

The Sermon: Teachings From Jesus Christ  
Part 3: A Better Righteousness  
February 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup>

**Welcome:** If you're just joining us, we're spending the first part of this year walking through the most well known sermon that Jesus ever preached...it's found in the gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7.

I believe the *Sermon on the Mount* is one of the best places in all of Scripture to go to see who Jesus Christ is, what it means to know Him, and if we know Him, how we will live! This is true whether you're a follower of Jesus, or you're unsure about Christianity on a whole. If you want to know who Jesus is, and what Christianity is about, start here!

Now...if you haven't already noticed from our first two weeks, as we move further into Jesus' sermon, He will press deeper and deeper into the nooks and crannies of our hearts.

There will be moments when you'll feel like you're being pulled apart by His words!

**Biology** – Do you remember 8<sup>th</sup> grade biology? No matter who you ask and regardless of whether they enjoyed the experience or not, the thing that most people will remember about 8<sup>th</sup> grade biology is the day the teacher busted out containers filled with formaldehyde and a specimen! I'm not sure what specimen was in your container, but mine was a pig. And for the next several days, our class dissected those pigs (which is a very generous way of describing what 8<sup>th</sup> graders do). We pulled our pigs apart...we cut deep...in order to examine and understand what was inside.

If you read the Sermon on the Mount with your eyes wide open, you will feel at times like you're being dissected. But please hear me! What God is doing in that moment is very different from 8<sup>th</sup> grade biology class...it's more like surgery! In the same way that a skilled surgeon cuts deep to remove disease from a sick person's body, Jesus will cut deep into our lives to expose and address the sick and disease-ridden parts of our hearts. **But hear me...He does that because he's for our joy and wholeness!** Don't be surprised if Jesus' words become very uncomfortable for you. Rather, see that God (in his goodness) might be allowing you to experience discomfort in order to heal you, maybe even to save you...

**To show you this, look with me at Matthew 5, starting in verse 17.**

*"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved."* Matthew 5:17-18

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Now, it is essential to understand what Jesus means here if we're to understand the rest of His Sermon. If you don't understand these two verses, His words will crush you! You'll shrink in despair.

**You see, when you read chapter five, you'll notice that Jesus goes back to the Old Testament again and again, and each time, He takes the law that was given to Israel through Moses and reinterprets the meaning of that law to show us what our lives will look like when He is our King!**

**For example...in vs. 21, Jesus says...**

*"You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder...' but I say, if you are even angry with someone, or you call someone an idiot, you are subject to judgment. You are in danger of the fires of hell." So, under the old covenant that God gave to Moses, murder was off-limits. Jesus comes along and says... 'If your anger gets out of control (if you're condescending or critical, and you belittle people), you're just as guilty.' **How you doing so far? Are you feeling pulled apart yet?***

**(Or, look at vs. 27)** *"You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.'* *But I say, if you look at a woman who isn't your wife (a man who isn't your husband) and there is lust in your heart...meaning, you allow thoughts about them to foster into desire and fantasy, until you're in bed with them in your mind...you've already committed adultery."* So...under the old covenant of Moses, 'adultery is a no-go.' Jesus comes along as says, 'lust is one and the same as adultery.'

**(One more – vs.38)** *"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven.'* I'll just ask you right now...how many of you sent a Valentine's Day card to your enemy? When was the last time you prayed for the family member who repeatedly says and does very hurtful things to you? When did you last ask God to bless the colleague you can't stand to be around? **How are we doing so far? Does anyone feel the surgeon's knife?**

**Jesus' words are very hard to read, aren't they?**

**Which is why, for the last two centuries, certain scholars and theologians have tried to soften the weight of Jesus' words by saying that He really didn't mean what He appears to be saying.**

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Their argument says that in the Old Testament, God gave his people a law of strict rules and requirements and a sacrificial system, all of which are very primitive and outdated. But in the New Testament Jesus has come along and changed that. He throws out the old law with all its requirements and in its place he gives us a new law of love and liberty. So, the Old Testament is about rules and judgment, but the New Testament is about grace and forgiveness.

**As this view has gained popularity, it has fostered the belief that what Jesus gives us is a list of ethical teachings and our calling as Christians is to try our very best to apply them so we can become better people. But when we fail or fall, that's ok...because we're under the law of love! And now...God is more lenient with his people. So, this argument says, Jesus has lowered the bar for us...and obedience is no longer that important.**

The problem with this conclusion is that it doesn't seem to be what Jesus is saying at all!

Listen to Jesus' words in chapter five alone...and ask yourself! Is He lowering the bar, or is He raising it? Is He saying, 'you know...murder in the Old Testament...off-limits,' but now that I've come...you know...try your very best not to murder your neighbor, but if you do it's ok because now we're a little more lenient under the law of love! It's simply not true that Jesus lowers the bar for those who want to be his followers!

