

What must I do to be saved?

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 5:27-30.

“27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: 28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. 29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. 30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Matt. 5:27-30).

I have entitled this sermon, “**What must I do to be saved?**” I would like to give you an overview of Matthew 5. When I read Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7, I am convicted of my own sinfulness. The requirements Jesus gave in these chapters seems so high, and there doesn't seem to be any wiggle room. I see five lessons in these chapters.

1. What God's holy law really means.
2. In ourselves, we are all guilty before God.
3. It is impossible for sinful man to do what God requires.
4. Salvation is God saving sinners by grace alone, in Christ alone.
5. Only Christ fulfilled God's holy law.
6. God commands sinners to look to Christ crucified as all of their salvation, and come to God by Him.

What God's holy law really means

When we read these verses, or all of Matthew 5, 6 and 7, the first thing we should see is that our Lord Jesus explains the true meaning of God's holy law. In this one sermon, Jesus said this six times: “*You have heard...*” followed by, “*...but I say unto you*” (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44)! Christ is the authority. He is the Word of God. It is His law. He is the Lawgiver. In His sermon

on the mount, Jesus tells us what God meant when He gave the law. By explaining what His law means, our Lord Jesus makes known our true condition before God. His law exposes our sin. The apostle Paul said, "*We know that what things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God*" (Rom. 3:19). Jesus said that it is not only our actions that are sin; but it is our thoughts and motives. We do wrong things first of all because we are sinners. Why do we do evil? Because we are evil. Who among us can deny they are guilty of hate and envy? Jesus said such thoughts are murder in the heart (Matt. 5:21-22). What man can claim he never looked upon a woman to lust after her in his heart? Jesus said that to do so is to commit adultery in the heart. Who can say they never used God's name to convince others they were not liars, saying, "I swear to God!"? Jesus said all such forms of speaking arise from evil within. Therefore, the first thing we learn in all of these is the holiness of God's law. God requires truth in the inward parts (Ps. 51:6). God's law is holy because God is holy. God's law finds us to be unholy because we are truly sinful. We are hostile towards God (Rom. 8:7). We deny His truth (Rom. 1:18, 25). We despise His way. We refuse His rule. Our sin denies God His right to be God, to rule as God on His throne over all things and over us.

I am guilty before God

Jesus said, God's law requires truth in our thoughts, not just our actions. Therefore, all of us break God's law all the time. Jesus made it clear that we all are guilty before God. Proverbs 24:8-9, "*8 He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person. 9 The thought of foolishness is sin: and the scorner is an abomination to men.*" To devise evil is to think or plan evil. A mischievous person is an evil person. Therefore, by what Jesus said, we must all take our place among the evil, with the mischievous. All men must own the fact that they not only do sin but that they are full of sin. Jesus said we must love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37). But who has ever done that? The apostle James said that to break one law is to break them all (James 2:10). And who has lived one minute of their life without doing that? Therefore, by what goes on in our mind alone, we must all admit that we have not kept one of God's

commandments one time! Jesus said, *“Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect”* (Matt. 5:48). We must not only do right and avoid wrong, but we must think right and think no evil (v48). God’s law requires that we keep every commandment, all the time, perfectly, out of love, with our whole heart. No wonder Jesus said, *“Out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man”* (Mark 7:21-23). Therefore, we have to line up with the guilty! We have to take our place on the enemy team against God, the side of thieves, liars, adulterers and murderers! We are guilty of breaking every commandment all the time. We have done what we ought not do. We have left undone what we ought to do. And there is no goodness in us at all. *“There is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Rom. 3:12). To deny this is to deny the truth of scripture, it is to deny Christ’s own words. This is the second thing we learn from Matthew chapter 5. We are all guilty before God.

It is impossible for sinful man to do what God requires

The third thing we learn from Jesus’ sermon is this: it is impossible for sinful man to do what God requires. We must realize that what God requires of us is impossible for us to do, because we are sinners. God tells us what He requires throughout the Bible. By doing so, He shows us our guilt. But He also does two other things. He describes Christ who did do what God requires. And He shows us the utter impossibility of becoming right with God by what we do. We have failed in all that God commands! But Christ fulfilled the very heart of what God requires! If God gives us grace to be honest, it will drive us to realize that in ourselves it is impossible to be right before God. We see this impossibility in Jesus’ words.

