't think those of us in New Covenant theology have done a very good job at answering this question as to how the Mosaic Covenant or Law can be considered "eternal", especially when he says here in the Sermon on the Mount, "I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I think NCT has had a tendency to simply wipe this issue under the rug. But I believe this question of the law's eternality is a legitimate question. For instance, in Romans, in the context of a discussion about "law", Paul says the law makes all men (meaning all men everywhere in all times and in all places) accountable (Romans 3:19) to God. How is that? We have our answer, which I will more fully develop shortly. Because the Person holding all men accountable *is* the Law. When the sheep and the goats are divided, Christ doesn't have to whip out the Mosaic law from the Old Testament in order to judge men. Christ, by His very nature, Person, and work, provides the context for the division of the sheep and the goats.

In fact, I think we can argue that the finality of the Mosaic law's form consummates a few years after Christ's death. And a tip off to that thought occurs in Matthew. He has an allusion to the law becoming abolished. Now, I want to state up front that I'm not going to fully develop this thought. I just want to put it on the table and suggest that more work needs to be done in this area. "I have not come to abolish the law, I am here as a lawkeeper. But oh, by the way, there will come a point in time, sooner rather than later, in which the law will be abolished". Remember, this word "abolish" is the same word that is translated as "destroy". The allusion is found in Matthew 27:40, and verse 40 is set up by verse 20:

Matthew 27:20: “Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.” Matthew here is setting up a juxtaposition in this chapter.

Matthew 27:40: “And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Now, unlike John, Matthew places this quote on the lips of his accusers.

This quote had shown up in Christ’s trial as an accusation (and not coincidentally, is the same accusation lodged against Stephen in his trial; compare Matthew 26:61 with Acts 6:14). We know the witnesses at Christ’s trial to be false witnesses in the sense that Christ had done nothing wrong; but the accusation in and of itself is completely accurate. We know this because of the account John provides us in John 2. And here on Golgotha the accusation shows up again in the form of mockery (it’s also another form of Satan’s temptation; compare Matthew 27:40 with Matthew 4:5).

The religious leaders who held the trial persuaded the crowd to “release Barabbas and destroy Jesus”. And the irony is in Matthew’s juxtaposition. Even as they “destroy” Jesus (as he had suggested in John 2), Christ is “destroying” the temple, or at least setting the stage for it to be destroyed (in A.D. 70). And certainly, this is how Stephen understood it, if we follow what he unpacks in his sermon (Acts 7).

Now, there is more than this simple juxtaposition taking place in Matthew. This thought of “destroying” temple is connected to the word “abolish” in Matthew 5:17. And this is where more work needs to be done. One cannot have “temple” without “law”. The two are inseparable. The giving of the law resulted in the creation of the tabernacle and “law” regulated everything that occurred in the tabernacle. This is reiterated when David dedicated the tabernacle after bringing the ark of the covenant back to it (1 Chronicles 17:40), it’s confirmed at Solomon’s dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 6:14-17), and it’s a central thought in the entire account of Josiah’s “discovery” of the law in the temple (2 Chronicles 34:14ff). Temple and law were inseparably bound to each other. So much so, that in Matthew’s use of “abolish” and “destroy”, to “destroy” the temple is to “abolish” the law. What we have in the destruction of the temple, embodied in the “destruction” of Christ’s “temple”, is the ending of the Mosaic law (and covenant: the end of the temple signals the end of the Mosaic covenant). The old law has given way to a new One, Christ himself. And the upshot of Matthew’s connection between Matthew 5:17 and 27:40, for our discussion within and without New Covenant Theology, is that Christ’s statement in Matthew 5:17 cannot be understood as a universal. There is an eschatological trajectory to the 5:17 statement which is connected to Christ’s work on the cross. Christ is not positing a truism for all places, all people, and all time, at least at it relates to the Mosaic form of the law. It must be understood within and limited to the framework of his place and his ministry in that moment in redemptive history.

