Matthew 5:17 Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy them but to fulfill them.

 Once again as we get ready to contemplate our text we are going to start off by speaking of the first two points that Jesus makes all the while recognizing that these two points teach the very same lesson. Jesus teaches this lesson because of the point that is made in our text and in the very last verse.

 What is Jesus talking about when he says **“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its flavor, how will it become salty again? Then it is no good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled on by people”** Dear people, I think these words are really straight forward. I am amazed at how many people try to come up with an explanation or go into great detail in order to try and explain what Jesus means. It is simple…If salt has lost its saltiness, it is useless and garbage! Let me put this into an application for you.

 Let’s say you have a church. This church doesn’t’ believe the Bible IS God’s Word. They have cast aside the miracles of the Bible, have rejected anything of the Bible that seems to contradict science, have declared that the resurrection of Jesus is nothing more than a spiritual remembrance and has declared that Jesus is only about love and doing your best to live that love. That is salt that has lost its saltiness! Everything that faith truly is about has been tossed out. This church may declare itself a “Christian Church” but it is salt that has lost its saltiness. This may be a person who has declared themselves a “Christian” but the point of and impact of Jesus is not in their life. Want me to put it in clearer language. “You are a Christian, but if you have lost Christ, how will you be Christian again?” I don’t care what you say or what you declare, God’s Word makes it clear that if you have rejected what Jesus is about you are no longer salt, no longer Christian! Pretty simple, isn’t it?

 Or, **“You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill cannot be hidden. People do not light a lamp and put it under a basket. No, they put it on a stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. In the same way let your light shine in people’s presence, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”** You are the light of the world. We recognize that we are only a light to this world because of the Light of Jesus. If you are ashamed of Jesus, if you don’t hear Jesus, if you don’t believe what Jesus says, if you don’t represent Jesus in your life, isn’t that a light under a basket?

If you are a light, you are shining, you are a beacon, a “lighthouse” to the ships floating on the stormy sea. You are a light because people see Jesus reflected in what you do and say, in how you conduct your life and live. But if you “the light” of Jesus are ashamed, too afraid, too worldly, how can you guide in the lost ships of the world? Are you the light of Jesus shining on that stand or are you the light under the basket?

Again, consider the application. Here is a “Christian Church” but this church has declared that it is only one of many wonderful religions of the world and that all faiths really worship and follow the same God but in their tradition. All the things we said above about the saltless church apply here. That is not a “Christian church!” It can’t be when it is without Christ. Or if in your life, as we follow along, I can’t tell the difference between all the others who curse and swear, use vulgar language, declare sin their right and privilege, despise their parents…Do I need to recite Galatians 5:19-21 here? Go read that verse and if it is you then you are a light under a basket, which is basically a worthless thing.

By the way, make sure you understand the full implications of a light under a basket. In the days when these words were spoken all lights were some sort of flame or fire. A flame or fire under a basket is going to go out. Want to see this application in action, then watch as the Ushers put out the candles on the altar with the little snuffer cup, basically putting the candles under a basket and poof, they go out. Please, don’t imagine that you are “Just a light that is hidden.” If you are under the basket, you are a light that is out!

What does all of this have to do with the rest of the text? It is a lesson on faith! It is a lesson on the very point of faith and on the work of our Savior Jesus. Our theme will be: **Surpassing Righteousness!”**

What did verse 17 say? **“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy them but to fulfill them.”** These words of Jesus make it clear that there is to be no such thing as a person or church who rejects the Law of God or even the Old Testament of God. This is still God’s Word. It is not to be thrown out, it is to be understood, grasped in the light of Jesus and in the fulfillment that Jesus came to do.

What can we say of the **“Law and the Prophets?”** It is God’s Word. It is something that testifies to and about Jesus. It is something that speaks of sin and reveals sin. It shows the origin and devastation of sin upon the world. It is something that Jesus came to deal with, but it is never something that is to be dismissed or ignored or tossed aside as of no account. It can’t be! Because to dismiss, to destroy the Law and the Prophets is to take away the very purpose and work of Jesus! That’s why Jesus said, **“but to fulfill them.”**

You get that, right? You get that you and I, basically any person of any age, has not be able to keep the Law of God in the way that God demands…to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. Since the fall into sin that has been the fact. Sin was in the world. Even before the Law was given, sin was in the world because as Romans points out, death was still a fact from Adam to Moses. And then God gave the Law to expose and reveal sin all the more. To hammer home the “eternal” truth of the Law Jesus then says in our section: **”Amen I tell you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not even the smallest letter, or even part of a letter, will in any way pass away from the Law until everything is fulfilled.”** It isn’t over until the world is over. So the Law “showed us our sins” and our desperate need of a Savior. No, you don’t ignore or toss aside the truth of God’s Law, you wrestle to understand what Jesus did about it?

