

The Question A Christian Should Never Ask

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into the importance of understanding the true essence of righteousness and the Kingdom of God as taught in the Sermon on the Mount. It emphasizes the need to move beyond external rule-keeping and legalism, focusing on internal transformation and a genuine hunger for righteousness. The imperative of striving for perfection is highlighted, not as a means to earn salvation, but as a response to the grace of God and a pursuit of holiness. The sermon challenges listeners to examine their hearts, desires, and motives in light of God's standards.

Scripture: Matthew 5:20, Matthew 5:3, Matthew 5:48, Matthew 7:13, 2 Corinthians 7:1, 1 John 1:9, Philippians 3:12, James 1:22, Romans 7:18

Topics: "True Righteousness", "Internal Transformation"

Description

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Transcript

These three chapters, Matthew 5, 6 and 7, I don't want to go too slow and I don't want to go too fast. Let's pray. Father, I would ask you to help us, all of us.

Give us ears to hear, give us the ability to properly understand. Lord, I pray that as I preach through this, that you would help me to be faithful to lead the people right, to not introduce any error. I pray that Lord, where I'm not right, just may their ears not even hear it.

Lord, where it is right, I pray that you would give us indeed ears to hear, a determination to run. Help us. As we look to you, we pray.

Father, please, make these three chapters a tremendous blessing to this people. I pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Okay, well let's look at the first verse. Seeing the multitudes, he went up on a mountain, and when he was seated, his disciples came to him. Then he opened his mouth and taught them, saying.

Of course, after this comes what is commonly known as the Beatitudes. Now, I would just say this. When Moses walked the earth, God said to him, do you know Deuteronomy 18:18? A lot of times, for some reason that stands out in my mind.

Maybe it's the 218's, easy to remember. But it's the passage where God says that he is going to raise up a prophet like Moses. Now listen to it, you don't have to turn there.

I will raise up for them a prophet like you, like Moses. From among their brethren, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them. That's what's happening here.

This prophet has come, the prophet like Moses. Moses was a lawgiver. God was the lawgiver, but Moses was the mouthpiece, undoubtedly.

Moses went to Sinai. Think about this. Moses went up on a mountain.

Jesus goes up on a mountain. You say, well, you know, maybe there's a parallel there, maybe there's not. But here's what's very, very interesting to me.

You know, Moses went through the Red Sea. When you look at 1 Corinthians 10, it says that the people were baptized in the cloud and in the sea. It's like there was this baptism, Moses goes through the sea.

And then what happens? They go out into the wilderness for 40 years. Jesus goes through the waters of baptism, and he goes out into the wilderness for 40 days. Moses leads 12 tribes.

Jesus leads 12 apostles. They both go up on mountains as far as the law is concerned. Now you can look at all of that, and you can say, well, you know, I don't know.

I don't think that's random. I think what we're supposed to see is the reality that we have a new Moses, and we have a new Sinai, and we have a new law. We have a new law giver.

I think that's what we want to see here. And with this Moses-like prophet, because that's what he said, that's what God said, a prophet like you. This Moses-like prophet, here he is, he's on the scene.

And I would ask you this, when Christ came on the scene, if we were going to sum up his entire life and ministry, the focus, like Christ came with a focus, if you were going to sum that up in one word, or three words, or five words, what would you say? What would basically be a summary word or a summary phrase that would capture? I mean, if you left this out, it simply would miss the heart and soul of what Christ came to do. How could you sum it up? Love. Now, here's what's interesting.

If you just look at the Synoptic Gospels, you know how many times love is found? Twice. A lot in John, but twice in the Synoptics. You'd be hard pressed to say that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were trying to bring this emphasis out, that the heart and soul of Christ... Listen, there's love there, there's no question.

But did they emphasize that specifically? Not really. What is it? Saved souls. Undoubtedly he came to that.

He came to seek and to save the lost. There's no question about that. What's that? That's exactly right.

Listen, sometimes we miss this, because I don't know, maybe here in the UK you're more about kingdoms, we're not about kingdoms in the US. We throw off all that king stuff. So, I think maybe it's easier for you to hear than it is for Americans to hear.

But let me just give you an idea here. The concept of the kingdom of heaven, it is found 32 times in your Bibles. And you know where every one of those is? In the book of Matthew.

Matthew seems to have been more targeted at the Jews. I mean, if you've really looked at the differences in the Gospels, it seems like Matthew, and there's a number of reasons for believing this we don't need to get into right now, but it seems like Matthew was specifically meant to be a gospel to the Jews. And they didn't like to use the name of God.

Now the kingdom of God is found various times in Matthew, but far, far, far less. And so, that's what's absolutely essential. This is the essential aspect of Christ's ministry, that if you miss it, you really miss the heart and soul.

And if we have eyes to see, just think, when John the Baptist came on the scene, now he was the forerunner, but what was the first thing out of his mouth? Repent. Why? The kingdom of God, or in Matthew, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And then Jesus comes on the scene.

