

The Law and the Disciple

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Verse: Matthew 5:19-20
Preached on: Sunday, March 24, 2024

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Please turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 5 for our Scripture this morning. Matthew chapter 5. If you have not been with us on Tuesdays, we've been looking at a crucial section of Scripture in the Sermon on the Mount beginning in verse 17 going through verse 20 and I'm going to read those four verses for us as we begin. 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 that final verse there in verse 20, alluding to the scribes and Pharisees, would have hit the hearers of Jesus like a thunderbolt. As we've explained in the past, the Pharisees were the religious experts, they were the highest religious teachers and authorities in the Jewish society of the day and what Jesus is saying in that statement is that you have to be better than them if you even want to go to heaven at all. He is simultaneously setting the bar very high and also saying that the prevailing religious authorities do not meet it. That's a stunning statement and it sheds light on why Jesus is saying these words in verses 17 to 20 when he is because he set forth a very different view of the kingdom of God and the nature of true spirituality than what the Pharisees had established; to the Pharisees, if everything was okay externally, it didn't matter what was happening on the inside. What Jesus comes and expresses in the Beatitudes is that it's all a matter of inner spirituality, that worship is from the heart, and so you see in verses 3 and following, you can look there with me. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the meek... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... Blessed are the merciful... Blessed are the pure in heart... Blessed are the peacemakers..." and on it goes. And so he is giving a very distinct and seemingly contradictory view to what the Pharisees taught.

Now, he has to explain what's happening for the benefit of his hearers. They equated the Old Testament with the Pharisees' teaching, and what they're hearing Jesus say is different from what the Pharisees said. So what Jesus has to explain is, "It's the Pharisees that are the problem, not what I'm saying and not what the Old Testament says. I," Jesus is explaining, "I came to fulfill the law. I am telling you what it actually means. I am giving you the true sense of the law and the Pharisees have not done that." And so he clarifies the nature of religious authority for them and helps them see that he is here to expand the law, to expound the law, better stated, to fulfill the law so that they should not think that he is contradicting what the law and the prophets say, rather, he is the one who carries forward the true tradition of what the men of God had been saying for many, many centuries. And as we just think about things chronologically, the law given to Moses came first in time some 1,500 years before the time of Christ, and what Christ is doing now is he comes later and he fulfills it; we saw that the last time we taught out of Matthew 5. In the law and in the prophets, you had many prophetic predictions of who the Messiah would be and what would mark the Messiah, the one who came to deliver Israel and Jesus shows that he fulfills all of that. The Lord also went forward and he fulfilled the law with his teaching. He fulfilled the law with his obedience. His life obedience was a fulfillment of the law and his death was a fulfillment of the punishment that the law requires at the hands of sinners, not that he had had any sin of his own, but he was fulfilling that aspect of the law on behalf of his people. So in his righteousness and in his sacrificial death, Jesus fills the law. He accomplishes everything that the law had in mind on behalf of his people. So that's a little bit of the background to the text that we're looking at.

Now, as time continues to progress, after Christ ascends into heaven and the apostles carry on the ministry and Jesus begins to build his church, there's something that happens. Men come to Christ. They begin to follow Christ. They become disciples of Christ and take up their cross daily and follow him, as Scripture says. Here's the question, when the disciples of Christ develop, how will they respond to the Scriptures that Christ has fulfilled? What will be the spirit that animates the people of Christ, the disciples of Christ, true Christians, how will they respond to the Scriptures that Jesus said that he came to fulfill? What Jesus is saying in verses 19 and 20 that we will be considering here this morning is this, the disciples of Christ will have the same spirit of submission to the law of God as their Master did. There is a complete continuity. Moses and the prophets set forth the law, Christ comes and fulfills the law, Christ calls men to himself and they continue to follow the law as well. And so Christ, what Christ does is he makes disciples. He makes followers of himself. And what they do, what true disciples do is that they seek to keep the word of God, they seek to teach the word of God, and by doing this they become the means by which Christ extends his kingdom and so that's what we're going to see Jesus expound for us here this morning and in our first point, if you're taking notes, you can just write down this: true disciples honor the law. True disciples honor the law, and perhaps here a little bit of contemporary illustration would be helpful for us for many decades, if not for a couple of centuries even. There's been a false view of Christianity in some places that says that to become a Christian, you say a prayer to receive Christ, and then it doesn't matter what happens after that. You just pray that prayer and say that you accept Jesus as your Savior, and if you do that, you're secure for all of eternity, it doesn't

