

Carrying His Values
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Matthew 5:17-22,43-45

These days there is much talk of the problem of gun violence and a debate about gun laws. What's the real issue with violence and murder? What would Jesus do? What CAN Jesus do?

- We're back in chapter five of Matthew picking back up where we left off a couple of weeks ago when Jesus commanded us to be "salt and light."
- This morning is "Sanctity of Life" Sunday. This text certainly addresses the value that Jesus places on human life and what He expects of us.
- Before we look at that portion of chapter five, let's "set the table" with the big picture of how Jesus was calling on His followers to live.
- **Okay, Bible scholars, finish this sentence: "The Christian life is not just hard, it's _____."** Let's look at two verses in this chapter.

Matthew 5:20 (ESV) Jesus said...

²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

- This would have been a shocking statement to all the Jews, and especially shocking to the "scribes and Pharisees." Basically Jesus was saying it's not good enough to be as good as the most religious people around.
- To be Jesus' followers you must be MORE righteous than that!
- Now jump to 5:48, where Jesus really gives us an IMPOSSIBLE standard for living:

Matthew 5:48 (ESV)

⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- Jesus' concept wasn't really new. In Leviticus 19:1–2 (ESV) we read:

19 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

- The truth is, a holy God can't lower His standards to accommodate sinful people. If He did He would no longer be holy. **Before Jesus came, how did the super religious people (think “legalists”) try to meet God's standard of holiness? What's the difference between the terms “spirit of the law” and “letter of the law?”**
- Pharisees: “If I just follow the rules I can please God and be righteous.”
- As Dr. Phil would say, “How's that working for you?”

Big Idea: In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus didn't just call His followers to a “higher” standard; He called us to an IMPOSSIBLE standard. Yet, He Himself came to provide the solution that makes living this way possible.

- Let's look at the first portion of our text to see what it says; what it means; and how it should change us this week.

Matthew 5:17–22 (ESV)

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

- Jesus knew what they were thinking. He knew what the Pharisees were whispering. So He addressed it “head on.” He didn't come to abolish “the law or the Prophets.” **What do you think Jesus meant by that term “law and the prophets?” What had the religious leaders of that day done to the “law?”**

- The scribes and Pharisees had expanded on God's revealed law with over 600 additional rules and regulations to keep. In a sense, He DID come to abolish the religious leaders' version of the "Law and the Prophets."
- When Jesus used "law and the prophets" He was probably referring to all of the Old Testament scriptures. He said, "I didn't come to abolish...to tear up...the Old Testament, I came to "fulfill" it.
- That literally means to "fill it to the brim," to "complete" the Old Testament. Jesus was taking people back to the original INTENT of God's law.
- In verse eighteen Jesus gave a short seminar on the inerrancy of scripture. Until "heaven and earth pass away" not even the smallest punctuation of God's word will pass away. God's word is always valid.
- Then He gave a warning in verse nineteen: Whoever "breaks," or "annuls," or "relaxes" the least of these laws will be least in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Relaxing a law sounds like bending the rules or looking for loopholes.
- Notice that those He referenced are "in the Kingdom." Some are just "least" and some are "great." Your salvation, your "standing" with God isn't determined by how well you keep the law. But the depth of your relationship with Him is enhanced when you keep the SPIRIT of the law and not just the LETTER of the law.
- Obedience doesn't save you but it sure confirms that you ARE saved!
- As one commentator put it: "God honors people who submit to His rule and obey Him out of willing allegiance."¹
- Now Jesus shifted to this IMPOSSIBLE standard for His followers.
- What if our thoughts immediately came true? Have you seen the TV commercial where the genie shows up and the guy wishes for a million bucks, then realizes there are hundreds of male deer in his front yard?
- What if our thoughts immediately came true? Someone makes you so mad you could strangle them and boom they're dead!
- Jesus was teaching that it's not enough to keep the law, it's about what's in your heart. Then he gives examples: murder;

adultery; divorce; using oaths; retaliation; loving people. In each example He says it's not enough to keep the "letter" of the law. It's about the INTENTIONS of your heart. Let's look at the first one.

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

- Verse twenty-one is straight out of the Ten Commandments: don't murder. **Was all killing considered murder? Examples?**
- Murder means the pre-meditated taking of an INNOCENT life.
- Verse twenty-two: Jesus said being angry enough to kill someone would result in judgment.
- Scripture doesn't teach that anger is a sin. It teaches us to be angry WITHOUT sinning (Eph. 4:26.) **So, why is this kind of "murderous" anger so bad?**
- **Who has the only legitimate right to decide who gets to live or die?**
- **If someone offends me or gets in my way so much that I want to take them out of this world; what position have I just elevated myself to?**
- I wish we had time to unpack the meaning of the words "insults" and "fool."
- In the context of valuing life, I found the word for "insults" interesting.
- In the NKJV it's saying "raca." That's an Aramaic word of insult. It's translation is *empty* (an expression of contempt):—good-for-nothing.²
- My point: When someone finds an unborn child to be so inconvenient that they just want it gone, they've said that life is "good-for-nothing."
- When the pro-choice people contend, "it's just tissue...not a life." They're saying "raca," good-for-nothing. Not worth having around.
- We just concluded that anyone who feels they have the right to take an innocent life has elected himself or herself God.

- That's what abortion (or euthanasia for that matter) is. Playing God.
- Let me pause to acknowledge that some people live every day with the guilt of an abortion. I don't want to be insensitive to that. God is a God of forgiveness and grace no matter what the sin is. He will provide comfort to anyone who may be dealing with that issue.
- If having murderous anger is wrong, how SHOULD we treat people?

Matthew 5:43–45 (ESV)

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

- Now this is really IMPOSSIBLE! Jesus wants us to love our enemies. No matter how mean they are to you, pray for them and love them.
- Incidentally, he didn't say hang out with them, but love them.
- **Here's the big question: How can sinful people even come close to living this way?**
- The only way to avoid sin is to change the heart. The only ONE who can change the heart is Jesus.

So, What's The Takeaway?

Warren Wiersbe writes:

“Jesus did not destroy the Law by fighting it; He destroyed it by *fulfilling* it! Perhaps an illustration will make this clear. If I have an acorn, I can destroy it in one of two ways. I can put it on a rock and smash it to bits with a hammer. Or, I can plant it in the ground and let it *fulfill itself* by becoming an oak tree.”³

- Jesus didn't just call His followers to a “higher” standard; He called us to an IMPOSSIBLE standard. Yet, He Himself came to provide the solution that makes living this way possible.
- No human in this life will achieve this standard completely. But because Jesus died for our sins, if we accept His free gift of

grace, His Spirit living in us can cause us to live MORE LIKE JESUS than we can imagine.

- It's an impossible standard. But remember, with Jesus nothing is impossible.
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¹ Explore the Bible Adult Leader Commentary - Session 7

² Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 22). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.