Now, I have focused on the law to make a point because of the nature of this discussion both within and without New Covenant Theology. Christ says I have not come to destroy or abolish the law OR the prophets. We will look at that particle “or” shortly, but

everything I have said above about the “law” is also true of the entire Old Testament. And we will see that in a moment.

Sermon on the Mount OT: Fulfill

How is it, then, that we can say Christ is Law Incarnate? The answer is found in the word “fulfill”. Even more fundamental to Christ's relationship to the Old Testament in the Sermon on the Mount and how He understands that relationship is in the word “fulfill”. Again, I'm going to be very brief. One question that comes up in our circles (and it's interesting, it's simply not on the radar of most scholarship; I've seen this only in our own NCT community) is whether or not Christ is speaking of the whole Old Testament. The question surrounds the use of the particle word that is translated “or”, in the “Law or the Prophets”. Again, most commentators treat this phrase the same as they would the “Law AND the Prophets”, i.e. this is a common Jewish reference to the whole of the Old Testament. This phrase is used repeatedly throughout the New Testament as a reference to the Old Testament scriptures, and it occurs more than once in Matthew (Matthew 7:12 – another reference within the Sermon, 11:13, and 22:40; this also includes the mount of Transfiguration where the law is represented by Moses and the prophets are represented by Elijah in Matthew 17:1-8). I think the commentators are right to treat “law or prophets” as a reference to the Tanakh or Old Testament.

However, here, I do think there is a subtle change in the way Christ speaks of the Old Testament... and I believe it has everything to do with the way he understands the word “fulfill” and has everything to do with how He views himself in regards to redemptive history. In using the participle “or” (in Greek, (ε), vs. (και); see Matthew 7:12), Christ isn't simply positing himself as the One who is fulfilling various aspects of the Old Testament. Christ erases any question here as to what his mission is and how he understands himself in light of the Old Testament. Rather, in making this subtle distinction, Christ makes it very clear, that he is comprehensively and exhaustively filling up the entire Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi to its fullest measure. Whether the Law OR the Prophets, no matter where you go in the Old Testament, Christ says, I am filling it up to its fullest measure. And this is exactly how He explains himself to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus and later in the upper room to his disciples in Luke 24. In other words, the participle “or” here doesn't limit the scope of Christ's fulfillment; quite the opposite. It broadens and expands the scope to its widest possible understanding. Christ has come to fulfill the entire Old Testament, every “jot and tittle” (to borrow the KJV language) of the Old Testament.

Fulfill: Filling up to the fullest measure in the fullness of time

The word “fulfill” is prompts the most controversy. And much has been written about it in our circles and in dispensational and covenantal circles. One must arrive at some definition of “fulfill”, for how one defines “fulfill” is reflective of one's entire hermeneutical and theological paradigm. The moment one engages the text of scripture, especially as the New Testament interprets the Old, one is confronted with having to define “fulfill”. In

fact, as I said previously, even beyond one's biblical hermeneutic, wrapped up and bound up in this discussion of "fulfill" is one's worldview, one's hermeneutic of the world.

For brevity's sake, I'm going to forgo a long treatment of "fulfill" here, and I believe Ed's presentation develops his more fully (no pun intended, ha). What I would like to do is skip right to the definition I believe best explains the word "fulfill" albeit with some tweaking.

The most common way to understand "fulfill" in our evangelicalism is reflective of the way dispensationalists handle the word "fulfill". In our Christmas and Easter stories, especially, pop evangelicalism speaks of "fulfill" as if what is happening in the New Covenant or New Testament is making some prophecy or some aspect of prophecy of the Old Testament come to pass. "Fulfill" is understood almost exclusively in a predictive sense... simply making predictions come true. Such a definition is completely lacking an eschatological orientation, and more often than not fails to understand any Christological significance to Old Testament prophecy. In fact, in some instances, it's almost as if Christ makes Old Testament prophecies come true by accident.