**Yod** – In fact, Jesus says *'not even the smallest detail of the law will disappear until its purpose has been achieved.'* The word for 'smallest' is the Hebrew word, yod! A yod was a tiny hook on the end of a Hebrew letter that distinguished it from other letters!

Jesus says, 'not even a yod (not a comma or a hyphen) will disappear until the law's purpose has been accomplished! He cannot possibly be saying that He came to eliminate the law!

**In fact...I would suggest that when Jesus came, He elevated the law's purpose in our lives.**

***"What do you mean?"***

To understand what Jesus means, you must look down further at verse 20.

*"But I warn you – unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom." Matthew 5:20*

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All through the gospels, Jesus makes statements like this that at first glance might go unnoticed! But when you look at them closely, His words will knock to your knees.

**Pharisees:** Do you know anything about the Pharisees? In our day and age, to be labeled a Pharisee isn't a compliment, but in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Pharisees were highly esteemed among the Jewish people. Obedience to the law of God was the master passion of their lives. So, they knew that the law contains 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions and everything they did, ate, wore, and said was in rigid compliance with those rules!

In Matthew 23...Jesus says that the Pharisees were so careful about their obedience to the law that they tithed off of their herb gardens – their mint, dill and cumin!  
**When was the last time you sold some of your Oregano or Rosemary and gave away the proceeds to the poor? How's your spice cabinet bringing glory to God?**

The Pharisees were famous for their righteousness. Compared to them, we're spiritual rookies! I don't care how big your Bible is, do you have tattoo God's law across your forehead? (If so...you have a different problem!)

**Yet...Jesus looks at the crowds and says, *"if you want to follow me...if you want to step into my kingdom, your righteousness must surpass their righteousness!"***

Now...if you were here for week one of this series, you might say, *"Jed...two weeks ago you told me that the only way for me to draw near to God is to admit my poverty...that I have nothing to offer God to earn his favor. But now you're telling me that the only way to earn God's favor is to become even more righteous than the Pharisees! What am I missing?"*

**Let me suggest two things that Jesus is saying to us in this text and in the Sermon on the Mount!**

**First: Jesus calls us to love God by obeying Him!**

**Let me ask you this! How do you love someone?** You find out what pleases them and do it!

**Valentine's Day** – Last year, Valentines Day came and went, and the day after Beth told me how surprised she was that I didn't get her a card! Now...give me a moment to explain! Years ago, we decided that we weren't going to pressure ourselves into going out on Valentine's Day...and we weren't going to get expensive gifts. It's just a decision we made! **Somehow** along the way, I got it in my head that our agreement

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included cards. To this day, I do not know where I got this notion? So...we had a conversation about my oversight, and Beth's desire to receive a card. So, can you guess what I didn't forget this weekend! A card! **Not because I want to keep Beth happy...but because I love her and want to do what pleases her!**

**In the same way, how do you love God? Find out what pleases him and do it?** In the Old Testament, God gave his people the Ten Commandments as an expression of his will and said, *"If you love me, obey me!"*

Jesus loves you too much to say, 'forget about the law.' He wants you to love His Father by obeying Him!

Someone might say... *"Well I don't know how I feel about the 10 commandments. They're really...old!"* Listen, no one really looks at the 10 commandments and says, *'eh...they don't matter,'* especially when it comes to how people treat you! You might not want to obey them, but do you like it when people lie to you? Steal from you? Murder you? Cheat you? Parents...do you like it when your children disobey you? No!

**We like God's law when it plays out in our favor, which shows that we agree that God's law is good! So...our problem isn't the law, it's that we don't want to obey it! We don't have a law problem...we have a love problem!**

Furthermore...the 10 commandments are more than an expression of God's will, they are an expression of God's character that show us how we were created to live!

**We were made in God's image. We were made to reflect him. When we don't follow God's law of justice and integrity and love and peace, we violate His design, and there is always a breakdown.**

**Cars & Bodies:** If you don't keep oil in your car, you're not honoring the design of your car, and it will eventually break down! If you consistently eat junk and watch HGTV all day, you will break down because you're dishonoring the way your body was designed!

In the same way, when we disobey God (sin), there is a breakdown in our lives...in our families...in our society! But hear me...Jesus is for your joy, not your destruction...

**So...the first thing Jesus says is... *"I want you to love God by obeying Him!"***

**Then He says, *"You will only love God this way if you allow Me to do it for you!"***

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**Let me ask you. What kind of love does God desire?** Begrudging obedience or joyful obedience?

