

Matthew 5:48 (NKJV)

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Let's start with a question.

Is verse 48 the summary of the prior paragraph or the summary of the prior chapter?

The more I thought about this, the more I think that it is the summary of the whole chapter. And as such, we will spend this morning reviewing the chapter in such a way that I hope it helps tie it all together for us. I hope to show the whole chapter is leading to verse 48.

Jesus starts his sermon by telling us who the happy people of a happy God are.

Matthew 5:3-10 (NKJV)

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This is a whole different breed of people.

We went through the progression at great length. We saw how spiritual growth happened to them. We saw what the work of God on their lives produced step by step. It created a person that is other worldly. This person just does not tick like the rest of humans on the planet. They have experienced a significant change from the inside out.

From the description of what a real Christian is, Jesus took us to our purpose. It is a large part of why we are left on the planet. It is what our days to be engrossed in.

Matthew 5:13-16 (NKJV)

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand,

and it gives light to all *who are* in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Then next Jesus teaches about why He came. And one way of describing **why Jesus came** was to say that He came to **fulfill the words of God**. This glorious old testament that God provided to reveal Himself, this is the same Old Testament that Christ's **mission** was to **fulfill**.

Matthew 5:17-20 (NKJV)

17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Remember how we looked closely at this? Remember that the jot and the tittle were the smallest **letter**, and then the smallest **mark** on a letter. Christ went out of His way to make it clear that His life was not a **correction** to the Old Testament. It was not a **change** to the Old Testament. It was an absolute **endorsement** of the Old Testament. This gave us one of the most profound **interpretation** aids in applying this passage. The teachings of Christ cannot contradict the Old Testament that He is committed to endorsing. That helps us immensely. We can check, using this principle, to make sure we are applying everything the way Jesus said. If we are, it does not contradict anything that is taught by principle in the Old Testament.

By that one principle alone we can know for sure that Christ was not delivering a brand new ethic, a new Jesus way of living. He was not delivering anything new at all.

All of the understandings that loft Jesus teaching as this **radical new mandate** for the human race, or some beautiful **new proclamation** to stand in the face of all that was said before are, well... just wrong.

Jesus is teaching His disciples what the law said all along.

Now who were the teachers who held the title of being teachers of the law in Jesus's day? They were the Scribes and the Pharisees. The Saducees were the liberals of the day. They were not all that concerned about exactly what scriptures said. They limited spiritual things to a much smaller box. So they are not the ones Jesus talks about in the rest of the chapter.

We know we are getting this right because it fits the flow of the text.

What is the most logical thing for Jesus to talk about after just telling us that He was all for the real Old Testament teachings?

Look what He says next.

²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees*, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

He has just introduced us to **the rest** of Chapter 5.

Christ is saying your experts are teaching stuff. You have heard the stuff they have been teaching. They posture themselves as being the **pros** in this business. They see and present themselves as “**the answer**” people. But you know what? What the Pharisees teach and believe **cannot save them**. You need to be **saved-er** than than the Pharisees.

Romans tells us that the Israelites did not **attain the the law of righteousness because they did not pursue it by faith, but by the works of the law**. They were using the law as a tool to **give them steps** to earn their approval by God. They were trying to **attain something** instead of **receive something**. Instead of the law driving them to **poverty of spirit**, which is where the truth of the law would take every truth seeking person, the pharisees figured out a way to **justify themselves** with the law. They used the law to prove that **their way of living in the flesh** was good with God. And if it appeared **not to be**, they would **rework it a little more** until it did.

So we **start** with this phrase in verse 20 that **our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees** and it **ends** by giving us **the goal**. Our righteousness must exceed the completely insufficient righteousness of the pharisees because something **a million times higher** is in mind. That law was pointing us to **a righteousness by faith** that will have a **perfection** about it that in some small way will **resemble God Himself**.

Now at that point, in light of all the heresies out there I want to make it perfectly clear. We do not become little **God Jrs**. But the goal of our righteousness is that we live in such a way that a person living in the darkness sees the **same light in us** that they see **in God**. They see **grace** pouring out on the **undeserved** by us that looks **just like** the grace that **God** pours out.

The goal of salvation is for us to become **like God**. We do not **become** God. But we take on some of His traits that are **other worldly**.

Now going back to where we were before we jumped to the end. Remember what we were looking at. Jesus was talking about the severe failure of those **holding the reigns** to the scriptures.

So what would we think Christ would do next?

It is simple. He goes through a series of **examples**. He certainly could have come up with more. But Christ picks several of his favorites.

And He essentially laid out the model we followed.

The **Old Testament** says something.

