

OpenTheo

Peace and Persecution, Salt and Light (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg provides an explanation for the analogy of salt and light mentioned in the Bible. He explains how salt was valued in ancient times for its germ-killing and preservative powers, and how its loss of savor represents a decline in its effectiveness. Similarly, the idea of being the light of the world implies a responsibility to guide others in the right direction based on the word of God. Ultimately, being the salt and light of the world requires Christians to impart a quality of righteousness that is able to preserve and guide others in the midst of degenerating influences.

Transcript

...had other elements in it too. If someone came to your neighbor and said, do you have any salt? It's possible that what they'd give them was partially salt and partially other minerals and stuff that they couldn't separate from the salt. Now, it was not unheard of for this mixture that they would refer to as salt to actually, through exposure to moisture or something else, have all the actual salt leach out of it.

And then what you had in your pot that you were calling salt didn't have any salt in it anymore. It was unsalty. And in those days, there was certainly no way to restore the salt to it.

I mean, if you could take the salt and isolate it, you wouldn't have the mixture itself in the first place. There was no way to re-salt this thing and to make it useful as salt anymore. It just becomes so much useless mineral mass in your kitchen and you just toss it outside.

It gets walked on. That's what he means if the salt loses its savor. Salt as we know it can't lose its savor.

It's salt and salt is always salty. It's part of the definition of being salt or it's part of the definition of being salty. But he was talking to a situation where they did have substance that they would call salt because of its salty flavor.

But its salty flavor was not due to the fact that it was salt but that it had salt in it, in the

mix. And that salt could, under certain conditions, be leached out and no longer be there, in which case the mix had nothing to commend it as salt anymore. Now, having said all that, you can now understand why Jesus spoke about the possibility of salt losing its flavor and the impossibility of re-seasoning it.

But perhaps it's more important for us to look at what he's trying to say from the metaphor. In what sense were the people hearing him at that time, who were his disciples, in what sense were they the salt of the earth? Now, there have been many suggestions made. Some of them make more sense than others.

But, of course, we're talking about a metaphor. Human beings are not salt. They've got salt in them.

They're partially salt, but that certainly is not what he's referring to. He's not referring to their actual chemical makeup. He's using a metaphor.

He's saying that, in some respects, Christians in the world are like salt. But, to understand what he means by that, we'd have to have some idea of what salt was used for, what salt meant to his hearers. Now, a lot of suggestions have been made.

As a matter of fact, because of the great difficulty of coming up with anything like pure salt, salt was itself highly valued. It was expensive. We are told that Roman soldiers, at a certain time in history, were paid in salt rather than cash, because salt was of such great value.

In fact, the word salary, that we now speak of the wages of a worker, comes from the same root as the word saline or salty. A Roman soldier's salary sometimes was salt, because it had value. And some have felt like Jesus was saying, well, Christians are the only thing of value in the world.

They're the salt of the earth. They're the only thing that God really values. Everything else is worthless.

I don't want to take the time to critique that theological perspective as to whether it's true that Christians are the only thing of value that God values on the earth. That, perhaps, could be debated both ways, but that's, in my opinion, probably not what he meant. There is a much less obscure meaning that would probably have commended itself first to the disciples.

Of course, salt was used for seasoning then, as now. And there's a sense in which some foods without salt are fairly unpalatable, but once salt is added, they're very desirable. In the book of Job, sorry, I don't have the reference, Job said, Is there any taste in the white of an egg? And can that which is unsavory be taken without salt? Both rhetorical questions, the implied answer is no.

There's no flavor in the white of an egg, and what is unsavory cannot be eaten without salt. I won't digress, but I was going to say something about salt, but not sufficiently relevant to take the time for right now. But let's just put it this way.

We all know that there are certain foods that are hard to eat without salt, but as soon as you add salt, suddenly they're quite enjoyable to eat. And some have felt that Jesus was saying that his disciples are that which gives zest or flavor or anything desirable to the world. But again, it's hard to say that that is what he had in mind, because for one thing, that isn't the effect that Christians have on the world.

