

# You Have Heard It Said October 27

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Gentlemen, we're looking at, we're continuing to look at a series of statements that appear in the Sermon on the Mount, which is the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

And if you look at the fifth chapter and the thirty-third verse today, that's where we're starting. But just to put the whole thing in context again, I want just to go back to the beginning of this section, which is in verse 17 of chapter 5, where Jesus says, think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. Now, when Jesus talks about the, I think I can do it.

This is where the law was written, the Ten Commandments, and then the five books of Moses, which are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, are an expansion on or working out of the law. And then the prophets are those who were, in a sense, made the law alive in every generation as they spoke to it. And then you come through the law and the prophets to the person of Jesus Christ.

[ 1 : 5 0 ] And at verse 17, he says, I haven't come to abolish this. I've come to fulfill it. Now, it's a terribly important statement because, of course, we can't get past the law.

I mean, the rescue of those two California whales with the aid of the Russian icebreaker and so on. Everybody saw an identifiable predicament for two whales. And so the law and the cost, everything was forgotten, and people just threw themselves into doing it, and it was a lovely, sort of spontaneous and gracious act.

But, you know, there are thousands of children dying in India that don't get that kind of love and spontaneous response. And I think that what, I mean, I don't mean to downplay things, but there is something essentially wrong with the law, you know.

Like the illustration that I have thought of is occasionally on a Thursday night, and some of the people from down the line will be aware of this, the tunnel is blocked up and you can't get through it.

[ 3 : 1 4 ] Now, if you were a policeman, what would you think your main duty would be at a time like that? Surely it would be to get as many people through the tunnel as quickly as possible.

But what, in fact, do they do? They sit along the side of the highway where there's an open lane that nobody's allowed into unless you're a bus, and wait for people to be overcome with temptation, move out into that bus lane, and they got them, you know.

Well, it's so stupid because the function of the law is not that kind of thing. The function of the law is to make things work. And that kind of activity is so contrary to the true function of the law.

So that our experience of the law is that what it does is wait till you're under some kind of pressure and step out of line, and then it's got you, and you're dead. You know, that's basically how the law works.

And that's the way it inevitably works, and we use it on one another that way, and we impose it on one another. We, husbands, write laws for their wives and then wait for them to disobey, and wives write laws for their husbands and wait for them to disobey, and parents for children and so on.

[ 4 : 3 1 ] And we play legalistic games all the time. It's very hard to get beyond it, beyond rules and regulations, and the good people keep them, and the bad people break them, and ultimately everybody breaks them, and ultimately everybody's dead.

And that's really basically what the Bible teaches about them. It works in that way, and so it's inadequate. And it's somehow when Jesus says, I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets, I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

And what the law points to is a perfectly ordered society, where everybody relates to everybody in a wonderful way. And the law tries to say, that's what we're aiming towards.

But the law cannot accomplish what it points to. The law can't do it. There is no way you can do it. And so the law breaks down, usually into violence.

And for us, we get to the point where we started in this talk, the law breaks down, and you find that you can't do it. And therefore, you're lost.

[ 5 : 53 ] Now, Jesus says, I am come to fulfill that to which the law points. Now, Paul, in Romans, he says, I know the law.

Not only do I know the law, but I see that it's good. You know, if people would behave this way, then the world would be a wonderful place to live.

And I know that, and I acknowledge that. And he says, but I find within my own heart that the very law I know, I am not able to do.

And so he points to himself and says, this is where the law breaks down. Even though we know it's good, we don't do it.

Because we make an exception for ourselves. And I've told you, I'm sure, about the senior judge who was caught misbehaving.

[ 6 : 54 ] And one of his fellow judges said of him, which I thought was very impressive. He said, he thought the law applied to everybody but him. And yet, you know, he lived with it all his life.

He never made the connection that it applied to him. Now, the only way that it can apply to us is not to condemn us. Because on those grounds, we're all dead.

You know, I mean, and that's what Paul says. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, the purpose of God. So we're dead. You know, the law isn't going to do it. And it doesn't matter whether you grave it in stone, write it in brass, fly it across the sky.

The basic problem is that while we acknowledge it to be good, we don't do it. You know, you can all, you know, you know what happens.

You know what your ambitions are and how it breaks down all the time. And Jesus says, I have not come to abolish the law so that everybody can do what they want.

[ 7 : 57 ] I have come to fulfill the law so that everybody together will come to that place where all that the law promises, which we acknowledge to be good, is fulfilled.

So it's entirely a good thing. Well, that's the first thing he says. The second thing he says as he introduces these, he says, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota nor a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Well, do you want to know what that is? I'll just show you just for fun. It's not very significant. But I'll, I'll, this is, if you were to write in Hebrew, you see, you might write something like that.

