

## The Righteousness We Need

Matthew 5:17-20

Pastor Tom Yoon

August 31, 2025

### Introduction:

- The Psalmist writes in Psalm 85, *"Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you,"* (Psalm 85:6).
  - We can't force revival, but we can seek and ask the Lord to revive our hearts.
- And this morning as we continue in our series, we see from our passage how we can seek revival by learning to obey the word of Christ.
  - It's through true obedience that we bear good fruit.
  - And here's thing about obedience: you can't sort of obey. You've got to obey with all your heart.
  - Joshua tells God's people, *"Do not turn from it (that is God's word) to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go,"* (Joshua 1:7).
- In the Christian life, it's possible to think you're obeying God's word and walking down the right path when you're actually going in the opposite direction.
  - You may be confident you're pleasing God when you're actually going against God's word.
  - Proverbs 14:12 states, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."*
- Think of the Apostle Paul, he was a very intelligent man. He was a very religious man.
  - He thought he was living a life that was pleasing God, but he was persecuting the body of Christ.
- This is exactly what was happening when Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount.
  - The Pharisees and the teachers of the law believed they were obeying God's word.
  - But Jesus calls them hypocrites and blind guides.
  - They weren't leading people closer to God. Rather, they were leading the people away from God.
- And to help the people, and set them on the right path, Jesus shows in our passage a picture of true obedience.
  - And how we can fully obey God's word.
- When we're going down the wrong path, remember that Jesus will intervene in our lives and set us back on the right path.
  - Jesus came to the Apostle Paul and set him on the right path.
  - And that's also what he does for you.
  - He's the good shepherd who goes after the one lost sheep.
  - He's the loving Savior, who comes to his people.
  - He's the true guide who lights your path.

- And it may be that you're going down the wrong path, and Jesus wants to speak to you today.
- To help you back on the right path.
- And so, we need to ask how does Jesus help us to rightly obey him?
  - If the Pharisees and the experts in the law couldn't get it right, how can we?
  - If our hearts are prone to wander, how can we walk in true obedience?
  - Jesus answers this in our passage this morning.

Point 1:

- First, Jesus shows how we can fully obey, because Jesus is the fulfillment of God's word.
- Take a look at verse 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,"* (Matthew 5:17).
- When Jesus speaks about the Law and Prophets, he's talking about the Old Testament.
  - During this time, there was no New Testament.
  - It wasn't written.
  - And when Jesus speaks about the Law and the Prophets, he's speaking about the Old Testament.
- And Jesus speaks about the Law and Prophets because people thought he was trying to abolish the Old Testament.
  - In Matthew 12, the disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and eat.
  - It happened to be on the Sabbath, so the Pharisees say, *"Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath,"* (Matthew 12:2).
  - On another occasion, John the Baptist's disciples come to Jesus and said, *"Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"* (Matthew 9:14).
  - And unlike the religious leaders, Jesus ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners.
  - And so, some believed Jesus came to abolish the law.
  - They believed Jesus was trying to destroy the old system and make a new system.
- And isn't this how some people think today?
  - They think the Old Testament isn't necessary.
  - Or helpful for Christianity.
  - Some people think it's legalistic and that it doesn't apply to us today.
  - They think the Old Testament is harsh and judgmental.
  - And that the New Testament is true Christianity.
- But listen to what Jesus says about the Law and the Prophets.
- He says: *"I have not come to abolish the Law and Prophets...but to fulfill them,"* (Matthew 5:17).
  - Jesus is saying that the Old Testament is pointing to himself.
  - All the prophecies of the coming Messiah, the hope of a redeemer, the hope of the nations, the picture of the suffering servant, the atonement for our sins, the one who

defeats the serpent, the one who makes all righteous, all the promises of God find there yes in Jesus Christ.

- It would take hours to go over all the ways Jesus fulfills the Old Testament, but the point is that the Old Testament prophecies, and stories, and laws are fulfilled in Christ.
- Now, here's what this means for you.
- It means that certain laws don't apply to you the same way they applied to ancient Israel.
  - We don't have to keep sacrificing animals to atone for our sin because the sacrificial system was pointing to the final sacrifice, Jesus Christ.
  - Hebrews 9:12 states, *"He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."*
  - The sacrificial system isn't the same for us because Jesus is the final sacrifice.
  - But we need to understand the system because it shows the importance of how Jesus washes all our sins away.
  - He's the Lamb of God who takes our sin away.
  - He's the final sacrifice who secures our redemption.
  - And because he fulfilled our redemption through his blood, we no longer have to sacrifice animals.
  - Jesus fulfilled this law.
- Furthermore, it means that without the Old Testament you can't fully understand the themes of the Bible.
  - To understand grace, and love, and obedience, and holiness, and forgiveness, and salvation, and hope, and faith, and everything about Jesus, you need the Law and the Prophets.
  - Saying that the Old Testament isn't important is like saying you don't have to watch the first 75% of a movie.
  - You need the whole movie to understand the message of the movie, and the ending of the movie.
  - If you want to understand the message of the Bible, and fully live the Christian life, and have genuine faith, you can't diminish the Old Testament.
  - Rather, the more we understand how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament, the better we can understand how it relates to our lives today.
- In Luke 24, after Jesus rose from the dead, there were two disciples who were walking with Jesus.
  - But they didn't recognize that they were speaking with Jesus Christ.
  - And the Bible says how, *"Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself,"* (Luke 24:27).
  - And after this, their eyes were opened, and they saw Jesus Christ.
  - And after Jesus vanished from their sight, they say to one another, *"Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scripture?"* (Luke 24:31).
  - Their hearts burned, as they saw how Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures.

- If you feel that your heart has grown cold and that your obedience is mechanical and dull, it may be because you haven't been looking to Christ.
  - But if you want to obey Christ, you need to look to Christ.
  - To worship him.
  - To seek him.
  - To love him.
  - See how the Old Testament points to him.
  - And your heart will begin to burn inside you.
  - Jesus is the fulfillment of God's word.

Point 2:

- Second, not only is Jesus the fulfillment, but we can fully obey God's word, because of the confidence we can have in God's word.
- Take a look at verse 18.
  - *"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law..."* (Matthew 5:18).
  - The iota was the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet, just like the letter "i" is the smallest letter in the English alphabet.
  - And a dot was the smallest mark you could use in writing.
  - Just like our period.
  - In other words, Jesus is saying how even the smallest letter or mark written in the Law and Prophets are important to him.
  - It's not only every paragraph or word, but even the smallest letter, even the smallest mark, that is important to Christ.
- Jesus reminds us that we aren't to relax or throw away any part of the Bible.
  - Nothing in the Bible should be taken lightly.
  - You can't say, "Well, this part isn't important for me."
  - This part doesn't really jive with our culture, so I think we can ignore these commands.
  - I don't personally like what this says, so I'm going to ignore it."
  - Everything in the Bible is important for us to learn, and study, and obey, even if it goes against our culture, even if it's uncomfortable to obey, even if it's going to lead us to persecution.
  - Every iota, every dot, is important and necessary to Christ, and it needs to be important and necessary for us.
- But we also see how everything in the Bible will be accomplished.
  - *"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,"* (Matthew 5:18).
  - Not only are all things important, but all things will be accomplished.
  - That means everything that's written in the Bible, will one day become a reality.
  - Every promise of God will one day become realized.
  - Every prediction will one day come to pass.
  - Every purpose God has from the Bible will come to completion.
  - No matter how small or big, all things written in the Bible will be accomplished.

- The prophet Habakkuk lived during a violent time.
  - In the first verse, he cries, “violence,” because there was injustice all over the nation.
  - And he cried out to God, but it seemed like God wasn’t answering his prayer the way he wanted.
  - And he began to wonder if God would accomplish his word.
  - But God answers Habakkuk and tells him to wait.
  - God says to him: *“Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come,”* (Habakkuk 2:3 ).
  - And even though things weren’t changing as fast as the prophet wanted, the prophet puts his trust in God’s word and waits for the Lord.
  
- In a similar way, when we see senseless violence, and constant war, when we face personal trials and God seems distant from us, when we’re worried about our finances and family members and jobs, when the answers are slow, and our prayers feel like they’re not being heard, we may wonder if God is going to accomplish his word.
  - But we can find encouragement because God will accomplish every promise.
  - He’s going to end all violence. He’s going to judge all evil. He’s going to lead you to where you need to go and provide everything you need.
  - Doesn’t his word say, not worry about what you’ll eat and what you’ll wear?
  - Just as he provides for the birds and flowers, he’ll provide for you.
  - Doesn’t God say, *“For I know the plans I have for you...plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope,”* (Jeremiah 29:11).
  - We can have confidence in our lives and our future.
  - Jesus says:
  - *“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,”* (Matthew 5:18).
  - We can fully obey because of the confidence of God’s word.

Point 3:

- Third, not only does Jesus fulfill, not only does Jesus give confidence, but we can fully obey because of the reward of God’s word.
  
- Take a look at verse 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,”* (Matthew 5:19).
  
- Jesus is dead serious that you don’t relax God’s commands.
  - In fact, Jesus says that anyone who relaxes or teaches others to relax even the smallest commandment of God will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.
  
- It’s hard to understand what Jesus means by least in the kingdom of God, because in Matthew 11:11 Jesus says: *“Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”*
  - But we need to see that Jesus is giving us a warning.

- There's something you lose when you relax God's commandments and teach others to relax them as well.
- You're in danger of becoming less useful for Christ, or losing out on glory, or not getting rewarded.
- Speaking about our resurrection bodies, the Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:41, *"There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory."*
- Or in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Paul writes, *"Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."*
- The Apostle Paul speaks about different degrees of glory and losing rewards.
- I know these are difficult things to understand, but we need to think about them.
- *"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..."* (Matthew 5:19)
- Perhaps in our verse today, Jesus is talking about churches and Christians who've relaxed God's commands so much, they've grown immature.
  - That's why they're called least in the kingdom of God.
  - Haven't you seen churches or Christians who are imbalanced in their obedience to God's word?
  - For some, everything is about evangelism and not confronting others with sin.
  - For others, everything is about studying God's word and not interacting with other believers.
  - For others, everything is about helping the poor and not working on growing in spiritual maturity.
  - There are commands in God's word that we may not like, that are hard to obey, that may be difficult to obey.
  - But God says that we need to obey all of his word.
  - Relaxing and teaching others to relax God's commandments can cause spiritual immaturity, a lack of fruit, and for Jesus to call you least in the kingdom of God.
- I know obedience isn't always easy.
  - But we need to consider if there's an area in our lives where we haven't been fully obeying the Lord.
  - Have you neglected reading your Bible, or spending time in prayer, or inviting someone to church where you feel the Spirit asking you to invite, or not facing your problems in marriage, or thinking of yourself over others, or favored people you like over people who are harder to talk too, or been lazy about Sunday worship, or have you been holding on to a particular sin, or withheld giving to the church or to gospel causes?
  - If we want to grow and live the Christian life, we need to fully obey the Lord and not relax any of God's commands.
- But let's also remember Jesus' promise to those who fully obey.
  - He says you'll be called great in his kingdom.

- I know that fighting sin, showing forgiveness, being kind to those who are harsh, being patient, enduring and persevering through suffering isn't always easy.
- Obedience is often hard.
- But remember this: Jesus remembers your work, and he will reward you and cover you with glory.
- And he will call you great in his kingdom.
- *"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." (Colossians 3:23-24).*
- *"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain," (1 Corinthians 15:58).*
- *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing," (2 Timothy 4:7-8).*
- You can obey because God rewards those who faithfully obey him.

Point 4:

- Jesus fulfills. Jesus gives confidence. Jesus rewards. But fourth, we can fully obey because of the transforming power of God's word.
  - Verse 20 states, *"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 5:20).*
- This is a staggering statement because the Pharisees and the scribes were known to be more righteous than all the people.
  - They were the ones who set the example of others to follow.
  - But here Jesus says that his followers must be more righteous than them, to enter the kingdom of heaven.
- Jesus isn't saying that we're saved by works and not by grace.
  - Our salvation isn't dependent on anything we do.
  - We're saved 100% by the cross of Christ.
- But when we believe and trust in Christ, the Bible tells us that we're born again.
  - He gives us a new heart, and we don't just obey God on the outside, but also obey in the inside.
  - We begin to obey because we're children of God.
  - Because we want to please our Heavenly Father.
- The Pharisees followed the rules, but they didn't truly obey with love.
  - But the Christian is someone who obeys because of love.
  - Jesus says, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments," (John 14:15).*
  - When you believe in all that Christ has done for you, he gives you a new heart.
  - He transforms you.

- And you're able to obey, not because you have to, but with a heart that longs to worship, and honor, and love the Lord, because you're grateful for all he's done.
- And your righteousness will truly be greater than the Pharisees.
  - Because their righteousness wasn't true righteousness, but a false righteousness.
  - But your righteousness is different, because it's from the Lord, it's flows from a changed heart and a changed life.
- If you find it difficult to obey, remember that the Holy Spirit is living in you and he's able to help you.
  - *"For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure,"* (Philippians 2:13).
  - You have the power of the Holy Spirit, who stands with you, lives in you, and can help you persevere and obey.
  - Abide in him, trust in him, believe in him, and you will bear fruit.

#### Conclusion:

- A doctor-friend of mine explained how he felt silly, even embarrassed, when he experienced his first code blue at his hospital.
    - A code blue is a way for some hospitals to alert the staff that a patient is facing a life-threatening medical emergency.
    - Doctors and nurses will need to rush to the room and perform lifesaving procedures, so the patient doesn't die.
    - As my friend was beginning his rotations as a medical resident, he told me how one day, he was walking down the hall and enjoying an ice cream cone after lunch.
    - When he heard a blue code come through the intercom, with the room number.
    - This was the first time he heard it, and he thought, "Oh, I better get to the room."
    - And he started walking to the room, eating his ice cream cone.
    - But then, just a few seconds later, a few of the doctors and nurses ran past him.
    - They were rushing to the room while he was walking with his ice cream cone.
    - He said one doctor yelled at him, saying, "Let's go, what are you doing!"
    - And when he got to the room, he saw one of the nurses on top of the patient pumping and trying to get the patient to breathe.
    - And the doctors, rushing to save this person.
    - He said it was so intense as everyone was working to save this person.
    - Luckily, they were able to save the patient, but he said that he felt so dumb eating his ice cream cone, while this person was about to die.
    - He vowed to never make that mistake again.
  - There are people in our world, who are spiritually dead and don't know Jesus Christ.
    - There is much work to be done.
    - There are good works that God has prepared for us to do.
    - It's not time for us to be relaxing God's law, eating our ice cream cones.
    - Rather, it's time for us to get serious and fully obey God's law.
    - It's time for us to seek God's face.
    - Let's not neglect any of Christ's commands.
    - But let's listen and fully obey all that Christ has commanded us to obey.
-



<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all references to the Bible are from the English Standard Version (ESV).