

# Jesus Against the Pharisees

*The Beatitudes*

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**Bible Verse:** Matthew 5:17  
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Tonight, we come back to the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5, and I invite you to turn there. We left off at Matthew 5:16 a few months ago. It was probably in October, if I remember correctly. We had taught through the Beatitudes. We had talked about the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and then we paused our treatment of the Sermon on the Mount, so that we could finish the series called "Building a Christian Mind," and we were looking at how to know true salvation. And so we paused at 5:16, but it was always my intent eventually to come back to it and so here we are. Those of you that have been welcoming the exposition on Revelation, for the foreseeable future, I'll be teaching on Revelation on Sunday mornings, and then we'll be going through the Sermon on the Mount on Tuesday evenings as we're starting here tonight.

This teaching from Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount is just of great practical consequence. I'm looking forward to covering these practical matters of anger and anxiety and prayer and other aspects that Jesus goes through in this great sermon, but what I want to do this evening is just a little bit refresh your memory and then move into actually a portion of the verse that Sid read to open up our time. Herein, the Sermon on the Mount, just by way of reminder. Jesus is describing the character of those who have truly been born again, the marks of those who are truly regenerate. He is describing the fruit of true repentance and he starts in the Beatitudes, verses 3 through 12, describing the blessing that rests upon those who have certain spiritual characteristics that are manifested in their lives and in this, in those Beatitudes, you immediately see a sharp contrast between what Jesus describes and the prevailing religious spirit of our day. That's going to be very important as we move along into verse 17 in just a moment. But look at the marks that he describes. In verse 3, actually let's just go back to remind you for just a moment. Back in Matthew chapter 4, verse 17, Matthew records a summary statement of Jesus' public teaching ministry and he says in Matthew chapter 4, verse 17, "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" He summarizes the message of Christ that Christ taught the crowds to repent because the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

Now already you see a great distinction between the message of Jesus and the message of today. It's very difficult to find any pulpit that treats the topic, the biblical theme of repentance seriously, even more difficult perhaps to find those that emphasize the coming

kingdom of God, and yet this is the summary of the message that Jesus is preaching. And as you move into Matthew chapter 5, Jesus expands on that. Jesus expounds what he means by this theme of repentance and what it means to belong to the kingdom of God. And as we saw many times, he is making exclusive statements that those who are truly born again, those who truly are in the kingdom, those who are true Christians are always marked by these characteristics that he describes to one degree or another. So that, look at verse 3 with me, chapter 5, verse 3, he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Theirs and theirs alone is the sense of the original text. And every subsequent beatitude that follows is of the same nature. Theirs and theirs alone. He's making an exclusive statement. He draws a circle. You can think about it this way. He draws a circle and then places inside the circle those who are truly born again, those who are truly part of his kingdom, and he describes them by various spiritual characteristics, and those who do not have those characteristics are outside the kingdom no matter what kind of verbal profession they might make or what kind of tongue allegiance that they might pay to God or to Christ even. If these spiritual characteristics are not real and growing and thriving, then that person is not a part of the kingdom of God. They are deceived about their salvation. And so Jesus describes there in verse 3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," the idea being blessed are those who understand that they have no spiritual resources of their own, they have no righteousness of their own to commend themselves to God, rather they are broken, they are empty, they are spiritually bankrupt, they know that they need a righteousness from outside themselves if they are ever going to be reconciled to God. They're poor in spirit. They realize they have nothing of their own. Verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn." There is sorrow over their sins, sorrow over their broken spiritual condition. Verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they," and they alone, "shall be satisfied."

