

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 5-7

“The King’s Inaugural Address”

Study Number Three – Matthew 5:17-20

In our first study we talked together about the fact that Christ is giving this message as sort of His political platform. This is his first major public address. He has a lot of scribes and Pharisees in the audience who are the religious leaders of the day, along with the disciples. They have not been followers of His for very long. They’re a fairly a new group.

He is speaking to the issue, basically if we were to try to summarize the Sermon on the Mount, of how righteous a person has to be to go to heaven.

Now that’d be a question we’d like to know. So many people come up to the end of life wondering if they’d done enough, whether their righteousness was adequate to get them into glory. And they have come out of conservative churches and served and sacrificed and given their money and been in positions of leadership and worked most of their life through, but they still had a deep lack of assurance that they were ready to meet the Lord.

Christ, at the beginning of this sermon, says it's not what we DO, it's what we ARE—The BE-attitudes. The poor in spirit, those who mourn for their lack of righteousness. Those who are gentle enough to receive it and those who hunger and thirst for it.

As a result of that work of righteousness in their lives, they're merciful in action toward others and they're pure in heart toward God. They are peacemakers. And sure they're persecuted, because the world does not understand what they're really all about.

In our last study Christ said, "You are not to be all these things in isolation. But to the world around you, you are to be salt and you are to be light."

We had TWO WARNINGS about the salt and the light:

1. The salt can lose its saltiness and so it's not effective.
2. The light can be covered with a bushel and it doesn't shine.

And we looked at some things as to why salt can lose its saltiness and why light can be covered by a bushel.

In this passage, Christ in His thinking is talking to a group of people whose whole lives are bent on trying to gain acceptance in the presence of God by the keeping of the Law.

Now here's the question that sets the stage for our study. If the emphasis in the kingdom is upon BEING, then what about DOING?

Do we have to do the Law? If it's being this, does it matter what we do?

The resounding affirmative answer is, YES it does. Because out of our character will flow our conduct.

The emphasis in the church today is upon DOING WITHOUT BEING.

And some of these people running around who say we're a bunch of hypocrites have got a lot to say. We don't listen to them, we turn them off because they only use that as an excuse for not becoming Christians.

But really stop and think about it. The whole emphasis seems to be in the Christian culture upon doing. If we do it, by coming regularly and giving our money and serving and sacrificing, everything's going to be fine. And the whole motivation is on that.

Where is the message on being? Where is the message of being still and knowing that He is God?

That's interesting. In the gospel of John it says Christ chose His twelve disciples to serve Him. Is that what it said? He chose His twelve disciples to be with Him. Because as a result

of being “with Him,” their lives were going to be changed and their conduct was going to take itself.

John is the epitome of that. The “Son of Thunder” becomes an apostle of love through a three year intense exposure to Jesus Christ.

That’s not as dramatic. It is not as obvious to go crawl in a closet, read our Bible and really get our act together, really get to know God so that the righteousness that flows out of our life is not a performance, it’s just us. We’re different because we’ve spent time with Him.

It does matter. BEING precedes DOING. Flowing from our character will be our conduct.

Now let’s take each verse and see how this lifestyle that Christ has just described in the Beatitudes and in the salt and the light, relates to the Law. All of these guys have been keeping the Mosaic Law.

The scribes and the Pharisees commit themselves to spend their whole life to keep all of the Law and all of its traditions. So they are super performance-oriented individuals who are listening in the audience.

So Christ senses their concern because they as well have had no emphasis upon what we’re talking about here.

Christ in Matthew 23 says, “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees,

you make the outside of the cup and platter white but inside you're full of dirt and filth." (ref. Matthew 23:25) In essence He's saying, "You don't spend any time on what's in here! It's all an external show."

The more we get into chapter 6 of this sermon, He's going to wail on them for the way they give their money and the way they pray in public and the way they fast. It's all external, without anything internal.

That is self-righteousness. When we say to a person, "You are self-righteous," we're saying, "You don't have anything inside and you're just acting that way."

And the whole conflict of the sermon is the conflict between self-righteousness and Christ's righteousness as we're going to see.

Alright, let's dig in now with that.

The key verse is the last one we're going to look at, which is verse 20. It's the key verse to the whole sermon.

v. 17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill."

Alright, Christ says, "Now I don't want y'all to get the wrong

opinion. I did not come to do away with the Law just because I'm putting all this emphasis on being here and what you are supposed to be. I didn't come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I didn't come to do it that way."

