

The Grand Conclusion

Introduction

This study explores Jesus's declaration in Matthew 5:17-20 that He came not to abolish but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. We'll examine how understanding Jesus as the culmination of God's covenant story fundamentally changes how we approach our faith and family life.

Central Thesis: We must stop trying to write Jesus into our own story and instead learn to embrace our role in Jesus's story—the grand narrative of God's covenant people that finds its fulfillment in Christ.

I. The Best Way to Be a Christian Family

A. A Different Approach to "Family Ministry"

The Problem: When churches teach about Christian families, they often focus extensively on family dynamics (how to be better spouses, parents, children) while spending insufficient time on what it means to be Christian.

The Solution: The best way to be a Christian family is to focus primarily on being Christian, trusting that healthy family relationships will flow from kingdom citizenship.

B. The Priority Principle

Matthew 6:33 - "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Application to Family Roles:

- Want to be a better spouse? → Seek first God's kingdom
- Want to be a better parent? → Keep your eyes on Jesus
- Want to be a better son/daughter? → Follow Jesus faithfully
- Want to be a better sibling? → Pursue righteousness

The Theological Foundation: When we prioritize kingdom citizenship and covenant faithfulness, we naturally grow into the people God designed us to be in every role—including family roles.

Practical Implication: This series focuses on helping us all become better citizens of God's kingdom, trusting that this will make us better family members in the process.

II. The Cliffhanger: Understanding the Old Testament's Incompleteness

A. Television Cliffhangers

Cultural Reference: Before streaming services, the worst words at the end of a TV episode were: "TO BE CONTINUED"

The Frustration:

- Right at the climax
- Good guy vs. bad guy
- Everything about to be resolved
- Then... you had to wait a week (or months for season finales)

Why It Matters: We called them "cliffhangers"—stories left unresolved, questions unanswered, tension unrelieved.

B. The Old Testament as Cliffhanger

The Startling Reality: The Bible that Jesus grew up reading—the Bible Paul grew up reading—the Scriptures every first-century Jewish person knew—was a cliffhanger.

What They Were Waiting For:

- When will wrongs be made right?
- When will God's promises be fulfilled?
- How will good triumph over evil?
- What happens next in God's story?

The Wait: Not one week. Not one season. **Four hundred years** between Malachi and Matthew—400 years of silence, waiting for the next episode.

C. The Questions Left Hanging

Unresolved Tensions in the Old Testament:

1. **The Promise to Abraham** (Genesis 12:1-3)
 - Through your offspring all nations will be blessed
 - But how? When? Who?
2. **The Davidic Covenant** (2 Samuel 7:12-16)
 - An eternal king from David's line
 - But where is he? When will he reign?
3. **The New Covenant Promise** (Jeremiah 31:31-34)
 - God will write His law on hearts
 - Sins will be forgiven and forgotten
 - But when? How will this happen?
4. **The Suffering Servant** (Isaiah 53)
 - Who is this mysterious figure?

- How does suffering lead to salvation?
 - When will this be fulfilled?
5. **The Coming Kingdom** (Daniel 2, 7)
- God's kingdom will crush all earthly kingdoms
 - But when? How? Through whom?

The Waiting: Generation after generation reading these promises, these visions, these prophecies—and waiting. Watching. Hoping. "What happens next?"

III. Jesus as the Resolution: "I Came to Fulfill" (Matthew 5:17-18)

A. The Bold Claim

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."

The Audacity: Jesus isn't claiming to be:

- Just the next episode
- Just the next chapter
- Just another prophet in the line

He's claiming to be: The **final chapter**. The **ultimate fulfillment**. The **resolution** to which everything was pointing.

