# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Jesus’ View of the Old Testament”**

**Matthew 5:17-19**

**September 1, 2019**

Today we begin a new six-week sermon series that I have entitled “The New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament.” There are two primary reasons why I have chosen for us to pursue this topic, one negative and one positive. The negative reason is this: there is a common misconception among readers of the Bible, including Christians, that the Old Testament is obsolete and therefore irrelevant to understanding our faith and guiding the practice of our spiritual lives. The reasoning often goes something like this: God provided the Old Testament for the Israelites living before Christ, but then he inspired the writing of the New Testament for everyone living since Christ. Is this true? Absolutely not! In fact, as we will see throughout our six-week series, the New Testament consistently and frequently affirms the writings of the Old Testament as not only relevant for all times, but necessary for our understanding of the ministry of Jesus and the early Christian church. This leads me to the positive reason for our study.

If, indeed, the Old Testament is necessary for our understanding of the ministry of Jesus and the early Christian church, it is important that we examine the connection between the two testaments and learn how they support one another. As we do so, we will not only become more familiar with the part of the Bible we tend to spend less time in, that is, the Old Testament, but we will gain insight into aspects of New Testament teaching that often escape us precisely because we have not explored the Old Testament background to that teaching. So, let’s begin our exploration of the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament by hearing what a very important New Testament figure thought of the Old Testament. I invite you to turn with to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:17-19

“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Jesus did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets, that is, the Old Testament. He came to accomplish their purpose. What, then, is the purpose of the Old Testament? For what reason did God inspire its writing? The answer lies within the Old Testament itself.

In the beginning God created the world. He made a man and a woman, Adam and Eve, and said, “It is very good.” He loved spending time with Adam and Eve in the garden he had made for them, a garden filled with all kinds of food that they were free to eat. The only thing he asked of them was that they not disobey him by eating of the tree which would give them awareness of good and evil. The rule was for their protection, for God had no desire that they experience the consequences of evil. But, evil already existed in the world in the form of Satan, the heavenly angel who had rebelled against God and had been expelled from God’s presence. In the guise of a serpent, Satan came to Eve and told her that God had not forbidden her to eat of the fruit of that particular tree because he loved her. No, said Satan, God knew that if she ate from it she would become like him, and he wanted no competition. Becoming like God sounded pretty good to Eve, so she ate the fruit and she gave some to her husband, Adam, and he ate it as well.

What happened next? Did disobedience to God’s law bring happiness, contentment, joy, and peace? Did they become like God, as Satan had promised? No, it brought about the first marital accusation: “She gave me the fruit to eat – blame her.” Adam went from loving and honoring his wife to throwing her under the bus. That was the effect of the first sin on the love between two people. And what about the love of God for his children? While God still loved them dearly, he could no longer be with them, for God cannot be in the presence of sin. He was forced to expel them from the garden, and Adam and Eve lost their relationship with God.

But, thankfully, God was not ready to give up on his children. While this was the sad breaking of the relationship between God and humanity, God was determined to find a way to restore that relationship. The Old Testament is the story of God’s determination to bring us back to himself. He gave the law to his people so they could understand what sin is and thereby avoid it. He instituted a system of sacrifice so that when his people disobeyed there would be an opportunity for forgiveness. He sent his prophets to his people to remind them of God’s laws and to tell them that the God who loved them wanted more than anything for them to love him with all their hearts.

Did it work? Did God’s people begin to love God with all their hearts? Not really. They steadfastly said that law obedience was a good thing, but they constantly disobeyed. They began worshiping other gods, making idols to those gods and serving them. They took the name of the Lord their God in vain, ignored the Sabbath, dishonored their parents, committed murder, slept with each other’s spouses, stole, coveted and bore false witness.

Thankfully, God didn’t end the story right then and there. He had a plan for how all that he wanted for his people could be accomplished. Not by external law keeping, but by faith in a person whose heart was completely committed to his heavenly Father. Throughout the Old Testament he included prophecies about this person, this Messiah, who would free his people from their sin. And then, “For God so loved the world that he sent his One and Only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” God sent us Jesus so that through him God’s purpose may be completed in us.

Jesus declares that he came to accomplish the purpose of his heavenly Father as revealed in the Old Testament. Jesus didn’t say, “Well, that didn’t work. Let’s try something different.” Jesus said that in him, everything will work. In him, we can learn how to obey the law and thereby love God and our neighbor. In him, we can have forgiveness when we disobey because of his perfect sacrifice on the cross. In him, we have the full prophetic revelation of God teaching us how to live God’s way.

God wants more out of his relationship with us than simply being surrounded by a bunch of children who keep his rules. He wants to know that we love him and that we love those whom he has created in his own image. When a man and a woman get married, does not the wife desire that her husband will be more to her than simply a law keeper? Does she not want, and need, more than anything to be loved? He may be a good husband in that he keeps the rules, and to continually break them would certainly call into question whether he has any regard for her, let alone love for her, but there is more to a marriage than rule-keeping. So it is with us and God. This is what God expressed as his desire in the Old Testament, and this is what Jesus fulfilled in the New Testament.

There is nowhere more apparent in Jesus’ ministry that he is fulfilling the Old Testament purposes of God than in his death. For, it is only through Jesus’ death that the relationship that the Father desires to have with you and me can be accomplished. As a holy God, he cannot be in the presence of sin. As a sinful people, we cannot be in relationship with a holy God. Does God then change who he is, stripping himself of holiness? No, he does not. Are you and I able to change the reality of our sinfulness and so enter into God’s presence? No, we are not. But, through the death of Jesus, there is forgiveness for our sin. Because of his sacrifice, his once for all sacrifice, all who call on his name will be saved through the forgiveness of their sin. All who call on his name will not perish but have eternal life. And that life is with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, an eternal relationship that accomplishes all that God purposed for you and me when he created us and placed us on this earth. This morning we celebrate our life with the Father, made possible through the Son and empowered by the Holy Spirit, as we share together in the Lord’s Supper.