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## *The Gospel According to Matthew*

### *What Does True Righteousness Look Like?*

*May 6, 2018*

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 5:17ff

**Scripture Reading:** Jeremiah 31

“To observe the Law is to do what the Law bids with a free and generous heart; that is, it is to gladly live for God, and to do well, yes, even if we had no Law.” [John Rogers, and friend of William Tyndale, martyred by Queen Mary in 1555]

Psa 19:7-14 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; (8) the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment

of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; (9) the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. (10) More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. (11) Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (12) Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. (13) Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. (14) Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

What does it mean to obey the Lord? What is true obedience to His Word, to His Law? What will it be like in the New Heavens and Earth, and what should we be seeing even now as the Kingdom of Heaven invades this fallen world, transforming Christ's elect into citizens of that kingdom?

Obviously this matter of obeying the Lord is life or death-

Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.

Abel obeyed the Lord. Cain did not. Abel lived, though Cain murdered him. Cain was rejected by God and perished in his sin. Obedience to God is life. Disobedience to Him is death.

What about you? Is your obedience to God's Law genuine, the kind that is accepted by Him, or is it that counterfeit brand that was the religion of the Pharisees? This is the thing the Lord Jesus is addressing and exposing for us here in the Sermon on the Mount.

Do you understand the import of this subject? This is our Lord's FIRST sermon at the beginning of His earthly ministry. And what is the subject He chose for that first sermon? *It was the exposure of counterfeit religion and the revealing of true religion.* This should jolt us. It should shake us to the realization that this subject is vital for us today, that Jesus' words are indeed life, and that there is all around us a false, counterfeit, antichrist religion parading as true, all the while working

to draw us away from Christ and life. This counterfeit is incredibly deceptive. It can be expected to come at us under the disguise of "Christianity" and most often be the largest and most visible form of "the church." That is precisely what it was in Jesus' day and it is this beast that Jesus is here stripping the mask from.

Listen to Jesus' words again which we considered last time:

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.

There it is in that last verse, 20. The righteousness God requires, the righteousness that characterizes true citizens of Christ's kingdom, the righteousness that is true obedience to the Law of God, *is not that of the*

*scribes and Pharisees. It is not that external religion which looks wonderful on the outside but which proceeds from a rotten, stinking, sin-enslaved, unconverted heart.*

For many years throughout my childhood and teen years, I practiced and really was taught this scribes and Pharisees righteousness. I went to Sunday School and church, but I really didn't want to. I knew the law of God, at least the 10 commandments, and I knew I was supposed to obey them. So I did, at least when people were watching. But I really did not want to. Slowly, that all changed. I don't know precisely when it happened, but by the time I was in my mid-twenties, I went to church, I obeyed God's Law (though imperfectly for sure), I hated my sin, and I began to read His Word because I wanted to, because I found I loved it. Before this time I was a Pharisee. My religion was that of the Pharisees. My righteousness was only enough to take me to hell.

Why are you here this morning? Why? Be honest with yourself. Why do you claim to believe in Christ? Because your parents or other loved one compel you to? Because you don't want to go to hell?

Listen, *the devil doesn't want to go to the lake of fire. But he is going.* No one in their right mind wants to enter into

eternal death in hell on the day Christ comes and judges them. Is anyone in hell right now saying "alright! This is exactly where I wanted to be." Of course not.

So, if you go to church, if you don't sin outwardly by actually stealing or murdering, but the only real reason you do or don't do these things is because you don't want to go to hell, then guess what – you will end in hell. Why? Because that kind of righteousness, that kind of so-called obedience to God *is the very kind practiced by the scribes and Pharisees, and it is NOT what makes us just before God!*

Listen now as Jesus illustrates what he means with the first example of how the predominant religion of that day utterly and miserably fell short of God's required righteousness:

Mat 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' (22) But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

The first verse is a statement of what these people had heard said. That is,

what their religious leaders, what their “church” had taught them. Don’t murder. This was of course the statement of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment. It said just that – you shall not murder.

But now Jesus tells us how He requires His Law to be obeyed. Not by a bare, naked, outward avoidance of physically and actually killing someone, but the obedience to this commandment is to proceed *from a heart that loves it*.

*But I say to you...everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults, whoever says ‘you fool.’*

I am not going to take detailed time here to caution you not to take Jesus’ words wrongly so as to believe and teach that any form of anger is sin. That should be apparent to all of us here by now. God himself is angry. Christ’s people hate the wicked enemies of the Lord and desire to see them dealt justice.

But what Jesus is saying is that hatred and anger that proceeds from a heart that would really like to kill, the kind that was in Cain’s heart, is enough to condemn a person even if they never outwardly and literally murder.

Listen to James Montgomery Boice on this (Matthew, Baker Publishing)-

“Ever since Sinai, the Jews had known, ‘you shall not murder’; it was part of God’s Law. But the leaders of the people had joined that commandment (found in Exodus 20:13) to Numbers 35:30, which demanded death for murderers, implying that the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment referred only to the specific act of killing.

