

All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 15

by Zac Poonen

To enter the kingdom of heaven, our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees in quality, which means having a higher standard of righteousness that comes from the heart.

Duration: 25:54

Scripture: Matthew 5:20-24, Acts 24:16, Ephesians 4:31

Topics: "Righteous Living", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon delves into the importance of surpassing the righteousness of the Pharisees by focusing on the quality of our actions and attitudes, particularly addressing the issue of anger and its roots in the heart. It emphasizes the need for genuine reconciliation with others before seeking forgiveness from God, highlighting the significance of maintaining a blameless conscience before both God and men. The message stresses the impact of our words on grieving the Holy Spirit and the call to put away all forms of anger, bitterness, and hateful speech.

Transcript

We turn once again to the verse that we've been considering all these past days and weeks. Matthew 28 and verse 20. Teach the disciples in every nation to do all that I commanded you.

Teaching all that Jesus taught, to do what he taught and what he commanded. This has been our theme and we've been looking at the statements of Christ in the gospel of Matthew and we've come so far to Matthew 5 and verse 19. And we want to look today at verse 20.

We want to take the teaching of Jesus exactly like it is written because many have diluted it, made it mean what it doesn't mean and because they're not able to live up to that standard, they've lowered God's standard down to their level. Now whenever you see something in God's word which you haven't attained to, higher than your level of life, you have two options. One is to say well it doesn't really mean that.

It means in a generally general way but not exactly like that. For example, if it says rejoice in the Lord always in Philippians 4.4, it doesn't mean always. It means generally speaking most of the time.

And now you've succeeded in lowering God's word down to your carnal level and you satisfy yourself that you're obeying it. But the spiritually minded Christian leaves God's word where it is and says I'm supposed to rejoice in the Lord 24 7 and he acknowledges humbly, Lord I'm not there yet. I'm rejoicing some of the

time, grumbling some of the time or most of the time.

I'm angry often but I'm not rejoicing always in all circumstances. I'm not giving thanks for everything like the Bible says. So I acknowledge this.

Please bring me there. That's the person who will reach there. The other person who has lowered God's standard to his level will never attain to God's standard.

One day wake up in eternity and discover that he disobeyed God all his life. So it's good to leave God's word where it is and acknowledge either we haven't understood it or we haven't reached there. Then there's some hope we will get there.

Remember that as you come to this verse. Matthew 5 verse 20. All that Jesus taught and commanded.

I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds, surpasses that of the scribes and pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Now remember that the righteousness of the pharisees was a pretty high standard. They kept the 10 commandments.

You remember that rich young ruler who came to Jesus and said I've kept all the commandments and Jesus didn't question that. Of course they couldn't keep the 10th commandment but nobody could keep that. But they were keeping all the other nine because the 10th one was inward and I'll come to that in a minute.

But they were keeping those commandments. They're keeping all the old testament laws. The more than 600 commandments there were in the old testament.

They were keeping that. The pharisees boasted that they prayed regularly probably three times a day. They fasted twice a week.

They gave tithes of all their income. And your righteousness must exceed. That means what? Does it mean you got to pray more than three times a day? Fast more than twice a week? Give more than 10 percent of your income? That's not the meaning.

We always think in terms of quantity because our mind is worldly minded. The more worldly minded we are, we think in terms of numbers, statistics, quantity. We judge a church by the number of people there are, not by the quality of life.

We think Jesus said all men will know you're my disciples when there are 30,000 of you meeting in one church. But that's not what he said. He told about his 11 disciples.

He said all men will know you're my disciples when you love one another. The number of people doesn't matter. You love one another.

That's the primary quality of a mark of a true local church of disciples. Jesus always emphasized quality. Today's Christianity, today's mission organizations, today's mega churches emphasize numbers.

How many people are there in our church? How many places have we reached? How much is our yearly offering? And these are the things they inwardly glory in. Oh preachers, how many countries have I traveled to? How many sermons have I preached? How many books have I written? How many TV programs am I speaking on? These are the things that carnal people glory in. Jesus always emphasized

quality.

Salt, quality. Light, quality. His disciples at the end of his life, he had 11 disciples.

