

Be perfect

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 October 2022

Preacher: Chris Lowe

[0 : 00] Verse 48 is meant to take our breath away, don't you think? What does Jesus Christ command those who follow him?

! We here at St John's who become his disciples, what does our Lord Jesus demand of us? Verse 48 puts so simply, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

That is, we're to live in such a complete and unblemished way. We're meant to live such blazingly pure and blameless and holy lives that we shine like our God in all his perfection.

That's what Jesus wants of you and me this coming week, that we be perfect. What do you make of that?

Miranda's just read a pretty long passage from the Sermon on the Mount. This is what's going on. Jesus has gathered his first disciples around him. He's begun to teach them about the kingdom of heaven, about belonging to him, being blessed by God.

[1 : 10] And in our passage this morning, Jesus teaches us how to do God's will and live righteously and obey God's law and please our Father in heaven.

And we are really, really meant to listen to Jesus. In chapter 5, verse 17, the first bit that we read, Jesus says, don't think I've come to abolish the law and the prophets.

I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them. So everything God said in the past, all God's law commanded, all God's prophets promised, all of that was like a big arrow pointing forward to Jesus. And now I've come, says Jesus, to fulfil the law and the prophets. Everything the prophets pointed to, fulfilled in my life and my ministry.

Everything that the law commanded, fulfilled in my teaching as you listen now. Maybe you've read things in God's law. Do you remember the Ten Commandments?

[2 : 06] You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. Maybe, first listeners, you've heard Pharisees and teachers of the law spin their own interpretation of how to live for God, love your neighbour and hate your enemy.

Maybe you're a person today, you've heard teaching, you've read books, you've given half a thought to how you should live in the 21st century. And in the 21st century, says Jesus again and again in this passage, you have heard it was said, but I tell you.

As the one by whose teaching God's law is fulfilled, we're meant to sit at the feet of our Lord Jesus and listen. As he takes God's law and teaches us straight and true, how to live righteously and do God's will and please our Father.

And what Jesus says in these verses, you'll have felt this already, is so intensely challenging and deeply demanding, is it not?

In verse 20, Jesus says to his disciples, I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

[3 : 21] Righteousness means you do God's will and you obey his commands. And Jesus says that our righteousness must outstrip that of the most serious looking religious teachers around you.

A deeper righteousness, a doing God's will from in here. What does it look like? Well, verse 21 onwards, all of this passage will show us, but he sums it all up in verse 48 right at the end.

Be perfect. Taking this slab of the Sermon on the Mount as a whole, the righteousness Jesus wants of us is Father-like perfection.

A life so totally in line with God and his character that we shine like our God in all his perfection. To which we should say, point one on the handout this morning, wow.

We should say, wow. And follow these things through, we're going to move through the passage from verse 21 onwards and see what this Pharisee outstripping, God-pleasing righteousness looks like.

[4 : 39] First, no hatred in our hearts. Verse 21, you've heard that it was said to the people long ago, you shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.

That's the sixth of the Ten Commandments. It's God-given, it's in God's law, you shall not murder. To which many of us will understandably say, tick, no problem, I've not killed anyone. At the girls' school sports day in the summer, each year group did the high jump and we parents went along and watched and they did it properly.

There was a nice big mat to land on and a run-up area that you curve round and do the jump over. And the high jump starts with the bar extremely low down. And every boy or girl just hops over, tick, no problem, until the bar gets raised.

And then the kids look and go, wow, now that's a challenge. You've heard it was said, you shall not murder, tick, no problem.

But I tell you, says Jesus, verse 22, that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Do you feel the bar rising?

[5 : 52] The righteousness he demands. Murder begins with an angry heart, it's where it comes from. And Jesus says that when we're angry with a brother or sister, it is as if we murder them.

Again, middle of verse 22, anyone who says to a brother or sister, Raka, you idiot, is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, you fool, will be in danger of the fire of hell.

No hatred in our hearts, no insults on our lips. That is how to obey and please our Father.

Second, no lust in our looks. It's verse 27 on, you've heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. Well, that's in the Ten Commandments too.

Hey, and that's okay, says someone, because I've never slept with another man's wife. That's pretty straightforward for some of us, I keep that. But I tell you, says Jesus, that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

[7 : 07] You say, wow, that's the standard. That's what this commandment is all about. A deep, deep purity in my heart and my gaze, which means I would not look lustfully at another ever.

Come next to God's will for marriage, verse 31. It has been said anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. That is a quote from an Old Testament passage, discouraging hasty divorces.

Don't do it. Yet in Jesus' day, there were people who used this verse to justify getting divorced for pretty much any reason at all. She's burnt my food.

She's let herself go. She's not fulfilling me. So we're done and I'm off. And that's okay, because God talks about divorce in the Bible. But Jesus refuses to have that sort of cruelty, which ruins lives and breaks God's commands.

But I tell you, says Jesus, that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery.

[8 : 24] And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Because despite a quick divorce and a certificate to prove it, she is in fact still married.