matter what happens later in life. Now, there is in some ways a small sliver of truth to that, but without more, it is a very distorted teaching because what happens is, and perhaps this has been true in your life in times past, certainly you've known people who have walked like this, people will walk an aisle or say a prayer, there will be no change or transformation in their life whatsoever, they continue living like they had prior to their little prayer, and nothing changes over the course of time. Weeks go by, months go by, years go by, they continue to live in the same way that they did, with no interest in the things of God, no interest in the word of God, no involvement in the church of God, pursuing the same sins of lust and drunkenness that had animated them before, and yet they want to call themselves Christians because of what happened in a moment of time. Beloved, that's a false view of Christianity, as we're going to see, and I'll expound a lot of texts here this morning to help you see that, but what's missing in that false view of Christianity is an understanding of the work that God does in the hearts of the people that he saves. It's not a matter of someone mouthing a prayer that makes someone a Christian. Scripture teaches us that when someone becomes a Christian, God has caused them to be born again. God has moved on their heart. He has worked on them. He has made them a new creation in Christ, as it says in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. The theological term for it is that they have been regenerated. God has given them new life.

Let's look at this for just a moment in Ephesians chapter 2 to just orient your thinking for a moment. In Ephesians chapter 2, In Ephesians chapter 2, verse 4, we read this after Paul has set forth that all men by nature are dead in trespasses and sins. He says this in verse 4, he says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Do you see it there in verse 5, God made us alive together with Christ. When someone is saved, God from outside of them has acted upon them. He has given them a new heart. He has given them new life and he has joined them to the Lord Jesus Christ. The same Christ who died to sin at the cross, who rose from the dead in new life, we are joined to Christ, we die to that prior realm of sin and death and Adam and self and we have been transferred into a new kingdom, a new realm where Christ is our head, the Spirit indwells us, and new life is animating everything that we do. That's a true Christian and if someone can just say a prayer and then continue living in the same spiritually dead way that they've been prior to the prayer, then it's obvious that whatever else was going on there, this was not new life received from God. This is a person that has not been born again. This is someone that is still dead in their sins despite the fact that they made a verbal profession of faith.

And so Jesus helps us understand this and clarifies it for us. When God saves a man, when God saves a woman, when he saves a young girl, when he saves a young boy, he gives them a new heart and in that new heart, there are new affections that are inclined toward a love and obedience toward the word of God. That's true conversion. And just thinking about that word conversion, think about it this way. When a man is truly born again, he's truly changed, you can see the reality of conversion. His prior life has been converted into something new. How could we say that somebody who lives in sin,

unbroken sin, prays a prayer, then just continues living the same way without any change in his life whatsoever, without any love for Christ, without any love for the word, in what way, by what contortion of human language can you say that a person like that has been converted, has been born again when they're the exact same that they were afterwards, that they were beforehand? That is a real dilemma for that false view of Christianity.

It helps us understand, if you want to look to Matthew chapter 7 for a moment, it helps us have a perspective on something that Jesus says in verse 13 of Matthew chapter 7. He says, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Beloved, there is nothing difficult, there is nothing narrow about the way that says pray this prayer without any moral consequence, without any repentance from sin, just pray this prayer and you will be secure with God for all of eternity. There's nothing narrow about that way. There's nothing difficult about that. There's no change involved in that. And so in the name of Christ, in the name even of Bible churches throughout the decades across our land, a false view of Christianity has been presented that says just pray this prayer and nothing else matters afterwards, and what we see in Scripture, as we're going to see as we go through today, is that that is not at all what Jesus shows us it means to follow him.

