

RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD

MATTHEW 5:20 • TV125B

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Matthew 5:20

“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Today we are going to open our Bible to the book of **Matthew, chapter 5 and the 20th verse.**

My subject is: **“RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD.”** Everyone ought to be interested in this subject: **“RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD.”**

In **Matthew 5:20** the Scripture says: *“For I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God.”*

Now, you think about that a moment: *“Except your righteousness, (your holiness), exceed, (not equal, come up to, but exceed the righteousness of the most moral, religious men of the day of Christ our Lord and the apostles) except your righteousness exceed theirs, you are not going to enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

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Now, who's speaking these words? The speaker is the Lord of glory Himself. This is no ordinary man. This is no ordinary preacher. The speaker is the Messiah, the Lord of heaven and earth "*who was made flesh and dwelt among us.*"

Jesus Christ our Lord, God almighty, God in human flesh: "*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth.*"

He said: "*I am the truth. Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.*" Our speaker here is the Lord Himself.

Now to whom is He speaking? I know this portion of Scripture is called the "**Sermon on the Mount.**" It is said that "*Jesus went into the mountain and when he was set, his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught.*"

The Lord Jesus Christ is speaking here to His disciples. That's the ones to whom He said: "*blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, blessed are the peacemakers, and blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.*"

And all of these three chapters in **Matthew** He is speaking to His disciples. Now read it again, **verse 1**; it says: "*He went up into a mountain and seeing the multitude, and when he was set his disciples came unto him and he opened his mouth and taught them.*"

And He is speaking here to His disciples, to those who had followed Him, not to men in general. You see, the Sermon on the Mount is not the way to be saved. It is the way of those who are saved. It is the attributes or character of those who are saved.

He spoke to His disciples. Now, what's His subject? The Lord of glory is speaking and He is speaking to those who are following Him, who are listening to Him, who are His disciples.

And His subject; what is it? It is holiness and righteousness, that righteousness which makes a man God's child.

That's the righteousness He's talking about, that righteousness with which God is well pleased, that righteousness with which God is pleased, not that righteousness that appeals to the flesh or appeals to men or which a man can fulfill.

But the holiness and righteousness He's talking about is that righteousness which a man has that opens the kingdom of God for him, enables him to have communion with God, and fellowship with God, to come into the presence of a holy God, that righteousness which makes a man accepted of God, that righteousness which equips a man for heaven.

Heaven, my friend, is a holy place, not just a special place, it's a holy place. It's prepared by a holy God for a holy people. "*Heaven is a place wherein dwelleth righteousness,*" the

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righteousness which we are talking about here, pure, perfect, immaculate, immutable, holiness of God.

“Who shall stand in his presence, he that hath clean hands and a pure heart,” nothing less than that. You see; God can require no more than perfection. He can accept no less than perfection, and still be God.

God cannot accept men on a schedule from one to ten. It's ten, that's all; its holiness, its righteousness and it is truth. This is what our Lord is talking about. The speaker is the Lord of glory.

And the people to whom He's talking to is His disciples, He said: *“Except your righteousness, (your holiness exceed the righteousness of the most moral, religious man, who ever lived), you won't even enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

The righteousness of which He speaks, that righteousness which is His subject is that holiness and righteousness that pleases God, that's accepted of God, that opens heavens doors, heaven, that holy place, *“there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.”*

Now then; no man has this righteousness by nature, no man. We are born in sin. No man has this righteousness by works. No man has this righteousness by the deeds of the law. Some thought they did and unfortunately some today think they do.

You see; these Pharisees and Scribes of whom the Lord speaks here; they tried to accomplish this righteousness by endeavoring to keep the law or the Ten Commandments. That's the reason the Lord said in **verse 17**; (now watch verse 17, two or three verses just before our text).

He said to His disciples: *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law. (Don't you think for a moment that I have come to destroy the law or to lessen the demands of the law or to do away with the law or to even ignore the law?)”*

He says: **verse 18**, *“till heaven and earth pass. Not one jot, not one tittle, shall pass from God's holy law till all of it be fulfilled.”* No sir; “I didn't come to lessen the law. I didn't come to destroy the law. I didn't come to do away with the law; the law will not pass away till every bit of it be fulfilled.”

Those who would live by the law and those who would be saved by the law and those who will establish a righteousness on the basis of the moral law; they must fulfill every jot and every tittle, all of the law.

To seek righteousness by the law is to be required to have two things, to never sin and never know sin. Now, that's just how strict the law is. If we are going to be saved and if we are going to establish holiness, and righteousness before God, based on the law, we must never know sin and we must never commit sin for the Scripture says:

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“To offend in one point is to be guilty of the whole law.” That’s what Christ said in **verse 19**: *“Why whosoever shall break one of the least commandments, and teach men so shall be called least in the kingdom of God,”* just one of the least Commandments.

Do you see what He is saying? Our Lord is saying: *“Except your righteousness, (your holiness, exceed that finest, that most impeccable righteousness that any moral, religious man can produce, that goodness, that morality), except your righteousness exceed that, you are not going to enter the kingdom of heaven,”* for there were many who sought to establish righteousness and holiness before God by their works and by their deeds and by obedience to the law.

Christ said: *“I didn’t come to destroy the law; (now don’t think that for a moment: I didn’t come to lessen its demands). I didn’t come destroy the law till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall pass from the law till it all be fulfilled. I say unto you: whosoever shall break one of the least commandments, (one that you count insignificant) he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”*

Somebody said: “I never lie unless I have to, or I never steal anything except to eat when I am hungry.” You know, we talk about white lies and we talk about little sins, Christ said: *“the least commandment.”* *“To offend in one point is to be guilty of the whole law.”* So those who live under the law, those who would seek holiness and righteousness based on the Ten Commandments or an outward morality, *“do you not hear what the law says?”*

Now, we don’t have the time to cover every verse in **Matthew 5** but I want you to go on and read the rest of that chapter and read what our Lord says. He says, and He is quoting the law and this is the way people interpret the law:

He said: *“You have heard it said by them of old time. (You’ve heard it said unto the teachers of old.) Thou shalt not kill. To kill is to be guilty of murder but I say unto you (and this is what the law saith; this is what the holy law of God is saying) not only thou shalt not kill but to have a thought of anger and wrath is to be guilty already of murder.”*

He said: *“If you say unto your brother thy fool; you are in danger of hell fire.”*

You see, that is murder in the thought, that’s murder in the attitude. That’s where the law reaches. The holy law of God doesn’t just reach to my actions, it reaches to my attitude.

It doesn’t just make demands on the outward man; it makes demands on the inward man. It doesn’t require just obedience outwardly; it requires obedience inwardly. For you see; *“God doesn’t look on the outward countenance but on the heart.”*

Now, you say: “I’ve never murdered anyone.” No; and everybody would agree with you. There are no witnesses to the fact that you have ever murdered anybody but there is an all-seeing, omnipotent, omniscient witness, who knows your thoughts and you would like to have murdered somebody.

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You had thoughts of murder. You had thoughts of hatred. You had thoughts of bigotry and malice and God looks on the heart. It's the heart; that's the seed of affections, "*Out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts. My son; give me your heart. Keep your heart. Out of it are the issues of life.*" Do you see that?

Then Christ said: "*You've heard it said by them of old times; thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you to lust, to desire, is to commit adultery.*"

You see, it's the thought. You say: "I've never committed adultery." Have you ever thought about it? Have you ever considered it? Has it ever entered your mind?

Guilty! The law of God says guilty for the law of God doesn't only charge us outwardly but it charges us inwardly. It just keeps going. He says: "*Thou shalt not swear, by heaven, earth, or anything on the earth.*" Anything more than yes or no is sin, anything.

Now, we are given to emphasize in what we say. We use strong words like "yes or no" you know. We precede it with a few strong words. Anything less, anything more than yes or no is evil.

We say, "I swear to God that is true or I swear upon my mother's grave that's true or I swear that's the truth." That's evil, and it's promoted from a heart that is given to exaggeration and given to emphasis and your word is not sufficient so you have to add something to it.

Read on! He said: "*You've heard it said and eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth;*" when the Bible is teaching that it is teaching proper judgment and proper punishment according to sin. That's what the Bible is teaching.

It's teaching that if a man steals a watermelon, you don't put him in an electric chair. And if a man murders his neighbor, you don't give him six weeks with a suspended sentence, "*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*" In other words, the crime merits the punishment that is suitable to the crime.

Our Lord said, the law says this, "*if your enemy smites you on the cheek; turn the other cheek. If he asks you for your coat, give him your overcoat too. If he compels you by force to walk with him a mile, go two with him.*"

"I couldn't do that preacher." That's what I'm saying: you can't do what the law demands, you can't. There's no flesh that can establish righteousness before God by this law.

There's no way that a human being in the church or out of the church, in the pulpit, in the pew, or in the world; I don't care man, woman, boy or girl, old or young can come up to this perfect requirement of God's law. That's the reason I say that men are fools to try to establish a righteousness before God or claim to be good.

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Now maybe you can say that I am a good person compared to a criminal. You can, but I'm a good person compared to this person or that person. But before God, before God's law we are sinners. We have thought sin, we have imagined sin, we have dreamed sin, we have anticipated sin and we have been restrained.

There are a lot of things that restrain us. You can take that old tiger over there in the cage. He's a good tiger as long as he is in the cage. But you let him out of the cage and you will see what his real nature is.

That's the way some of you are. You are held in by the restraint and bars of matrimony, religion, reputation, your job, or something like that. What would you be if all those things were taken away?

Some of us who were in the service in World War II; we saw what men and women are really like 9,000 miles away from home with the bars of church membership and the bars of matrimony and the bars of respectability and the bars of reputation all lifted. Nobody knew them, nobody is going to report what they are all like.

That is what man is by nature. That's what the law says; men who seek holiness by the law; they are either blind to their sins or they are blind to the real holiness of the law.

Christ said: *"You've heard it said by them of old times; you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemies. I say to you; love your enemies: Pray for them which despitefully use you, pray for them. If your enemy hunger; feed him. If your enemy naked; clothe him. Pray for him and don't have any hatred at all."*

My friends; what we have done, we have missed this thing. We don't know what sin is and we don't know what the law says or we wouldn't try to establish righteousness before God based on the law and our obedience unto it.

Our Lord said to the Pharisees and this offended them; they got on Him for eating without washing His hands. That was one of their ceremonies, one of their traditions, and one of their customs to wash your hands before you ate.

He didn't and His disciples didn't. They said: *"You don't wash your hands before you eat."* He said, *"it's not that which goeth into the mouth that defiles a man, it's that which comes from his heart."*

And you see these men were offended by that, why? It was because they thought that righteousness consisted in outward things, they didn't do this and didn't do that and didn't do the other and they thought that made them holy.

Christ said: *"Out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts, out of the heart proceeds murders, out of the heart proceeds blasphemy, out of the heart proceeds fornication, out of the heart comes these things: this is that which defiles a man, not to eat with unwashed hands."*

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In **Luke 16:15** he said: *“Ye are they that justify yourselves before men but God knows your hearts and that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination to God.”* Oh how we need to look at that verse and how we need to study it.

Are we justifying ourselves before men? What is the basis of our conduct and behavior? Is it to seek the approval of men or are we seeking righteousness and holiness before the Lord God? There is a difference!

The Pharisees had a form of righteousness. Listen to this Pharisee in the temple; Christ said: *“The Pharisee went into the temple to pray and he lifted his eyes to heaven and he said: Lord I thank ye I’m not like other men, I fast twice a week and I pray and I give alms to the poor and I don’t commit adultery and I’m not unjust and I’m not an extortioner; and I’m not even like that publican over there.”*

And our Lord said, *“the Pharisee went home damned and condemned because God looked at his heart.”* God didn’t pay any attention to what he said, any attention to what he did, because our Lord God saw his heart; he saw his heart.

God called these men, “hypocrites, they say and do not. They claim and are not.” Christ called them *“whited sepulchers, whited graves.”* He said, *“On the outside you are whitewashed and you appear beautiful to men but on the inside you are full of dead men’s bones.”*

All of the creeping, crawling, vile insects of hell are in your heart and you know they are there. While you claim this outward respectability, outward morality, and outward righteousness, your very insides are exposed to the all-seeing eye of God and God condemns you for what you are inside.

You better have righteousness better than that outward righteousness. He not only called them “hypocrites and whited sepulchers and a generation of snakes” but He also called them “clean cups on the outside.”

I wonder if you go into a restaurant and the waitress brings you a cup and it’s just as pretty and shiny and clean on the outside but on the inside, my goodness alive, it looks like it’s been used for a year and never been washed. Would you drink out of it, of course not?

Christ said: *“These men are clean cups on the outside but on the inside they are full of extortion and excess.”* He said, *“Thou whited sepulcher, thy hypocrite; cleanse first that which is within and the outside will be clean.”*

This was Paul’s charge against Israel in **Romans 10:1**. He said: *“I bear them record; they have a zeal for God, (they have a zeal for God, they have an enthusiasm for religion), but not according to knowledge.”*

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“They are ignorant of God’s righteousness, (God’s holiness), and they are going about to establish a righteousness of their own (a holiness of their own).” They are going about to establish something that doesn’t even exist.

They are going about to establish something on the basis of a law which cannot save, which wasn’t given to save. They are going about to establish an outward morality that God doesn’t even look upon. In fact; He looks upon it and condemns it.

It comes down to this in **Isaiah 64:6**, Isaiah said, *“We are all as an unclean thing. Our righteousness’ are filthy rags. We all do fade as the leaf. Our iniquities like the wind have taken us away.”*

Every man in the Old Testament, who saw God, saw his sins, every man; I don’t care how moral he was, how influential he was, how important he was, or how religious he was.

Isaiah said: *“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord high and lifted up. His train filled the temple and the cherubim’s and seraphim’s cried: holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts.”*

And he said: *“I cried O woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips.”* When this man saw God’s holiness he saw his sinfulness and the sinfulness and wickedness of all about him.