**Obedience** – If I ask one of my children to take out the trash, and they respond, ***“Yes, I will take out the trash, but I want you to know that I hate doing it and I hate when you ask me too!”*** Does that warm my heart? No...I’d rather hear, ***“Of course dad...I’ll do it because I love you.”*** That happens in our home...once in a while! But that’s our aim...because it’s an obedience that comes from the heart and brings joy!

God desires a love and obedience that comes from the heart!

**Remember...Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees! But it doesn’t make sense. They were so obedient!** Later in Matthew 23, Jesus actually called the Pharisees whitewashed tombs. They were beautiful on the outside...but underneath all of their spiritual activity, and religious lingo, and obedience...there was no life. There was no joy. There was no affection for the Father! They were dead.

Now...if the obedience of the Pharisees was insufficient. And if we’ve already seen that we don’t love God with a righteous love that seeks to joyfully obey Him all of the time!

**The question is...what hope do we have?**

**Listen again to Jesus! Do you remember what He said?** *“I have come to accomplish the purpose of the law.”* The text actually says, *“I have come fulfill the law.”*

**What does it mean to fulfill the law?** It means to keep it! If there is a stop sign, you fulfill the law by stopping. If you ignore the stop sign, you pay the penalty!

And because we are unable to obey the law perfectly, Jesus came to earth in our place, and He fulfilled the law not once, but twice!

**First...he fulfilled the law by obeying it completely!**

The New Testament writers who stood beside Jesus throughout His entire ministry, acknowledge this...

*“This High Priest of ours (Jesus) understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.”* Hebrews 4:15

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*"(Christ) is our example, and you must follow in his steps. He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone." 1 Peter 2:21b-22*

**Jesus was joyfully committed to the will of the Father. Love for the Father was the master passion of His life! He did what we haven't done!**

**Second...he fulfilled the law by paying the penalty!**

Jesus' obedience to the Father led Him to his death...

The prophet, Isaiah spoke of Jesus when he wrote...

*"He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord has laid on him the sins of us all." Isaiah 53:5-6*

The narrative of the Bible says that we were created to know, obey, and delight in God with our lives! But we haven't done that. Isaiah says...we've left God's paths to follow our own. We've dishonored God's design for our lives, and as a result our lives have fallen apart...

**In Galatians chapter 3, the Apostle Paul describes the purpose of the law...**

*"Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins." Galatians 3:21*

The law was never meant to save you! It was given to show us how sinful we are so that we would look to God to save us! So that when we look honestly into the law and realize how far we fall short of God's standard, our eyes would turn toward Jesus!

**Our only hope is that God would do for us what we cannot do for ourselves!**

**On the cross, Jesus did just that! Jesus was bent and broken for our sin to make us whole! Jesus took the full weight of God's judgment so that we could be set free!**

And when we place our trust in what Jesus Christ did for us, God forgives us (because Jesus paid our penalty), and He gives us the perfect record of Christ! His record of flawless and joyful obedience! His righteousness!

**This is what Paul writes earlier in Galatians...**

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*"Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law."*

Galatians 2:16

You can spend your whole life trying to become righteous in order to earn God's favor! But it will never work! The standard is too high! You'll wilt. **You must have a better righteousness!**

#### Close

**How do you know if you have a better righteousness?** In your heart of hearts, is there an earnest desire to know and love Jesus? Or do you find yourself doing things to keep God happy? *I better do this or God will zap me!* Do you spend an inordinate amount of time comparing yourself to others, proud of your goodness and critical of others? Or do you freely admit and confess sin and boast in the beauty of Christ? Do you frequently write off people who don't live up to your standards, or are you gracious with the faults and weaknesses of others? Are you able to rest in the truth that God's delights in you because Jesus got it right for you? Or, do you look at the law of God and grow anxious?

**Jesus offers a better righteousness. The only way to get a better righteousness is to receive it from Him! To lay down all of your efforts...to throw up your hands and say, "Jesus, I give up! I'm powerless. I'm penniless. I'm poor. I need the righteousness that only you can give me!"**

**I trust you...**please accept me on the basis of what Jesus did for me!

**I repent of my sin...**I turn from it! I'm sorry for my sin. I want to love you with my whole heart!

**I bow my knee to you...**as King!

**The moment this happens, God gives you the perfect record of Jesus! By His Spirit, He gives you a new heart, and awakens in you a desire and power to obey!**

*"The Sermon on the Mount is quite unlike the Ten Commandments in the sense of it being absolutely unworkable unless Jesus Christ can remake us."*

Oswald Chambers

**The beautiful thing is...He does!**

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**Baptism Celebration** – I need you (to be the Savior of me life...to forgive me). I want you (to be the King of my life). Baptism is a celebration of our union with Christ! We are covered in his righteousness.

**Pray**