Another popular way, especially in Reformed circles, is to speak of "fulfill" in terms of "bringing to realization". This is better than the predictive view, because it acknowledges that there is both an intention in the Old Testament, and an intention with the Messiah himself in bringing these shadows to pass. "Bringing to realization" is very helpful in understanding "fulfill" in that it sees in Christ a goal and purpose of the Old Testament prophetic word, both in narrative, historical, poetic, and prophetic form. But even this definition doesn't go far enough.

Before I get to the definition which I think best explains "fulfill", here's how Strong's defines "pleroo": "to make replete, that is, (literally) to cram (a net), level up (a hollow), or (figuratively) to furnish (or imbue, diffuse, influence), satisfy, execute (an office), finish (a period or task), verify (or coincide with a prediction), etc.: - accomplish, X after, (be) complete, end, expire, fill (up), fulfil, (be, make) full (come), fully preach, perfect, supply."

The interesting thing about where we are headed with this word is that if we look at the text and understand how Matthew is using this word, and how Christ uses the word in the Sermon on the Mount, to hone in on any one aspect of this word "fulfill" is going to skew the entire exegesis interpretation. In other words, it would seem to me that at any given point in time, as Christ is fulfilling the Old Testament, any one of these things or more or all of them at the same time are in play, especially those words "satisfy", "execute", "finish", "accomplish", "complete", "end" (or probably better "bring to an end", "fill", "full", and the last one is very important to our discussion: "perfect". As Christ fulfills the Old Testament, he "satisfies" the Old Testament expectations, he "executes" the Old Testament demands and requirements, he "finishes" and "brings to an end" the work of redemption first promised in Genesis 3:15, he accomplishes that which had been laid out for salvation, he "completes" and "perfects" all of the types and shadows, and he "fills" "full" all of the Messianic anticipation of the Old Testament.

Fulfill: Wells/Zaspel

I think Wells/Zaspel come very close to capturing the essence of fulfill, though I don't agree with everything they say in their extrapolation of their definition. Here's Wells/Zaspel: to "reach its climax", "reached culmination", "accomplishment", and "realization".

Hence, W/Z write that the Matthean use of pleroo "makes a clear announcement that God's purposes have reached their culmination in Jesus... the sense of fulfillment is a broad, redemptive-historical one."

W/Z quote Carson... "the OT was preparing the way for Christ, anticipating him, pointing to him, leading up to him."

W/Z further: "At Jesus' baptism, he claims to embody the practice of righteousness which God requires of all men. The idea is 'accomplishment' and 'realization of God's purposes' is not far away... It would appear from the general Matthean use of 'fulfill' (pleroo) that Jesus' claim (in 5:17) is intended to be understood in an eschatological sense... Jesus himself...specifies (in Luke 16:16-18) that the law had a prophetic/prospective function; it anticipated Jesus Christ who brought about its expectations; namely, the kingdom. And the coming of the kingdom affected the law... Christ brought the 'full' eschatological intent of the law to final realization. Moses survives, but only as he is taken up into Christ."

Not only does a "new temple" anticipate the abolishment of the old law of the old temple, so too does a "new kingdom" anticipate "new law". If there is a new kingdom, there has been a change in "law" (Even some scholars, such as W.D. Davies, point out that there were some in the rabbinical tradition who were convinced that the new messianic kingdom required new Torah.)

And again, notice that last sentence from W/Z. Moses survives, the law's eternity is true and is not "abolished" per se, because it is taken up into Christ.

More W/Z: "It is entirely arguable that Matthew's whole theological motivation in writing his Gospel may be summed up in this one word - 'fulfilled'... For Matthew, Jesus is the fulfillment of all the expectations regarding David's and Abraham's son, and he is the one who 'fills full' all the promises made throughout Israel's history. Speak of Bethlehem, Galilee, the Messiah, the King of Israel/the Jews, the suffering Servant of Jehovah, the Son of Man, or any of a host of other terms pregnant with expectation, and Jesus is the Fulfiler, the answer and goal of them all..."

