

# (Matthew) ch.5:6-5:20

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of hungering and thirsting for righteousness and the quality of life over quantity in the Christian life.*

**Duration:** 55:12

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:3-12, Matthew 5:19-26, Matthew 6:33, John 15:13, Romans 7:7-8, Romans 7:10

**Topics:** "Christian Witness", "Spiritual Transformation"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not hiding one's testimony in the workplace. Instead, he encourages believers to let their light shine by doing good works, just as Jesus did. The speaker also highlights the transformation of Jacob's life, who initially pursued worldly desires but eventually sought after God's blessing. The sermon emphasizes the need for believers to have the right attitude and words towards others, and to seek reconciliation with anyone they have hurt before offering their prayers or service to God.

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## Transcript

Let's turn today to Matthew chapter 5 and verse 6. We've been considering in these last studies the beatitudes, the characteristics of those who will possess the kingdom of heaven, those who will follow in the footsteps of Jesus and be his disciples. And here's another one of them in verse 6, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Hunger and thirst is an essential requirement for possessing anything that God has for us.

We read in Hebrews 11 and verse 6 that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. In Jeremiah 29 verse 13 says, You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. Anything precious is never found on the surface of the earth.

Gold is found deep in the bowels of the earth. Precious stones are found deep below the surface. What is found on the surface of the earth is usually valueless.

If we want to find hidden treasure, we have to dig. And Jesus said, if anyone hungers and thirsts for righteousness, he will be satisfied. Righteousness is not what most people in the world are hungering and thirsting for.

As we were considering in our previous studies, the previous verses, what we see here in these first few verses of Matthew 5, is a contrast between that which characterizes the race of Adam, and that which characterizes those who are under the headship of Jesus Christ. Or we can put it like this, a contrast between the spirit of Satan, with which the race of Adam has been infected, and the spirit of Christ. And if we can see the opposite, then we will understand what Jesus is referring to in these verses.

We saw that the opposite of poverty of spirit was self-sufficiency. Likewise here, in verse 6, what is the opposite of hungering and thirsting for righteousness? What do people in the world hunger and thirst for? It's not for righteousness. People in the world hunger and thirst for pleasure, money, honor, position.

It's mostly these four things that people in the world are pursuing. They pursue after money, honor, pleasure, and position. In contrast to that, Jesus said that we are to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

And it's impossible to hunger and thirst for righteousness if I'm hungering and thirsting for honor in this world. It's impossible to hunger and thirst for righteousness if I'm hungering and thirsting to make more money. And a lot of people are seeking to make money in the name of religion as well, which is the worst form of hungering and thirsting.

And it's because of these other hungers and thirsts in our lives which are not mortified that many, many believers never seem to make progress in righteousness. Think, for example, of a person who calls himself a born-again Christian and who's still losing his temper after three, four years after being converted. Why is that? Why is it that righteousness in this area of overcoming his anger has never come into his life? If he were to be honest and were to seriously examine his life, he'd discover that's because he's not mortified certain other hungers and thirsts in his life, like a hunger and thirst for honor, and position, and money, and pleasure, and for his own rights.

Unless those other thirsts and hungers are mortified, it's impossible to hunger and thirst for righteousness. We read in the life of Jacob in the Old Testament that he ran after money, he ran after women, and he ran after getting his own rights for so many years. Finally, God broke him at a place called Peniel, we read in Genesis 32, where he grabbed hold of God and said, Lord, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

He who had grabbed so many earthly things for so many years had finally, after twenty years of God's discipline, come to the place where he wanted to grab hold of God. That is to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Lord, I will not let you go unless you give me victory over this sin that is ruining my life.

Very few have such a hunger and thirst. In fact, Jesus said in John chapter 7 and verse 37 to 39 concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit, he said, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me. Do you know that you can't come to Jesus unless you're thirsty? You don't need any other earthly qualification, but you have to be thirsty.

You can be the greatest sinner on the face of the earth and you can come to Jesus Christ, but you've got to be thirsty. Thirsty for what? Not thirsty to be blessed. The world's full of people who are thirsty to be blessed.

They want God to heal them, they want God to give them money, they want God to help their children pass their examinations, get good marriage partners for their children, give them children good jobs, and they are always seeking for earthly things. Jesus is not inviting such people. God blesses a lot of his children with earthly things.

