

**The Sermon on the Mount**  
**What Your View of Scripture Says About You (Part 5)**

**Matthew 5:17-20**

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Turn with me if you would to Matthew 5 and let me read for you again this section beginning in verse 17. Matthew 5:17. Jesus says to us:

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

According to our Lord, in this paragraph, there is one simple tool that can accurately diagnose your spiritual condition. And that tool is the scripture. A true subject of Jesus' spiritual kingdom will always have a right relationship to the scripture. A true Christian always rightly responds to the Bible. Jesus, as we've learned, in this passage identifies really three responses to scripture that should characterize every true believer. If you're a believer, these should characterize your life. First of all, you should understand Jesus' relationship to the scripture. We've already looked at this in detail. If you weren't here, I encourage you to go back and catch up with us, but in verse 17 Jesus said, I want you to understand how I relate to the scripture. And of course at that time it was just what we call the Old Testament, the 39 books of our Old Testament. That was the content Jesus is talking about. And He says, I didn't come to abolish that, but I came to fulfill it. That is, He came to explain the Old Testament in its true and full meaning to us in His teaching. He came to fulfill it in the sense of obeying it, keeping it in a way that no one ever had, perfectly, in His life. And He also came to fulfill it in the sense that he embodied everything to which it pointed, in His person. He fulfilled it in the fullest possible sense.

Secondly, if we're going to respond correctly to Christ and to the scripture, we must believe Jesus' view of the scripture. Not only do we have to understand that He didn't come to do away with the scripture, He came instead to fulfill it. And we have to understand what He believed to

be true about the scripture. And in verse 18 He lays that down in just one monumental verse. And again, if you weren't here, I encourage you to go back and catch up with us. But basically, in this one verse, Jesus explains to us that he believed several enduring attributes of the scripture. He believed in its permanent authority; until heaven and earth pass away it stands. He believed in its verbal inspiration down to the words, even the letters, even the smallest strokes of letters, breathed out by God. He believed in its plenary inspiration; that is, it was all breathed out by God. He says until all is accomplished. Its complete inerrancy. Jesus, in that statement in verse 18 makes it clear that He believes everything in the scripture down to the letter and the smallest stroke was true and would be fulfilled. And then its careful preservation, because He was talking about documents that weren't in existence any more in the first century. The original autographs on which Moses and the prophets wrote weren't still available. He's talking about a document that was carefully copied, and in the case of the Septuagint, translated, and He still called it the scriptures, implying that God had preserved His word. Not inerrant in the copies, only in the originals, but the essence of His word captured and preserved for generations to come. That's what Jesus believed, and if you're going to be a follower of Christ, you have to believe that about the scripture as well, because He did.

Now, last week we began studying verses 19 and 20 where we learned the third response toward the scripture that characterizes all true believers. We must accept Jesus' diagnosis with the scripture. Jesus, in these two verses, 19 and 20, diagnoses the spiritual condition of three different categories of people. And in each case the only tool that he uses to make that diagnosis is their relationship to the scripture. Now we called the first category of people that Jesus describes here, the dishonorable disciple. This is a person who is in the kingdom, who will enter the kingdom of heaven, who does belong to Jesus today and will be with Jesus in the future, and yet he is not worthy of honor. Why? Look at verse 19, the first half. "Whoever then, annuls (*the word means to disregard, to downplay, to minimize, to ignore. Whoever then annuls*) one of the least of these commandments (*[that is the least significant portion of the Old Testament scriptures--without My direct authorization]*) and teaches others to do the same shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus says I will designate the person who minimizes and downplays even one portion of the scripture without My authorization, least in My kingdom. That's a sobering thought.

The second category of people that Jesus identifies here we call the honorable disciple. This person is in the kingdom and worthy of honor. Look at the second half of verse 19. "But whoever keeps (*the Greek word is does, literally, whoever does*) and teaches all the Old Testament scriptures (*except the ones that I specifically authorized you to set aside*) shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." That person who maximizes, who exalts the scripture, Jesus says that person I will say is great.

