Matthew 5C

* We’re studying through Jesus’ first sermon delivered during His earthly ministry, which we call “the Sermon on the Mount”
  + We’ve already studied the first sixteen verses of the sermon, including the well-known section called, “the Beatitudes”
  + As we learned, these traits are the spiritual fruit of a changed heart
  + But as I read from Luke’s Gospel during the last section, Jesus also taught that the Pharisees, Israel’s religious leaders, weren’t authentic representatives of God
    - They may have possessed authority but they were ignorant and blind when it came to knowing how to please God
* Jesus, a man clearly empowered to speak for God, has declared that the Pharisees’ demonstrations of sanctimoniousness counted for nothing with God
  + The Pharisees lacked and and
    - They were depending on their self-righteousness rather than God’s mercy
    - They loved the money and power of this world, rather than the Kingdom to come
    - In short, Jesus labeled the Pharisees as fakes, counterfeits, and frauds
  + If you were a Jew, listening to Jesus’ teachings you would probably start to wonder if anything you’ve been taught is correct and true?
    - Jesus has called into question everything Jewish culture held dear
    - Because if the Pharisees *weren’t* God’s spokesmen, then what about the Law & traditions they commanded everyone to follow?
    - Was Moses wrong too? Are the feasts irrelevant? Was the temple service invalid?
    - Was Jesus advocating that it all be thrown out?
  + Jesus knew His listeners would have these concerns, so in the next section of His sermon, Jesus reassures the crowd

**Matthew 5:17-20**

**17***“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose.*

**18***I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.*

**19***So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

**20***“But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!*

* In v.17, Jesus addresses the crowd’s concerns, saying He didn’t come (meaning His mission wasn’t) to put an end to the Law and Prophets
  + This statement has been a source of considerable controversy in the Church
    - There are those who point to Jesus’ words here, to claim that some or all of the Law God gave to Israel remains in effect for Christians
  + These claims rely on a misinterpretation of the text made possible only by taking Jesus’ words out of context
    - First, let’s understand what Jesus actually said:
    - He said that He did not come to “*abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets.*”
    - For a Jew, the phrase “the Law of Moses or the Prophets” was their way of saying “the whole Bible”
    - Since the New Testament didn’t exist in Jesus’ day, the Jewish Bible wasn’t called the Old Testament
    - Instead, they called the Bible “the Law and the Prophets” or sometimes “the law of Moses and the Prophets”
  + In effect, Jesus said, “I didn’t come to abolish the Bible”
    - And of course, Jesus never advocated for doing away with the Word of God, after all, Jesus IS the Word (John 1:1)
* We could translate Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:17 this way:
  + Don’t think I came to abolish the written Word of God…on the contrary, I came to all that God’s Word requires
    - Jesus came as a man to live in perfect compliance with God’s Word, never committing even a single act of sin
    - Since Jesus was born a Jew under the Law, He also lived in perfect compliance with all the requirements of Israel’s Law
    - And more than that, Jesus also fulfilled all the prophecies spoken by the prophets concerning the Messiah
  + Jesus was perfectly righteous in all that He thought and said and did
    - Therefore, by His earthly life, He brought to pass all that Scripture requires and promises
    - In that sense, Jesus fulfills the Word of God, and He is the only human being who has ever done so or ever will
* Take note of what Jesus says in v.18