Jesus fulfilled it. He kept it perfectly for you and for me. He then took its punishment, its threat of hell and damnation to the cross. There Jesus paid for our sins. There Jesus by taking your “hell” thus offers and extends to you the gift of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But don’t forget to be “salt” and “light.” Don’t forget that Jesus is to have an impact, Jesus is going to effect a change in your life.

That’s why our text continues: **“So whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches other to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”** I do not think this passage is saying that the law breaker, that those who have rejected God’s Word and Jesus, and teach such are still going to go to heaven. I believe the “least” place in heaven is actually a place called “hell,” a place where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” We need to get it into our heads that hell is a real place where God will put those who have despised his gift, denied his majesty and sovereignty. Hell is still a place that is a part of God’s realm, the least place, the worst place…a place souls will deserve because they have spurned and rejected God.

Thus the next line: **“But whoever practices and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”** Make no mistake. This is those who teach the truth of the Law, the marvel of Jesus fulfilling that Law. This is those who point to Jesus as the cause and reason, the heart and core of eternal life and salvation. This is those who understand the message of sin and death, of redemption and salvation in Jesus. And notice that both these lines emphasize: teach! One “breaks and teaches” and the other “practices and teaches.” Here is the difference between unbeliever and believer. The unbeliever rejects God and his revelation found in Scripture and he spreads it, he teaches godlessness, while the believer clings to the message of God found in Scripture.

The message found is that Jesus has fulfilled the Law. Jesus has kept if for us, paid its debt and offers to us the complete and sure forgiveness of sin…just because we believe in Him. Because we believe this is what Jesus is about. Because we grasp this awesome gift of eternal life that Jesus came to win and did. We know that because Jesus rose from the dead! Actually, physically rose from the dead and then ascended into heaven to have all things put under his authority and love.

That is the whole point of the very last verse here. **“Indeed I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and experts in the law, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”** So how do you do that? How do you surpass their level of righteousness? Because in truth, when it came to outward piety and holy living, you will be hard pressed to find any better, any that looked better than these religious leaders of Jesus’ day. They excelled in looking good! They were particular and they were exacting in the outward obedience to the Law. Note what I just said…”in the outward obedience to the Law.” Outwardly they looked great. But do remember that Jesus called them a “brood of vipers, snakes, blind guides, hypocrites, those who make converts twice as much sons of hell as they are, whitewashed tombs, outwardly clean cups but cups filled with greed and self-indulgence” (Mtt. 23:1-39). And yet note that at the beginning of that chapter Jesus essentially praises their zealousness. It was just misguided and godless because they thought it was all about what they did and how they did it. They thought “righteousness” was about our personal keeping of the law, our personal goodness and our personal good works. They were wrong.

Had they actually paid attention to the Law, actually contemplated what God revealed and said and how God from the very beginning of sin kept pointing to the Savior and the need for that Savior to atone for sin, they might have been saved. Even when Jesus, God’s promised Savior arrived, they rejected him because as far as they were concerned they didn’t need him, ever!

They didn’t need Jesus because they believed “righteousness” was what they did. Jesus clearly showed that righteousness was what He was and what He did. He kept the Law perfectly. He died to atone for our sins. Jesus then rose from the dead and in that God has declared: “Believe in Jesus and His righteousness is yours!” We are “declared righteous” in Jesus. God the Father forgives us, wipes out our debt of sin, adopts us, and clothes us in the garments of salvation because of Jesus. This righteousness is sure and certain because it does not depend on us but rather on Jesus and what He has done and accomplished. His righteousness become ours by faith through grace. It is the only way that our righteousness can surpass that of these pious, but hypocritical men.

Your faith is to be in Jesus. You are to be touched and changed by Jesus. You are to be salt! And by the way, if salt loses its saltiness, how does it get salty again? Because you repent and turn to Jesus. Jesus is the only one, the only way to make non-salty salt, salty again! It is the only right answer to his question. And you are to be light to this world. How does your light get lit again? Because of Jesus. He brings back the smoldering wick, he fans into flame the fading faith. Jesus is always and only our answer.

Jesus, thank you for what you have done for us. Continue to work in us and help us to be your children, heirs of eternal life, those who are salt and light to the world and those whose righteousness is the sure salvation you have provided. Amen.