Beloved, this is all by way of very brief reminder to show you the inner spiritual characteristics of true repentance. the inner spiritual condition of those who have truly been born again. It is completely contrary to the self-confident image that is presented in our society at large and certainly by large segments of corporate Christianity, you might say. The sense of projecting power, of projecting dominion, of projecting all kinds of spiritual self-confidence, what Christ describes is the exact opposite of it: poor in spirit, mourning, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, persecuted for righteousness' sake. And Jesus goes on to say in verses 10 through 12, this is all by way of review and it's very tempting for me to just preach it all again, but I can't do that, Jesus goes on to say that these spiritual characteristics are despised by men of the world, even despised by men within the church so that he says in verse 10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs," and theirs alone, "is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." This is really crucial to understand as we gather up momentum to go to verse 17. Jesus says, having expounded these various characteristics of the truly repentant, he immediately tells us, warns us, counsels us that the people of the world are going to be in conflict with the people of the kingdom. It's unavoidable. There is a colossal spiritual conflict that takes place between unregenerate man no matter their religious background, with the true

nature of the kingdom. And so he says, he encourages us, he warns us, he helps us to see that this characteristic, this path of repentance, regeneration is not given to us in order to make us popular in the world, it will actually be the exact opposite because the world hated Christ, they hated his message, they hated his person, and the more that we become like Christ in following him in true repentance, the more that we're going to receive the same response from those around us.

Now, Jesus goes on to say, having laid all of this out, he goes on to say that despite the resistance of the world to the people of God and despite the humble apolitical nature of true spirituality, there's actually powerful influence at work in the people of God. So he says in verse 13, "You are the salt of the earth." Verse 14, "You are the light of the world." Verse 16, "Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." His point is that even though there is this outward despisal of these characteristics, there is a hidden, unseen spiritual influence that takes place as the people of God manifest these characteristics. It has a restraining effect on the sin of society, on the sin of people around us. It has a developing, growing influence even though it is not what the world respects or what the world considers to be power and influence. What is power and influence in any day and age? You know, it's political power, it's authority, it's prominence, it's influence. You know, if I see the phrase social media influencer one more time in my lifetime, I'm going to get sick. This is not true influence, you know, and you can't measure influence by clicks on a silly video. No, the true influence that God uses, that God blesses, comes through this humble manifestation of the character of the kingdom of God.

Now, in our day, that's radical, counter-cultural, counter-intuitive thinking. No one, no one, no one anywhere in the world in our social media saturated mindset would look to someone that does not have a social media account, doesn't have thousands or millions of followers on their account, and isn't prominent in the news, no one would look at a person who does not have that and instead just has these humble characteristics that Jesus describes and look at them as a person of influence. You know, nothing's changed. We're looking at something from 2,000 years ago, but nothing's changed. The world looks at all of the wrong characteristics to assess whether there's real influence there or not. Now, nothing was different 2,000 years ago. What Jesus is saying here in verses 3 through 16 was just as radical in his day as it would be in ours today and so, there is something, having set forth these things, he needed to clarify what he was saying, what he was doing, so that his audience would not misunderstand and that brings us to verses 17 through 20. We'll be looking at these verses for a little while, not just tonight, but in a few weeks to come also and I want to read them to set them before you, Matthew chapter 5 verse 17. Jesus said,

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and

teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now, someone reading this for the first time not familiar with some of the background that surrounded what Jesus was saying might look at this and say, "That seems kind of odd. Why would he say that here?" But what Jesus is saying here is of utmost critical importance for his immediate audience and for us as we seek to understand the implications of his teaching. And notice particularly, just pay particular attention, although we're not going to get to this verse this evening, at what it says there in verse 20. Jesus says, "I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." He injects the Pharisees into the discussion of what he is saying at this point in the sermon and that's very critical to understand. Jesus is telling his audience, "Consider the religious leaders around you and understand that unless your spiritual condition exceeds theirs, you won't enter the kingdom of heaven at all." By implication, he's saying that the Pharisees are not in the kingdom of heaven. Now that may not sound like such a big deal to us here today, but by the end of our time together, you'll see why this is so very, very critical. We're going to try to understand what Jesus says here through the eyes of his audience here this evening and what I want you to understand is there's an even bigger principle really that's at stake here. Tonight's message is titled, "Jesus Against the Pharisees." Jesus against the Pharisees. If you're taking notes, you can write that down that, which is a better title and more descriptive than what's actually going on here, which is the threat of unexamined assumptions or the threat of unexamined presuppositions; you'll see why I say that as we go along here.

