

Jesus law and kingdom - oaths, retaliation and enemies

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Date: 13 May 2018

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[0:00] Okay, so, picking up from last week, Steve spoke on Jesus coming to fulfill the law. We looked at verses 17 in chapter 5, verses 17 through to 32, at the fulfillment of the murder, adultery and divorce. And Steve asked the questions, does Jesus undermine the law of Moses or fulfill it? Is pharisaic righteousness, if it's not the answer, then what is? And does it mean that the kingdom has no citizens? And we saw that Jesus did fulfill the law, that God judges the heart, and it's a changed heart that's required, and that the changed heart is evidence that God has brought us into the kingdom. And on our own, we can't be citizens of the kingdom, but by grace, we can. So, God has made a way for this to happen, and we need this changed heart. So, I'm picking up now from verse 33, which carries on from there.

And we have three sections, one regarding oaths, a section which is headed an eye for an eye, and then love your enemies. So, from verse 33, we'll look at these three other areas where Jesus corrects the disciples' understanding of the law. And he teaches them that the requirement is to be perfect as their father is perfect. So, verse 48, at the end of chapter 5, he says, be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect. And this is quite a big thing to say.

I mean, we probably all feel some amount of conviction when we read this. And the point is made clear from this chapter that our heart needs to be changed, not just our actions. And I'm sure that we all still feel that our hearts need some changing, even if we've been a Christian a long time, and been following Jesus for a long time, we still feel that there are many things in our hearts that we would like to change. And I think the challenge here that Jesus presents in chapter 5 is very similar to the challenge presented to the rich young ruler. So, I just wanted to read that passage. It's in Matthew 19, from verse 16. So, page 986, Matthew 19. And then from verse 16, it says, Now a man came to Jesus and asked, Teacher, what good things must I do to get eternal life?

Why do you ask me about what is good? Jesus replied, There is only one who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments. Which ones, the man inquired. Jesus replied, Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother, and love your neighbour as yourself. All these I have kept, the young man said. What do I still lack? Jesus answered, If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me. When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. So, we'll leave it there. So, this man had kept the law. He'd done everything that the law required, and he wanted to get assurance that he was going to be part of the kingdom. And to his sadness, Jesus tells him that it isn't enough just to keep the law, that he has to give up everything and follow Jesus.

Jesus. And this is what Jesus is saying here as well, that we need a changed heart. We need to follow the example of Jesus. And we need to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. So, what I want to say tonight, really, is that we shouldn't be like the rich young ruler. We need to listen to Jesus. We need to follow Jesus. So, my first point this evening is, what does it mean to be perfect? So, when he says here, be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect, what does that actually mean? So, I want to start by just looking at what the Greek word means. And it's the Greek word teleos. It's the same word that is used in the parable of the rich young ruler. And it means consummated goal or completed by going through a necessary process or fully matured. So, it's kind of similar to the idea of if you grow a plant, so if you're growing one of Martin's tomato plants

and you treat it right and you do all the right things and give it the right water and light and you should get your fully grown, fully matured, proper tomato plant at the end of it. I've failed to do this in the past, but I believe it's possible. So, this is kind of the idea, the idea of being fully matured into being what you're supposed to be. And the examples of the word used, so, as I said in Matthew 19, the rich young ruler, when Jesus says that he needs to be perfect, this is the same thing that he's saying that by selling his possessions and following Jesus, this is the changed heart, the perfecting of him, the full change that's required to be part of the kingdom. And another example is in 1 Corinthians 2.6, which I'll just turn to and read. And this is Paul talking to the church.

[6:00] Chapter 2.6, he says, we do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are coming to nothing. So, here, when he says that he speaks a message of wisdom among the mature, this, again, is the same word that is used. This is the *teleos*, which is perfect. So, he's describing here these people in the church in Corinth that they have, they have become mature, full grown, this is what they're supposed to be. And he speaks the word wisdom to them.

So, here we have, in the next phrase in this verse, verse 48 again, it says, be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.

