“CARRYING HIS VALUES”

Scripture: Matthew 5:17-48.

It’s important when you study the Bible to keep in mind that primarily this is a book about God. The Bible reveals God’s good and perfect and holy character. It tells us who He is, what He does, and what His plans and His purposes are. One of the most important things to know about God is that He wants to have a relationship with mankind. Man was created in God’s image to have fellowship with Him, to represent Him on earth. But man fell, he sinned. Man messed up that right relationship with God. And when that happened, God showed His great love and compassion. Instead of destroying man, He came up with a plan to redeem him. And that is the central theme of the Bible…it’s a story about redemption.

God reaches out in His great love and mercy to restore fallen mankind back to a right relationship with Him. God loved us so much that the Father sent His only begotten Son to us to show us the Father, to teach us about His character, but also to be our Savior, to save us from our sins, our fallen state. By simply placing our faith in Jesus as the only begotten Son of God who died for us, the perfect sacrifice who paid the penalty for our sins, we are declared righteous. By God’s grace, we can then have a relationship with God. Because of what Jesus did, we are declared righteous before God. When we studied Abraham last year we talked about how he was declared righteous because he believed God and how that was “imputed righteousness.” This is the same righteousness that Lot received and that we Christians have. It means that the righteousness of Jesus Christ is applied to our account. It is not our own righteousness, but His. Only then is our right relationship with God established for the rest of eternity. Not because of anything we did, but because of what Jesus did for us.

Basic as this may sound to you, it is foundational to our understanding the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus teaches us the character of God the Father. And the Father’s character is also Jesus’ character, which He lived out for us. Jesus told His disciples “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Jesus modeled for us what God’s character looks like. And in the Sermon on the Mount what Jesus does is contrast God’s perfect, holy, good, righteous character with our severely flawed character.

Jesus began His sermon with the Beatitudes (5:1-12), which we looked at two weeks ago. “Blessed are…” and He lists several internal attitudes or characteristics. To be truly happy people, to have an inward peace and contentment, we must have a personal relationship with God. And that relationship begins when we become “poor in spirit.” We reach a point where we realize we have nothing. We are spiritually bankrupt. We are completely at God’s mercy. We can’t do anything to save ourselves. We recognize ourselves as sinners and we acknowledge that before God. We mourn over our sin. We yield ourselves to His will. And when we get saved, God changes us. We become transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. As believers we learn to deal with our sin, seeing it for what it is, repenting of it and confessing it. And what happens to us internally is reflected externally by our behavior toward God and others. We become salt and light in the world. Oh and by the way, the world is not going to like that change in us. In fact, Jesus says they will hate us for our godly living and they will likely persecute us.

It is in this light that I want us to look at the Sermon on the Mount…

READ Matthew 5:17-18. Jesus claims here that He came to complete the Old Testament, or bring it to full measure. How? By being the fulfillment of the Law (given to Moses) and the O.T. messianic prophecies. In Luke 24:44-45, just prior to His ascension back into heaven, Jesus tells His disciples, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and Prophets and the Psalms [the entire Old Testament] must be fulfilled. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”

So tell me. What is it that Jesus did that fulfilled the Law or, in the words of Hebrews 8:13, made it “obsolete”? His redemptive work of salvation…His sacrificial death on the cross (see Hebrews 9:15-28 and 10:1-18). But remember that as Jesus is speaking these words in Matthew 5 that has not yet taken place. But later, when Jesus would die on the cross He would pay the sin debt for all mankind once and for all. This payment would meet all of the requirements and demands of the Law. So then, the old covenant was rendered obsolete and it was replaced with a new covenant. That familiar passage whenever we take the Lord’s Supper from 1 Cor 11:25 – Jesus tells His disciples, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

As far at the prophecies concerning the Messiah, Jesus fulfilled many of them when He came the first time. But not all of them have been fulfilled yet. Some remain unfulfilled even in 2016. Those that remain unfulfilled will be fulfilled at Jesus’ second coming, when He sets up His future earthly kingdom (the millennial kingdom). Everything God spoke about in the O.T. will come to pass as He said it would. As the old expression goes – “every jot and tittle” of God’s word will be accomplished in His time and in His way.

One last point that I feel needs to be made about the Law. Some have erroneously labeled the Law as “bad” and Grace as “good.” Be careful! God’s Word refers to the Law as good. God had a purpose for giving the Law to Moses. No, it was not given in order to make men righteous or to save people (recall Abraham and Noah). The Law was given to show us that we cannot measure up to God’s perfect and holy standard. The Law reveals the righteous character of God. It shows that people are sinners and, therefore, need a savior. The Law itself never saved anyone – it pointed us to the cross of Jesus where God poured out His grace.

READ Matthew 5:19. The Law is God’s perfect standard. It instructs us about His righteousness. It teaches us about God’s holiness. So, it needs to be studied and taught. Don’t neglect the O.T. truths. I love the O.T. and believe it is relevant. We can learn a lot about God and His nature when we study the O.T. Please notice that in verse 19 whether you neglect the teachings of the O.T. or you study and do them does not have an impact on your salvation. You are still in the kingdom of heaven. You are saved by grace through faith in Christ and eternally sealed. You are righteous based on the imputed righteousness of Christ. However, Jesus clearly warns us as His followers that we should continue to reverence and study the teachings of the O.T. So verse 19 is a word of admonition to believers.

