

# Madness: The King's Challenge

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**Preached on:** Sunday, February 3, 2013

I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to the book of Matthew chapter five. And I have already gotten a few gestures in laughter this morning from the guys who attend our Tuesday morning Bible study. Today we are actually going to cover three chapters of Scripture in less than 30 minutes. If you don't understand the humor of that, then you haven't been a part of Tuesday morning Bible study where it would take us years to probably do this. But, nonetheless, in Matthew chapters five through seven, if you are a first time guest or visitor I want to welcome you to the next installment, so to speak, or the next passage in dealing with this idea of madness. This idea that Jesus Christ the King of creation, the one day King of kings and Lord of lords, in his incarnation when he dwelt with us as a Emmanuel, God in the flesh, that everything that he did, everything that he taught was so completely backwards from how a human king would do it, from the very way in which he came in swaddling clothes, to last week as we studied the men that he placed in his cabinet, today he is going to offer up a challenge for us.

This challenge is found in Matthew chapters five through seven and may be one of the most famous passages in all of the Bible or in all of the world. It is known as the Sermon on the Mount.

Now if you were to take just a cursory view of history and ask yourself: What are the most famous sermons that have ever been preached? Now, you know it is famous if it is spoken of years later by a multitude of people.

In the last hundred years there have been certain sermons entitled such as "Payday someday." There was several hundred years ago "Sinners in the Hands of an angry God." There are very few sermons that so resonate with people that they surpass the life of the one who gave it. The Sermon on the Mount is probably the one most recognizable communication of Jesus Christ in all of the gospels. And in this passage of Scripture Jesus has gathered his disciples. He has gathered these whom he has just called, those men, as we will see in just a moment, who have been waiting for this call and finally got this call. He has gathered them around and he is going to communicate to them what we know as the Sermon on the Mount.

In just a few moments as we go through the details of this passage I want you to understand that there are really two ways that you can approach the Sermon on the Mount. Neither of them is wrong. In fact, often times both of them do not get addressed at the same time. The main way in which we look at the Sermon on the Mount is kind of a bar or a standard or a litmus test for faithful obedience Christianity. It is kind of if you do this and you don't do that, everything is ok.

One of the struggles that I have with that, though I believe that the Sermon on the Mount lays out the principles for life and what we should do as far as decisions for life, is understanding that there is not a single born-again Christian at the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus Christ has not gone to the cross yet. Jesus Christ has not shed his blood. The people who are listening to the message were raised in Judaism, were taught in Judaism and this is the first communication that Jesus is going to give them about the message that he is going to share for three and a half years.

Now understand the principles and the truths that are there are valuable and viable for every aspect of our life. But more than that possibly this morning as we look at the Sermon on the Mount, is it possible that Jesus was teaching them not just the bar, so to speak, but the reality or the necessity that there is no way to live this thing called life. There is no way to reach that standard unless Jesus Christ is at the center of your life. Yes, the Sermon on the Mount communicates so much that needs to be there, but at the same time I believe it communicates that if we do not have Jesus Christ as the center, then none of us will ever get there.

That being said, I want to encourage you to turn to Matthew 5. For the sake of time and for your ability to stay awake, we are not going to read three chapters of Scripture. But what I do want to do is this. I want to go through three very simple concepts or points that I believe that the Sermon on the Mount brings up. The first one will be found in chapter five and it is what I want to call the futility of the law. Understand that chapter five Jesus does this incredible verbal aspect of taking “you have heard it said” to “but I say to you.” You have seen this, but I say to you. What Jesus is doing is comparing his message to what we know as the law, those teachings, those commandments found in the Old Testament.

Now I have used the word futility. I did not use the word replacement. In chapter five Jesus said, “I have not come to abolish the law.” In fact he said not one jot or tittle will ever be replaced from it. He says that within the Sermon on the Mount, but we need to realize that in Galatians 3:24 the law is called a school master or a school teacher whose purpose—listen to this—the purpose of the law, the purpose of the Old Testament is to show us Jesus Christ so that we might be justified by faith.