Now today, Jesus uses the scripture to diagnose one other category of people. Now we meet this third kind of person, who also by the way, claims to be a follower of Jesus Christ (or at least attached to Jesus in some way) in verse 20. Let's call this third category the false disciple--a person who is not in the kingdom at all. Now it's important to note, as we begin, that Jesus does not address verse 20 to the scribes and Pharisees. He had plenty to say to them, but He's not talking to them in verse 20. Nor is verse 20 about the scribes and Pharisees. They serve merely as a teaching point to the crowd that is gathered around Jesus that day.

Jesus is addressing people who have in some way attached themselves to Him—at least for that day of teaching, when He taught that sermon there in this Sermon on the Mount. Remember, according to Luke 6 who's present. We studied this when we first began, but Luke 6 tells us right around Jesus were the 12 apostles. He had just appointed them earlier that morning to be His official representatives. Outside of the 12 apostles, around them, was another group of those who claimed to be Jesus' disciples, His followers, just as we do here today--many of us. And then beyond them there was a large crowd who had come even from surrounding countries. They brought their relatives to be healed or perhaps they'd come to be healed, and to hear Jesus' teaching. These were supremely interested people who had expended a great deal of effort and energy to be there to listen to Jesus.

Now in verse 19 Jesus described two groups of people in that crowd who belonged to His spiritual kingdom. But in verse 20 He tells us about a third group and He tells us this third group will not enter His kingdom. Now that is a remarkable diagnosis by our Lord. Because all the people who were listening to Him that day had already manifested some genuine spiritual interest. Just as you have, to some degree, by being here this morning. They had traveled in some cases great distances to see and hear Jesus. Some of them, according to Luke 6 had already experienced miraculous healing. They had had an amazing experience with Jesus. But in spite of their genuine interest in Jesus, and in spite of their willingness to hear Jesus teach, and in spite of their claim to be His followers, Jesus said that there were some present there that day who in reality were not part of Him. They were not in reality His disciples. Jesus is diagnosing the person who claims some connection to Christ, but proves in the end not to be a true disciple at all. This person may or may not believe that he or she has a relationship with Christ. But Jesus, by His own diagnosis says they don't.

Now, look at verse 20. Notice the flow of the sentence and the structure of the sentence. "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." The sentence begins with the word *for*. That connects it to the paragraph we've been studying. This is not a new topic. Instead, Jesus is still dealing with; how a person responds to the scripture reveals his true spiritual condition. Here in verse 20 Jesus says your response to the scripture not only indicates whether you will be least or greatest in the

kingdom but whether or not you're in the kingdom at all. Your response to the scripture tells you and tells Christ whether or not you really belong to Him.

Again, He introduces this statement in an emphatic way: *for I say to you*. That's Jesus' way of saying listen up. Here is a solemn, serious announcement of a spiritual truth. Now notice the structure. He begins with a dependent clause. "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees" And then comes the main part of the sentence, the main clause, the independent clause which is really the heart of Jesus' statement. So let's start with that independent clause—the second half of verse 20. "you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" The word you is plural. It's addressed to those listening to His sermon that day, and all of those who, in the future, would read or study this sermon as you and I are doing today. Jesus is talking to us just as surely as He was talking to them. He says to us, there are people here this morning who minimize the scripture, downplay the scripture, but are really in My kingdom. There are those who maximize and exalt the scripture in their lives. They are in My kingdom as well and worthy of honor. And He says, there are also those here this morning, as there were there that morning, who will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Some who've attached to Jesus both then and now who will not enter.