The world often hates salt, I should say hates Christians, and therefore do not value Christians as salt, and do not consider life to be more seasoned, well-seasoned or zesty, because of the presence of Christians. Salt had a more utilitarian kind of use as well, and probably this was its main value and its main use, was for the preservation of perishable foods, especially things like meat, which can rot quickly, especially in an age when they had no refrigeration, and when they lived in a hot climate and so forth. You slaughter an animal, you're best to eat it all at once.

The next day it could have maggots in it or it could get worse, or at least a short time later. But if you wish to preserve meat over a period of time, since there was no option, for instance, of freezing it like we can today, you could pack it in salt, and salt, as we know, is an antiseptic. It does kill bacteria and so forth, and it retards decay.

So that meat which would decay quickly without salt could be preserved and remain edible for some time with it. Also, for the same reasons, because salt does tend to kill germs, salt was often used to put in wounds. There's a saying about rubbing salt into a wound, which is usually referring to something unmerciful that you do to someone else, but actually to rub salt in someone's wound was about the most merciful thing you could do in ancient times.

They didn't have a much better way to kill the germs and prevent infection. But of course, when salt is rubbed into a wound, the reason we think of that as an unkind thing to do to someone is because it hurts. A lot of medications hurt, but it's the very thing that makes you hurt that also makes them valuable.

Now, I'm not sure exactly how Jesus intended it, but I think most commentators would agree, and it seems to me likely that they're correct, that Jesus had something of this germ-killing, something of this preservative power of salt in mind when he said that his disciples were the salt of the earth. There really isn't any other place in the Bible where he used that metaphor. He did say in Mark chapter 9, a much more difficult passage to interpret than this, actually, the other place where Jesus spoke about salt.

And I'm afraid I'm almost at a loss to say for sure what he meant by it, but the last verses in Mark 9, verses 49 and 50, it says, For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and

every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another. Now, the statement in verse 50, salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it, obviously is the same statement we found in this passage in the Sermon on the Mount.

And so we look for parallels in meaning, although this is probably a statement given on a different occasion. Obviously, he had the same statement, that salt, once it loses its flavor, cannot be re-seasoned. But I'm not sure if he's making exactly the same point here as he made in the Sermon on the Mount, when he says, Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.

In Colossians, Paul said, that our conversation should be with grace, seasoned with salt. Now, what do all these references to salt mean? Some of them are a little more difficult than others, and we will have occasion to comment on each of them in their own turn, but I think, in general, probably what he is saying is, that the world, ever since the fall, has been on a degenerating course. It's getting more and more rotten.

But the presence of Christians in the world, can act like salt, in a lump of meat or something, to keep it from rotting. That society's doom is forestalled by the influence of godly people. We know, for example, that Sodom and Gomorrah had become quite rotten, and yet not so rotten, that God wouldn't have preserved it a little longer, had there been so many as ten righteous in it to salt it.

There weren't. There was arguably one, maybe three righteous in it. It's hard to know how many of Lot's family would be regarded as righteous.

We know that Lot himself is called righteous in the New Testament, so we know that they had one righteous man in there at least, but that wasn't enough. It would have taken a higher density, or at least a further agreement between Abraham and God, to secure the preservation of Sodom, with so little influence of righteousness in it. But even ten righteous would have been enough to preserve the city from its doom.

And, no doubt, Jesus is saying that as meat is preserved longer, and does not simply rot uncontrollably when you put salt in it, at least not so rapidly, so the presence of the disciples of Jesus in the world are there to retard the growth of decay, and to preserve the world somewhat longer, and somewhat healthier, like salt that's rubbed into a wound. It promotes health, as well as prevention of decay and rotting. That is probably the use of salt that Jesus had in mind when he said this.

Now, one observation I'd really like to make is that the only reason that salt can have this effect on society is because salt is different than the stuff it's preserving. Salt can preserve meat, because salt is not meat. It's fundamentally different than meat.

Salt doesn't rot. It is itself something with eternal, abiding, un-rotting qualities. And not

only that, but it can impart such quality to a perishable substance that is added to.

It is the very differentness of salt from the element into which it's placed that makes it possible to benefit that element. If the salt was just another piece of meat, then it would only decay like the rest, and might even promote decay when added to the other meat. And the point I'm making, of course, is that the only way the church is to be salt in the earth is by not being like the world.

