

[3] And deep down their original desire to glorify God had deteriorated into seeking glory for themselves. As Jesus says in Matthew 23:5: all you do is done for men to see. The whole of c23 is a judgement of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law for the failure to be truly righteous.

Matthew, if we want to know what it is to positively live a righteousness better than the Pharisees, has already given us an example and Jesus has already declared its key qualities.

Matthew's example is Joseph. Mary's betrothed husband was a righteous man, so he struggled over what to do when he discovered that Mary, before they had consummated their contracted marriage, was pregnant. Righteousness is a tussle in our being between our hearts and our minds. Our hearts of faith say do this, our minds of the law [or even worse of the world] say you can't do that.

God helped Joseph do the right thing through the visit of an angel. We are not to seek angels to lead us, for we have someone even better, we have the Holy Spirit. As Paul tells us in Romans 8:5 those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. And He desires to lead us in Godly right living so our living honours God.

Jesus at the very beginning of His sermon sets out what is essential. Not rules for doing but attitudes of being. We grow the beatitudes in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Keeping external rules is irksome. Living God's way is abounding blessing.

Here I invite us all to a quiz of our hearts.

Read Matthew c5 verses 3 to 12, with a heart open to the Holy Spirit.

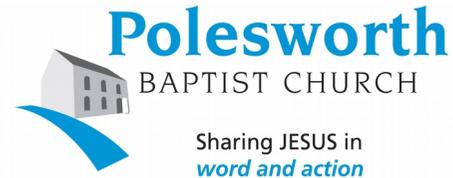
See each and all the Beatitudes as a promised blessing of God.

Let the Holy Spirit speak into you, even if in just one of them – *“my daughter, my son, I want to bless you with great joy in this way”* – this is God's gift of His joy within you as you give yourself to living rightly in Him.

Led by the Spirit your righteousness will exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. The more you live in these ways the greater will be your present blessing and your eternal reward in heaven.

Pray, may the Lord the Holy Spirit speak into your hearts

Rev Nick



Sunday 31st January
Reflecting on Matthew 5 v 17 to 20
Jesus has not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets

First look at the Libre Office Impress Presentation: Optical Illusions

I'm sure you know this, but what we see in the world is seen through the processing of our brain. We don't just see what the light brings in, we see according to the way our brain has been trained to see things. Hence the famous glass ½ empty, glass ½ full interpretation of a 50% glass of water.

Now open the slide show of optical illusions – if you haven't already - to help us understand that the way we see Scripture, such as the OT, is shaped by the way we see things. As well of course by the Holy Spirit.

This is very much a see and respond session, not a study and analyse, so we're not pausing to examine each slide but looking for instant responses.

Matthew 5:17-20 [NIV 1984]

‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Anyone who breaks 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 practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Looking at vs17-18 Us, Jesus and Old Testament

Many people just cant take the OT. That goes back a long way. In the second century a son of a bishop, a man called Marcion re-wrote the New Testament to cut out all its references to the Old Testament – including this passage. Andy Stanley an American Pastor who leads a mega church in Atlanta, says that the Gospel “is completely detached ... from everything that came before.” and that “Christians should unhitch their faith from the Old Testament.”

But it's in the Gospel that Jesus says, He did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, that's the Hebraic way of referring to the Old Testament, but to fulfil them. He is saying you can't make sense of me and my Father, of who I am and what I am doing unless you see me in the Old Testament.

We have a puzzle. We know what abolish means: throw over, and cast away. And the New Testament clearly shows that we are not to e.g. be circumcised, which was a central to the Old Law, so what does fulfilling the OT mean?

Its primary meaning here, seems to me, is this: to make up what is lacking, to satisfy what has been desired, to complete something by bringing it to an end. But that end is not necessarily a simple closure.

Let's consider an everyday example. Perhaps in the lock-down you've leapt into cleaning action. But before you can satisfy your desire to clean your home your vacuum breaks down, and you can't complete your work. You consult the good advice of family, friends and websites. You organise a new vacuum. You go online. You make your order. You pay the price. But you have to wait for it to be delivered. You receive it. Open the box. Take it out. Hopefully read how it works. Put it together and then use it to fulfil your cleaning plan. But cleaning doesn't stop there. It is not a once only event, but a continuing process. You'll have to keep cleaning until the end of the earth. Yet do you see that the focus is not the vacuum but you the cleaner. The vacuum is simply the tool you are using, to fulfil your desire, your plan, your purpose of maintaining a clean home.

In the same way the Old Testament is God's means to bring us to Jesus so that through Him we can live with God. God's eternal purpose is for Him to dwell with us and us with Him. It's the primary theme of the OT, it's the goal of Christ in the Gospel, it's the daily pilgrimage of the Church, it's the New Creation life.

Jesus fulfils scripture c 1 to c4

Matthew has many references, explicit and implicit showing us that Jesus Christ in His being makes up what is lacking in the OT: in them our salvation is promised; in Christ our salvation is accomplished. That's why He came. To fulfil that promise. He is the son of Abraham through whom God's blessing is offered to the world. Sin and evil are done for but there's a gap between the start and the finalising of that. In this age there is always dust to be cleaned.

But in Jesus it will one day be finished, until then it is a continuing Kingdom work. Jesus is the pivot of all God's activity. All the Law and the Prophets lead to Him. As the risen Jesus said to the disciples in Luke 24:44 everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the

Psalms [that is the OT] Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. And what were those Scriptures? They were the Old Testament. In them is the message that Jesus would suffer and rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached to in His name to all nations. Filled with the Holy Spirit we are called to that work. By the Holy Spirit we see that the OT applies to us today.

Looking at c5 vs 19-20: Jesus, Us and righteousness

Very briefly. The OT Law., according to Martin Lloyd Jones in his classic reflection on the Sermon on the Mount can be seen as having 3 parts:

Judicial. This rested on Israel being a Theocracy ie a people directly ruled by God. But in Matthew 21:43 Jesus declares that the Kingdom of God, that is the theocratic rule of God, will be taken away from Israel and given to a people who will produce its fruit. This aspect of the Law is fulfilled in Christ for Israel today is not a Theocracy, but the Church is, for Christ is our head. We are a people committed to living under the rule of the Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ceremonial. How we worship God. We don't e.g. offer ritual sacrifice or build a stone temple. Christ is the final sacrifice & by the Holy Spirit we are God's living Temple. The ceremonial law lives in us as we live in Christ.

Moral. We are God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God therefore as e.g. Peter tells us we are called to abstain from sin, and live good lives, expressed in good deeds, which leads others to glorify God. The moral law is meant to be visibly alive in the lives of Christ's people.

So we come to Jesus telling us that we are to live lives which exceed that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in righteousness. Yet these were the people honoured in Israel for being righteous! However Jesus identifies three main faults in their righteousness:

[1] They kept the law in their outward behaviour but not in their hearts. So as Luke tells us in 13:14 instead of celebrating that Jesus healing people in the synagogue on a Sabbath they told Him of for working.

[2] They created rules to help people keep the Law but were willing to use those rules to avoid their deeper Law commitments, as e.g. we see in Mark c7 where they say set aside the commandment to honour their parents by saying the help they could have given has gone instead to God. They posture their way out of obedience.