In Matthew 4.23, Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom. When Jesus in 4.17 began to preach, He said, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And many of you know how Mark's gospel starts.

But it's the same idea. The kingdom. Think with me.

When the twelve were sent out, Jesus sent them out and commanded them, saying this, Don't go into the way of the Gentiles. Don't enter into the city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

And as you go, preach this. Say, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Have you ever paid attention to the parables? Listen to the parables just found here in Matthew.

Another parable He put forth. Saying, The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. Again, The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field.

Again, The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took. Did I do that twice? No. I read it twice.

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till all was leavened. Again, The kingdom of heaven is like the treasure hidden in a field. Again, The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls.

Again, The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind. Therefore, This is another verse, Matthew 18. Therefore, The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

And again, Matthew 20. For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning and hires labors for his vineyard. And again in Matthew 22.

The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son. And again, Matthew 25. The kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went and meet the bridegroom.

And again, Matthew 25. The kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And I'll tell you this.

The reason I'm hitting on this is because this is indeed the great theme of the Sermon on the Mount. You don't want to miss that. In fact, The heart and soul, The very backbone of the Sermon on the Mount.

And you don't want to miss this. Because really, The whole Sermon on the Mount revolves around this passage. Namely, Chapter 5, verse 20.

You can look at it. For I say to you, That unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, You will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. That is what this is about.

Now listen, You're going to go wrong if you try to interpret this righteousness as the righteousness that Christ accomplished. That is not what this is about. Nothing in this Sermon on the Mount is about Christ imputing his righteousness to us.

Nothing in this Sermon is about that. This is all about our righteousness. And you'll see that.

As soon as he finishes verse 20, What happens? Well you've heard it said, That those of old you shall not murder. Whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother, You see what he does immediately? He doesn't go into some discourse about imputed righteousness.

He immediately puts his finger at them and he says, I'm going to tell you what kind of righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. And he starts out with a matter that has to do with how the Christian confronts law. How the Christian confronts anger.

How the Christian confronts lust. It's all about our righteousness. When you get to chapter 6, again, it's about our righteousness in secret.

When you pray, you should pray like this. When you fast, you should fast like this. When you give alms.

It's all about our righteousness. That's what the Sermon on the Mount is about. You don't want to miss that.

But kingdom, you see it there. Your righteousness, if you're going to enter the kingdom. This is serious stuff.

Your righteousness better exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. You see, kingdom. Look at verse 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 10. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. You go into, look with me at verse 19.

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so. You see, this has to do with us. Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

Again, it's about doing and teaching what Christ is teaching. Whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. There it is again.

For I say that to you, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Then when we look at chapter 6, you can see the absolute emphasis in verse 33. 6.33. Seek first.

We sing this in the US. Perhaps you do here as well. Seek first the kingdom of God.

Seek it first. That's the priority. You don't want to miss that.

That is the priority of this sermon. As we go through it, this is the issue. You want to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

And then once again, 7. The well-known 7.21. You just let your eyes move down there. 7.21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven. I'll tell you this.

This sermon on the mount is about entering the kingdom. And if your righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter. And again, see, when you come all the way to the end, it's the same thing.

All the way at the end, it's got to do with the way you live, the way your life, your obedience. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Who will enter? He who does the will of my Father.

What is the will of His Father? Obviously, you compare Scripture with Scripture. The will of His Father is that your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Because if it doesn't, you won't enter.

Only those who enter who do the will of the Father. You combine those two passages. You see, it is the will of the Father that you pursue some kind of righteousness that obviously the Pharisees and the scribes did not obtain.

So, the great theme, we see it here. This is not a kingdom with geographical borders. When you think kingdom, you hear the king in there.

You see, there's a king. You see the king? Look at the very end. Verse 24.

Whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. Do you remember what was said to Moses? I'm going to raise up a prophet like you. And whoever doesn't listen to him, God says, I'm going to require it of him.

And that's what you have right here. This is the heart and soul. And you know, sometimes we hear king in kingdom, but do you ever really focus on the D-O-M? That's got to do with dominion.

You can think king, dominion. That's what this is about. This is about who's going to hear Christ, and in poor in spirit, we're going to resign ourselves to him.

It's about the reign of Christ. Now, let's think about the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven for just a second. Because sometimes when we think about the kingdom of God, we simply think about this realm in which God rules.

You know the reality is, the sovereignty of God demands that in the greatest sense of all, God is king. Christ is king. All authority has been given to him.

All are under his rule. All are under his reign. But that is not what kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God means in the New Testament.

Not primarily. Here in the book of Matthew, and even more in this Sermon on the Mount, it is used in a limited sense. It's true.

God reigns absolutely over all people, all demons, all life, all creation, at all times. No one and nothing can escape it. That's a reality.

But in Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount, kingdom of heaven, kingdom of God, it's used in a limited sense. And you know it is. Why? The reason we know it is, is because the scribes and the Pharisees are not in this kingdom.