So, Jesus teaches the disciples how to be perfect in this chapter, and then says that this is what the father is like. So, some of these areas that we've looked at, so God doesn't lie.

When it says an eye for an eye, talking about retaliation, God does not retaliate in the way that the human sinful heart does. And God does love his enemies. And it says in Romans 5.10, for if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?

So, while we were still enemies, this is God loving his enemies. And I also wanted to point out, it refers to the heavenly father as your heavenly father.

[7:53] So, this is Jesus talking to his disciples and saying, this is your heavenly father. So, there's a relationship. It doesn't say that you must be perfect for God in heaven to become your heavenly father.

And I think that's very important, that by having this relationship, by the grace of God coming to us and saving us and giving us that changed heart, we're then enabled, through the power of the spirit, to become this full-grown, matured, perfected person.

And it doesn't mean that we will be out without sin, because we know that we will always have to fight sin in our lives until we reach heaven.

But I think the sense of this is that there is an overcoming and a sincerity in our hearts and a real love for God in this perfecting.

And this is what Jesus is teaching here in chapter 5. So, I think it's just worth saying, the ideal way of things is that fathers would teach their children and they teach them from when they're born.

[9:13] And over time, they become more obedient, hopefully, as they get older, until they're full-grown and then their fathers don't need to teach them anymore, because they have matured. Fathers don't abandon their children because their children fail.

That shouldn't happen. And fathers don't only take on the responsibility of a father after their children have matured. And so, it's not the case that a child has to grow up, become fully matured, to then win the approval of or to attain the father that they always needed.

The father relationship is there from the beginning and it's something that they have which helps them to mature. So, this is the picture that God has given us here. And it's a very comforting and amazing picture, I think, that God shows himself to us as a father and that we can put our faith and our trust in that relationship we have.

So, we look at verse 48. It says we must be perfect and we must come to Jesus through the poverty of the Beatitudes. So, taking this in the context of the whole of the Sermon on the Mount, we read in chapter 5 that at the very start in verse 3, it says, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. So, we need to come to God beginning in this place. We must trust God as our father and not as a taskmaster or a cold ruler who we need to appease or win his approval.

[11:04] And we must be given a new heart. And it has to be given to us. It's not something we can do ourselves. So, we shouldn't be like the rich young ruler who saw the perfection required and went away sorrowful.

We should come to Jesus with humility, come with empty hands and be looking to the goodness and the grace that he shows. So, point number one, we've looked at what being perfect is in the context of this sermon here.

And point number two, how does Jesus apply this? So, following on from last week, Steve looked at anger, lust, and divorce, as we see earlier in the chapter.

And from where I picked up in 33, we have three more areas on oaths, on retaliation, and on loving your enemies.

So, I think when Jesus addressed this issue of oaths, there was a particular culture of people making oaths. Now, I don't know of anyone who's really made an oath.

[12:13] I know when I was growing up that some of the kids I used to play with would always swear on their mom's life. If they wanted to make a point or try and get people to believe what they were saying, that was because of their unreliability, that you couldn't take their word for anything.

And I think that's really the point. It's to do with integrity. So, there's nothing fundamentally wrong with making an oath, but it says in Numbers 30, verse 2, which I think this is where Jesus quotes from, he says, And so, making oaths was part of the Jewish culture, but it had become almost a caricature.

People were making oaths and not keeping them. And Jesus is saying that we need to have integrity. God is aware of everything that we say. And we don't need an oath to make it more or less true.

And so, it's not so much that we should avoid oaths altogether, but that we should tell the truth. So, people don't need to ask us to swear an oath. They can take our word for it.

When we say we're going to do something, we will do it, and it's believed. So, this is the character that Jesus is saying that we should have as Christians, that we have integrity, we can be people who are believed and trusted in what we say.

[13:46] Then, in verse 38, it talks about retaliation. And this is a big subject when I was thinking about it. And I'm not going to say everything there is to say.

We could probably still be here next week talking about it. But, verse 38 says, So, from the very start, this is very counterintuitive.

The idea that there is an evil person and you're not going to resist them. And I think it's worth saying that this is specific to individuals.