He blesses a lot of unbelievers with earthly things too. But here he's inviting those who are thirsty for something spiritual. If anyone is thirsty for the power of the Holy Spirit in his life, the Spirit that brings righteousness and purity into one's thought life, into one's speech, and into one's total personality, if anyone's thirsty, Jesus said, let him come to me.

And where do we find such thirst? A thirst for uprightness, a thirst to pay all our taxes correctly. Do you have a tremendous desire in your life to pay all your income taxes correctly and righteously? Very few people are interested in that. They're always trying to escape as much as possible out of these things.

Jesus said, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who never want to be in debt to other people, for example, who have a great desire to stay out of debt, those who never want to do one unrighteous thing in their life, who hunger and thirst to do what is absolutely right in money matters, to never harm or hurt another person by anything that they say or anything that they do. If there is a hunger and thirst like that, the promise here is that they shall be satisfied. So we can say this, according to this, this is a law in the kingdom of God, that the measure of our righteousness is directly proportional to the measure of our thirst.

How holy you are depends on how thirsty you are for holiness. And if you are not more holy today, it's because you are not really, deep down in your heart, really thirsty for more holiness or more purity. Because you have thirsted and longed for other things, you got those other things, which are temporal and which will pass away.

People would fast and pray for healing, who would never fast and pray to get victory over dirty thoughts. Why is that? God sees in such a believer that such a person has got no desire to become like Jesus Christ. He is only interested in his own profit.

Healing brings personal profit. Money brings personal profit. There are people who would fast and pray for these things, who never dream of fasting and praying to overcome their irritability or to overcome the harsh way in which they speak to their wives.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Paul says in Philippians chapter 3, amazing words, which we need to see as the reason why Paul lived such a godly life. He had a tremendous ministry, but he had a godly life back of that ministry.

He longed for this righteousness that we are speaking of. And he said in Philippians 3, 9, he says, I long that I may be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law. Do you know what the righteousness in the law was? It was a righteousness that kept a man pure on the outside.

He wouldn't commit murder on the outside. He wouldn't commit adultery on the outside. But he says, I'm not satisfied with that.

He says, I want a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the new covenant righteousness, which prevents me from committing adultery on the inside, in my thought life, which prevents me not only from murdering my brother, but prevents me from being angry with my brother. That is a new covenant righteousness and Paul longed for that. And he says that I may be found in Christ, not having this old covenant righteousness, which is merely external, but a new covenant righteousness which comes from God.

And he says, for this, verse 8, I have suffered the loss of everything. He gave up everything. He counted it all, it says in verse 8, as rubbish, compared to possessing this righteousness.

That is thirst. To hunger and thirst for righteousness means that I recognize that this new covenant righteousness, that Jesus has come to give me, which is inside my heart and in my thought life, is so valuable that everything else is rubbish compared to it. And we can say that as we hunger and thirst, God increases our capacity.

When we first come to Christ, the capacity of our heart is something like a little cup. And that can be filled. But then God increases our capacity, it becomes like a bucket.

And that is filled. And then God increases our capacity further. If we hunger and thirst, it becomes like a big tank, then like a river, and like many rivers.

And Jesus said, if you are thirsty, come to me and drink. And ultimately, many rivers of living water will flow out through you. But the fundamental requirement is thirst.

May God grant that to us. Let's turn to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, and verse 13. In our previous studies, we had been considering the nine beatitudes mentioned in verses 3 to 12.

And we could call them nine right attitudes that a Christian should have. We could, in those verses, contrast the spirit of Christ, described in those verses, with the spirit of Satan, which would be the opposite of those verses. It was Jesus who was poor in spirit, and who mourned for sinful Jerusalem, who was gentle, who hungered and thirsted for righteousness in the flesh that he had come in a sinful world, who was merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, and who had been persecuted for righteousness sake, and because he represented his father accurately.

And the opposite of those right attitudes or characteristics or virtues is the spirit of Satan found in the race of Adam. Self-sufficiency, a jovial, casual, careless attitude to life, a harshness and possessive covetousness, thirsting for earthly things and not for righteousness, an unmerciful attitude, impurity of heart, a quarrelsome nature, and seeking the honor of this world, even if it means compromise, and even if it means not confessing Christ. Those are the opposites.

And these verses are good for us to have a spiritual check up with always. For we know whether we are on the right track, whether we are progressing in these virtues which Jesus considered preeminent. Now we look at verse 13 where Jesus said, You are the salt of the earth, and if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? In the context in which it comes, it's clear that it's these virtues that Jesus has just been speaking about in the previous ten verses that give taste to the salt.

Without these qualities, the salt would be tasteless. And then, it is good for nothing. Think of that phrase that is used commonly in the world, good for nothing.

It's quite an insult to turn around to a person and to say to him that you are a good for nothing person. And yet those are the very words that Jesus used concerning Christians who did not have these virtues that he had just spoken of. The important thing about salt is not quantity.

In a large plate full of rice or curry, we put very little salt. It's not the quantity of salt that is important, but the quality. If the salt has lost its taste, even a large amount of such salt would be useless.

It would serve no purpose. It is quality, strength that is important in salt. And Jesus said, you are the salt of the earth.

Which teaches us that the important thing is not for Christians to be large in number on the earth, but like salt, though small in number, small in quantity, yet powerful in quality. This is an emphasis that we need to recapture in our day when Christians are thinking that we can influence the world by numbers or influence a country by increasing in numbers. That is not God's way.

That's the way of the world. The world impresses people by numbers. A political party impresses its opponents by numbers.

Religious cults and many religions seek to impress people with numbers. Whereas Jesus said, very few will find the way to life. He said that later on in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 7. But here also he places that emphasis on quality.

Salt is used. It was used in the days of Jesus for wrapping meat, to prevent it from decaying. It is used as a symbol for restraining evil.

That's one of the functions of the Christian on the earth. To restrain evil by our life and by our witness. We can't drive out evil from this world.

Jesus will come again in glory and do that one day. But we have to restrain it by our life and by our witness. Think for example, in a room full of people who have no conscience, cracking dirty jokes, when a Christian walks in, who has a clear bright testimony, immediately there is a restraint.

But if that Christian has lost his taste as salt, there is no restraint. They continue with their dirty conversation. Such must be our witness, in our place of work, with unconverted relatives, in our home, wherever we go, that our influence has a restraining effect on sin and evil.

That's how it was with Jesus. When Jesus entered Zacchaeus' house, immediately Zacchaeus was convicted. Jesus didn't open his mouth.

He immediately was convicted of his sin. There have been men like that, so filled with the spirit, whose very presence, without their opening their mouth, convicted people of sin. But when we lose our salt, even if we are large in numbers, it is good for nothing.

That's important for all Christians to recognize, that a Christian, who does not have the virtues listed in these verses, has become good for nothing, even if he is a member of a church, that believes the right doctrine, and is born again. It's good for nothing, it's only fit to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. It's possible to have the gifts of the spirit, and still be good for nothing.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 13, Paul makes that clear, saying, that even if I have the gift of speaking in tongues, even if I have the gift of prophecy, and the gift of faith, the ability to move mountains, even if I have charity, such that I give my possessions to feed the poor, charity in the sense of giving money, and even if I give my body to be burned, if I don't have love in my heart, I have lost my taste, and I am nothing, he says in verse 2 of 1 Corinthians 13. It profits me nothing, he says in verse 3. Notice there, nothing, nothing, zero. We become valueless, when the taste has gone out of the salt.

Jesus went on to say in verse 14, You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck measure, but on the lampstand. And He gives light to all who are in the house.

Let your light shine before men, in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. The light speaks of our life. In John 1 verse 4 it says, In Jesus was life, and that life was the light of men.

The only thing that can be called light, in this dark world, is the life of Jesus. That life, when it comes into me, and possesses me, and controls me, and determines the way I conduct myself, then I too become the light of the world. For Jesus said in John 8 verse 12, that He was the light of the world.

Now He turns around and tells His disciples, You are the light of the world. And men do not light a lamp, and put it under a peck measure. A peck measure speaks of business.

It speaks of hiding one's testimony, in one's place of work. No. In the place of work, it must not be hidden under the peck measure, but it must be put on the lamp stand, for all who are in the house to see.

Again, notice that the important thing about light, is not its size. Think of an electric bulb, how small it is, and what a large room it can light up. The volume of that electric bulb is so small, compared to the volume of that room, yet it lights up the whole room, and drives out the darkness.