And if we think that somehow W/Z mistakenly have left out Matthew's portrayal of Christ as re-enacting Israel's history from that list... we read further in Wells/Zaspel: "Matthew reveals a keen awareness of redemptive history that causes him to see in the person of Jesus a realization of all of Israel's long hopes (cf 11:13). he very casually sees in Jesus' ascent from Egypt, for example, a 'fulfilling' of the experience of the nation of Israel (2:15; cf Hos. 11:1)."

And W/Z quote R.T. France in this regard, "What may seem to us as an embarrassingly obscure and even irresponsible way of handling scripture is in fact the outworking of a careful tracing of scriptural themes, which in different ways point to Jesus as the fulfiller not only of specific predictions, but also of the broader pattern of God's Old Testament revelation....this typology is not so much a hermeneutical technique as a theological conviction which expresses itself in various ways in Matthew's presentation of Jesus' life and teaching. Its effect is to show Jesus as the point at which all the rich diversity of God's relations with his people in word and deed converges; that is what 'fulfillment' means for Matthew." -- Wells/Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*, pp. 112-114.

This last point of France's is **why** W/Z understate what is happening in 2:15 a bit. It is not a "casual" observance. The strength of "fulfill" in Matthew 2:15, 2:17, 2:23, 1:22, 3:15, and 4:14 is the same as it is in Matthew 5:17. It's the same word with the same meaning with the same force and intent. These passages are all interconnected. This isn't simply "casual" observation. There is intent on Matthew's part to show us in his account of Christ's life, death, and resurrection how Christ's fill up the Old Testament. And there is intent on Christ's part in speaking and orchestrating all of these things to show us how he fills up the Old Testament. For example, Christ walks into the desert knowing full well that he is recapitulating in his person the experience of Israel. It's not an accident (or even a point of exegetical speculation) that Christ is tested in the wilderness. It's not an accident that Christ is in the wilderness "40" days. Christ is orchestrating all of this, not only for us to make the connection, but to bring our salvation to pass. We can say the same thing about all of the other points where Christ and the Old Testament intersect in the book of Matthew. More on this in a moment.

So... "fulfill" for Matthew means the culmination of anticipation, the point of convergence, the final eschatological goal realized in Christ. Fulfill doesn't merely mean that Christ made a prediction come true. W/Z, France, Carson, Moo & a host of others push back against that popular and inadequate notion of "fulfill". "Fulfill" means that Christ "fills up" all that was intended by God in his revelation, his promises, and redemptive history. Christ fulfills not simply in speech, but in "act". What was promised, expected, and anticipated in the past has come to fruition in the endgoal of what was revealed and promised... and this end goal is sitting on the mount dwelling fulfilling the Old Testament even as he speaks.

Christ, in Matthew 5:17, isn't merely saying that the Old Testament predicted his coming. He isn't merely saying that he is bringing the Old Testament to realization. The entire Old Testament anticipates something in the future, and Christ is saying He **is** the something greater of the Old Testament. He is the endpoint, the end goal, the exhaustive and comprehensive satisfaction of all things Genesis to Malachi. And each one of the selective fulfillment passages in Matthew has this thought in mind. Christ fills up the fullest measure of the Law and Prophets in the "fullness of time". This idea of "fulfillment", this idea of "filling up", includes the fullness of times, or as Vos says, "the arrival at a predetermined goal" (Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, p. 26) in redemptive history through Christ's appearance as Messiah. Christ's fulfillment of the Old Testament brings

the Old Testament, in both its history and revelation, to its predetermined goal. In fulfilling the whole of the Old Testament, Christ posits himself as its dominant figure, toward which everything contained therein moved in an eschatological trajectory.

