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Revisiting the Sermon on the Mount, perfection

Matthew 5:48

Prayer: *Father, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the gift of your presence. Once again, Lord, we're opening up your book, we're looking at one particular verse, an incredibly important verse, and so I pray as we do that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit guiding us, directing us and again making this of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

The verse that I want to focus on this morning, it's the last verse of chapter 5 of Matthew's gospel, a very, very famous Sermon on the Mount, but this particular verse I see as one of the most important verses in the entire Bible. Now it's only one sentence but it represents the summation of the entire Sermon on the Mount that Jesus has just delivered and Jesus's words here can literally mean the difference between spiritual life or death. The verse is Matthew 5:48. Jesus says: *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Now if you read through all the different commentaries on this verse you're going to find a great deal of discussion as to whether Jesus meant it to apply only to the previous discussion that he was having about loving our enemies or whether he meant it in a larger sense to apply to everything that the Sermon on the Mount stood for. Furthermore, perfection itself, that can be understood in a number of different ways from absolute flawlessness to the idea of finishing or completeness. I prefer to look at Jesus's words as meaning exactly what they seem to mean, and that is perfection as impeccability, as an absence of anything that's less than perfect.

Now, we look at the sermon, the entire sermon has Jesus comparing the Pharisees' way of looking at what it takes to please God compared to Jesus's understanding of that very same thing. And Jesus insists against everything we've ever known that perfection is an absolute requirement.

The Sermon on the Mount contains a series of contrasts between the Pharisees' understanding of scripture and Jesus' who just happens to be the author of scripture. This is what Jesus says in verse 21. He takes up the issue of murder, and he says: *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'* 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." He goes on to speak about lust in verse 27. He says: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

You see, over and over again Jesus uses the phrase *"You have heard it said"* and he uses it to describe how the Pharisees understood living a life pleasing to God and then he compares it to his understanding by simply stating, *"But I say"*. And Jesus had an extraordinary advantage in these discussions because he happens to be God as well as the author of scripture itself. I mean the Pharisees can talk all that they wanted about how they imagine God would be pleased but they were just guessing and Jesus wasn't. And Jesus repeatedly took them to task for consistently getting it wrong.

I mean, time and again Jesus took on the Pharisees, whether it was a discussion about murder or adultery or divorce or oath taking or loving your neighbor and each case he demonstrated how badly they had misrepresented God's will in their teachings. I mean the Pharisees loved to reduce pleasing God to a series of rules, commands and ordinances that you follow to the letter. And the

emphasis was always on the literal fulfillment by hands and feet with almost no involvement whatsoever of the heart. And Jesus summed up their teaching by saying in *Mark 7*: *"Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"*

So the whole Sermon on the Mount consists of Jesus deconstructing the Pharisees' teaching, and the way he went about it was to take the demands of the Pharisees and make them even more difficult. You know, it's if the demands are written down on a smartphone or a touch screen and you touch the touch screen, you just expand your fingers, it gets bigger and bigger, that's basically what Jesus did. He just touched it with his fingers expanding it to make it larger and even more difficult until eventually it's going to become impossible.

If the Pharisees claim that the act of adultery was forbidden, then Jesus would expand on that to say that even the thought of adultery is forbidden. If murder was wrong, Jesus would expand on that and say calling someone "a fool" makes you guilty. So over and over again Jesus took the difficult of the Pharisees and he expanded it to make it the impossible of Jesus. And understood this way. Jesus' final statement can be considered a summation of everything

that God's law demands of us when Jesus says: "*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" Of course our reaction to that is, "You're kidding." "You're joking." Now we say that because on the very surface this command seems absurd. I mean who in the world would demand perfection of anyone for anything?

I mean if there's anything this world understands, it's that perfection on any level whatsoever is simply not attainable. There may be a platinum iridium bar at the Bureau of Standards that represents as close as you can get to the perfect ounce or pound or inch or meter, but even those standards cannot be perfect because nothing is perfect. Nothing in the physical world or the metaphysical world as well.

