Interestingly, when Tertullian (*An Answer to the Jews*, 8) informed his readers of the sanctifying of the water by his Jesus’ baptism, he also noted that Christ sealed (*signo*; mark or inscribe (Morwood, 2005: 174)) visions and prophecies by his advent (*adventus*). He states that the advent fulfilled (*adimplevit*) this. While not designed as such, this certainly could be commentary on Matthew 5:17 and Jesus’ insistence that his coming (*ēlthon*) was with the specific purpose of fully satisfying the will of God, which naturally includes the covenant law.

The covenant of Jeremiah 31 is written on the heart, finding satisfaction in the ontology of Matthew’s fulfiller. The Christological emphasis of righteousness and sonship established the forthcoming “but I say to you” that is the authority recognized by the audience. Meier (1976: 41) sets the stage for the words that are pivotal to understanding the relationship between Jesus and the law, noting that 5:17-20 is positioned prominently in the Gospel. “Preceding all the *Streitgesprache* and other ‘legal’ material as it does”, Matthew introduces Jesus and his view on the law. As such, this passage offers more problems than any or all of the rest of Matthew.

Gardner (1991, 132) considers verse 20 to be summation of the Sermon. From a contemporary perspective, it would be considered the text from which Jesus preached. With a single challenge, Jesus elevates his teachings above formative Judaism. Carter (1994: 45) suggests this is the “thematic sentence”. The beatitudes, the salt and light parables, the Halakah on the law, and the stringent responsibilities put on the hearers mandate the listeners’ responsibility in response to the sermon, anticipating that his audience would exceed the most prolific example of what was considered as righteousness—the Pharisee. This verse then becomes the key to understanding not only the current text, but also the whole of the sermon. Additionally, it becomes the apex for the scene moving from the fulfilment of righteousness via the demonstration and testing of sonship to the question of the law.

As a wise prophet, Jesus’ begins by congratulating his audience for desiring true happiness (*makarioi*). The one who is truly happy finds it in the fullest expression of the law. Taken as a whole, the list of characteristics would be reminiscent of a blessed land flowing with milk and honey as recalled by the Deuteronomic writer (6:3). The religious significance of this phrase (milk and honey) in the cultic history cannot be overlooked. Stern (1992: 555) reveals that the various cultures (Canaanite, Babylon, etc.) understand this as God’s provision. Merrill (2001: 161) describes this phrase as having two commodities that are the product of agriculture and nature, representing the full blessing of God’s promises. In the same way, the *makarioi* are to be congratulated “because of God’s response to their behaviour or situation” (Blomberg, 2001: 97). The Greek view of happiness is divided between the classes. The common citizen (*hoi polloi*) think happiness is found in pleasure, wealth, and honour. However, the “people of quality” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a; lit. *hoi charientes*, the graced ones) would say that while the other has some effect on happiness, excellence and proper reflection are much more fundamental in shaping their perspective of happiness (Miller, 2010: 596). France (1985: 114) senses the same in his description of happiness as a condition of life realized in the intrinsic value and the outcome (right living). Thus, whether for the Jew or Greek, it is obvious that Jesus elevates happiness to mean the blessings of God related to his promises. The resulting lifestyle becomes salt and light to whomever sees this individual. Beginning here, Jesus has established that there is a higher plain that is achievable that does not seem to be dependent on the law. Following this produces appropriate actions. Matthew (as a compiler) has now set up his audience (his church community) with a model of discipleship that ensures that they are following Jesus (Viljoen, 2011: 390).

With this introduction, Jesus would seem to be exposed to questions regarding the continuing validity and benefit of the Law of Moses. While there is no evidence that Jesus was accused of misrepresenting the law, he begins his fulfilment statement with a defence of his right to speak to the law and fulfil it. As noted in the previous chapter, this is driven by *ēlthon*. This is a Matthean expression with Christological significance (Banks, 1974: 227). It occurs five other times with similar force (9:13; 10:34 11:19; 18:11; 20:28). Banks (1974: 227) senses that this may be redacted in 5:17 by Matthew to enhance the Christological importance of Jesus' work. Redacted or not, it certainly carries Christological weight as it precedes the authoritative Halakah to follow. Having established his right to speak to matters of the law, Jesus makes a startling statement that re-energizes the law with a new perspective. The remarkable statement that is to follow elevates Jesus well above Moses who could only be a mediator of the law. He is not the messenger bringing the law. Rather, he is the essence of the law understood as the surpassing righteousness. To understand this better, it is necessary to deconstruct this passage to see the integral parts.

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