And in order to make this from being a, a, a, a, a, like that, a kind of soft B into a hard B, you'd put a little dot in there.

And, uh, that letter up there is, uh, uh, uh, it, it goes with, uh, oh, it might even go with a dot down here.

[ 9 : 19 ] But what happens to that letter up there? That's a Yod. That's the smallest Hebrew letter. And that's a dot so that, you know, that the law, which is written down, there is no, even the smallest part of it's not going to disappear.

So nobody's going to disappear the law, not even the smallest part of it will. But then he, he goes on and says, till heaven and earth will pass away, this law remains.

It, it won't change so that it's a kind of universal law that affects everybody in every society. Uh, whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

Now, what, what I think he's saying there is, is that, uh, that, uh, what we do is, is take the law, which is, uh, kind of straight up and down.

And, uh, you know, I showed you, we, we want to bend it a little bit, you know, and then we keep working at it until we've bend it into a, you know, it's, it's, it's, this doesn't look anything like what it is.

[ 10 : 33 ] And he says that you don't bend the law. You keep it absolutely straight. And Jesus says, that's what I've come to do. And anybody who teaches that has missed the whole point.

They are least in the kingdom of God. So that, uh, that process of bending the law is not what, and then I think I've told you before that that's, that's generally what, uh, what ministry, ministers are called upon to do is to bend the law.

You know, you can have laws about baptism and laws about marriage and laws about confirmation and laws about taking communion. And then you just meet hundreds and hundreds of people who say, but pastor for me, you know, and, and so you, well, yeah, for you.

And, uh, so, uh, that's what, that's what ministers get to be known for is that, uh, somehow they have some influence with God whereby they're allowed to bend the law.

And, uh, when you get to heaven, God doesn't say, do you know the law? You say, no, I didn't know the law, but I knew a minister and he twisted it around to make me feel good.

[ 11 : 48 ] And I really appreciate him. He was a really nice guy. And, uh, that's, that's been his function. Well, Jesus says, that's not the way it works.

The law is to be fulfilled. Not a jot or tittle is going to be taken away. Uh, whenever then, whoever then relaxes is least in the kingdom.

I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Now, I don't think that there is, well, I mean, there may be, but that's a wonderfully misunderstood statement.

Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. Well, having said that statement, he then goes on to describe the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees.

And the way he does it is, you have heard that it was said by the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not kill. You've heard it said by the scribes and the Pharisees, you won't commit adultery.

[ 13 : 01 ] You've heard it said by the scribes and Pharisees, you won't enter into divorce. You've heard it said by the scribes and Pharisees, you won't perjure yourself.

Now, having said all those things, then what they did was they took the scriptures and they started to bend them. And they developed all sorts of wonderful ways that you could bend them.

So that by the time Jesus came along, they had them bent into kind of pretzel shape so that you, you know, they had figured it all out.

You know, they said, you know, as long as you don't pull the trigger, you're all right. But Jesus said the purpose of the law was that you shouldn't even have hate in your heart.

That's what the law is about. It has nothing to do with whether you pull the trigger or not. If there's hate in your heart, then you've broken the law. He said that as long as you're not caught in the act of adultery, then you're okay.

[ 14 : 14 ] You can live a life of sexual dissolution and of all sorts. I mean, you can be a moral wreck filled with lust and all sorts of terrible things.

But as long as you haven't actually done it, the law remains intact. That's what the Pharisees said. When it came to divorce, they said, you know, that as long as you get a bill of divorcement, because Moses spoke about a bill of divorcement.

We dealt with this last week. But Jesus says that isn't even what Moses was talking about in that passage. And you've gone and taken it so as to allow yourself divorce.

And he was talking about something else altogether. Divorce is a legal enactment that takes place in a society. But Jesus says divorce doesn't even come into the question.

As far as the law is concerned, there's got to be a relationship which is a lifelong two, you know, one life, one partner relationship.

[ 15 : 18 ] That's what the law is pointing to. The law is pointing to a marriage that works. And you've made a million exceptions to it.

And then he comes along to perjury today. And he talks about perjury. He says, you've gone and done this too. Now, if you want to know what they did, turn to Matthew 23, verses 16 to 22, and you'll see how they worked on the business of perjury.

Matthew 23, 16 to 22. And this is Matthew 23 is where the scribes and the Pharisees really get it, with both barrels. And Jesus speaks to them.

But in this, he speaks to them about what they do about perjury. He says, Woe to you blind guides. Have you got it? 23, 16.

Woe to you blind guides who say, If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing. But if one swears by the gold of the temple, he's bound by his oath.