Now, what does He mean by the term "Law" and the "Prophets?"

Christ is referring by this term to the whole Old Testament. In the Old Testament we can use the term "Law" to refer to the Ten Commandments. We say we're under the Law and we speak of the Ten Commandments and the other part that goes with it.

Or we can use the term "Law" to refer to the Mosaic Law—all of its commands. Or the Jews use the term "Law" to refer to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—the whole five books.

And then they use it one other way, and Christ uses it this way and it refers to the whole Old Testament. When He spoke of the "Law," He meant the whole Old Testament.

The prophets were included in that. And He came not to "abolish, but to fulfill."

There's another reason that Christ is saying this right now, and we'll understand it in our next study. He's saying it right now because He's emphasizing all the "being" that we just had—being salt, being light—the Beatitudes.

In our next passage He's going to say, "The Law says unto you, but I say unto you." Six illustrations in living color of how Christ and His teaching supersedes the Law so He wants us to be mindful of that as He gets ready to teach that last part of chapter 5 when we see all of this. That He didn't come to "abolish" it, He came to "fulfill" it.

Now one writer has done a tremendous amount of work. He went through all of the ministry of Christ and he counted the number of times that Christ used the Old Testament. And these are some interesting statistics. Listen to this:

He quoted 66 times from the Law (that's Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). He quoted 40 times from Isaiah, 37 times from the Psalms, 22 times from Daniel, and He quoted from the other 39 books, at least 24 of them that we have record of in the Bible—the New Testament. We assume that the other 15 books were quoted at some time or another, although it is not clear in the text.
(source unknown)

He spoke a lot of things that were not recorded, John tells us that so it's obvious that He probably spoke of these others.

Now what does it mean He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets?

Because we are guilty of breaking the Law, because of sin in the garden, Christ is coming with an express purpose in mind.

And that purpose is to fulfill the Law perfectly then He will qualify to die for our broken Law.

Now does that make sense? Before He can qualify, **FOUR THINGS** have to be true. Before Christ can offer us His righteousness, He must do **FOUR THINGS**:

1. He must take on humanity—He must become a human being.

That's why Bethlehem is so important. That's why that little Babe born is critical. He's got to be like us—take on humanity. He is our Kinsman-Redeemer.

2. He must fulfill the Law perfectly—He cannot break it in thought, word or deed. He's got to fulfill every point of the Law.

3. He must then die for our broken Law—because the justice of God says the guilty sinner dies. So Christ must die.

4. Christ must be raised from the dead—which is the Father's approval of His work.

If the Father is satisfied with what the Son has done upon the cross, He'll raise Him from the dead. If not, He'll leave Him in the grave, because He'll only be dying for His own broken Law.

These four things have to be true and all four of them are true

of Jesus Christ. He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, and to be eligible He has to fulfill the Law perfectly and die in our place.

Now what about fulfilling the Prophets? Ever thought of that? Over three hundred prophecies were fulfilled, literally, on the day that Christ died on Calvary. Incredible.

Four-fifths of all of Bible prophecy is already fulfilled literally. Christ came to fulfill the rest of it. The one-fifth remaining will be literally fulfilled in the same way the four-fifths were.

With what's going on in the land of Israel, we are getting very, very close. Notice how everybody is so upset over the oil situation the price at our pumps are going to be affected by what they decide. It's all going to converge there in the Middle East.

There is absolutely nothing that stands in the way of Jesus Christ turning out the lights and taking His church home. Israel's in the land, everything is in readiness, Christ can fulfill that prophecy in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye we'll be with the Lord.

He came to fulfill it and we're on the way. Israel is going to mourn over Him, whom they have pierced. They're going to look on Him, Zechariah the prophet tells us. That's going to be fulfilled too.

v. 18 For truly I am saying to you, until heaven and

earth pass away, not one smallest letter nor smallest letter-marking shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

“For truly I am saying to you, until heaven and earth pass away,”—and it’s going to. It’s obvious in the book of Revelation that’s going to take place.

“not one smallest letter nor smallest letter-marking shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.”

If we belong to the denominational straight lines we are aware there’s a tremendous battle over whether or not the scripture is fully inspired or whether it has errors in it.

Christ had a tremendous respect for the scripture. Even to the letters and the letter markings. To Him every bit was going to be fulfilled. He had the highest regard. He never, ever questioned the authority or the accuracy of the Word of God. It’s only been in this intelligent generation that we’re giving people an excuse for absolutes by destroying the absolute authority of the text. And Satan knows that if he can get to that point, he allows people to be sloppy and unconcerned about being obedient to what the scripture has to say.