Now what's interesting about this sentence in Greek is, it is appropriate and legitimate grammatically speaking, in Greek, if you wanted to make something emphatic, to put a double negative. You can't do that in English. Those of you who have some recollection of your schooling, you understand you can't do that, it's not legitimate. But it was in Greek. And Jesus does that here. Jesus says, and if I could paraphrase it, He's essentially saying 'for some of you listening to me, there is absolutely no way you're going to enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Now, as I noted for you last time, so far in this sermon Jesus has referred to the kingdom as the current spiritual kingdom. The group of people over whose hearts He rules right now. If you have acknowledged Jesus as savior and Lord, then you are in His spiritual kingdom today. He reigns and rules over your heart and over every heart that has so acknowledged Him. But here in verses 19 and 20 Jesus looks ahead to a future physical manifestation of the kingdom, when he physically reigns. Now, understand those two aspects of the kingdom—the spiritual kingdom over which He reigns today, and the future physical kingdom. Those are intimately related and cannot be ultimately separated from each other. Because to enter Jesus' future physical kingdom, you already have to belong to His spiritual kingdom. That is, you must have acknowledged Jesus as your rightful Lord and king. And you must demonstrate the reality of that faith in Christ by submitting to His authority every day.

So let me summarize the main clause of verse 20. Listen carefully. This is what Jesus says. He says, listen, there are some of you who have attached yourselves to Me today who do not belong to My spiritual kingdom now, and you absolutely will not enter My physical kingdom in the

future. In fact, taken by itself, the main clause of verse 20 says “no one hearing Jesus will enter His kingdom” period. But the dependent clause tells us there is one exception. In other words, no one hearing my message this morning will enter Jesus’ future physical kingdom unless. Unless you meet the condition that Jesus establishes in verse 20. Jesus says, let me tell you who are going to get in. Look again at verse 20. “For I say to you you will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.” Do you understand how crucial this is? Jesus is making a very solemn pronouncement here. You think you’re a Christian? You think you’re going to heaven? Jesus says let me tell you whether or not you are. It all comes down to this. Does your righteousness surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? That’s what Jesus says. You’re not getting in, I’m not getting in unless we meet this condition, so we’d better understand what this condition is.

Who were the scribes and Pharisees? Well, the scribes were the official caretakers of the scripture. They are the ones who made sure that the scrolls on which the scripture was actually written were carefully copied generation after generation, and preserved, and stored, and guarded, and protected. They are also the ones who were its greatest students. They were the ones who were its most respected interpreters and teachers. They were the experts in the scripture. This was their occupation, their vocation, what they did for a living. The term Pharisees doesn’t describe a profession or a vocation but rather a theological position. Many of the scribes were also Pharisees. That is, they held to the theological position that the Pharisees stood for which was one of conservatism. They took the Old Testament scriptures literally—all of them. The Sadducees only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament. The Pharisees accepted it all. Most of the Pharisees were not scribes however. That’s why they are always differentiated. Most of the Pharisees were laymen, theological conservatives, serious about God, serious about their heritage, serious about the scriptures.

Now, because we have Jesus’ assessment of this group on the pages of the gospels, we already don’t think much of their righteousness, do we? In fact, there are a lot of things you don’t mind being called in today’s world,, but you don’t want anybody to say you’re what? a Pharisee. It’s not a good thing. Why? Because of Jesus’ assessment. But understand this. If you had been in the crowd that day, I can promise you that you would have been shocked by Jesus’ statement. Because the scribes and Pharisees were considered in the first century to be the most holy and righteous people alive. In fact, the Jews had a saying in that time that if only two people go to heaven, one will be scribe and the other will be a Pharisee. But Jesus here just cuts across all of that. And in one brief statement He says that the scribes and Pharisees, as a whole (there would be some exceptions) but as a whole, they’re not going to enter My kingdom. In fact, keep your finger there and turn over to Matthew 23:13 On Tuesday of the passion week, Jesus gets even more pointed. You can keep your finger here as well; we’re going to go back and forth between this and chapter 5. But notice, Matthew 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; *(you’re like an obstacle to*

*keep them from entering*) for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.” You’re not in and you keep others from going in. Look down at verse 15. “woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.” Wow. Jesus says, listen, the scribes and Pharisees are not in the kingdom and are destined for hell. Now, go back to chapter 5. Because in Matthew 5:20, Jesus says something more than that the scribes and Pharisees aren’t getting in themselves. He says that you’re not getting in and I’m not getting in unless our righteousness surpasses theirs. Our righteousness has to be greater than theirs. So that raises the really important question: so what was their righteousness and what was wrong with it?