**18***I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.*

* + Jesus testifies that the Word of God is going to stand the test of time and be proven right in the end
    - When all is said and done, the Word of God will still be there, setting the standard for entering Heaven and convicting us of sin
    - In fact, Jesus says the physical universe itself is less enduring than the Word of God
    - If you think the Universe is unshakable, what does that say about the Word of God?
  + Jesus says that even the smallest detail has and
    - Therefore, every detail in Scripture, no matter how minor, will come to pass and cannot be set aside
    - Today, we have a doctrine built on Jesus’ statement…the inerrancy of Scripture
    - Every word in the original written manuscripts is exactly as God intended, with no mistake or error
    - Not even a single letter is out of place
* Jesus is making another point concerning the Pharisees
  + Jesus was inferring that He was NOT interested in complying with the Pharisees’ oral law
    - Remember a couple of weeks ago, I explained how the scribes had created a vast set of rules and traditions for Jewish life
    - These rules were first developed following the Jewish return from captivity in Babylon
    - They were intended as a form of protection to ensure Israel never violated Scripture again and thus, never be sent into captivity again
    - The scribes called their new rules “fences” because they were barriers to violating Scripture
    - If you kept the scribes’ rules, then you would have no possibility of violating Scripture, or so they assumed
  + A classic example of a “fence” is the kosher requirement to never combine meat and dairy
    - In kosher kitchens, meat products and dairy products are never combined or served together
    - To make sure meat and dairy never mix by accident, kosher kitchens maintain separate dishes, pots and even refrigerators for serving and storing meat and dairy
  + Obviously, this restriction isn’t spelled out in the Law given to Moses, so why did the scribes propose it?
    - In Exodus, and again Deuteronomy, the Lord instructs Israel not to boil a young goat in its mother’s milk
    - This practice was uniquely associated with Baal worship among the Canaanites
    - In Canaanite pagan rituals, worshippers would take a baby goat or calf from its mother soon after birth and boil it in the mother’s milk
    - So, God gave this law to Israel to keep them from participating in Canaanite idolatry
* When the rabbis and scribes sought to create a “fence” to protect Israel from violating this law, they missed the whole point of the law
  + They focused entirely on the logistics involved and overlooked the spiritual

of the law

* + - The rabbis wondered what would happen if a Jew bought a young goat from a certain butcher
    - And then that same Jew also bought milk from a farmer in the market
    - But unbeknownst to that Jew, the milk he purchased just happened to come from the mother of that young goat
    - If that Jew then cooked the goat in the milk, he would have broken the law, the scribes concluded
  + To preclude any possibility of such an accidental violation, they established rules barring the mixing of meat with dairy
    - Over the centuries, later rabbis came along and expanded on the rules of the prior rabbis
    - The fences continued to grow ever more encompassing until eventually, the rabbis reached the point of requiring separate dishes and pots and pans
    - That is why even today in Israel you cannot order a cheeseburger at a kosher McDonald’s
  + Once these rabbinical rules became firmly entrenched in Jewish culture, the original intent of God’s Law had long been lost
    - What started as a prohibition of engaging in Canaanite pagan worship had become a silly concern about cheese sitting on a burger
    - In fact, by the time the rabbis had decided to outlaw the mixing of meat and dairy, the Canaanites were extinct!
    - Nevertheless, their rules live on without purpose or reason, and with little or no relationship to the Word of God
* Over the centuries, the Pharisees’ rules were assembled into a book called the *Mishnah*
  + *Mishnah* means “repetition”, because it was taught through repetition, and it records centuries of rabbinical “scope creep” (continuous or uncontrolled growth in a project's scope)
    - By Jesus’ day, the Mishnah’s reach extended far beyond simply prohibiting the mixing of meat and dairy
    - It has six divisions covering tithing, feasts, sabbaths, temple service, ritual cleansing, women, and various crimes
    - In its printed form, the Mishnah can reach to over 1,000 pages in length!
  + Obviously, that’s a lot of additional burden, so to ensure the Jewish people respected the Mishnah, the Pharisees eventually claimed it was equal to Scripture
    - Despite the fact that the Mishnah wasn’t written by Moses, the Pharisees claimed Moses received it from God
    - They claimed God communicated the Mishnah orally to Moses, not in writing
    - Over the centuries, it was passed down orally through the elders and priests of Israel
    - Only after the Jews’ return from exile in Babylon did the scribes write it down, supposedly under the inspiration of the Spirit
    - The Pharisees began calling the Mishnah an “oral” Law, which complimented God’s written Word
  + The Jews of Jesus’ day had two forms of “Scripture”
    - They had true Scripture, called Moses’ Law and the Prophets
    - And they had an additional work of so-called Scripture called the Mishnah
    - It’s similar to the way Mormons claim that both the Bible and the Book of Mormon are Scripture
    - But also like the Mormons, in practice, the only book the Jews *actually* studied and followed was the oral Law, the Mishnah
* When Jesus’ accusers lined up to say he was abolishing the Law or the Prophets, what they actually meant was He was disobeying the oral law
  + His accusers made no distinction between these two works
    - In fact, the Pharisees were more disturbed by a violation of the Mishnah than they were of a violation of God’s Word
    - Today in Israel, it’s a far greater scandal to set butter on your dinner plate in a kosher home than it is to commit fornication
    - All this to say, when we read about Jesus being accused of violating the Law, we need to understand they mean the oral law
  + Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that these two works, Scripture vs. the Mishnah, were not
    - One came from God, but the other was given by men
    - One was the way to life and godliness, but the other was merely a means of self-righteousness
    - One must be accomplished, but the other must be abolished
  + The words Jesus used in v.18 we to clarify His
* This one issue explains everything you need to know about why the Pharisees hated Jesus
  + If Jesus invalidated their treasured Mishnah, then what would happen to the Pharisees’ power over the people?
    - If the people realized that the Mishnah’s requirements were not sent from God, then the Pharisees instantly became irrelevant
    - Because their power and wealth was based in their expertise of the Mishnah, not in the Word of God
  + At the core of their conflict, was the fight over the authority of Scripture vs. the teaching of men
    - For example, in every case where Jesus is accused of violating the Sabbath, he is actually violating the Mishnah’s rules concerning Sabbath observance
    - Those rules were not God’s definition of how to keep the Sabbath
* This same conflict continues today, because the enemy knows how important discrediting the Word of God is in his war with God
  + And the enemy works to discredit the Word of God with two versions of the same lie
    - To the irreligious of the world, Satan lies by telling them the Word of God is , full of myth and error
    - They can ignore it, and they gladly do
  + But to the zealous of the world, Satan’s lie goes in the opposite direction
    - To that group, he says that Scripture is so holy and special we can’t begin to understand it without expert
    - Like someone who buys a really nice couch, but then covers it with plastic
  + The Word of God is so special, we don’t actually read it or learn what it says
    - Instead, we need priests or popes or sages or imams…or Pharisees to interpret it for us
    - And for the same reason, they study their books, books like the Mishnah or the Catholic Catechism or the Book of Mormon, rather than the actual Word
  + Both lies have the same effect…Satan takes our eyes off of the truth and replaces it with nonsense dressed up to look like it’s from God
    - We need to guard against falling into this same trap today
  + We must be careful that we not focus on our own “mishnahs” rather than turning to the one Book actually offering truth on all these matters
    - That’s the key issue behind His conflict with the Pharisees
    - Jesus said He came to uphold and fulfill the irreplaceable, irrefutable, unequaled Word of God
    - He came to tear down the worthless manmade rule books that distract people from that truth
* To know how serious Jesus is about elevating the Word of God over the opinions of men, hear what He says in v.19