It is not size, but quality. You can have a zero watt bulb, which doesn't light up the room at all, or a hundred watt bulb, which lights up the room brightly. It's not size, it's a question of strength, of light.

Let your light then, shine before men in such a way, that they may see your good works. Our good works, which come forth from this life of Jesus, is the light that people should see. And when they see it, they are to glorify, not us, for the good works we have done, but our father in heaven.

In other words, we are to do our good works, not just do good works, but do our good works in such a way, that we give the glory to God, and give God the credit for it. Then, together, many such lights, can be the true church of God, described in verse 14 as a city, set on a hill, that cannot be hidden. Not the size of the city, but the power of the light, that shines forth from that, into a dark world.

Let's turn today, to Matthew chapter 5, and verse 17. In our last study, we were considering, how disciples of Jesus Christ, are to be the salt of the earth, verse 13, and the light of the world. And in both cases, we saw that, the emphasis was not on size, or numbers, or quantity, but on quality of life.

The salt, was to have strength, or taste in it. The light, was to shine brightly. It's not a question of the size of the bulb, but the strength of the light.

Not the size of the lamp stand, but the brightness of the light. We also saw in verse 16, that our light was to shine, in such a way before men, that they were to see our good works, and glorify our Father in heaven. It's possible for us, to do good works, to do kind deeds of helpfulness, to others, and to ruin it all, as far as the Christian testimony is concerned, by receiving the honor, and the credit to ourselves.

We read in Ephesians chapter 2, and verse 10, that long before the foundation of the world, God had prepared for us good works, that we should walk in. God has a specific plan for our life, a life that consists of good works, like He had a plan for the life of Jesus. In Acts 10.38, we read that God anointed Jesus,

with the Holy Spirit and power, and He went about doing good.

That was His testimony, not preaching sermons. Peter says, He went about doing good. Think of that, can be written on our tombstone friends.

This man went about doing good. This woman went about doing good. That's a tremendous testimony.

That was the testimony Jesus had. And Ephesians 2.10 says, that God has created us, and you in Christ Jesus, so that we might walk in those good works, that He has prepared beforehand, for us to walk in. And then when those good works are done, we are to go one step further, and examine our hearts, to see that the credit, and the glory, and the honor for those good works, do not come to us, but go to the Father.

If people give it to us, we should be quick to pass it on to God, so that the glory goes to Him. And we just say, we are unprofitable servants. We have done only that, which it is our duty to do.

Only then are works essentially good, in God's eyes. And there we can see, what a lot of corruption, dwells in our flesh. Like Paul said in Romans 7.18, nothing good dwells in my flesh.

I can do a good work, and then take the credit for it, and then that corrupts, the whole work itself. It's like a good glass of milk, being corrupted by just a drop of poison. Further in verse 17, Jesus said, Do not think that I came to abolish, the law or the prophets.

I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter, or stroke, shall pass away from the law, until all is accomplished. Here we see, that Jesus did not come to abolish the law.

Many people think, that in the new covenant, grace means, we don't have to keep the commandments anymore. Jude speaks about such people, in his letter, in the epistle of Jude, in verse 4. In fact, in verse 3, Jude says, I was wanting to write to you, about our common salvation, trying to explain the gospel. He said, but, I changed my mind, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, obviously, I felt the necessity, to write to you, to contend earnestly for the faith, which was delivered to the saints.

Because he says, certain people have crept in unnoticed, who turn the grace of God, into licentiousness. Or, those who turn the grace of God, into a license, to commit sin. How do we turn the grace of God, into a license to commit sin? By imagining, that the grace of God, demands that, we take the law lightly.

That's how many Christians have taken it. They felt, law, that was for the Old Testament people, to obey, and obey, and obey, and they didn't succeed, so they struggled, so God brought in grace. They think, well you don't have to obey, and God just forgives you.

That is, turning the grace of God, into license to sin. But that is not, what the grace of God, has come to do. No.

The grace of God, we read in Romans 6.14, has come to deliver us from sin. In other words, to make us keep the commandments. In other words, the difference between law and grace is this, that under the law, man struggled with his own strength, and could not keep the commandments.

Under grace, God gives us his power, through the Holy Spirit, called grace. That power is called grace, so that we can keep the commandments. That is how, we are freed from the law.

The law is not abolished, but we are freed from the law. Galatians speaks about, our being freed from the law. I am freed from the law, because I am keeping it inwardly now, by grace.

I am freed from the law, externally. And so Jesus wanted to clarify that, to his disciples, and said, I came not to abolish the law. No, far from it.

Not to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill. And we can say, to fulfill in a far deeper sense, than they commanded it. You will see that in the rest of this chapter.

Whereas Moses only commanded, don't commit adultery. Jesus said, I have come to fulfill it, and to teach you to fulfill it, not just externally, but deep down in your thought life. That is how he fulfilled it, in its deepest meaning, in the spirit of the law, not just according to the external letter.

For he said, truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke, shall pass away from the law, until all is accomplished. In other words, Jesus spoke about the law as something, which was greatly esteemed, and valued in heaven. And everything that the law commanded, will be fulfilled.

Therefore he says, in verse 19, If anyone cancels, or annuls, one of the least of these commandments, notice the emphasis there, on the least of these commandments. He doesn't do it himself, in his mind he has cancelled it out. And he teaches others the same thing.

He will be called, the least in the kingdom of heaven. He may not lose his salvation, he may not go to hell, but he will be called the least, in the kingdom of heaven. But the one who keeps, and teaches them, he shall be called great, in the kingdom of heaven.

Notice there what it says. The way to become, least in God's eyes, is by, taking a casual attitude, towards obedience, to the small commandments. The big ones, like don't commit murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, everybody keeps.

Most Christians anyway. But it's the smaller ones, the ones which are not so important. People say, oh that's a small thing.

The point is not whether it's a small thing or not, the point is, has God commanded it? Jesus makes it clear, that there are least commandments, and greater commandments, according to verse 19. But our attitude to God, and obedience is tested, not in the great commandments, but in the least ones. Think of some of the smaller commandments, in the law.

The smaller commandments, in God's word. They are a better test, of our attitude towards God, and obedience to his word, than the big ones. Water baptism for example.

Women covering their heads, as it says in 1 Corinthians, chapter 11. These are greater tests, of our attitude to God's word, than whether we, refrain from committing murder, and adultery. The question is, has God commanded it? And have I used my reason now, to interpret it in some other way, so that I don't keep it? Then we teach others, with our reason.

That's not serious. Well, you don't lose your salvation, for not being baptized, or not, a woman not covering her head, in the meetings, in prayer. But, you certainly can, come down, to be least in God's eyes, by, despising, God's commandments.

And that's just, those are just two examples, there are many others. The least commandments, in God's word. But, if you keep, and teach them, and notice the emphasis there, is first on keeping.

It's no use, teaching, if we don't keep first. To be great, in the kingdom of heaven, you got to keep, and you got to teach, God's commandments. That's how it was, with Jesus himself.

He never taught anything, that he hadn't practiced. There's a saying in the world, that you must practice, what you preach. With Jesus, it was the other way around.

He preached, what he had already practiced, and continued to practice. It's no use practicing, after we preach, we have to practice, before we preach. We read in Acts 1 verse 1, the last part, that Jesus began to do, and teach.

He first began to do, then to teach. For 30 years he did, then he taught and did, for the next three and a half years. So we see, that's why he's the greatest, because no one, did it so perfectly.

Now we are called to follow in his footsteps, as his disciples. To keep, and to teach, all of God's commandments, the whole counsel of God, everything found in God's word, from beginning to end. Thus, we shall be great, in God's eyes, even if men, do not consider us great.

Let's turn today to, Matthew's Gospel chapter 5, and verse 19. We were considering in our last study, the importance of obedience, to the small commandments. For it is through obedience, to the small commandments, that we prove, our attitude, towards God's word, as being right.

Many can keep the big commandments, it does not test, their attitude to God's word. Our attitude to God's word, is tested by the small commandments, and whether we keep them or not, and if we are called to teach and preach, whether we preach them or not. Those who keep and teach them, will be called great, in the kingdom of heaven.

There's a great temptation, to keep quiet, if we are preachers and teachers, on the smaller commandments, of God's word. We call them, unimportant and non-essential. If they were unimportant and non-essential, God would never have commanded them.

The very fact that God has commanded them, proves that they are essential and important. Even though they may be lesser, compared to certain other commandments. But, it is a great temptation to, neglect them, and to teach others, that some of these commandments are not so important, because that will give us a wider hearing.