We need to understand this text from the perspective of the first century audience and the first point that I want to lay out for you, which is really just a background point, not related to the text directly, is we could say it's the control of the Pharisees, the control or even the profile of the Pharisees in the eyes of Jesus' audience. And let's just back up for a moment and ask ourselves a question that is central to interpreting the Bible. How do we know what the biblical writer meant by what he said? How do we know what the biblical writer meant by what he said? You know, it's well known that a common practice in broad evangelical circles is to have, you know, people get together for Bible study and they'll say, "What does this mean to you? What does it mean to me?" And, you know, and people just go around and pool their ignorance and think that they're having a spiritual discussion about the Bible. As John MacArthur said, "I don't care what the Bible means to you. I want to know what the Bible means." See, and what the Bible means is independent of our opinions. It has an objective meaning that can be understood by certain principles of interpretation and we know what the biblical writer meant not by discussing it with ourselves 2,000 years after the fact, but we know what the biblical writer meant by what he said by doing this, we take the biblical writer in the natural sense of the words that he used with his audience in their historical context, the natural sense of the words that he used with his audience in their historical context. You see, the Bible is inspired by the Spirit of God. The Bible is fully the word of God and comes from God. It is God breathing out his word to us so that we have the very word of God. How do we

know how to understand that? Part of what we need to know is that he used men in the process of writing the Scriptures, he communicated his word through men who were writing to an audience in a fixed historical context.

Now if this all seems kind of esoteric, just stay with me and it will make sense soon enough. The biblical writers, with the influence of the Spirit of God upon them, had an intention that they were trying to communicate to men who would receive their words, and these words were received in a historical context in which they all lived. There were cultural assumptions that were made, there were linguistic language assumptions that were made, and there were thought patterns that were in place, and God used all of that to communicate his message. Well, our job 2,000 years later is to try to learn something of that historical context ourselves so that we can do this, we want to put ourselves to the extent that we're able, and it's not a perfect process removed by 2,000 years, but what we want to do is we want to know something of the background so that we can step into the sandals of those who received the word in the first century and try to understand it in the way that they would have received it, okay? That's what we do. We have to be aware of the background in which Scripture was written if we're going to have a right and proper sense of what the first century author meant when he wrote to his first century audience.

It's called the grammatical historical method of interpretation. It's critical for our text and this is where I think what we're pivoting to now, I find all of this very, very fascinating. It's exciting to me, actually, is to understand this, when Jesus was preaching this sermon back some 2,000 years ago, preaching to an audience, beloved watch this, it's so obvious when someone points it out to you: Jesus was not teaching men in a spiritual vacuum. He was not teaching men who had a blank slate about spiritual matters in their mind, he's teaching them things on principles that they were hearing for the very, very first time. No, he was teaching people who had grown up in a particular Jewish society, speaking to a predominantly Jewish audience here, speaking to people who had grown up with religious assumptions, religious practices, religious teaching, religious authority, and this is what they had known for decades as they had grown up, and now Jesus steps into that context and begins to teach them. So they had all kinds of assumptions and presuppositions about what was true and how you know what is true. They had prior beliefs about God and about religious authority. Okay, just let that set in for a moment. They had prior beliefs when they were hearing Jesus. They had existing patterns of thought, existing presuppositions in their mind, and it would be through that grid of assumptions, history, presuppositions, that they would interpret what Jesus was saying to them, all right? That's always the case. We hear things and interpret them in light of what we have known in the past. Jesus' audience had prior assumptions about God and spiritual authority. Stay with me. This all comes together in a very powerful way, I promise.