Right? Because they don't have a righteousness that gets them in. Anybody that doesn't do the will of the Father, who is in heaven, doesn't get into this kingdom. This kingdom is something that has to be entered.

And only some enter it. So when you think kingdom of God, it is in this limited, it's kind of a subset. It's this, brethren I'll tell you, it's obvious what it is.

It's that God has sent His Son, and He mediates His authority through the Son. And the Son, this is God's chosen King. And He has come, and God basically says, you bow your knee to My King, and you enter the kingdom.

You resist Him. You fight against Him. I'm going to require it of you.

It's not enough to hear Him. If you're the wise man, you hear Him, and you do what He says. And He said one time, why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and you don't do the things I say? He's Lord.

He's King. He's Lord of Lords. He's King of Kings.

See this is what the kingdom is all about. And how do you get in? Well, I'll tell you this, your righteousness better exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus told Nicodemus, that unless you're born of the Spirit and water, you will never enter.

You'll never see the kingdom. The kingdom is taken by force, is what Scripture says. So, that's what we're talking about here.

Now, you know this, truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom. Now, I want to show you a pair of verses that's incredibly helpful. Turn to Mark's Gospel.

Because you basically, I love this kind of thing. I love to be able to show you and convince you about things where, you know, you can get your own eyes right in Scripture, and you can say, yeah, there's no question about it. What he's saying is right.

What he's saying is true. We don't doubt that. If you look at Mark chapter 9, verse 45, I just want you to see something that happens.

There's a synonymous word usage here that's extremely helpful. Mark 9, verse 45. If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.

It's better for you to, now notice these words, enter life. Did you see that? Okay, just keep that thought in the back of your head. It's better for you to enter life, lame, rather than having two feet to be cast into hell.

So the difference, obviously we've got entering life or being cast into hell. Now go to verse 47. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

It's better for you to enter life. What does it say? The kingdom of God, with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hellfire. You see what he's just done? He's equated the kingdom of God with what? Life.

Eternal life. The opposite of hell. So make no mistake about it.

We now know what it means to enter the kingdom. No confusion. There never has to be any confusion.

Christ himself defines his terminology for us. To enter the kingdom, enter life. The kingdom of God here is a subset of the universal kingdom.

And this subset, this aspect of the kingdom, is exactly what the Sermon on the Mount is all about. It's concerned with entering the kingdom. We've got to press into this.

The way is narrow. There's all aspects of entering. And it's equivalent to entering life.

That's exactly what it is. So the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, when used in this narrower sense, really has to do with the way God's sovereignty bears directly on his saving purposes. That's what it's all about.

All who enter the kingdom, they have life. And you know what? If you don't enter the kingdom, you don't have life. That's the reality of what we're faced with here.

Now, I'm going to come back to this again. One of the most important verses in this Sermon on the Mount is chapter 5, verse 20. Look at it again.

I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will by no means enter. And you know what? We can replace here the word that we just saw is synonymous. Life.

What he's saying here is, the scribes and Pharisees don't have life. They don't have eternal life. They perish.

Jesus said that. There's no life for these guys. From the days of John the Baptist until now, Jesus said this.

He said, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence. The violent take it by force. This is God's kingdom mediated through Christ.

The sermon I just showed you emphasizes surrender to this. Not everybody enters the kingdom. Who enters the kingdom? Those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Now listen. I just got a question yesterday about perfectionism. Listen.

You have to listen to what Christ says. That's what I'm calling everybody to do. We want to take Christ at face value.

We want to be very careful how we approach this sermon. Why? Because here's what Christ says. He says, whoever hears and does, that's a wise man.

There's a storm coming. It's a storm of God's judgment. You want to weather that storm? He says, I'll tell you exactly who the wise man is who weathers that storm.

He hears me and he surrenders to my kingship. You see it's all about king dominion. Kingdom.

Surrender. Do we have ears to hear what Christ says? Because you know what? You know what the second guy is? The fool? He's not a guy that never hears. He's not the Muslim in far off Pakistan that never hears.

You know who he is? He's the guy that hears. He's the guy that sits right here in this church. Sister.

We call her. But if her life is characterized, you see in the end, it's not going to be whether you call brother or sister here, and whether you carried your Bible around, sang the hymns. In the end, Christ knows who has bent the knee to him.

That's going to be the real issue. Now, there's nothing, listen, there is nothing more important in the Christian life than how we approach our Bibles. Nothing.

If you are a hearer only, you're deceived. That's what James says. Deceiving your own selves.

There's all sorts of people. They hear the preaching. They argue with it.

They want to fight. Listen. I'm not preaching through this for us to fight.

I want us all to just bow. That is going to be the safest place. Listen.

There's nothing more important than how we approach the Bible. The way we read it. The way we respond to it.

The way we answer to the authority of it. Listen. We know nothing about God.

We know nothing about his kingdom. Aside from this book. Yes, you can look out there.

nature may tell us some things about God. But the reality is, it's not conclusive. We might be able to draw certain inferences, but how do we know if we're right? You see, we know when we come to Scripture, it's right.

And here it is. It's found. This is our authority.

Why? We have a prophet that's like Moses, that has come and God said, you need to hear him. This is my beloved Son, whom I'm well pleased. You need to hear him.

I mean, that's the word today. I mean, brethren, do you realize? Do you realize, as you drive home today, you're going to go down this street, and you're going to see all these people walking, because it's

lockdown time. Everybody wants to get out, and they want to see the snow, and we saw a bunch of people out there.

They're not even hearing. I have often thought, the most miserable people in the entire world, are not the people out there, who are living it up in this world. It's the halfway Christian, that makes it all the way here, and hears the word, and then doesn't do it.

If there's anybody that's most miserable, in all the world, they're living it up. But you know, you try to live that halfway Christian life, and you know, you make certain sacrifices, and you live a certain way, and you try to put on a certain morality, but then if you don't make it, you don't enter. And Jesus said, it's going to be more tolerable, for certain people, in the day of judgment, than these people, that come under the sound of the gospel.

What I'm driving at is this, listen, we have to admit, that it's not enough, to merely read our Bibles, and it's not enough, to simply hear the preaching. That's not enough. Both groups hear.

We can't stop with that. You know, we can read in such a mechanical aspect, and manner, that we really derive no benefit. Or there's this, you come to the Word of God, with your presuppositions.

You've got these preconceived notions, about what everything already means, and you can't even hear what Scripture says. Oh, I fear that, about the Sermon on the Mount. Do you know one of the places, that people so often go wrong, when it comes to law, and grace.

And if there's any part of our Bibles, that deals with law and grace, it's found right here, in the Sermon on the Mount. I mean, you know, you hear something like this, well, you've heard, you shouldn't commit adultery. I say unto you, whoever looks at a woman to lust, has already committed adultery, with her in his heart.

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out, cast it from you. It's more profitable for you, that one of your members perish, than for your whole body, to be cast into hell. And you know what happens? We've got people, that are so wrong, in their thinking about grace, that they can't even hear that.

Doesn't apply to me. Why doesn't it apply to you? I'm a Christian. When saved, I always saved.

I can't lose my salvation. So they can't even hear that. They don't even have ears, that can take this seriously.

And you know this is true. This grace, it's like, well wait, wait a second, I'm saved, by grace through faith, not by works. And so you know what? Because people lock into that truth, they just say, I can't hear what Jesus says, in the Sermon on the Mount.

It doesn't even reach your ears. But I'll tell you this, you get to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and he says, if you hear me, and you don't do what I'm saying, you don't take this to heart, you're a fool. And when that storm comes, your house is going to fall down.

You see, if we don't understand grace properly, we're going to go wrong here. But then you get people, that run to the other extreme. They read the Sermon on the Mount, and they feel like, oh, well I better do this, that, and the other thing, to be right with God.

I better do this to be a Christian. And then they fall into works. And when that storm comes, their house falls down.

So how do we manage this? What you don't want, is this mindset, oh no, I've got to keep this rule, I've got to keep this law, and I've got to keep this standard, and you basically build this fence, and I've got to live within there, or God's going to get me. You see, that's not the right way either. And that's basically the mindset, that the Pharisees had.

I've just got to work harder. You know, you reach these things, you've got to work harder. Being out of balance either way, is deadly.

And so what we really have to ask is, you know, what do we do with this? What do we do with this sermon? I would ask this, are its standards even obtainable? Go back to Matthew, if you're in Mark 9. Go back to Matthew 5. Matthew 5. You go right to the end of chapter 5. Verse 47, if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Now let me ask you this, just words have meaning. Does Jesus expect us to live above and beyond the Gentiles as Christians? Obviously. And then look what he says, therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Now is Jesus saying, I don't want you to be perfect? Let me ask you this, are the standards of this sermon obtainable? When Jesus says this, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you won't enter the kingdom. Does that sound like he expects that some people are going to pull that off? Here's the thing, let your eyes go over to Matthew 7. You know this verse, it falls in the Sermon on the Mount. Enter by the narrow gate.

Now see here he's talking about entering this kingdom, because he's talking about life. And as we saw in Mark 9, the kingdom of God is equivalent to saying, enter life. Now, what does he say? He says, enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, broad is the way that leads to destruction.

There are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate, difficult is the way which leads to life. And there are few who find it.

Now listen, if you compare that verse to Matthew 5.20, what do you get? You've got people entering the kingdom in Matthew 5.20. You've got people actually by no means will enter, but he shows us how you do enter. That's if your righteousness exceeds that of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. And then you've got few who find life in Matthew 7.14. They're the same people.

Right? I mean the same people that enter the kingdom are the same people that enter life. It's synonymous. And so what is Jesus saying? He's saying, I know this, there's a few of you in the world that are going to achieve that standard.

So, we ask this, is it attainable? Is it unattainable? Obviously the standards of the Sermon on the Mount are not attainable by the masses. But what he's saying is they are attainable by a few. You can't do this natively and naturally.

But you can do this by the grace of God. And that's where grace comes in. Grace always has to do with God empowering, God helping.

And look, it's obvious. They're not entirely unattainable. Why? Because a few find it.

To put the standard here beyond everybody's reach would be to ignore the very purpose of this sermon. Because the sermon has to do with the entering. It has to do with hearing.

It has to do with doing the will of the Father. He certainly sees a few attaining to the standards here. They are attainable.

Not by everyone. By God. Only those who have experienced, like it was said to Nicodemus, unless you're born again, you're not going to be among the few.

You see, people that are born again, they can pull off. What Jesus is after, they can pull off. I know he uses the word perfection.

I'm going to talk more about that in just a second. And I'm not teaching. And I don't believe you'll find this in Scripture.

But that perfection in this life is attainable. But you know what? I'm afraid a lot of people, they immediately want to come to the conclusion, well, we can't obtain it, and therefore what? Well, there's no effort in attaining it. It's like you back away from the standard.

No, we don't want to do that. Don't do that. You need to hear what Jesus is saying.

And we're going to look at this over weeks and months. But these things are attainable. If you've entered the Kingdom of God by the way of being born again.

They are obtainable. Now, I want to do a word study. Because I take notice of this because it has doctrinal impact.

You want to notice very carefully the difference between indicative verbs and imperative verbs. And you can see it plainly in the English. You don't have to know Greek to figure this out.

But just let me tell you something. Let's do just a little study here on verbs. When you have verbs, you have person.

In other words, a verb can have to do with me, that's first person. It can have to do with you, that's second person. Or maybe you're removed altogether, that's third person.

There is the idea of whether it's singular or it's plural. You've got that aspect. We're talking about verbs here.

I know there's differences between the Greek and the English, but just hang with me. You have the voice of the verb. That means is it active or passive.

Like the verb, am I doing it actively or is it something happening to me. So you get that aspect. You get the tense.

You know in English we have future, we have present, we have past. It's different in Greek. You have perfect and imperfect and present and there's just different tenses.

But here's the thing. There's also something called mood. The two primary moods, there's others, but the two primary are indicative and imperative.

Now imperative, both of these words ought to speak for themselves. An imperative is imperative. It's a command.

The verb is a command. The verb tells you to do something. An indicative indicates what's true.

That's key. Because if God told us you've got to do this in order for the indicative to be a reality, if the imperative precedes, that's not Christianity. That works.

You've got to do this and then this will be true of you. Christianity starts with the indicative. What God does, the result is our obedience flows out of it.

The imperative flows out of it. Brethren, you get this backwards, it's life and death. And when we talk about a righteousness that exceeds and goes beyond and surpasses the scribes and the Pharisees, if you go off on this, it's life and death.

You've got to know these verbs. You know why I'm so adamant at this point to give you a little verb instruction? It's because for the first 16 verses of this Sermon on the Mount, there is no imperative. We are so wired to want to do, I'm afraid people have a hard time reading the Beatitudes without hearing imperatives.

Like, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And when people hear that, I've got to be poor in spirit. That's not what it's saying.

Do you recognize what Jesus did? He sat down, He's instructing His disciples and He simply gives an indicative. He says those in the world who are poor in spirit. Do you remember what Jesus said? You don't need a doctor unless you're sick.

People that are sick come to Christ. How does anyone feel sick? How does anybody come under conviction? When the Spirit comes, He's going to convict men. Righteousness of sin, righteousness, judgment.

How does it happen? How does somebody come to be poor in spirit? It's an internal thing that God works. And you know what? Anybody that's in that place where they recognize that they need a doctor, bang, they're right there. This is what's key.

The indicatives precede the imperatives. What that means is He's telling us what grace does in the life of a child of God. He's not telling you what to do to become a child of God.

He's telling you what is true of those who are children of God. And then He goes and He launches out into okay, as a child of God, this is the life that I want to flow from your life. Is there a place then to take an imperative, to take commands, and for the people who are in this place to actually work this out by the grace of God? Absolutely.

But if you try to jump in here and work this out without these beatitudes being a reality in your life, it's not going to work. Listen, these are the blessed people. You know what that means? You've got the comparison in Luke 6. If you're not blessed, you're cursed.

And you need to recognize this. These are the only blessed people on the face of the earth. There are no others.

And it's all together. This isn't a bunch of different people. It's not like the poor in spirit is different than the meek and they're different from the mourners.

No, it's all the same person. And all the blessings. Kingdom of God.

You'll see God. You'll be... You'll receive mercy. You'll be filled.

You'll be satisfied. I mean, all of these... Blessed are those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Why? I mean, theirs is the kingdom.

It's all one and the same person. Now, again, with that thinking, let's come back to Matthew 5.20. I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Now, I want to look more closely at that.

Let's think about the scribe and the Pharisee. Because I'll tell you this, what you and I don't want to be is the scribe and Pharisee. Because if we are, we won't enter.

