

MATTHEW 5:17 – 26

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

We are still discussing the Sermon on the Mount. Please see yourself sitting on a hill at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. A gentle breeze is blowing as you listen to the greatest sermon of all time.

We have covered the Beatitudes, where Jesus gave out blessings to those that had chosen to follow Him. In this He told us how a follower of His looks and acts. HE shows us the character of a believer. He minced no words when it came to the fact that those who followed Him and lived out the beatitudes would be persecuted. But even in that, there is blessing. He went on to say how even in times of persecution, we are not to withdraw into ourselves or even into our Christian communities, but are to be salt and light to a world that is going to Hell. We are to actively engage the community so as to preserve and be a light to the world, and in so doing we glorify our Father in Heaven.

This week, Jesus segues into a little different subject. That is, He very clearly makes the point that He has not come to do away with the Law, but has come to fulfill it. This is/ was a very important point for a couple of reasons. Let's look at what He said.

Matthew 5

17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is telling His disciples how they should regard the Law. Jesus makes it clear, in no uncertain terms that He did not come to do away with the Law. He could not have med it any more clear. One reason for this is that Jesus is coming with a new message; at least in one sense. Any attack on the Law would be grounds for a riot or even worse. Jesus had to make His position plain. He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. As we will see, Jesus is going to get to the heart of the Law, the way in which it should have been taught prior to His coming.

Jesus didn't come to the 10 commandments or to the 613 commands contained in the Law to change or abolish them. The only thing He added was perfect obedience. This is why He was the perfect sacrifice. Jesus was the lamb without spot or blemish.

He goes on to say that Heaven and earth won't pass away, not one jot or tittle will pass away from the Law until ALL is fulfilled.

- Jot – the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet.
- Tittle the tail or hook used to distinguish one Hebrew letter from another.
- The beth and the kaph. The only difference is a tittle.
- This strongly infers that Jesus believed in the plenary inspiration of scripture. (Not just the ideas but the actual words and letters also.)
- Jesus didn't want to abolish the Law of Moses.

So where does that put us as Christians when it comes to observing the Law?

- The punishments under the Law in a theocratic and/ or monarchy.
- Punishments under the Roman Empire. Jews didn't have the legal authority to carry out the death penalty and other punishments.
- Jesus recognized this when the woman was brought to Him who was caught in adultery.
- If the NT tells us that we are free from OT sacrifices or observing the Sabbath, then we don't practice those things. We understand those things to have been fulfilled in Jesus. (Adventists) Col. 2 – those things were but a shadow of Christ.
- But what about thou shalt not murder, steal, and commit adultery?
- Did Jesus have anything to say concerning homosexual behavior? Some would say He didn't. This passage says differently.
- The morals of the OT Law are still the same.
- Verse 19: Why we teach the OT.
- Verse 19: What the people had been taught was not right. It focused on the externals rather than the heart of the Law. Jesus has come to undo what had been done wrong for so long.

So Jesus is clarifying His position, which should also be our position concerning the Law. Now having done this, He says something that blows everyone away.

20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

When Jesus said this, the oxygen was sucked out of the room. (If they had been in a room.) The Pharisees were held up as the top examples of righteousness.

- We can be guilty of giving the Pharisees a bad name. They were originally reformers or leaders of what we would call a "back to the Bible movement."
- Atrophy
- Head-bump Pharisees
- What does it mean to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees? External vs. internal.

- Our righteousness will never be good enough to reach or please God.
- We have to put on the righteousness of Jesus.
- ***Phillippians 3:9 not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;***
- We aren't good enough. Self-improvement is not the message of the Gospels. We can't pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and meet God's requirement of holiness.
- And when Jesus makes plain in this sermon what it means to keep the Law we will be even gladder that Jesus ' grace has been imputed to the believer.

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'

- Most Jews had not read or studied the Law for themselves. They had only heard what they had been taught.
- We need to read and study for ourselves.

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' 22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. 23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

- The difference between murder and killing.
- Death penalty, self-defense, just war.
- It was taught that you could harbor all of the anger and hatred in your heart you wanted and it was ok. Just don't actually kill them.
- Once again, they majored on the externals and not the heart.
- Jesus ups the ante and goes internally. **It isn't only the ACT of murder but the heart of murder with which Jesus was concerned.**
- The Apostle Paul got this revelation when he came to, "Thou shall not covet." It was then that he realized it was a matter of the heart and not just external actions.
- Anger is akin to murder.
- Raca – moron! Idiot! This can bring us into judgment as well.

- Your gift at the altar. Don't let ministry or church attendance stand in the way of reconciling.
- Make it right with your brother and THEN come back to service, having left your gift at the altar.
- Reconcile!! Rom. 12:17,18; **17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.**
- Reconciliation is a two way street, but we have to make sure we have done what we can to reconcile.
- Our heart in how we deal with each other is huge!!!
- Some of us get pretty good at holding on to the anger. We can't stay at a boil for long, but we are good at turning it down to a simmer. (spouses, the look)
- Ephesians speaks of not letting the sun go down on our anger.
- Imagine how well things would work if we were to constantly seek to reconcile instead of not letting anyone get over on us. Not holding grudges.
- How can we deny forgiveness and reconciliation to others when Jesus has forgiven us for so much and so much that is so much more awful than any way we have been wronged.

When we see how Jesus interprets the Law, we should be even that much more appreciative of His sacrifice. Have you murdered anyone lately? Go make it right, because God has forgiven us.