And so point number one, true disciples, true Christians, you might say, honor the law of God, they honor the word of God. There is a divine symmetry that marks the law, that marks Christ, and marks his disciples. Look at verse 19. with me, Jesus says, "Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments." The "therefore" connects what he is about to say, it's a bridge to what he's about to say, connecting it with what went before and what had he said before? He said there was an abiding authority to the word of God that could never be broken. In verse 18 there, look at it with me, he says, "until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." If we look at chapter 24 verse 35, we see that Jesus says, "heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." There is an eternal authority to the word of God that God intends never to be compromised, that he is ordained would never be broken, and so the law has an abiding authority. Watch the inevitable simple logic of this. The law has an eternal authority because it comes from an eternal God. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, came to fulfill that eternal law and he did so in his life, in his death, in the messianic predictions, in his teaching. He fulfilled all of it to perfection.

Now, going up to the time of Christ, there are 1,500 years of abiding authority of the word of God, and the climax of the honoring of the word of God came when Christ was on the earth, born of a woman, born under the law, kept it to perfection, and then offered his life up for sinners at the cross. Now, beloved, those who step into the stream of that divine revelation, those who swim in that river, those who are following in the footsteps of Christ are following in the footsteps of the divine authority of the law. As a result of that, as a result of that, the one who truly belongs to Christ will have the same mind toward the law that Christ did. Christ said, "This is the word of God that is to be honored. I came, I honor it, I fulfill it," Christ says. His disciple comes and says, "That's what I

embrace also." To set yourself apart from the law, to have no interest in the word of God, to be living in disobedience to the law is a contradiction in terms.

So look at verse 19 with all of that in mind. Christ says, "Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom." To relax in this context means to set aside your responsibility to obey it, to say, "That doesn't apply to me." What Jesus is saying is that God measures you and God measures me by the way that we measure his word. The one who honors the commandments will be called great in the kingdom. The one who dismisses the commands will be called least in the kingdom. And those who are slack in obedience are least in the kingdom and beloved, building on what I was saying earlier, when you bring the fullness of Scripture to bear upon an understanding of this principle, the sad reality is that those who are slack and indifferent to obedience may not even be in the kingdom at all. They may name the name of Christ without truly being born again. Jesus said in Matthew 7, he said that, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was its fall." He says that after he said, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter," verse 21.

Turn over to the book of James, if you will, James immediately after the book of Hebrews, toward the end of your New Testament. Scripture warns us about this over and over again. Only a fool would ignore it, dismiss it, and carry on as he hurtles toward his appointment with God. In James chapter 1, verse 21, let's say, we read this, "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." Do you see it there, beloved, receive this word with meekness. Receive it with a humble spirit. Receive it with an obedient spirit. Put away all of the sin and receive the word into your heart because that word is what is able to save your souls. And then he goes on and says in verse 22, he says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Don't hear the word, James says, don't hear the word and then fail to apply it. Verse 23, "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like." Verse 25, "But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." There are those who hear and don't act. There are those who hear and continue living as they always had. Those, James says, will not be blessed. Those are deceiving themselves, he says. It's those who act on the word of God, who hear and act upon it, they and they alone will be the ones who are blessed.

Look at James chapter 2 verse 14. The lengths that some people will go to explain away this passage is a stunning thing to read and see. James chapter 2 verse 14, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for

the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." Something that is dead has no life in it, it cannot produce any results for you. If you were hungry on the street, someone said, "I'm a Christian, God bless you, I hope it goes better for you," and walks away, you would not be too impressed with their sense of faith or their Christianity. Say, "But how can you walk away when I'm sitting here in need?" And that's just an illustration of the greater principle that the law of God has an eternal authority, and those who truly belong to Christ will truly honor that authority, will be eager for that authority, will receive that authority, will act in response to that authority.