B. Fulfillment, Not Competition

Key Distinction:

- Jesus didn't come to **compete** with Moses
- Jesus came to **complete** Moses
- He's not opposing the Law; He's bringing it to its intended destination

What "Fulfill" Means:

1. **Complete what was incomplete** - The Law pointed forward; Jesus is what it pointed to
2. **Accomplish the purpose** - The Law had a goal; Jesus is that goal achieved
3. **Embody the reality** - The Law cast shadows; Jesus is the substance
4. **Bring to fruition** - Seeds planted throughout the Old Testament bloom in Christ

Colossians 2:16-17 - "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you... These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

C. The Scope of Fulfillment

"**The Law or the Prophets**" = The entire Old Testament

What Jesus Fulfills:

1. **Every commandment** - He perfectly obeys and embodies God's will
2. **Every promise** - God's faithfulness reaches its zenith in Christ
3. **Every vision** - Prophetic glimpses become present reality
4. **Every story** - Narrative threads converge in His person and work
5. **Every institution:**
 - Temple → Jesus is the true temple (John 2:19-21)
 - Priesthood → Jesus is the great high priest (Hebrews 4:14)
 - Sacrifices → Jesus is the once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10)
 - Covenant → Jesus establishes the new covenant (Luke 22:20)

The Boldness: Imagine standing before people whose entire identity was wrapped up in Torah and declaring: "Everything you've been reading, everything you've been waiting for, everything God promised—it's all about me."

D. The Permanence of God's Word

Matthew 5:18 - "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."

Understanding the Statement:

- **"Iota"** (ι) = The smallest letter in Greek alphabet (yod in Hebrew)
- **"Dot"** = The smallest stroke distinguishing Hebrew letters

The Point: Even the tiniest markings in Scripture are more solid, more permanent, more certain than the physical earth beneath your feet.

Why This Matters:

- God's Word **always** accomplishes its purpose (Isaiah 55:11)
- God's Word **never** returns void
- God's Word **will** fulfill its intended goal

2 Peter 3:10 - "But the day of the Lord will come... the heavens will pass away... and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed." But God's Word stands forever.

What Is Its Purpose?: To bring people to faith in Jesus the Messiah. Every word, every law, every story—designed to prepare the way for Christ.

IV. True Righteousness vs. External Righteousness (Matthew 5:19-20)

A. Teaching and Doing

Matthew 5:19 - "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."

What Jesus Is NOT Saying:

- That we earn salvation by keeping commandments
- That Old Testament ceremonial law still binds Christians
- That we can ignore the Law now that Christ has come

What Jesus IS Saying:

- Following Jesus doesn't put you at odds with the Law
- Following Jesus puts you in **harmony** with the Law's true intent
- Jesus isn't teaching people to disregard Scripture; He's teaching them to see its fulfillment in Him

The Principle: Because Jesus fulfills the Law, following Jesus means living out the Law's ultimate purpose—love for God and love for neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40).

B. Righteousness That Exceeds

Matthew 5:20 - "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

The Shocking Statement: The scribes and Pharisees were considered the **most** righteous people in Jewish society.

Understanding Righteousness:

Definition: Righteousness = Being in right covenant relationship with God and living out that relationship faithfully.

Two Types of Righteousness:

1. **Quantitative Righteousness** (Pharisees)
 - How much do you do?
 - How many commandments do you keep?
 - How many religious activities do you perform?
 - External, measurable, countable
2. **Qualitative Righteousness** (Jesus's teaching)
 - Where does it come from?
 - Is it from the heart or just external?
 - Does it reflect genuine covenant relationship?
 - Internal, transformative, authentic

The Problem with Pharisaical Righteousness:

- Merely external compliance
- Lacked heart transformation
- Appearance without reality
- Self-righteousness instead of God-dependence

Matthew 23:25-28 - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence... So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

C. Heart-Level Obedience

The Rest of the Sermon on the Mount illustrates this principle repeatedly:

Matthew 5:21-22 - "You have heard that it was said... 'You shall not murder'... But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment."

The Pattern:

- External compliance: Don't murder ✓
- Heart reality: But you hate your brother ✗
- Jesus calls for transformation at the deepest level

Other Examples:

- Adultery → Lust (5:27-28)
- Oaths → Simple truthfulness (5:33-37)
- Retaliation → Non-resistance (5:38-42)
- Love neighbors → Love enemies (5:43-48)

The Point: True righteousness isn't about doing more; it's about being transformed more deeply.

