

Follow Jesus – Authentic Righteousness Part 2

2/18/18 - Pastor Randy

The sermon on the mount consists of teaching Jesus presented to His disciples about the way his followers are called to live. Jesus sermon is set against the background of Jesus announcement that the kingdom of God has arrived on earth because Jesus has come (Matt. 4:17, 23). There are numerous references in the sermon on the mount to God's kingdom. But the kingdom has not arrived in its fullness. Jesus speaks of the kingdom as both present and future. Some refer to this initial phase of the coming of the kingdom as the kingdom of God "breaking into" this world; a world that has fallen under the power of Satan.

God has come to begin his work of conquering sin, evil, and death; His doing away with all material and spiritual corruption through the person of His Son, Jesus. The way Jesus began to accomplish this victory was by living a life of authentic righteousness, teaching about authentic righteousness, confronting sin, healing the sick, caring for the poor, and delivering the demonically oppressed and possessed. Ultimately Jesus victory over sin and death would take place at the cross, but his three years of ministry prior to His crucifixion was full of demonstrations and instructions about the life we have to look forward to in God's future eternal kingdom. In God's kingdom there is shalom. Shalom is a Hebrew word often translated peace, but our English word peace is insufficient. When there is shalom everything is the way it ought to be; when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Full shalom will not arrive until the return of Jesus when we experience the new heavens and new earth, as Jesus puts an end to sin, Satan, sickness, suffering and death once and for all. BUT now, with His first coming, shalom is breaking into a broken world. Jesus, the perfectly righteous one, has come to achieve a victory over sin and Satan that will result in the creation of the church, a redeemed people of God, indwelt and empowered by His Spirit who will begin to transform them into His image so that they will reflect His righteousness. As this happens they will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Kingdom of God = God's will is done = God's people live lives of authentic righteousness.

Last week we began to look at Jesus' teaching on a series of subjects related to God's moral vision for His people. Jesus introduced his moral and ethical

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teaching by saying,

“But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!”

A righteousness that “is better than” or “surpasses” that of the religious leaders is a righteousness that does not concern itself with merely obeying the letter of the law. Jesus purpose was to demonstrate that one can keep the letter of the law and still not reflect the righteous character and conduct fitting for a follower of Christ and citizen of God’s kingdom. Jesus is contrasting authentic righteousness -the kind that was produced in the heart of a person by the Spirit – from superficial self-righteousness that manifested itself in external behavior only.

Last week we looked at Jesus teaching comparing hatred and verbal abuse with murder. They are related as the root is to the fruit; as the seed is to the plant. Today we are going to pick up where we left off. In vs. 27-30 we read,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”

The follower of Christ and citizen in God’s kingdom is expected to not merely refrain from the physical act of adultery, but from the desire to commit adultery evidenced by the intentional look of lust. The key to this “looking” is the intentionality. Jesus is not equating righteousness with a freedom from the very experience of sexual attraction. This intentional looking is the seed of adultery. Lust and adultery are not the same in all respects, but in one respect; lust is the seed and adultery is the weed. The seed is closely related to the weed. The weed grows from the seed. Sexual lust is so powerful that once it is aroused, it is hard to stop. The seed will blossom...eventually!

So here is Jesus solution: If you are tempted to touch a woman who is not

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your wife inappropriately, cut your hand off! If you can't keep your eyes from looking at women in a way that stimulates inappropriate desire for them, pluck your eye out! Well, no! Thankfully Jesus wasn't actually suggesting literal dismemberment. As I mentioned last week, Jesus engages in hyperbole in his sermon. His words were not intended to give specific instructions as to how to avoid lust, but rather to drive home the seriousness of the issue. Sometimes severe actions are called for to help us avoid this trap. A man might have to leave his job if he find himself vulnerable to a particular woman. He might need to cut the cable. He might need to invest in a tool like "Covenant Eyes"; a program that tracks the internet sites visited by the user and sends them to an accountability partner.

You may have never murdered anyone, but if hatred in your heart caused you to wish someone were dead your, then you are no more righteous than the murderer. You may have never committed the act of adultery. However, if you wanted to, but the opportunity never presented itself, then you are no more righteous than the adulterer.

The passions of lust and hatred have something in common. Both distort our perception of people; depersonalizing and dehumanizing them, turning them into objects rather than sacred persons created in the image of God.

