

He is called teacher by the people. It's the word "rabbi", and sometimes he's called "rabbuni", which means good teacher, great teacher. Matthew 5 actually begins that way in the most famous teaching Jesus said or did, the sermon on the mount, it starts this way: "when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up to the mountain and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then, he began to speak and taught them". Jesus is a teacher and in the sermon of the mount, he teaches mainly from the law. He would be expected to do that as a rabbi, and one of the best ways to understand the sermon of the mount, is to see our Lord's commentary on the law of God, on the Ten Commandments, on the great covenant that God made with us. He starts with nine blessings, and then following the nine blessings, he addresses the disciples and calls them salt, and then he calls them light. He says: "You're salt of the earth" and then he says: "you're light". So, you should let your light shine to the blessing of people, so they can know what you've learned.

Then, Jesus focuses on the law. And it's interesting to notice how he does that on this very famous line that is so key to understanding the sermon of the mount. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law". The word actually means to tear it down, or to dismantle it. "I have not come to dismantle or tear down the law and the prophets. I have come not to abolish, not to tear it down or dismantle, but I have come to fulfill". Now, that is a very important word. It's an important word throughout the New Testament, it's an important word throughout the ministry of our Lord. What does it mean that Jesus now is claiming, and promising that he will fulfill the law? Fulfill it. What is that supposed to mean? Well, the word fulfill really means two things. Just to understand it, it means to "show the reason for" or the "rational for", and "the goal of" the law. And then, to fulfill it would mean that you would understand the rationality, would understand the reasons, and you'd understand the goal of the law. And then, the law would be for you accessible, to help you and me to understand God's will for our lives, and the covenant of his will for our lives. Jesus goes on to make the point that this fulfillment means that he's going to treat the law as if it's timeless. It's not just something in the moment or in a certain time and place. "Do not think that I have come to dismantle or destroy the law, or the prophets, I have not come to dismantle them, but to fulfill them, for Amen I tell you, that not until heaven and Earth pass away, shall one stroke of a letter pass away from the law until all is fulfilled". He promises now that this law, this great covenant that God made will be fulfilled, and that's how he starts the sermon on the mount.

Well, how is he going to teach the fulfillment of the law? What's he going to do to help us understand the meaning, the reasons, the meaning, and the goal of the law for us, so that we can do something with it? So, that it will be of help to our lives. Well, watch how he does it. First, he's going to take on parts of the law, he's going to take on also the experiences of the people and interpret them and help them to see where they fit, and how they fit together. I'll give you the example: look in verse 43, this is now the 5th chapter, sermon on the mount is chapter 5, 6 and 7 of the book of Matthew. Now, we're in the 5th chapter, the very beginning, where he is now

going to play this role of helping us understand the fulfillment of the law and God's will for our lives. So now, take verse 43:

“You have heard it said: you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy”.

Now, that's not in the law. He's not talking about a commandment from the law, nor is that sentence anywhere in the Old Testament. Nowhere in the Old Testament does it say... it says in lots of places that you shall love your neighbor, but nowhere does it say that you shall love your neighbor, hate your enemy. We wonder where that comes from, because it's in quotation marks. Jesus says: you have heard it said. You shall love your neighbors and you shall hate your enemy. Well, we have a clue because a community that existed all the way up until the fall of Jerusalem in 78, was the Kumeron community, they lived outside of Jerusalem on the River Jordan. They were great keepers of documents, fortunately, because in 78, when the Romans swept in and destroyed Jerusalem and destroyed Masada, they also destroyed the little town of Kumeron, the Kumeron community. But the people, fortunately, collected their writings and they stored them not in the city, but stored them in jars upon caves, in 22 caves, and the Romans never found them. In fact, no one found them until 1946, when some sheep purgers found these stone jars. They're the Dead Sea Scrolls, and they contain translations of the entire Old Testament, except for the book of Esther, all the books of the Old Testament were there, commentaries on the books and also manuals of discipline for that community. In the Dead Sea Scrolls we find this sentence that Jesus is now quoting. So, we know where he got it. “You have heard it said: you shall love your neighbor, hate your enemy”. Because the community was very... they had a lot of enemies that they hated, and they wanted everybody to know that. So, they had this saying: love your neighbor, hate your enemy.

