Matthew 5E

* Let’s return to Jesus’ examples illustrating what true righteousness requires
	+ But first, let’s recap…
		- Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is a gigantic resetting of Israel’s understanding of what it takes to enter Heaven, or the Kingdom
		- Entering the Kingdom, Jesus said, requires living a life that was even more righteous than that of the Pharisees
		- It required living according to the spirit of God’s Law, not merely following the Pharisees’ manmade “oral law”
	+ In the second half of this chapter, Jesus has been giving us examples of what this higher standard requires
		- Last week, we learned that the spirit behind "D not murder” goes a lot deeper than not taking another person’s life
		- The true intent of that law was to be loving to people!
		- And when God said “Do not commit adultery”, He didn’t just mean don’t fool around on your spouse
		- He meant stay faithful to your wife with your heart, mind, soul and strength…don’t even let your eyes stray!
	+ We still have four more examples in this chapter to study, and as we examine them, we’ll continue to see how they refuted the Pharisees’ teaching
	+ For the final four examples, we will focus mostly on the heart of each issue, rather than on the Pharisaic concern
		- And I also want us to consider if we’re thinking about these issues like Pharisees too?
		- That is, are we guilty of setting aside the Word of God and ignoring God’s heart on these matters
		- While we pursue our own rules in place of His?

**Matthew 5:31-32**

**31***“You have heard the law that says, ‘A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce.’*

**32***But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.*

* Jesus’ third example compares the Pharisees’ teaching on divorce with God’s view of divorce from the Scriptures
	+ Let’s begin by acknowledging divorce is a sensitive and emotionally charged issue
		- Many of our lives have been touched by divorce
		- And it’s always a painful and often embarrassing experience
		- Nevertheless, it’s important we understand the Bible’s perspective on this topic
	+ In this chapter, Jesus is using divorce as an example on a larger point…divorce is not His main point, no more than murder or lust was
		- Jesus returns to this topic again, later in this Gospel, in Chapter 19
		- At that time, Jesus will go into much greater detail on the subject
* Tonight, we’ll focus on understanding Jesus’ point in this example
	+ Jesus quotes from the Mishnah (“You have heard the law that says” not “as it is written”) where it paraphrases Deuteronomy 24
		- In that law, Moses commanded that a man who divorces his wife must send her away with a certificate of divorce
		- But Jesus says, that whoever divorces his wife “makes" her commit adultery
		- To understand how these two statements relate, we need to appreciate the culture of Jesus’ day
	+ In the ancient east, women had no legal standing
		- Generally speaking, they couldn’t own land or own a business
		- They couldn’t testify in court or enter into contracts
		- So, a woman had no way to support herself in the culture
		- Additionally, women generally didn’t possess sufficient upper body strength to handle the strenuous effort required to work the land
		- So, a woman in Jesus’ day literally had no way to provide for herself through labor
	+ Therefore, women relied on men to survive
		- During the first part of her life, a young girl lived under her father’s roof, depending on his support
		- Later, when she married, she was supported by her husband for the rest of her life
		- If she was widowed, she would move in with a son or brother-in-law
* If that woman’s husband lost interest in her and kicked her out of the house, she faced a desperate situation
	+ Not only was her marriage falling apart, but she was at risk of losing her only means of support
		- She would be set out of the house with the clothes on her back and little else
		- There would be no alimony or child support
		- She wasn’t going to get a divorce settlement
		- And generally speaking, she couldn’t return to her father’s house, since she was considered the property of her husband
	+ To make matters worse, the woman was still considered married
		- Which meant that no other man could consider giving her shelter either
		- A respectable man would never spend private time in the company of a married woman, especially in his home
		- That man could be accused of adultery which was punishable by death
* Therefore, a woman abandoned by her husband was literally without hope
	+ Unfortunately, this happened commonly in ancient life
		- Hard-hearted and cruel men abandoned their wives routinely, simply because they tired of her or wanted someone else
		- They left these poor women destitute and helpless, without a means of support
	+ Such a woman was in real danger of starvation or abuse or death by exposure
		- Her best chance for survival was to depend on the mercy of strangers or family members, eking out a meager life as a beggar
		- The story of Ruth and Naomi is an example of such a situation
	+ To correct this injustice, God said to Israel, in Deuteronomy 24:1, that if a man is determined to divorce his wife, he must give her a certificate of divorce
		- The husband couldn’t kick his wife out of the house with nothing
		- He had to give her a certificate of divorce
		- With a certificate of divorce, the woman had a reasonable chance of finding another man to take pity on her and marry her
		- Another man could take her as a wife without fear of being charged with adultery
* But reading the Law carefully, it’s clear that God was not approving of the man’s decision to divorce his wife
	+ The Lord was simply commanding the man to show some to his victim
		- God did not intend Deuteronomy 24 to become a license to engage in divorce and remarriage
		- It’s similar to the case of another law

