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## *The Gospel According to Matthew*

### *Clean the Inside of the Cup*

*April 29, 2018*

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 5:17-20

**Scripture Reading:** Genesis 6

Last time we considered these words of Jesus to His disciples:

Mat 5:13-16 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. (14) "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. (16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they

may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

I hope that these verses are a real encouragement to you. You are salt and light if you are truly in Christ. Your presence in this world, in your community, among your relatives, functions as a moral preservative and a beacon of Christ's truth to people who are enslaved to corruption and darkness.

I was thinking of Noah this past week and realized that he is a perfect example of salt and light in this evil world. Noah is actually spoken of quite often in Scripture. Listen:

Mat 24:37-39 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (38) For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, (39) and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

1Pe 3:20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

2Pe 2:4-5 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; (5) if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

Noah lived in an incredibly corrupt and evil world. That is the very condition of the world we can expect to see ourselves as the time for Christ's return draws closer and closer.

Now, you will not find any record in Scripture of Noah preaching a sermon to his neighbors. And yet the New Testament calls Noah a herald, or preacher of righteousness. By his "preaching," Noah condemned the world. In reverent fear he obeyed God

and constructed the ark. And THAT was his sermon! We are told that while he built the ark, "God's patience waited" and held back the deluge until it was finished. In other words, Noah was salt, and Noah was light. His presence in the world preserved the world, giving the wicked opportunity to turn from evil and to see the light of God's truth. *And Noah succeeded in his mission even though not a single person outside his family repented and believed!!*

That is a biblical teaching that I was never given growing up in the church. Instead, I was told that THE way to "witness" for Christ was to buttonhole people and verbally preach to them, the most holy method being going around knocking on doors. I was made to feel incredibly guilty. But the fact is that *being salt and light, being who you really are in Christ*, is the fundamental way to shine your light in this dark world. In fact, is it not true, that unless a Christian is truly *being* a Christian, his or her words are meaningless? And remember, Christ has just given the true description of a genuine member of His kingdom (the beatitudes).

So then, who are we going to be? A Noah, or one of the masses who rejects Christ? Only 8 people!! That's all who were saved.

## You Can't Just Have a Clean Exterior

Now, having described *true* citizens of His kingdom, that is, true Christians, Jesus goes on to contrast them with the supposed models of righteousness who reigned in the visible “church” in those days, namely, the scribes and Pharisees. And here is how Jesus begins:

Mat 5:17-20 "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.

(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.

Largely, the rest of this sermon is an exposure of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of the day, proving that their so called righteousness was

in no way a fulfillment of the Law of God. “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you...” is the repeated phrase the Lord uses. And then he will go on to show how the hypocrites prayers and offerings are repugnant before God.

External religion. Jesus will come back to it before this Gospel of Matthew ends:

Mat 23:25-28 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. (26) You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. (27) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. (28) So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

And this is what Jesus is speaking about here in vss 17-20. He is expounding the heart and spirit of the Law and the Prophets – of the Old Testament. And although the Pharisees and scribes had put themselves off to everyone as being the epitome of law-keeping and fulfilling, Jesus says that their religion was a gross distortion of

what God's Word really requires. They majored on *externals*. God's covenant law goes to the very heart of the man. And THIS is why Jesus said –

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

Understand? *You must be born again*. God's Law must be written on our heart so that we truly *know the Lord* and love Him and one another. The Pharisees really were that filthy cup that appears clean because the outside is scrubbed.

We know that one of the accusations made against the gospel of Christ is that it promotes law-breaking. For example:

Rom 3:27-31 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. (28) For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. (29) Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, (30) since God is one--who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. (31) Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

And it is apparent that already, this early on in Jesus' ministry, the accusations from the Pharisees were coming. "He is abolishing the Law!!"

And you remember that the very same charges were made against Paul and the apostles:

Act 6:8-13 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. (9) Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. (10) But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. (11) Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." (12) And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, (13) and they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law,

But in fact it was the enemies of Christ who were abolishing the Law of God and they had been doing it for centuries. Their religion knew nothing of regeneration, of the Spirit giving the man a new heart, of the real spirit and

intent of the Law. Therefore all they had and all they understood was works righteousness. Doing this. Not doing that. They totally missed the truth that the Law by which they sought to be righteous before God actually condemned them.