V. The Only Path to True Righteousness

A. Trusting Jesus as Atoning Sacrifice

The Necessity: There is no way to be in right covenant relationship with God apart from trusting Jesus to atone for sin.

The Pattern in Old Testament:

- High priest entered Most Holy Place
- Offered blood sacrifice for sins
- Made atonement for the people
- This was repeated annually

The Fulfillment in Jesus:

- **Hebrews 9:11-12** - "But when Christ appeared as a high priest... he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."

The Application: First-century Jews couldn't be righteous without trusting Jesus as the high priest who offered Himself. We can't be righteous without trusting His atoning sacrifice either.

B. Trusting Jesus Through Obedience

The Other Side: Righteousness isn't just about atonement; it's also about allegiance and obedience.

The Foundation Metaphor (Matthew 7:24-27):

Wise Builder:

- Hears Jesus's words
- **Does** them
- Builds house on rock
- House stands in the storm

Foolish Builder:

- Hears Jesus's words
- Does **not** do them
- Builds house on sand
- House collapses in the storm

The Point: True trust in Jesus expresses itself in obedience to Jesus.

James 2:17 - "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

C. Entering the Kingdom

Matthew 5:20 - "...you will never **enter the kingdom of heaven**"

What's at Stake: Not just better family life. Not just happier homes. **Eternal destiny.**

The Kingdom We Long For:

- Utter peace
- Abundant life
- Evil vanquished
- Sin abolished
- Death destroyed
- Brokenness healed
- Decay reversed
- Corruption eliminated

- God's promises fully realized

The Only Path: Trust in and obedience to Jesus as the fulfillment of all God's promises.

Application for Families: We don't just want better family dynamics now; we want our families to enter God's kingdom forever—and that requires covenant faithfulness through Christ.

VI. The Critical Distinction: His Story, Not Ours

A. Jesus Is the Conclusion to a Particular Story

The Story Jesus Concludes:

- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
- Joseph, Moses, Joshua
- David, Solomon
- Elijah, Elisha
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
- Exile and return
- Waiting and longing

This is crucial: Jesus is the conclusion to **this specific narrative**, not just any narrative.

B. The Movie Analogy

Avengers: Endgame Illustration:

Scenario 1: You watch Endgame without seeing previous Marvel movies

- You might understand some things
- You'd miss most of the significance
- References would be lost
- Impact would be diminished

Scenario 2: You watch Endgame thinking it's the conclusion to Star Wars

- You wouldn't understand it at all
- It wouldn't make sense
- You'd be confused and frustrated
- Wrong story entirely

The Application: Jesus makes sense as the conclusion to the story of Israel. He doesn't make sense apart from that story.

C. The Mistake We Make

What We Tend to Do: Write Jesus into **our** story

How This Looks:

- "Here's my family background..."
- "Here's my cultural heritage..."
- "Here's my story of success and failure..."
- "Here's what I'm trying to accomplish..."
- "Now, Jesus, fit into my narrative and make it better"

The Examples:

- Our family story (good and bad experiences)
- Our ethnic or national identity
- Our cultural background
- Our personal achievements
- Our individual goals and dreams
- Our family traditions and values

The Problem: Jesus is too big to fit in your story. Your story isn't large enough to contain Christ.

D. The Invitation Jesus Actually Offers

What Jesus Wants: For us to embrace our role in **His** story

The Correct Approach:

- This is the story of God and His covenant people
- This is how God called Israel out of Egypt
- This is how God made them His special people
- This is how God brought forth the Messiah through them
- This is how God is inviting **your family** into this grand narrative
- This is how **you** fit into God's eternal plan

The Shift: From "Jesus, join my story" to "Jesus, write me into Your story"

VII. Practical Application: Learning to Embrace Your Role

A. For Every Family Member

The Best Way to Excel in Your Role:

- Best husband? → Embrace your role in Jesus's story
- Best wife? → Embrace your role in Jesus's story
- Best parent? → Embrace your role in Jesus's story
- Best child? → Embrace your role in Jesus's story

- Best sibling? → Embrace your role in Jesus's story
- Best grandparent? → Embrace your role in Jesus's story
- Best neighbor? → Embrace your role in Jesus's story

Why This Works: When you understand yourself as part of God's covenant people, living out His eternal purposes, you become the person God designed you to be in every relationship.