And so this morning I want to look at the heart of this command for perfection but because it really is the heart of the gospel.

There's four ways that we Christians can look at this idea of perfection in the Bible, four ways to see how perfection absolutely affects every single one of us. First of all, perfection is foreign; it's also futile, fatal, and by the grace of God finished. So that's what we're looking at this morning. Perfection is foreign, futile, fatal and finished.

And first we want to look at this idea of foreign. You see, you can look far and wide, high and low and any other way and you will never in any other way, shape, manner or form and find anything in the whole of human existence that has the quality of perfection. It is absolutely foreign to human experience. I mean, try to imagine anything in all of creation being flawless; just try to imagine it. I mean you may be able to come close to perfection with regard to something but how close you come is strictly a matter of what standard you choose. I mean, a platinum iridium bar that measures exactly one meter on a metric scale, well that would be hopelessly off if it was measured on a nanoscale. I mean, you may think you're close to perfection in millimeters but you wouldn't even be remotely close if you're measuring in terms of atom. I mean, when you get down to angstroms you're measuring in terms of the distance between electrons and protons.

Any physical scientist will tell you that perfection in the physical world is completely foreign. But those are just physical attributes. We simply have nothing in the physical universe that represents perfection, but the same is true in the metaphysical universe. We acknowledge that, we say "nobody's perfect" and we accept that as being absolutely normal. But what if it isn't? Or should I say, what if it wasn't?

What if there was a time when perfection was absolutely normal? I mean, the very idea is so foreign to us that we have a hard time imagining what that would be like, but God says perfection is exactly what he is like. And he further says that his creation was originally like him, perfect. *Genesis 1:31* says: *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.*

I submit to you that we have no idea what "very good" even remotely looks like. "Very good" is God's way of saying that creation was perfect and that's perfectly foreign to us. I mean, "very good" is as foreign to us as it was natural to God. Every ounce, pound, inch or meter of God's creation was flawless, a flawless reflection of a flawless creator and we can't even begin to imagine what that was like. What does a perfect garden look like? And what was it like to see, taste, touch and feel absolute perfection in absolutely everything? What does a perfect melon taste like? We can only imagine.

I remember C.S. Lewis described one of his characters in his science fiction trilogy, he was on this imaginary planet during their Garden of Eden time, and he sees some low-hanging fruit and he's so hungry, he decides he's going to risk taking it. And he grabs it and takes a bite and he says instantly his head almost exploded as he nearly fainted with a depth of pleasure in eating

that he had never even begun to imagine before. He couldn't imagine that so much pleasure could be associated with simply eating something. It turned out it was just one of the minor plants that grew in that garden. But that's what routine perfection tasted like in Lewis's imagination.

All of the real garden's perfection, that was ruined for us by Adam. He's the one who traded in all of our perfection for one bite of forbidden fruit. But I have no doubt that if I ever ran into the original Adam before the fall, I would have thought of him either as an angel or some type of Superman and for all practical purposes he was Superman. I mean he was a human being perfect in mind, body, soul and intellect.

You know it said we only use a tiny percentage of our intellectual ability. Well, just imagine Adam, Adam had access to one hundred percent of everything that Einstein, da Vinci or Michael Jordan had. Everything that they had was a pittance compared to what Adam was freely given. I mean we simply have no way of even gauging what a flawless human being would be like. I mean, there's only been two or three, there was Adam, Eve and Jesus. Adam I've never met and Jesus had to empty himself so that his fully revealed perfection wouldn't kill us. So we will never fully comprehend at least in this life how truly foreign perfection is. Like the song

says, we can only imagine.

What we know for a fact is this, this world that we live in now today is a pale shadow of what it once was. *Romans 8:20* tells us: *The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

See, this world we live in, it's the new normal that Adam's fall created. And we all know it's a world full of futility, of corruption and groaning. We know for every glorious sunset there's drought, there's sunstroke, there's skin cancer. For every single ocean view there's hurricanes and tsunamis. For every mountain view there's earthquakes, there's sink holes, and that's just the physical world.