Was that a large number? But look at the quality of their life. 11 disciples who could turn the world upside down. Where do you find disciples like that who have forsaken all and who had no interest in money and things like that? It's so rare to find even one preacher like that in the world nowadays.

So we see it's quality that Jesus meant when he said your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees in quality. Not in the number of activities that they're engaged in and that you engage in. It's got nothing to do with money.

It's got nothing to do with praying. It's got nothing to do with fasting. It's got to do with quality of life.

And then he goes on in the remaining verses. In fact right through almost till the end of the Sermon on the Mount explaining this one verse. We can say the major part of the Sermon on the Mount is explaining Matthew 5 20.

Do you want to enter the kingdom of heaven? He speaks a lot about it. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

Verse 3 verse 10. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And now he says your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven.

In what way? There were two good things about the Pharisees that Jesus himself gave a certificate about. If Jesus could give a certificate about something you can be sure it is pretty good. Let me show you those two good qualities in the Pharisees.

Matthew 23 and verse 2 and 3. Matthew 23 verse 2 and 3. Jesus says the scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses. Therefore all that they tell you to do and observe do. But don't do according to their deeds.

So what he's saying here is everything that they tell you to do you can do. Their doctrine is right. That's the first certificate he gives them.

He wouldn't say that about the Herodians who were worldly. He wouldn't say that about the Sadducees who did not believe in angels or in the resurrection from the dead. He wouldn't say to the disciples all that the Sadducees tell you to do do.

Because their doctrines were wrong. But when it came to the Pharisees he said their doctrines are right. He has one certificate.

And the other certificate that Jesus gave of the Pharisees is in Matthew 23 and verse 25. You clean the outside of the cup and the dish. That means your external life is very upright.

Here's another testimony that the Lord gave about the Pharisees. Their external life was upright. Now if your external life is upright and your doctrines are all right, correct, you could still be a terrible Pharisee who's on your way to hell.

Because it is to these people that Jesus said in Matthew 23, how will you escape the damnation of hell? He says further down in Matthew 23 and verse 33, you people who got all your doctrines right, you people whose outside of your life is very clean, how in the world will you escape the sentence of hell? You think Jesus would say that to some Christians today? Your doctrine is all right. Your external life is so good that people appreciate you. How will you escape hell, my dear Christians? What is it that Jesus is looking for? Your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees in quality.

Now these are not comfortable truths that Christians like to listen to because we've been coddled and comforted for so long and assured by preacher after preacher after preacher that our sins are forgiven, we're all on our way to heaven, the blood of Jesus is all that we need. Well, it's better to trust in the Word of God than what some preacher tells you. See what Jesus himself said.

If your righteousness doesn't surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees in quality, you are not going to enter the kingdom of heaven no matter which preacher assured you that you're going there. It's better to listen to a preacher who points you to God's Word and tells you the truth. Don't get a surprise in the day of judgment, my friend.

Now he explains it. He says, what is it, what is the standard that the Pharisees maintain? The standard of the law externally, the outside of the cup. You've heard that it was said, you shall not commit murder.

That's good. When you don't commit murder in that area, the outside of your cup is clean. But he says, what about the inside of the cup? That's the question.

Your doctrine may be right, but what about the inside of the cup? Therefore, I say to you, it's not just the man who commits murder who's liable to the court, verse 21. I say to you that if a man has the seed of murder in his heart, that is anger. Murder comes out of anger and that's the seed.

It's like a little acorn seed from which the big oak tree grows. Anger is the seed from which murder comes. And Jesus was going to the root of the problem.

The Old Testament, we can say was, the law was like a pair of scissors that snipped off the fruit when bad fruit, when it came from the tree. But John the Baptist said, Jesus has come with an axe to the root of the trees. He's come to hit the root of the problem.

It's something like, to use a modern illustration, the law was like ointment that you spread upon a sore that comes in your body, prevent it from coming forth. The law restrained people from murder, adultery, and so many evils. This ointment, we immediately rub it, it goes away, but comes up somewhere else and you rub it again.

Comes on your leg and you rub it again. And then all of a sudden, somebody discovers an antibiotic and the doctor says, now you don't need to keep rubbing the ointment. Take this antibiotic and it hits the root of the problem and gets rid of this disease that is causing these eruptions on your skin and you can be healed.

So this is what grace does. Grace hits the root of the problem. So he says, I want to tell you that anger will make you liable to the court.

Verse 20, in the Old Testament, murder would make you liable to the court, but I'm saying anger will make you just as guilty today. So in the Old Testament, you were guilty if you committed murder and in the New

Testament, you're guilty when you get angry. Now, an anger which is just in the heart, it hasn't even come out of our mouth yet.

An anger in your heart, verse 22, makes you guilty. Here is the first wrong attitude. There are nine wrong attitudes that Jesus spoke of after speaking about the nine right attitudes.

He speaks about nine wrong attitudes that people can have and the number one wrong attitude is anger. And if you have anger in your heart, it's a wrong attitude and you're already guilty. Even though you have done nothing, you've said nothing, you've not killed your brother physically or with your words, but you're guilty already.

And then if that anger goes one step further, you know, out of the abundance of the heart, Jesus said, the mouth speaks. The mouth is like the overflow valve of what is in the heart. And if there's anger in the heart, it overflows through the mouth.

And then he says, if it overflows through the mouth and you say something to hurt your brother in your anger, now you're going to be guilty before a higher court, the Supreme Court. Before that, you were just guilty at a lower court. He's using human language to show that your guilt is at a much higher level when you have allowed that anger to be expressed in words towards your brother.

If you have kept it in, good, but you're still guilty. And then if you express it, you're guilty at a higher level. And then he said, if you go still further and you hurt your brother with even more angry words, you can be guilty enough to go beyond court, beyond Supreme Court to hell itself.

So what is he saying here? That anger is the first of three steps to hell. Anger in the heart is the first of three steps to hell. Have you ever heard any preacher tell you that? That when you got angry, when you get angry with anyone, it could be with your wife.

It could be with your husband. It could be with your mother-in-law. It could be with your neighbor.

It could be with your boss. It could be with someone who's done some evil to you. But if you're angry in your heart, in God's eyes, the seed of murder has already been there.

It's already there in your heart. You're guilty. And if it comes forth, it may not have come forth into murder yet.

It may come forth only in words so far. You're guilty. And just with more words, you're guilty enough to go to hell without ever having murdered that person.

This is where our righteousness is to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees who only thought of murder as taking a man to hell. And Jesus said, but I say to you, we can say that Moses went up to the mountain and brought down the two tablets with ten commandments. Jesus went up to the mountain and replaced those ten commandments with the Sermon on the Mount and said, whatever's written in those commandments which Moses got on the mountain, I want to tell you the spirit behind those commands.

He said once in John 6, the words that I speak to you are spirit and life. The flesh profits nothing. It's the spirit that's most important.

And he tried to get behind the law to show what was behind the law of murder. God was against your getting angry with your brother. It's a serious thing.

And if you are angry with your brother, what should you do? It's wonderful that the Lord gives us a solution. He doesn't only identify the problem. He gives us a solution.

A true prophet will not only indicate the sin in a church or in a person, but will provide them a solution like a good doctor does not only diagnose the sickness, but tells us the cure. And so he says, here's what you must do. You come before God with your offering.

You realize that you're sinned. And so you come to God and say, Lord, I'm sorry. You're bringing your offering of apology to God.

But God says, that's not enough. I'm not going to accept it. I'm not going to accept your offering of asking for forgiveness.

Leave it there. First, go to your brother whom you spoke against, whom you hurt. Leave your offering there.

Because you remember your brother, you hurt him. Go first, be reconciled to your brother. Verse 24.

Then come back and ask me for my forgiveness. Then come back and present your offering. Now, how many people do that? When you have hurt your wife by some words you spoke, or you hurt your husband by something you said, or a co-worker or somebody.

What, as a Christian, what is the first thing you need to do as soon as you're aware that you did something wrong? To go to that person and say, I'm sorry. Not to go to God. The Lord says here, don't come to me first.

We need to understand here God's law. You have to go to that man whom you hurt first. Otherwise, God won't even listen to your prayer.

It's so clear. Go first to man and not to God. First be reconciled to your brother.

Then come present your offering. But people may say, what if I go to my brother and say, I'm sorry for what I did and he doesn't forgive me. Your responsibility is over.

Then it's between him and God. If he's got a grudge against you, God will deal with him. But you finished your responsibility.

