

Red Letters | The Sermons of Jesus Christ

The Fulfiller

Matthew 5.13-20

2.13.22

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. 17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

We're looking at the sermons of Jesus Christ and THIS YEAR (between Christmas and Easter) we look at the most famous speech, called The Sermon on the Mount.

I've said that the most important phrase in the whole sermon is the last five words of verse one (5.1) i.e.

"His disciples came to Him." The crowds were intrigued but His disciples are CAPTIVATED! They're NOT content with being interested by His mysterious words – they're interested in HIM and over they're drawn to His Person like their lives depend on Him (because they DO!) "His disciples came to Him."

But that important phrase (5.1) is NOT the theme or the key passage – just most important to the doing of the sermon. The summary or premise of The Sermon on the Mount is TODAY'S short passage.

The theme of the sermon is righteousness. What does it mean to live in right relationship with God, with our neighbors and with ourselves? Or from a Greco-Roman Philosophy angle: what does it mean to live a complete, full, mature, good life? What's our "telos", our end or our goal or purpose in life? What's Jesus Christ's definition of the "summum bonum", the Highest Good? Among all the philosophies and religions of His day, how will HE answer that all-important question?

Already the clergymen – priests and religious experts are concerned that He's proposing something that's fundamentally different from Judaism. He does things and says things that seem to come from God (John 3.2) but He also seems...peculiar? It seems like He wants change (powerful people don't like change!) and "He seems to be advocating a departure from our religion – a rejection of our ancient traditions – we keep the Law and the Prophets... Him? We're not sure."

Is the Way of Jesus a new religion? What is it saying about what we call the Old Testament...and will people who embrace the Way of Jesus use His Way as a covering and excuse for UN-righteous bad behavior?

Lets look at:

- 1) An OLD Fear
- 2) A Third Way
- 3) A New Obedience

The old fear is one that continues to be leveled at people who have recently come into a newfound state of spiritual joy and freedom. People may look on that person as having kinda lost it. "She has a faraway look in her eyes...she may have joined a cult or he may be ON something... "He says, 'Namaste' or 'Hallelujah!' – seems weird!" "I don't think what she's into will make her anything but strange!" And another facet of this old fear is that this whole new spiritual program or this counselor he's seeing is only making him more self-focused and idle. OR to put it another way, "Where DOES he GET this stuff?!" I mean why can't he be like everyone else – what is this odd, trendy, fad he's into – I don't get it!" With Jesus, the concern was, "I think He's leading people away from the 'Faith of our Fathers' and is starting a new religion totally detached from the true, pure, orthodox tradition that's defined us as a people... The changes He's proposing will be the death of our way of life...our religion... our place!" (John 11.48)

And sometimes those fears are well-founded. Some people do join cults. Some people and religious organizations in a quest to be relevant or in an attempt to grow or have a greater impact on the society – they diverge from the old path and what remains is fundamentally different... "We thought this was a kind of renewal movement but it's become unrecognizable and unorthodox... and bad."

Some of you have come from churches or groups or organizations that went that way... Attempting to be relevant, they became essentially something ELSE... Like SALT that unbelievably lost its flavor. It's not a new phenomenon – it's an old fear. How do we keep up with the times but maintain our true distinctiveness and remain who we are?

Sometimes a reformer arises and brings things back to the basic essentials. Sometimes it goes the other way – the reformer messes with the essence of the program... So, which type IS this Jesus of Nazareth: is He cutting out the appendix or the heart?

Jesus answers the question: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets..."(17) i.e. "I plan to leave the heart of Judaism in tact! The Scriptures are safe with Me!..."

Maybe the powerful people breathed a big sigh of relief... and maybe the outsiders...the poor people and the sinners thought, "See... He's no different from the self-righteous clergy and the establishment! I hoped that He would let us off the hook and do away with this hyper-strictness that only the super-elite religious people can even obey...Man, I'll NEVER be righteous! I was hoping He'd abolish the Law!" Then Jesus Christ doubles-down – "Nope! Anyone who messes with the Hebrew Bible (Law or Prophets) in even the smallest way is a nobody in God's rule over the world!"

And the Pharisees and religious people say, "Go get 'em preacher! You're our kinda guy!" THEN (v. 20) Jesus says, "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." (HUH?) "So... He's NOT a reformer. He's just like 'the Man' those powerful, self-righteous religious professionals! BUT wait!" And the other side says, "See...He's NOT a reformer! He holds to the whole Hebrew Bible – the HEART of our faith! He's righteous like WE'RE righteous! But WAIT!"

And Jesus Christ shows that He's NOT a reformer who has come to remove the heart of Judaism and YET, He's also NOT there to applaud the religious uber-righteous clergymen – He just said publically that they haven't even entered God's Kingdom!

