

CHRIST AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Matthew 5:17-20

Intro: Anybody who knows the Lord and is acquainted with the Bible, knows that our Lord's Sermon on the Mount is, and always has been, a very, very important part of Scripture. We don't know exactly when the Lord gave this message, but it certainly was basic to His own life and ministry, as well as for the lives and ministries of all of His people from that day until this. And so its importance cannot be over-emphasized even for us today. One sad fact is very evident in what professes to be the Lord's work today, and that is that there are many pastors and churches who don't really understand what the ministry is into which the Lord has called us. We see churches doing often the most fantastic things to attract people to their meetings. I constantly hear from many of you and from the Lord's people outside of our church, that it is getting harder and harder to find churches where the Bible is really taught. There is a great emphasis on entertainment, but little emphasis on edification. In fact, if you spoke to the average church member today they would not know what you were talking about if you mentioned edification to them. The emphasis is more upon building large churches instead of building great saints!

What all of us need to do is to take our Bibles and study them from the standpoint of learning how men and women of God have served Him in the past. But it is most important that we study the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the truth is that you can't find any evidence in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ for the things which have become so popular in churches today – none whatsoever! And there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that the Lord's work changes from generation to generation. In fact, that Lord's work today is exactly what it was when our Lord was here on earth. To depart from the Biblical pattern is to forsake our the real message, and to turn to other methods which will not be blessed by the Holy Spirit.

One of our memory verses from the prophet Jeremiah has direct application to the Lord's work today. I am referring to Jer. 2:12 and 13:

12 Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD.

13 For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

We are guilty of manufacturing our own cisterns which hold no water instead of taking people directly to “the fountain of living waters,” the Lord, that they might know what eternal life is.

The Sermon on the Mount was delivered especially for the disciples, as we learned from the first two verses of Matthew 5, and so the Lord was thinking about what the disciples needed to learn if they were to serve the Lord as He intends for us to serve him.

Let me take you back for just a moment to the last two passages we have considered together.

In the first part of Matthew 5 the Lord spoke of the characteristics that He wants to see in our lives, characteristics that bring His blessing, and, at the same time, bring us happiness. And so the Lord spoke to His disciples about such things as humility (poverty of spirit), true sorrow for sin, meekness, a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Let stop there for a moment. How many Christians do you know, and are you one of them, who really wants to be righteous? Do you “hunger and thirst” for it? Do we really want to grow in the Lord? If so, do we know how? Go over the beatitudes again and again thinking about no one but yourself. Do they describe you? Do you think they describe the average professing Christian today?

But let me go on. The Lord wants us to be merciful. Are we? He wants us to be “pure in heart.” Are we? He is going to have more to say about that in this message. And then, are you a peacemaker, not spending your time trying to keep people happy politically, but showing in your life that you know what real peace is. Are you concerned that people would come to know true peace by being justified by faith? And then have we suffered at all for the Lord’s sake, or are we doing like a lot of professing Christians are doing, are we so much like the world in our dress, and in our talk, that people in the world don’t see any difference between us and them?

The Lord Jesus was telling His disciples that the foundation of their ministry was not in how many degrees they had after their names, or how popular they were, nor how much ability they had. He was telling them that their joy and the effectiveness of their service would be in direct proportion to the godliness of their lives. We have a lot of so-called church experts going around telling people how to serve the Lord, but

they have little to say about the Bible, little to say about prayer, Biblical praying, little to say about faith, little to say about holy living. But let's not point our fingers at someone else when we might be on the wrong track ourselves.

This emphasis which our Lord made, takes us down through verse 12.

Then the Lord went on to indicate that people who can be described by the Beatitudes in the first twelve verses, will be salt and light in the world. And we learned that "salt" has two basic values which apply equally to the Lord's servants and the work that they are to do. Salt preserves. And the ministry of the Word will be preserved if those who preach it are holy people. The other use of salt is that it savors. It makes food taste good. A godly disciple will be used to enable people to see that God is good and that His Word, the Gospel, is good. And so they will want to taste of it. The Lord called His people "light" because we live in a world of spiritual darkness, but people who don't know the Lord don't know that they are blind. When spiritual light comes their way by the Word, and by a messenger who is walking with the Lord, that is when they often see the light.

Today we come to the third point in our Lord's message on that mountain. I am speaking of verses 17 through 20. *Here the Lord was speaking about His own ministry.* One thing I want you to notice about these four verses, is that they all have to do with the Word of God. The Word is not mentioned in verse 20, but by its association with verses 17, 18 and 19 we can see that the condition spoken of there is the result of the Word of God in a person's life. I ask you to notice carefully what the Lord said about His ministry in these verses. Then go and do likewise.

The first point in verse 17 has to do with the overall purpose of:

I. THE LORD'S MINISTRY (Matt. 5:17).

You can tell from what the Lord said here that the people had a perverted idea of the Lord's ministry. You know, people can become so accustomed to error that when they hear the truth of the Word of God, they think that is heresy. The Jewish people thought this about our Lord's preaching and teaching. Cf. Matt. 7:28-29. Notice how often in the Gospels it is said that people were astonished at our Lord's teaching. Nicodemus, who was one of the leading theologians when our Lord was on earth, came by

night to see the Lord, and he didn't even know what it meant to be born again. I take that as meaning that this theologian didn't have the slightest idea as to what the Gospel was. People thought our Lord was teaching something entirely new.