When I mention that it is the futility of the law, I believe that Jesus is sharing with them, he is sharing with us our complete, absolute inability to actually fulfill the law. And because of that it is somewhat futile.

Allow me to give you maybe a more vivid illustration of what I mean. The word meaning futile or in futility means a task that just is not going to get accomplished.

Yesterday I don't know why I did this, but every now and then—I know this is going to shock you—I get just a hare brained idea that makes no sense at all and Traci just looks at me and says, “Look, that is what you want to do, I am not going to stop you.” I decided that yesterday for some reason it was so beautiful outside, I donned all the heavy coats I could and I decided to go and pick weeds. I know you are thinking I am a little bit odd,

but for me that is therapy, ok? I began to pick weeds and I am filling up bags of weeds and I mean I am going to town. I have got dirt all over me, mud all over me. Even the dogs are looking at me like I am a little weird. The kids know I am weird. They are staying away. And I have been doing it for about an hour to an hour-and-a-half and I have made my way about half way across the back yard. I looked back and it didn't look any different than when I started.

I had evidence of all these weeds. I had grass stains all over me. I had dirt all over me. I had sweat pouring. I mean, I even had the jacket off because I had gotten hot. But when I looked at it, it didn't look any different. And when I speak here that the futility of the law, what I want you to hear is: In our desire to fulfill its obligations, in our human ability to try to "be good" or "be righteous," no matter what we do, when we look back it is going to look futile, because there is so much that we missed.

Allow me to share the details. Look in verse 48 of Matthew 5. I want to show you "God's Ruler." And I put that in quotes. It is his standard. What is his measuring device for life? Verse 48. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."<sup>1</sup>

Now, I don't know about you, but I fall way short of that one. The ruler, God's standard, his form of measurement for life is be perfect because I am perfect.

1 Peter chapter 1:15 says. "Be holy for I am holy." And we see this ruler, we see this standard in the early chapters of the Bible. When God comes to Adam in Genesis chapter 2:16 he says, "You may eat of every tree of the garden except that one." And the Lord made it very clear to him that there is no room for negotiation. There is no room for debate. We are not going to sit around and have a powwow and discuss if you think this is fair or not. This is what I am laying out. And here in chapter five and verse 48 at the conclusion of you have heard it said, but I say to you, he says, "Here is the standard. Here is the rule. Be perfect."

Anybody with any level of common sense has realized they have fallen short. In fact, the Bible says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. That is God's rule. What has happened, though in our lives and in most people's lives is we respond to God's rule. In fact, I want you to back up in chapter five and I want to show you three ways that humanity tends to respond to God's standard.

Now these ideas didn't just come out of thin air. In fact, you see it in Genesis 3:9. You see it in 1 John 2:15-17 that sin tends to be easily categorized into three areas: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. That which makes us feel better, that which looks good and that which makes us think more highly of ourselves.

In the midst of chapter five of Matthew I want you to look at verses 21 and 22. It says:

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:48.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.<sup>2</sup>

Let me tell you how man responds to God's ruler or standard. We say, "God, we understand what you said, but you don't understand the situation. Or in this scenario it is justified or in this area..." And so what we do is we begin to categorize sin as not sin because if you understood our position, you would respond in the same manner. That is why Hebrews 4:15 is so critical, because it says that Jesus Christ while incarnated in flesh underwent every temptation known to man. You cannot look up in the face of Jesus and say, "Jesus, you don't get this." He does get it, because he was here and he lived through it. That lust of the flesh, how many times when we say, "Well, in that situation if somebody does that to you or somebody responds to you or if that were ever done to me, I could justify your retaliation. I could justify your revenge. I could justify... fill in the blank."

Isn't that how we respond to God's law? He says, "No. Be perfect."

You know, this is why Peter struggled when he said, "Jesus, how many times should I forgive somebody? Seven? Is that good?"

And Jesus said, "No, Seventy times seven."

And you can almost sense this coming out when you look at that passage and Peter is almost going, "Oh, but Jesus, you don't understand who I have dealt with. You don't know who I have been fishing with."

What we have done is we have responded to God's ruler by making our own rules to justify our lack of perfection.

How about the lust of the eyes? Go to verse 27 of Matthew five.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.<sup>3</sup>

How easy it is to respond to the perfection that God has asked of us to be pure of heart and to be pure of mind. And say that, "God, I haven't actually consummated anything. I am good." And Jesus says, "Yes, but, you don't have to actually consummate to experience sin," because what comes through the eye, and it is later on in the Sermon on the Mount, your body becomes at one with that something. You begin to think on it and

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:21-22.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:27-28.

harvest on it. And it begins to dwell in your life. The lust of the eyes... and don't think of it just in an intimacy format, but the craving of things of this world.

You say, "Well, I never bought it, so I must be good. I have never experienced it, so I guess I am ok."

And Jesus is saying, "Your absolute craving is a desire to have "it." That alone says you haven't matched perfection. You have fallen short. It is the lust of the flesh. It is the lust of the eyes.

And then in verse 33 and 34 it is the pride of life.

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne.<sup>4</sup>

And the idea that we can have the ability to take the credit for anything. You know, any time that I am experiencing this with my own children even in our home when there is what we would call an earthly sense of success, whether that success is in academics or success in athletics, I am very quick to remind them that the mind that they have that allowed them to score well on a test was formed and fashioned by God. The legs that allowed them to run at a certain speed and they received a certain medal of accomplishment, those legs came from God.

And so what Jesus is saying is: You taking credit for anything you have done... you say, "Well, I have worked hard. I was diligent. I studied. The time I sacrificed, surely I deserve some credit." Jesus goes, "Whoa, time out. Did you make your mind up? Did you make..."

You know, it reminds me of the old joke about the scientists who come to God and say, "God, we just want you to know we don't need you anymore. We have learned how to create humanity on our own. We can do it."

And God says, "Let me see this happen."

And so they go into a laboratory and they do just like the book of Genesis says and they get a bunch of dirt and a lot of chemicals and lasers and the next thing you know there is what would seem to be a perfectly fashioned human being. And God turns to the scientists and says, "Sorry, get your own dirt."

The same concept is here that we have responded to a lack of perfection by setting up our own set of rules to replace God's rules, which leads to the third point of the futility of the law. Man's replacement. When it comes to the matters of faith, when it comes to the matters of eternity, what have we replaced God's standard with? Ours? How have we done this? We have done it by replacing a relationship with him with religion.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 5:33-34.

I want you to back up to verse 20 of Matthew chapter five that kind of kicks off this whole passage that we have been dealing with. Jesus says:

“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.”<sup>5</sup>

Now these Pharisees, these scribes, these were religious leaders. These were individuals if you were going to take a poll, they lived the law better than anybody else. Their life, at least on the outside would be spotless. These are the individuals that you would want to emulate and imitate. These were the standard of human perfection. But as Jesus just pointed out, even human perfection falls eerily short. So what have we done to God’s ruler? We have responded by replacing it with religion.

Now let me give you a definition of religion. Religion is any form of activity or obedience that with enough diligence and determination can actually be accomplished. In other words, religion is saying if I don’t do this, but I do that, God is pleased with me.

You realize that we create religion so that we can attain success to feel good about who we are. But Jesus said, “No, no. Your “religion” must be better than the Pharisees to even think that you have got a shot at it.” Why? Because we have all fallen short. And what happens in our lives, in humanity’s lives, is we take a “relationship with Jesus Christ” and instead of entering in to a relationship, we enter into a religion where we check a box, don’t do this, do that, make sure we never get close to that and we put our head on our pillow and say, “Everything must be good.”

But like I mentioned with the futility of picking the weeds, the futility of religion will never be good enough. We will never mark the boxes. Why? Because at one point in life we will look back and say, “I missed something.”

Which leads to the second point of the Sermon on the Mount. I want you to go ahead and go to chapter seven. In chapter seven beginning at verse 21 we find what I believe is probably the scariest passage in all of the Bible. And what I want to speak to is the faith that is involved here. We talked about the futility of the law, so what is the faith that we must possess in order to respond to the Lord appropriately? In verse 21 of Matthew 7 Jesus says:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:20.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 6:21-23.

In this passage of Scripture, when we see two things that are going wrong and only one thing that can go right, what is the faith that we need to possess? How do we need to appropriately respond to God in light of our complete inability to keep the law? The first thing is this. It is not about the philosophy or the belief that we hold. Notice twice in this passage:

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord...”<sup>7</sup>

This idea that they recognize who he is, that they recognize his grandeur, they recognize his power, they recognize that there is a God and they are not him. The problem is it says that when they respond to him, they are seeing his perspective erroneously. See, this is the natural outflow of replacing a relationship with a religion, when we set our standards and our guidelines and our fences, so to speak. We say, “But, God, surely, you must react the way I have got my fence set up.”

And what happens is we say, “Well, surely God would never do that. Surely God understands my situation and he would never go there.” And so what happens is we adopt these philosophies of you don’t have to admit that you are a sinner for Jesus to save you. Why? Because surely God wouldn’t think that way. He sees us positively, not negatively. That sin stuff, that is bad stuff.

Do you see how we get into these philosophies and say, “Well, if I were God, that is now how I would see the world.”

Well, guess what? You are not God. And we see the world erroneously. It can’t be by this philosophy that we hold. But what is more clear in this passage is it can’t be by performance. Notice what it says. We prophecy, we cast out, we have done wonderful works. And I think one of the saddest truths of this passage of Scripture is there are so many people who think because they do this and do that and don’t do this and don’t do that that somehow God says everything is good. And we call it works based salvation that somehow we can be good enough to earn God’s favor. But Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it very clear. It is:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.<sup>8</sup>

We don’t have the ability to save ourselves. We don’t have the ability to forgive ourselves. Only he can. We could never work enough to be ok. Which leads to the final aspect about faith. It is not about a philosophy you hold. It is not about performance that you do. Let me tell you what it is about. It is about a personal relationship. Notice what it says in verse 23.

“I profess unto them, I never knew you.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 6:22.

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 7:23.

What Jesus Christ is saying that one day when you breathe your last breath or he returns, whichever one comes first, your eternal destiny, all of humanity's eternal destiny is not determined by what you thought or what you did, but who you knew.

You have heard that old phrase, right, it is not what you know, it is who you know. And Jesus makes it very clear. I never knew you. There was never a time where you and I entered into a personal relationship. Oh, you did a lot of good, sure. You thought a lot of good, sure, but you never confessed you were a sinner. You never confessed you couldn't do it on your own. You never acknowledged that Jesus Christ was born, lived, died and rose sinless for our propitiation, for the punishment of our sins. That is how we enter into a personal relationship. We acknowledge our inability in his absolute ability. That is how it happens.

Now let me share with you how we get this mixed up. I am going to share a story with you that I find hilarious, my wife kind of finds hilarious and I hope you will as well. The very first church that I pastored, much smaller in context than this, was one of the most blessed times of our life. Not because of the size, but it was just the innocence of all that were involved. I didn't know what I was doing and they didn't know any better to know what I should be doing. And so we just had a good time.

And there is a phrase that I have used throughout my life in relation to this subject matter that I want you to hear clearly. We are all going to be surprised one day to find some prostitutes in heaven and some preachers in hell. That is based on John 8, the story of the woman who is caught in adultery. The last time I checked, don't you have to have two to get caught? Nonetheless, Jesus comes to her and says, "Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more." And then there is another guy who thinks he is ok, because he never got caught.

Some prostitutes are going to be in heaven. Some preachers are going to be in hell. Why? Because it is not based on who we were or what we did, but who he is.