Now, Jesus' audience here, this Jewish audience, was raised on Moses and the prophets. They were raised on multiple feasts and spiritual observances from the Old Testament that reinforced what they knew from the written word, and from season to season and from year to year, there were these repetitive observances that deeply ingrained truth on their minds, okay? Now, there's nothing really insightful about what I just said. It should just kind of be obvious, if you have any acquaintance with the Old Testament, to realize

that they had a calendar that they followed. They had the temple and they had sacrifices and they had all kinds of different things that they were used to and accustomed to that – watch this – that they associated with truth, and even more precisely, they associated their understanding of those things with what the truth was. Now, adding to that, when you come to the New Testament, you find introduced a group of people, a group of leaders that were not found in the Old Testament. You don't have Pharisees in the Old Testament. The Pharisees were a group of religious leaders that arose from the close of the Old Testament about 400 years prior to the time of Christ and the coming of Christ, and so there's a lot of interesting historical background to that. We're not going to go into it here tonight, just to point out the fact that when you open the New Testament, you find this group of religious leaders that is not mentioned in the Old Testament but the New Testament talks about them and assumes their existence in a way that they're obviously a dominant influence in the first century culture in which Jesus would have been teaching.

Now let me tell you just a little bit about the Pharisees, because all of this is critical to understanding what Jesus meant in verse 17. This is part of the historical aspect of interpretation that we're engaging here and I'll give you a lot of biblical examples as we go along. The Pharisees were the religious leaders of the day. They were the religious teachers of the day, you could say. And they had strict views about the nature of biblical law, the law of Moses. And as you read the gospels, you'll find that they were meticulous in their outward religious observances. They were meticulous about this and they would tithe herbs and spices because they wanted to be so precise about it and they wanted to be so precise about what could or could not be done on the Sabbath and things of that nature. And the result of this is that the Pharisees were actually a very proud and condescending group of men. They were proud and they were condescending toward others. Even though they were religious leaders and people followed them, they actually held the people that they were leading in contempt. They viewed them as a level below the Pharisees. The Pharisees kept the rules, the common people didn't and so this keeping and observing of the law distinguished them and made them proud, made them self-righteous, and they viewed others with contempt. They viewed others with contempt.

Look at John chapter 7, so you can see what I'm referring to here. Once you're alerted to these things, you find it throughout the gospels. It's all over. It's all over the place when you see when it's pointed out to you to look at this. Now, let's begin in John chapter 7 verse 40, and I'll pick it up there. "When they heard these words, some of the people," they had heard the teaching of Jesus, they were wondering if he could be the Christ, "some of the people said, 'This really is the Prophet.'" And notice, they were hearing Jesus directly, and they were trying to ascertain who he was, and they were seeing that he was someone elevated. He was someone a cut above, even if they didn't fully understand the fullness of who he was.

Verse 41, "Others said, 'This is the Christ,'" he's the Messiah, "some said, 'Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?'" As if they didn't know his background. And so here you go in verse 43, "there was a division among the people over him." Even in Jesus' day the teaching of the word of God from Jesus himself

created division. The existence of division is no indication of whether someone is teaching the truth or not. If it was, then there would be no division over Christ himself. But here Christ is teaching and there's division about who he is and the significance of what he's teaching.

Verse 44, "Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him." Now in verse 45, here's what I want you to see about the Pharisees, "The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, 'Why did you not bring him?' The officers answered, 'No one ever spoke like this man!'" And so think about him as being, this is not a fair analogy, but the cops on the street were told to go arrest him and they said, "I can't arrest him. No one's ever spoken this way." Not a Pharisee saying that, but he's speaking to Pharisees. "The Pharisees answered them, 'Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.'"

Now notice what's happening there. The crowd, hearing Jesus for themselves, are speculating, "He's a prophet, maybe he's the Messiah." There's conflict about it. The Pharisees, when all of this is reported to them, they respond with condescension. They proudly say, "Have any of the Pharisees believed in Christ? Do you see any of us following Christ? But this crowd that's paying attention to him, they're just accursed men, common men. They don't know." And so the Pharisees had this self-righteous view of themselves. They looked at others with contempt and you see this played out there in that passage in John chapter 7.