You don't have to force him to forgive you. You got to do your best to clear your debt to him because you've sinned against him. And as far as you're concerned, your reconciliation is complete when you have done your part.

Now, if he doesn't do his part to forgive you, that's between him and God. A person who doesn't forgive another will go to hell. But that's none of your business.

You have to do your part to go and ask forgiveness and then come to God. Otherwise, he says, if you don't do that, then you can finally go to hell. That's the meaning of you'll be thrown into prison.

And you'll never be able to come out of there till you're paid the last sentence too late after you get into eternity to go and ask people for forgiveness. That's why we need to settle all matters with God and men right now. The Apostle Paul once said in Acts chapter 24 and verse 16.

Acts 24, he was speaking to Felix in a trial and he said to them, he said to Felix in verse 15, I have a hope in God, he says, which all men cherish, that there will be certainly a resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. Now, I believe all of you who are born again Christians believe in two resurrections. The book of Revelation speaks about a first resurrection and a second resurrection.

Jesus spoke in John 5, the resurrection of the wicked, resurrection of the righteous. And here also he says, there'll be a resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. People die and one day they're going to be raised up, the righteous and the wicked.

And he says, I want to be in the resurrection of the righteous, not in the resurrection of the wicked. And in order to be in the resurrection of the righteous, what do I do? In view of this, means because this is true, that there's going to be these two resurrections and I want to make sure that I'm in the right resurrection of the righteous, I do my best. He doesn't say, I trust in the Lord to forgive my sins.

That's fine. Salvation is only through the death of Christ. But I do my best to maintain always, means 24-7, the word always means 24-7, a blameless conscience before God and before men, not only before God.

I seek to keep my conscience 24 hours a day, seven days a week, clear before God and clear before men. And you see an example of that in the previous chapter where he shouted at the high priest and as soon as he realized his error, he immediately asked for forgiveness in Acts 23. I believe it's implied there in the words written there.

So first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your offering. In Ephesians 4.31, this is why in Ephesians 4.31, we have such a strong word, which says Ephesians 4.31, let all anger be put away from you. Our words are very important.

Remember the one place in scripture where it speaks about grieving the Holy Spirit, about hurting the Holy Spirit, really making him sad at the way you are conducting yourself, is in our speech. Ephesians 4.30 says do not grieve the Holy Spirit. And what is the subject in the previous verse and the next verse? The words we speak.

Let no rotten word, that's the exact meaning there in verse 29, rotten. The literal meaning is let no rotten word come out of your mouth, but only what is good, that it may give grace to those who hear. And don't grieve the Holy Spirit with your words and therefore let all, let me paraphrase verse 31, let all bitter words, wrathful words, angry words, clamorous words, slanderous words, be put away along with all hateful words.

The context is words. Let all angry words and spiteful words and bitter words and words of yelling and screaming and slander and gossip and hatred be put away from you because that's how you grieve the Holy Spirit. How much? All.

Verse 31, all. I want to ask you, my dear friends, how many of you have taken that word seriously, Ephesians 4.31? Do you believe what Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees? It's not enough to say I have not murdered people. Have I got angry with people and expressed myself in anger and hatred and kept a bitterness against people? I want to clarify one thing.

When you raise your voice at your children, that may not necessarily be anger. It may be because they don't take seriously what you say. You know, it's like if somebody's a hundred meters away from you, you've got to raise your voice to help him to hear.

You're not angry with him. In the same way, that child may be sitting next to you and you tell him to do something, but in his mind he's 10 miles away. You raise your voice, you're not angry.

I need to distinguish between raising a voice without anger and raising a voice in anger. Now, don't justify yourself with that, but ask yourself if there's anger in that. There's no excuse for doing that with adults.

With your wife or husband, you can never make that excuse because a raised voice in speaking to an adult is almost invariably a sign of anger. Let's ask for the Holy Spirit's help to put away all anger, call it murder, and put it away from our life so that we can please our Heavenly Father and let our light shine before men as they see our good words and our good works and glorify God for what he's done in our lives. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word that lifts us higher, your call to come up higher from the low level at which we are living. We want to teach people around the world to be disciples and to obey all that you have commanded us. Thank you for this opportunity.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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