The **Pharisees taught a distortion of it**

Jesus taught the **essence** of it.

Jesus proceeds to show us how the Pharisees had minimized the perfect law of God so it was fully attainable by anyone who wanted to, as long as they went strictly by the pharisees laws.

Then Jesus proceeded to show how the **law, when really understood**, guides a believer in a way of living that they have **no chance of perfectly fulfilling**.

But that is ok because these people already understand their **poverty of spirit**. There is little surprise when they fail. They know that they **never have** and **never will** earn God's favor by their fleshly effort. They know that **everything they have** is from Grace. So they are **willing**, and even **want to**, do those things that God truly requires. They know it will be an uphill battle. And they know that they will never do it perfectly. But they **want to want to**. They would rather be **failing** at that which **God truly wants** than to be **succeeding** at something that **does not represent God at all**. They would rather be a **faulty reflection** of that which God **really wants**, than a **perfect reflection** of that which looks **nothing** like God.

What Jesus lays out is a million miles removed from the Pharisees teaching.

But it is how we are to live as Beatitude believers.

Remember how Jesus started with **Murder**. And He basically tells us to stay off the murder train altogether.

Then he explains that Adultery really starts when we covet. And avoid coveting like it is the corona virus. Do anything to get rid of it's stronghold in your heart.

Then Jesus talks about Divorce. Jesus lets us know what a big deal marriage really is and that only sexual sin by a believer or non believer or abandonment by a non believer is reason for divorce and allows remarriage. Otherwise we need to figure out some way of working it out, even if separation is a tool in that effort.

Then Jesus talks about using **oaths** as tools of deception. And Jesus lets us know even playing those games at all is in the devil's playground. Simply tell the truth in your normal communication. Don't embellish, because that leads to deception.

Then Jesus talks about justice and lets us know that justice is not an **individual mandate**. The civil government was given this job. As much as we can, we should remove a wicked person's control over our behavior or attitudes. We should be submitted to king Jesus and not king flesh to the place that a person **cannot push our buttons** with insults to our dignity, removal of our property, threatening our security, or demanding our time. We must have the attitude that asks, What does King Jesus require of me at this moment. I think it is safe to say that there is no human other than Jesus that will ever carry that our perfectly.

And finally Jesus talks about **who** we are to love and **how** we are to love. And we find ourselves seeing humanity from **His** gracious perspective. We reflect Him when **He loved us** when **we** were His enemies. We issue out good things to bad people because it is like our Lord. We go beyond any idea of economy, to give something to get something. And we move to an eternal framework where we **give out good things to evil people** because **our Father** makes it His normal business to give out good things to evil people.

And that is where we reach our conclusion.

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Notice the you shall. ESV says therefore you **MUST** be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

What is the point here?

Would Christ have gone through all the beatitude traits to only, at the end tell us that we are all **disqualified** and will never receive our reward? Given what the Bible tells us everywhere else, we cannot possible arrive at that conclusion. After all, we as believers live in the belief that if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Who of us has not had to assure his or her heart a million times with that verse?

No we cling to the fact that we are saved by faith. We know that the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I think the next verse helps us to understand a little better.

Ephesians 2:7-10 (ESV)

7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

I believe it works out like this.

We need a greater righteousness than the Pharisees. We need more than a **works based** righteousness that a human being can attain to. That will never do. No. Righteousness that will achieve salvation **MUST** be perfect righteousness with no sin in it. Well everything that Christ said in each of his examples showed us that this **absolute righteousness**, which it is very clear that it is impossible for us to do perfectly.

So when Christ gets to the end He tells us, friends, this is what righteousness is. If you want to know the right thing, the righteous thing, in each of these situations, I have just laid it out to you. And in the Spirit you are **capable** of doing it. But because we live in the flesh and are surrounded by the world and are inflicted by the devil, failure is a certainty.

But Christ wants there to be no confusion. If you want to know what the **perfection** of my Father is in these situations, I am telling you. What I just told you is what **perfect** looks like. In fact Jesus could say, watch me and you will **SEE** what perfect looks like. That is what perfect is. And that is what you must be.

That righteousness is the righteousness that surpasses the righteousness of the pharisees. And that is the righteousness that you need. You can't cheat like they do. You can't bump down the law to say things that make the law **achievable** by your efforts.

You cannot grade your efforts on a curve, where the highest score gets the A, no matter how far the effort falls from perfection.

No God's standard is **perfect righteousness**. And that is what we must shoot for and that is what we must obtain.

And here is the beauty of it all.