So, this doesn't really apply to governments or to law enforcement. That the way that Jesus is teaching us to act is that we take some level of abuse from people.

It says here that if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also. So, if somebody strikes you on one cheek, you turn your cheek and he strikes you again. And it's this kind of attitude where we don't want to see, or we don't insist on seeing justice for ourselves.

[15:10] That we can take this abuse from somebody without having to see, you know, we must see our justice done. And it's a very hard thing, a very difficult thing because we need a lot of wisdom to know how to apply this in many situations.

It doesn't mean that we just accept abuse in every situation. There are many, many situations where people are abused emotionally and physically and justice should be done and people shouldn't just live in these situations.

So, it needs a lot of wisdom to really understand how do we react when people do things to us where we feel like we need to retaliate.

But, where possible, we should live peaceably and, where possible, we should de-escalate situations that we come across. If somebody snaps at us, the temptation is just to snap back.

But, I think the Christian heart and the Christian attitude is that we respond gently and in a way that shows that we are concerned for the other person.

[16:25] And, as the passage says, sometimes this means you end up getting slapped twice. So, it's a very hard thing to accept, I think, that we are going to live a life where people will do things to harm us and we won't retaliate.

But, this is the character that the character that Jesus has shown us to emulate. And, it says in the Beatitudes, just a few, a page back, it says, Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the sons of God.

So, here again, right at the start of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is setting this description of the heart of the Christian that the blessed are the peacemakers. And, then the next couple of verses are slightly different and more talking about being compelled to do things or having our generosity abused.

So, it says here, if somebody wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And, if somebody forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

So, if someone compels you to give time and money, we should give it and we should be generous with our time and money but not foolish in how we do that.

[17:55] And so, I think very broadly, I think if somebody is lazy and they're trying to get us to do things, I don't think we're obliged to do that.

Thessalonians 3.10 says, the one who is unwilling to work should not eat. And so, if people are being lazy and they're expecting other people to do things for them, then I don't think we're obliged to be constantly giving.

Or, where giving money will harm people. So, if we know people are abusing the money or the generosity with, I mean, examples of buying drink and drugs as we face these situations quite often with people asking for money.

This is actually harming them and so, it's very difficult but it's not a wise way to give money if we know people are abusing it. And people who don't need it.

So, some people just like to get something. But the picture that God has given us, if we read the Beatitudes and say by faith that this is something that we're striving for, that God in heaven is our Father, that we have a heart that is generous, we have a heart that wants to give and a heart that wants to show and share the love of Christ.

[19:23] So, we should not hold back in giving where there is a real need and we should be willing to let our generosity be abused. Not to say that if we know it's going to be abused, we'll just let it happen but we take the risk that we don't know in every situation the sincerity of the request but we allow ourselves to be open to having our generosity abused in some way.

And I don't imagine anyone will get to heaven and Jesus will say to them, you know, you were very shrewd down there, all those people asking you for money and time and you didn't give much away, good job.

It's not the Christ that we see in the Bible and so, there will be times where we give our time and energy and our money and don't see any good come from it but this is the character, this is the heart that God has shared with us and so we need a lot of wisdom in all these situations, every situation is different and we won't have time to weigh up the situation and to try and make a well-informed decision so we give where there is a need.

And then this last section about loving your enemies and I think we're very good in this country about not having enemies and people tend to get on fairly well whatever walk of life you're in so, yeah, we don't have a lot of enemies I don't think but people are still persecuted so people in other countries certainly are persecuted by oppressive groups from other religious groups, from communist governments, those in authority, you could be persecuted by your boss and so we pray for those who persecute us even if we wouldn't necessarily call them our enemies there is an antagonistic relationship in some way with persecution and so this is the love that God has shown us in loving us as his enemies when we didn't always walk with the Lord we had hearts which were sinful and he's rescued us from sin and death just purely by his grace and he shows his common grace it says to all the righteous and the unrighteous which is amazing that he causes his son to rise on evil and the good and sends the rain on the righteous and the unrighteous and so God is