Once females have been objectified and depersonalized they are then turned into commodities for personal consumption. Once people have been objectified they will soon be exploited. Objects don't have feelings or rights. This is what gives birth to and feeds the sex trafficking, pornography, and prostitution. Here is where our society is currently: We have normalized and even celebrated the notion that a female's body ought to serve the purpose of providing sexual entertainment for men. This used to be relegated to a corner of society. It used to be confined to the so-called "red light districts". Today it is a mainstream part of our culture. The culture has tried to sanitize it and make it respectable, only to have the whole experiment blow up in our face. Unless and until there is a radical transformation in our culture's attitudes and beliefs about sexuality, we will continue to be the #metoo culture. Without a radical re-embracing of Jesus' sexual ethic; that the purpose of sexual pleasure is to enhance the life-long covenant love between

a man and woman (i.e. MARRIAGE) the problems are not going away. You can emblazon #timesup on a million billboards, but until we decide – especially men - that the purpose of a woman's body is not for the entertainment of the public, we should not be surprised when men treat women as sexual playthings. What we should expect is for a man to treat women according to the way he has learned to view women.

Sexual temptation does not go away with marriage. Married couples need to recognize that they are vulnerable to these temptations. The NT authors create no expectation that we will be free from the experience of temptation. They continually call us to resist and flee from it. There is no reason to urge people to resist something they don't desire.

Spiritual maturity does diminish the incidence and intensity of temptation. Here are two ways the Spirit helps us.

1. The person who is walking in the Spirit will view members of the opposite sex through Jesus eyes, as persons worthy of respect and genuine love.
2. The person who is walking by the Spirit will recognize that the value of chastity outside marriage and fidelity within marriage is of greater value than the pleasure of yielding to lust. As a result, the renewed values of the spiritually mature person are motivated to decisions to avoid exposing himself or herself to situations and activities that are bound to stimulate those temptations. What we read or watch can make us more or less vulnerable to the sin of lust.

We often miss the radical nature of Jesus' teaching here because our issues with male dominance and privilege are as severe as in Jesus day. The culture of Jesus day made women responsible for male lust and promiscuity (See John 8:1-11). Jesus, in a manner that would have certainly rattled some cages, places the responsibility primarily on the shoulders of the man.

It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Next Jesus takes up the issue of divorce. The Mosaic law permitted divorce

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but required that the man give his wife a certificate of divorce. Jesus says, “If you send your wife away for a reason other than infidelity on her part, you are just like an adulterer even if you give her a certificate. Under the Mosaic law, the whole purpose of the certificate of divorce was to grant the woman documentation that would allow her to be remarried. Without the certificate she had no remarriage prospects and in ancient economies a divorced, unmarried woman was going to have a difficult time providing for her needs legitimately. When Jesus said that “makes her commit adultery”, He was saying in essence, “You have put her in the position where she is not able to be faithful”. By sending her away, you are forcing her to be with another man when she never violated her covenant with her first husband.

They justified divorcing their wives by giving them a certificate of divorce, therefore keeping within the letter of the law, but the reality is the divorce was an act of infidelity whereby they were breaking their covenant without.

Here is the bottom line. Jesus is saying that authentic righteousness means sticking to your vows. Authentic righteousness is evidenced by an attempt to do everything within your power to preserve the covenant. The Pseudo-righteous look for loopholes so they can fulfill the letter of the law without having to really be faithful to their spouse. In Matt. 19 we find similar but more detailed teaching on this issue by Jesus in response to the question from a religious leader and expert in the Mosaic law. In that instance Jesus referenced God’s intention for marriage to be an indissoluble union between one man and woman. Don’t you tear apart what God has put together! Jesus did make an exception in the case of infidelity, recognizing the reality that a husband or wife cannot prevent their spouse from breaking the covenant.

Lust and divorce are both expressions of infidelity to the covenant. They are both examples of a failure to be faithful to God who calls us to love our spouses in a manner that reflects the covenant keeping love between Christ and His church. If you wish you could be with another woman you are just like an adulterer. If you found a legal justification to leave your spouse so you could be with another woman, you are just like an adulterer.

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely,

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but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."

