

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MARCH 7TH-8TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

A FULFILLMENT (MATTHEW 5:17-20)

After His disciples heard Jesus' description of the kind of person God blesses, they most likely were wondering, "how could anyone ever attain that kind of righteousness?"

- Surely keeping the Jewish law perfectly must be the way to attain God's blessings- but the only problem is, no-one has ever been able to do that (Eccl. 7:20).

Jesus has not come to abolish and do away with God's laws and commands (vs. 17-18).

- Instead He came to fulfill God's law- He came to "fill out" or "expand", to clarify their original meaning and point to God's heart for internal & external righteousness.
- What Jesus is saying is that He wants more from His disciples than begrudging obedience, behavioral modification, or simple rule following.

Jesus was not lowering God's standards, in fact He says that anyone who does will be called the "least in the Kingdom of heaven" (vs. 19).

- It must have been shocking to hear Jesus tell His disciples that the kind of righteousness they must have must "exceed that of the scribes & Pharisees" (vs. 20).
- The scribes and Pharisees were absolute EXPERTS in following the Mosaic law.

They tithed off of their "mint, dill and cumin" (Matt. 23:23), and followed strict guidelines for prayer, fasting, hand-washing, and Sabbath worship.

- There was no way that ANYONE could beat them at the righteousness game!
- But their "righteousness" was only external (Matt. 23:25).

What Jesus wants is a different kind of righteousness- one that begins in the heart first.

- He's not after more righteous deeds by human efforts, but more righteous hearts that have been transformed by God's grace.
- An inner righteousness that shows the world how good God is EXCEEDS an outer righteousness that shows everyone else how good we look.

After clarifying to His disciples the kind of righteousness that fulfills the law, Jesus gives six examples from the Jewish law of this principle at work (vs. 21-47).

MURDER (MATTHEW 5:21-26)

Jesus begins to redefine this new righteousness by redefining sin itself: beyond the physical act, sin begins with the intention of the heart.

- So Jesus brings up the familiar prohibition against murder from Exodus 20:13, but then shockingly connects murder to anger, abuse, and insult (vs. 21-22).
- A sin like murder begins first in a heart hardened by anger and hatred.

It's not a sin to be angry (Eph. 4:26), but it is a sin to let that anger control us to the point where we become unforgiving and bitter (Heb. 12:15).

- When that anger towards someone else leads us to use abusive and violent language towards them, we've committed the same kind of violence against them that God spoke against in His prohibition against murder- we're to bring our anger to God.

Not only does sinful anger and bitterness impact our relationships with others, it can affect our relationship with God (vs. 23-24).

- Jesus tells His disciples that before we offer a sacrifice in worship of God, we need to first deal with sinful anger and bitterness in our hearts towards other people (vs. 24).
- We're to be "peacemakers" (vs. 9)- people of reconciliation and forgiveness.

We're to "come to terms quickly with our accuser" (vs. 25).

- We can build offenses up in our heads to be much worse than they actually are.
- When Jesus tells us that if we don't "we'll be handed over to the judge...and won't get out until you've paid your last penny" (vs. 26), He's actually reminding us of the divine judgment that awaits those who refuse to forgive.

Nothing stifles or chokes out a move of God like a group of people that claim the name of Jesus but don't walk in the grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation of Jesus.

- A disciple's heart is committed to dealing with sinful anger, bitterness, and offense because they understand that it's unrighteous in God's sight.

ADULTERY (MATTHEW 5:27-30)

Jesus moves on to the command concerning adultery taken from Ex. 20:14.

- The Pharisaical interpretation of adultery at that time was that it was simply the physical act of sexual intimacy- anything else was technically permissible.
- Jesus begins to expand this command by getting straight to the heart of the matter.

Adultery is a sin because it's taking that which doesn't rightfully belong to us.

- A person can objectify another by gazing in a way that is only reserved for their spouse.
- Sexual impurity begins in the heart- spiritually speaking, lust & adultery are equivalent.

The "look" that Jesus mentions in vs. 28 is not a casual glance- it's a constant stare with the purpose of feeding the inner sexual appetite as a substitution for the act of sex.

- It's not wrong to notice an attractive member of the opposite sex, but it becomes sin when the "look" occurs and they're sexualized and fantasies are awakened in the imagination.
- According to Jesus, it's just like adultery- you're taking that which doesn't belong to you!