If there's any sense in which we're supposed to impede or retard the progress of decay in our society, it is not going to be by copying our society and by being like them. And unfortunately, as most of us have noticed, decay in our society has not been retarded recently. Decay has accelerated in our countries that we live in.

It has gotten worse, and it's gotten worse very rapidly. And one of the reasons for this, I believe, is because the church has adopted an entirely new philosophy in general. Namely, that if the sinners won't come to us and become like us, we'll go to them and become like them.

If they don't like hard pews, we'll pat our pews. We'll pat our pews so that it's more like their couch at home, that they like to sit around on. The couch potatoes can come to church then.

If they don't like the old hymns because, you know, they're not contemporary, we'll find some way to add contemporary to it. If they don't like the King James Version because it's not the language of the newspaper, we'll come up with a new version every few years to replace it and to degrade the English language and degrade the Bible down to the language of the most illiterate people on the planet. And we'll do everything we can to make Christianity, we use the word, relevant.

The functional word here is relevant. We've got to make the gospel relevant. And for relevant, you should read *Watered Down*, conforming to the world.

Because the world that doesn't love God will not consider anything relevant that is true to God. The world in rebellion against God is not going to regard as relevant anything that is not in rebellion against God or that is true to God without bleaching. If the world doesn't want to come up to the standard, the church will just lower the standard until they can fill their parking lots and fill their buildings and build bigger buildings and so forth.

Although, you know, I mean, a good example of this is one of the church growth principles that's taught all over the world in church growth seminars is that churches grow faster if they're not mixed racial. For example, in San Francisco, you've got Chinatown, you've got Vietnamese town, you've got Korean population, some places Italians, in other places, and so forth. And, you know, if you start separate congregations

for them and don't expect these people to fellowship with people of other races whom they have some lack of affinity for, then your church will grow faster.

Yeah, it'll grow faster in numbers. But if these people are never being confronted with their racism and their prejudice, they're not really growing. You're filling your churches, but with what? With people who are refusing to change, refusing to accept the terms of discipleship, refusing to accept their brothers in Christ because they're keeping their prejudices intact.

The church is not supposed to lower its standards so that it appeals to people who are carnal and sinful. It is supposed to challenge and provide an alternative. And to the extent that the church lowers its standards to win the world, the world simply despises the church more because the world instinctively knows that the church is supposed to be different.

And when they see the church pawing after the ways of the world, they don't say, Oh, good, now I feel better about joining the church. They usually say, It's obvious the church doesn't have anything. It doesn't have anything to offer.

Why would it be getting its ideas from the world if it had something distinctive, a revelation from God? I mean, why is it getting its revelations from man these days? By following the world, the church is making the statement that we have nothing distinctive to offer. And we're not really any different than any other do-gooders on the planet. And therefore, the church, when it ceases to be salty, when it ceases to be different than the world, when it ceases to provide an alternative, when it gives up its immortal character and tries to make itself like every passing fad that comes along, which is transient and mortal in the extreme, then there's nothing, there's no staying power, there's no preservative power left.

When the salt loses its saltiness, that is, that which makes it different than the meat that's rotting around it, it's worthless. And it'll only be trampled by men. And that's exactly what is happening and could happen to a greater extent even than it is now here to the church, it getting trampled under the feet of men.

That is treated with disdain and perhaps even crushed in the terms of persecution in time to come. When the church doesn't have a witness of holiness, a witness of discipleship, a witness of uncompromised devotion to Jesus Christ, then it's lost its salt and it doesn't have any salt in itself. And Jesus has said what it's good for after that, just to be given over to the abuse from the unsaved world.

Sadly, the church is quick to compromise, to avoid persecution, to avoid seeming irrelevant, to avoid seeming old-fashioned, to avoid seeming too different. Because in our world, in our liberal world, of course, being different is very much frowned upon. You're supposed to fit in.

You're supposed to be politically correct. You're supposed to think the way everyone else thinks. And being different can win you a little bit of scorn.

Just like when salt is rubbed into a wound, the person who's being healed by it may react violently to it because it stings. Not everyone wants to be healed that much. But nonetheless, the church was put here to be salt.

And if it loses its savor, certainly it can't blame God if he turns us over to be trampled underfoot of men. That's what Jesus said they'd be good for if they lost their seasoning, lost their savor. The other metaphor he uses is light of the world.

This is actually a term Jesus used of himself a few times. Of course, that's not at all unfamiliar to us. We know that in John 8 and verse 12, there's one of the places that Jesus said, there's the first of two places, actually.

John 8, 12, Jesus spoke to them again, saying, I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. The same statement is made by him in John 9. In verse 5, he says, as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world, which implied that when he leaves, someone else is going to be the light of the world, in a sense.

And then, of course, in John 12, 35, Jesus said to them, a little while longer, the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. He who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.

Obviously, the contrast from light is darkness. If the church is the light of the world, it assumes that without the church, the world is in darkness. Darkness is characterized by blindness, and blindness is one of the great problems of being blind.

You don't know where you're going. That's what Jesus said. He who walks in darkness does not know where he's going.

By the way, these same ideas are picked up by John in his epistle, 1 John, and restated again. And Paul talks this way also in Ephesians, chapter 5, where what I was saying a moment ago about not conforming to the world is a necessary part of being salt. We can see that Paul says it's also a necessary part of being light.

It says in Ephesians 5, verse 8 and following, For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, proving what is acceptable to the Lord. And verse 11 says, Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light. For whatever makes manifest is light.

Now, Paul says we are light. We were once darkness, but now we're light in the Lord. It's interesting he doesn't say you were once in the darkness and now you're in the light, which would be another true thing to say.

I mean, it's obviously true that we were once in darkness ourselves and now we're in the light. We're supposed to walk in the light. But here he doesn't say it that way.

He says you were once darkness, now you are light. It's not just that you were once blind yourself. You were once part of the problem.

The darkness that was in you was part of the sum total of darkness that was in the world in general. But now you are light. You're not only in the light, but you are now to shed light.

You are now a light bearer. Now, what is meant by light? Again, this is a metaphor. We're very familiar with it.

So familiar, in fact, that we might forget that it's a metaphor. So like when the Bible talks about walking as a metaphor for Christian living, it's so familiar to us we sometimes forget that it's not literal. You know, it's a metaphor.

But what does it mean, light? Well, Paul tells us in his passage in Ephesians 5, whatever makes manifest, whatever exposes is light. And he said, therefore, in verse 11, don't have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. That again requires that we take a stand different than that of the world, that we stand out like sore thumbs from the world because those who are in darkness behave a certain way.

Those who are light expose the wrongness of that. Jesus was the first light of the world to do that, at least in terms of the New Testament. I guess we could say the prophets in the Old Testament were in their own way lights the world.

But Jesus said in John 3, verse 17, God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned. But he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light that deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done in God.

Now, if we are the light of the world, you might say, well, the world should welcome us. If I'm in a dark room, I certainly appreciate someone bringing me a candle or a flashlight or

turning on the lights so I can see where I'm going. Yes, unless you have been flattering yourself in the darkness that you were good looking.

And when you turn on the light, there was a mirror there and you saw you were ugly. Then you might curse the person who turned on the light unless you wanted to face the truth. Some people would rather be comfortably in the darkness because walking the right way isn't an issue to them.

See, if you wanted to walk through a darkened room and you had no idea what obstacles might lay between you and the other side of the room and it was all dark, obviously you'd consider it a real blessing for someone to bring you some light to illuminate your path. But if you had no interest in walking across the room and as I said, your main concern was to conceal how dirty you were or how ugly you were or how offensive something about your image was, then, you know, because you don't care to cross the room anyway, you're not trying to walk properly, the light does you no good and it only makes you uncomfortable because you're exposed. Now, this is an image that is used frequently in the scripture, but when Jesus says we are the light of the world, it means a couple of things.

One, is that to those who want to walk with God, we should be able to give them some insight. We should be able to give them some clues. Like light in a dark place, like the word of God itself is a light into our path, a lamp into our feet.

So we, the church, are supposed to be showing the world a different way to walk. Jesus said, as we saw in the Gospel of John, I am the light of the world, he who follows me shall not walk in darkness. Well, the world is walking in darkness.

Now, you know, the world knows it has problems. It just doesn't know how to solve them. The world knows that crime is out of hand right now.

The world knows that racism is creating all kinds of problems. There was a massacre just today, or maybe it was last night, in South Africa. Some militant black people went into some, I forget what place they went into, and just shot up some people.

This racism, although there's been a truce called in South Africa, and likely, you know, between the Palestinians and the Jews, there are these official truces in place, but there's still killing going on between them, because racism and nationalism are just out of hand. But the world doesn't know what to do about them. The world thinks you just throw money at the problem.

And when you throw money at the problem, it just gives the criminals more money to use, you know, in a sense, the people who are doing the wrong things. Because there's corruption in the police department too. There's corruption everywhere.

You see, it's righteousness that exalts the nation, but no one would know that if there

wasn't someone there to point that way. And the church is supposed to be a conscience to the world. Now, a conscience does two things for people.

It's what the light is. It's a conscience. It lets you know the right way to go, but it also makes you aware of what you're really like.

We can say to the world, abortion is not right. And we should expect them to thank us for telling them so. You know, hey, part of the problem gang is abortion.

Get rid of the abortion, and some of the problems in the world will go away. At least the death of a lot of babies will. But you might think they'd congratulate us and thank them for telling us that, for telling them that.

But you see, the problem is along with telling them that, you're telling them that they're doing the wrong thing. And that's news that they're not always wanting to welcome. And that's the way in which the church, like a light to the world, is a conscience to the world.

But once again, like salt, if the church loses its distinctives, if the church says, well, you know, maybe we are a little old-fashioned in these ideas. You know, maybe in some cases, you know, we should change our views about women. After all, we are a little behind the times.

And I mean, all other major corporations have found women work well as CEOs and presidents of corporations, even owners of corporations. Who are we to keep them out of the pulpit? Who are we to disagree with the world on these issues just because the Bible does? I mean, we're kind of falling behind step a little bit. But if we compromise with them, we're not showing them the way to go.

They're showing us the way to go. Of course, we do so because we don't want them to react violently. And we do get that a bit.

We speak out against the things that our society is becoming more tolerant of or that our society has embraced. And we take a firm stand on biblical principles. There's going to be negative reactions because what you're saying is judging them.

Now, Jesus said, I didn't come to condemn the world. I came to save them. But they're already condemned and this is the condemnation.

That when light came, they didn't want it. They condemned themselves because in a sense, the light condemned them. I mean, it made them react the way they did by recoiling into the darkness because they wanted their sin.

And anyone who comes along and says, sin isn't right, and shows them the light and the right path to go on, that person, well, there's certain people who would like that. Those who do the truth come to the light, Jesus said, that their deeds might be exposed, that

they are wrought in God. There are those who love truth, Jesus said, those who want to do what's right and what's true and surrender to the truth.

They will welcome the light even if it's unflattering. Even if it does say that they're doing the wrong thing. They want truth enough that they'll endure the embarrassment and the shame and come the right way.

But there are many people who want to do their evil deeds and they will in no sense welcome light. And therefore, the church is tempted to avoid getting these people angry at us. It's tempted to just say what they want us to say.

And say it is really okay to be homosexual if it's a loving monogamous relationship. It is okay for people to live together, divorce and remarry over trifles. You know, if it's really a matter of needs, personal needs and so forth.

I mean, the church is waffling on every issue of morality and ethics. And not just the liberal churches. They waffled a long time ago.

They were total sellouts decades ago. It's the evangelical church that's waffling now. And the salt is losing its savor and the light is losing its radiance.

Partly because who wants to be a stinger in the wound of a sick, wounded society? Who wants the reaction against us of that sting? Who wants to shine the light on people who are doing things that they just as soon weren't declared and weren't exposed? Well, Jesus did. And Christians have for many centuries. And Christians are supposed to do so.

And that's what Jesus is saying. In a sense, salt and light are both unpleasant to certain persons, but certainly desirable. And those who love the truth will endure both.

But there is a danger of putting the light under a bushel because it's hurting too many people's eyes or causing them to react too negatively. Or of the salt losing its savor. And that's what Jesus is warning against.

He's not just trying to give a sermon about being salt and light. He's giving a warning about... He's saying, listen, whether you know it or not, you are salt and you are light. And the only thing that's going to keep the world from total, immediate disaster is you.

But, because of the cost of being salt and light, there may be a temptation to lose that saltiness or to put that light under a bushel. Don't you dare do that. Because then, you will find that you are worthless except to be trampled under the feet of man.

Jesus said in verse 16, Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. So that when he talks about letting your light shine, he's not even talking principally about what we say, but what we do. Obviously, when we speak the truth, insofar as the Word of God is a light, we shed light by our

spoken words.

But often, even if you don't say a thing, if you just do something very different than what the world does, your very good deeds shine out and are conspicuous. I've, many times in my life, worked at part-time jobs and even some full-time jobs short-term just when I was on hard times. And, you know, I was always in the ministry, but I was... sometimes when I'd get some bills, I'd go and work a little while and pay them off.

And I've always worked among non-Christians. And I, you know, while I'm not at all ashamed of my testimony, I love to witness to unbelievers and I love it when they bring up the subject. I'm not a person who goes there and just says, Hey, praise the Lord, brother! Do you know Jesus? Are you washed in the blood? That's just not my style around unbelievers.

And there have been times, I can think of two at least, where I was in my first day on a job, you know, by the first coffee break, they said, You're a Christian, aren't you? I said, Was it so conspicuous? You know, and they said, Well, you're the only one here who doesn't swear and doesn't smoke. You know? Well, those aren't the main attributes of being a Christian. It's not smoking, not swearing.

But I was in those places amazed to realize how just being sensible in the way you talk and, I mean, just governing your tongue a little bit and not running with the crowd, how you stand out like a sore thumb and how your good deeds, in a sense, are conspicuous. And they are a light, too, even before you say a word. And Jesus says, Let them see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Now, later on, in chapter 6, Jesus is going to say, Don't do your good works to be seen by men. When you give alms, when you pray, when you fast, don't do it in a way that's calculated to be seen by men or calculated to get approval from men. And it might seem to contradict what he said right here where he says, Let your light shine before men so they might see your good works.

The difference is, however, and there's not really a difference. It's a different issue. Here he says, Let your life be the kind of life that makes people believe in God, that makes people glorify God.

The life he's telling them not to live is like the Pharisees in chapter 6 who did these things to glorify themselves, to be seen by men and to have the praise of men. You should live a quietly, in some respects, quiet and inconspicuous godly life, and it'll be visible. You don't have to go trying to show off.

If you live a godly life in this society, you will stand out like a sore thumb and you will not be able to hide your light. That doesn't mean you shouldn't speak up either. I'm just saying that there are people who do religious things so that people might regard them as

religious and that people might admire them for the sacrifices they make.

And that's what Jesus tells them not to do. Don't do good deeds in such a way as to be seeking attention for yourself and glory for yourself. But you should do good deeds and you should do them publicly.

You should do them in such a way that people will see them and glorify God. The difference is whether you're doing what you're doing to please God and to give Him glory or to get the praise of men and to be seen by men for your own self-aggrandization. Anyway, we'll come to that in chapter 6 a little later.

Let's go to verses 17 through 20. Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

For surely I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whosoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Now, with this declaration in verse 17 that he did not come to destroy the law and the prophets, Jesus begins actually a lengthy thing that takes the rest of the chapter where he's seeking to clarify his position about the law, the law of Moses. Or maybe I should say more probably the law of God because the law of Moses was the law of God and Jesus didn't come to do away with God's rule.

He didn't come to do away with obedience to God. He did in fact come to do away with some of the regulations that were associated with the Mosaic law, in fact all of them, but he didn't come to do away with God's law as in principle. He came in fact to enforce God's kingdom, to establish the lordship of God over people.

And the reason he starts out by saying don't think that I came to destroy the law and the prophets, it suggests that some people were inclined to think that. Now, why would anyone think that? Why would anyone think that Jesus had come to destroy the law and the prophets? Well, most recently in our studies of the life of Christ, Jesus was inviting conflicts between himself and the Pharisees over Sabbath keeping, for example. Later he would argue against the need for his disciples to wash their hands in the ceremonial way necessary.

He also did a lot of things that scandalized those who were really the custodians of the law. Now, it was no doubt the case that many people in their heart of hearts and maybe outwardly in their mouths were saying, this Jesus, he's contrary to the law. If he's the

Messiah, he's here to do away with God's laws.

And Jesus said, no, don't think that. You're misinterpreting what I'm doing here. I'm not here to destroy the law or the prophets.

As if I'm coming as an enemy. When you destroy something, you're coming as its adversary. I'm not coming as an adversary to the law.

I'm coming to fulfill it. Now, what does it mean to fulfill it? Well, let's read the next verse too because that's part of where he says it. For surely I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

These verses are quoted frequently by those who would have us still keep the Sabbath and still keep the law of God, although they're not using it very consistently. They say, well, Jesus didn't come to destroy the law. True, he didn't come to destroy it, but he did come to do something to it.

And he stated twice what it was, to fulfill it. The question is, once it's been fulfilled, what remains to be done about it, if anything? He's saying, I didn't come as an adversary to the law. I came to do something positive with respect to the law.

And he said that not one jot or one tittle of the law is going to pass away until I have accomplished this thing with it, till all of it's fulfilled. Something that's confusing about verse 18 is that it has two lines in it. Both begin with the word till.

Till heaven and earth pass away. And then the last line is till all is fulfilled. And these are clauses that speak of the duration of something in particular, namely the statement that comes between them, that not one jot or one tittle will pass from the law.

Now, the law is here to stay until something happens, he says. Not the slightest pen stroke of the law is going to be altered until something. The problem is there's two tills.

Till heaven and earth pass away is the first one, and till all be fulfilled is the other. And this, perhaps, would make one think that all will not be fulfilled until the heavens and the earth pass away. Since the heavens and the earth have not passed away, it would be argued that it hasn't been fulfilled, and if it hasn't been fulfilled, then it must still be in force.

The problem there is that it proves too much to say that, because Jesus said until all is fulfilled and until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle will pass from the law, and yet many jots and tittles have passed from the law. Jesus himself abrogated the dietary laws, as Mark points out in Mark chapter 7. It's clear that he brought an end to the sacrificial system. That was part of the law.

Those were certainly jots and tittles in the law. We find that Jesus did a lot of things. It

seems like, as Paul understood Jesus' mission, he brought an end to circumcision as a requirement.

He brought an end to lots of things in the law, even festivals and sabbaths and holy days and new moons. Paul said those were temporary, and they're no longer in force. Now, obviously, some parts of the law have passed away, yet Jesus said not any part is going to pass away until the whole thing is fulfilled, so whenever any part passed, it must have been when the whole thing was fulfilled.

But you say, but wait, why does he say till heaven and earth pass away? That seems to make it more long-standing. And that does, I admit, that does make this statement somewhat confusing. But let me suggest to you this.

There are, and I've told you this before, but we're on this passage as a place to say it again. There are two ways in which the law was fulfilled by Christ. He came to fulfill the law.

And there are two ways because there are two different kinds of laws. Bear with me, if you already know this by heart. One kind of law, the ceremonial ritual laws, had value only insofar as they looked forward to something else, something bigger than themselves.

They were like prophecies themselves. When a Jew would offer a sacrifice, when a Jew would keep Passover, his very actions were calculated to foreshadow something that would later happen, namely, Jesus' death and resurrection and his offering himself for the sins of the world. The keeping of the law in its ceremonial and ritual aspects were simply ways in which God had the people act out prophecies, really.

And just as Jesus fulfilled prophecy by being the one that the prophets foretold, so he fulfilled those aspects of the law by being the one that they looked forward to. That when the ceremonial law was practiced by the Jews, it was done so as a way of visibly anticipating some future thing and Jesus was that future thing and what he did was that future event. And therefore, he fulfilled those laws just like he fulfilled prophecies.

That's the first sense in which he fulfilled the law. Now, because when Jesus fulfills a prophecy, I mean, when it's been fulfilled, we don't look for more fulfillment of it. If it's fulfilled, it's filled full.

You don't put any more into it. It's full. It's reached its fullness.

Once a prophecy has been fulfilled, we don't start saying, well, let's look for another meaning of this prophecy in the last days or something like that. Some people do, but you don't need to. Once it's been fulfilled, it's served its purpose.

Likewise, with the ritual laws that anticipated Jesus, his fulfilling of them is exactly like

fulfilling a prophecy. They're fulfilled. They're full.

They've served their purpose. We look for no further use from them. We can be inspired by looking back and seeing how he fulfilled something that was so long ago predicted either in law or prophecy, but, I mean, there's no more use for them.

They have served their purpose. Now, the other kind of laws, as we know, is the moral laws, those laws that reflect on the very character of God. Morality is based on God's character, and therefore morality is not something that God can arbitrarily change because he can't change himself.

He's not changeable. He's a God who doesn't change. Therefore, if God thinks of something as immoral at one time, he can never think of it as moral any other time because the reason it's immoral is it's not consistent with his character.

And since his character isn't going to change any, morality isn't going to change either. Therefore, those laws in the Old Testament that embodied some moral principle, they did so because they were reflecting on the character of God himself. Now, Jesus coming, dying, resurrecting, going to heaven, that doesn't change God's character any.

It doesn't change morals any. Therefore, those things still are binding. But in what sense are they fulfilled? The moral laws, Jesus has to fulfill also, or need to be fulfilled.

Look at Romans chapter 13 real quickly. We're really now racing against the clock. So, please follow me closely and quickly.

Romans 13, beginning with verse 8. Paul said, Oh, no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. Now, Jesus fulfilled the law, the ritual laws, but what law does a person, you or I, fulfill when we love another? Well, he says, for the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet. And if there's any other commandment, they're all summed up in this saying, namely, you shall love your neighbors as yourself.

Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. Jesus said, not one jot or tittle would pass until all the law was fulfilled.

The ritual law was fulfilled by what Jesus did. But the moral law is fulfilled by what we do. Of course, Jesus did it too.

He kept the law, the moral law. Notice this. The examples he gives that are fulfilled by love are all moral issues.

He doesn't include in verse 9, thou shalt keep the Sabbath holy. He doesn't mention anything about offering sacrifices or abstaining from certain foods. Those were in the law

too, but that's not the commandments he has in mind.

When he says, he that loves fulfills the law, he means the moral requirements of the law are fulfilled. If you love God, you won't violate your moral duties to God. If you love your fellow man, you won't violate your moral duties to your fellow man.

So, Paul understood that the moral law was fulfilled in fact by us loving one another. Look at Galatians 5. Just for a second opinion on this. From the same guy.

I guess it's not a second opinion, is it? Same author. The Holy Spirit. Does that make it a third opinion? Okay.

Galatians 5, verse 14. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Now, notice the expression.

The law is fulfilled. All the law is fulfilled in this one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said, I'm going to fulfill all the law and not one jot or tittle is going to pass away until all is fulfilled.

In fact, heaven and earth aren't even going to pass away until it's all fulfilled. What I understand this to mean is that Jesus did fulfill all the ceremonial law, as I pointed out, and he also fulfilled and is fulfilling in us the moral law by living his life in us, causing his love to manifest and reproduce in us. We are continuing to fulfill the law until heaven and earth pass away.

That aspect of the law is going to continue to be in the process of fulfillment as long as there is an earth, as long as there are people on earth, as long as there are righteous people doing the will of God, they will be fulfilling his laws by loving one another. And that's, of course, the doing of Jesus, too. Yes? Right.

Amen. Thank you for that scripture. I usually give that one as a cross-reference, too, except for the time restraints, but I'm glad you brought it up anyway because it says in Romans 8, 4 that the righteous requirements of the law, that's the moral law, righteous requirements, the requirements of the righteousness of the law, moral aspects of the law, are fulfilled in us.

Fulfilled is the right word. Who walk not in the flesh but in the spirit. Now, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, your righteousness has to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees or you'll in no way enter the kingdom of heaven.

But how could anyone do more law-keeping than the scribes and Pharisees? They made a vocation of it. Your righteousness has to exceed there's not in terms of quantity or number of good deeds, but in terms of quality. Your righteousness has to proceed from a heart of righteousness.

The Pharisees did outward things that were righteous, but it wasn't in their heart. Your righteousness has to exceed theirs in that you are doing these things out of love, that you are fulfilling the law in the proper spirit. And that is how he fulfills the law.

By making us more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees could possibly be, he writes his law in our hearts. He takes away the stony heart and gives us a heart of flesh. We'll have more to say about this particular aspect when we come back next time.

We'll be looking at how he expands on the law in the remainder of this chapter.