Jesus said that if your right eye causes you to sin, if it offends you, pluck it out. He said if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Therefore, if we must have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew

5:20), and **if we have to come up with this righteousness ourselves**, then *we* have to start plucking out and hacking off whatever causes us to sin. Now, before you start mutilating yourself, think about this. Are people who cannot see without sin? Are people without arms also without sin too? Surely not. If so, then why did the apostle Paul say about himself, “*I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing*” (Rom. 7:18). If there was nothing good in the flesh of the apostle Paul, then to do what Jesus said here, he would have to kill ourselves to be saved! That is impossible isn't it!? But that's what the law requires: The sinner must die! “*The wages of sin is death*” (Rom. 6:23)! We cannot keep God's law or pay for our own sin by killing ourselves! How do we know that? Because those in hell never pay for their sins. They are there forever. After an eternity in hell, they have an eternity yet to suffer! Nor do we actually keep God's law by suffering in hell! We therefore cannot pay for our own sins.

But the key to understanding this verse is found in Matthew 5:20, is to hear what Jesus said, that to enter heaven, our righteousness must be better than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Now, if you were a scribe and heard Jesus say that, you would know right then and there that you were excluded from heaven by your works, because Jesus said a righteousness better than yours is required for you to enter heaven! Your very best is not only not good enough, it is going the wrong way. The apostle Paul made it clear that if we attempt to be righteous before God by our own law-keeping, we are “*debtors to do the whole law*” (Gal. 5:3). You see, the scribes and Pharisees trusted their own obedience as the way to find favor with God. Yet the apostle Paul, who was once a Pharisee, said that by what the law required outwardly, he was blameless (Philippians 3:4-7). Yet when Paul saw Christ, he realized all he had done before that time was a pile of dung: disgusting, revolting, sickening dung! Therefore, anything you or I do to make ourselves right with God not only does not help, it makes things worse for us before God. Because it is all hypocrisy. It is not true obedience. It puffs up our mind with conceit by thinking outward obedience is a basis for acceptance with God. The best efforts of the best of men are therefore not only not good enough, they are really bad because they are done with the thought of earning God's favor

and earning life by our own personal obedience. But how can I earn anything from God?!

The rich young ruler came to Jesus and said, “*Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life*” (Matt 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18)? Jesus replied, “*Why do you call me good? You know the commandments: do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not lie, do not cheat, honor your father and mother.*” The young man said, “*Master, all these have I kept from my youth up.*” Jesus said, “*Go sell all you have and give it to the poor.*” Scripture says that young man went away sorrowful because for that, because he was very rich. He could not do what Jesus said because his heart was covetous. He lived for himself and trusted his riches. He could not get eternal life by what he did because he was a sinner, who could only think sin. It was impossible for him to change his heart. Jeremiah said it this way. “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil*” (Jer. 13:23).

We might be able to pluck out our right eye, or maybe even both of our eyes. We may be able to cut off our hand, maybe even both of our hands. But we cannot change our hearts! Therefore, Jesus spoke these words to silence all who trust their own works in some way to obtain salvation and blessing from God! He spoke these words to drive us to despair in ourselves, to cause us to see that our heart is the problem! No amount of self-mortification will change our heart! “*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he*” (Proverbs 23:7). What we think is what we truly are. And God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 17:9-10; Rom. 8:27; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 2:23). We are not only guilty, but because we are sinful in our heart, it is impossible for us to do what God demands. “*By the deeds of the law (by our own personal obedience to the law -- Deut. 6:25) there shall no flesh be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin*” (Rom. 3:20). If my heart is full of sin and I must be perfect before God, is there no hope, then? Well, there is no hope for me in me, but...

Salvation is God saving sinners by His grace alone, in Christ alone!

There is hope for sinners in the grace of God! Grace is God saving us by Christ alone for reasons not found in ourselves, but only for reasons God found in Himself. God's grace never looks for a reason in me to save me! The Spirit of God by the apostle Paul said, "*Being justified freely (without cause found in me) by His grace, through (the basis) the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). God never looks at my past for a reason to save me. He never looks at what I will be someday for a reason to save me. God never shows grace to me because He expects to get something from me someday. Grace is God doing everything for me in Christ and looking to Christ alone for every reason to bless me, without any contribution from me! And we must quickly add this: God's grace does not merely attempt to save. His grace actually saves! God's grace must exclude all contributions from me. Paul said, "*If it be of grace, then is it no more of works, otherwise, grace is no more grace*" (Rom. 11:6). If we are saved by grace, we must be saved **by grace alone**. **Grace alone means God saves us for what He thinks of Christ...alone!***