Now, a little bit of background about the teaching of the Pharisees. All of this is really critical, beloved. The Pharisees had a particular teaching about oral tradition. They believed that there was an oral tradition that was alongside the written law of Moses that God had given. And so the Pharisees believed that in addition to the written law of Moses, that God gave a separate oral law to Moses, and that Moses gave that oral law to Joshua, Joshua gave it to the elders, the elders gave it to the prophets, and the prophets gave it to the Pharisees. It's the exact same thing that the Catholics manufacture to establish their tradition. "Oh, we've got this tradition outside of the Bible, but it's come down to us," and they use that to justify their false authority. Talking about the Pharisees now, this idea about an oral tradition, beloved, there is no historical basis for that belief whatsoever. There is no mention to that in Scripture but that presupposition, that assertion, allowed them to add their own regulations to the Old Testament and claim an equal authority for their tradition to the Old Testament. An oral tradition with equal authority with the written law of Moses, exact same thing the Catholics do, the exact same condemnation upon both of them. I'm pausing here just to kind of let all of this sink into your mind and let you absorb what I'm saying.

What the Pharisees taught is that the tradition that was given to them historically through the generations gave the true insight into the law of God, into the law of Moses, and they went so far as to say that, "If you follow our tradition, you'll never violate the law because our tradition functions like a fence around the law and if you don't cross the fence that we established, then you'll never be in danger of breaking the law of God." The

result of that is this: the Pharisees controlled the synagogues, they influenced the people with their teaching, with their gifts of charity, so that, here's the crucial pivot point, so that the Pharisees, despite their contemptuous attitude toward others, they were held in an elevated status by everyone in the Jewish society there in the first century. People looked upon them as the ones who had the knowledge, they were the ones who had the authority, and therefore what the Pharisees said was automatically authoritative. What the Pharisees said was automatically the truth of the matter. There was nothing to think about. The exact way that so many Catholics respond to the false religious authority that they honor. The parallels are really frightening.

There was a historian in the first century, a famous historian by the name of Josephus, and he spoke about the Pharisees in his writings, and he said this about the Pharisees. Listen closely because it's really going to help us see what's happening in the text now. Josephus said this, "The Pharisees have so great a power over the multitude that when they say anything against the king or against the high priest, they are immediately believed." Listen to that again. "The Pharisees have so great a power over the multitude," think about the power that a pope has over faithful Catholics, "The Pharisees have so great a power over the multitude that when they say anything against the king or against the high priest, they are immediately believed." If there is a conflict between competing authorities, the king says something, the Pharisees say something else, the crowd automatically believes the Pharisees. The high priest, same thing.

So there was this automatic deference to anything that the Pharisees said. There was an automatic credibility given to the Pharisees so that anyone who contradicted the Pharisees was wrong by definition. That was their assumption. That was their presupposition that governed the way that they thought about all of life. All right, you with me? The Pharisees were the boss, and they reveled in that position, they exploited that position, and the crowds followed them with an unthinking allegiance so that, beloved, the people the common people who would have then constituted the audience of Jesus, equated the teaching of the Pharisees with the law itself. What the Pharisees said was equivalent to the law of Moses, was equivalent with the word of God, and so to contradict the Pharisees would be to contradict the law itself. All right, that's the control of the Pharisees and all of this shaped the way the audience of Jesus would have received and understood and interpreted his teaching.

So, let's go to our second point here for this evening, the confrontation of Jesus. The confrontation of Jesus and if you can just put yourself into the sandals of that first century audience, you will see that they had a great dilemma on their hands. They had an unspeakably difficult, apart from the help of the Holy Spirit, they had an unspeakably difficult conflict in their mind as they heard the teaching of Jesus because setting the Pharisees aside for a moment, when they heard Jesus teach, they knew that they were hearing words from the lips of unparalleled greatness. They were hearing something of unparalleled greatness from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Go back to Matthew chapter 7 at the end of the chapter and you'll find this in other places in the gospels also; I'm just going to point it out here for the sake of time tonight. At the



