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Exceeding Righteousness and Our Attitudes; Matt 5:33-48
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Introduction – Remembering the cultural context when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount will help us to recognize the massive significance of this message.

The spiritual elite of the day, the scribes and Pharisees, were viewed by many to be the true people of God. They were in charge of worship, they supposedly lived according to the strictest observance of God's Law, they knew the Scriptures, they were the authority on how to interpret and apply Scripture, they carried themselves with a certain high religiosity. If anyone knew God, if anyone was right with God. It must be them. And no one had to tell them so. They knew how pious they were.

Jesus comes on the scene and begins to shatter their false notion of faith. He goes so far as to point out their faith and their practice as among those who will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. And then as if that were not stunning enough, He begins to paint a picture of true faith, and everything He says about true faith looks and sounds nothing like the faith of the scribes and Pharisees. In fact, the faith of the scribes and Pharisees is the prime example of false faith.

It's not about who keeps the rules the best or who knows the most Scripture or who is the most moral or going through the motions or praying the most pious prayers or giving the most money or etc, etc. It's about transformed hearts that result in transformed lives. It's about those who have truly encountered God, no matter their status or background or ethnicity, and now truly love God and others.

We can readily see how that message speaks to every generation and every people. The easiest lie to believe is that we are right with God based on our record of what we've done right and what we haven't done wrong. True righteousness, however, is about Christ and His record. Only He has always done right and never done wrong. Therefore, faith in Him is what transforms us into the people of God. And as we saw last week, true faith affects our passions and now today we see true faith affects our attitudes. Sinful passions are easy to recognize

and somewhat easier to confess and begin to correct. No true believer wants to be filled with hatred or destroyed through lust. However, sinful attitudes are much more subtle and difficult to recognize and confess. Alongside our inner legalist, we have an inner self-justifier that gives us plenty of reasons why we have the right to hold wrong attitudes.

- I. Exceeding Righteousness and Integrity (vv33-37)
 - a. An oath is a verbal appeal to a higher authority or an emphatic plea in order to reaffirm the truth of one's statement or promise.
 - b. At first glance it would seem that Jesus was prohibiting all forms of oath-taking. Some have read this verse and with intention to follow the Lord's teaching have been convinced that any type of oath is not biblically permitted. So for example, by their convictions, they do not believe one should take an oath even in a court of law.
 - i. We know that Jesus was not teaching that oaths were to be avoided in every situation because Jesus Himself spoke under oath at His own trial. Matthew 26:63-64
 - c. What Jesus is confronting here is how Pharisaical righteousness had twisted OT law concerning oaths.
 - d. Leviticus 19:11-12 – restating some of the 10 Commandments in the context of love your neighbor (v18)
 - e. So the Pharisees had adopted a way to make oaths without violating the Lord's name. Instead of swearing by the Lord's name, they would simply swear by heaven or earth or Jerusalem or even their own lives. That then provided them a loophole to be misleading and dishonest. They could go back on their promise. If I would have sworn by the Lord, of course I would keep my vow. But since I swore by another means, I'm not obligated to keep it.
 - f. In other words, by trying to skirt the law of God, they were actually breaking the law of God over and over. They were lying to their neighbor while pretending to honor the law of God.
 - g. Jesus is saying swearing by these other means does not loosen the bond of your word. It doesn't loosen the connection to the Lord as you suppose. Heaven is His throne. The earth is His footstool. Jerusalem is His city. And your life is in His hands. God is sovereign over everything!

- h. Now before we throw too many stones at the Pharisees, maybe we need to be reminded that at times we've been guilty of the same sin that fails to love our neighbor when we fail to keep our word.
 - i. We say things like, "I promise. I really mean it. I'm telling the truth. I will do it." We vow to change or keep commitments and really we're only saying what we need to say to be left alone. We really don't mean to follow through.
 - j. How does true righteousness treat our words to one another? We love our neighbor enough to be men and women of our word. Yes means yes and no means no. We follow through. We keep our promises and commitments. We don't look for loopholes. We don't lie to get out of trouble or skirt our responsibilities.
 - k. The people of God are people of integrity. We should be known as trustworthy, dependable, and honest. It should be said of us, "If he makes you a promise, you can take it to the bank."
 - l. You know why that's so essential to our faith? Because God always makes good on His promises to us! He is a God of His Word! We, then, as His people, should be people of our word.
- II. Exceeding Righteousness and Mercy (vv38-42)
- a. This passage has often been misunderstood in our day as Jesus teaching a total passive stance against all aggression. Some believe passages such as this mean that Christians should not participate in war. It becomes really uneasy if we take this to mean total passive stance when it comes to self-defense or protecting the ones we love from those who mean to do them harm.
 - b. Again, that is not what Jesus is teaching here. Jesus is confronting how the Pharisees twisted the OT law to their own desire and wishes.
 - c. The statement and eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth appears three times in the OT, in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. In all three instances, it is a matter of judicial law. It's the Lord's instructions on how justice is to be meted against criminals. It was just, the punishment fit the crime, and it was a deterrent as stated in Deut 19.
 - d. The Pharisees had broadened the use of this phrase to include personal vengeance and retaliation. If anyone does anything to me, I'll get them back. After all, the Bible says, "an eye for an eye, and a

tooth for a tooth.” So they had taken what was meant as the standard of justice in court and made it their excuse to personally retaliate. That’s the issue here.

- e. Jesus is teaching that true righteousness responds to those who seek to hurt us or take from us or force us into service with unsuspecting mercy.
- f. To be giving, forgiving, generous, and merciful is the way of true faith, for that is the way the Father has dealt with us.

III. Exceeding Righteousness and Love (vv43-48)

- a. The problem with false righteousness is that in the end it is no different than the moral code of the world. Loving those who love us and hating those who hate us is how the world operates.
- b. But true righteousness is vastly, vastly different and distinct. True righteousness loves even those who hate us and persecute us.
- c. Why? Because that’s how the Father loved us. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5:8, Eph 2:13
- d. How? Through the love of God. Loving God and loving others.
- e. V48 – What does that mean?
 - i. The word translated “perfect” is not being used here as we commonly use it. Jesus is not teaching sinless perfection.
 - ii. Perfection in terms of always glorifying and honoring the Lord is to be our desire and the goal for which we strive, but in this life, we will never achieve it. We will reach our perfection in Christ when Jesus comes and we are transformed into His likeness – Phil 1:6.
 - iii. This word however is referring to completion, holiness, set apart, patterning our lives according to the Lord and not according to our flesh or the world.
- f. It simply means this: Be a person of your word as God is a God of His Word. Be merciful to those who mistreat you as God is merciful to you. Love your enemies as God loved you when you were His enemy. In this way be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Treat others the way your Father treats you. Love God and love others. That is the way of true righteousness.

Conclusion – Pharisaical righteousness walk by a short list of do's and don'ts. True righteousness walks a totally different path. True faith looks and acts so utterly distinct that is often surprising, misunderstood, and even mocked. True faith is not outward conformity to our own standard. True faith is a transformation of the heart that transforms the life. It's a radical, undeniable, visible, demonstrable loving of God and loving of others. The true people of God are truly peculiar, different people.