

The Perfect Law

Sermon for the 10th Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:17-20

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law of the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is the founder of the Christian religion. This sentence sounds as true as saying that water flows downhill and therefore, all rivers flow into the sea. And when Jesus' life story is read, we notice why this is so. For example: Jesus placed Communion as the middle point of the Christian worship service. Jesus also calls the disciples and confirms Peter as the rock on which the future Church should be built. And lastly, He sends the disciples to Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit. Only when the Holy Spirit came could the disciples build the Church with the power of the Holy Spirit and that's why it's said still today that Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. So one can claim with good reason that Jesus is the founder of the Christian religion. But Jesus Himself appears to disagree with this opinion because in all clarity, He says today: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law of the Prophets.”* With this, Jesus makes it clear that He actually isn't bringing anything new. Everything that He taught, everything that He did, is nothing new but was already from the very beginning, part of God's plan. And this plan of God's, which was from the beginning, included Abraham, Moses, the people of Israel, the 10 Commandments, and the righteousness of God as revealed through the Old Testament. Because of this, the 10 Commandments, as well as the people of Israel, are inseparable parts of our Christian faith. The Christian faith doesn't first begin with Jesus but was already there long before! For this reason, we have established a special Sunday for the people of Israel. And today is the 10th Sunday after Trinity Sunday. On this Sunday, we think about the fact that Jesus as well as His disciples, Paul, and most of the other first Christians, were Jews. But we also think about the fact that there are still Jewish Christians today who, on the one hand are firmly anchored in the tradition of the Jewish people and yet believe in Jesus. At the same time, we also pray that the Jews who don't yet believe in Jesus today may realize through their own scriptures that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah. But we want even more. We also want to recognize the importance of the Old Testament as prophetic forerunners of Jesus and also celebrate the Law of Moses on this day. I know that all sacrifices in the Temple were fulfilled through the one-time sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we no longer have to offer sacrifices today. But how does it relate to the other commandments? And how does it relate to the law? Many people say today that the Law and the Commandments no longer apply since Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus tells us today that that's not so. He didn't come to abolish the law. On the contrary, He even pleads that we keep the law much more closely than the Pharisees. In the further course of the Sermon on the Mount, we see what Jesus means. He quotes several laws, such as adultery and murder, and even increases the severity of them. According to Jesus' speech, not only is breaking the law an attack on God but the very thought of adultery or murder means de facto that we have already broken God's commandment. Jesus also requires us to keep the Laws of Moses and keep them even better than the Jewish people. Does this

mean that by keeping the law even better than the Jewish people and better than the Pharisees and only through our so-called better righteousness that we have hope of being saved? When we read the Old Testament, we get to know many holy people who had pursued a better righteousness and were also much better than we could even imagine today. Nevertheless, not one of them was completely righteous. The Bible knows no saints but bluntly reveals the human faults of the men of God and says: No one is righteous! Adam already failed with the first Commandment by believing in Satan more than in God. Even Moses is not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of a transgression. This can be observed in many other examples so that Isaiah finally summarizes for everyone in Isaiah 53 – that man can't attain the righteousness that is before God. The same is promised to man through the dying of Jesus Christ on the cross. That doesn't mean that the Law became invalid through Jesus. No! The Law is still in effect. However, it is imperative that a greater righteousness be added, otherwise we will be lost. All of this can be explained best in practical life. And that happens something like this: I hear about God's Commands and see that they are good and right. That's why I try to also keep these Commands. Interestingly enough, most people in the world already do this. They actually recognize at least the sense of the 10 Commandments and know that the Commandments of God are right and good. And every child can understand that if all the people in the world loved God with all their hearts and also loved their neighbor as themselves, we would have a perfect world. But this is not the case. We can observe this painfully throughout the world. But above all, we can also observe this in ourselves because we realize very quickly that there are other powers present in us and in our hearts that prevent us from keeping God's Commandments. That's why we continually notice how we fail. We all have the painful experience of not being able to keep God's Commandments. And that makes us sad. But this experience shows us that we are not righteous and we need something else so that we can attain God's righteousness. And that's exactly what the Bible shows us. We see that for the first time with Abraham. In the story of Abraham, the Bible says: "[Abraham] believed the Lord and He counted it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6) It is important to see here that Abraham didn't believe in himself or in his strength. He believed in God! He believed that God would stand by him even if he sinned and had many failures. Abraham believed that he was a child of God. Not because he has done anything good, but because God has done something good. And that's exactly what Jesus did for us. Jesus didn't abolish the law. On the contrary, He demonstrated to us the better righteousness that is valid before God! And then He led us into the Promised Land with great power as He died on the cross for us. What Moses couldn't do because he sinned, Jesus did. He went into the Holy of Holies and presented Himself for us as a sacrifice so that we can live. Through Jesus we realize that God stands by us and wants only good for us. And does only good for us!

When I hear Jesus' words for today, it makes me sad at first because Jesus says: *"unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* But these words only make me sad when I look to myself and not to Jesus. If I don't have Jesus, I stand naked before God with all my failures. But I am not alone. Jesus placed Himself by me. He has obtained for me the righteousness that I don't have. And that's why I look to Jesus in my need and call to Him. I see that He came just for this reason, so that we can be righteous through Him. I notice and believe that it is His Will that I become righteous. And if that is His Will, then I will become righteous, even with my many failures. Amen.