Now what does he mean by the “letter” and the “letter-markings?”

Hebrew is always read from the right to the left. Their letters never have any vowels. If we wanted to write the word “love,”

that has two vowels in it. We would write two letters, “l” and “v.” Under the “l” would be the letter marking for “o.” Under the “v” would be the letter marking for “e.” So the vowel pointings would be underneath the letter. And so that’s what He’s saying. Even to the letter pointings, the vowel pointings under the letters, and the smallest letter which is the dot and the backwards “c” which is the Herichio, that’s the smallest letter in the Hebrew text. He says all of it will be fulfilled.

When it comes to the specific authority of the scripture, we always have to turn to Revelation 22 where Christ says:

Revelation 22:18-19

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. If anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the Holy City which are described in this book.

Now He gives a warning in verse 19.

v. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

“Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these

commandments and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

DOING before TEACHING.

Ezra 7:10

Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, to do it and then to teach it in Israel.

At the end of the sermon He’s going to tell us about the wise man who builds his house upon the rock and the foolish man who builds his house on the sand. Basically the guy who builds his house on the rock is the guy who does these things.

James picks up on that and he says:

James 1:22

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

So Christ gives a WARNING. He says we’ll not escape if we neglect so great salvation. Don’t drift by our opportunities to be obedient. Practice before we preach. We do it before we teach.

Now that leads us to the verse that we’re going to spend the rest of our time on. The verse that has the gospel in living

color—verse 20.

When a verse starts with the word “For” we always have a reason for what He’s said before.

Christ said, “I came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets perfectly and don’t tell anybody not to practice certain parts of it. Realize it’s all very, very important.”

We do it and then we teach it with the highest regard, because we’ll be the greatest in the kingdom if we’ll teach it with its authority and not question it.

v. 20 For I am saying to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

“For I am saying to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Now that verse scares us when we first read it, doesn’t it? Because we know that the scribes and Pharisees probably played in the NFL. They were the pros.

These guys dedicate and commit themselves to the keeping of every part of the Law and none of us could measure up to what they did. Christ comes along and says “unless your righteousness exceeds theirs, you aren’t going to heaven.”

Now that is scary. Why is it scary? Because we still have that performance bug inside us. We still think that we're stacking up points and we're hoping that somehow, someday, as a result of what we do, it's going to affect our position when we get to heaven. And so we're working like crazy.

Paul says every mouth ought to be stopped and all the world ought to become guilty before God. Understand why the sermon starts with "Blessed are the poor in spirit?" Because when we read this verse, there's no alternative. We have to say with all honesty, we cannot measure up to this twentieth verse! There is no argument!

We all have the same nature and our righteousness won't make it. There's not a person sitting in this room that can fulfill the requirements of this verse and plan on going to heaven, because we're good enough.

"Poor in spirit"—now mourn over that! In gentleness be willing to receive what God has provided in the person of His Son.

The whole emphasis is upon BEING, not on DOING. And in order to be something has to happen inside of us to change us. We're going to talk about that in just a minute.

Isaiah 64:6 is a good verse to put here:

Isaiah 64:6

All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags, we shrivel up like a leaf...

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

People are still striving, still struggling, still fighting for new records. We see it in Indianapolis and everywhere else. They keep trying to go faster on wheels, eventually they lose their lives.

When we come to this, there has to be a better way. Christ says, “That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” (ref. Luke 16:15)

It is totally rejected. There’s no hope for us.

What are we supposed to do when we realize that we’re condemned? That there’s no righteousness for us? We have to throw in the towel. That’s the beginning. We have to declare our bankruptcy. We have to say we don’t have that righteousness.

If that’s true, what is the purpose of the Law if it’s not to be kept and to try to gain righteousness?

The purpose of the Law is to convince us of our lack of righteousness. It is not something to perform to gain

righteousness.

We've all heard "love your neighbor as yourself," and "live by the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule." We're going to get to the Golden Rule before this one's over because it's in this sermon. We're frustrated by it because we know in our heart we've broken it at some point or another.

The Law was designed by God to convince us without any question that we do not have a righteousness that will gain acceptance in His sight.

Now for a little test. Remember that God doesn't grade on the curve, okay? The rules for this test are, if we break one, we're guilty of the whole thing. Isn't that horrible?