[ 16 : 32 ] This is a kind of casuistry that they developed among themselves. This is how the Pharisees evaded the law. You blind fools.

Which is greater, Jesus says? The gold of the temple? Or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, If anyone swears by the altar, it's nothing.

But if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he's bound by his oath. You blind men. For which is greater? The gift on the altar that makes the gift sacred?

So he who swears by the altar swears by it, and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it, and by him who dwells in it, and he who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits upon it.

Well, they did the same thing we do. That they built up a structure of lies that everybody understood.

[ 17 : 39 ] And you made it appear that you were speaking the truth, but you weren't held to speaking the truth. You could deliberately deceive people.

And so we build into our lives a whole structure of lies that we live with. We all know we do them. I was interested in, I think, the current Atlantic Monthly to learn that the basic ingredient in an aspirin and in Aniston is exactly the same.

And that there have been years and years of multi-million dollar suits between these companies, because it's such an enormously profitable business. Sort of 40 million people a day in the States take a headache tablet.

So, I mean, supplying those is very big business. And so they advertise, you know, to make you think that there is some essential difference, you know. And it's a lie.

Everybody knows it's a lie. But that's the way our society works. We build all sorts of deceptions into our world so that we can, we develop a kind of tolerance for lies.

[ 18 : 55 ] Nobody gets very indignant about it. Everybody knows. Everybody does it. And on and on it goes. I think that's why we were all delighted, maybe you weren't, to see the leaders of the political parties debating the other night and calling each other liars and things like that.

I mean, that's perfectly true. But that's only because they belong to the same society we belong to, and they behave the same way we behave, and they live in the same culture we live in, and that's the way we work.

And it's not just, I'm not just being, in a sense, speaking derogatorily of our society.

I think it's, it becomes, it becomes difficult. There's a dramatic sort of illustration from my own life when I was in really deep trouble, and I decided the only way I could get through it was to lie.

So I lied. This isn't a long time ago. I mean, it's not back in prehistory or anything. But then I, I watched what happened, you know.

[ 20 : 01 ] And what you have to do once you've lied is then you have to readjust everything else to fit the lie, or else people will catch you at it, you see.

And so lying compounds lying, which compounds lying, and finally you've created a totally artificial world for yourself. And you spend your nights thrashing on your bed, wondering how you're going to keep this imaginary world together without admitting that you've told a lie.

And, uh, it's, uh, that's, that's what happens in our society. And the whole possibility for communicating with one another breaks down because of this process.

Well, that's why when Jesus comes and says to them, you've heard that it was said to the men of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

Well, again, there's an interesting thing about this and about, uh, the one that precedes it is that, uh, Jesus quotes what the Pharisees and the, uh, Sadducees were saying.

[ 21 : 22 ] You know, this was the, this was what they had taught the people to think in these terms. But if you try and trace back where these statements come from, they don't come from Scripture.

Now, they may express some aspect of Scripture, and they may have particular references where part of them, but the thing has been put together in a way to, uh, in a way that, that the Pharisees felt they could handle it.

And so what they're doing is saying that this is what the law demands, but where are they going for it? They're not really going to the Scriptures. And of course, this is what, this is what happens to the church or the synagogue.

They get out of touch with what the Scriptures are actually saying. And they sort of take, uh, a modern version of it or a culturally acceptable version of it or a morally idealistic version of it, and instead of teaching what the Scriptures say, they sort of condense something.

They do a kind of Reader's Digest version of the Scriptures and say, well, now, this is, this is essentially what's there. And gradually, that essentially what's there drifts further and further away from what's actually there.

[ 22 : 42 ] And so, Jesus says, you've heard that it was said, you know, this piece of information about perjury which has drifted off to here, you've heard that that's what it's all about.

And you've watched how the Pharisees and the scribes have said that you make an oath by the temple or by the altar or by the offering on the altar or by the gold in the temple.

You do all those things. But you know secretly that that doesn't count, you know, that that's just a deception. You're just reinforcing a lie because you probably think that the lie will have some therapeutic benefit to those who hear it.

And so, for very good motives, you're taking a lie and you're swearing to it. But you know that ultimately that doesn't count. What ultimately counts is that the temple and everything in it is from God.

That you can't even swear by your own head, he said. Because you're not responsible for it, you know. If you were, you wouldn't have all those gray hairs. You're not in control.

[ 23 : 55 ] You are under God. And so, Jesus says, I want you, I want you to, to recognize that the purpose of the, of the law, when that purpose ultimately finds fulfillment, then what will have taken place is this.

And, he says, you won't swear by your head, you cannot make one hair white or black.

Let what you say be simply yes or no. And, when he says that, he's really, in a sense, saying the same thing as is, is quoted in James epistle, chapter 5 and verse 12, where James says, above all my brethren, don't swear by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, but let your yes be yes and let your no be no, that you may not fall under condemnation.