And so further relationships are adulterous. The righteousness God demands, lifelong marriages that reflect God's perfect and unwavering love to his people.

No hatred in our hearts, no lust in our looks, no allowance for adultery. Verse 33 onwards, no lies on our lips. Again, you've heard it was said to the people long ago, do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the oaths you've made.

Which sounds straight enough. You swear an oath, you say, I will do this, and then you fulfill it. And yet in Jesus's day, the Pharisees have come up with all sorts of ways to wriggle out of keeping what God says.

Sometimes we say today, I swear on my mother's life, or I pinky promise. And we mean, believe it, I'll do it. Do you know, back in the day, the Pharisees would say stuff like, if anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing.

[9 : 40] But anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath. Oh, come on. Stop finding ways to lie. I tell you, says Jesus, do not swear an oath at all.

Either by heaven, because that's God's throne, or by the earth, that's his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for that's the city of the great king. All you need to say is simply yes and no, and anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

No lies on our lips. Speak the truth like your trustworthy God. Be a man, be a woman of absolute integrity.

In verse 38 onwards, no resting on our rights. You've heard that it was said eye for eye and tooth for tooth, but I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. What do you make of that? Stop fighting back. Facebook comment for Facebook comment.

[10:50] Think of Jesus himself, whom they arrested and slapped and spat on and beat. And beautifully, he didn't resist.

He didn't return slap for slap. He lived righteously and he pleased his father. Verse 43 onwards, finally.

No limit to our love. You've heard it was said, love your neighbour and hate your enemy. The Old Testament commanded love your neighbour, but by Jesus' day, someone had twisted God's commands.

It's about my neighbour, obviously. Those who love me and are good to me, I'm to love them, but not my enemy. I will hate them. Which is how our world works.

And the bar's pretty low, really. But I tell you, says Jesus, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your father in heaven.

[11:54] Your shouty neighbour, your cruel classmate, your angry boss, your country's tyrannical ruler, love them, pray for them.

No limit to your love, that you may be children of your father in heaven. Because he loves the evil and the good, doesn't he? Causes his son to rise and fall on all of us.

So be like him. Verse 48. Drawing together this radical way of righteousness. Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.

From your heart and in your life, you shine with an unblemished and whole obedience. There's no hatred in your heart, no lust in your looks, faithfulness in your marriage, no lies on your lips, no resting on your rights, no limit to your love.

A whole God-pleasing life reflecting the perfection of your heavenly father. You're meant to read that and in part go, wow. Wow. Wow.

[13:06] I wonder if it is possible in our lives to aim too low. Is that just me? Some of the time?

Yeah, I follow Jesus. I'll make it through the week and get to church and I'll try to be Christian. Of course, I never do the really bad things like adultery and murder.

That's kind of a given for me. I'll be broadly polite and as nice as I'm able to, even though I'm angry inside. Of course, my eyes wander, but no harm done, really.

I'll try to limit how much I insult people close to me in my house. And I'll mostly do what I say I'll do, as long as I've got the energy for it. And, well, there's forgiveness for me anyway because I've got the gospel.

And so on I trundle, feeling a bit sorry for myself. But I'm safe because I've got Jesus. And in my life I'm aiming so low. Do you know what I'm talking about?

[14:11] Matthew 5 in part is meant to grab us. This is the deep righteousness that Jesus demands of me. And it's stunning.

It's stunning. My heart no longer seething with self-pity and resentment and anger, bursting out with insult. My eyes no longer roving and lusting.

I'm a faithful man. I'm truthful. I'm meek like Jesus. I am limitless in my love for others. What a challenge. That he wants me to be perfect as my father is.

Not just me, you. And all who enter his kingdom. Like imagine a world living under the rule of Jesus. Imagine a world where anger and insult in the family home are no more.

Imagine a world where the internet is clean of pornography because no one wants it. Imagine a world where women can walk home late at night without the fear of leering men. Imagine a world where the devastations of casual hookups and short-term marriages are done away with.

[15:27] And instead of revenge and hatred, there is humble love. And our father's will is done on earth as in heaven. That's the righteousness that Jesus demands.

In part, don't you hunger for that and thirst for that in your own life and in the world and say, wow, wow. Ow. And yet at the very same time, we listen to our Lord and we look at our own lives and we say, ow.

Ow. Back in chapter 5, verse 20, Jesus says to his disciples, I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

I am a disciple. Yet to my shame, I fall so far short of his righteous demands. They sting me. Do you not sense that too? There may be some here this morning who have terminated the life of another.

[16:42] And the guilt sticks to you. And you think, will I ever enter the kingdom of heaven? Some of us in private at moments or in public, we are blazingly angry.

And we're cold and mean in our comments. Jesus says, no lust in our looks. Have you committed adultery this week in your heart?

Because verse 29, if your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. Because it's better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. Some of us have been married and are now divorced.

I know that. And you've experienced how divorce is so very messy and complicated and painful. And there is no such thing as a no-fault divorce.