And they had a standard of righteousness. They were religious people and they had a standard of righteousness. And actually on the outside, they looked really good.

And what you and I don't want to be come that judgment day is we don't want to be these guys. And so let's think about them. Because if our righteousness has to go beyond, is it just a matter of I've got to work harder than they work? No, that's not what he's saying.

That is not what he's saying. So, basically, what these guys wanted to do was they sought to build a fence around themselves. A fence of requirements.

This is typical Pharisaical thinking. I'm going to build a fence. And if I'm inside, I'm good.

If I go outside, God's going to get me. Basically, you know what they did? They externalized righteousness. And they quantified righteousness.

You say, what do you mean? I mean this. They said, you know what? We've got to tithe the anise, and the mint, and the cumin. It's all external.

You've got these bang, bang, bang, bang. Did that. As long as they did that, I'm inside the fence.

And I'm good. I'm good with God. You see, if you are always thinking, what do I have to do to stay inside the fence? If that's the way you hear things, what do I have to do so God doesn't get me? What do I have to do? What is my fence? Christian righteousness, it's going to go beyond this, or there's no kingdom for you.

Now listen, the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, they are people that are always asking the wrong questions. And you can find out, you can find yourself by the questions that they would ask. You know they ask them, because you see it in the way their lives worked out.

They were always asking the wrong questions. Always. And the moment you externalize piety, you externalize godliness, you're going to ask the wrong question.

Every time. That's what they did. I mean, it's this question, what do I have to do for God to be on my side? And I just ask you, how many of you are doing that? That's the real question.

Constantly absorbed with how much external you've got to do to be in. What do you have to do? You look at life like that. What do I have to do to not be in the lost crowd? What does my life have to look like? How much do I have to perform? You see, the Pharisee would ask this, how much can I get away with and still be inside the fence? You know that's how it was.

That rich young ruler, oh boy, he comes along and it's like, what do I have to do? Keep the law. Wow, I've been in the fence my whole life. That's basically what he said.

Jesus said, that is the wrong standard. Do you think as a rich young ruler, who thinks he kept the law perfectly, do you think he tithed? You better believe it. I've seen it.

I've seen it in the church. Back in the day, I used to handle the finances at GCC. I can remember seeing, there was a certain guy that would give to the penny, a tenth of his income.

I mean, and 29 cents. You see, this guy was like that. Kept them all from my youth up.

What do I got to do? See, that's the question. What do I got to do? What do I got to do to be safe within here? And Jesus says, that is the wrong fence. The fence is perfection.

And that is at an internal level. You need to be perfect like your father. And so, he's not saying that in this world, that we're necessarily ever going to get out there.

But he's saying, that's the fence. And he says it to the rich young ruler. He says, you know what? You may have tithed your whole life, but you've never loved anybody.

This has never come from in here. He says, you go sell it all. And you see, this is the beauty.

When you go into the New Testament, and you find the people who are entering the kingdom, what do you find? A widow who gives it all. Zacchaeus who says, half of it. And if I wronged anybody, I'm going to give them four times as much.

Those early Christians, they sold their property, so that nobody went without. You see the difference here? The problem is, the Pharisaical altogether wrong perspective. They think this way.

As long as they did what was required, that to them meant that they were making it. It meant they were alright with God. Their acceptance with God, was entirely based on this performance on the law.

They had this fence, as long as they stayed within the fence, they felt they were okay. Here's the thing, the fence says don't steal. They would take the external realities of the law, and they would say, there's the fence, don't steal.

So as a good rich young ruler, Paul said when it came to the law, blameless, see I'm inside the fence. But then in Romans 7, what does he say? I saw that commandment that said not to covet, and he said the more I tried not to covet, the more I coveted. And I recognized I was outside the fence.

I wasn't perfect. I wasn't meeting God's standard. But you see what happens when he gets saved? All for Christ.

For me to live is Christ. He left everything behind. This is the difference.

By externalizing, it never has any value. Scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites, you're like whitewashed tombs that indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside you're full of dead men's bones. You see this is the problem.

You're asking the wrong questions. It's like, what do I got to do? How good do I have to be? How many times do I have to speak right to my wife? How many times this? How much before it becomes such habitual sin that I'm on the outside? Wrong question. That's not it.

Because you see what happens to the person in the Sermon on the Mount? Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Because you see, when the hunger inside, because I want to know God. And I see Jesus, He went to that cross.

He went to that cross to give me fellowship with God, to bring me to God. It's like, I want to do that. I want to be like Christ.

I want to have my work shine so that my Father is glorified. I desire that. And you know what happens when that is the desire? It's love for Christ.

It's love for God. It's a desire to be holy. It comes out of a heart that's pure.

Not a heart that's... You see, these guys don't steal. Rich young ruler Paul, when he was a Pharisee, they could say, never stolen. You know what the problem with that is? You can never steal and be a thief.