More doors will be open for us, and if we seek, more open doors for ourselves, and greater honor from men, we will certainly keep quiet, on the smaller commandments. But those who are seeking to be great, in God's eyes, will keep and teach, all of the commandments. Big or small, the only question is, has God commanded it? And he goes on from that, in verse 20 to say, For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses, that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter, the kingdom of heaven.

In verse 19, he is speaking about being great, in the kingdom of heaven. You may enter, but you may not be great. You may enter, you may end up as the least, because, you did not keep or teach, the lesser commandments.

But now, in verse 20, it is a more serious issue. Here it is a question of, entering the kingdom of heaven, all together. Unless your righteousness surpasses, exceeds, goes beyond, that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

What was the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees like? We get a little glimpse into that, in Philippians 3, where Paul, who was a Pharisee, before his conversion, says, in verse 5, that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law, Philippians 3, 5, of Pharisee. In verse 6, as to the righteousness, which is in the law, found blameless. He was completely blameless, when it came to the righteousness, which is in the law.

In other words, he kept the ten commandments, as God intended, people under the old covenant to keep it, which was externally. Externally, just like the rich young ruler, who came to Jesus, and said, Lord, I have kept all these commandments from my youth. Paul also could say, he kept all the commandments, as God had intended it, on the outside.

Where was it that Paul could not keep the commandments? That he makes clear in Romans chapter 7. He says, when I saw a commandment, Romans 7, verse 7, which said, you shall not covet, sin, verse 8, took opportunity through the commandment, and produced in me coveting of every kind. And this commandment, verse 10, Romans 7, 10, which was to result in life, proved to result in death in me. That was the tenth commandment.

And that was the one commandment, which related to the inward life, thou shalt not covet, something that is thy neighbor's, or someone who belongs to your neighbor. And there, Paul found it very difficult to keep it. And so we see, that the righteousness of the Pharisees, was an external righteousness, which kept the commandments on the outside, but could not keep it on the inside, in the heart, in the spirit.

And now Jesus says, he is introducing the new covenant. And there we see clearly, that the standard in the new covenant, is not lower, than the old covenant standard. This is false grace, that leads Christians to a standard of life, which is lower than the old testament.

No, the standard is higher. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds, goes beyond that old testament righteousness, of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. In other words, it must be a righteousness, which is not only on the outside, but on the inside.

You remember what Jesus told the Pharisees, in Matthew chapter 23, that they cleaned the inside of the cup, Matthew 23, 26. But the outside was, full of robbery and self-indulgence. And so he said, in Matthew 23, 26, first clean the inside of the cup.

Then, the outside will automatically be clean. In other words, cleanse your inner attitude. Then the outside will automatically, be clean.

So, this is what, he is going to speak of, in the rest of this chapter, and in the rest of the sermon on the mount. This verse 20 is like an introduction, to the rest of the sermon on the mount. Right up to the end of chapter 7. He is now describing, this new covenant righteousness, which will give, taste to the salt, and light, in the lamp stand.

He is describing, the righteousness that will become the possession, of those who have the qualities, described in Matthew 5, verses 3 to 12. This is the righteousness, that we are to hunger and thirst for. The righteousness that he is going to describe.

An inner righteousness, and not just, an external one. In Romans chapter 8, verse 4, verse 3 and 4, the Holy Spirit says, what the law could not do, because of the weakness of the flesh, God has done. Sending his own son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, he condemns sin in the flesh, in order that, the requirement of the law, which was kept on the outside by the Pharisees, during the old covenant time, might now be fulfilled, and there is a very important two-letter word there, in or inside us, within us, who are now in the new covenant, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

There we see the contrast, in verse 3 and 4 of Romans 8, between what the law could not do, and what grace can. What was it the law could not do? It could make a man holy on the outside, but it could not make him holy inside. What can grace do, which is superior? It makes a man holy on the inside too.

John 1.14 says that, Jesus came full of grace, and truth. And he goes on to say there, in John 1.17, that Moses brought the law, but Jesus Christ brought grace. And grace is as superior to the law, as Jesus is superior to Moses.

No one would doubt that Jesus is superior to Moses. Well, then grace, which Jesus brought, is superior to law, which Moses brought. Law could cleanse a man on the outside, grace can cleanse and help a man keep himself spotless on the inside.