Verses 29-30 is saying to purify the desires of the heart and discipline the actions of the body.

- Obviously Jesus isn't speaking literally in "tear out our eye" and "cut off our hand".
- He's telling us to deal immediately and decisively with whatever triggers us.

It costs less to address the root of the sin early on.

- He's saying, "Do WHATEVER it takes to correct your heart's attitude NOW", because an inflamed, uncontrolled appetite for sexual impurity will cost you EVERYTHING.

DIVORCE & OATHS (MATTHEW 5:31-37)

In vs. 31, Jesus quotes the rabbinic thinking on divorce that was drawn from Deut. 24:1.

- The OT instruction requiring a certificate of divorce wasn't commanding divorce, it was actually providing a woman protection when a divorce wasn't chosen.
- The certificate kept husbands from treating their wives carelessly.

The scribes & Pharisees were using this instruction to excuse any divorce for any reason.

- So Jesus clarifies by narrowing the allowable reasons for a justifiable divorce.
- Notice- He's not commanding divorce- He hates it (Mal. 2) but at the same acknowledges that at times it's permissible in the instance of "sexual immorality" (vs. 32)

The Bible speaks of divorce being permissible because of desertion (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

- The purpose of Jesus' teaching is not to explain every detail regarding divorce & remarriage, but rather to help us think about God's design for marriage- it's intended to be exclusive, one man/one woman, for life. Divorce is to be a LAST RESORT- not a 1st option!

Jesus' next example from the law involved the practice of oaths.

- A vow or an oath was an optional, above-and-beyond promise of an offering to God.
- It wasn't required, but once it was made it had to be kept and it couldn't be complicated, legalized, or reduced to technicalities. If it was broken, it was subject to God's judgment.

The Pharisees had twisted this practice to matters of technicalities (a lot like American legal contracts) that would misconstrue the normal meaning of words.

- Their system of oaths was used to sidestep the truth through clever wordplay.
- They wouldn't swear by the name of God, but they'd swear by "heaven", "Jerusalem", or their "own head" (vs. 34-37).

Jesus tells His disciples not to take an oath at all, but simply to say "Yes" or "No" (vs. 34, 37).

- Our character should be so consistent, stable, and trustworthy that we don't need to swear or offer oaths to get people to believe us.
- What Jesus desires for us as His disciples is trustworthiness, honesty, and integrity.
- It begin in our hearts- if our heart is pure and trustworthy it will be shown in our life.

LOVING YOUR ENEMIES (MATTHEW 5:38-48)

The "eye for eye" passages (Exod. 21:24, Lev. 24:19-20) were given to legislate justice.

- Breaking the law had consequences, but personal vengeance wasn't intended.
- The Pharisees had taken these passages as a divine right for retribution.

But the citizens of Jesus' Kingdom are NOT to seek revenge or reciprocity-(vs. 39).

- If they're sued, they'll give more than the judge decreed (vs. 40) and if a Roman soldier forces them to carry a burden for a mile, they're to be willing to go two (vs. 41).
- They're to give freely and generously more than what is required of them (vs. 42).

This is where Jesus' teaching directly confronts our strongly held cultural beliefs on justice and giving people what it is they deserve.

- But as citizens of a new Kingdom, our citizenship is based precisely on us not getting what we deserve.
- Because God loved us when we were His enemies (Rom. 5:10), we're to love our enemies & pray for those who hurt us (vs. 44).

When we do this, it shows our identity as "sons of the Father who is in heaven" (vs. 45).

- The Father gives His gifts (sun & rain) to good and evil alike, and so we as His children are to love and pray for everyone- not just the ones we think deserve it.
- If we only love those who love us, are we really walking in God's love? (vs. 46-47)

By ending this section of teaching with this idea, Jesus is doing two things.

- First, He's setting the bar so high that anyone with delusions of their own self-righteousness or holiness is confronted with how inadequate their own "righteousness" is.
- But secondly, He's talking about a different kind of perfection ("telos")- a complete, fully surrendered, whole person righteousness.

"Does my inside demeanor match my outside behavior? Where's my heart?"

"Who am I when I'm alone?"

"What comes out when I'm squeezed?"