You say, how? Well, because you try to put on this, you know, you want to meet the standard so you don't steal. Or you're too much of a coward. What would be the consequences? But inside your heart is lusting for that thing.

Do you recognize the difference? When God comes along, He didn't come along to stop your stealing. He came along to kill the thief in us. And to kill the liar in us.

You see, this is why on the cross it can be said, we die to sin and live to righteousness. This is what He came to do. Brethren, somebody can be inside the fence and be altogether still a thief.

Because it's in the heart. Because they want that thing. You see, that's what Jesus is saying.

You've heard it said, and they nicely have the fences set up that you're not supposed to commit adultery. Seventh Commandment, we all know it. But I'm telling you this, you may think you're inside because you never cheated on your wife, but if you've been gazing over there at that other woman, you need to recognize what's happening here.

That's what we've got. God's not interested in simply doing a whitewash job on us. And that was the issue with the scribes and Pharisees.

It's absolutely thoroughgoing in humanity that we basically look at... I mean, we tend to view righteousness as what we do or don't do. That is so ingrained in us. What good thing do I have to do to have eternal life? Get into the kingdom.

What's the thing? Even Peter. Did I forgive my brother seven times? See, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. Seven times.

Now I've got the rule. I've got the standard. I've got the fence.

And so you can all the time externalize it. Did I forgive seven times? And see, when Jesus said 70 times 7, He wasn't saying, well, okay, 490 is the limit. That's not what He meant.

He meant the objective in all of it is perfection. Strive for it. If you fall short, my blood will wash it away.

But this is what you strive for. Why? Not as an ethical code by which you've got to become a child of God. Not that.

Because you have a new heart that desires this. Blessed are the pure in heart. The pure in heart don't run out and want to defile themselves.

Blessed are those with hunger and thirst for righteousness. They don't want to run out and steal and do all sorts of wicked things. Why? Because the desires have been changed.

Do we fail? Do we fall? Yes. And His blood will wash that away. But we press on.

Do we have a season of darkness? A season of slowness? We can confess our sins. And He's faithful in just to forgive those sins. What kind of questions get asked by people who have these fences? You know what? This is a dead giveaway.

Can I do this and still be... That is the question of the Pharisee. Can I get away with this and still be in the place where God's not going to get me? That is the Pharisee question. Where the Christian views this... No, I don't want to see how close to the fence I can live.

I want to see how close to perfection I can get. And that's what He says. Be perfect.

As your Father is perfect. And we don't need to get all hung up over this if we have failures in our life. Because even Peter, as a child of God, is saying, they're trying to even wrestle with this.

Is it seven times? Lord, show us where the fence is. Oh guys, it's so limited. When he says 70 times 7, you recognize the word 7 has everything to do with perfection.

Peter might have even thought, you know, 7, oh that's great. No, 70 times 7. You've tithed the rich young ruler? No, no, no. Give it all away.

And give to the poor. And come follow me. You see, it's radical.

Because it's internal. This is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about. Questions.

People want to know the limits of their conduct and still be inside. That is not a Christian question. And if that is a question you keep asking, it's not a Christian question.

It's a Pharisaical question. And I'm not saying a true Christian can't ask that Pharisaical question. But you just need to recognize, brethren, where we're at.

Because as we go through this sermon, I'm just going to ask this, as we go through it. You know, you have to confront Jesus' words individually. I know this.

Am I perfect? No, I'm not perfect. But I can tell you, at the age of 25, something happened in my life where God broke me and I was poor in spirit. In other words, I recognized I needed Christ desperately because I didn't have anything to offer God spiritually.

I was bankrupt and I was broke. Did I shed tears over my sin? I did. Blessed are those who mourn.

Meekness has to do with humility. Is there still too much pride left in me? Yes. But did something altogether different happen where I fell at the feet of Christ? Yes.

Did I have a hunger and a thirst for righteousness? Yes, I did. Has it always maintained the most intense level? Not always. But is it radically different than what was there before? Yes.

Is there a desire to love people, not just to give down to the scent when it comes to tithing? Yes. Do I want to have all my goods at God's disposal for the sake of God's people? I do. I mean, what you're going to have to ask, and I'm not saying all this out of pride or to belittle anybody else, I'm just saying, look, I have to face Scripture just like you do, and I can look at this and say, I'm among the blessed because this has happened to me.

Now, if you've got ears to hear Christ, what happens is as you hear Him, will the imperative kick in where we recognize what really pleases Him is that we not even be angry, we not even lust, we don't do our praying to be seen, our giving to be seen, our fasting to be seen. See, we hear this, and the Spirit of God, we even hear the warnings. You know what God said to His people? I'm going to put the fear of God in them so that they don't depart from Me.

And so one of the things that happens, we hear about, you better pluck out that eye or it's better for that to happen than to be thrown into hellfire. And you know what the warnings of God do to the children of God? They make us step back from the edge because He puts His fear within us. And I feel that.