This is the meaning of Matthew 5, verse 20. Unless your righteousness exceeds and surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. And then, in the following verses, he goes on to speak about anger, as opposed to murder.

In the Old Testament, he said, in verse 21, you are not to commit murder, but I say to you, you shouldn't be angry. Anger is murder in the heart. Physical murder is external.

That was what the law required, but Jesus says, I'm teaching you righteousness, which goes beyond the righteousness of the Pharisees. You shouldn't be angry with your brother in your heart. If you clean the inside, in other words, if you cleanse your anger away from your heart towards your brother, there is no danger of your murdering him.

The outside will automatically be clean. Likewise with adultery. The Old Testament forbade external adultery.

In the New Covenant, Jesus forbids it even in the thought life. And if you cleanse yourself from this in your thought life, you are in no danger of committing it externally. Likewise, in verse 33, in the Old Testament, Jesus said, you were to speak the truth when you made a vow, but I say to you, whatever you say, whether you take an oath or not, your yes must be yes.

Your no must be no. In other words, you must always speak the truth, even when you are not under oath. When a man takes an oath, he is really saying that, I tell lies most of the time, but right now I'm going to speak the truth because I'm under oath.

But for a New Covenant person, that's not to be the case. He must speak the truth all the time. Further, he said in verse 38, that the Old Covenant had said the righteousness of the Pharisees was they understood it like this, that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, they misunderstood God's word.

But I say to you, forgive and don't take revenge. And further, the Old Covenant permitted you to hate your enemy, but in the New Covenant, I teach you to love your enemies. So we see that the Lord was leading

His disciples to a higher standard under grace, to that which He had really come to fulfill.

And this is where we need to beware of the false teachers who would teach us that grace means we are freed from the law in the sense that we don't have to keep it. No. We are freed from the law in the sense that the external law does not have any power over us because we are keeping it inwardly.

That is the true meaning of grace and that's the true meaning of being freed from the law. Thus we shall enter into a righteousness which exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees and thus enter the kingdom of heaven. Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel chapter 5 and verse 21.

Commencing here at this verse and on until the fifth verse of chapter 7. Jesus expands on the statement that He had made which we read in Matthew 5 verse 20. Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. And He goes on to explain what He means by that so that the disciples and we are left in no doubt as to what exactly Jesus meant.

He explains in relation to nine wrong attitudes that we can have. Whereas the Old Testament emphasis was on action, wrong actions. In the New Testament the emphasis is on wrong attitudes that lead to wrong actions.

And God is going to judge us not just for wrong actions and wrong words but for wrong attitudes as well. In the Old Testament the Lord did not judge people for wrong attitudes. In fact we may ask why not? If that was God's standard.

The answer to that is given in Matthew chapter 19 where the Pharisees when they came to Jesus and asked Him this question why did Moses permit divorce under the Old Covenant? Verse 7 Jesus replied saying because Matthew 19 8 because of your hardness of heart. In other words under the Old Covenant because the Holy Spirit was not given in the sense that we have Him today people's hearts were hard. Therefore God did not expect a higher standard.

He permitted David to have many wives. He permitted many things under the Old Covenant. But now that the Holy Spirit has been given so that our hard hearts can be replaced by a soft heart God expects much more than under the Old Covenant.

He expects more than what the Old Covenant saints attained to. He expects us to be wholehearted so that we go beyond the level of the Old Covenant saints. Go beyond overcoming wrong actions and wrong words and come to the place where we even cleanse ourselves of wrong attitudes.

This is the meaning of what Jesus said when He told His disciples that the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John the Baptist who is the greatest under the Old Covenant. Not that we are greater than John the Baptist but the possibilities are greater for us and we can rise higher if we are wholehearted. The sad fact of course is that many Christians are not wholehearted and so their level of life is far below that of Moses or Elijah or John the Baptist but that is not the way God intended it.

And so here we read of nine wrong attitudes. A contrast to the nine right attitudes that we considered in verses three to twelve. And therefore the whole Sermon on the Mount is a very good spiritual touchstone.

A passage of scripture from which we can constantly examine ourselves to see whether we are growing to maturity whether we are acquiring that which is primary in the Christian life. These nine right attitudes and overcoming these nine wrong attitudes. The first of these wrong attitudes is mentioned in verse

twenty-one to verse twenty-six.

In the olden times you were told not to commit murder but and whoever commits murder is liable to the court but I say to you, Jesus said everyone, and there is no exception here, there is no partiality with God everyone, believer or unbeliever who is angry with his brother. Anger is the first step to murder. So Jesus is going to the root.

You remember what John the Baptist said which we considered in Matthew chapter three, the axe is laid to the root of the tree. That is the new covenant message. That he is not just come to chop off the fruit like the Lord did.

Jesus has come with grace to lay the axe to the root of the tree and the root of murder is anger. He is laying the axe there. And if you are angry with your brother, you will be guilty before the court.

Now the King James version has this phrase, angry with his brother without cause. In the margin of the NASB here it says, some manuscripts insert that. And I can imagine why certain people inserted that to justify their anger.

Is there any man angry without a cause? Every human being who gets angry always has a cause for it. And once you insert that clause into it, without cause, it would justify every type of anger and the whole strength of that verse is gone. No, that clause should not be there.

Without cause, no. Anyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court. And whoever says to his brother, raka, which means empty head or good for nothing, referring to his intelligence, you are stupid.

He will be guilty before the Supreme Court of God, that is. And whoever shall say one step further, you fool. Raka, empty head, refers to his intellect.

Fool refers to his heart condition. Bible always speaks of the fool as the man whose heart condition is unspiritual and carnal. You call a person you fool shall be guilty enough to go into the hell of fire.

In other words, if you despise your brother, you are guilty according to New Testament standards. Therefore, he says, if when you are presenting your offering at the altar, there remember that your brother has something against you. And why does your brother have something against you? Because of a wrong attitude in your heart towards him, as a result of which you spoke words that hurt him and offended him and insulted him in your anger and irritation.

Jesus said, Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, all evil dwells primarily not in our heart but in our flesh. It's in the flesh that Paul said nothing good dwells. We can say that temptation is the lust of the flesh seeking entry into the heart, first of all in our thoughts.

And when we permit those lusts to enter our heart, we have sinned. Not externally yet, but in our heart, in evil thoughts. Jesus said in Mark chapter 7 verse 21, from within out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts first.

From that fornication, theft, murder, adultery, deeds of coveting. The deeds follow the thoughts. So we see here that this wrong attitude led to a person speaking wrong words.

Raka, you fool, or some words that despise or insult another human being. Another brother in this case. And then you come to God, your religious person.

You come to offer your prayer or your money or your service or your sermon or anything. And your conscience reminds you that you have hurt your brother. The Lord says, leave your offering.

Stop your prayer. Don't open your mouth. Don't put your money into the offering box.

Don't offer that service to God. Go first and be reconciled to your brother. In other words, you have to first go to your brother and set things right with him.

Otherwise God will not accept your offering. Whatever it is. Then we can imagine how many offerings that Christians make are not accepted by God because they are not first reconciled to God.

Think if you put a verse like this on top of the offering box. First be reconciled to your brother or sister. Then come and present your offering.

And if people took that seriously, I think the amount of offerings in most churches would come down if they were honest. But yet, we must remember, God does not accept an offering which comes from a man who is not reconciled to his brother. As much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men.

If you have hurt somebody, go and apologize first. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law. Verse 25 That is God's word.

Opposes you. Your conscience convicts you of having disobeyed while you are in the way. And in the way means while you are still alive.

Otherwise, one day your opponent will deliver you to the judge. The judge is God. Today he is your father.

But you don't take his word seriously. You don't go by the witness of your conscience and the witness of God's word. One day, that word, your opponent at law is not Satan, it's God's word, will deliver you to the judge, to God.

And the judge will finally punish you. Truly, I say to you, verse 26, you shall not come out of that prison until you have paid up the last cent. That means eternal damnation.

For if you have not forgiven your brother, your heavenly father will not forgive you. So it is very serious. This matter of anger, it is very serious.

We must not take it lightly. In the new covenant, your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, which was don't commit murder. It must come to the level of do not lose your temper at your brother.

Die to your own rights, to your reputation, or whatever it is that has been hurt. And humble yourself and forgive. And put to death that wrong attitude towards your brother, otherwise one day God's word in the new covenant that you hear today and that you heard from the word will deliver you to the father as a judge.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/8/SID8302.mp3>  
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