So kind of circle back around here maybe, we can say it this way: the law comes from God, men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God, we read in 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 20 to 21. God is the one who has all authority over heaven and earth as the Creator and Redeemer of creation in Revelation 4 and 5, and then later on God is the Judge of the creation, and so there is this abiding sovereign authority in God and Christ as God's representative, as God in human flesh, he comes with all of the authority of God, fulfilling the law of God, and says, "Now as your Master, now as your Lord, here's what I have for you." You are to receive the word of God with that same principle of love and submission that marked the life of Christ himself. You adopt a posture of submission to the law, submission from the heart, a real and genuine submission.

We read in 1 Samuel that God does not see as man sees, God looks on the heart. We saw from the Beatitudes the nature of the way that Jesus spoke to the inner man. Scripture says, "A broken and a contrite heart, O Lord, you will not despise." What you can't do, you can't do what the Pharisees did and what the Pharisees did is they did this, they did lesser things, they did outward things, and they assumed and taught that they were being fully obedient to God when they did. And so if you look, we can illustrate this in Matthew 23. Turn to Matthew 23 with me. In a scathing chapter of Jesus denouncing the Pharisees and the scribes, the whole chapter would be worthy of reading at this point, but we'll just go to verses 23 through 26 to illustrate the point that an external superficial obedience is not what God calls us to. It's a heart obedience. So that he says in verse 23, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean." He says, you'll be so scrupulous about making sure that you tithe the full 10% of little herbs and spices but you don't care about justice, you don't care about faithfulness. Elsewhere, he condemns them for teaching people that they could devote their assets to God and evade supporting their families as they did that. They carefully counted out garden herbs to tithe them, but mark this, beloved, they neglected the greater commandments. They neglected love for the God of the law. They had no inner love for Scripture. They had no inner desire for obedience. They were complete hypocrites. They presented one face to the world, but inside they were actually something completely different.

Now, with that in mind, go back to Matthew 5, verse 19. Matthew 5:19 and this is what the Pharisees taught others to do; you will see that as we go through the rest of chapter 5 in weeks and months to come. Jesus says, "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, whoever," he goes on to say, "but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Whoever does them and teaches them. You see, what Jesus is saying is that God approves, God blesses believers who are obedient to him, who demonstrate a reverence for the word of God, the written word of God. This is distinct. This is a completely different religion, for lack of a better word. We are not talking about those who claim that they receive visions from God in their dreams, that God speaks to their heart, and all of these things that have nothing to do with the written word of God. That is something different that is not at all what Jesus is describing. This is people reveling in the imaginations of their own heart, not the written word of God. Jesus is talking about the written law, that which came from the prophets, whoever does that and teaches that will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. The true Christian will have a settled submission to Scripture, which is different from walking around with a mindset and a tongue that glibly says, "God spoke to me about this or that." Well, where do you see that in the Scripture? Where is that written in the word of God? And this is a principle that distinguishes that false view of ongoing revelation with what Christ teaches, that it's about how someone responds to the written word of God that he himself came to fulfill.

And so, beloved, if we want to know what a true Christian is, what a true Christian looks like, what is the fruit that shows that someone has truly been born again, what is the fruit that shows that someone has truly repented? You look for this, you look for someone who has a developing life pattern of loving the word of God. You look for someone who affirms the importance of obedience to the word of God rather than diminishing it, rather than saying, "Yeah, I know, I know, he's lived in sin for 30 years, but I remember when he prayed at my knee when he was just a babe and asked Jesus to come into his heart. I remember that and therefore I'm sure that he's saved." That's not the way that Christians are to think, that is not true salvation because a true reception of Christ, truly being born again, truly receiving Christ changes you, gives you a new nature, and the reflection of that new nature is found in the fact that someone loves and wants to obey the word of God. That's what Jesus is saying.

What he says here when he talks about who's least and who's great in the kingdom of heaven, he's saying that God will evaluate, ultimately when we stand before God in judgment, he will evaluate our entire lives on an individual basis, he'll evaluate our individual lives on precisely the issues that we're talking about here this morning. It's very sobering, isn't it? It's very convicting, isn't it? Now let me just pause here, call a timeout if you will, and just clarify lest there be any misunderstanding of what we are saying here today. In this passage Christ is not telling us that we obey the law in order to earn our salvation. We do not obey the law in order to achieve standing with God. We can't do that. Scripture says all of our righteousness is like filthy rags. And even in the context of Jesus's own teaching, we can see that that's not what he was saying in this passage that we're looking at today. Go back up to the Beatitudes again. In verse 3, Jesus

started, beloved, the entire cornerstone of everything in the Sermon on the Mount starts with his pronouncement of blessing on those, it says in verse 3, "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." The whole starting point of the Sermon on the Mount is that the ones who are in the kingdom understand that they are spiritually bankrupt. They are poverty-stricken in relationship to God. They mourn over the fact that they are sinful. They do not boast in the fact that they are proud or that boast in the fact that they are obedient. They realize upfront that they need a Savior. They realize upfront that they have no righteousness of their own.

To illustrate this, I think we should turn to Luke 18 and just see this stated clearly so that there would be no question about what we are saying here. Luke 18, beginning in verse 9, you can see the contrast. Jesus goes out of his way over the course of the fullness of his teaching ministry to show that proud, self-righteous people will not enter the kingdom of God. So, in verse 9, Luke 18, "He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'" That boasting of self-righteousness, presuming to enter into the presence of God on his own merits, you could say. Jesus draws a contrast in this parable in verse 13 and he says, "But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'" He does not come protesting his righteousness, setting forth his own righteousness. He's so convicted that he's reluctant to even look up. He simply pounds his chest and says, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I appeal to your mercy, not my goodness, for you to hear my prayers," which is the whole idea of truly becoming a Christian, is that you appeal to the mercy of God, you appeal to the person and work of Jesus Christ to save you, not pointing to anything of your own to entitle you with merit with God. Christ is not telling us to start obeying so that we can earn our salvation. He started in the Sermon on the Mount by saying that his disciples, true Christians, deny any sort of self-righteousness whatsoever. They repudiate it. True Christians repudiate self. They repudiate self-righteousness. They repent of sin. That's what Jesus is saying. Salvation is by grace alone, not by works. Galatians 2:16 says by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified.

So, beloved, we're not talking about how one enters into a status of being accepted by God in what we're saying here from Matthew 5:17 to 20, we're not talking about how you enter into a status, how you receive a status of righteousness that is given to you by faith. What we're talking about is what is the fruit of the fact that you have been born again? What is the mark of someone that truly belongs to Christ? What is the mark of someone who has the Spirit of Christ within them? And the mark of the Spirit of Christ within a person is tested first and foremost by whether they have something of the same love and submission to the law of God that Christ manifested when he said, "I came to fulfill the law with my life and ministry." You see, true grace, this is the point, we do not obey in order to earn our salvation. You cannot obey God enough in order to earn a declaration of

righteousness on your behalf. By the works of the law, no flesh will be justified. But that does not mean that the law doesn't tell us something about who we are inside.

Look at Matthew chapter 5, verse 6 for example. Matthew chapter 5 verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." You see, saving grace not only wipes away your sin and gives you a righteous status before God, true grace changes the heart and it changes the heart in a way that that heart now desires the things of righteousness which before that same heart had no interest in. You desire a righteousness that before was of no interest to you. And where's that righteousness found? Where did God make his righteousness known? He made it known in his word. Not through speaking in dreams and visions to false apostles in the 21st century. Not to silly people who want to talk about how God spoke in their hearts and, you know, and that's their whole basis in complete disregard to Scripture. No, he speaks in the word. That's where he's made his righteousness known and the one who has truly received grace, who's truly received life from God, the God who gave the word and gives the life will give a spirit of reception to the word, to those that he actually saves.

Now, let's continue on to point number two here today. Point number two: true disciples obey from the heart. They obey from the heart. There is this desire for the word of God that we've seen, and the obedience comes from within. Jesus calls his disciples to an inner love for God and his word that was completely alien to the Pharisees of the day. Look at Matthew chapter 5 verse 20 with me. He says, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of God." Let's approach it this way, and we'll come back to the text here. We've often said, we've often pointed out that Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments, summarized the law into two primary principles and they're both principles of love, if you'll turn to Matthew 22 with me. Matthew 22, in verse 34, we read, "When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees," this is Matthew 22 verse 34, "And one of them, a lawyer, asked [Jesus] a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.'" Beloved, he says, the first commandment, the great commandment of the law of God is that you would know to love him with everything in your inner man. That's the first and great commandment and then he goes on in verse 39 and says, "a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." You can trace that principle of love through all ten commandments in the first table, first four commandments directed toward our love for God, the second table, commandments five through ten in Exodus 20, directed in one way or another in our love toward man and Jesus says, you measure all of these things by an inner attitude, an inner disposition of love.

And so now coming back to Matthew chapter 5 verse 20 with that in mind, when Jesus says, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven, understand, beloved, that he is not calling his disciples to an even more fastidious keeping of the most minute details of tradition that the Pharisees had created, to be even more careful about how you tithe on your garden herbs and do a

better job than the Pharisees on that. That's not what he's talking about at all. What he's doing is he's making a call to an inner transformation of the heart where you love God, where you love Christ, where you love his word from within your inner man, and you desire that with all of your heart, with all of your mind, with all of your soul, with all of your strength. That's what he's calling us to. The Pharisees didn't have that and so he says you have to have a love inside for the word of God that is foreign to what you see in your religious leaders around you.

Now, beloved, I want to step back. We're going to go to a passage in the Old Testament in just a moment but that's the standard in the Old and the New Testament, is this inner transformation of the heart. What Jesus is saying here in Matthew chapter 5 verse 20 is consistent with, watch this, what the message of God has always been. This has always been the point, even though the Pharisees had distorted it and missed it. So turn back to the prophet Ezekiel, if you will, Ezekiel chapter 36. Ezekiel 36 verse 26, speaking of the nature of the new birth, God says to the people of the Old Testament that there would come a day where, verse 26, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." In other words, it'll go from being cold, hard, and dead to living, warm and active. Your heart itself will be like that. And what will be the evidence that that new heart has been received? What will mark it? He says in verse 27, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." God tells the people of the Old Testament, and this is toward the end of the prophetic ministry with Ezekiel, he tells them the new birth will give you a new heart with new desires that show fruit in obedience to what God has revealed. That's the Old Testament. Jesus came to fulfill the law, fulfill the prophets. He's fulfilling, he's bringing that to fruition. He's bringing it forward in the ministry that he's showing in his teaching in Matthew chapter 5.

Now in your New Testament, turn to the book of Hebrews chapter 8. Hebrews chapter 8. We read in chapter 8 verse 10, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." Notice in verse 10, he says, "I will put my law in their minds and write them on their hearts." In the inner man, there will be this recognition of the authority of the word of God. There will be a love and an embracing and a submission to it that marks those who have truly been born again. And so what Jesus says about your righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and the Pharisees, he's pointing to this heart attitude, this heart righteousness, this heart life that is involved in responding to the word of God.

Beloved, the righteousness in the kingdom of God, the righteousness that God produces in the new birth, that Christ came to develop in his disciples, that righteousness of the kingdom is a righteousness of the heart of the inner man. Paul said in Romans chapter 7 verse 22, "I delight in the law of God in my inner being." Psalm 119 verse 97 says, "Oh, how I love your law." John 14 verse 15, Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." It could be no other way. If you love the Lord, you would love his

authority. You would love what he teaches. You would long to please him. And so in true salvation, God gives the sinner a new heart that, in response, loves his word. And, beloved, that leaves us with a piercing reality that we have to come to grips with if we're going to discern the age in which we live, if we're going to test the spirits, as 1 John 4:1 tells us to do, if we are to have a sense of our own standing with God. Jesus taught on this so repeatedly and says those who do not love and obey the word are not true Christians. Now we're not talking about whether a true Christian can sin or not. A true Christian can sin. That's why we have a verse like 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he's faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's why David could confess his gross sins in Psalm 51 and be assured of the restoration of the joy of his salvation. But it's when you don't care about sin. It's when you don't care about obedience. It's when you have no love for the word of God, no desire for it, no respect for the authority of Christ. Those are the people that need to be awakened. Those are the people that need to realize that their callous indifference to the word of God could not possibly coexist with having the Spirit of God within them. Couldn't possibly coexist.