It is not good news to me to hear that if I do something, then God will bless me. It is not comforting to me to hear that if I do my part, God will do His part and keep His promises. It is not good news to me to hear that one day God will accept me if I do what He requires, or that someday He will approve of me and bless me if I meet the conditions required for His blessings. The only good news and the only comforting news to me, a sinner, is that God looks to Christ for everything that He requires from me! My only hope and comfort and all of my salvation, is that God has received Christ sacrificed to bear and remove the sins of sinners like me! **Salvation is not forgiveness and life at the end of a long life of obedience on my part.** Salvation is forgiveness and life given to me in Christ my Substitute, who gave Himself in death to satisfy God for the wrong my sins did to Him and to fulfill the obedience His law demands of me. Because God made Christ all for His

people, my salvation is complete, accomplished by Christ alone, without any contribution from me. I can only rest in Christ, because only His death satisfied God for my sins and only His obedience fulfilled God's law. God commands me to look away from myself to Christ alone. In Isaiah 45:22, Jesus said, "*Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else*" (Isa. 45:22; Acts 4:12; Num. 21:6-9; John 3:14-15; Heb. 12:2). In salvation, God designs and gives and brings and does everything! I am the unworthy recipient of all of His blessings in Christ, yet by God-given faith, I am the happy sinner who finds all God requires in Christ alone! God's grace never looks to the future for payback from me. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is grace that saves me without any contribution from me: past, present or future. His grace saves because by God's will Christ died to answer all that His law demands for His people.

Faith is not something I exercise to get things from God. Faith is a gift God gives to me to see that all God requires and demands of me He has already fulfilled and satisfied in Christ. This is the fourth thing we learn from Matthew 5 -- salvation must be by grace, from first to last, and it must be by what Jesus did alone. It does not depend on me in any way at all.

Christ alone fulfilled God's law

The fifth thing we learn from Matthew 5 is that Jesus Christ alone fulfilled God's holy law. Jesus said "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.*" Throughout His sermon, the Lord Himself explains the holiness of His law. His words convince us that we have utterly failed in all that He requires. We stand in awe at the righteousness of God's law, and terror that we have broken it in every way. We are dismayed that we are unable to do what He requires. Then we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself fulfilled that law! And then we stand in awe and wonder in love and in admiration that Christ would do that for us, that God would give Him for that purpose! We then gain a deeper recognition of God's holiness, because God gave His Son, to fulfill that law, and that only Christ could fulfill it! We realize that to fulfill God's law requires a love for God's will and His glory and His people. And we admire Christ

because we find all of these in Him alone. We are amazed that He loved and died for His enemies, for His adulterous wife! He Himself did all He preached in this sermon. He prayed for and forgave His enemies (Rom. 5:10). Jesus alone fulfilled the law and the prophets, to save His people, to bring them to God, and all of this to God's great glory! Thus, God's law not only exposes us, condemns us, and shuts us up in the prison of our sin, but it glorifies God because His law is so holy Christ alone could keep it. And we glorify our Savior, because He kept it for His people, in their place, for their righteousness!

Romans 8:3-4 teaches the same thing. We should read it whenever we read Matthew 5. It says this:

- What the law could not do,
- Because it was weak through our sinful flesh
- God did
- By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.
- And in Christ's flesh, God condemned sin in the flesh.
- That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us...
- Who walk by the Spirit of God, believing Christ and Him crucified as all of our salvation and hope.

Romans 8:1-4 is good news to a man whose natural heart is full of sin, who finds it impossible to be right and do right in himself, and who understands that God's law is holy, and yet who knows he can't do one thing to fulfill that law!

I may attempt to remove my sin by plucking out my eyes or cutting off my hands. But by doing these we are like the scribes and Pharisees, trying to enter heaven by what we do, dressed in the rags of our own filthy righteousness (Isa. 64:6). That is impossible! Yet, what is impossible with men, is possible with God! Oh, thank God, what is impossible for me, is not impossible with God! God did what we could not do. He cut off sin from His people when He cut it off in the Lord Jesus Christ, when Christ died on the cross (Col. 2:11)! God laid the sins of His people on His Son, on Christ (Isa. 53:6). When Christ died, God condemned their sins in His flesh. The law can never put my sin. The law can never put my sin to death

without also putting me to death, because I am the one that sinned. I am THE sinner! And God's payback for sin is death (Rom. 6:23)! But! God, in His incomprehensible grace, substituted His only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in the place of His sinful people (1 Cor. 15:1-4)! When the Lord Jesus obeyed His Father, when He finished doing all of God's will to save His people from their sins, by giving His life in offering to God for the sins of His people by His death on the cross, God received full satisfaction from Him for the wrong our sins did to God's holiness. He then raised Him from the dead. Thus, we died in Him (Rom. 6:6, 11; Gal. 2:20). Our sin was cut off in Christ. Christ fulfilled the righteousness of God's law (Rom. 10:4)! The last thing Jesus said from the cross was, "*It is finished*" (John 19:30)! Because God's will was accomplished, because our salvation was finished, therefore, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus said if our hand or eye causes us to sin, we must cut them off. But in His death, our entire sinful self was cut off! Death is for sinners, but Christ put sin to death in His own death! Christ brought His guilty and helpless people to God. He satisfied God's justice. God, in justice, now justifies His people for what He received from them in Christ.