end of the Sermon on the Mount, after Jesus had finished his teaching, we read this in chapter 7 verse 28, "when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." They heard Jesus teach. They gathered around him. They heard him speak and they knew, they knew there was something about the content of what Jesus said, the tone in which he said it, the demeanor with which he carried himself, all of which projected a supernatural authority to them that was something distinct, unique from what they were used to in their religious environment. This is something different. This is astonishing. And elsewhere, and I think we read it there in John 7, never did a man speak this way. And so their breath was being taken away as they heard Jesus teach but in light of the control of the Pharisees that we've seen, beloved, that created a very great problem for them. This created a mental collision that started to fracture their own minds. Jesus, as he taught, consistently embarrassed the Pharisees by exposing their ignorance and violation of the law. This is a conflict of great colossal proportions. I know I end up saying that a lot, conflicts of great colossal collision, but it's true. It's what the Bible does when it comes to the mind that begins to understand. The Pharisees were the rule, they were the boss, they were the authority. Jesus had this great teaching effect upon them, and now they're seeing Jesus, as I'll show you in just a moment, they're seeing Jesus embarrass the Pharisees and accuse them of ignorance and false teaching, basically. This is a complete deconstruction of everything by which first century thought functioned in a Jewish mind.

I want to show you a couple of examples of it. Matthew chapter 12. Look at Matthew chapter 12, beginning in verse 1. "At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.'" Now looking past the question of the Sabbath, realize that there is a conflict of spiritual authority going on there. Jesus' disciples are doing one thing, the Pharisees, the ones who were the presumed authority in culture, are saying, "This is wrong." Jesus is about to tell them, "No, there's nothing wrong with it. It's perfectly fine."

Verse 3, "He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read,' see, have you not read, verse 3, verse 5, "have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?" He says, "Haven't you read the Bible? Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Well, this is a complete embarrassment of the established religious authorities. It would be like having a religious debate with the Pope and showing what an ignoramus he is on matters of Scripture and it would be a complete embarrassment.

Verse 6, Jesus says, "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless." Three times in those seven verses, he just utterly humiliates and embarrasses the Pharisees, showing their ignorance and showing their spiritual bankruptcy. It's incredible.

Look at chapter 19, verse 3. Chapter 19, verse 3, the "Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?'" He answered," the same way, he said, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." He said, "Haven't you read this? Don't you know the basics of the Bible?"

Verse 7, "They said to him, 'Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?'" Jesus said, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." And so he explains Scripture, they try to throw up an objection and Jesus explains it and shows that they have no idea what they're talking about.

Chapter 21, verse 14. Chapter 21, verse 14, "the blind and the lame came to Jesus in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant, and they said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read,'" once again their utter ignorance, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?'" Have you never read? Have you never read? Have you never read? Jesus, with this self-authenticating authority, teaches with great power and everybody recognizes it. He exposes the emptiness of the Pharisees who were the presumed authority, and you can start to see how this collision is working itself out.

Now, in addition to that, in addition to exposing their ignorance, Jesus condemned the Pharisees as being an evil and undiscerning generation. Look at chapter 12, verse 38. Chapter 12, verse 38, "some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, 'Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.' But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.'" You're asking for a sign because you're evil men. You're asking for a sign because you are spiritually adulterous from the living God.

Chapter 16. Chapter 16, verse 1, this is all through the gospel of Matthew, isn't it? Matthew 16, verse 1, "the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, 'When it is evening, you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red." And in the morning, "It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening." You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.' So he left them and departed." Evil, adulterous generation. Have you never read? What is wrong with you?

You could look at Matthew 15, let's just jump over to Matthew 23 for just a moment. Matthew 23, there's a series I believe of eight woes that are pronounced on the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. We'll look at one just for illustration purposes. Matthew 23

verse 13, "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. Woe to you, blind guides," and on and on it goes.

All of this extensive review of Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees to show you that there is this confrontation that Jesus makes with the Pharisees which is nothing less than having declared spiritual war on them. He declared spiritual war on them. Jesus came into the world, into this culture, where the Pharisees had this privileged position of deference that they did not deserve, they had this position of teaching authority that was based on something that they had made up, and as Jesus teaches, as Jesus interacts with the crowds, as he interacts with the Pharisees, he has completely exposed them as being corrupt frauds who did not belong to the kingdom of God at all.