C.S. Lewis summed up perfectly the horrors of the metaphysical world in his introduction to his book *"The Problem of Pain."* Speaking of life on earth, this is how Lewis introduces it. He says: "And what is it like while it lasts? It is so arranged that all the forms of it can live only by preying upon one another. In

the lower forms this process entails only death, but in the higher there appears a new quality called consciousness which enables it to be attended with pain. The creatures cause pain by being born, and live by inflicting pain, and in pain they mostly die. In the most complex of all the creatures, Man, yet another quality appears, which we call reason, whereby he is enabled to foresee his own pain which henceforth is preceded with acute mental suffering, and to foresee his own death while keenly desiring permanence. It also enables men by a hundred ingenious contrivances to inflict a great deal more pain than they otherwise could have done on one another and on the irrational creatures. This power they have exploited to the full. Their history is largely a record of crime, war, disease, and terror, with just sufficient happiness interposed to give them, while it lasts, an agonized apprehension of losing it, and, when it is lost, the poignant misery of remembering."

This is not the way life was supposed to be. I mean, have you ever wondered why nothing in this world can ever satisfy? And I don't mean in some lofty theological way. It doesn't matter if you're a billionaire or a pauper, it doesn't matter if you're searching for your next meal or a bigger and better yacht, what makes our human experience the way that it is is this deep-rooted sense of futility and a longing for something more.

It was Solomon who said in *Ecclesiastes*: *Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.*

Now you've got to understand, those words were uttered by the richest, wisest and most powerful man of his day who denied himself nothing in his absolute pursuit of pleasure. I mean, God just took a man and he gave him every single thing that this planet could ever give and then he allowed him to freely express how utterly futile the very best of this existence could be. And this was his conclusion: *All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.*

And you know, most of us spend our lives reaching out for a brass ring that we'll never, ever get. That's what drives most of us.

You know, "If only I get that brass ring then my life will become worthwhile." And whether it's riches or fame or power or respect, the whole world amounts to the very same carrot on the end of an incredibly long stick and we're all simply different donkeys trotting along, wondering why it's always just out of reach. And all you have to do is read the stories of those who have made it, to those who've actually grabbed that brass ring; and that small group of people are just like Solomon was, they're disillusioned and they're ultimately unsatisfied but don't expect them to be telling us that.

You see, those who think they've already arrived, they're too busy finding something else to pursue in order to make up for that loss, for that deep-seated inability to ever be satisfied. And once again C.S. Lewis defined why that is. He defined it better than anyone, I think. He says -- quote -- "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."

And we're so removed from that other world, it's so altogether foreign that Jesus demanding of us that we be perfect, as his heavenly Father is perfect just strikes us not just as foreign but also as absolutely futile. I mean to demand perfection of creatures who've never even remotely experienced it seems hopeless

at best and certainly unfair. And why not demand that we fly or that we walk on water as well? I mean they're all equally impossible. I mean, not being a water walker or an Icarus, it's not a capital offense, but according to Jesus not being perfect is. So how is that fair? I mean, after all, nobody's perfect. To err is human. We all make mistakes, I mean, how is it that God can seriously demand perfection?

Well the answer to that question is simple. It's how could God not? See, as creatures born into a world of imperfection, we think it's only reasonable that we should be judged by a standard that takes that imperfection into account. I mean how can my creator demand perfection if it's never been even remotely a part of my experience? I mean, if I've never known a perfect anything, how in the world can my creator demand perfection in everything? And make no mistake about it, God isn't using hyperbole here. He fully intends us to understand that perfection is a non-negotiable demand for any and all who would enter heaven.

This is what he says in *James 2:10*. He says: *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.* In *Galatians 3:10* he says: *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law,*

and do them."