If you had seen a scribe or Pharisee in the first century, you would have witnessed a remarkable display of external righteousness. According to the New Testament, let me just take you through it. In my notes I have scripture references written next to these, but I’m not going to take you through all the references. Let me just give you a description, according to the New Testament, of these guys. They loved the scriptures. They read and studied it every day. They prayed often, and they prayed for long periods of time. They fasted often. In fact, many of them fasted two days every week. They gave 10% of every thing they possessed to God, even their garden herbs, everything. They didn’t hold back anything. They were very careful to observe all of the ceremonies that were a part of their tradition, some of them prescribed in the Old Testament, others of them part of their tradition like the washing of hands before a meal, not for cleanliness, but for ceremonial purposes. They led exemplary moral lives. You almost never heard of one of the Pharisees being guilty of taking God’s name in vain, or of failing to keep the Sabbath or of stealing, or of committing adultery. They were fervent faithful evangelists, constantly trying to convince Gentiles to come and worship not the pagan idols that they had been raised with but the one true and living God. They fastidiously tried to obey the scriptures. They attempted to keep all 613 commands that they had found in the Old Testament Law: 248 positive ones and 365 negative ones. According to Acts 23 they even lived in anticipation of the resurrection. Listen, these guys were exemplary by every obvious external standard they appeared to be genuinely righteous. Not one of us externally could have stood up next to these guys and have appeared more righteous than they were. Now look back at Matthew 5:20. “I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” The Greek word translated *surpasses* here literally means to possess something in abundance. It was used in secular Greek of a river overflowing its banks. Jesus says unless your righteousness overflows way beyond the scribes and Pharisees, you’re not getting in.

Well that brings me to the crucial question, and that is, so what was wrong? What was so terribly wrong with the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees that would bring Jesus to say this? When you study the gospels you discover that their righteousness was fatally flawed in two ways. And I want you to understand these. First of all their righteousness was fatally flawed

because it was self-righteousness. It was rotten at its foundation. They missed the whole point of the Old Testament scriptures. In Galatians 3 what does Paul say is the point of the Old Testament? It was to show them their sin and their utter lack of personal righteousness and to drive them to their Messiah as their only hope of real righteousness. They didn't get that at all. They missed it altogether. They thought they simply needed to keep God's law in order to achieve a right standing before Him. If they could just keep it pretty well, then they would be righteous enough that God would accept them. They could be good enough for God. Listen, do you know everybody's born with that theology? My kids were born with that theology. Your kids were born with that theology, and so were you. You can be good enough for God, just work harder. That's what they thought. They thought that they could get there by their own efforts.

Let me show you this. Look at Luke 16:13. Jesus has just commented on the fact that a slave can't have two lords, two masters. And therefore, you've got to decide. Are you going to be a slave to God or are you going to be a slave to wealth?

Now the Pharisees, *(verse 14)* who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at him. *(And notice what He says to them, verse 15.)* 'You are those who justify yourselves. *(in other words you declare yourselves to be right, acceptable to God, but it's strictly human. It's in the sight of men)* but God knows your hearts.'

You justify in your own hearts yourself. You justify yourself with others as if you're righteous, but God knows what you're really like. They tried to build self-righteousness. You see this even more over in Luke 18:9. Jesus tells a parable, a story. "He also told this parable, that some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous" They believed they were good enough for God and they viewed others with contempt. They saw themselves as good, and therefore they measured others against them and saw they came short, so they viewed others with contempt. And Jesus goes on to tell the story. We're going to come back to that so I won't look at it now. Turn over to Romans 10, because here, Paul identifies it very clearly. This was the mindset of first century Judaism. Romans 10:1. He says;

Brethren, my hearts' desire and my prayer to God for my brothers is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, *(they're zealous)* but not in accordance with knowledge

In other words they don't get it. What didn't they get. Verse 3. "For not knowing about God's righteousness. . ." That is, not knowing how high God's standard is, what He sees as righteousness, and not understanding what Paul was talking about in the first chapters of Romans, and that is the gift of righteousness that God gives to the believing sinner. They didn't

get any of that. So what did they do? Verse 3 they sought to establish their own righteousness, by their own efforts and therefore they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Listen, you cannot get into Jesus' kingdom by your own righteousness. It's not going to be good enough for God. You will never, ever be good enough for God. What does Romans 3:10 say? "There is none righteous (*what?*) no not one" Not you, not me. Not one of us will ever stand before God and be good enough to meet His standard. You only can get into Jesus' kingdom if you have someone else's righteousness that meets that standard, and that's Jesus' righteousness. What does Paul say in Philippians 3. You remember, he was talking about his own righteousness before conversion and how qualified he was externally? But in Philippians 3:9 he says; I want to be found in Christ, "not having a righteousness of my own derived from my keeping of the law, but the righteousness which is through faith in Christ" –the righteousness which God gives as a gift on the basis of faith. That's your only hope. That's my only hope, and they didn't get it. The Law didn't serve its purpose in their case. It didn't show them their utter lack of righteousness and their need of the Messiah. They just thought they could be good enough. So clearly, their righteousness was flawed in that it was self-righteousness.

But that's not primarily what Jesus means in Matthew 5. In context, Jesus is chiefly referring in Matthew 5 to a second way their righteousness was flawed. Not only was it self-righteousness, it was imperfect righteousness. They were very righteous. But their obedience to the scripture was imperfect. And it was imperfect in several ways. Let me point those out to you. First of all, their obedience to scripture was external, and not internal. They defined obedience as external conformity rather than internal obedience from the heart. Jesus said this in several places. In Mark 7:6 He said this. These people, they give me lip service, but what? their heart is far from Me. They externally conform. They talk a good talk but it doesn't come along with their heart.

But I want you to turn to Matthew 23 because here's where we really get insight into this imperfect righteousness. Seven times in this chapter Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites. The Greek word for *hypocrite* (you're probably aware) was used to describe someone in the Greek theater. In Greek theater, to make sure you could see the person at a distance, and what role they were playing, they wore masks. Sometimes large masks that would let you see who that character was from the distance that the theater was away from the stage. And so, simply the word hypocrite means someone who puts on a mask to play a particular role. That's all it means—an actor. It came to be used of anyone who pretended to be something that they aren't. Jesus says the scribes and Pharisees were playing a part outwardly, but it wasn't who they really were. Look down at verse 25. Matthew 23:25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (*you play actors*) For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence." You clean up the outside, the external. You look great. But not true on the inside. Who would want to drink out of a cup that's been carefully and meticulously cleaned on the outside, but looks like some of the cups in my college



dorm room when I was growing (back in that stage of my life)-- it's got stuff growing there for three or four weeks. Who wants to drink out of that? Verse 26. "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also." Start with the inside because that's the most important, and then the outside will follow. "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs" To keep people from stepping on the tombs of your forefathers, in the first century they would whitewash them. They would put a white paint over them. Sometimes they were very carefully decorated and all adorned in white. Ironically, guess what color the scribes and Pharisees most often wore? White robes. Jesus says, yeah, it looks great. But just like that grave that looks really pretty from the outside, you are inwardly full of rot and decay. Verse 28 "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy (*in other words, you're just play acting, and watch this*) lawlessness". Your heart is still completely lawless. You're not obeying God in your heart. It's all on the outside. This isn't how God responds is it? You remember what Samuel the prophet said? God does not see as a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the what? the heart. God cares about your heart. He doesn't care what you look like on the outside first and foremost, until the heart is right, then the outside'll be right. But what's going on in your heart? That's why, by the way, back in Matthew 5:6 the true citizens of the kingdom are described as those who inwardly, in their heart, hunger and thirst after true righteousness. They're not just interested in looking right. They're interested in being right.

So the Pharisees' and the scribes' obedience was imperfect in that way, but it was also imperfect in that it was self-centered and not for God's glory. Not only was it external but it was self-centered. They pursued some measure of obedience to God's word, but it was always about them, what they could get out of it. Look at Matthew 23:5. This is a stinging, biting indictment from our Lord. "They do all their deeds to be noticed by men." And then he goes on with a list of them. Think about that. This isn't me saying this. This is Jesus saying, these guys did what they did to be respected, to be honored, to be elevated, to be thought well of. It wasn't about God at all. It was about the people around them. That's not true obedience. That's not true righteousness. In fact, you remember, those who were citizens of the kingdom, they demonstrate good works for what end? So that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven. Not these guys. It was about their glory. Listen, if the reason you obey God is for utterly selfish motives-- if it's because in some circles you want to be healthy or wealthy or you want to have a good reputation in the community, or you want to be looked up to and respected, and that's primarily what it's about, then it's not real righteousness.

A third way their righteousness was imperfect is, their obedience to the scripture was incomplete and not radical. They did obey some of the scripture, but often, they obeyed the easier, less important commands and failed to obey the most important ones. Look at Matthew 23:3. When they teach the Bible, do what they tell you. But don't do according to their deeds for they say

things and do not do them. Look over at Matthew 23:23. Jesus says you tithe your garden herbs but you've "neglected the weightier provisions of the Law; justice and mercy and faithfulness;" Yeah, they obeyed, but it wasn't radical obedience, it was convenient obedience. In fact, other times they replaced the true meaning of the scripture by their tradition. You remember Jesus in Matthew 15 gets onto them for the way they had this deal about something that could have benefited their parents. They said, oh no, I've given this to God. And therefore they undermined the whole intention of the scripture. By the way, as we go through Matthew 5, Jesus is going to give six examples of how, through their twisted, distorted interpretation of scripture they have changed what God intended into something else entirely. They missed the point. So their obedience was convenient, incomplete, and never radical. What God wants from us is radical obedience. Look at 5:48. "therefore be perfect as your Father is perfect." Doesn't mean true perfection is achievable in this life, but that's the standard. And we should never be comfortable with anything less. Radical obedience.

Now go back to Matthew 5. Let's wrap this together in a package here. What is the point? Jesus is saying that the disciples who were listening to Him would not enter into His kingdom (those who claimed to be connected to Him) would not enter in His kingdom unless their righteousness exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees, whose righteousness was self-righteous and it was incomplete. Their obedience was external and not internal. Their obedience was self-centered and not for God's glory. Their obedience was incomplete and not radical. They failed to live up to the standards of scripture. But what does their incomplete obedience, their imperfect righteousness have to do with not entering into Jesus' kingdom? Was Jesus saying that we enter His kingdom because of our works? Clearly not. I mean, in His first attack against their righteousness was that it was self-righteousness. So what's His point? Listen carefully. This is absolutely crucial. To get into Jesus' kingdom your righteousness must be greater than the scribes' and Pharisees' in this sense. You must have true righteousness. Not self-righteousness, but true righteousness. So how do you get true righteousness? Where do you get a righteousness that is internal, radical, and lived for God's glory. You only get it one place, and that's from God Himself. In fact, according to Christ, true righteousness begins with two acts of God. This is the only way you can be truly righteous. It begins with regeneration. That's a word that simply means God gives you a new heart. You remember Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3? "Unless you are (*what?*) born again, you can not enter the kingdom of God." You have to get a new heart. You have to start all over. There's got to be a radical change in who you are that's like being born a second time. And only God can do that. Why is that birth so important? Because in that birth that theologians call regeneration, you get a new desire for, delight in, and ability to obey the word of God. You remember the prophets in the New Covenant, Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36? "He will write His laws upon your heart" He'll give you both the delight in and the desire to obey, power to obey. Before we can be truly righteous, God must first change our hearts.

