

**The Kingdom of God and the
Validity of Contemporary Judaism:
Jesus' View**

We commenced a short study of Jesus' sermon he delivered in the Galilee that Matthew recorded in his presentation of Jesus' person, claims, and accomplishment. From the previous lesson, I sought to make a few introductory comments to set the setting:

1. The synoptic gospels provided the increasingly diverse followers of Christ an authoritative tool to assure the faithful transmission of the gospel and instruct believers in their manner of walking with God.
2. Mathew's audience was Jewish which accounts for the numerous Old Testament quotations in the book and, most particularly, the content of the sermon we are studying.
3. Through Jesus' itinerant ministry in the Galilee more and more people were stunned by His words and works (4:23-25).
4. Jesus was claiming to be the Promised One, Israel's long-expected deliverer. The question before the increasing multitudes concerned entrance into it. While they conceded that righteousness was the prerequisite (Ps. 24:3-4), was the message of the scribes and Pharisees, the message of environmental avoidance, the same as His?
5. Jesus' central idea throughout the message is a resounding, "It is not." Righteousness is not gained by avoidance; it is a gift of God through His son. Righteousness emanates from the cleansed heart, not the hands!!

The Sermon on the Mountain

I. The Setting, 5:1-2

II. The Introduction, 5:3-16

A. The beatitudes, vv. 3-12

Jesus, first, describes those who are already in His kingdom by the recurring phrase, "Blessed" (meaning, the approval of God rests upon those who...) followed by a promise of fulfillment.

B. The similitudes, vv. 13-16

He then describes the duties of those who are in His kingdom with two metaphors: salt, a persevering and flavoring ingredient, and light that dispels the darkness. By our lifestyles we are to create a taste for Jesus; by telling His story we are to scatter the darkness of spiritual darkness. These are qualities the scribes and Pharisees did not possess!!!

III. Clarifications and Thesis, 5:17-20

Jesus begins, however, with an explanation of His relationship to the Law. He is not opposed to the Law, nor did he seek to abrogate it; He came to explain it correctly, to fill it with meaning since he is the meaning. Since the “Law and the Prophets” point to Christ, He is its fulfillment. He is the goal of the Hebrew Scriptures.

A. Jesus and the Hebrew Scriptures, vv. 17-20

Jesus begins the sermon by answering a question that would have been in the mind of his hearers. What is Jesus’ relationship to the Law of Moses and the interpreters of it? Is the approach of the Pharisees the correct way into the kingdom?

1. The Hebrew Scriptures, a pointer, v. 17

This paragraph is important because Jesus makes clear His relationship to the OT Scriptures. He is not opposed to Moses in any way; in fact, He came to recover Moses, as well as the prophets, from Pharisaic distortions.

The term “fulfill” has three nuances. First, it can mean to obey what the scriptures demand (Jesus certainly did that). Second, it has the idea of filling with its proper interpretative meaning. This would seem to be what Jesus is doing in the remainder of the chapter. And third, it can mean to bring to completion. In a sense the Hebrew Scriptures were a pointer, a volume that anticipates the coming of a promised one. That one came in the person of Jesus thus completing its role of anticipation.

2. The Hebrew Scriptures, its durative importance, v. 18

Until the end of the age (“until heaven and earth pass away”), the OT is valid and enduring.

3. The Hebrew Scriptures and obedience, v. 19

Most likely, the “commandments” refer to the “Law and the Prophets.” We (“whoever”) are to obey them as they point to Christ, their fulfillment. It appears that in the kingdom, as it is now manifest, rank is determined by conformity to the person anticipated in the Hebrew Scriptures. Since the Law pointed forward to Jesus and His claims

4. The Hebrew Scriptures and Pharisaic righteousness, v. 20

Jesus’ evaluation of Pharisaic righteousness is telling. If one is only cleansed outwardly, one will never enter God’s kingdom. This sermon is an assertion that Pharisaic righteousness is inadequate and distorted.