See, God's saying that his law, it's one unified perfect whole and he's saying you can't violate any part of it without violating all of it. You know, you can't find any part of a balloon that you can stick a pin in without blowing up the entire balloon. It doesn't matter how big of a pin you use. I've often put it this way, whether you commit capital murder or steal a paper clip is usually important in terms of the crime that you committed but in terms of perfection, it's completely immaterial. You can picture one sin as a huge pin and the other as a tiny one but both are going to blow up the balloon. God's law is God's law. It says, "*Do not murder*" but it also says, "*Do not covet.*" Now, one may seem much less devastating than the other but they're both part of God's law, and to violate either is to render us imperfect and unfit for heaven. I mean, talk about futility.

I mean, "*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" was Jesus driving a stake into the Pharisees' idea that God's law was something that could ever make you good enough by trying harder. They taught that the law could be negotiated, abrogated or ignored as long as you paid lip service to their rules. And Jesus destroyed that notion by raising the bar that they had set low so high that no human could ever attain it. They

said, you can't murder; Jesus said, you can't even be angry with your brother. They said, be very careful about your oaths; Jesus said, don't even swear by the hairs on your head. They said, you must not commit adultery; Jesus said, don't even think about committing adultery. And on and on it went.

You know, whenever the Pharisees attempted to make men worthy by keeping a set of rules, Jesus would just take those rules and make adhering to them absolutely futile. And that was always the point. See, rule keeping will never make us acceptable to God because rule keeping will never make us perfect, and perfect is the only standard that a perfect God can accept. That's utter futility.

Most folks hold to the view that God must judge us on a sliding scale that adapts itself to our fallenness; but understand, Jesus doesn't buy that for a second. Just remember this world we live in, this world of imperfection is completely foreign to who God is. I mean, he had lived in this broken world for the express purpose of addressing the fact that not only was perfection foreign and futile, but the lack of it was also fatal. It's fatal to approach God without it.

What made Jesus so adamantly opposed to the Pharisees was that their teaching wasn't simply misplaced or misinformed, it was

fatally flawed. In *Matthew 23*, he says: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.*

That's why understanding what Jesus meant by saying, "*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" can mean the difference literally between heaven and hell. I mean, it's heaven for those who grasp it; it's hell for those who refuse.

And here's why understanding this distinction is so incredibly important. I want to use an example of a person pretty well known. I read a while back about an article describing an interview with Donald Trump. I was attracted to the article by the questions that the interviewer was asking him. *The Daily Caller* described it this way. It said: "In a recently released excerpt from his October interview with GQ, Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump revealed that he does believe in Heaven and is working hard to get there. 'I've done a fabulous job and made the lives of many, many people much better,' Trump told GQ's Chris Heath. 'Do you believe in Heaven?' Heath asked in response. 'Yes', answered the real-estate mogul. 'I hope [I'll be going]. That's what I strive for.' Trump also noted that his quest to enter the Pearly Gates is going 'pretty good.'"

(<http://dailycaller.com/2015/11/25/trump-im-working-on-getting-into-heaven/#ixzz3t1YJgOeL>)

Now, regardless of what you think of Mr. Trump politically, I have to say spiritually, based on what he said in that interview, he's in very serious trouble. You see, there's a critical difference between striving for perfection and actually attaining it. There's also a critical difference between thinking that striving for perfection is the same as attaining it. I mean, it may be going pretty good in your own mind, but perfection is an all-or-nothing proposition.

The very thing that Jesus was getting at in the entire Sermon on the Mount was the absolute impossibility, the futility, if you will, of attaining perfection by striving for it. The Pharisees specialized in devising ways to make you think that you had somehow made yourself worthy enough for God, and it seems like they never even considered the problem of perfection. Nobody ever does.