And in the Dead Sea Scrolls we found these sentences: you shall hate the sons of darkness. That means that I get to decide who the sons of darkness are, or my community decided, or these are sons of darkness. They're eligible for hatred, maybe even eligible for murder, because they're sons of darkness. And notice: it's under the guides of religion, it's under the guides of their own faith system, that we love our neighbors and we'll tell you who your neighbors are, and we tell you who your enemies are. So, they're eligible for hatred. And so, the saying is there, Jesus decided in the sermon on the mount to take on that saying. And we're grateful for it, because he redefines enemy. He redefines a whole lot of things in the sermon on the mount. Now watch this: “You've heard it said: you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you...”, and you're going to hear that several times whenever our Lord handles the law or handles the sayings of the people, he'll say: “But I say to you”, he's going to play the role of the teacher. “But I say to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”. The word persecute is a very harsh word in the 1st Century Greek language, it's a word that means literally to “run

down”. It was used in the gladiator games when they ran down animals. Actually, ran them down to death, and even prisoners were thrown to the arena and the gladiators would run them down. And that’s the word persecute. It means to run down.

And so, now our Lord says: “You’ve heard it said: love your neighbor, hate your enemy. But I say to you: love your enemies, whoever they are, pray for those who run you down”. And then the last line is a beautiful line: “So that you may be children of your father in Heaven”. Now, this is a teaching of Jesus, he’s now... he’ll do this throughout the whole sermon on the mount, he’s going to take sayings, he’s going to take quotations from the Old Testament just before that he took the quotation “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”, you heard him say that, and then he will discipline that saying. Now, that’s a saying actually in the scripture. Here’s a saying, this is not anywhere in the bible, but he had the people know it, and maybe some people are thinking about that saying, maybe even like it. And so, Jesus disciplines it, he plays the role of the teacher, and he teaches that we should love our enemies and pray for those who run us down. But Jesus not only taught this, he did it. And that’s why we respect him. Why do people follow Jesus Christ? It’s because of what he taught, but also what he did. He did what he taught. He taught: love your enemies. He did this on the cross, one of the seven last words of our Lord on that cross was, as prayer: Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. He did not hate his malefactors, he did not hate the soldiers that crucified him.

There were two thieves that were crucified with him. One of them mocked him, and he may have been a murderer, who knows what he was, but he was an enemy of the people. And the other thief on the cross said: “why are you doing this? We are guilty, this man is innocent. Teacher, would you remember me when you come into your kingdom?” And Jesus said another one of the great words from the cross to that malefactor. That man, who’s a thief, he says: “Amen, I say to you. Today, thou should be with me in paradise”. Jesus loved those who everyone thought about as enemies. Jesus loved those who ran him down, he played that role in his life, and that’s why we trust him. Now, we’ll also take on the law itself. And now, we’ll look at a passage, the first passage, in our Lord’s exposition on the law, he takes on in chapter 5. As soon as he finishes saying: “I have not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it”, then he’s going to start teaching on the law. You might expect... why doesn’t he start with commandment number one? Wouldn’t that make the best sense, start with “there’s no other God”, “you should love the God with your heart, strength and mind”, and then “thy neighbor as thyself”, law one and two, why not do that? Instead, Jesus decides to start with another hard commandment.

It’s the sixth commandment. Now, watch how he does it. Watch Jesus the teacher: “You’ve heard it said...”, and in this case, in ancient times, he’s referring now to one of the commandments in the 10 commandments. “You’ve heard it said by those in ancient times: you shall not murder”.

That's the sixth commandment of the ten commandments. "And whoever murders will be liable to judgement. But I say to you..." Remember? We saw him do this before, now he's going to do that again. He's going to redefine, expand, the definition of murder. It's going to maybe make us uncomfortable to watch how he does it. Maybe some of you were a little relieved, and I was, when he said: thou shall not murder, I'm glad I'm not guilty of that. That I have not done. But now, when this command begins to be unfolded by Jesus, he's going to move the starting point for murder back further than we had imagined. And so, he says: "You've heard it said: you shall not murder. And whoever murders will be liable for judgement. But I say to you that if you're angry", here's another harsh word: anger. "If you are angry with the brother or sister, you will be liable for judgement. He doesn't say that you're a murderer, but he says you're liable for judgement. And if you insult a brother...", by the way, the RSV doesn't know what to do with this Hebrew word thrown in here. There are not many Hebrew words that appear in the New Testament text that aren't translated for us. A few.