**Exodus 22:16**

*“If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to anyone and has sex with her, he must pay the customary bride price and marry her.*

* That Law says, that a man who seduces a woman outside of marriage, must pay a dowry to the family and marry the girl he seduced
	+ Scripture is clear that having sex with a woman before you marry her is always a sin…100% of the time…we call it
	+ But in Exodus 22, God addresses the aftermath of fornication, because He knew sinful men were going to sin in this way
	+ He obligated the man to make amends for his sin by marrying the girl
	+ Obviously, Exodus 22:16 doesn’t mean God thinks it’s ok to engage in fornication
* Likewise, just because God made accommodation for divorce, doesn’t mean He

of it

* + The Pharisees had taken Deuteronomy 24 to be just that…a license to divorce
	+ They assumed God wouldn’t have made allowance for a certificate of divorce if He didn’t see a need for it at times
* So, they set about to define in the Mishnah the many reasons that justified a divorce
	+ Over the years, the Pharisees invented a long list of such reasons
	+ None of these reasons were found in Scripture itself, the rabbis simply imagined them
	+ The most ridiculous of these rules stated that a husband was justified in divorcing his wife if she burned his soup
	+ With rules like that, it’s obvious that these men were simply looking for any reason they could to end marriage
* As silly as these rules seem to us, the Pharisees said they were equal to Scripture because they were part of the “oral law”
	+ Ironically, their rules were supposedly intended to limit divorce
	+ Yet, because of those rules, it became easier and easier for men in Israel to do the very thing God said he hates
	+ And all the while, they assumed God approved of their behavior because the Pharisees said it was OK
* Once again, Jesus sets the record straight
	+ In v.32, Jesus says, that despite Deuteronomy 24, and despite the Mishnah, everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit
		- Given the background I gave you earlier, we can understand what Jesus means when He says, a man “makes” his wife commit adultery
		- By ending the marriage, the husband essentially forced his wife to seek shelter under another man’s roof
		- In that sense, the husband made her commit adultery because her only other option was starvation
	+ Even more challenging, Jesus says that when that next man marries the divorced woman, he too commits adultery
		- That probably shocked the crowd listening to Jesus
		- Everyone in Jesus’ day assumed this new husband was in the clear because that woman came with that certificate of divorce
		- But Jesus says that certificate didn’t change the situation from God’s point of view
	+ That certificate was simply intended to make the best of a bad situation by preserving the of the woman
		- That certificate didn’t actually end the first marriage vows…it just gave the woman a chance for survival
		- Because if the choice is between the woman’s death and adultery, adultery is the better of the two
	+ That certificate doesn’t mean that the marriage has ceased – adultery is still adultery
		- The husband’s choice to divorce his wife was a sin, and it led to a chain of sin, by his wife and the next man
		- We could summarize Jesus’ teaching simply by saying, if you want to please God, honor your marriage as a lifelong bond
		- “One wife per , one man is God’s ”
* Now, you probably noticed Jesus mentions an exception in v.32
	+ I want to wait until Chapter 19 to discuss this exception in detail
		- For now, simply note that grammatically speaking, Jesus’ exception applies to the second half of that verse
		- We could reword the sentence this way… “everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery except in the case of infidelity”
		- Jesus was simply saying that a husband can’t be guilty of making his wife commit adultery if she beat him to it…if she committed adultery first
	+ One last thing:
	+ While divorce is a sin, it’s not an unforgivable sin, and it’s not worse than other sins
		- Remember, Jesus said that those who have called a person a fool have broken the sixth commandment against murder
		- And He said that those who have lusted have broken the commandment against adultery
		- So how many of us have hated another person? How many have lusted?
		- Did Jesus die to cover the sin of divorce, or only to cover your sin?
		- Obviously, He died for all of us because we all have sin, no matter what kind
		- And so, we have no basis for judging anyone in the body of Christ concerning their life circumstances or past
		- Our only priority on this topic, or any other, is to encourage everyone to learn what the Word says so we can all do better in the future
* Let’s move to the next example for today, beginning in v.33

**Matthew 5:33-37**

**33***“You have also heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.*

**34***But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, ‘By heaven!’ because heaven is God’s throne.*

**35***And do not say, ‘By the earth!’ because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, ‘By Jerusalem!’ for Jerusalem is the city of the great King.*

**36***Do not even say, ‘By my head!’ for you can’t turn one hair white or black.*

**37***Just say a simple, ‘Yes, I will,’ or ‘No, I won’t.’ Anything beyond this is from the evil one.*

* The next example begins with our tell-tale phrase “you have also heard”, indicating another quote from the Mishnah is coming
	+ In this case, Jesus quotes the Mishnah’s command concerning the taking of oaths
		- In the written Word of God, the Lord said in Numbers 30, that we are obligated to keep our vows
		- In Leviticus 27, the Lord warns that failure to keep our vows, even unintentionally, will bring the consequences of the vow
	+ In ancient times, written contracts weren’t common, so a verbal agreement was usually the only way business was done
		- Those verbal agreements were solemn, and if a man wasn’t trustworthy, no one would do business with him
		- We have contracts now, but this principle still applies in modern life
* The Pharisees took the spirit of God’s Law regarding oaths and tossed it aside
	+ In the oral law, they expanded greatly on what God said concerning oaths
		- They invented an array of ways men could take oaths
		- And they imagined an equal variety of ways that oaths could be broken or excused
	+ For example, the Pharisees created an elaborate system for determining whether an oath was truly binding
		- The binding nature of an oath depended upon what the promisor swore by
		- For example, a person swearing by God’s name was always bound to keep his oath because the Pharisees said God was
		- But swearing by heavens and earth was not binding they said, since the heavens and earth were not eternal
		- And if a man swore his oath while facing toward Jerusalem, then the Pharisees said it was binding
		- But if he swore while facing *away* from Jerusalem, it wasn’t
	+ The effect of these convoluted rules was deceit and fraud in business dealings
		- It’s the equivalent of the small print in a contract
* Jesus denounces the Mishnah’s stupid rules on oaths
	+ In v.34, Jesus says swearing by Heaven is just as binding as swearing by God Himself, because Heaven is the throne of God
		- Likewise, in v.35, Jesus says swearing by earth is equally binding as swearing by God because it’s the footstool of God’s feet
		- And regardless of which way you face, swearing by Jerusalem is always binding because it’s God’s city in the Kingdom
	+ Jesus wasn’t validating the Pharisee’s silly categorization of oaths, He was simply exposing how ludicrous their logic was
* In the matter of making vows or oaths, what does righteousness require?
	+ Jesus said it begins with understanding our place in God’s economy
		- In v.36, Jesus says you shouldn’t make guarantees about things you can’t

…it’s taking a needless gamble and it’s evil

* + - Someone might swear an oath upon their own head, meaning they put their own life as a ransom, should they fail to keep their oath
		- But Jesus says you can’t even change the color of your own hair, so how can you assure anyone of what you can do in the future?
	+ If you can’t control even the least thing on your own body, why place so much at risk over things you have no hope to control?
		- On the contrary, the Lord was trying to steer us away from oaths altogether
	+ Jesus says, the spirit of God’s Law was to encourage men to simply state their intentions honestly as “yes” or “no” without need for additional promises
		- If you operate this way, you will have need to make oaths
* In v.38, Jesus moves to the Mishnah’s laws on retribution

