

**Matthew 5: 19; “Unless Your Righteousness Exceeds”, Sermon # 19 in a series
entitled – “These Sayings of Mine”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on October 24th, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.**

So, I have been taking you slowly through this passage where the Lord Jesus says – “I did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill. And we have seen that Christ has fulfilled the whole Law of God; the moral, the ceremonial, and even the judicial law as it was written in the Decalogue and relates to our obedience to God and men. He fulfilled it all, with a complete and perfect obedience to God, keeping His commandments at every point; every jot and tittle of them. We saw in verse 18 that when it says that one jot or tittle will not pass from the law until all is fulfilled, and until heaven and earth pass away, until all is fulfilled, that the Lord Jesus must therefore be referring to the righteousness of the law being fulfilled in us.

But for God’s law to be fulfilled in us in any way of consistent obedience, we must come to better understand Christ’s statement in verse 20 – “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of heaven.” How should we understand this statement? In order to help your understanding of what our Lord expects of us all, in terms of our own righteousness, I want to give you 2 statements of truth which flow from His words to us here.

1st of all – You do have a righteousness of your own which you need to pay attention to.

The Lord Jesus calls it – your righteousness. Very simply, your righteousness is those things which you do which are right, according to God’s moral law, in order to keep and to obey His commandments, and thus please Him. God expects all men to obey His moral law. We can also say that a part of your doing what is right is your avoiding and shunning those sinful things which God has said that you should not do. In these two things consists your righteousness; positively in keeping God’s commandments, and negatively, in not breaking the least of them. Every man must pay attention to their own righteousness, if they would enter in to the kingdom of heaven.

This entering which Jesus mentions, applies both to entering the kingdom of heaven spiritually in conversion to Christ and ultimately entering into heaven itself, the place where God particularly dwells, in relation to His saints, who have departed this life. You should understand that our God is immense, and He fills all things. God is eternal and therefore His righteousness is unchanging. The requirement for entrance into God’s favorable presence, is righteousness. For whether you will enter the kingdom of heaven someday, relates directly to whether or not you have come to truly know God now, in this life. To be saved from your sins you need a righteousness which is perfect, and to enter heaven, you must have more than an outward obedience, like the scribes and Pharisees had.

Think about the words of Psalm 24, verses 3-6. “Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? “Or who may stand in His holy place?” “He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.” “He shall receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” “This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face.” So in the immediate context, this Psalm was written by David concerning who should enter the holy hill of the Lord to worship the Lord, in Zion, in Jerusalem of old, in His holy hill. Whether it was the priests and the Levites, bearing the ark of the Lord into the tabernacle or temple, or whether it was any of sons of Jacob, the generation of those who wanted to worship God there, they had to have clean hands and a pure heart.

How could they meet God’s holy requirement? It says here that they could not have lifted up their soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully about how they had lived their life before God. They had to have clean hands and a pure heart in king David’s sight, but more importantly, in God’s

sight. The person that had clean hands and a pure heart in regard to bringing the ark up to Jerusalem and establishing their worship, would receive a blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of their salvation for doing the right thing in terms of keeping God's commandments. Now, there is no doubt, that each person participating in this worship in those days of old, had to search themselves to see whether this was true of them, whether they had clean hands in relation to their dealings with men, and whether their heart was pure before God in this matter of their exclusive worship of God. Were they purely devoted to God? Were they clean and pure in their hearts?

Well, I am sure, that in general, their intention to worship the one true and living God was righteous. And the intention of all of those persons involved in the worship of those days, would be to be righteous in all their ways before God and men. No doubt, if they thought about it for a while, they still would have to conclude that their own righteousness, their thoughts, their words, and their actions were not perfect in the sight of God; that their obedience was deficient in some ways, even ways unknown to themselves, perfectly. If they were thinking rightly, I am saying, they would conclude that theirs was not an absolutely perfect righteousness.

Each man would sense and know the plague of his own heart, as Solomon writes about in 1st Kings 8, verse 38, and they would confess this to God and they would be forgiven of their sins. Each man would realize that he fell short of the glory of God in certain particular ways. Indeed, the nation of Israel failed God in many ways, over its generations, since the time when king David became king, and the prophet Isaiah saw it correctly in Isaiah 64: 4, "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, who acts for the one who waits for Him." "You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways." But then he says – "You are indeed angry, for we have sinned – in these ways we continue; and we need to be saved." "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags."

And you will remember that even Uzzah, when they brought the ark up to Jerusalem that first time, went to steady it, and yet he was struck dead by God, because the ark had not been brought up in the way that the Lord had commanded that it be moved. Righteousness is not doing simply what we think might be right, or expedient, in situations of worship and in the practice of keeping God's commandments. But it should always be done in God's way, and with reverence for His Person and trying to learn what pleases Him in regard to our obedience. David did get it right the second time when he brought the ark up to Jerusalem.

But notice here in Psalm 24, that the requirement of perfect righteousness, even though not met perfectly in the priests and people in themselves, in many ways, it would most certainly be met by another. And it was on account of Christ, this Pure and Holy One who was coming, their promised Messiah, that they would receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of their salvation. He is spoken of in verses 7-9 in terms of our receiving Him. "Lift up your heads O you gates!" "And be lifted up, you everlasting doors!" "And the King of glory shall come in." "Who is this King of glory?" "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." "Lift up your heads, O you gates!" "Lift up, you everlasting doors!" "And the King of glory shall come in." "Who is this King of glory?" "The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory."

This is speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ coming to bring salvation and blessing to them then in those days, through faith. And, since the Scripture cannot be broken, it is also speaking to us as well. That is, it is speaking of Christ's coming into our hearts and blessing us in these New Testament, New Covenant days, bringing great spiritual blessings in relation to our receiving Christ's righteousness by faith so that we can keep His commandments! In those Old Covenant days of David, when the temple was built, the ark of the covenant was finally placed there, between the cherubim, and it was meant to be a type and picture of Christ their King ruling over them.

That was an exhortation to all Israel that they would believe in the One true and Living God, and that, in particular, when they would welcome Him, their Messiah, Christ the King of Glory, into their hearts. The picture is of them lifting up the everlasting doors of their hearts, so that He would be brought into the center of all of their worship and service to God, into the holy of holies, of that day. And even so, because the Father would have us to honor the Son, even as we honor Him, the Father, we must consciously bring Christ into the center of our worship as well. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. He is our Righteousness. He ever lives to make intercession for us.

He is therefore to be our focus. We know that in doing this, all the Persons of the Divine Trinity are honored because Christ is the One who has brought us to the Father, and we have fellowship with the Father and the Son, by the Holy Spirit's working, taking the things of Christ, and showing them to us. Our God comes to us, then, as a church gathered, in the preaching of the word, to be worshiped and adored, because our God knows that His Law has been perfectly fulfilled the law by Christ His Son. And over the course of our lives as believers, it is being fulfilled in us.

You will remember that in the giving of the law, concerning the ark, the two tablets of it, were placed in the ark, to show that the law was in Christ's heart, and He having fulfilled it on our behalf, is then to be worshiped and adored, and the Triune God magnified worshiped and adored for all that He has done for us in accomplishing our redemption and our salvation. We lift up the gates of our hearts so that the King of glory may come in. We lift up the everlasting doors of our minds, so that that the King of glory might be present in our worship and pleased with our service of worship; our thoughts, our prayers, and our songs of adoration and praise, expressing our love, and our hopes to become more like Christ and be able to glorify God while we live.

And Christ who has come into our hearts to dwell there forever by His Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of hosts, since He has fulfilled God's Law perfectly, He knows that it is by His grace, that we can keep God's commandments, and learn to keep them better over time. And it is His righteousness which is imputed to us when we believe in Him. And He covers us with that beautiful spiritual garment, the robe of His perfect righteousness, so that all of our acts of righteousness are covered by His righteousness. And all of our doing and keeping of God's commandments, is acceptable to God because of Him. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes, because He suffered and died for our sins, and so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him.

You will recall that that this verse that I just mentioned to you, from Romans chapter 10, is set in the context of the apostle Paul's heart desire for his countrymen, Israel according to the flesh, that they might be saved. He says there that he bore witness to them that they had a zeal for God, but it was not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, had not submitted to the righteousness of God, as it is found in Christ! For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. He is the end of the law for righteousness because He fulfilled it completely, when God knows that we can't.

So he goes on to say there, that if you confess with Your mouth, the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame. Each of us needs to take care that we be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness which is according to the law, but the righteousness which is through faith in Christ. If you take care to see that your works are established in God, that is doing them from the foundation of His perfect righteousness, they will most certainly be established. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He

shall bring it to pass. The righteous desires of your heart will be established, and He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday sun. (Psalm 37: 6)

2nd – Your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees in order for you to go to enter the kingdom of heaven and to go to heaven.

The wording here is a most important thing, because the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day were thought of by many people, as being the most righteous of men. Indeed they thought of themselves this way. They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, but they despised others who they thought were not righteous. The scribes were the more learned part of the people. They were employed in writing out and expounding the law. And the Pharisees, they thought of themselves as experts in the Law. They had often read the Law and they discussed it among themselves, and they came to their own conclusions about how the commandments should be kept. But in doing so, they added their own traditions to God's holy law, as being of equal authority with the Scriptures themselves.

Jesus said in Matthew 15: 3, they would transgress the commandment of God because of their tradition. For God commanded, saying – Honor your father and your mother; and He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death. But they would say that whoever says to his father or mother, whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God – then he didn't need to honor his father or mother. Jesus said – Thus have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. And He called them hypocrites. They were hypocrites because they would draw near to God with their mouth, and honor Him with their lips, but their heart was far from Him. And in vain they worshipped Him teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

You see, the scribes and Pharisees believed that they knew what the Scriptures were saying, but still, many of them only kept God's commandments in an outward way of righteousness. In many cases, they did not have a love for God or other people, but they were only interested in the outward show of religion so that they might be looked up to, and be seen as very righteous men. Their love of outward righteousness did not have a corresponding love of inward heart righteousness and holiness, and so in many cases they were hypocrites. And Jesus toward the end of His earthly ministry told them this plainly. In Matthew chapter 23, He rebuked them very severely for this. In verse 1 of chapter 23, He said to the multitudes and to His disciples – “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.”

That is, they were the teachers of the Mosaic law to the people, claiming to be expert in it. Jesus said – “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.” “For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of the fingers.” “But all of their works they do to be seen by men.” In verse 13 Jesus said to them – “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” “For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.” Ah, this was the problem, was it not? Shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men. What does that mean? It meant that they were wickedly rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ and their need of salvation by Him, of their obtaining by faith in Him, a righteousness better than their own.

And so he told them in Matthew 23: 25 – “Hypocrites!” “For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of extortion and self-indulgence.” “Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.” The Pharisees took great pains in outward ceremonial righteousness, but really no concern with inward cleanness and purity of heart. What they really needed, only the Lord Jesus could give them. But they were rejecting Him, and all the while, He was fulfilling the Law in front of their eyes. He was always going about, doing what was good. He lived before them in perfect righteousness in word and in deed. God the Father was certainly well pleased with Him and said

so publicly at His baptism, and yet the scribes and Pharisees thought that He deceiving the people. It is John's gospel which shows us this the most clearly.

In John chapter 7, verse 1, it says – “After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. When it says “the Jews” it means the scribes and Pharisees and rulers of the people, along with many others of the Jews supporting them in their false opinions of Jesus. In verse 10 of that same chapter it says – But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.” “Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, ‘Where is He?’” “And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him.” “Some said, ‘He is good’; others said, ‘No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.’” “However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.

In other words, the view of the majority of the spiritual leaders in Israel, was that Jesus, the only perfect Man who has existed in the history of the world, was a deceiver. The reason that these Jews thought this way was because they were trusting in their own righteousness, that it was sufficient to save them from their sins, and they falsely assumed that they knew God, when they did not, because they were placing confidence in their own fleshly understanding of what righteousness was. You will remember that the apostle Paul in the book of Philippians chapter 3, verse 5, said that if anyone might have confidence in the flesh, he more so: he was circumcised on the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, he was a Pharisee; concerning zeal he persecuted the church. Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, he was blameless.

In what sense could Paul possibly believe that he was blameless when he was persecuting Christians? It was because he was trusting in his own righteousness and trying to establish it in the sight of God. We should understand that many people by nature do this, and they live this way. But Paul was very deceived when he thought that he had to do many things contrary to the name of the Jesus of Nazareth. But Jesus says here, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Paul very much needed the righteousness of Christ to enter the kingdom of heaven. He received it by the Lord's confronting him on the road to Damascus and revealing to him that He was the Lord of glory. The perfections and glory of Christ show us our own sinfulness, but they should not drive us away from Him. Instead you should come to Him and you shall find rest for your soul.

If you think that your own righteousness will suffice, please consider that God's law requires absolute perfection in thought, word, and deed, and that continuously, at all times. It requires that you love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your mind, and your neighbor as yourself perfectly. On these two commandments, hang all of the Law and the Prophets, Jesus says. Consider that the apostle James says in James chapter 2, verse 8 – “If you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and convicted by the law as transgressors.’” “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”

But only the pure and perfect and holy Lord Jesus fulfilled all of these commands of God perfectly. This is why James says in chapter 1, verse 25, that if you have believed in Jesus Christ, you come into the experience of keeping the perfect law of liberty. The perfect law of liberty is your learning to keep the commandments of God because you are no longer under law but under grace. When you believe in Christ, you are no longer married in the law. You are spiritually married to Christ, and you have been made to die to the law so that you might bear fruit to God, even though you are not absolutely perfect like Christ yet. God sees you as perfectly righteous, in Christ, when you believe in Him. And He will over time, in your sanctification, be made over to be more and more like Christ.

You will never be condemned because you are in Christ. You are seen by God as righteous for His sake. He has written His law on your heart for Christ's sake. You now look into this perfect law of liberty, and you see that since Christ fulfilled it, that you have the freedom to go about to do and keep it yourself. If you continue in it, and you are not a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer of the work, that is, of keeping His commandments, you will be blessed in what you do. Your righteousness will not just be outward like the scribes and Pharisees, but inward, because of the grace of Christ. I will speak to you more about Christ's righteousness in relation to your own righteousness in my next message.