**19***So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

* + Jesus says that anyone who advocates for the annulling or ignoring of even the least requirement of Scripture will be held accountable by God
    - Such a person, Jesus says, will be in the Kingdom
    - In other words, there is no greater way for a believer to offend Christ than undermining the Word of God
  + On the other hand, those who set their minds on obeying the Word of God, and teaching others to do the same, will be worthy of
* So where does that leave the Pharisees?
  + Remember, if you lived in that day, you saw these men as the most religious, most dedicated and fervent followers of God imaginable
    - Won’t they receive honor for their respect of God’s Word?
    - Notice Jesus adds in v.20, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom
  + As scrupulous as the Pharisees were, they were still a long way from equaling the glory of God
    - They may have tried their best, but in reality, they simply became experts at following their own rules, rather than obeying God’s Word
    - As much as we may look down our noses at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, we’re no better
    - We do the same thing…we carefully define the rules we think make us holy so we can sleep at night
  + For example, if we like to lie, but we never cheat on our spouse, then we tell ourselves that lying is no big deal to God
    - But we’re going to Heaven, because He approves of our faithfulness in marriage
    - Or we judge homosexuals or murderers or pagans by saying, “There’s no way that person is going to heaven”
    - Conveniently forgetting our own lusts or hatred of others or devotion to materialism
    - That’s being a Pharisee, and Jesus says it’s not good enough to get into Heaven
    - That’s why Jesus came…to bring you into the Kingdom with Him!