Take the word Hallelujah, that simply comes in the Book of Revelations as a Hebrew word: "Halal", praise, "Yahweh", praise the Lord, Hallelujah. And so, we love that word. Or the word "Amen" is used by Jesus in this very text several times. That's a Hebrew word, that's not a Greek word, and it appears in the New Testament texts as a Hebrew word, not translated but transliterated. Just simply given to us: Amen. It means "rock" in the Old Testament. It means faithful. And so, it's like saying: faithful, faithful, or rock, rock, when he says Amen, and he uses it a lot. So, that's one. Now, a bad one appears. The RSV decided to translate this, "and if you insult a brother or sister then you'll be liable for the council". The word for insult, though, is really a Hebrew word, Wajah. And Jesus simply puts the word in, he just says it, he says the Hebrew word wajah. And then the text, when it's given to us in the New Testament, it just repeats that Hebrew word Wajah. It's a slang expression from the 1st Century, and in Hebrew it means "empty headed". You know, when you think of some of today's words of abuse that we use in the streets to each other, this seems a little bit mild. But, evidently, it was considered a pretty bad insult in the 1st Century. You "empty headed" person. So, if you say Wajah, "empty head", but it even has one more, then you'll be liable for the council, for the courtroom. And if you say "you fool", that's another one, that literally means, "you silly one" or "you foolish one".

By the way, our Lord will later use this word in the sermon on the mount, in the very end of the sermon on the mount, he tells a parable about himself, and then he says: if you hear these words of mine and you do them, you're like a competent carpenter who builds his house on rock. But if you hear these words of mine and you don't do them, you'll be like the silly carpenter who built his house on sand. Notice that he doesn't say the "bad" carpenter, of the "evil" carpenter, the "silly" carpenter. The "foolish" carpenter. He picked the wrong foundation to build on. So, he uses that word again, "foolish" or "fool". You're foolish. And now, here it's used, he says: if you use that to a brother or sister and you say "you fool", you "empty headed person", then Jesus goes on to show that there are consequences for that. So, if you say that to a brother or sister,

you'll be liable for the council. If you say "you fool", you'll be liable, and now he makes it even worse, you'll be liable for Gehenna Fire. And the RSV decided to translate that to "the Hell of Fire". I have to explain it, just outside the gate of Jerusalem was a garbage dump. And the garbage dump was always burning, like most garbage dumps are, because they would burn the debris out there. And when people walked by that garbage dump, they named it Gehenna. And then Gehenna becomes the name for the lake of fire hell. For punishment. And it's used that way in a slang way, in an expressive way, and so Jesus now uses it, and everybody would know what that means. You'll be liable to the hell of fire, to the Gehenna of fire. This garbage dump.

So, now he's got people scared about doing those things, regarding people around us. It's still not murder, but it's bad, it's on the way to murder in a sense. So, when you're offering your gift at the altar, now there's two people he's going to attract. First, is worshiper. You're on the way to worship at the altar, you're worshipping God. But remember now, this worshiper who's worshipping God has got some bad things in his life right now. He's called one person a Wajah, he's called another person "foolish", and he's also filled with anger toward someone. And so, he's on his way to worship, and our Lord does an interesting thing. He says: when you're on your way to worship and you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, they know this, and they therefore have this to accuse you of. You have been hating them, you're angry and you've called them foolish. You know that, they know that. So, you're on your way to worship, they have something against you, and then Jesus says something interesting, he says: "Stop your way to worship". He doesn't say: go to the temple and confess your sins and make them right with the Lord and then you can come back and work with these people. No. He stops them on the way to worship. He interrupts their act of worship, and says: "no, leave your gift for the altar and go first and be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift". The word "reconcile" is an interesting word. It means to listen and to talk. It's a word for dialogue, it's part of the dialogue vocabulary from Greek. And to talk, to listen, to listen and talk. And it's called "reconciliation". To reconcile. To listen to the brother and sister that has something against you and that you are in trouble with. So, listen to them and talk to them, and then leave your gift, go, and be reconciled, listen, and talk to each other, and then we get the idea of dialogue from that; and then, come and offer your gift.

And then, he says this: come to terms quickly with your accuser. Now, we've got somebody else. Not that we are on the way to worship with something that's wrong with our lives. Now, somebody else is on their way too, they're an accuser, they're on the way to the courtroom, and they want to see punishment for us. They're not going to worship God, they're going to find the prosecutor to prosecute us for our flaws, for our hatred, for our anger or for these things we did. So, he says, "come to terms quickly with your accuser while you're on your way to court". By the way, the word "terms" there is a weak word for a beautiful Greek word that's used there. The word is "eu", in Greek, if you put "eu" in front of a word it means "good", but it's then "eu" in front of the word understanding, a "good understanding". So, literally, the better translation

would be: come to a better understanding. In the message, Eugene Peters translates as: make things right. Come to a right understanding. Come to a better understanding. And that's a good word, a good idea, come to a good idea, or a good understanding, and do it quickly with your accuser while you're on the way to the court, or your accuser, and now there's the humorous part, I think, there's a little of gothic or dark humor, but there it is: "if you don't do this, your accuser will hand you over to the judge", and that's not the end of it, "and the judge to the guard, and the guard will throw you in prison. And Amen, I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny".

And that's humorous in a way. It's a little overstated, but all because you were angry and all because you said wajah, and all because you called somebody foolish, but because you had that harm that happened in your life, and the accuser accused you, brought you to the judge. Be careful: there are consequences, Jesus says, to the wrongness that we do. Well, notice what he's done in this interesting little passage: what he's done in the handling of the law, is he's given us a strategy for avoiding murder. You want to avoid murder, and that is one of the commands, "You shall not murder" and certainly, no one wants to be a murderer. So, how do you avoid murder? And he has a fourfold strategy that he gives you. The first is: watch out for runaway anger. Runaway anger is the first bad step to where you may end up in murder. In fact, James says that, who's the brother of our Lord, wrote a book called James, and he said: what causes wars? It starts with anger that is runaway, like a cancer, in our lives. It's toxic. In fact, James writes it this way: be quick to listen, be slow to speak, be slow to anger, because anger does not produce God's righteousness. So, beware of anger. Anger itself, beware of it, watch out for it, be careful with that. That's the first step in this strategy.

The second is watch out for bad words that disrespect another person. And that's the problem with wajah and with foolish. These are bad words, they disrespect another person. As we know, a great deal of harm, a great deal of violence that happens in the streets, happens because maybe one person felt disrespected by another, and mocked by another, and then vengeance set in. They had to get even. So, avoid the words of disrespect. And Jesus is teaching that, and he says: remember, you'll be liable for judgement when you use words like this, and you may end up in front of the judge; the judge sends you to the jailer, the jailer to the prison, and you'll have to pay every penny for that. And then, he kills the story. He kills the story of two people on their way: one is religious, that's the one going to worship. But he's got something wrong in his worship. We know that he's got anger there, and we know that he's already disrespected the people around him, and he's on his way to worship. And Jesus cuts that off, and he says: "I don't want that kind of worship. I don't want you to worship that way. I want you to stop and get reconciled first. Go and be reconciled, and then find a better way. Find a better truth". And so, he does that, but also there's a person that's not on the way to worship on the way to vengeance, on the way to harm, and get even with someone who's done wrong. He calls them: the accuser. There's somebody that's accusing you, and they're on the way too. And he says to both: he says quickly, with both

of you, find a way to have dialogue, find a way of talking and listening to each other, and then find a better word. A better word. That better word, that we might call a larger hope, that will give you a way to resolve what's happening between you. So, find the better idea.

Now, the big question is: what is that better idea? What is that good truth, or that good understanding? It's interesting, isn't it? Now, we're back to fulfill. Jesus Christ himself started by saying: I'll fulfill the law, and now in this little parable of two people, they're on their way, one to go to worship. And you know, we're scared of that in many ways. Pascal was the one who said: "men never delighted doing evil, as much as they can do it for religious reasons". And you give me a person who is highly religious, with an ideal like "love my neighbor and hate my enemy", and that says that it's working in my life, so that I can find the proof in enemy and I'll have evil, and I'll have a fraudulent religious reason for it. Notice that our Lord cut that off. Don't call that religion. The worship of God is not the worship of God. He cuts that off. He says: I want you to first talk that through, listen to that with each other and resolve it, and find a better idea. And then there's also the person who just wants vengeance, the person that just wants punishment, and wants the people who done harm to be punished. He also tells them, that person: quickly work out a resolution, find a better idea.

What is the better idea? This brings us to another word in the New Testament for reconciliation. If this one word is the word translated "reconciliation", "dia lasso", "dia logue", it's a way of resolution. There's another word. Open in Romans 5. In Romans 5, St Paul gives us another word for reconciliation, in explaining Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the law. He puts it this way, it almost sounds like he's been listening to the sermon on the mount. This is verse 10, chapter 5: "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God", now you notice he's not going to talk about reconciliation because of dialogue, or because of something we did to resolve a crisis we have with each other. "We will reconcile to God through the death of His son. Much more surely, having them reconciled, we will be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God to our Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation". By the way, the word here for reconciliation is not the word "dia blasfo", not the word dialogue. Is the word "katalasso", katalasso is a very important Greek word. St Paul used it in two decisive places, here and also in Corinthians. It's a word in English "catalyst", becomes a term in chemistry, where in a chemical reaction, a chemical component will come into reaction and it changes everything in the reaction, but it stays what it is. It doesn't change, it just changes what it changes. And that is called a catalytic agent.