James 2:10 says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole Law and yet offend in one point, he's guilty of all." We're just doing this to show that we don't have a chance.

1. Thou shalt not kill.

We haven't killed. When's the last time we got angry? He says to be angry is the same as killing.

2. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

No, we haven't done that either. Well, when's the last time we looked on a woman to desire her as "a well-tabernacled spirit." a Mormon missionary said. You see, we're guilty.

In our next study Christ is going to take the Law and show us that it's the ATTITUDE not the ACTION that counts with Him. We all have hearts that are defiled and sinful and it manifests itself in action, which brings us short of the glory of God and of His righteousness.

Alright, then what does the Law do? It takes us by the hand and it brings us to Christ.

It says, "The Law is my schoolmaster. It brings me to Christ." (ref. Galatians 3:24)

Since we have no hope we have to find our hope in a Person. And our hope for righteousness resides in the Lord Jesus.

Paul said, "I went about trying to establish my own righteousness, but then I counted everything but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things." (ref. Philippians 3:8-10)

He gave up all of the traditions. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. With regard to the Law he was blameless except for "thou shalt not covet," he blew it. And on and on we can go with his credentials, but he said, "I gave it all up because Jesus Christ was the answer."

Want to know something? When playing around with this word "righteousness" in this study, God really spoke in a new

way.

“Except my righteousness would exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, I would not enter into the kingdom.” (ref. Matthew 5:20)

Let's look at some verses.

Romans 1:17

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last; just as it is written, the just shall live by faith.

In the gospel there is a righteousness from God revealed that we get by faith, okay? Isn't that a neat verse?

How about these?

Romans 3:10

As it is written, there is no one righteous, no, not even one.

Romans 3:21

But now a righteousness from God apart from the law has been made known to us to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus

Christ to all who believe. There is no difference.

Romans 4:3

What does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was credit to him as righteousness.

What this tells us is that the Law brings us along and we're condemned. We're poor in spirit and we're mourning over it. And Jesus puts His arm around us and He says, "Don't worry about it man. I died for your broken law. I fulfilled all of the righteousness of the Law so that now in My death I can give over my righteousness to you. And it's yours as a gift."

That's Martin Luther climbing those stairs. And as he climbs the stairs he finally realizes the righteous shall live by faith, not by climbing stairs and counting beads and carrying on in performance!

It is not in the action! It's in the reception of a gift from a God who loves us so much that He was willing to hurt and to send His Son to say, "Now I offer you something that will make you acceptable in My sight."

The righteousness of Christ becomes ours at the moment we express faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now some of us are still hung up on performance. Some of us are still hung up on: "What is all this doing that I'm supposed to do as a Christian, the good works in the New Testament,

and in trying to live for the Lord and trying to discipline myself to memorize the scripture? Aren't those good works?"

Yes!

How do they relate to our righteousness then?

At the point that we receive Jesus Christ, we are declared perfectly, positionally righteous in God's sight. We are as perfectly righteous as God's Son, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 1:18

Come now, let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

We are perfect in God's sight! There is no offense in us! There is nothing in us that God cannot look on, because we are declared righteous. That is positional righteousness.

Now draw a straight line across the page and put another dot at the end of it.

That dot out there is our death. This is our new birth. When we were born into God's family He declared us righteous. And on the line write "positional righteousness."

There is nothing that we can do with the rest of our life, as long as we live, that will ever affect the straightness of that line or the perfection of our positional righteousness in Christ.

Once He declares us righteous, He doesn't go back and do it over a second time. Because we don't mess with perfection!

God, from the minute we are born again into His family, sees us in Jesus Christ—perfect!

Nothing we will do will undo or change that. That's what's going to get us into heaven, not our practical righteousness that goes on from day-to-day.

Alright now, come down from this left dot and put another one down here a little ways. Practical righteousness from the moment we become a Christian—our good works, our stewardship, our witnessing, our prayers, our Bible reading, our going to Bible class, the things we do to bring glory to God, whatever it is. Okay here's the dot.

Now if we were to draw a graph with this dot toward our destiny of death out here, our graph would go up and down. Because all of us have peaks and valleys in our Christian lives.

There are times we're blowing hot and there are times we're blowing cold. There are times when things are going great and there are times when we feel like we're just sucking up dust every time we turn around. And nothing really makes much sense and it seems like a lot of sound and furry, signifying nothing. And then all of a sudden we get turned on and up we go a little further.