Well, a few weeks after sharing that insight to that small congregation there was a family in our church that had a young boy who had about his ninth or 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. Traci was his Sunday school teacher and they had a slumber party. And they were sitting around the table and they were eating pizza and ice cream and doing what little boys do, you know, eating all this kind of bad stuff. And the dad was going around asking these little boys, well, what do you want to be when you grow up? Some little boys were saying "Oh, I want to be a fireman. I want to be a police officer. I want to be a doctor." You know, all these different ideas that little boys come up with. Last but not least he came to his own son. He said, "Son, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

This little nine or 10 year old little boy said in complete innocence, "Daddy, I want to be a prostitute."

Thankfully none of the other boys in the room knew what he meant and he said, “Son, what do you mean by that?”

He said, “Well, Pastor Jeff said that prostitutes get to go to heaven and Miss Traci is going to heaven and I want to be a prostitute just like Miss Traci.”

He was saved and baptized very quickly thereafter. But you get the point that it is not based on what we do or what we even think, it is based on a personal relationship, which leads to the final point of the Sermon on the Mount.

We have talked about our futility to keep the law. We have talked about the faith that we must possess, not faith in our own abilities, but faith in Jesus’ alone. Then there is this foundation. In verse 24 Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount: All of the you have heard, but I say to you, all the communication of let me clarify something. This is the final word. This is leading up to the invitation. This is what he wants his audience to leave with. He says:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.<sup>10</sup>

What is this foundation that Jesus concludes may be the most famous sermon in all not only of his existence, but the whole world? There are two products that your life can exist upon, either upon a rock or upon sand. Those are the two options. Jesus says that when your life is over, when all is said and done, either your life was built upon a rock or it was built upon sand. That is the product that our lives are built upon. There is not a third option. That is the product. Let me share with you the prophecy that is in here. It says that the rains came down.

I don’t know if you know this about life, but it is going to rain one day and the floods are going to rise one day, but even more than the every day problems we run into, do you know the first time that it rained in the Bible, the very first time it rained in the book of Genesis, was in relationship to what we know as Noah’s flood. The Bible says in Genesis as well as in Matthew 24 that humanity was eating, drinking, being married, getting married. Life was fine. When all of the sudden the judgment of God rained down. The Bible ends in the book of Revelation during what we know as the Great Tribulation and humanity still will not repent of their sins. And toward the end of that famous seventh seal it says, “And God rained down hail and fire.” Jesus equated his second coming with Noah’s flood.

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 7:24-28.

Second Peter 3 equates the end of the world back to Noah's flood. Folks, one day the rains, figuratively and the floods, figuratively are going to occur. Every single human being at some point in some time will face the judgment of God himself. For all men must die and face the judgment.

Jesus is saying, "You know what? One day the floods are going to rise and the rain is going to come down and everything you built your life upon is either going to stand or slide away."

You know, it is interesting to me that we live in a culture and a society that the most expensive, most elaborate and the most desired homes are built upon the most fickle of ground, the beach, the ocean, the lakes. How many times have you heard the phrase ocean front property, beach front property? You take that same house and put it in the middle, no offense, in Topeka, Kansas, and the value will be so substantially less. Why? Because in human eyes we say the beach and the sand is the high commodity. In Jesus' eyes the madness of this... he goes, "Oh, no, no. You want to be upon a rock so far away, because when the floods and the rains come down, you want to make sure that your life is secure."

And so he gives this prophecy that the time is coming, judgment will ensue. And here is your final thought. The person that is involved. All throughout the Bible Jesus Christ is referred to as the rock. He is called the cornerstone: 1 Corinthians chapter 10 speaks of Moses in the wilderness with the Israelites. He says, "And that rock was Christ Jesus." And the Bible speaks in the book of Daniel that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would be a stumbling stone. People would actually trip themselves over the rock of Jesus, because they would not believe in Jesus. On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand, all other ground is sinking sand. That is the message that our life is either built on Jesus or something else. And one day when we face the almighty judgment of God, there is only one foundation that will stand, the rock verses the sand.

The problem is everybody in our lives, it seems like, is trying to convince us to build our life on sand, because that is the better property. You know what realtors say, it is location, location, location. Jesus is saying, "Absolutely, it is location, location, location." Don't get caught up in what looks good on the outside, but what will be eternal and long lasting.