And so He told even His disciples who had been just as blinded to the Gospel as most of the Jews were, and who could have been swayed by the overwhelming conviction of the people that our Lord was a heretic. When the Lord spoke of "the law and the prophets," He was referring to the only Bible the people had in those days, the Old Testament. And He wanted all of them to know that He had not come to take their Bible away from them. He had not come to do away with the Scriptures. But in a very unique sense He had come to "fulfill" it! You and I could not have said that, but the Lord could say, and did say, in so many words, "the law, and the prophets," the message of the OT, *was all about Him!* It all anticipated His coming. It looked forward to His coming. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ proved that the OT was absolutely true! Cf. John 5:39, "Search the Scriptures . . ." Also Luke 24:27, 44. This last verse has direct application to our text in Matthew 5:17. This is what it says:

44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me (Luke 24:44).

Cf. Philip's message to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:35.

So, in a very unique way, our Lord's ministry was a ministry of the Word. Not in the same way, but, nevertheless, by life and by word of mouth this is the ministry to which He was calling His disciples, and to which we are called. May God forbid that I would ever desecrate my calling by taking your time to give you anything but the Word of God.

But let's look at verse 18. Here we see

II. OUR LORD'S TOTAL CONFIDENCE IN THE SCRIPTURES (Matt. 5:18).

The Lord here declared that not one "jot" (י) or one "tittle" (ט) would pass from the Law (all of the OT) until it is all fulfilled. I believe with others that the Lord was declaring here *the total divine inspiration of the Word of God!* Men can deny it, burn it, substitute other words for it, but it stands secure.

Why men will turn from the infallible Word of the living God to the fallible words of mortal men, is more than I can understand. God has called His people to speak His Word faithfully. Cf. Jer. 23:28.

Here we are this morning over 2,000 years since the Lord spoke the words of our text, and the Word of God is still with us. And there is not the slightest chance that it will change or disappear. If you are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, you will be satisfied only by the Word of God. We grow by the Word.

The third thing that the Lord believed about the Word is given in verse 19 or our text.

III. THE LORD STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEYING THE WORD OF GOD (Matt. 5:19).

We don't know what the least of the commandments was, but we know what was the greatest commandment, and what was the second after the first. Cf. Matt.22:35-40. It is important that the Lord did not give first place, or even second place, to any of the ten commandments. As far as I know, the Lord never said what was "the least of the commandments." What the Lord was calling attention to, was that every commandment is important. And the person who breaks even the least has earned the distinction of being least in the kingdom of heaven.

But (and notice the order here) he who obeys and then teaches the least of the commandments, will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. In other words, we are all going to be judged on the way we have handled the Word of God, not just our teaching, but our obedience first, and then by faithful teaching.

One of the marks of a true Christian is that he is responsive to the least thing that the Lord asks him to do. There be those who claim to follow the Lord, but who never have been saved. It may be that their profession puts them in the kingdom of heaven, *i.e.*, under the authority of heaven. But they will be purged away in the final judgment.

We have one more verse to go: verse 20. What do we learn from the Lord about the ministry from this verse? Actually is applies to everyone.

IV. THE LORD BELIEVED THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS HAD TO

BE INWARD AND REAL (Matt. 5:20).

Who were “the scribes and the Pharisees”? They were the teachers of the Jewish people. When compared with the Sadducees, the Pharisees were the orthodox, the conservatives. But what was wrong with their righteousness? Let our Lord answer that question. Please turn to Matthew 23, the chapter which is full of denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees. Over and over the Lord called the “hypocrites.” What is a hypocrite? He is an actor on the stage. He is one person when he off of the stage, but he takes on a new, different role, when he comes on stage. Follow as I read to you verses 25-28:

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matt. 23:25-28).

The Lord is not looking for actors. I find it interesting that in many churches drama is one of the chief ways of ministry. The very basis of drama is hypocrisy. You are pretending to be what you are not. That is Pharisee-ism. Their righteousness was only what they put on display when they were in public. They were entirely different when they were in private.

I will tell you another thing that was bad about Pharisee righteousness. It was what they were doing. True righteousness is first of all imputed to us by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then it becomes more and more evident in our lives as we learn to know and love and obey our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

What kind of righteousness do you have? Is it the righteousness of Christ by which you have been made acceptable to God? Or is it a front that you put up when people are watching you? Would we be surprised if we knew what you are reading in the seclusion of your own home? Would we be surprised if we knew what you are watching on television? Would we be surprised at the way you talk when none of the Christians you know

are with you? The Pharisees could pray long prayers. But it was just a show, just actors taking part in a drama. But we need to be concerned about getting to heaven. And one thing we need to remember is that we aren't hiding a thing from the Lord. He knows those who know Him, and He also knows who are only pretending that they know the Lord.

Concl: Do you see what the ministry of the Word is. I am not thinking just of those of us who preach, but of every person who claims to know the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to spread the Word. We are called to preach the Gospel even on just a one-to-one basis. And we are to spread the Word, not substitute anything else for the Word. But those who bear the vessels of the Lord are to be clean. The Lord is to have the first place in our lives, and that can only be if the Word is first in our hearts. We are to know it, to live it, and then we can minister it with the power of God upon us. A godly man or woman is a mighty instrument in the hand of God even in the God-less days in which we live. May we love the Lord and His Word with all of our hearts, and then make sure that those around us hear the life-changing message of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.