very liberal with the love and the kindness he shows to people and Jesus says if all we ever did was show love to people that we liked then we'd be acting no different to the world which is quite a challenge when you can go maybe several days maybe longer without seeing anyone that you don't like and so you show kindness to all the people you see because you surround yourself with people you like and then this is a real challenge because when was the last time we showed kindness to somebody we didn't like or somebody who didn't like us and it is it is a challenging challenging question but again it's at the beginning of this sermon he said blessed are the merciful for they shall be shown mercy and blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven so we shouldn't be like the rich young ruler who is relying on the law to keep himself right with God but we should go beyond that and see what does God really want from us what attitude should we have that will really bring glory to God so point number one just to recap we've looked at what being perfect is in the context of this chapter and point two how Jesus applied this in these three examples specifically and point three how do we apply this to our life so it's all very well we've got these three examples that we can that we can look at but in every area of our life where we couldn't possibly expect to have every single case explained by Jesus in a single book because there is there's too many facets to our life too many different situations so how do we apply these principles to our whole lives so we need to go beyond what the law says so the law is a guide but Jesus is saying here that our hearts should be changed and we should go beyond the law the law is almost a shadow of the the real thing so the law was given for the benefit of Israel but it wasn't enough to save them and he says to the the rich young ruler give all that you have and follow and so it's a big a big step change from keeping these these laws to giving up everything and following Jesus and it just made me think how many times have we have we gone away sad because we aren't willing to give something up and follow Christ and there are always always challenges that we will face in life and it's not a one time decision this is something we need to decide to do every single day to to give up everything in this life and follow Christ and so examples of this could be the way we spend our money we should spend our money in a way that shows the world that money isn't the most important thing that God is we should spend our time in a way that shows the world that our time isn't the most important thing but God is we should show people that work isn't the most important thing to us but that God is even the way we serve we should serve in a way that shows people we're serving God not serving to get approval so in in all things all situations in our life we should be doing things to show people that the glory of God the the love that we have for God is the most important thing for us and Jesus sums this up in two commandments in verse sorry

[26:04] Matthew 22 verse 37 Matthew 22 37 Jesus says love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind this is the first and greatest commandment and the second is like it love your neighbour as yourself all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments so this is very similar it's a kind of expanded statement of something else Jesus says at the end of this sermon on the mount where he says in 712 so in everything do to others what you would have them do to you and this sums up the law and the prophets so this is it's really the summary of the change that we need to see in our hearts that we love others and we love God and so we've kind of come full circle to the beginning of the message where we began with the Beatitudes that the only way that we can fulfil these commandments these two commandments to love God and to love others is to go back and begin at the Beatitudes where it says blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God blessed are those who are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And so we start there. We start with coming to God in humility, acknowledging our sin, and looking to him to change us, and then to begin living this out.

And it's a process. It's not going to happen instantly. It's something we need to work at day by day. And so we shouldn't be like the rich young ruler who thought the cost was too high, because it's not. The call to sell everything and follow Jesus is a high cost, but it's not too high. It's something we're called to do every day, to give up the things in this life, to cast off things that are distracting us from our walk, and to use everything that God has given us for his glory.

So Matthew 13, 44 says, The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought the field.

[28:57] So the point one, we've looked at what being perfect is. Point two, how Jesus applied this in the three examples, and then how do we become perfect?

How does this apply to our life? So there are things that we need to do, things that we need to take seriously. There's a lot of good instruction in these chapters that we're looking at, and we do need to think how we're going to apply this to our lives.

But this has to come from a changed heart. We're not perfect, and we won't ever be sinless in this life, but we can be free from the consequences of sin if we put our trust in Jesus, and we can have innocent hands, and we can have sincere hearts through walking with Jesus.

And this is the kind of perfection which is being spoken about, and this can be attained through a close walk with Christ. So I hope that you were all encouraged.

I find it very easy to read these kind of verses and just feel that I need to do more. But just trying to do more isn't going to change anything.

[30:11] We need to come to Christ. We need to worship him. We need to love him, and we need to rely on him to change us. By beholding his glory, we will be changed.

Amen.