Now it's no wonder that the Pharisees hated him and wanted to see him dead but let's set the Pharisees aside for a moment and come back to the audience that Jesus is teaching here in Matthew chapter 5. Go back there to Matthew chapter 5 with me. In light of everything that we've seen here this evening, beloved, I think that you can get an idea of why Jesus said what he said in verse 17. The audience of Jesus, their initial presupposition would have been that if Jesus is opposing the Pharisees, then he must be opposing the law of God itself, he must be opposing and contradicting the law of Moses because they equated in their presuppositions the law of Moses with what the Pharisees said. And so what Jesus is doing here in verse 17, we spent 45 minutes laying the groundwork to make this one statement, Jesus is correcting that misunderstanding. He is exposing their presupposition as being a false presupposition so that having cleared away the false conception, they are able now to receive his teaching with receptive hearts so that he says in verse 17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Why did he say that and why did he say it right there? He said it right there because everything that he had said in the Beatitudes was a contradiction of the spirit of the Pharisees. Everything that he had said about true influence, salt of the earth, light of the world, was contrary to what the Pharisees taught. And so for the audience, they filter that through the matrix of their presuppositions, and they say, "He must be against the law because he's obviously contradicting the Pharisees." And Jesus says, "No, the problem here is your presupposition. I'm not contradicting the law. I did not come to abolish anything about the law. I actually came to fulfill it." And what he is saying to them is, what Jesus is saying, "I'm not violating the law, I'm not contradicting the law. The people who are contradicting the law are your Pharisees, are your spiritual authority that you've always followed. It's not me violating the law, it's them." It's a great clarification about the significance of his ministry. and the purpose of his teaching. All of that is very fundamental to understanding Matthew 5, because as you read on in Matthew 5, you'll see six different times beginning in verse 21 where Jesus says, "You've heard it said, but I say to you. You've heard it said, but I say to you." And in every case, he's quoting a

position that the Pharisees had taught, and he's correcting it in order to recover the true meaning of the law from the false perversion that the Pharisees had created on it.

We'll see a lot more in coming weeks but for now, beloved, see just this much. I realize that tonight's message has been a little bit technical, maybe, having to dive in to see, but verse 17 is a crucial transition in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has set forth positive character traits about what it means to be truly repentant, truly regenerate, who the true people of his kingdom are, and now he has to shift that over and work out the implications of that for his first century audience. He's teaching this. He's teaching this, and it has application for us today: Jesus Christ is the final authority, not the traditions of men. Our hope is in the word of Christ. Our final allegiance is to Christ, no matter what we've been taught in the past. No matter what you've come to know, what you've come to assume through your upbringing, there's this reality in true salvation where you realize that there is a transfer of allegiance from what you've always known to what is true, from what, you know, maybe a favorite pastor taught you, maybe what well-intentioned but misinformed parents taught you, and then you come to the word of God and you start saying, "But that means that what I heard in the past is not true. I've always believed this or that, but where do I find that in the Bible?"

And it can be a very unsettling experience and I'm going to maybe overstate things a little bit here with what I'm about to say just to make the point. I'm not even convinced that it's an overstatement but for those that have been raised in particular spiritual environments where you could lose your salvation, you need to kiss Mary in order to go to heaven, blah, blah, blah, you grow up with loud music and bright lights and 15-minute messages that are designed to make you laugh, and you think that this is true Christianity, Beloved, what Jesus is saying here in Matthew 5 verse 17 gives us a very broad and bright light of discernment on how to think about these things. And I know, and I love so many of you in this room because I know that you have gone through, the Lord has brought you through the process of thinking about these things, and you've actually rejected past tradition that you received when the Lord opened your eyes to what the truth of Scripture is. And I love you for it. I really do, and you're a profound encouragement to this most unworthy pastor. But for people that have been rooted in a particular religious tradition and then they're exposed to reading the Bible, being taught from the Bible and all of this, there comes a point where you say something like this to yourself. There's something that starts to dawn in your mind where you start to say, "I have to rethink everything in light of this. I have to reconsider everything that I've ever taught, that I've ever been taught, that I've ever heard. This is so different from the tradition that I received that I've got to rethink it all." Some of you raised in false religion and recognizing, "This completely deconstructs what I used to think was true." That's a good process. That's what Jesus is leading his audience into here in Matthew chapter 5 verse 17, "You've got to rethink it all." Jesus speaking here, "You think, I'm violating the law. It's actually everything that you knew beforehand, before me, that was violating the law." And the mark of a regenerate heart is the one who's willing to be taught and willing to receive from Scripture the things that undo and then rebuild their entire worldview around the truth.