Over the years I've come to the conclusion that without the intervention directly by the Holy Spirit, this is a truth that may seem obvious to believers but it's absolutely invisible to non-believers. For years I thought how hard is this to understand? God is perfect, we're not. If you want to find a way to be with

God, you got to find a way to be perfect. Jesus in *Matthew 5:48* is just saying the obvious: *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

What I find mind boggling whether it comes from the mouth of Pharisees or from the mouth of Donald Trump is the idea that I can get there simply by trying harder. I mean, for sure you can achieve a lot of relative goodness by working hard at it but that's not what Jesus is saying. I mean, nowhere in the entire Bible will you ever, ever hear God say, "Just try your best." What you're going to find over and over again is God insisting that your best and my best will never even begin to approach the level of perfection that God is demanding, and it's a truth that God goes out of his way to communicate.

We've all heard *Isaiah 64*. We say it so often it's lost its meaning. We say: *We are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.* And I've stated this many times, as uncomfortable as this passage is, it bears repetition. I mean *Isaiah* is writing to his fellow Jews. As we've seen with the Pharisees, those folks are sticklers for certain things and one of the things that they were known for is personal cleanliness and hygiene, particularly when it came to issues of blood.

And that term "filthy rags" is translated in the ESV as "polluted garment." Well, that's about as close as anyone wants to get to what it truly means. The actual term means a used menstrual rag. And what Isaiah's doing, he's reaching as far as he can to provide a picture of our goodness compared to perfection and what it actually looks like to God, and he's speaking to a people who are beyond appalled at his imagery. And his intention is to shock them into seeing something they'd become blind to. And they, like the Pharisees, like Donald Trump, they thought goodness was something you strived for by personal efforts. And God says in no uncertain terms, you just cannot get there from here. And I pointed out that Isaiah in this vividly awful description, he's not pointing to our sins. He's pointing to the best deeds we could ever muster. He says, "*all our righteousness is as filthy rags.*" That's incredible.

There's a distinction I need to make here. I'm not saying we're incapable of doing good. I mean, the Red Cross does good, the Salvation Army does good; Jesus himself said in *Matthew 12: The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good.* And God takes delight in the good that he sees. It's just that when we offer that goodness up as a means of claiming our right to heaven and God's presence, then that goodness has got to be flawless perfection, and God knows we don't do perfection.

There's actually another scatological reference to our righteousness in the book of Zechariah. Zechariah 3 has a picture of the high priest standing before God. This is *Zechariah 3*. It says: *Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."*

Now understand the high priest was, he was required to bathe repeatedly. He was required to wear scrupulously clean linen garment, and Joshua the high priest had done just that. But here God is describing Joshua in this instance as standing before him clothed in excrementally filthy rags. I mean, to us he looked fine. To God he's standing at the altar smeared in excrement. That's what our righteousness compared to perfection looks like to God. These are not at all pleasant images and you can take them either of two ways, you can say either God is standing repulsed, revolted and rejecting our best efforts as filth or he's simply acknowledging how our very best looks to him and how willing he is

to scoop us out of that filth and make us clean. He says: *Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."*

I think of that image every time I pray before preaching. I mean, I acknowledge I have two choices before I enter the pulpit. I can choose to be clothed in my own excremental filth and if I'm clever enough, I can make it look like an Armani suit, or I can by faith clothe myself in Christ's own righteousness. As *Romans 13* says: *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.* So I choose Christ's righteousness.

So why couldn't the Pharisees see that? Why does it appear that Donald Trump doesn't see it? How about your friends? How about your neighbors, those you try to share the gospel with who simply don't want to hear it? I mean, it seems so abundantly clear and yet so often the ones we desperately want to understand it, they can't see it. They can't see it even though it's staring them right in the face. Well, God tells us why in *1 Corinthians 2*. He says: *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

So this idea of perfection is foreign to us right from the day that we're born, it's futile to us to even begin to approach perfection knowing we'll never even begin to achieve it; and yet that imperfection is absolutely fatal when it comes to being made worthy of heaven. That's why *"Therefore you must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* is one of the most important verses in the Bible. I often refer to it if I'm sharing the gospel with somebody. The natural man can't begin to imagine a God who would hold us accountable for a perfection we can never even come close to. A God would condemn us for not achieving what he's already told us is utterly futile and who considers our imperfection a fatal flaw that precludes our ever entering into heaven, what kind of God is that? Well, it's a God whose perfection extends to his justice and whose justice can never allow imperfection.