**Matthew 5:38-42**

**38***“You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’*

**39***But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.*

**40***If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too.*

**41***If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles.*

**42***Give to those who ask, and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow.*

* Jesus quotes from the Mishnah’s take on Exodus 21:24, where the Lord told Israel that justice should be measured out proportionally
	+ The Law uses indirect examples to say let the punishment fit the crime
	+ An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth
	+ We shouldn’t demand something more valuable than was taken from us
	+ An eye is far more valuable than a single tooth, so don’t demand an eye for a tooth
* But of course, you know what the Pharisees did here, right?
	+ They took this law hyper-literally, so they could turn it into a license for personal vengeance
	+ According to their Mishnah, a Jew could take personal revenge against someone who harmed them, so long as they only took one tooth or one eye, *etc*.
* But the Lord wasn’t advocating taking personal revenge, much less maiming people
* God He was limiting retribution to ensure that punishment didn’t become

* + - The true spirit of that law was to encourage
	+ God’s heart is to encourage mercy for those who offend us
		- Jesus says, if you want to follow the spirit of the Law, you’ll show no interest in retribution whatsoever
		- Let them strike you without striking back
		- Respond to their unreasonable requests by surprising them with your generosity
		- When they borrow and don’t return, let them borrow again anyway
		- And when they impose upon you by their unreasonable requests, respond as though you wanted to do it anyway
	+ If you’re listening to Jesus’ list and wondering if there are any exceptions, then you’re thinking like a Pharisee
		- Righteousness means looking like and not like ourselves
* The right question to ask is, “How would God respond in these situations? What would Jesus do?”
	+ For example, what did Jesus do when they slapped Him on the cheek?
* As you listen to these examples, it’s easy to take the perspective of the injured party…the one offended
	+ But have you ever considered that you are the offender? Even more sobering, have you considered you were an offender to God Himself?
		- We are the sinners, the ones who offend God
		- And then one day, we came to Christ seeking His mercy
	+ In that moment, you and I were the ones demanding things from God that we had no right to have
		- We were the evil peopke that Jesus didn’t resist when calling upon Him for mercy
		- We were the ones asking Jesus to walk a mile with us, and He surprised us with His generosity
	+ When you asked Jesus to forgive you for your sins, Jesus went a long way beyond just forgiving you
		- The Bible says that by our , He adopted us as children of God, making you and me part of the family of God
		- He also has made you a fellow heir in His Kingdom
		- He has promised you a place in His government and a share of His inheritance
		- And He placed His Spirit in you
	+ Jesus went the extra mile for us even though we didn’t deserve it
		- So how can we refuse our Lord, when He asked us to be His hands and feet to this lost and dying world?
		- How can we refuse to live according to the spirit of His Law when He has already accomplished all that it requires on our behalf?
* If you’re searching for the big take-away from this chapter, here it is…
	+ Heaven is a tall order…taller than you can reach
		- You can’t get there on your own, because you can’t measure up
		- But Jesus could and did
	+ So now we live as His disciples. And now we represent Him
		- But you can’t do that effectively if you revert to following rules that were worthless in the first place
		- Stop listening to others’ “do’s” and “don’ts” - even the ones in your own head
	+ Get into the Word of God and stay there
		- And as you do, you’ll be amazed by two things
* First, you’ll be continually humbled by how far you are from the standards of righteousness that God requires
	+ And then secondly, as you continue to study God’s Word, you’ll be amazed at how much your heart is changing by what you learn
		- You’ll find yourself thinking and acting differently
		- Almost instinctively, you’ll begin living by the spirit of the Word, where before, you couldn’t even follow the letter of the Law
		- And that recognition will serve to increase your love for Christ and your devotion to Him