That's the word St Paul uses here. Jesus Christ stays who he is. He is the redeemer, He's the one who was able to love his enemy. He is the one who went to the cross in our behalf. He conquered death in our behalf, he stays who he is. We are changed by him. He is the one that is the new

truth, the new truth is here in the sermon on the mount, that our Lord uses when he says: find the new truth. The new truth is Jesus Christ himself, who undercuts and comes underneath our dialogue, who comes underneath it, and gives it its stature and gives it its possibility.

Reconciliation. The reconciliation comes when Jesus Christ is able to change your life, and he can change your lives. He can make us new, he can take away the fear, he can take away the hatred. He can resolve. We may not be able to. We may do a lot of reconciling and calm things down, but we need someone who is able to resolve and heal the brokenness, and that's what he does. And so, Jesus plays that rule. That is the fulfillment of the law. He fulfills it by doing what we cannot do: completing the law. We're not able to confer forgiveness on ourselves. We need to be forgiven, we need to be healed, we need that undergirding underneath it, that lifts us up. And so, Jesus Christ plays that rule. Let me tell you a little story that kind of illustrates that to me.

A number of years ago, when I was a student at Princeton Seminary, I used to go quite often up to New York City, my uncle lived there and I loved to go up there, and he loved to go to the Radio City Music Hall, and so he kind of introduced me to Radio City Music Hall, and I loved going to Radio City Music Hall. It's one of the greatest musical venues and movie venues there is in America. 3,000 people can sit in the Radio City Music Hall. And I was there once for a patriotic concert that they were having. They have these great extravaganzas, with the Rockettes, the great dancing group in Radio City, and I was there. It was a... It was an event in which they were honoring America, and they were singing great patriotic songs, it was very beautiful. As I remember, they had a Glee club there, from one of the universities, the University of Michigan, I think, Glee club was there on the stage as well, and they were singing all of these great songs. And the last song in the set was America the Beautiful, by Katherine Lee Bates, in 1904, she wrote "O beautiful for spacious skies, For amber waves of grain", this amazing, it's a hymn really, America the Beautiful, and in the first chorus, when it comes to the chorus, she says this: "God shed his grace on thee / And crown thy good with brotherhood / From sea to shining sea!", and in the second part, she prays again, a prayer for us, as a country, and she says: "God mend thine every flaw, / Confirm thy soul in self-control, / Thy liberty in law!". She prays for that. It's a great song and I was listening to this great peace making song, it's a song of patriotism and joy. Suddenly, I begin to sense in this great auditorium there was a sound coming. They had an orchestra there, and the Glee club was singing, but I began to sense a sound coming, and I look down to the corner end in the Radio City Music Hall, in the little corner right near the stage, and a door opens, and then the console of the Great Organ slides down from the door, and you can see the organist starts to play. And they had this giant organ in the Radio City Music Hall, and I begin to realize this mighty organ was coming in underneath the University of Michigan Glee club. Underneath the orchestra, and it was coming underneath as they were singing "America the Beautiful", and it became a beautiful kind of parable to me.

What we need is something mighty that can come underneath and lift up this goal to reconciliation, this goal to dialogue with each other, this goal to find a better way. And it comes



up underneath. And that's what St Paul is describing in Romans 5: if while we were enemies, God has reconciled us. He has done what we can do for ourselves, he has given us hope, and given us this great new idea. So now, we have this joy, we have this possibility of life. I think that's what our Lord is doing when he takes on the law. And takes on even sayings that aren't in the law, but they're just sayings that are circulating among the people that could be very damaging, and he takes it and he heals it. And he does it, what he teaches, he does. And that's why we follow Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, thank you for Your love, and thank you for the way You take hold of this marvelous covenant, the covenant of law, and fulfill it for us. And also, thank you for the new truth. The new understanding that can enable us to make peace with each other. We thank you for that. Bless us in our families, bless us in our relationships, people on the streets, bless us as people and nation, and nations between nations, so we can learn how to dialogue and we can learn how to discover our belatedness, that there is a great belovedness underneath every one of our lives, and it comes from You. Now bless us, in Christ's name, we pray. Amen.