And if it all ended with all of us being banned from his presence, the universe would still be shouting, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord GOD Almighty!" But it didn't end there. *John 3:16* says: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*

You see, God's justice found a way to punish imperfection and his mercy found a way to pay the price of that punishment. God would condemn all those who fell short of his glorious perfection and

then he would stand in the place of his sheep and receive that just punishment. God found a way to restore our perfection not by keeping elaborate sets of rules but by simply believing in the God who would die for them.

God says there's only one way to reclaim perfection and achieve righteousness in this world, and that way is through faith. He uses the example of Abraham. This is what God says in *Romans 4*. It says: *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness."*

See, Donald Trump is striving for something he can only achieve by believing, because *"Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* What we can't fully comprehend is the first part of that verse that describes how much God loves us. For God so loved the world that he determined to enter it in spite of its imperfection. Understand, this world seems perfectly normal to us, because it's the world we've been born into, but we can't imagine

what it must have been like for Jesus to enter a world so incredibly foreign to everything that he created. I mean, understand, Jesus left a world of absolute total perfection to enter into a world where imperfection had brought decay and death and sickness. And also to a metaphysical world that had nothing but hatred, lust, envy and murder. It was a world that was just groaning in its bondage to decay. What must it have been like for the one flawless human being to eat, sleep and live in a world that wasn't just imperfect but one that reveled in its rottenness because it was ruled by the king of rot himself, the aptly called "lord of the flies."

You know, when people complain about all the evil in the world and how it couldn't possibly be governed by a good god, I point out that every other religion posits a god or a force that's quite removed from earth itself. Christianity alone claims a God who got right into the thick of it, not as some observer but as an actual participant, who came as our shepherd determined to rescue his sheep, as our high priest determined to represent us before a holy and perfect God by experiencing the very worst our imperfection had to offer. Degradation, shame, torture and execution on the physical level; abandonment, betrayal and outright hatred for his sinlessness on the metaphysical level, that's the reward that God got for joining us in our misery. But absolutely none of this took

Jesus or his Father by surprise. And they knew the price they would have to pay even before they spoke us into existence. It was all before them and yet God so loved this world that he was willing to send us his Son.

And Jesus wasn't born to be a religious or political leader or a philosopher or a good example; he came to this earth to be a sacrifice for sin. He came to this earth to live out the exact same life you and I have to live with one critical exception, he did it flawlessly. Once again, we're back to trying to imagine something our minds can't fully comprehend; that is that in this world of imperfection for a period of 33 years, perfection itself lived among us. And Jesus was the perfect light of the world come into the world's darkness. And as the scripture says: *"And this is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."*

You see, the darkness so deeply resented the light that eventually it succeeded in crucifying the only perfect thing this world has ever known, but even that horror was by design. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, they used the cross as a public staging area where God himself would prove to the universe that both his justice and his mercy could remain perfectly intact if he

would be willing to condemn all sin in the flesh and then in his own flesh absorb that condemnation.

It took six earth hours for an eternity in hell for every one of God's people to be poured out on the head of his Son. But at the end Jesus had an answer to a perfection that was foreign, futile and fatal. You see, having paid the full price of our imperfection, he could now see us as fully justified, made perfect by our debt now paid in full. So he said in his final words on the cross, *"It is finished."* That's Jesus' answer to *Matthew 5:48*: *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

You see, at the cross a perfection that was foreign, futile and absolutely fatal was now through his sacrifice finished and delivered for all who would believe. God found a way through faith in his Son's sacrifice to give us his flawless perfection. And I can only say along with Paul: *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*