I don't feel like, oh, I better do that to get saved. I better do that to make sure God doesn't get me. No, I recognize while God is very serious about that and it is fearful, that is a very fearful warning and I don't want to get close to that edge and I'm going to plead with Him and He'll give me the grace to pluck these eyes out.

You see, when the question you're asking all the time is this, what are the limits of my conduct that I can still be on the inside? Pharisee. That is entirely Pharisaical. Because basically what that is, the question you're asking is about the law.

You're no longer guided by Christian ethics. It's now Pharisaical ethics. Ethics has to do with living out the moral realities in your life.

And what drives the Christian? The indicative drives the Christian life. The Pharisee, the imperative, drives the Pharisee's life. That's the difference.

Can I do this and still be in? People that ask that, they haven't understood the Christian faith. Because what that person is wanting to do is be fenced in by law. What defines my conduct by law so that I can still know I'm on the inside? What are the limits to which I can be dominated by sin and still be on the inside? They're always looking for that.

They're always asking that. How much can I practice sin? How much can it be habitual and I'm still on the inside? Brethren, that's the wrong question. It's entirely to misread the gospel of the kingdom when you ask those questions.

Jesus is saying, there's no security in that. No security. And so this thing, as we see, is going to start out with no imperatives.

And I'm afraid we're so wired. Because you know, even as little kids, we just are so wired by our natural disposition to basically view righteousness by this external law-keeping or rule-keeping. How good we've been.

We've got these notches. Bang, bang, bang, bang. We're so wired.

And it's almost like I know when I say to you, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It's almost like you can't even hear it without reading the imperative into it. Oh, I've got to be poor in spirit.

I've got to do it. I've got to make myself that way. I've got to achieve that.

And that's not even what He's doing. And brethren, the reality is, as we describe, because what I plan to do next week is describe what poor in spirit is. And listen brethren, if you're here and you look at that and you recognize I'm not poor in spirit, well then you're not in the blessed ranks.

But that doesn't leave you hopeless. Because Christ is bidding you. They call this name Jesus.

Because He's going to do the saving. He's going to save His people from their sins. He came to seek and save the lost.

And if there's any burden, any desperation in your heart to go to Him, He heals it. He makes it right. And so that's what I want.

I want us to look at this. And you know what? If you can look at the Beatitudes and say, yeah, it's not perfect, but definitely God has put me in the ranks of the blessed, then hallelujah. And if you look at it and you say, no, I don't think I'm there.

The last thing I want to do is encourage you to try to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and make yourself this. Because that won't happen. The place is to fall at the feet of Christ and plead with Him to break the pride, which is the opposite of... I mean, what's the opposite of poor in spirit? It's to be rich.

It's to think you've got your act together. It's to think everything's okay. What's the opposite of meek? Obviously it's pride.

What's the opposite of mourning? It's just going on and living life and not really thinking your sins are all that bad. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness. The opposite of that is obviously hungering and thirsting for other stuff.

For things of the world. Hungering and thirsting for that which God doesn't approve of. And we can go through it.

But that's where we're headed. That's where we're headed. Listen, I think you all know that what I've said today is true.

The Pharisee would ask the wrong question. And Jesus was always clearing all that fog away. Saying, you want to follow me? There's the standard.

Perfection. That's where the fence is. The fence is perfection.

And you know what? We've got the blood of Christ that sufficiently covers over any place I fall short of it. And that's the beauty. I can strive for it, and if I fail, the blood washes me.

And I'm forgiven. And I can go right back to striving, and loving, and giving, and being like Him. And if I fail, I can confess my sin.

He's faithful and just. It's the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all unrighteousness. That's reality.

The fence is perfection. And just this last thought. Brethren, I'm afraid that when people automatically, first thing out of their mouth, we can't achieve perfection.

You know what they've already done? They've already succumbed to a fence. Because that's not how Jesus taught. You notice that? Scripture never says that.

Scripture never wants to really lay that home, you can't be perfect. It doesn't do that. Just the opposite.

It says be perfect. And you know what if you've been born again? You ought to have a heart that longs for that. Right? And so the objective should not be to be able to define how that's not possible.

Rather, on the other side, you should say, I long for it. And I'm going to strive. That's one of the things about the praying and fasting we're doing.

It's not praying and fasting like the Pharisees. Oh, I fast twice in the week. No, none of that.

We're fasting and praying so that we can cling to the Lord and have Him reward us with what? The grace to catapult us further towards that perfection. I'm afraid too many Christians set the standard way too low. So they're not even striving.

Brethren, you know what the reality is? If this sermon, if God will take it and really lay hold on your heart, we can be way beyond we are right now. That includes me. Father, I pray that you'd help us to really grasp, to be able to understand right, to be helped.

I pray for these folks here. Lord, please, may you be compassionate and kind. May you help us all to sort out where we're at.

May you show mercy to us in that. Lord, I pray that you would save the unsaved. And I pray that you'd help us that are saved to run ever so better.

To have ears and hear. Lord, have mercy upon us all. I pray in Christ's name, Amen.

Well, you're dismissed, brethren.

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