Somewhere on this graph we're going to die. And BAM! At the moment of our death our practical righteousness joins our positional. Why?

1 John 3:2

Soon you shall be like Him, for you shall see Him as He is.

Horatius Bonar wrote a commentary on Leviticus. And Charles Haddon Spurgeon wanted a copy of it and Bonar wrote on his picture, as he autographed it, "Soon there will be a better likeness if you could have only waited a little."

That's so cool. Soon there will be a better likeness because we're going to be like Jesus—complete, perfect in His sight. We're made like Him.

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun this good work in you will continue to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

And then BAM! it's complete. In the practice hits the position.

Now doesn't that bring a lot of peace? So many people have never realized that this positional righteousness overrides everything else. And that is never affected.

Practical righteousness—we're motivated out of love and a desire to please the Lord and to be made as much like Him as we can. The Father is glorified and fruit for our life and we want to be as much like Jesus as we can so people will respond and come to know Him as Savior.

Phillips translates this and says, "I tell you that your goodness must be a far better thing than the goodness of the scribes and Pharisees before you can set foot into the kingdom of heaven at all."

And it is at the moment that we come to know Christ. If we know Him as Savior, our righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, because positionally we're perfect in Christ. Isn't that beautiful?

That's the way it is. If we don't know Jesus, we're not. Declare bankruptcy. Be poor in spirit. Be a person who is humble enough to receive that gift of righteousness which is ours. He waits to offer it to us.

Understand the two guys in the temple? The one guy says, "I thank You that I'm not like this creep." This guy is poor in spirit. "He went down to his house made righteous, the Lord Jesus says.

All human effort must be rejected. We will see it in our next study.

Matthew 7:22

Many will say unto that day, “Lord, Lord, haven’t we done...”
And I’ll say, “Depart from Me. I never knew you.”

Augustus Toplady caught it in her hymn, “Rock of Ages,”
when she says:

Nothing in my hands I bring,
simply to thy cross I cling.
Naked come to thee for dress,
Help us look to thee for grace.
Foul I to thy fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

Rock of Ages cleft for me...
(source unknown)

God will wash us. God will cleanse us. And He’ll give us His
righteousness.

Now there are four lessons that we get out of our passage.

Lesson #1: Christ came to fulfill the Law and the prophets.

Lesson #2: Not one word will pass away unfulfilled.

He keeps His promises.

Lesson #3: We are to do it before we teach it.

We are to practice before we preach it.

Do it before we teach it—Practice before we preach it.

Lesson #4: There is a righteousness by faith available in Jesus Christ.

God exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

There is a righteousness available in Jesus Christ that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

One hymn writer put it this way:

A mind at perfect peace with God,
O what a word is this,
A sinner reconciled through blood,
This, this, indeed is peace.

So near, so very near to God,
Nearer I cannot be.
For in the person of His Son,
I'm just as near as He.

So dear, so very dear to God,
Dear, I cannot be.
The love wherewith He loves His Son,
Such is His love for me.

Why should I ever careful be?

Since such a God is mine.
He watches o'er me night and day
And tells me mine is thine.
(source unknown)

Father, how we praise You for the clarity and simplicity of the gospel. Lord, we just love You and praise You for who You are. And thank You for speaking to us, helping us to understand that positionally we're perfect in Your sight. For sinners like us, that's a very precious truth to get a hold of. And we thank You that we don't have to stand before You and on the basis of human works, that the action has nothing. It's the being, it's the attitude, it's the heart, it's the direction of the will. And we would pray, if there are those who need to drop their own righteousness and empty their hands so You can fill it with Your own, that they would come to know Christ this very day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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NOTES

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v. 20 For I am saying to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Matthew 5:17-20 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. What did Christ come to do in relationship to the Law, according to verse 17?

3. What is the promise of verse 18 in relationship to the Law?

4. What is the destiny of those who break the “least of these commandments,” according to verse 19?

5. What is the promise for those who “do and teach them,” according to verse 19?

6. What does Jesus say about our “righteousness,” according to verse 20?

7. Read Romans 1:16, 17 and state what happens when Christ comes into the life by faith.

8. Explain Galatians 3:21, 22 in light of verse 20.

9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Christ came to fulfill the Law and the prophets.

LESSON #2: Not one word will pass away unfulfilled.

LESSON #3: We are to be doing before we are teaching the Scripture.

LESSON #4: There is a righteousness by faith available in Jesus Christ that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:
