

INTRODUCTION

STORY: Emancipation Proclamation was passed in America in 1863. This law changed the legal status of over 3 million slaves in America. Now, slavery has been in effect in America for 246 years. To make a law like this is huge! Now for the newly freed slaves, you might think that they were joyous about being free in which they were, but they were also terrified. Although they were free, they weren't free. The laws had changed, but the hearts of many people, especially in the American south were still the same. In fact, as we know it seven years later in the American south there were state and local laws put into effect called the Jim Crow laws. Although they were not written in the American legislation, they were enforced by many, and many African Americans suffered due to these laws. The basic assumption behind these laws was that African Americans were "separate but equal" with whites in America. As we examine through the Jim Crow America, these conditions were extremely harsh upon African Americans. Many former slaves hoped to be back in slavery due to the increase brutally they received from these laws. These laws lasted another 100 years until the Civil Rights Acts of 1964.

I bring this story up for two reasons. First, it is black history month. I want to reflect and thank God were he has brought our country, but yet, we still have a long way to go. Secondly, this example shows us that laws might change, but hearts remain the same. This is the core issue Jesus is addressing in our text today.

TRANSITION: Now, all of us this room have a love/hate relationship with laws. Some of us in the room are rule followers and some of us in the room are rule breakers. For the rule followers you tend to obey but your heart most of the time is not connected to the rule you're following. I would reason that you obey the rules because you get a lot identity in being the good person.

Then for some of us, we are repelled by the idea of following the rules, so we break them. As a rule breaker, you find your identity in living without consequences. But check this, you are still obeying rules, but they are just the ones you made. You think you are self-made. But disobeying the rules doesn't make you a self-made man, rather just selfish.

But as we look at our text for today, Jesus is going to expose both the rule breaker and the rule follower. Because of sin, our hearts naturally rebel against God and his laws. So what Jesus is going to do is he is going offer us a new kind of obedience. An obedience that you can't muster up on your own. An obedience that leads to worship of God and joy in your heart.

So here is the main idea for today. **You need Jesus because you can't be who God laws require you to be.**

But before we dive into the text, I want to give you guys a forewarning we are going to cover a lot of ground in the text. Its one principle applied in different areas of life. We are going to try to grasp this one principle and then we are going look how Jesus applied this. With that in mind. Let's read Mathew 5:17

JESUS AND THE LAW

Matthew 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

The people that Jesus is speaking to is the disciples with the crowd hanging around listening in. He begins his teaching but resting on these three words, “Do not think” meaning that he is addressing wrong thinking about the laws and the prophets. Therefore I want to camp out a bit here to talk about the law and prophets.

When the NT, puts these two phrases together law and prophets. It is usually addressing the entirety of the OT. Traditionally, the law is considered the Pentateuch which is the first five books of the bible and the prophets is all the rest of the books of the OT including the wisdom books like psalms and proverbs.

Within the OT, there are around 613 laws. So when Jesus says that he did not come to abolish such laws but to fulfill the law, some ear began to perk up. So with that, we need to understand the purpose of the law and prophets.

Law: When we consider the law we think lawyers, government, policemen. But we need to get a Jewish understanding of the law. The law is central to life and story of Israel’s existence. The law was made to distinguish Israel. It is connected to the covenant in which God promised to be their God, and they will be his people. He would bless them, and they will be blessings to other nations. God’s intention for the law was to govern and purify his people so that his name was being made known among all nations.

Prophets: Now the purpose of the prophets is testify to the people of Israel the importance of adhering the law and following God’s commands. They reinforce what God promises and commands.

Therefore, if Jesus was going to destroy the law and prophets then he would destroy God’s intentions to make his people to be set apart. But he didn’t. He came to fulfill the law and prophets. Therefore, he is placing himself in the center of Israel story but more importantly God’s story. Then Jesus goes on in verse 18...

18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

What this means that is that God is serious about his commands to be obeyed. Jesus is reinforcing that those that think that it’s all grace and the law does not pertain to us anymore you are mistaken. To excuse the law would be to deny God. The law teaches us about God and how to love him. It exposes us and shows us our need. Jesus is emphasizing here that we need the law. The psalmists would reflect on the law, and it says that the law is good and perfect. So since its good and perfect, there must be a trick on how we approach the law.

In fact, Jesus reinforces the practice of the law at the end of the passage in verse 48; he says, ***“You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*** So what is Jesus trying to get at? Let Look at verse 19

19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus uses “therefore” meaning what he previous said was true. Therefore, we need address some wrong ideas of the laws. Back in the OT, the Jewish rabbis would consider some commands more important than others. So Jesus needed to infuse a proper view of the law. He says those who relax the least of the commandments will be called least in the kingdom, but those who do them and teaches will be great in the kingdom. But before we get into that, we have to under what is the kingdom of heaven.

What is kingdom? Well, earlier in Matthew, Jesus tells the crowds to repent because of the kingdom of heaven at hand. Meaning that Jesus is the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is a destination, but it is also a person, Jesus.

Relaxing the Law: Therefore, when he uses the term least in the kingdom he is saying that you when you loosen these commands of God, the kingdom will be lost in your heart and those around you. Another way to say it is that when you become lax on the commands of God, the more your heart become callous and joyless to Christ and his commands. What Jesus is trying to get them to see that there is joy in obedience because he has come, but they have the wrong way of seeing the law and so do you.

When we think about God, we think about him being a harsh taskmaster that is telling what to do. With that thinking, there tends to be little joy in your heart when it comes to obedience. But I am here to tell you today, the joy in Christ is not devoid of obedience to his commands rather his commands or laws leads you to joy. But the only way for this happen flowing from a new heart. You need Jesus because you can’t be who God laws require you to be.

Jesus then says that those you teach them to obey will be called great. To interpret this in laymen terms Jesus saying those who hang around will influence you. Why? Because we teach with our lives. If you take an intentional approach to living to obedience, you will influence those to do same. If we take a lazy approach to obedience, we will influence those around to do the same. Let me share how this played out practically for me in a bad way.

STORY: I remember this one particular story in my Junior year of college and a couple of us started this on going tradition of the fried chicken and koolaid party. This inaugural event was going to be at one of white chocolate frat bro house, mainly because he had a swimming pool. Now I know what ya’ll are thinking, I thought that black people can’t swim, why are ya’ll hosting a party at swimming pool?? Well, to address that myth, we can swim, we just don’t want

to get ashy so choose not to... But let me get back to the story. Now as we were all preparing for this party, we were just slamming each other with jokes. It just something we did, we would sit in a circle and light each other up. This seemed very normal to us but not to those around us. In fact, while we were getting ready for the party one of my fraternity brothers's girlfriends stopped us as we were preparing for the party and she told us in these exact words, "You guys are so rude to one another, do you don't speak kindly to each other and I am shock that you are Christians." Ouch!

Now, the point of the story is to expose that I struggle here but also to show that we can lead people don't the wrong path by not pursuing holiness. My heart was in the space that I thought it was safe because I was around other Christians. The matter of my heart was that I wanted to be cool over being holy. I had the thought that I am not under the law but grace. Due to that thinking, I did not realize that my heart had become hardened to God's commands. I took a lax view of God's commands, and I end leading my brothers down a path of sin.

You see many of us in the room we struggle here. Because of our lack of understanding God's law we lack to understand the application of them. We believe the lie that we are under grace but fail to realize that grace was costly.

But to press a little harder, there some of you in this room you need to hear this. You have influenced people in your circles the wrong way you need to see that Jesus is serious about his commands because he is serious about holiness. Why? Because he's serious about your joy in him and the only path for that to happen is for you to see him as all you need! **You need Jesus because you can't be who God laws require you to be.** But we got to keep moving, Jesus then says in verse 20...

20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

He makes a very strong and almost impossible statement. He says that you need to be better than the best law-keepers around. He uses this word righteousness which means the act of has moral uprightness. The Pharisees and scribes were the Tim Tebow on their day.

The Pharisees and scribes misunderstand the application of the law. They were obeying out of obligation. They were obeying because it was their way to prove to God they were holy. This is a wrong way to obey the law and a wrong way to respond to God. But check this though, Jesus did not lighten the commands of God; he increased him. He made obeying much more difficult. In fact, it seemed that Jesus made obedience impossible. I need us to rest here a bit. Have you considered that you can't obey in your own will to get God to love you???

But the proper way to obey is not to try harder or to be better, but it's first realized you can't. But Jesus here is given us a different target towards obedience. The pharisees obeyed to perform but he Jesus wants us to obey because we are loved.

You see kingdom righteousness works from the inside out because it first produces changed hearts and new motivations so that the actual conduct of Jesus' followers does in fact "[exceed] the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

MATTERS OF THE HEART

Now, the rest of the sermon on the mount is Jesus teaching us how to obey him from that new heart. Jesus increases the stakes of obedience but he increases his presence in our heart so that we can obey. Our obedience is flowing from being transformed by him.

So we are going to look some test cases Jesus gives to the disciples to see the law with new eyes and a new heart. As we look at the text, he going to begin each phrase with ***"You have heard that it was said but I say to you..."***

Now, Jesus was not contrasting His interpretation with the original intent of the law but with the interpretation of the scribes and Pharisees. He is giving them how to interpret the law in light of them having a transformed heart. Let's look at verse 21

Murder to Anger

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

This statement is the six commandment, *"Thou shall not kill."* When God gave this commandment, his intention was not just for people to refrain from killing. Rather, he wanted them to refrain from the hatred that existed in their hearts that lead to the murder. The Pharisees and scribes were acts only external. So they did not kill anyone, but their hearts were filled with rage all the time. So is yours. When you have anger in your heart, you are declaring who is your Lord, which is typically you. Anger is a secondary emotion that reveals what you love. So my question for those that are wrestling with anger, what do you love right now? You can't turn your anger off you have to have something outside of you to expose you. You need freedom. Christ offers that to you.

Adultery to Lust

27 "You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus then tries to clarify the seventh commandment in the eyes of the disciples.

The rabbi's understood that if someone would take another man's wife that would be considered adultery which is true. But Jesus addresses the problem more deeply. He says if you looked at a woman with lustful intent you have already committed adultery in your heart. Adultery is first birth in the heart and manifested in action. Now the scripture says women here, but in a broader context, anything that is outside of the bounds of the marriage bed is considered

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lust. This means porn, physical activity, and we can go on. But here the challenge here, the solution is not to be less lustful but more grateful for the Lord Jesus Christ. You can't stare at sin and Jesus at the same time.

Divorce to Faithfulness

31 "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

32 But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Now I know that this is a sensitive topic for some of us in the room. If you are divorced, I am sorry you went through that experience. But what Jesus is trying to get here with divorce is that he is trying to elevate the standard of marriage. Jesus is upholding the marriage covenant. What he is saying is stop trying to find a way out of marriage or the letter of the law. What Jesus is trying to do is he is trying to contrast divorce to faithfulness. Your heart can be fickle, and things happen in life. But it takes a supernatural work of God to be faithful. Faithfulness mirrors God. It's easy to divorce it's much difficult to main faithful, and you can't muster that up on your own. You need to experience the faithfulness of God to be faithful.

Oaths to Truth-Telling

33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King

Oaths are barriers to truth-telling. The OT saints would swear on the temple to prove they were serious when they were not. Jesus is challenging the disciples to a life of integrity. It was easy to make an oath because there were not consequences to it. Jesus is turning the notch up a bit. Only those who follow Jesus can be truthful because he reveals to us our brokenness. The cross exposes us to declare our need for Jesus. Because of the cross, we don't have to swear to oath to prove our authenticity because we need not to defend our reputation.

Retaliation to Contentment

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Not to repay someone for a deed they did to you is quite simple. It much harder to act in love and that is birth from contentment. Contentment allows you to rest in the sovereignty of God. So you don't have to retaliate rather commit to love. Therefore, for those that are fighting unforgiveness right now, you need to let that go. That is robbing you of your peace. So let your spouse hook or your best friend off the hook. Why? Because you have everything you need in Christ and he did not repay for your lack of love towards him rather he died for you.

Conditional Love to Loving Your Enemies

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

It’s easy to love people who think like you, act like you and does everything you do. That is my friends called conditional love. Jesus is challenging the disciples to love that only the Holy Spirit can do their heart. Love your enemies.

Now all these commands seems heavy because they are but Jesus takes it up one more notch in verse 48. Let’s look at it.

CONCLUSION — PERFECTION

48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Now, Jesus is not preaching perfectionism but completeness. What I mean by this? When Jesus uses the word perfect, the correct translation is “complete.” You see verse 48 is a mirroring reflection of Leviticus 20:7 when God tells his people they are to be holy because he is holy. Meaning God has designed his people to obey the law, but they did not have the ability to do so.

Now because of Christ, who cancel our debt of law-breaking by being nailed to a cross. He is now empowering his disciples to obey in his power. He is commissioning you in the power of the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of the law to obey from a transformed heart. You see you were made to obey God, and because of Christ he now have the ability to obey the laws with a changed heart. Now, **You have Jesus and you can obey God’s law how he made you to do.**

Pray (band comes up, as I close exhort the crowd and have them stand)

Steps on how to live now:

- First, look at Christ and seek to live like him. Ephesians 5:2 — Little kids works in their dads clothes and imitates their dad. It’s not perfect but they are trying and they daddy loves it. The difference here from the metaphor is every attempt done by faith is seen as perfect in the eyes the Father.
- You need to be honest — All of things mentioned. Some of us in the room are living in hidden sin. But Jesus puts the stakes high but made his grace greater. You can confess where you are because Jesus meets you where you are but he is not going to keep you where you are.
- Get in community — You can’t grow unless you have people helping you see yourself. When you get into community they will be begin to start calling out those external actions and challenging you to consider the matter of your heart.