Is that all murder is? asked Jesus. Is it nothing but killing? Suppose a man wants to kill his enemy but is stopped by some unexpected circumstance. Is he innocent just because he didn’t get a chance to follow through on his desire? Suppose he is too cowardly to kill but would like to do it. Or suppose he is just afraid of getting caught. What if he only hates his enemy? Or insults him? Is he still innocent of breaking this commandment? [NOTE: I am not sure that Boice is properly using “enemy” here. Remember, Jesus used the word “brother”]

No, says Jesus. In a human court the only acts that can be judged and punished are external acts, because human beings can look only on outward things. They cannot see the heart. But in God’s court ‘anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment,’ and anyone who merely says “You fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell.’

This is not earth-shatteringly new, of course. The Pharisees and other teachers of the law should have discovered this deeper meaning of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment by themselves. William Hendriksen observed rightly,

‘There was no excuse for the fact that in their interpretation of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day, in agreement with the men of long ago, were omitting the main lesson. Moses had emphasized love for God (Deut 6:5) and for man (Lev 19:18). Not only that but the very first domestic quarrel narrative, the story of Cain and Abel, had in a very impressive manner pointed up the evil of jealous anger, as being the root of murder (Gen 4:1-16)....Accordingly Jesus, in interpreting the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment as he does, far from annulling it, is showing what it had meant from the very beginning.’”

Let me give you an example of a murderer. We have had murderers in this church in the past and when confronted, they departed:

1Co 5:11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

A reviler is this very person Jesus is describing. The one who murders others with his words...wicked anger that bursts forth with insults and assaultive, hurtful words. This by the way is one of the fundamental words in the Bible for “abuser.” And yet this sin is looked upon rather lightly by most professing Christians and churches. It is tolerated and minimized. Revilers travel under our radar parading themselves as most holy saints. But if you watch, you will see them and probably you will be their target. Such a person is a Pharisee. Their righteousness will only take them to hell. They are violators of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment.

Jesus then continues to explain what he means regarding, “you shall not murder.” Listen again:

Mat 5:23-26 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (25) Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. (26) Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

What is the primary point? Simply this: True citizens of Christ's kingdom *desire from the heart to have right relationships with their brother*. They don't revile. They try to set things right. They desire reconciliation. (Notice Jesus specifically says "brother." The wicked unrepentant we are to come out and be separate from). Example:

Mat 15:12-14 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" (13) He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. (14) Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

Notice carefully that Jesus did not run after these Pharisees even though he knew they "had something against him." That is to say, they were not brothers.

But what then did Jesus mean here in verses 23-26? Listen again and think about them carefully:

Mat 5:23-26 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (25) Come to

terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. (26) Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Specifically, just who is Jesus speaking of when he says "your accuser"? Who is this? What does he mean?

Joh 5:45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope.

Let me suggest to you that the Accuser Jesus is speaking of here is Moses – that is, the Law. The Law requires, as Jesus has just shown us, obedience from the heart. From a heart that truly loves one's brother. A heart that desires real righteousness and therefore a heart that desires putting things right and restoring our relationships with one another.

Anyone who does not do so, anyone who does not have such a heart but who practices Pharisee righteousness, pursuing just the letter of the law, will be condemned by that Law and the Judge, who is the Lord Jesus, will cast such a person into hell. They will never come out.

Over the years we have experienced in this church numbers of people who outwardly looked so holy, but who constantly reviled, accused, and evidenced no desire to love others and be at peace with them. You can see it because when such people are present they constantly create strife and hurt and friction and division.

Such people use the Bible just as the Pharisees used the Law – to justify themselves. To accuse others (“take them to court”). Such people can quote masses of Bible verses, but so could the Pharisees. (NOTE: You can NEVER be at peace with such a person because they do not desire it). Here are just two verses that describe such a person:

Pro 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

Pro 22:10 Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease.

They are murderers, you see.

Here then, once more, is the essence of what Jesus is telling us:

1. The Law of God requires joyful, willing, love-motivated obedience
2. The real Christian, the genuine citizen of the kingdom, will not

have to be told “you must go and put things right.” He will desire to do so from his heart as soon as he becomes aware that his brother has something against him. He goes. He does not pretend at hypocritical worship. He goes and makes things right.

3. And what he does not do is use the Law of God in such a way as to justify himself and his actions, insisting that the OTHER party be the one to bear the guilt. Anyone who does that will end up condemned by the very Law they were just so certain they were justified by.

Let’s close with two final points:

1. You must be born again. No human being can conjure up this righteousness that comes from God in Christ. Don’t think you can. You will only be a Pharisee. God must give you a new heart through faith alone in Christ alone.
2. It may not be at all to say that the majority of the visible church consists of Pharisees. Certainly they are all around us. They seem to be the finest of Christians. They are present at every church meeting. They can quote scripture left and right. They

practice their “righteousness” in a way that people can see it and so they appear to be the holiest of the holy. *But they are murderers. They kill with their mouth and words.* They never admit fault. They condemn others. They criticize and accuse. Then they resume their smiley face, most “kind person in the whole church” façade.

Such people, be assured, will find on that Day that the very Word of God they used to justify themselves will in the end condemn them, and they will end in hell.

Don't you be one of them.