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INTRODUCTION

For the past few weeks, we have embarked on a journey through the book of Matthew. We have seen that Matthew clearly shows that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah of Israel because he descends from King David, he was born in Bethlehem, Angels testified to his identity, wise men from the Far East mysteriously came to worship him, he was tested and passed his temptations in the desert with Satan and even had a “coronation” ceremony, so to speak in his baptism, which was attended by his Heavenly Father and the Holy spirit and who also testified to his divine identity.

By the time we get to Matthew chapter 5 where we are today, Jesus has begun to minister and now is teaching about the Kingdom that has come. This is the teaching of the heavenly King, the Messiah and deliverer.

Last week we looked at what Jesus was saying about the law, and we went “up” to get an overview from the text to see what the whole Bible says about how we as Christians are supposed to live God’s law. This week we are going to look at the same text, but this time we are going if “down” into the text.

Let’s listen to Matthew Chapter 5, verses 17-48. As I read the text, I will stop to make a few comments, but will save most of it until the end.

READING

Matthew 5:17–48 (ESV)

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. 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.

Jesus was probably speaking to his detractors, people that were upset with his supposed laxness in observing the law. He healed on sabbath day, he associated with sinners and other things that broke some people's ideas of how a person following God's law ought to live. His words and his actions were calculated to show the real truth about how life ought to be lived.

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

Jesus is showing that he is more serious about the law than the Pharisees. We see that some people will have either a diminished place or an exalted place in heaven depending on what we do with his law. But notice that they will still be in heaven. But others will not be there based upon their lack of righteousness.

Jesus says that our righteousness needs to exceed that of the Pharisees. Now the Pharisees were the "professionals" of Judaism. The pharisees spent all day, studying the law and trying to keep it. Most people had to work, but the Pharisees were supported through the temple tax so did not have to "work."

These words were shocking to the disciples and people listening. It would be like saying, you cannot enter unless you beat Michael Jordan one on one in basketball. People would have thought, "well then what hope is there for me then?" It was meant to be shocking.

Jesus in this passage is talking about some of the Ten Commandments: Murder, adultery, False testimony (lying).

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

Jesus says five times, “You have heard that it was said to those of old” ... They would have heard these things taught from the Pharisees as they taught the Law of Moses and the other Old Testament prophets. So Jesus is comparing their teaching to his. He says, “But I say to you.” This also would have been shocking since Jesus was comparing his words to that of the scholars of Law and to the Old Testament scriptures themselves. It would not have been lost on their ears, the amount of authority that he was taking.

Jesus, in this first stanza is saying that not only murder is wrong, but the thoughts about it. What if you were planning to murder and were prevented somehow? What if you wanted to and were afraid of getting caught? He is not saying all anger is wrong, but murderous anger is.

And more than that, you’re guilty even when you insult your fellow human. By saying “you fool” or “raca” in the native language. Maybe they voted for the wrong candidate or are driving too slow in traffic, or too fast. Those words easily fly out of our mouths. Remember all that Adam and Eve did to cast all of humanity into hell was eat an “apple!” When we insult a fellow human, Jesus is saying you are guilty enough to be cast into hell. Sin is sin. It is not how big it is; rather the existence of it that matters. A little bit of cancer, before modern medicine, was pretty much a death sentence.

²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your

gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Jesus is very practical. He says if there is something that is taking your unity from a brother or sister, you have to deal with that before you come to worship.

Jesus continues in verse 27,

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Again, the Pharisees were actually trying to limit the scope of the law to be the actual deeds done, while ignoring the heart. Jesus because he is diagnosing the depth of the disease of sin, says that what is happening inside of you is where the real sin is.

Jesus said elsewhere, Matthew 15:18–20,

¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

Jesus is saying that sin is so serious, that it would be better to do damage to your body to prevent it. But he is not serious that we poke out our eye or cut off our hand. He knows that we would just be a bunch of left-handed,

blind, lustful sinners wandering around. But the seriousness of it is still there.

³¹ "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Some of you noticed that I skipped these verses in the reading last week. My intent was to deal with this subject in more depth in Chapter 19 as we will. But since I decided to use this same passage again this week, I now have read them.

Verse 33,

³³ "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

The Pharisees were teaching that there were various degrees of oaths. Jesus says "no" there is only "yes" or "no", or you are lying. Lying, either by "intent" at the beginning, or by "result" at the end. Have the integrity to mean what you say.

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the

one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Even the most ancient laws of Hammurabi pre-dating the law of Moses spoke of limited retaliation. So that if someone broke your tooth, you could not kill them.

But Jesus again, shows that the better way is to forgive. Why are you focused on retaliation instead of forgiveness? Even more than that, do good to those that hate you. Don't resist the evil man. A soldier in the Roman army could force someone to carry a load for a mile. Jesus says, "go two." Give to those who beg.

Verse 43,

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Next Jesus really raises the bar. He wants people to be like him and God the Father; Love your enemies, pray for their salvation. God is continually gracious to sinners everyday and was and is to you. Love those that are different, don't just greet those like you, but be vulnerable and say "hi" or "hey" or "sup" to people that you might think hate you.

⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Jesus' teachings are the most profound ever given. The demands are far higher than any human can hope to attain. Jesus doesn't flinch in telling the truth. And speaks with authority and as if he will be the one that is going to judge; oh, he will be.

If you even have tried to turn over a new leaf, or stick to a diet, or just be a better person, you know that change is not easy. And the sort of change that we need to live up to his teaching seems impossible.

How are we supposed to live in relation to the law?

We saw that the New Testament recognizes, as any honest person would, the impossibility to earning salvation by keeping the law perfectly.

We are saved by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law.

Galatians 3:23–26 (ESV)

²³Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian [or tutor], ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

Romans 10:4 (ESV)

⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

We talked last week about three parts of the law: The Moral laws like the Ten commandments; the civil laws that governed their society; and the ceremonial and sacrificial laws, and also the prophecies.

Jesus when he says “I have not come to abolish the laws to but to fulfill them and not a “dot” will be done away with until all are accomplished is speaking largely of himself. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, and the entire sacrificial system was completed in his death on the cross for our behalf. He was the true and final lamb that was slain.

There are also three functions of the law, to teach us and show us our sin, like a mirror for our soul; to restrain evil in society, because God writes his basic laws on the hearts of people so they make laws that basically conform to his principles and restrain evil; and also the use of the law in our lives to reveal God to us and show us his perfection.

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We saw that people can have four responses to the law: We can dismiss it, we can despair over it, or we can delight in it and learn to depend on God to fulfill it in us.

But Jesus is very clear. The Law of God does have a place in the Christian life, and we cannot dismiss it, nor dare not despair over it either.

Jesus says this, Verses 19-20

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

That's speaking about me, by the way, I dare not "undo" what Jesus is doing here.

OUR CONDITION

This is why it is important to have a clear understanding of this important passage. Our natural instincts can lead us in the wrong direction when it comes to pleasing God; **we need to recognize that two paths lead to completely different ends. We need to know which pleases God.**

WHAT IS COMMON IN THESE VERSES?

In the Sermon on the Mount, we see that Jesus' teaching technique is often to compare two things. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, in his summary, Jesus compares several twos:

There are the paths.

Matthew 7:13 (ESV)

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

There are two trees.

Verse 17

¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

And there are two houses,

Matthew 7:24–26 (ESV)

²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell,

and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

Throughout the sermon Jesus is comparing things that look very similar, but are completely different in their substance or end result.

Two paths, one running to destruction and the other to salvation; two trees, one with good fruit and another with poison fruit that can kill you; and two houses one that collapses on its occupants and the other that protects them.

Slides 7,8,9 There are many things in nature that seem similar.

In our passage too, there are two contrasts also. **But what are they between?**

We see similar looking people; both are serious in their attempts to try to please God. Both are apparently seeking to know and obey God's law, both pray, both give. Both agree that murder is wrong, adultery is wrong, lying is wrong. They appear to be very similar. Yet Jesus is making a serious contrast.

Jesus says, "unless your righteousness exceeds the scribes and pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

So, Jesus is not saying, that you need to work harder than the Pharisees, though that may be what happens, but something that is "qualitatively" different, not just "quantitatively" different. We need something of a different "substance." Both are good people, trying to go to church, trying to obey God, both give and fast and pray, but one path leads to destruction.

Jesus warned his disciples in the book of John, "beware of the leaven (or bread) of the Pharisees." He meant their teaching was harmful and wrong. If eaten it was poisonous. So apparently Jesus was comparing his teaching against the prevailing teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees. **Jesus is comparing Christianity and religion.** They are completely different in their

outcome and substance. So, if this is true, we need to look at these verses and say, “ok if that it true, then what makes Christianity different than religion?”

WHAT WE NEED TO SEE

Verse 19 says,

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.

These people, though they do something wrong with God’s law, are in heaven. They might be the least, but they are there. We also see that the Pharisees or religious people are not, verse 20,

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

So, it is clear that Jesus is comparing very religious people, the Pharisees, to people that are in heaven.

Jesus is comparing Christianity (his followers) and the practice of religion. These are the two paths, the two trees, the two houses.

In every sermon I endeavor to preach the Gospel – the good news. The good news is this, that we are not saved by keeping the law. Jesus did not say “I came not to abolish the law, but that my disciples would keep it.” No, He said, “I came that not to Abolish the law, but to fulfill them.” Jesus himself is the fulfillment. He perfectly obeyed the law and all of its requirements so that he could be a spotless lamb and die for us on the cross, to bear our sin, so that God could justly forgive us. All of his righteousness is put on us, because we are “in Christ.” That is the good news. We are

saved by faith in Christ. So that is why we say that Christians, those that put their trust in Jesus are in heaven, while those that follow a religion are not. We have to turn from ourselves to trust in Jesus to be our substitute. There is no other way be in heaven!

So, there is this way of living and believing that vastly surpasses the religious way of living. We could title the rest of this sermon, “how not to be a Pharisee.”

Pharisees or religious people are concerned with doing or not doing the actual act.

Christians are concerned with what is going on in their heart. When sin arises they confess their sin and flee to Christ for forgiveness. This is why the Law still has a place in the life of Christ’s followers. It reveals the truth and purity and holiness of God. It makes us tremble before him because he is so holy! Yet we have experienced his mercy and flee to him only in this way!

Pharisees or religious people will do their religious deeds for all sorts of various motivations. They will do it because they think they are getting “points” with God. They will give or go to church, because of that. They might want to be seen as a “good person” and so give or serve in various ways. Their pride is a motivator. They also might seek to obey God’s laws out of fear, over God’s judgment.

Christians have a different set of motivation as we have seen in the “beatitudes”; they are poor in spirit, not prideful because they know they are hopeless sinners apart from Christ transforming their hearts. They are “meek” and don’t seek to defend themselves or get their own way because they know God is the one to do that. They give mercy, because they are overwhelmed with God’s mercy to them in Christ.

Pharisees or religious people can be very loving to their own. In their own church, as long as you don't "cross" them. But they also hide their light under a basket in case someone might see them. They withdraw from sinners to keep themselves pure.

A Christian will want others to see their light so that people can recognize that it is from God. Even if that brings out the enemies and persecution. They have courage to jump in and love people that are not like them or are unlovable.

CONCLUSION

Here are a few things to reflect on. The law has a definite place in the Christians' life. We are to love it just as the psalmist in Psalms 19 or 119. It shows who God is and our hearts should resonate with the goodness and truth of it. We delight in God's law.

A Christian already knows that God the Father loves them, and sent Christ to die for them. They understand that we cannot perform for God, he instead acted for us. All that we do is out of gratitude to him!

We know that we need to be very serious about obeying Christ. The reality of our faith is revealed in our obedience. Our obedience does not save us, our faith in Christ does. Yet, if we are not being challenged by God's law and turning in confession to Christ to transform us into his image, then we should question if our faith is real. We depend on God to transform our hearts to live his law.

If you are not sure you are in the Kingdom- that you are going to heaven, I would like to talk to you about that subject. But in short, turn in faith right now to God. Confess your sins, and by faith receive the gift of Christ and his work in forgiving your sins.

I invite everyone to pray with me now.