As God is holy, so God's law is holy. There is no hope for any man to enter heaven by what he has done or by what he can do. It's impossible. No hope at all. Every man is guilty (Romans 3:19). It is impossible to attain to the righteousness of the law by our personal obedience (Romans 3:20; 9:31; Gal. 2:21). But Christ did what was impossible for us. He did what He said we must do, and which, in believing, we are assured we did in Him. He fulfilled the law. Every jot and tittle, from the smallest mark to the greatest commandment. He fulfilled the law to love God and His neighbor as Himself. And the Lord Jesus not only kept the law completely, but He kept it perfectly. He kept it all the time. He kept it from His heart. He understood what God's holy law really meant. And He came to do it. He never hated. He never envied. He was never angry without a righteous cause. Now, a really good man might die for his friend, but Christ laid down His life for His enemies (Romans 5:7-8). God says that in doing so, He established everlasting righteousness for all who look to Him alone with God-given faith (2 Cor. 5:21; Romans 10:4). We don't look to what we do, but to what Christ did. We don't look

to our faith, but to Christ's obedience and sin-atonement blood. We don't look to our hope. Christ is our hope (1 Tim. 1:1). We don't look to our looking. We abandon all hope in ourselves and rest our eternal life in Christ crucified, not looking for anything else. We depend on Christ crucified for all of our salvation without looking for or relying on any back-up plan. All of our confidence is Him. We have no back-up plan. In our hearts, our boats and bridges have been burned. We have no desire to look back. There is no good thing in us. But Christ is the "Good Master" who finished the will of God, and by His one offering for sin, perfected all for whom He died. "*By one offering, He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified*" (Hebrews 10:14). The law made nothing perfect, but Christ made His people perfect by laying down His life in perfect obedience to God for them. He is the better hope (1 Tim. 1:1; Hebrews 7:11,19; 8:6; 10:14).

Conclusion

Now in conclusion, the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7, does not tell us what we must do in ourselves to enter heaven. It does not tell us what we must do in ourselves to please God. It does not tell us what we must do in ourselves to be a good Christian. The Sermon on the Mount explains the righteousness of God's law, and tells us where that righteousness is found. Christ, in the Sermon on the mount, tells us of a law so holy that all men are sinners before God. And He tells us what He, the only good and holy Man ever did to fulfill God's holy law in every jot and tittle! It leaves us with only one hope: that hope is Christ. He did not murder. He loved His enemies. He did not lust after a woman. He laid down His life to save and purify His own adulterous people! He did not steal. He restored what He did not take away by paying the price of His own life to God as a ransom to redeem us from all iniquity (Psalm 69:4; Matt. 20:28; Titus 2:14; Zech. 9:11; Job. 33:23-24). We must be perfect. But there is only one way to be perfect: we must find Christ to be all of our righteousness and perfection before God. What the law could not do, Christ did in His death (Rom. 8:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 10:4). Christ alone fulfilled the righteousness of God's law (2 Corinthians 5:21). He alone satisfied God's justice and fulfilled God's law for His elect people in His death on the cross. He made all of His people righteous by His obedience

(Rom. 5:19). Now, by God-given faith, we look to Him alone. We do not look to ourselves (1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Romans 10:4).

Do we ignore what God requires of us because Christ is our righteousness? Not at all. We glorify God in believing Christ, because faith agrees with God's word that Christ is our only sin-payment and all of our righteousness. Second, we want to be like our Savior. In our new man, we don't want to sin. But until we enter heaven, we go on fighting this fight of faith. We will keep learning over and over the holiness of God, our own guilt and sinfulness, the utter impossibility of making ourselves right, and the amazing grace of God that Christ would do for us what we could never do. We wait for the time when we shall see Him as He is and be like Him (Psalm 17:15; 1 John 3:1-2).

What must I do to be saved? You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the one Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). You must look to Him as all of your salvation! Believing Christ is simultaneously the realizing I can do nothing to save myself, but He has done everything by Himself for His people. It is seeing and calling upon Christ as all of my salvation! If you see Him as God and man, the Lord who has become your salvation, then you have been saved. He gave you that faith. And if you thus see Him, you will walk in this truth all the days of your life, giving glory to God, because He receives you for Christ's sake alone!