Yet who wronged who and who left who can get so horribly tangled. And you're bruised. And Jesus' warning here against adultery may confuse you or sting you or bring you low.

[17:51] And you think, what am I going to do? As we hear our Lord's commands, ow. And this week, unless I'm mistaken, you've not been as straight and truthful as you should be.

And when someone gets paid back for being unkind, either online or in your life, you secretly smile. And quite frankly, there's a raft of people that you ignore or won't greet or think badly of.

And there's a few whom you pretty much hate and would never pray for. And so commanded to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Jesus' commands, at the same time as you going, wow, to live like that.

His commands slice you open and expose you. I do not shine like God in all his perfection. I am guilty and dirty. And unrighteous.

And I hate it. I hate it. And this is Matthew 5. In the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus fulfilling the law by his teaching.

[18:56] You've heard it was said, but I tell you, this loving Lord, this King of all. The righteousness our Lord Jesus demands is Father-like perfection.

And partly we should say, wow, I want that. And yet in the blazing light of his teaching, ow, woe is me. So finally this morning, what now?

What now? If hearing the Lord address you through Matthew 5, it makes you hungry to change and to grow.

And if hearing your Lord address you through Matthew 5, it makes you hungry to change and to grow. And if hearing your Lord address you here, you feel so brought low by your sins, you could almost cry. Then Jesus says to you today, do you know what he says to you?

You are blessed. God favours you. He smiles on you.

[20:00] You say, really? Yes. Come back to our memory verses at the start of Matthew 5. Have you learnt them yet? Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Chapter 5, verse 3. In the Old Testament, Isaiah 66, verse 2, the Lord declares, These are the ones I look on with favour. These are the ones I smile on.

Those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at my word. There is no blessing from God for those who stand tall before him, thinking that they're good enough and have done enough. If the teaching of Jesus brings you low and you know how poor you are before God, blessed are the poor in spirit. If you look inside and look at your life and you know you've been so foul and so far from what Jesus wants of you here, and it almost crushes you and you could almost cry, as you cast yourself before him and say, Father, forgive me.

Blessed are those who mourn. God favours you. For you know, our Lord came into the world.

[21:20] He was given the name Jesus. It means God saves because he will save his people from their sins. He comes to us, we who are sinners and broken by his teaching, and he comes to bless us and save us.

He, Jesus Christ, who was never wrongly angry, who never looked at a woman lustfully, who never took revenge and always loved his enemies, our Lord Jesus Christ, this Saviour, who was perfect like his Father, he went to the cross to die for hating, lusting, adulterous people like us.

He suffered the fire of hell on our behalf, in our place, so that we, who deserve to be cast away from God for all eternity, are instead forgiven and saved and blessed and included in his kingdom and comforted.

It's so appropriate this morning to share bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, where we think on the death of Jesus and taste again the saving mercy of Jesus Christ through his death and receive God's comfort for those who mourn their sins.

He teaches us how to live. We say, ow, we run to him for mercy, and he says, I'm here for you. I've come to save you and die for you.

[22 : 57] And, having then received his mercy and his blessing, our Heavenly Father stands us on our feet again, and he sends us out into our week to, to obey our Lord Jesus and his commands.

When you know the free, overflowing grace of God to sinners in your life, you go out into your week and you pray, Father, we long to be what you've made us to be.

We long to be perfect, as you are perfect. We hunger to do your will, our Lord, and to live righteously and please you. We thirst for purer hearts and lives.

To obey this teaching in Matthew 5 and to be like you, wow, we want this more than anything else. To which the Lord Jesus Christ says, wonderfully, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because what?

They will be filled. In part now, and through your life going forward by his help, and one day in full, we will be filled, you know.

[24 : 15] God will make us those who do his will. And the day will come when you and I will shine with an unblemished and whole obedience.

We will have nothing to be ashamed of in our looks and our hearts and our lives, because in our characters and how we are, we will be like our heavenly Father in all his perfection.

And when that day finally comes, we will be satisfied. And God will be glorified. So hear the words of Jesus to you this morning.

Say wow of what he commands us. Ow! Run to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy. And then go out into your week and do what Jesus commands in Matthew 5.

Be perfect. Don't aim low. Aim for perfection. Aim for Christ-like, Father-honouring perfection. Be perfect. As your heavenly Father is perfect.

[25 : 21] And know that what he commands us to do, he will fulfil in our lives. Let me lead us in a prayer. Let's pray together.

Unless your righteousness outstrips that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord Jesus, we praise you for your true, wonderful, cutting teaching.

You show us how we should be, our hearts and lives, doing the will of your Father and our Father in heaven. how we hunger and thirst for this righteousness in our lives.

And yet we are conscious, our Father, of how far short we fall. We are helpless. We know ourselves at times to be foul.

And so we run to you. We run to you for mercy and cleansing and forgiveness and restoration. And we trust you, our Father, that what you command us to do, you will bring about and you will fill us.

[26 : 53] We praise you and we pray for that in Jesus' name. Amen.