IV. The Argument the Pharisaic Instruction is twisted and wrong, 6:1-7:6

Jesus’ argument for the validity of the condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees, the presentation of evidence, is three-fold: they have twisted the meaning of the Holy Scriptures (5:21-48), they do not practice religious ritual

properly (6:1-18), and they do not manifest their “faith” in practical living (6:19-7:6).

A. The misreading and faulty interpretation of the Scriptures by the religious leadership, 5:21-48

Jesus begins by explaining that the Pharisees had distorted the truest meaning of the Law; they were simply ignorant of Moses. The recurring phrase is “You have heard it said, but I say to you.” He uses six examples to make His point. The six are divided into sets of three, divided by “again” (v. 33). The first three deal with issues of the heart or attitudes (murder, adultery, divorce), things that spring from the heart. The second set seems to be actions (truth-telling, non-retaliation, love). Jesus’ criticism of Pharisaic interpretation of the Hebrew Scripture is that they emphasized outward issues, not issues of the heart, inward concerns and attitudes not merely outward appearances.

1. The Law, Jesus, and murder, vv. 21-26

Jesus cites Scripture, defines it correctly, and states a remedy for its violation. In God’s kingdom, there is no place for hatred. Malicious anger is so heinous that it must be dealt with immediately.

a. The law stated, v. 21

The reference is to hatred that is the root of murder in the sixth commandment (Ex. 20:13).

b. The law correctly interpreted, v. 22

The law against murder goes much further than the physical destruction of life; it involved deformation of character. It involves malicious anger, contempt (“raca” meaning fool or knucklehead, is an attack on a person’s intellectual capacities), and public spiteful criticism (an affront to a person’s moral character). The first has the potential of landing one in court, the second before Israel’s high court (the Sanhedrin), and the third severe judgment.

c. The remedy for dereliction, vv. 23-26

There is a shift in these verses to the second person singular from the second person plural in the previous verses indicating that Jesus is stating two personal correctives to the exhibition of anger. We are to seek immediate restitution; inharmonious relationships demand immediate action.

1) In the context of worship, vv. 23-24

There seems to be hyperbole in Jesus’ instruction. If a Galilean was in Jerusalem worshipping and remembers ought against someone, unless they are in the city at the same time, they would have to make the eighty-mile trek home and then return.

2) In the context of a legal breach, vv. 25-26

The emphasis in both remedies is to make amends; here the emphasis is not only do it but do it quickly. Matters such as these only get worst with procrastination.

2. The Law: Jesus, and adultery, vv. 27-30

Adultery, the tenth commandment (Ex. 20:17, Deut. 5:18), is the theft of another's most intimate possession; it is about sexual coveting. This sin, like all of them, begins in the imagination. The issue is not mere sexual attraction, but the desire, even planning, for a sexual encounter with another's wife. From an inner sense of desire comes an outward action.

The remedy is radical action. Since the removal of body parts would not deal with the cause of lustful action, Jesus must be posing a ludicrous solution to point to the profundity of the problem.

a. The law stated, v. 27

The command prohibits sexual adventures outside of marriage for males and females, though in the ancient, pagan cultures when the command was given men could have sexual adventures as long as it was not with another man's wife; married women were expected to remain chaste.

b. The correctly state interpretation, v. 28

According to Jesus, the desire of conquest, whatever the status of the female, qualifies as the act of adultery.

c. The remedy for dereliction, vv. 29-30

Clearly, Jesus is using hyperbolic language here because he has made the point that desire is the root of motives issued from the heart, not the actions of hand or eye; our hands and eyes may be involved in an action, but they are not the root of the action.

The remedy is so absurd that it suggests the ludicrous saying that my sin is not my personal responsibility. Neither the eye nor the hand (perception or instrument) is the cause of adultery; it is personal desire in coveting a pleasurable object that God prohibits. Marriage is a sacred covenant between a man and a woman that must not be violated!

3. The Law: Jesus, adultery, and divorce, vv. 31-32

The reference is to the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:14), but Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 24:1, 3. The preface, "it was said also," connects divorce and adultery in that both are rooted in lust, one often leads to the other. Divorce is wrong because it generates adultery. When marital unfaithfulness occurs (the term covers a variety of sexual perversions), divorce is then implicitly permitted. The implication is that a person legitimately divorced is free to remarry. If the cause for the

divorce is invalid, any later marital union is considered adultery! Adultery becomes a legitimate basis for remarriage.

It is important to see that the portion of Scripture that Jesus quotes (Deut. 24:1-4) assumes the validity of divorce.

In Jesus' day, there were two views among Israel's leadership on the issue, a liberal and a moderate school. Liberals, the school of Hillel, argued for divorce based on a variety of causes at the discretion of the husband with no recourse by the former wife; it simply was activated by a declaration of dismissal. The moderate school of Shammai argued that divorce was permitted only on the ground of sexual infidelity. Jesus is more conservative than either Jewish school in his opinion, restricting the grounds of divorce to adultery only. As in the case of Joseph with Mary, the grounds of divorce were established by Mary's pregnancy, so the only issue was a private or public repudiation (1:18). See comments on 19:3-12.

To treat a wife in this fashion when adultery had not happened was to treat her as adulterous and the male becomes adulterous should he remarry or if his former wife does, he is liable. The point of Jesus' teaching is that it corrects the misuse of Deut. 24:1-4. While Deut. 24 is not invalidated, its contemporary misuse in Judaism is curbed.

a. The law stated, v. 31

Among the Jews of Jesus' day divorce was a simple procedure of placing in the hand of a wife before witnesses a document dissolving the marriage, releasing the male from any claim to be a husband to her.

b. The consequences stated, v. 32

Jesus restricts the grounds of divorce to adultery, placing guilt on a male that dismisses his wife for any lesser cause. In Jewish culture a dismissed wife had no choice but to seek a second marriage because she would have no protection or means of livelihood unless she turned to prostitution. In the case of a remarriage of the innocent party, the guilt in the second marriage, an act of adultery, was that of the former husband. While divorce might happen in a world where promises are not kept, it is not God's ideal at all. The right of remarriage was to protect the innocent and provide for the offended one.

Thoughts:

1. Jesus gives us a clue about how to read the Hebrew Scriptures. They point to Him; He is the meaning of them in that they were shadows that anticipated several things about Him: that He is the grand Deliverer, that He would deliver through suffering, and that he would reign victoriously. To read the Hebrew Scriptures correctly is to ask, "What do they tell me of Jesus?" Relative to this chapter, "How should I conduct my life as a child of the kingdom?" Jesus is the end of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the model of them.
2. To enter Christ's kingdom, righteousness is required, a righteousness that is far more than external conformity to God's law; it requires motives that create actions that reach to the inner depth of our fallen being. Jesus' standards are impossible to meet because they are conformity to his character that is perfection. This tells us that we need a divine substitute, one to take our place, someone to stand in the place of our sin and act as our righteousness. Jesus is our righteousness. Is he yours?
3. The standards for a follower of Christ, proper conduct or kingdom righteousness, are not like the standards of the world. The world accepts moral conformity without any movement of the heart; the world operates by the law of threat. God's standards are only expressed outwardly; in God's family morals begin with right heart attitudes. Do you find solace in outward conformity more than conformity of affections to the will of God? The world punishes actions, not attitudes. This tells me that when it comes to discipleship there must be a lot of repentance daily.
4. God prohibits all degrees of anger calling it murder. It is not uncommon for Christians to entertain animosity toward acquaintances and relatives. Is there someone in your life that has offended you, but you have not forgiven her/him? Do you carry anger, perhaps legitimately so, in your heart? Has someone hurt you and you find it hard to let go of the hurt? The consequences are self-destructive; they can damage family relationships.
5. The most sacred earthly relationship is that of marriage, the consenting of a couple to share their lives exclusively with each other. One of the great scourges in this nation is the dissolution of that bond. For the Christian, marriage cannot be broken except when it has been broken by sexual promiscuity, sexual union the outward sign of commitment to oneness. We must teach our children the sacredness of marriage. While we live in a less than perfect world, we must neither teach nor imbibe the standards of our culture if they stand in antithesis to the Bible.