Now, when, when I, I know that when I get busy and you get under pressure and you got a lot of things to do, then you start giving the answer that you think will be most convenient to that situation to get you out of your present stress and circumstance and move you out into a place where, where you can escape from the immediate pressures of life.

and then you look back and see all the damage you've done because your yes hasn't been really yes and your no hasn't been really no and you're left with a whole backlog of work that has got to be gone back over and you've got to do, do it all over again and you've got to go back and sort it all out and say, this is what I really meant and this is, and that's, that's what Jesus is saying, that that's what we've got to do.

[ 25 : 49 ] That's what, that's the goal we've got to have. And I think that's why we need time alone. We need time to be quiet. We need time to examine our own hearts.

And we need really to critically examine the whole process of communication. That's, I think, why in our modern day we use a lot of counselors.

You know, because a good counselor is somebody who can sit down between two people and say, now what was it you said? Now what did you hear him say?

Now is what he heard you say in fact what you said? And what they do is just keep working with people until people are saying what they really think and listening to them long enough that people really come out with what they really think and helping to put that and say, well now, that's the basis of carrying on.

Unless you get that out, then the relationship is just going to break down. And you know how often that happens. because what you're really thinking, what you're really saying, you haven't got time or you're not in the mood or it isn't convenient or it's easier to get out of it by saying something fast and flashy that will get the problem out of your way for a few minutes.

[ 27 : 13 ] And then you have lost touch with reality and your yes is no longer yes and your no is no longer no. and people recognize that.

They probably recognize it because they do it themselves but they realize that communication didn't take place. And that's why you can get a whole room full of totally intelligent people with a cocktail in their right hand talking for an hour or two and nobody says anything of any significance during the whole time.

the possibility of communication has just been wiped out because there are certain deceptions which we play with and ideas that we play with and we can't get down to letting our yes be yes and our no be no and having the kind of relationship in which we can give expression to it.

So again, the news that comes out of this little story that Christ tells is really bad news, isn't it? I mean, it's not the kind of thing that we can stand up and raise our right hands and say, from this moment on, my yes will be yes and my no will be no.

All we can do is stand up and say, which we do, Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of my heart, clear up the chaos and confusion in my life, that I might, what comes on there?

[ 28 : 59 ] perfectly love thee and worthily magnify your holy name. In other words, clean up this mess. The sort of, you know, that I know that person thinks that's what I'm going to do and that person thinks that's what I'm going to do so I've got to make sure that I don't let that person know what I've told that person.

I don't want to let that in. You know, and the whole jumble just crowds in upon us and it's very difficult. Maybe that's why I like going back to Toronto and talking to people there because they don't know the jumble I'm in out here.

You know. But it's a wonderful thing. I think you, that we need to recognize the reason Jesus says this is because this is what he wants.

He wants us to be able to speak to one another from the heart. He wants us to be able to unload all the subterfuge and all the deceit and all the sham and all the hypocrisy and really be able to talk to one another.

And he says, the law isn't going to change because you can't do that. The law is going to remain until you can do that.

[ 30 : 25 ] And the purpose of love I have towards you in Christ by which you are forgiven and by which you are given new life and by which you have a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

I mean, it's a righteousness which belongs to Jesus Christ and only belongs to you as you belong to him. That's where the righteousness comes from.

It doesn't come from you or me. It comes from Christ and our belonging to him. And it's that that Christ says.

Paul picks it up in Romans and he says, if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord you will be saved. in other words, you know, that the picture of the New Testament almost is when you can come to that place in your life where your tongue and your heart are so in line that you can actually speak with your tongue the truth that you have come to in your heart and say that Jesus is Lord then the kingdom has come for you, you know.

And I suppose it's why Paul says that even if you could just say Abba, Father, you could just say that almost childish word in acknowledging that God is God then you begin to see what Christ has for us and how totally inadequate we are apart from his continuing purpose of love towards us.

[ 32 : 17 ] So, that's that passage. Let, you know, let me pray for us. Our Father, we live in a welter of words and words are often meant to deceive and even when they're not meant to, they often do deceive and our hearing is not always such as we hear what we need to hear but only what we want to hear and the whole sort of structure of our minds rejects a whole lot of things that we badly need to hear and accepts a whole lot of things that we shouldn't be able to tolerate.

but that's who we are and that's where we are. So, we ask that as you have spoken your word to us in Jesus Christ that you will give us hearts to hear that word and that by our lives we may respond to that word.

what has been said today which is not helpful or useful give us the grace to forget and what has been helpful and useful burn into our hearts that we may become what is your purpose we should be.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.