The perfect righteousness that we are required to have is **graced to us** through Jesus Christ. We get it by confessing with our mouth the Lord Jesus.... That Jesus truly is King, and believing in our hearts that God really did raise Christ from the dead, along with understanding the reason Christ did. Then we will have eternal life.

When we come to Christ in salvation we receive this perfection that is required of us for salvation.

But that is not the whole story. Remember what Eph said.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The righteousness we were given at salvation was **imputed**. It was **counted** toward our account.

But that righteousness was not **imparted**. We are not given **full possession** of it. Our flesh was not instantly removed. Our wicked desires didn't instantly turn into good ones. No. That is the rub. We are **counted** as good. But we don't **exhibit** the goodness unless we are looking at our righteousness from God's court room. But this **new birth** has enabled us for a whole different way of life.

God created us for good works and God created the good works for us to do them.

So like we cannot ever say enough that we begin **to do** the perfect things because we know them to be **like God**. Oh we do not **do them all**. And even when we do them they are **not perfect**. But Christ laid out what the holiness we were given by the blood of Christ **looks like** in day to day decisions. So we have the glorious opportunity to live like a blood bought child of the King. We are not confused about what **righteousness is** when wicked men push our buttons, or when we are tempted to win the affections of our neighbors wife, or when someone has done us wrong and we want vengeance.

Even though we do not always **do it**, we can now call a spade a spade. When we are tempted to excuse ourselves we can say, "**No that is not what King Jesus said. King Jesus says this is what looks like God. I can see that**". I cannot excuse my failure. But I can confess it and depend on my imputed righteousness to save me, not my imparted righteousness.

Good works, **imparted** righteousness, is the evidence of salvation, **imputed** righteousness.

Let's look at what our brother Jones has to say.

Is there anything more discouraging? We feel that the Ten Commandments, the ordinary moral standards of decency, are difficult enough; but look at these statements about not even looking with lust, about going the second mile and throwing in the cloak together with the coat, and so on. There is nothing more discouraging than the Sermon on the Mount; it seems to throw us right out, and to damn our every effort before we have started. It seems utterly impossible. But at the same time do we know of anything more encouraging than the Sermon on the Mount? Do we know of anything that pays us a greater compliment? The very fact that we are commanded to do these things carries with it an implicit assertion that it is possible. This is what we are supposed to be doing; and there is a suggestion, therefore, that this is what we can do. It is discouraging and encouraging at the same time; it is set for the fall and

rising again. And nothing is more vital than that we should always be holding those two aspects firmly in our minds.¹

The Christian is a man who goes beyond what a normal human can do because he has been **enabled** to do the impossible through the power of the Holy Spirit. **I can do all things**, and those are the things we are empowered to do in the Christian life, like suffering in the example of the verse, through Christ who strengthens me. We have a supernatural fruit.

We are not like other men. God has gifted us to **exceed the righteousness** of the pharisees.

At the same time, we are **like God** and **like Christ**. We are not junior models of Him. But we have a **family resemblance**. We do some of the same things. We have some of the same traits because we have learned them from Father God and brother Jesus.

We see the whole world differently. The pharisees saw the law mostly in terms of **what they should not do**. We see it in terms of a **higher way of living**. We see **love** as **what we exist for**. And love is primarily positive. We are here to continue pursuing that quest that is **most satisfying** and **motivating** to the heart of a human. We live in the love of God and the love for others. We have a purpose far **bigger than ourselves**. It is even bigger than, but contains, our own self interest. Our quest is not only to resemble our God but to love Him to the point of congruity.

That is what Jesus is talking about. That is what He is **calling us to today** and **tomorrow** and **next week** and **next year**, until He calls us home.

And what is our destiny?

One glorious day our imputed righteousness **will match** our imparted righteousness. Our actions and attitudes will actually be perfect, just like Christs. And just like we aspire to now.

We will not attain the goal by our continual improvement. It will still need to be **given to us by grace**. But by the time we are **given this perfection**, it should not be completely out of our **realm of experience**. We ought to know what it is **to love** so much **like God** that we grace those who hate us. We ought to know what it is to have **pure hearts** toward someone for whom we are tempted to have all kinds of other thoughts. We ought to know what it is to long for God's grace to be shown to some **whose evil heart is doing evil**

¹ Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1976). [*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*](#) (Second edition, p. 315). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

things. We should be experiencing this radical transformation daily. We are supposed to smell of heaven. And we do that by being like God.

There is no sense delaying these changes. Let's challenge each other to prepare for a **steady diet of perfection that we will have in heaven** by practicing the attitudes and actions now. Let's practice to get ready for the environment that Jesus has spent over 2000 years preparing for us.

Matthew 5:48 (NKJV)

⁴⁸ Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.