Job was an outwardly moral man. He was a law-abiding citizen. He was a respected man, he was a religious man. He prayed for his sons and daughters. He said: *“I’m going to pray for them lest they not pray for themselves, I’m going to offer a sacrifice for them lest they forget.”*

Even God told Satan that Job was a man who shunned evil and yet, when Job saw the holiness of God he said, *“Lord; I’ve heard of you and now mine eyes seeth thee, wherefore, I hate myself. I repent in sackcloth and ashes: I’ve spoken once, twice, and I will never speak again: woe is me.”*

Daniel, praying Daniel, suffering Daniel, Daniel of the lion’s den; he said: *“when I saw the Lord my beauty melted into corruption, (corruption, mind you).”* That’s what Daniel said of his righteousness, *“corruption.”*

It brings me back to my text. Our Lord said: *“Therefore, except your righteousness, your holiness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees you shall not enter the kingdom of God.”*

Now let’s work on that a little bit!

First of all: Their righteousness was their own!

It was established by their works, by their fasting, praying, obedience, abstinence, and all of these things. Our righteousness as believers is Christ; Christ is our righteousness.

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Listen to these Scriptures:

Romans 10:4, “*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.*”

2 Corinthians 5:21: “*He was made sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him:*

Romans 5:12, 19, *Wherefore, by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin so death passed upon all men for all have sinned. By one man’s disobedience we became sinners. By the obedience of one we were made righteous.*”

Their righteousness was their own, their own. Ours is Christ. He was our Representative; He obeyed the law for us. He imputed to us, imparted to us, He gave to us, He reckoned to us a perfect righteousness based on His obedience.

Now, their righteousness, the Scribes and Pharisees, was by their own works; their works were theirs. Ours is Christ’s work. He fulfilled the law for us.

You see; a man told me one time, he said: “Preacher, until I started listening to you on Channel 13 I didn’t know why Christ came into the world. I know He came and died but I didn’t know why He lived on this earth 33 ½ years as a man in the flesh; why was He tempted, why was He tested? Why didn’t He just come from heaven as a full grown man and die on a cross and go on back to heaven and get the job done?”

“*Our Lord was made under the law.*” You see; God’s law demands obedience. God’s law must be honored. God gave the law to man and man must keep the law. God requires obedience to the law of man and man must obey that law.

And Christ came down here in subjection to the law of the home, the law of the land, the law of Israel and the ceremonial law and the law of God, the moral law. He kept them all “*in every jot and tittle.*” He said, “*I came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it, fulfill it.*”

You see; He not only died on the cross and satisfied justice but in His daily life, in His walk and talk and thoughts He knew no sin and He never sinned.

What were those two things a while ago that I mentioned to you that we had to have before the law, never know sin and never do sin. “*Christ knew no sin,*” and the Father said, “*this is my Son in whom I am well pleased.*” He did that for us. He represented us.

Secondly: And then notice this; their righteousness was their own based on their own works!

Their righteousness was imperfect as all flesh is imperfect. There is no perfection in the flesh but ours is a perfect righteousness; it’s perfect in Christ:

“*He is made unto us wisdom, (perfect wisdom), righteousness, (perfect righteousness, holiness, perfect holiness), redemption, (perfect redemption).* For the Father said of Christ: “*this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.*”

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Thirdly: Now, something else about the Pharisee's righteousness; it was their hope!

For they are going to stand some day before the Lord of glory and say: *"Lord; we have preached in your name. We have prophesied, we have cast out devils and we did many wonderful works."*

Some might say, "That's our righteousness, that's our hope. What we did, we went to church, we served and we taught Sunday school. We fasted, we prayed, we gave alms, and we gave our tithes. That's our hope."

He shall say: *"Depart from me I never knew you."* That's their hope and that's their righteousness. God can't accept it. God is a holy God.

You see, I don't care how good your righteousness is, it's a fleshly righteousness: *"In the flesh dwelleth no good thing. It's filthy rags."*

God cannot accept anything less than perfection. You can present the best deeds a man has ever done, the best words a man has ever spoken, the most gifts a man has ever given. God can't be satisfied with it because it is imperfect. God is perfect. God is holy.

Now, if Christ comes and stands in our place and He says: "Father, do you see these wounds? I was wounded for their transgressions. Father, you see; here's my record; it is perfect. Here are my thoughts; they are perfect. Here's my works; they are perfect and I did that for those people who believe in me and here they are. They have righteousness; it's my righteousness, not theirs, it's mine.

That's the reason the Lord said: *"except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees."*

Now watch **Colossians 1:21 and 22:** *"And you that you were one time alienated, enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh to present you holy, unblameable, unproveable in God's sight."*

Christ is our righteousness and Christ's righteousness far exceeds the righteousness of any religious, moral, reformer who ever lived because Christ's righteousness is God's righteousness!