And in the controversial sense of what is taking place in Matthew 5:17 and 18, the Law itself has its fullest and highest expression in coming to fruition and culmination in Christ. Law, as revelation and expression of the divine will, does not escape this cataclysmic shift in redemptive history. Contra the silly expectations of the Pharisees, the anticipation of the Old Testament isn't being fulfilled in their practice of Old Testament law, their duties and teaching at the temple and synagogues, or even political aspirations for Israel the nation, but in a Person.

Fulfill: J.M. Gibbs

There's one other point to be made on this word "fulfill". In his article "The Son of God as the Torah Incarnate in Matthew", J. M. Gibbs points out something I had not seen before in Matthew and this word "fulfill", even as I disagree in the end with how he defines "fulfill". I think he is on to something, especially as Matthew unpacks "fulfill" throughout his book. Gibbs defines "fulfill" as "to embody by action". Thus, in relation to the Torah, Gibbs suggests that Christ is "enfleshing the Torah". This is both helpful and doesn't go far enough. He rightly points out that fulfill is always attached to "action" in Matthew rather than words. We will see that in a moment when we walk through Matthew.

This is helpful, in the sense that it lends further credence to the idea that Christ's fulfillment wasn't simply by virtue of who he was. Christ doesn't simply show up on the scene and, by virtue of his being the second person of the Godhead, declare himself to be "fulfiller". His *actions* fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. It also makes sense in light of Matthew's "literary markers" and their use of "perfect" in a progressive way (remember, the last "marker" includes the word "all").

Further, fulfill attached to "action" also ties "fulfill" to the chronological and progressive, even as it is eschatological. And that's the problem with defining "fulfill" as simply "to embody by action". Gibbs' definition is totally lacking an eschatological dimension. These "actions" are bringing to fruition all that the OT pointed towards. Christ's fulfillment is the "yes" and "amen" of the Old Testament. Christ is the Alpha and Omega of the Old Testament. He "enfleshes" the Torah, because he not only does "Torah", he becomes, in and of himself, all that the Torah was ever meant to portray and be. Christ is the full and final revelation of the Tanakh (see Hebrews 1:1-2), including Torah. From the moment that the first commandment is given to Adam, and from the moment the law is delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai in shekinah glory, Christ not only was fingering the law on stone, Christ was present in the revelation of the law in shadow form. And now he sits on another more glorious mount declaring that he is that law's fullest and highest expression and essence. It's not simply that he speaks Torah (as some commentators and scholars are inclined to see). Christ doesn't simply *do* Torah, and somehow expresses the true meaning of Torah in his actions (which is how Gibbs understands Torah Incarnate). Christ himself fills up to fullest measure and becomes everything Torah foreshadowed and revealed.

Christ embodies, in word and deed, everything *about* Torah. Going beyond Gibbs, Christ's "enfleshment" not only is an interpretation of "Torah", it is the fullest and final interpretation of Torah. Christ has become, in and of himself, the so-called "third use of the law". His embodiment of the Torah not only becomes the Torah's highest expression, he himself becomes the New Standard of holiness par excellence.

Rather than just declaring it to be so, let's see this unpacked in Matthew.

Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets

Matthew 1:22 "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to **fulfill** what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)." Here's an example of what is meant in the word "fulfill". Matthew says here "all this took place to fill to its highest measure" the meaning, anticipation, and expectation of the Isaiah text (Isaiah 7:1ff), even to the embodiment and essence of everything ever said about the concept of Emmanuel in the Old Testament. From God walking in the cool of the garden with Adam and Eve, to the burning bush, to the glory cloud in the wilderness, to the shekinah glory cloud descended on the temple during Solomon's dedication, Christ fills up to the fullest and highest measure all of the Old Testament's anticipation and expectation of God dwelling among His people. Everything Israel ever thought to be true about God being their God and they being His people finds its culmination of anticipation, the point of convergence, the final eschatological goal realized in Christ, the Emmanuel.

Matthew 2:15: "And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to **fulfill** what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." We can go to Hosea 11, and begin to go verse by verse showing how Christ fills up to its highest measure all of the expectations and anticipation in Hosea 11.

Matthew 2:17: "Then was **fulfilled** what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more." Whether or not there was a lady named Rachel in Jeremiah's day whose children were killed is irrelevant for the point being made about "fulfilled" (I tend to think that there was). What is important to see here is that, even as this event unfolds after Christ's birth, in the person and history of Jesus Christ, the fullest and finest measure, the comprehensive and exhaustive meaning for the Jeremiah passage has come to fruition.

Matthew 2:23: "And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be **fulfilled**: "He shall be called a Nazarene." Again, we can come to the passage in Isaiah 11, and show how Christ fills up to the fullest measure all that is anticipated in a branch coming out of lowly Nazareth.

Matthew 4:14: "And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be **fulfilled**: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the

Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Everything intended, anticipated and expected in the prophet Isaiah is coming to fruition and highest expression in Jesus Christ (and yes, even those things which have yet to be consummated at the very end of the age chronologically. The eschatological fulfillment of the Old Testament is comprehensively Jesus Christ).

Matthew 8:17: “That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to **fulfill** what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.” What was written about in Isaiah 53, to the fullest and highest measure is filled up and subsumed in the person of Christ Jesus.

Matthew 12:17: “And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to **fulfill** what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

Matthew 13:35: “All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to **fulfill** what was spoken by the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.”

Matthew 21:4: “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” This took place to **fulfill** what was spoken by the prophet, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, **your king** is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

Matthew 27:9: “Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was **fulfilled** what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.” Interesting thing about this act of fulfillment, it envelopes two OT accounts... both Jeremiah’s and that account which was in the backdrop of Jeremiah’s prophecy, the story of Joseph being sold into slavery.

Again, notice Gibbs’ point. All of these instances involve actions. Previously, we noted the literary markers in Matthew and the use of “perfect” and “finished”. All of the literary markers were attached to the end of discourses or Christ’s speech. Here, all of the passages in Matthew using the word “fulfill” are attached to action, most notably, Christ’s **acts**. Christ is **doing** something, actively, to bring about fulfillment.

“Fulfill” as interpretive key

If we bring these together, we have a sense of a “word” and “deed”, or “speech” and “act”, rhythm throughout the Matthew’s gospel. Follow all of these through the text of Matthew, especially as each literary marker brings a sense of something being perfected, and this fulfillment of all things Old Testament is progressive. Each “fulfill”, using various Old Testament passages, brings with it a sense of fulfillment that wasn’t true before. There both a time and eschatological element to fulfill. The time element is inseparably connected to eternity. In the incarnation, Christ bring heaven and time together. This is the in breaking of a kingdom from above and with it is a fulfillment of all things Old Testament. Time and eternity are coming together in the word “fulfill”, because Christ is fulfilling the Old Testament in the fullness of time, the anticipated end of that which had been spoken by the prophets (Heb. 1:1-2).

And what is most interesting is that we are given a divine interpretation from the Son who would be King who sits among His people as a light to the nations. Using the word “fulfill”, Christ places himself within the broad scope of redemptive history. If we want to know the trajectory of this fulfillment, if would want to see an explanation for the Incarnation, if we would want to know how it is that this Son who would be King, if we want to know how it is that those who are blessed were ever bestowed with and imputed a righteousness that is from above and not their own, if we want to know how it is that this David-Moses has pronounced blessing on His people, we must know that he himself satisfies all of the expectations and desires of His people with this pronouncement: **“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.”**

This statement, “I have come to fulfill”, is a statement of hope for North, South, East, and West Israel. This is a statement of wonder for those who have been called out as disciples. Matthew’s original audience must gaze in amazement at the One who sits on the mount. Christ here isn’t simply giving us an academic answer to our questions about what happens to the Old Testament or what happens to the Law. No! Christ places himself at the center of all redemptive history, and posits himself as the anticipated endpoint for all history and revelation! All of Israel’s hopes and dreams were bound up in the future Davidic Heir, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, who now sit in front of them ascended as a Covenant King for His people. All of their highest aspirations for meaning, purpose, and glory, fueled by Old Testament expectation, are attached to the Messiah who now dwells in the flesh among his people. And here we have the heir to the Davidic throne sitting on the Mount proclaiming about those expectations “I am He”.

