Matthew 5D

* We ended at v.20, as Jesus told the crowd that if they expected to enter Heaven by following the example of the Pharisees, they’d better think again
  + - We have to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees because we have to equal Jesus’ righteousness
    - We know we can’t enter Heaven by our own merit…we need Jesus to do it for us
* Religious thinking leads us to *feeling* righteous without actually making us righteous
  + - Jesus says if you want to enter the Kingdom, you have to meet God’s standard, not one you invented for yourself
    - And God’s standard is the one Jesus established: perfection, equaling the glory of God
  + But as we’ll learn today, God’s standard is even tougher than living perfectly
    - God’s Law requires that we obey perfectly in heart, mind, soul and strength
    - Our words, thoughts, motives and attitudes must also agree perfectly with God
  + That’s what Jesus means when He says you have to exceed the example of the Pharisees
    - And to help us see this standard clearly, Jesus provides six examples that demonstrate how demanding God’s standard of perfection truly is
    - In other words, when Jesus said your righteous must exceed that of the Pharisees, here’s what He meant

**Matthew 5:21-22**

**21***“You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’*

**22***But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.*

* Jesus opens each of his six examples with the phrase “you have heard it said…”
  + This statement appears in vs.21, 27, 31, 33, 38 and 43
    - That phrase was a customary rabbinical saying that always preceded a reference to the oral law, the Mishnah’s instructions
    - Saying “you have heard” distinguishes the quote from actual written Scripture, which rabbis quoted with the phrase “as it is written…”
    - In this case, Jesus says “as you have heard” because He is quoting not from Scripture, but from the Mishnah, the oral law
  + In these six examples, Jesus chooses some of the most challenging – and even offensive – rules in the Law of God
    - The first of Jesus’ six examples concerns the Mishnah’s teaching on the sixth commandment to not commit
    - The Pharisees taught that a person found guilty by a rabbinical court was liable for murder
  + That’s the oral law Jesus quotes in v.21, and it certainly makes sense to us
    - A Jew who killed another person, but was declared not guilty by a rabbinical court, would not be considered a murderer
    - Our own law today works the same way
    - So naturally, we assume God follows the same standard…or does He?
* This example exposes how following manmade rules like the Mishnah leaves us with a false sense of security
  + When someone gives us a list of what we need to do to get to Heaven, we begin to think, “I got this.”
    - When it comes to entering Heaven, the only standard that matters is the one God established
    - And if our list of rules isn’t the same list God uses, then our list is worthless, no matter how well we follow it
  + Jesus says you have to keep both the letter and the of the Law
    - And the spirit of keeping the sixth commandment goes much deeper than simply not murdering
    - Jesus says meeting the requirements of “thou shall not murder” includes not expressing anger, unrighteously, against another person
    - You cannot even speak a word against a person
    - Even just calling a person a fool is enough to bring you under the condemnation of the sixth commandment
  + That’s God’s standard for righteousness, and it’s much higher than anything the Pharisees imagined in the Mishnah
    - We’re learning that measuring righteousness goes much deeper than just actions
    - It includes considering our attitudes and thoughts
    - Said another way, the measure of our righteousness is found

ourselves

* + Long before you decide to raise your hand to take the life of another person, you’ve harbored animosity against that person in your heart
    - You have likely harbored sinful feelings, entertained sinful thoughts, and spoken hurtful words against that individual too
    - The act of taking the person’s life was just the final link in a long chain of sin that lead up to that violent moment
* Obviously, few of us have taken another person’s life in violation of the sixth commandment
  + If I were to ask you, “Have you ever committed murder?” most of you could confidently answer, “No”
    - Nevertheless, according to Jesus, every single person in this room is guilty of violating that commandment
    - Not because you violated the letter of the law but because you violated the spirit of that law
    - Even though you’ve never taken someone’s life, you are equally guilty for having hated another person or said a word against them
  + Notice at the end of v.22, Jesus says violating the spirit of a law is enough by itself to cast you into fiery hell
    - The standard for entering Heaven is perfection, and insulting a person is a sin
    - One sin is enough to bar you from Heaven, therefore hating is enough to get you thrown into Hell
  + Jesus’ point is, that manmade rules like the Pharisees’ oral law won’t guide you to Heaven…they’re only fooling you
    - You have to do better, much better
    - You have to understand God’s standard for Heaven
    - And that standard is Jesus

Jesus explains with two illustrations

**Matthew 5:23-26**

**23***“So if you are presenting a sacrificeat the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you,*

**24***leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.*

**25***“When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly. Otherwise, your accuser may hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to an officer, and you will be thrown into prison.*

**26***And if that happens, you surely won’t be free again until you have paid the last penny.*

* In His first illustration, Jesus describes a worshipper at the temple preparing to make an offering to God
  + Suddenly, he remembers he has a fellow Jew (“brother”) who has something against him
  + At some point in the past, this worshipper offended his brother, yet has never repaired that relationship
  + In effect, he has broken the sixth commandment
  + He didn’t kill anyone, but his offense to his brother violated the spirit of that law
* Jesus’ point is that the worshipper’s heart knows that hatred for a brother was a sin
  + The Law didn’t say that this man’s offense was a sin, but his own

convicted him

* + And that was enough for that worshipper to realize he had to make amends
  + His actions put him in violation of the spirit of the commandment
* Rather than coming before God bearing this guilt, the worshipper leaves to make things right
* Having set aside his sacrifice to reconcile with his brother, the worshipper can then return and approach God in the temple with a clear conscience
  + Jesus’ point is that we don’t need the Mishnah or any rule book to understand what righteousness requires
    - Our own conscience convicts us of our sin
    - Those who rest on a technicality, like not having killed someone, know full well there’s more to pleasing God
    - To please God, we must acknowledge our sin and do what righteousness requires
* This leads us to Jesus’ second illustration in v.25
  + Jesus describes two people involved in a legal dispute
    - One person is taking the other person to court to settle the matter
    - In the illustration, Jesus puts His audience in the place of the one being sued
    - And it’s clear from His illustration, that you are guilty of the charge made against you
  + Jesus says, knowing that you are guilty of the crime, you should act sensibly in resolving the situation before you get to the court
    - Don’t persist in your denials and don’t perpetuate the dispute
    - Because where will this lead? Ultimately, if you don’t resolve the situation, you will end up in court
    - And in court, the judge will look at the facts and render a decision
    - If you are truly at fault, then you can safely assume the judgment will go against you
  + When the court convicts you, there will be consequences that you can’t escape from
    - Now you’re at the mercy of a merciless judge
    - Only a proud and self-deceived person would persist in going to court knowing they were guilty
* Can you see Jesus’ point in these illustrations?
  + First, true righteousness begins with understanding we are inherently

* + - If we persist in our little game, we’re only deceiving ourselves
    - Our righteousness needs to exceed that of the Pharisees
  + Secondly, given the fact that we know we’re guilty of , and since we will face God for judgment in a day to come, what ought we to do now?
    - If we’re sensible, we would act now to resolve our trouble
    - In Jesus’ illustration, there were two men involved in the dispute
    - One man had offended another, so resolving the dispute involved reconciling with that other man
  + When we’re talking about sin, the One we offend is
    - So we need to reconcile with Him
    - So not only is God our Judge, He is also our opposition
    - We need to make peace with Him, Jesus says, before we give an account to Him
    - If we don’t, Jesus says, we will pay the for our sin
* How do we reconcile with God? How do we make friends with God? The answer is simple…we can’t on our own, but God has made a way available
  + First, the Bible says we must , which means to confess our sin, acknowledging we are guilty of offending God
* And then secondly, seek God’s mercy by accepting His provision of through faith in Jesus Christ
  + - By faith, we receive credit for Jesus’ perfection, and God accepts Jesus’ death on the cross as an acceptable payment for our sin
  + That’s how you reconcile with God, as Paul says

**Romans 5:10** *For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.*

* We aren’t good enough to get into a Heaven that only accepts perfection…not even the Pharisees were good enough
  + That standard of perfection is so demanding, that it even requires perfect thoughts and attitudes…who can meet that standard?
  + Only Jesus…Jesus did what was required for us, because God knew we couldn’t do it on our own
* Let’s look briefly at the second example Jesus gives

**Matthew 5:27-28**

**27***“You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’*

**28***But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

* Again, Jesus quotes from the Mishnah, saying, “you have heard…”
  + This time, Jesus uses the Mishnah’s teaching concerning the seventh commandment not to commit adultery
    - Once again, the Mishnah’s definition of what constitutes a violation falls short
    - The Pharisees said that when a married person engaged in sexual relations with another, they committed adultery
    - Jesus says that this commandment also covers lustful glances
    - Lust is not equal to adultery, but it violates the spirit of that law nonetheless
  + Are you beginning to see the danger of following manmade rules – even rules that are supposedly based on the Bible?
    - Inevitably, we arrange them to give ourselves a false sense of security
    - It’s easy to avoid the act of adultery, so we say that’s enough and feel pretty good about ourselves
    - But God’s standard is much higher, and we can’t measure up
    - And then to add insult to injury, we usually don’t even follow our own rules that well
* Once more, Jesus uses two illustrations to make His point

**Matthew 5:29-30**

**29***So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

**30***And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

* Jesus says it’s better to pluck out our own eye, rather than allow it to lead you into lusting and He says if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, rather than let it lead you into sin
* To understand His illustrations, let’s be clear in what Jesus is NOT saying
  + First, Jesus is not advocating for cutting off body parts, because it does nothing to address the problem Jesus is concerned with
    - That should be obvious, but it’s worth explaining
    - If you pluck out your own eye or cut off certain other body parts, you don’t get an automatic pass into Heaven
    - Nowhere does the Bible teach that self-mutilation is a fast pass into Heaven
  + In fact, the Bible says exactly the opposite
    - Abraham was commanded by God to cut off a part of his body in obedience to God-circumcision
    - Nevertheless, Paul tells us in Romans, that the Lord declared Abraham righteous by his faith that moment
    - So through Abraham’s example, we would know that circumcision was not the means by which Abraham became righteous
  + Secondly, Jesus couldn’t be advocating the removal of body parts as a solution to sin, because it obviously wouldn’t work
    - Even if I remove my eyes, that won’t prevent me from lusting in my heart
    - Sin is committed in the heart (in the spirit), not in the eyes
    - So even without eyes, I still have the capacity to sin, even if I lack the ability to act on that desire
* Jesus’ words were intended to be hyperbolic and ironic, not
  + Jesus was illustrating that we should be willing to make any sacrifice necessary now, if it can keep us out of an eternity in Hell

Paul, wrote of his experience reconciling with God this way:

**Philippians 3:4-9**

**4***though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!*

**5***I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law.*

**6***I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.*

**7***I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.*

**8***Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ*

**9***and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith.*