Matthew 5E

* Let’s return to Jesus’ examples illustrating what true righteousness requires
  + But first, let’s recap…
    - Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is a gigantic resetting of Israel’s understanding of what it takes to enter Heaven, or the Kingdom
    - Entering the Kingdom, Jesus said, requires living a life that was even more righteous than that of the Pharisees
    - It required living according to the spirit of God’s Law, not merely following the Pharisees’ manmade “oral law”
  + In the second half of this chapter, Jesus has been giving us examples of what this higher standard requires
    - Last week, we learned that the spirit behind "D not murder” goes a lot deeper than not taking another person’s life
    - The true intent of that law was to be loving to people!
    - And when God said “Do not commit adultery”, He didn’t just mean don’t fool around on your spouse
    - He meant stay faithful to your wife with your heart, mind, soul and strength…don’t even let your eyes stray!
  + We still have four more examples in this chapter to study, and as we examine them, we’ll continue to see how they refuted the Pharisees’ teaching
  + For the final four examples, we will focus mostly on the heart of each issue, rather than on the Pharisaic concern
    - And I also want us to consider if we’re thinking about these issues like Pharisees too?
    - That is, are we guilty of setting aside the Word of God and ignoring God’s heart on these matters
    - While we pursue our own rules in place of His?

**Matthew 5:31-32**

**31***“You have heard the law that says, ‘A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce.’*

**32***But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.*

* Jesus’ third example compares the Pharisees’ teaching on divorce with God’s view of divorce from the Scriptures
  + Let’s begin by acknowledging divorce is a sensitive and emotionally charged issue
    - Many of our lives have been touched by divorce
    - And it’s always a painful and often embarrassing experience
    - Nevertheless, it’s important we understand the Bible’s perspective on this topic
  + In this chapter, Jesus is using divorce as an example on a larger point…divorce is not His main point, no more than murder or lust was
    - Jesus returns to this topic again, later in this Gospel, in Chapter 19
    - At that time, Jesus will go into much greater detail on the subject
* Tonight, we’ll focus on understanding Jesus’ point in this example
  + Jesus quotes from the Mishnah (“You have heard the law that says” not “as it is written”) where it paraphrases Deuteronomy 24
    - In that law, Moses commanded that a man who divorces his wife must send her away with a certificate of divorce
    - But Jesus says, that whoever divorces his wife “makes" her commit adultery
    - To understand how these two statements relate, we need to appreciate the culture of Jesus’ day
  + In the ancient east, women had no legal standing
    - Generally speaking, they couldn’t own land or own a business
    - They couldn’t testify in court or enter into contracts
    - So, a woman had no way to support herself in the culture
    - Additionally, women generally didn’t possess sufficient upper body strength to handle the strenuous effort required to work the land
    - So, a woman in Jesus’ day literally had no way to provide for herself through labor
  + Therefore, women relied on men to survive
    - During the first part of her life, a young girl lived under her father’s roof, depending on his support
    - Later, when she married, she was supported by her husband for the rest of her life
    - If she was widowed, she would move in with a son or brother-in-law
* If that woman’s husband lost interest in her and kicked her out of the house, she faced a desperate situation
  + Not only was her marriage falling apart, but she was at risk of losing her only means of support
    - She would be set out of the house with the clothes on her back and little else
    - There would be no alimony or child support
    - She wasn’t going to get a divorce settlement
    - And generally speaking, she couldn’t return to her father’s house, since she was considered the property of her husband
  + To make matters worse, the woman was still considered married
    - Which meant that no other man could consider giving her shelter either
    - A respectable man would never spend private time in the company of a married woman, especially in his home
    - That man could be accused of adultery which was punishable by death
* Therefore, a woman abandoned by her husband was literally without hope
  + Unfortunately, this happened commonly in ancient life
    - Hard-hearted and cruel men abandoned their wives routinely, simply because they tired of her or wanted someone else
    - They left these poor women destitute and helpless, without a means of support
  + Such a woman was in real danger of starvation or abuse or death by exposure
    - Her best chance for survival was to depend on the mercy of strangers or family members, eking out a meager life as a beggar
    - The story of Ruth and Naomi is an example of such a situation
  + To correct this injustice, God said to Israel, in Deuteronomy 24:1, that if a man is determined to divorce his wife, he must give her a certificate of divorce
    - The husband couldn’t kick his wife out of the house with nothing
    - He had to give her a certificate of divorce
    - With a certificate of divorce, the woman had a reasonable chance of finding another man to take pity on her and marry her
    - Another man could take her as a wife without fear of being charged with adultery
* But reading the Law carefully, it’s clear that God was not approving of the man’s decision to divorce his wife
  + The Lord was simply commanding the man to show some to his victim
    - God did not intend Deuteronomy 24 to become a license to engage in divorce and remarriage
    - It’s similar to the case of another law

**Exodus 22:16**

*“If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to anyone and has sex with her, he must pay the customary bride price and marry her.*

* That Law says, that a man who seduces a woman outside of marriage, must pay a dowry to the family and marry the girl he seduced
  + Scripture is clear that having sex with a woman before you marry her is always a sin…100% of the time…we call it
  + But in Exodus 22, God addresses the aftermath of fornication, because He knew sinful men were going to sin in this way
  + He obligated the man to make amends for his sin by marrying the girl
  + Obviously, Exodus 22:16 doesn’t mean God thinks it’s ok to engage in fornication
* Likewise, just because God made accommodation for divorce, doesn’t mean He

of it

* + The Pharisees had taken Deuteronomy 24 to be just that…a license to divorce
  + They assumed God wouldn’t have made allowance for a certificate of divorce if He didn’t see a need for it at times
* So, they set about to define in the Mishnah the many reasons that justified a divorce
  + Over the years, the Pharisees invented a long list of such reasons
  + None of these reasons were found in Scripture itself, the rabbis simply imagined them
  + The most ridiculous of these rules stated that a husband was justified in divorcing his wife if she burned his soup
  + With rules like that, it’s obvious that these men were simply looking for any reason they could to end marriage
* As silly as these rules seem to us, the Pharisees said they were equal to Scripture because they were part of the “oral law”
  + Ironically, their rules were supposedly intended to limit divorce
  + Yet, because of those rules, it became easier and easier for men in Israel to do the very thing God said he hates
  + And all the while, they assumed God approved of their behavior because the Pharisees said it was OK
* Once again, Jesus sets the record straight
  + In v.32, Jesus says, that despite Deuteronomy 24, and despite the Mishnah, everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit
    - Given the background I gave you earlier, we can understand what Jesus means when He says, a man “makes” his wife commit adultery
    - By ending the marriage, the husband essentially forced his wife to seek shelter under another man’s roof
    - In that sense, the husband made her commit adultery because her only other option was starvation
  + Even more challenging, Jesus says that when that next man marries the divorced woman, he too commits adultery
    - That probably shocked the crowd listening to Jesus
    - Everyone in Jesus’ day assumed this new husband was in the clear because that woman came with that certificate of divorce
    - But Jesus says that certificate didn’t change the situation from God’s point of view
  + That certificate was simply intended to make the best of a bad situation by preserving the of the woman
    - That certificate didn’t actually end the first marriage vows…it just gave the woman a chance for survival
    - Because if the choice is between the woman’s death and adultery, adultery is the better of the two
  + That certificate doesn’t mean that the marriage has ceased – adultery is still adultery
    - The husband’s choice to divorce his wife was a sin, and it led to a chain of sin, by his wife and the next man
    - We could summarize Jesus’ teaching simply by saying, if you want to please God, honor your marriage as a lifelong bond
    - “One wife per , one man is God’s ”
* Now, you probably noticed Jesus mentions an exception in v.32
  + I want to wait until Chapter 19 to discuss this exception in detail
    - For now, simply note that grammatically speaking, Jesus’ exception applies to the second half of that verse
    - We could reword the sentence this way… “everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery except in the case of infidelity”
    - Jesus was simply saying that a husband can’t be guilty of making his wife commit adultery if she beat him to it…if she committed adultery first
  + One last thing:
  + While divorce is a sin, it’s not an unforgivable sin, and it’s not worse than other sins
    - Remember, Jesus said that those who have called a person a fool have broken the sixth commandment against murder
    - And He said that those who have lusted have broken the commandment against adultery
    - So how many of us have hated another person? How many have lusted?
    - Did Jesus die to cover the sin of divorce, or only to cover your sin?
    - Obviously, He died for all of us because we all have sin, no matter what kind
    - And so, we have no basis for judging anyone in the body of Christ concerning their life circumstances or past
    - Our only priority on this topic, or any other, is to encourage everyone to learn what the Word says so we can all do better in the future
* Let’s move to the next example for today, beginning in v.33

**Matthew 5:33-37**

**33***“You have also heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.*

**34***But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, ‘By heaven!’ because heaven is God’s throne.*

**35***And do not say, ‘By the earth!’ because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, ‘By Jerusalem!’ for Jerusalem is the city of the great King.*

**36***Do not even say, ‘By my head!’ for you can’t turn one hair white or black.*

**37***Just say a simple, ‘Yes, I will,’ or ‘No, I won’t.’ Anything beyond this is from the evil one.*

* The next example begins with our tell-tale phrase “you have also heard”, indicating another quote from the Mishnah is coming
  + In this case, Jesus quotes the Mishnah’s command concerning the taking of oaths
    - In the written Word of God, the Lord said in Numbers 30, that we are obligated to keep our vows
    - In Leviticus 27, the Lord warns that failure to keep our vows, even unintentionally, will bring the consequences of the vow
  + In ancient times, written contracts weren’t common, so a verbal agreement was usually the only way business was done
    - Those verbal agreements were solemn, and if a man wasn’t trustworthy, no one would do business with him
    - We have contracts now, but this principle still applies in modern life
* The Pharisees took the spirit of God’s Law regarding oaths and tossed it aside
  + In the oral law, they expanded greatly on what God said concerning oaths
    - They invented an array of ways men could take oaths
    - And they imagined an equal variety of ways that oaths could be broken or excused
  + For example, the Pharisees created an elaborate system for determining whether an oath was truly binding
    - The binding nature of an oath depended upon what the promisor swore by
    - For example, a person swearing by God’s name was always bound to keep his oath because the Pharisees said God was
    - But swearing by heavens and earth was not binding they said, since the heavens and earth were not eternal
    - And if a man swore his oath while facing toward Jerusalem, then the Pharisees said it was binding
    - But if he swore while facing *away* from Jerusalem, it wasn’t
  + The effect of these convoluted rules was deceit and fraud in business dealings
    - It’s the equivalent of the small print in a contract
* Jesus denounces the Mishnah’s stupid rules on oaths
  + In v.34, Jesus says swearing by Heaven is just as binding as swearing by God Himself, because Heaven is the throne of God
    - Likewise, in v.35, Jesus says swearing by earth is equally binding as swearing by God because it’s the footstool of God’s feet
    - And regardless of which way you face, swearing by Jerusalem is always binding because it’s God’s city in the Kingdom
  + Jesus wasn’t validating the Pharisee’s silly categorization of oaths, He was simply exposing how ludicrous their logic was
* In the matter of making vows or oaths, what does righteousness require?
  + Jesus said it begins with understanding our place in God’s economy
    - In v.36, Jesus says you shouldn’t make guarantees about things you can’t

…it’s taking a needless gamble and it’s evil

* + - Someone might swear an oath upon their own head, meaning they put their own life as a ransom, should they fail to keep their oath
    - But Jesus says you can’t even change the color of your own hair, so how can you assure anyone of what you can do in the future?
  + If you can’t control even the least thing on your own body, why place so much at risk over things you have no hope to control?
    - On the contrary, the Lord was trying to steer us away from oaths altogether
  + Jesus says, the spirit of God’s Law was to encourage men to simply state their intentions honestly as “yes” or “no” without need for additional promises
    - If you operate this way, you will have need to make oaths
* In v.38, Jesus moves to the Mishnah’s laws on retribution

**Matthew 5:38-42**

**38***“You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’*

**39***But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.*

**40***If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too.*

**41***If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles.*

**42***Give to those who ask, and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow.*

* Jesus quotes from the Mishnah’s take on Exodus 21:24, where the Lord told Israel that justice should be measured out proportionally
  + The Law uses indirect examples to say let the punishment fit the crime
  + An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth
  + We shouldn’t demand something more valuable than was taken from us
  + An eye is far more valuable than a single tooth, so don’t demand an eye for a tooth
* But of course, you know what the Pharisees did here, right?
  + They took this law hyper-literally, so they could turn it into a license for personal vengeance
  + According to their Mishnah, a Jew could take personal revenge against someone who harmed them, so long as they only took one tooth or one eye, *etc*.
* But the Lord wasn’t advocating taking personal revenge, much less maiming people
* God He was limiting retribution to ensure that punishment didn’t become

* + - The true spirit of that law was to encourage
  + God’s heart is to encourage mercy for those who offend us
    - Jesus says, if you want to follow the spirit of the Law, you’ll show no interest in retribution whatsoever
    - Let them strike you without striking back
    - Respond to their unreasonable requests by surprising them with your generosity
    - When they borrow and don’t return, let them borrow again anyway
    - And when they impose upon you by their unreasonable requests, respond as though you wanted to do it anyway
  + If you’re listening to Jesus’ list and wondering if there are any exceptions, then you’re thinking like a Pharisee
    - Righteousness means looking like and not like ourselves
* The right question to ask is, “How would God respond in these situations? What would Jesus do?”
  + For example, what did Jesus do when they slapped Him on the cheek?
* As you listen to these examples, it’s easy to take the perspective of the injured party…the one offended
  + But have you ever considered that you are the offender? Even more sobering, have you considered you were an offender to God Himself?
    - We are the sinners, the ones who offend God
    - And then one day, we came to Christ seeking His mercy
  + In that moment, you and I were the ones demanding things from God that we had no right to have
    - We were the evil peopke that Jesus didn’t resist when calling upon Him for mercy
    - We were the ones asking Jesus to walk a mile with us, and He surprised us with His generosity
  + When you asked Jesus to forgive you for your sins, Jesus went a long way beyond just forgiving you
    - The Bible says that by our , He adopted us as children of God, making you and me part of the family of God
    - He also has made you a fellow heir in His Kingdom
    - He has promised you a place in His government and a share of His inheritance
    - And He placed His Spirit in you
  + Jesus went the extra mile for us even though we didn’t deserve it
    - So how can we refuse our Lord, when He asked us to be His hands and feet to this lost and dying world?
    - How can we refuse to live according to the spirit of His Law when He has already accomplished all that it requires on our behalf?
* If you’re searching for the big take-away from this chapter, here it is…
  + Heaven is a tall order…taller than you can reach
    - You can’t get there on your own, because you can’t measure up
    - But Jesus could and did
  + So now we live as His disciples. And now we represent Him
    - But you can’t do that effectively if you revert to following rules that were worthless in the first place
    - Stop listening to others’ “do’s” and “don’ts” - even the ones in your own head
  + Get into the Word of God and stay there
    - And as you do, you’ll be amazed by two things
* First, you’ll be continually humbled by how far you are from the standards of righteousness that God requires
  + And then secondly, as you continue to study God’s Word, you’ll be amazed at how much your heart is changing by what you learn
    - You’ll find yourself thinking and acting differently
    - Almost instinctively, you’ll begin living by the spirit of the Word, where before, you couldn’t even follow the letter of the Law
    - And that recognition will serve to increase your love for Christ and your devotion to Him