And wherever Matthew’s audience goes in the book of Matthew, and wherever we go in the book of Matthew, whenever we run across this word “fulfill”, because of Christ’s declaration in Matthew 5:17, we are confronted with the Davidic Heir who comes filling up the Old Testament along with all of it anticipation and expectation, filling it up to its fullest measure. Anywhere this word “fulfill” occurs in Matthew now must be interpreted in light of the One who has proclaimed, “I have come to fulfill”.

“Fulfill” and “finish”: the rhythm of redemptive history

This fulfilling, then, fills out (ha!) what is being perfected. And we can trace the progression of the word “perfect” through the lens provided for us in Matthew 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.” These two thoughts become woven together throughout the fabric of Matthew.

7:28-8:1: "And when Jesus **finished** (perfected) these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,... when he came down..."

Notice the rhythm here between acting or performing and speaking. “I have come to fulfill”... “when Jesus finished these sayings.” This is the rhythm of all of scripture: God speaks, God acts, God interprets his act. Redemptive history is bound up with Christ’s actions and speech.

Matthew 8:17: “...This was to **fulfill** what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah...”

Matthew 11:1: “When Jesus had **finished** (perfected) instructing his twelve disciples..”

Matthew 13:35: “This was to **fulfill** what was spoken by the prophet...”

Matthew 13:53-54: “And when Jesus had **finished** (perfected) these parables...”

Matthew 21:4: This took place to **fulfill** what was spoken by the prophet...

Matthew 26:1: "When Jesus had **finished** (perfected) all these sayings, he said to his disciples..."

Matthew 27:9 Then was **fulfilled** what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah

There’s the rhythm... fulfill, perfect, fulfill, perfect, fulfill, perfect.

“Fulfill” in Matthew 5:17 and Matthew 3:15

Finally, there is one “fulfill” (pleroo) and one “perfect” (teleio) that we have left out of the discussion so far, because these as they are connected have everything to do with all that is taking place in the Sermon on the Mount and indeed in the rest of Matthew. This isn’t simply fulfilling the Old Testament and perfecting his mission for fulfilling and perfecting’s sake. We are the blessed beneficiaries of all that he spoke and accomplished.

Matthew 3:15 is a critical “fulfill” passage leading into the Sermon on the Mount. Beginning with verse 13. Remember there was a question about whether John was going to baptize Christ: “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” A lot of scholars spill a lot of ink trying to figure out just what is being “fulfilled” in Christ’s baptism. Certainly it is true that Christ had to be baptized in order to identify with a sinful people. But that is only the half of it.

Understood in light of the Sermon on the Mount and its central theme, there is more to it than simply identifying with a sinful people. After all, why is it necessary to identify with a sinful people?

If righteousness is at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, when Christ says in the Sermon's thesis statement "I have come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets", he is giving answer to the dilemma he posits just a few verses later, in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, one's righteousness "must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees". How is it that anyone could ever dream of having a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees? And how is it that I, one of the many sinful people, will ever be "perfect, even as my Father in heaven is perfect?"

Contra a Jewish culture wrapped up in asserting its own righteousness, the kingdom citizen hungers and thirsts for a righteousness that only the King can satisfy... they seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. But this righteousness is beyond the grasp of the kingdom citizen. One must feel the weight of this. The kingdom citizen hungers and thirsts for a righteousness that cannot and will not be his own.

And as we track just what it is that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees through the rest of the Sermon on the Mount we might be driven to the point of depression. How is it that one could be more righteous than those who dedicated their entire existence to promoting their own righteousness? These Pharisees are those who have championed obedience to God's law on their own terms, and in so doing, have come to have confidence in their own righteousness. The righteousness of their kingdom is attainable. These are they who are confident that the kingdom rewards the kind of righteousness applauded by men. If entrance to the kingdom requires a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees, those paragons of Jewish virtue, how can anyone enter? This Sermon on the Mount proposes an ideal so high and unattainable, Christianity's critics have scoffed at the ethic here, suggesting such severe demands are unjust and even unethical. No one can live up to the standard proposed by this king on this mountain. And they are right.

But there is hope to be found in the Sermon on the Mount. There is hope in the relationship between "fulfill" and "finish" as they are accomplished by the Son who would be King. The answer to such a severe dilemma is found in the One who declares, "I have come to fulfill all righteousness, and I have come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets". The One who sits on the Mount, teaching the people among whom he dwells, is, in fulfilling all of the Old Testament and in fulfilling the law, fulfilling all righteousness. Not one prophecy, not one narrative escapes Christ's fulfillment. Not one command is not touched by Christ's perfect obedience to the law. As Christ fills the Old Testament up to its highest measure and as he obeys and satisfies the law to its fullest end, Christ is filling up to the fullest measure the righteousness necessary for those without hope otherwise.

And as that rhythm courses through the rest of Matthew, we have "fulfill, perfect, fulfill, perfect, fulfill, perfect", all the way to the cross and resurrection, ending on another mount where the One who has perfected all righteousness declares, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and earth... and I am with you always, even to the end of the age".

Against the backdrop of Matthew 3:15, when Christ declares on the Mount “I have come to fulfill”, he is declaring “I have come to solve the dilemma... You who are hungering and thirsting after a righteousness that is beyond your grasp, I have come to fulfill everything that was ever anticipated in the Old Testament, and in doing so, everything I do, everything I say, as I finish and perfect all that I came to do is bringing about the righteousness you lack. You need righteousness. You hunger and thirst for righteousness. I have come to give you that righteousness.” Fulfill, perfect, fulfill, perfect, fulfill, perfect; the rhythm of redemptive history in the book of Matthew is providing us with a righteousness in the One who is perfecting and fulfilling our salvation on our behalf.

The banquet of blessing

We must end this in a Matthean parallel to the blessings and cursings of the Sermon on the Mount. Remember the blessings and woes of the Sermon on the Mount? The blessings of this new covenant that is coming occur in the beatitudes. And we find the cursings in the last part of the Sermon on the Mount. Among the blessings is this blessing which is tied to the theme of the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for a righteousness that is not their own, a righteousness that they have no chance of ever obtaining... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for a righteousness that is outside of themselves, a righteousness found in the one who fulfills all righteousness.” One must wonder how it is that those who are “blessed” in the beatitudes ever come by their blessedness.

The answer is found in a parallel to the beatitudes which occurs in Matthew 22. In the latter part of Matthew’s book we find blessing and cursing as well. And in Matthew 22 we find blessing before Christ pronounces woes on the Pharisees in chapter 23. What we find in Matthew 22 has everything to do with “blessed are those” and “I have come to fulfill”. Beginning with verse 1: “And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “**The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.’ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.**

“**But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.**”

The wedding hall was filled with those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness. And those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness have been given wedding garments of a righteousness that is not their own. How is it that those in the Sermon on the Mount come to be blessed? They are blessed because they have been given seats at the banquet table of the Son who would be King. And the only way to get a seat at the banquet table of the Son who would be King is for that Son who would be King to fill up to the fullest measure every last drop of the Old Testament, and in doing so all the way to the cross, obtain for His people a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. Oh my soul, we must see ourselves as those unworthy guests, feasting at a table at a banquet do not deserve, donned with a righteousness we never had a chance of obtaining. All thanks to the One for whom the banquet has been thrown, the One who no longer sits on that mount, but sits on a throne having been given all authority in heaven and earth.