The issue at hand here is integrity and honesty. Jesus was not quoting a specific law but summarizing a number of statements in the Mosaic law about the necessity of keeping a vow or oath that one has made. The religious leaders had developed a whole system of oaths that were binding to various degrees. Craig Keener in his commentary on Matthew writes, *"The further removed the oath was from the actual name of God, the less danger they faced for violating it...Thus people swore by heaven and earth...Jerusalem...ones head...God's throne...Jesus teaches that all oaths invoke God's witness equally.*

This practice is not foreign to our culture. It is the same as when a child says to mom or dad, "I swear to God, I really did do my homework. Someone must have stole it". I was wondering where did the pinky swear come from? I read that in Japan, the pinky swear originally indicated that the person who breaks the promise must cut off their pinky finger. In ancient times the oath called on a deity to witness that what you were saying is true or hold you to your promise. If you lied or failed to keep your promise you would be liable to being cursed by the deity.

Bottom Line: Jesus is saying that while the law required you to keep your vows and to not swear falsely, His followers, His kingdom people who are motivated by righteousness don't need to swear or take an oath. Again, Jesus is not creating a law against oath taking but speaking to the fact that if you are a person of your word you don't need to swear to God that what you are saying is true. The honest person's "yes" will be trusted as meaning "yes".

Swearing to God is a tacit admission that your word cannot normally be trusted. It is like saying, "Because I am swearing to God, this time you can really believe me!"

Our takeaways for today:

1. Let's not settle for just being people that refrain from the physical act of

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adultery and other non marital sexual activity. Let's pursue lives of authentic sexual purity by keeping our eyes and ears and minds away from images and messages that depersonalize people turning them into objects. Men, let's fill our minds with truth that reminds us that every woman that is not our wife is our sister or daughter in the Lord – or potential sister or daughter in the Lord. Ladies, Ask God to help you view men that are not your husbands, as your brothers and your sons in the Lord.

2. Married people. Stop looking for and asking when and how it might be acceptable to the Lord for you to leave your spouse and start asking God how you can enhance the covenant with the person God has joined you to.

3. By committing ourselves to living with integrity we affirm and honor our Savior Jesus whom John described in Revelation 19 as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, *the One called Faithful and True, who will judge the world in righteousness*. Because we are in Christ, the ultimate faithful and true One, we can live as His faithful and true ones.

4. Bring your failures to Jesus so you can receive forgiveness, grace to change, and be reminded that your right standing with God is not based on your ability to be perfectly righteous but on Jesus perfect righteousness applied to those who have been united with Christ by faith.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ABOUT THE NT MEANING OF "RIGHTEOUSNESS".

The sermon on the mount is about righteousness. In the NT, the term righteousness is used in two ways. At times the word refers to the believers' position or status and other times it refers to the believers' character and conduct.

1. Positional Righteousness – A right standing, or right relationship with God. It results from our union with Christ through faith in His atoning work on the cross. While we are not perfectly righteous in our attitudes, affections and actions, we are counted righteous because of our relationship with Christ.

2. Personal, Practical Righteousness – Righteous attitudes, affections, and actions. Through the power and influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Christians experience a transformation of their attitudes, affections, and actions in a direction consistent with the attitudes, affections, and actions of Christ.

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Jesus saved us to place us in a right relationship with God SO THAT we will begin to relate rightly to God, to others, and to ourselves.

Jesus came to earth, assumed a human nature, and as a man lived a perfectly righteous, perfectly sinless, life of perfect obedience to God the Father. His life of perfect righteousness culminated in His supreme act of righteousness; His willingness to lay down His life for us in obedience to the Father. In His death, the sinless One suffered, in our place, the just penalty for our sins. (Isaiah 53:4,5 NLT; 1 Peter 3:18)

Jesus perfect righteousness, demonstrated while He was alive and ultimately as He gave up His life, reversed the curse of Adam's sin which had left all of us not only guilty before God, but enslaved to the power of sin (Romans 5:12-21; Romans 6:5-11; 22-23).

Salvation from the penalty and the power of sin comes from Jesus alone, the One who bore the penalty and broke the power of sin. It is now through faith in the person and work of Jesus that we become "united with Christ"; reconciled to the Father as His sons and daughters; recreated by the Holy Spirit with our Father's "DNA" and empowered to do the Father's work; assured of the promise of an eternal inheritance from our Father. (Romans 5:10,11; Romans 8:1-17; Galatians 3:23-29; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Titus 3:4-7)