Look at Luke chapter 6. Luke chapter 6, Jesus asks a pretty plain and obvious question. He says, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" Lord is a recognition of authority. It's a position of master. To call someone Lord is to say, "I owe my obedience to you." Jesus says, "Why do you insult me with the title of Lord when in your life you do not obey me?" And then he goes on. He doesn't just leave it there. He shows the consequences that are at stake. Verse 47, "Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them," this sounds like James just quoted right from the Lord, doesn't it, from what we looked at earlier. Jesus says, "Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built." Verse 49, "But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great." That overflowing, powerful stream lashing against the foundation is a picture of the judgment of God and what will happen at the judgment of God based on the way that people have responded to his word.

Now let me give you a couple of quotations as we wrap this up here this morning. James Montgomery Boice says this in his book, "Christ's Call to Discipleship." He says, "Jesus cannot be our Lord without obedience, and if he is not our Lord, we do not belong to him. We are like a man whose house will be swept away by a flood." Charles Spurgeon said this in his exposition of Matthew, he said, "The kingdom is not for rebels, but for the exactly obedient. It not only requires of us holiness, reverence, integrity, and purity, but it works all these in our hearts and lives." Notice what Spurgeon says there. He says this is what the gospel requires, this is what the kingdom of God requires is this heart obedience to Christ, to his word, reverence, integrity, purity. But it not only requires that, it works all these things into our hearts and lives as well. I'm going on with the quote from Spurgeon. He says, "The gospel does not give us outward liberty to sin because of the superior excellence of a supposed inner sanctity, rather it produces outward sanctity through working in our inmost soul a glorious freedom in the law of God."

So, my friends, my dear friends, I ask you, do you know God like that? Do you know him from an inner heart response of love and responsiveness to his word? Because true Christians obey the word. They love the word. They delight in obedience. It grieves them when they fail. They turn from sin when they sin, but the guiding principle, the North Star in their lives is oriented toward the word of God and shaping their lives according to the word of God. Beloved, that's what a true Christian does. A true Christian could never go unchanged. You could never go from dead in sin to indwelt by the Spirit and not have a life change as a result. That's a complete misunderstanding of our condition in sin, and it's a complete misunderstanding of the power and purpose of the Spirit of God when he comes to indwell a man. He comes to produce disciples of Christ, disciples who respond to the word of God like Christ did in perfection. And if I could say this, true Christians certainly don't walk away when they're confronted with their disobedience. They respond to that. They seek to work out repentance in their hearts and lives.

Well, we'll give Charles Spurgeon the final word for this morning in this final quote. "What a King we have in Jesus. What manner of persons ought we to be who say we are in his holy kingdom. How careful ought we to be of our Father's revealed will, how determined to allow no trifling with the law and the prophets."

Would you stand with me as I close in prayer?

Father, we stand to respond to your word. We stand and ask your Spirit to search each heart and to enable us to respond rightly to what we've heard from your word. May those who have played the part of the hypocrite, dead in sin, Father, may you open their eyes. May the blind receive sight. May the lame walk. May lepers be cleansed, as it were. May the deaf hear the word of God and you call them forth to new life, to a true conversion in Christ that will be shown by an entirely new attitude to the law of God. For the rest of us, Father, we pray that you would cleanse us from our sins and renew our hearts to walk in obedience, whatever that may cost, whatever that may mean for each individual life. Father, we ask you for the help to do what you have called and commanded us to do. Jesus, we own you as Lord, Lord, and we walk away today wanting to do what you tell us to do and it's revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.