And if you've crossed that bridge, I know I had to cross it, I know others that have, cross that bridge where you say, "I've got to rethink everything," that's a mark of being born again. That's a mark of the work of the Spirit of God within you. Perhaps you're a young person, you know, and you've been raised in a Christian home where these things have been taught to you. It's a little bit, maybe just a little bit different for you where you have to transition away from, "This is what my parents believe," to saying, "This is what I believe. I embrace this, I own this for myself." And you're thinking it through not as something that's handed down to you from parents, but that which you say, "These are my convictions. This is what I believe. I will follow Christ myself." It's a sweet thing to see that happen in someone's life in ministry. In the big scope of things, I think it's actually comparatively rare. People don't naturally want to examine their presuppositions. They don't want to confront the possibility that they've believed false things. They don't want to confront the possibility that maybe they've been a false professor of Christ for many, many years.

There's a humbling before Christ that must take place and if that's happened in your life, give thanks to God because it is a special precious gift that he has given to you and it is the spirit in which our church wants to function. You know, the Bible says in Acts 17:11, says, "Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." Not everyone wants to examine the Scriptures. Not everyone wants to receive the word with eagerness. It's so much easier to just want to stay in the traditions and the beliefs that you knew but, beloved, that's not a safe path. Those who would stay in the traditions with the Pharisees were following blind guides who led them into a pit. That's not where you want to end up.

And so, as we come to the teaching of Christ, we recognize that in Christ is the final authority, in his written word is our final authority, and we examine everything by that, and we come with no prior commitments that we are not willing to change if Scripture teaches us to the contrary. That's the mark of a true disciple and so all I can do is ask you, is that the character of your heart? Is that the desire of your heart? "I want the word of God above everything else. I want obedience and truth above my past traditions. I don't want to be governed by unbiblical presuppositions. I just want the truth. I must have the truth no matter what, no matter what it costs. Does it cost me relationships? If I have the truth, the relationships can go. Does it mean I have to leave a former religious tradition so that I can have the truth? The prior religious tradition has to go because when I read the word of God, when I read Christ in the gospels," the regenerate heart says, "I know that I am hearing the words of truth. I am hearing the words of unparalleled greatness. I am hearing the words of the Son of God himself and I must have that above all else." That's the heart of a true disciple. Is it yours? I pray to God that it is.

Let's pray.

*Father, make us like those noble Jews in Berea, make us into those that receive the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so, and when the word confronts us, confronts our thinking, confronts our behavior, confronts our*

*attitudes, Father, I pray that you would give us a heart not to resist, not to lash out, not to strike back because we're trying to protect our pride and prior associations, but just conform us by your Spirit to your word, because as you do that, you'll be conforming us to the image of Christ and preparing our souls for heaven. Do that in each one, here in the room, over the live stream, those who one day will hear these things in subsequent ways. Father, we earnestly plead with you, we earnestly plead with your Spirit, earnestly desiring, Father, that you would honor your word in the hearts of those who hear for their eternal blessing, for the glory of Christ, for the building of your kingdom and your church. Lord, please, please do that which only you can do. Do not let your word return void, but have it accomplish the fullness of everything for which you've appointed it and just help us as humble people to do our part in the advance of your kingdom in responding in obedience and love to what your word says, no matter what it says, no matter how it cuts against the grain of our thought and life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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