1Co 9:9-10 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? (10) Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.

Religionists never get past the exterior. For them, they have fulfilled a law like this if they leave a literal muzzle off of a literal ox that is literally treading out grain. They fail to see the spiritual principle behind it which is the law of love applied in a very practical way. The plowman gets to share in the crop he worked so hard for.

Listen to all of this reiterated by William Hendriksen and we will let him sum this all up for us: [The Gospel of Matthew, New Testament Commentary, Baker] -

“Jesus just now has been admonishing his hearers to let their light shine by performing good works to the glory of the Father in heaven. Now such works

are those that are in harmony with God’s holy law. The scribes and the Pharisees were reputed to be the guardians of the law. Yet Jesus was about to expose these men as being hypocrites (5:20; 6:1.2.5.16). Did this mean then that he had come to undermine the authority of the law, and of the prophets reaffirming the law? He answers, “Do not think that I have come to set aside the law or the prophets. I have not come to set aside but to fulfill.”

Christ’s opponents even now had begun to regard him as a destructive revolutionist, an iconoclast who wanted to break every tie with the past (John 5:18). This attitude toward Jesus never left them but rather grew on them (see Matthew 25:59-61). Also see Acts 21:21 for a similar attitude toward Paul.

The opponents were wrong. Did the scribes and Pharisees demand good works? So did Jesus. Did they hold Moses in high regard? So did he. The righteousness which he proclaimed was not a novelty. It was in thorough harmony with that enunciated in the Old Testament; that is, in the law and the prophets.

Jesus then as he begins to set forth the righteousness of the kingdom, immediately dismisses the charge of his enemies that he is a proclaimer of

novelties, and shows that his ministry was not in collision with the Old Testament but in harmony with it.”

And of course He Himself was the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets:

Luk 24:25-27 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! (26) Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (27) And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

The religion of the Pharisees was not the righteousness the Law taught or required. This was because:

1. It was a religion that only addressed externals, works performed, outside the man apart from his heart, and
2. It was a religion that was blind to Christ. It failed to see that Christ was the One to whom the Law and Prophets pointed.

Therefore their religion, while pretending to be the true religion of the Old Testament, was in fact a heartless, loveless, Christless system built by people who wanted to be teachers of the Law but who had no understanding of it.

## External, Pharisaical Religion Today

The continuing plague of the church down through the centuries has been this same counterfeit religion of external works and show. Such a system harbors and fosters evil. It is vital that we are able to recognize it when it comes across our path. Let me suggest this test to you:

*When a person's Christianity is "showy," when their words and actions are exercised in such a way that attention is drawn to them, when by their words and actions they cause others to feel lesser than and inferior to, such a person's degree of "holiness," you can be sure that you are in the presence of a Pharisee.*

Let me show you that this surely is the case:

Mat 6:1-3 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (2) "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (3) But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

There it is. *Practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.* Such a person is a cup clean on the outside but full of corruption inside.

***Pharisees tend to rise to the top of religious hierarchies because their exterior, works-righteousness deceives others.***

This is the very typical scenario in denominational hierarchies and in other church organizations as well. It is how Pharisees end up taking over a local church. It is how Rome got to be what it is today.

You see the thing exposed when Jesus tells what it will be like when He comes again:

Mat 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' (23) And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

See it? They boasted of their works. They talked the Christian lingo. They did all kinds of things "in Jesus"

name. And they did it all to be seen by others, to be praised, to earn merit with the Lord. They did what Proverbs warns us about:

Pro 25:6-7 Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, (7) for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble....

In contrast, the righteous just did what they are. They lived out the righteousness that proceeds from a new heart and weren't really even conscious of it.

Mat 25:37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?

In other words, the genuine Christian is often rather invisible. His or her piety is within not on display for the purpose of self-glorification. The good works such a person does proceed from the heart with no motive of self-glory.

Mat 6:2 "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

And again:

Mat 6:5-6 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (6) But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

THIS is the nature of the righteousness Jesus is talking about. Be wise in these things. Beware of counterfeits, and be certain that your profession of Christ a real one that proceeds from a new heart.