READ Matthew 5:20. Here is a key verse for understanding the Sermon on the Mount. OK, how much righteousness is required to gain entry into the kingdom of heaven? (Hint: verse 48) 100%. Was the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus’ day 100% No. Is your own righteousness 100%? No. So, then, who can enter the kingdom of heaven?

In verses 21-45 Jesus offers six examples to contrast the self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (the best of the best of people who kept the Law better than anyone) with the God’s perfect standard of righteousness. Some people have dubbed these as “radical teachings” of Jesus. They say they are difficult to understand. But Jesus is simply showing us God’s holy perspective. When Jesus says, “You have heard,” He is referencing the conventional teaching of His day by the rabbis, which included the Ten Commandments, the Mosaic Law and the oral traditions which had been passed down. So let’s look at each one briefly…

READ Matthew 5:21-26. “You shall not murder” is of course one of the Ten Commandments. “Whoever murders will be liable to judgment” was a rabbinical teaching. Most people would feel OK about this one because, after all, they haven’t killed anyone. But Jesus teaches that a person who harbors anger toward someone or a person who thinks another person is a fool are just as guilty of sin before God as a murderer. Remember, this is God’s perspective, not man’s. God considers all sins, even those we might consider to be minor or private sins as a personal affront to His holy character. As Jesus says in the NASV, they are “guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”

So, anger, grudges, petty differences, and ungodly attitudes are not the character of God and they should not be part of ours either. They should to be dealt with immediately. These things hurt your fellowship with God and with your brothers and sisters in Christ. They also hurt your Christian witness to unbelievers. Jesus says we should have the character of God. It may mean swallowing your pride. It may mean giving up your personal rights. Jesus teaches that we should be peace makers. This was one of His Beatitudes. In Romans 12:18 Paul says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

READ Matthew 5:27-30. Here Jesus references another of the Ten Commandments, “You shall not commit adultery.” And again many would feel OK because they have never defiled the marriage bed by having sexual relations outside of marriage. Jesus teaches however, that in God’s eyes, if you lust after a person who is not your husband or your wife, in the privacy of your own thoughts, you are guilty of adultery. God does not just look at our external actions, but He looks straight into our heart and minds. Lustful thoughts me just as guilty a sinner as that person who actually commits adultery. Again, we all fall well short of God’s perfect standard, don’t we?

READ Matthew 5:31-32. What Jesus quotes here is the Jewish traditional teaching about divorce. It is based on Deut 24:1. Jesus reminds His followers that God permits divorce for one reason only (sexual immorality, unfaithfulness). Our standard, our society’s standard may include a wide range of grounds for divorce. These might include physical or verbal abuse, neglect, irreconcilable differences, abandonment, etc. Hey, no doubt we could all tell stories and could probably make good cases for each one. But God’s perfect, holy standard is much higher than man’s and divorce for any other reason other than unfaithfulness falls short of God’s ideal standard.

READ Matthew 5:33-37. Here Jesus references Numbers 30:2, which strictly prohibits going back on one’s promise to the Lord. In O.T. times promises were made by making oaths or vows to God and involved some sort of binding obligation on the part of the person making the oath. But God’s perfect standard is that we not make vows. He would prefer instead that we be men and women of our word. We keep our promises and commitments to God and to each other. If we say we are going to do something we just simply do it. No excuses. “Yes” does not mean “Maybe” or “I think so.” And “No” does not mean “Probably not” or “I’m not sure.” Say what you mean and never make a promise you don’t intend to keep. Once again most if not all of us fall short of God’s standard, don’t we?

READ Matthew 5:38-42. Jesus quotes Exodus 21:24 and Lev 23:20. The O.T. Law allowed for someone to exact revenge in kind against a party who had injured them. Hey, sounds fair to me. If someone hits me, I should be allowed to hit them back. If someone sues me, I need to hire a good lawyer and defend myself. If my boss tells me to do something I don’t like or I think is stupid I will probably just do the minimum to get by. We could give example after example of defending our personal rights. But Jesus teaches that God’s holy standard is a passive non-resistance. This was not an original concept of Gandhi or MLK Jr. It is a Christ-based teaching that is the kind of action God expects of us. It runs counter to our selfish sinful nature to do this, doesn’t it? And it certainly runs counter-cultural in our “Me first” society.

READ Matthew 5:43-48. The first part is a quote from Lev 19:18 “You shall love your neighbor.” The part about “hate your enemy” is not found anywhere in the Bible. It was most likely either a rabbinical teaching or the conventional wisdom of Jesus’ day. Jesus tells us how God expects us to treat our enemies. It’s easy to love people who love you and treat you good. It’s extremely difficult to love people who hate you or mistreat you. Not only does Jesus tell us to love our enemies, but He tells us to pray for them as well. Again, we all fall short here don’t we?

Well, how did you all do on God’s Righteousness Test? Does your character line up with the character of God? I’ll be honest with you. I failed this test. The truth is that all of us, even the best of us, fall well short of God’s perfect standard, don’t we? “For all have sinned all fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

Application: There’s really no place in a Christian’s life for feelings of personal superiority or self-righteousness. The only righteousness that really matters when all is said and done is the righteousness of Christ.