He's NOT an escapist like the sinners (who disregard the Word of God) and He's NOT like the religious guys who keep the Word of God but only externally but inside their hearts also disregard the Word of God) – “Jesus, which side are You on? Are You for the Word of God or against the Word of God?” And Jesus says, “I am the Word of God!”

“I am NOT come to lower the bar or to raise the bar. I'm here to do what NO ONE has ever done: to clear the bar! I'm come neither to invalidate Moses or the Prophets (like the sinners do) NOR to invalidate Moses or the Prophets (like the clergymen do with their showy, check-list, outward adherence to rules they pretend to keep so that God will owe them a good life and they can pretend to be better than their freaky secular neighbors).

“I came not to invalidate God's covenant but to DO it...as no one has ever done it. I'm come to the House that stands incomplete and uninhabited – but I've NOT come to raze the house and erect a new religion in its place – but to complete the House... the Kingdom of Heaven come to earth!”
“I will show you what the Law really means – I'll fulfill the Law i.e. I'll fill it with meaning and show you the Heart of the Law (which is LOVE!)

“With My dying breath I will finish (i.e. fulfill the agreement God made with humanity) I am the Word, the Mind, the Logos of God...I am God Himself and by becoming one with you – by becoming a Human Being, the God-Man, I will do the God-side of the agreement AND the Man-side of the agreement. I came to finish what Israel has left undone – to fulfill/complete the Plan... a New Covenant based on My life, death and resurrection!”

It's like when Joshua saw the Angel (Jos CH 5) as they were about to go to war and Joshua asks, “Are you for our enemies or for us? Which side are you on?” And the Angel says, “No.” (Josh 5)
“Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” The commander of the LORD's army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.” (14-15 NIV)

Jesus Christ is now here...the New Joshua (yeshua) AND the Captain in one Person saying, “I will show you the true intent of the Law AND I will keep the Law...and give My record of perfect obedience to anyone who will trust Me. AND I will complete the House – not tear it down – will establish the Reign of God in all the earth – on earth as it is in heaven!”

A third way that they'd never considered – a quality or righteousness that's perfect (infinitely better than anything the Pharisees or any holy man or woman could ever generate) “I will require you have a perfect record in order to enter heaven and then I will GIVE you that record – MY righteousness will be attributed to anyone who trusts me... and their unrighteousness will be charged to Me...”
But wait... there's more!

AS Jesus Christ describes the completion of the agreement – the fulfillment/perfection of God’s plan, the New Covenant – we hear the words of Jeremiah (31) describing this day – “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days... I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

And again from Ezekiel (36) "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. And you will live in Israel, the land I gave your ancestors long ago. You will be my people, and I will be your God." (26-28 NLT)

See, in this New Covenant is not simply a promise of a perfect standing before God based on Jesus Christ fulfilling the agreement FOR all who trust Him... BUT ALSO the promise (which He’s also fulfilling) the promise of LIFE... the door is opened to the Good Life, the telos, the purpose, the end and aim of the Life that God wants for us.

God’s Spirit somehow enters into the believer in Jesus Christ and the Spirit of Holiness begins to sweetly assert His will... grace instructs us internally (Titus 2.11ff) so that we begin to want what God wants. God’s will (on earth as it is in heaven) begins to be our will – a new way of obeying. We begin to obey NOT because we’re afraid of the church catching us and kicking us out... not even because we fear God kicking us out... but because we see that God’s LAW, obeyed from the heart (not merely externally like the Pharisees did) but as an expression of inwardly motivated LOVE... THAT IS THE TRULY GOOD LIFE! Fish find their freedom/telos in the water...birds find their freedom/purpose in flight...and human beings find their freedom and purpose in the environment of LOVE...and the Law, properly understood and rightly motivated – LOVE is the fulfillment of the Law and the environment for which Human beings were created.

What we see before this key passage is a call to do good works so that those works somehow trace back to God as the Source. After the passage is a listing of seven such works all used as an examples of this superior and “extra nos” (from outside ourselves) good works that are powered by the New Covenant and have their sourced in God’s Spirit and grace –

The New Obedience is empowered by the Spirit and grace – keeping God’s Law is living the good life... God does it IN us and through us...God brings us IN to His Kingdom as we believe and then He begins to work this posture INTO us...our hearts become soft toward Him...our “have-tos” become our “want-tos”. New Covenant obedience isn’t merely legal ...it’s not that we shoot for “tempered obedience” or moderate... or relative obedience but full obedience that comes from a liberated heart... In that sense it’s more than legal obedience (supra-legal) surpassing the demands of the Law – and only the Spirit can supply the inner disposition required to keep that Law by love.