B. The Learning Process

The Objection: "But I don't know much about the Old Testament. I don't know about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses..."

The Response: That's okay! The key word is **LEARN**.

What You Don't Need:

- To know everything before you can be saved
- To master all the details to have faith
- To understand every nuance immediately

What You Do Need:

- To commit to being a student
- To recognize that Jesus is the fulfillment of Law and Prophets
- To understand that not knowing Law and Prophets limits your understanding of Jesus
- To want to know as much as possible about the One you love

The Logic:

1. If Jesus is someone you love → Want to know Him better
2. If Jesus is someone you're committing your life to → Want to know Him deeply
3. If Jesus is the foundation you're building on → Want to understand Him fully

C. The Movie Series Analogy

If You Loved the Final Movie: You'd want to go back and watch all the previous ones

Why?:

- Better appreciation for the conclusion
- Understanding of references and callbacks
- Deeper emotional impact
- Fuller comprehension of character development

Application to Scripture:

- If you love Jesus (the conclusion)
- Go back and read the Law and Prophets (the setup)
- You'll understand and appreciate Jesus more fully

- You'll see how everything points to Him

D. For Parents: Teaching Your Children

Don't: Have your children write Jesus into their own stories

- "Here's who you are, here's your family background, now add Jesus"

Don't: Write Jesus into your family story

- "Here's our family narrative, now let's fit Jesus in somewhere"

Do: Help your children embrace their role in Jesus's story

- "Here's God's story, here's how Jesus fulfills it, here's where we fit"

The Difference:

- First approach: Jesus serves our story
- Second approach: We serve Jesus's story

Which Story Is Bigger?:

- Your family story is limited, finite, small
- Jesus's story is epic, eternal, cosmic
- Jesus's story has room for everyone
- Your story can't contain Jesus
- Jesus's story can contain you and your family

VIII. The Practical Command: Read Scripture

A. The Simple Application

The instruction: Read Scripture.

Specifically:

- Read the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy)
- Read the Prophets (Isaiah through Malachi)
- Understand how Jesus fulfills them
- See your place in this story

B. As Families and Households

Be a family that:

- Reads the story of Scripture together
- Discusses how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament
- Embraces your role in Jesus's family story
- Sees yourselves as part of God's covenant people

Practical Implementation:

1. Family Bible Reading

- Regular, scheduled time
- Age-appropriate discussions
- Connecting Old Testament to Jesus

2. Asking the Right Questions

- How does this point to Jesus?
- What does this teach us about God's plan?
- Where do we fit in this story?

3. Retelling the Story

- Abraham to Jesus
- Moses to Jesus
- David to Jesus
- Prophets to Jesus

4. Living as Part of the Story

- We're not just reading about God's people
- We **are** God's people
- This is **our** family story now

C. Understanding the Whole Story

Why This Matters Theologically:

Without understanding the Old Testament:

- You miss most of what the New Testament is saying
- Jesus's words have less impact
- The significance of His death and resurrection is diminished
- You can't appreciate the fulfillment if you don't know what's being fulfilled

Examples:

1. Jesus as Lamb of God (John 1:29)

- Without Passover and sacrifice system: Weird metaphor
- With Old Testament background: Profound fulfillment

2. Jesus as Temple (John 2:19-21)

- Without tabernacle/temple history: Confusing claim
- With Old Testament background: Revolutionary truth

3. **New Covenant in Jesus's Blood** (Luke 22:20)
 - Without Exodus and Jeremiah 31: Strange statement
 - With Old Testament background: Climactic moment
 4. **Jesus as Son of David** (Matthew 1:1)
 - Without Davidic covenant: Just genealogy
 - With Old Testament background: Royal announcement
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IX. Theological Synthesis: Covenant Continuity and Fulfillment

A. The Covenant Framework

The Pattern Throughout Scripture:

1. **God initiates covenant** (grace)
2. **God's people respond** (faith)
3. **Covenant relationship established** (righteousness)
4. **Covenant stipulations given** (obedience)
5. **God's people become blessing** (mission)

This Pattern Appears:

- With Noah (Genesis 6-9)
- With Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17)
- With Israel at Sinai (Exodus 19-24)
- With David (2 Samuel 7)
- **Fulfilled in Jesus** (New Covenant)

B. Fulfillment Doesn't Mean Replacement

Critical Distinction:

✗ Wrong View: Jesus replaces the Old Testament (so we can ignore it)

✓ Right View: Jesus fulfills the Old Testament (so we understand Him through it)

What Fulfillment Means:

- The goal is reached (not abandoned)
- The promise is kept (not broken)
- The shadow gives way to substance (not irrelevance)
- The seed becomes a tree (not a different plant)

Romans 10:4 - "For Christ is the **end** [Greek: telos = goal, completion] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

Matthew 5:17 again: "I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfill** them."

C. Our Place in the Story

Ephesians 2:11-13 - "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh... were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

The Theological Reality:

- We Gentiles were **outside** the story
- We were **strangers** to the covenants
- Through Christ, we've been **grafted in** (Romans 11:17-24)
- We're now part of **Abraham's family** (Galatians 3:29)
- The story of Israel has become **our story**

This Changes Everything:

- Abraham is our father in faith
- The Exodus is our deliverance
- The Law reveals God's character to us
- The Prophets spoke to us
- Jesus is our Messiah

X. Conclusion: The Invitation to the Epic Story

A. Stop Writing Jesus Into Your Story

The Problem: When we try to fit Jesus into our pre-existing narrative:

- We make Him too small
- We miss His significance
- We reduce Him to a supporting character
- We remain the protagonists

The Result: A diminished Jesus and a disappointing faith

B. Let Jesus Write You Into His Story

The Invitation: Jesus invites you and your family into the epic narrative of God's redemptive work

What This Means:

- You're part of something far bigger than yourself
- Your family has a role in God's eternal purposes
- Your life has significance beyond your personal goals
- You're connected to thousands of years of covenant history

The Promise: When you embrace your role in Jesus's story, you find:

- Your true identity
- Your real purpose
- Your eternal significance
- Your place in God's family

C. The Call to Learn

For Individuals:

- Commit to being a student of Scripture
- Learn the story from Abraham to Jesus
- Understand how Jesus fulfills every promise
- Embrace your role as covenant member

For Families:

- Read Scripture together
- Teach your children the whole story
- Help them see where they fit
- Live as part of God's family narrative

For the Church:

- We're not disconnected individuals
- We're part of the same story
- We walk through life together
- We help each other embrace our roles in Jesus's story

D. Final Encouragement

The Good News: You don't have to have it all figured out to start. You don't need to master the Old Testament before you can follow Jesus. But if you love Jesus, let that love drive you to know Him better—and you can't fully know Jesus without knowing the story He came to fulfill.

The Prayer: "Jesus, I want to stop trying to fit You into my story. Write me and my family into Your story. Help us learn, grow, and embrace our role in the epic narrative of Your redemptive work. May we be faithful members of Your covenant people."

Discussion Questions

1. How have you been guilty of trying to write Jesus into your own story rather than embracing your role in His story? What does that look like practically?
2. Why is it important to understand Jesus as the fulfillment of a specific historical narrative (Israel's story) rather than just a general spiritual figure?
3. How does viewing the Old Testament as a "cliffhanger" resolved in Jesus change the way you read both Testaments?
4. What's the difference between quantitative righteousness (Pharisees) and qualitative righteousness (Jesus's teaching)? How does this apply to your family life?
5. If someone asked, "Where does your family fit in God's story?" how would you answer? Can you articulate your family's role in Jesus's story?
6. What practical steps can you take to become more familiar with the Law and Prophets so you better understand Jesus?
7. For parents: How can you help your children see themselves as part of Jesus's epic story rather than just adding Jesus to their personal stories?
8. How does understanding that Jesus fulfills "not an iota, not a dot" of Scripture affect your view of the Bible's trustworthiness and relevance?