But there's a second act of God required—not only regeneration, but also justification. A changed status before God. Not only do we need a changed heart, we need a changed status of right with God. Now go back to Luke, and let's finish here. Let me finish this parable Jesus began. Luke 18:9

“He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves they were righteous, and they viewed others with contempt. *(Here's what He said to the self-righteous, Let me tell you a story.)* Two men went up to the temple to pray. *(Righteous Jews went twice to the temple every day to pray if they lived in the Jerusalem area, the morning sacrifice and the evening sacrifice. One of those times, these two men went up)* one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. *(a Pharisee, and the lowest of the low, a tax collector.)* The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank you that I'm not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ *(You see this guy is consumed with his own self-righteousness. He thinks he's good enough for God. Jesus says,)* But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his chest, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner.’

Literally the Greek text says ‘God, be propitiated, God, let your wrath be satisfied toward me, the sinner.’ Wouldn't even look up. Just beating his chest saying, God, I am the sinner and I need You to turn Your wrath away from me. Be merciful. Show me grace. Show me mercy. Now notice what Jesus says, verse 14 “I tell you, this man went to his house justified. *(declared in a moment's time to have a right standing before God)* rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” Listen, you need, to be really righteous, you need a changed heart—that's regeneration. And you need a changed status before God, a changed standing--that's justification. How do you get both of those? How can you experience a changed heart and a changed standing before God, where God says, that person's righteous? How do you get that? Look back in verse 13. Here's how you get it. When you are willing to turn from your own self-righteousness, and you're willing to humble yourself before God, and like this tax collector, you cry out to God for mercy. We're right back with the first beatitude, aren't we? “Blessed are the beggars in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” This is how you get real radical righteousness. You acknowledge your utter lack of righteousness and you cry out to God for mercy. And God changes your heart and He changes your status before Him. And then He makes it possible for you to live in obedience to Him. He writes His laws on your heart. He gives you a living spiritual heart, that loves Him and longs to obey Him and has the power to do so.

Let me ask you, what kind of righteousness characterizes you? Is it internal and from the heart? Is it radical and complete? Is it for God's glory? If so, then you have experienced that changed

heart called regeneration, and you have experienced a changed status called justification, where God declares you to be right with Him. And He has given you real righteousness. You belong to His spiritual kingdom today and someday you will belong to His literal physical kingdom. Or is your righteousness merely external conformity, partial, incomplete? You can take the Bible or leave it. I don't really care that much. I'll do what I want to do. I'll live the way I want to live. And I'm driven by my self-interest. I want what I want out of life. I don't really care what God wants. If that's your righteousness, then it's no better than the scribes and Pharisees. You are not in Jesus' spiritual kingdom today, and unless there's a radical change, you will not be in His kingdom in the future. And the only way that can change, is for you to be like this tax collector—to find yourself humbled before God, crying out for His mercy to change who you have become. That's where it begins.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for your truth. Lord, thank You that we don't rely on our own self-righteousness. We would never be good enough to meet Your holy standard of perfection. Thank You that we have the righteousness of another credited to us—the righteousness of Your own Son, those 33 perfect years of obedience credited to us. And that You treat us as if we had lived them. Father, I pray that You would help every person here this morning to take serious thought of what their relationship to the scripture says about them. Father, don't let someone walk out of this service this morning still blinded to their own true condition before You. Lord, help them to see that if they're truly a believer, but one who is minimizing and downplaying the scripture, in which case they're dishonorable in their service to You. Whether they're a Christian who, although imperfectly, is maximizing the scripture, and seeking to obey it and teach others to do so. Or Father, whether they're simply a hanger-on—someone who's attached to Christ in some way, but by their response to scripture, Jesus has diagnosed them as not being a true disciple at all. Lord, use Your word in all of its power in every heart. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen