

## 26. Simple commands for the matter of the heart

April 10, 2016

I am sure that many of you have heard, "The matter of the heart is the heart of the matter." I've used this phrase before, as you may remember. It means that whatever we do is an outcome of what we are as we studied last Sunday.

Our Lord Jesus is starting to expound this truth to His followers, including us. The Sermon on the Mount is not for unbelievers, because they have to have the Holy Spirit in their hearts to understand what Jesus is speaking to them as well as to follow His commands.

### A. YOU ARE THE SALT AND LIGHT

*Matthew 5:13-16 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Jesus speaks of the influence that we are to have in the world in which we live. In those days, salt was used as a preservative, because they did not have refrigeration like we do now. When they butchered meat, they would salt the meat heavily, because the salt would kill the surface bacteria of the meat and would prevent it from rotting.

Not only as the preservative for ourselves from rotting and decaying, but also we are supposed to be seasoning elements in the lost world. When we add salt in the food, it brings up the flavor of the food much better. We should be like that. We need to show our full and meaningful lives with the peace and joy from our God to unbelievers, so that they may want to have what we have.

We must stand against the effects of sin, working to preserve everything in this world from contamination. This obviously includes working to preserve purity and vitality in regard to people, but as salt, we should seek to preserve the purity and life of whatever we come into contact with.

Salt becomes tasteless when contaminated with dirt and other impurities. When salt that's being used as a preservative loses its saltiness, what happens to the meat? It becomes useless. Salt must keep its "saltiness" to be of any value. In the same way, too many Christians lose their "flavor" and become good for nothing. To fit in with the crowd, they use foul language, don't mind dirty jokes, and wink at sins.

Not very long after I got saved in 1987, I was talking about my salvation to a salesman of a Yellow Pages company where I was a graphic design contractor. He told me that he, too, was a born-again Christian. I told him, "I didn't know that you were." From the way he spoke and the things he did, I didn't notice that he was a Christian before. It was a shock to him. It became a turning point for him and he became a very dedicated Christian and also became one of my mentors. As a matter of fact, he was the one who encouraged me to get involved with a prison ministry.

Please notice this, salt speaks of inward character that influences a decaying world, while light speaks of the outward testimony of good works that points to God. Our task is to keep our lives pure so that we might “salt” this earth and hold back corruption by spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ as our light to this world.

Light also has two purposes:

**1) It eliminates darkness.** – The definition of darkness is absence of light. However, we should not stick our lights into the unbelievers’ eyes to irritate them, rather through the light we have, they may see that they are in darkness like we once were.

**2) Doing good works through our life-light is for others to glorify God, not ourselves.**

By the way, did you notice that Jesus didn’t tell us to become the salt and the light, rather He told us that we ARE. It is not because we have everything together and walking around with the halos above our heads, but the Holy Spirit who lives in the hearts of the born-again Christians makes that happen.

The figures of salt and light also remind us that the life marked by the Lord Jesus is not to be lived in isolation so that we would not be contaminated by the world. We often assume that those inner qualities can only be developed or displayed in isolation from the world, but Jesus wants us to live them out before the world so that the world can see the light of Jesus in us.

## **B. THE LAW AND TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS**

*Matthew 5:17-20 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus rejected the Pharisees’ accusation that He was nullifying the law. There are a lot of people today who speak negatively concerning the Law of the OT and declare, “We’re no longer under the Law of the OT, we are under grace.” It is true, but there’s nothing wrong with the Law of God, the Law is holy, righteous, and good. The only problem with the Law is that we can’t keep it because of our own shortcoming. The Law was never intended by God to make us righteous, rather to show us what true righteousness is through Jesus Christ and to make us realize that we’re sinners.

When Jesus said, “the Law,” He is referring to the first five Books of the OT, a.k.a. the Torah which deals with the moral, judicial, and ceremonial laws.

In His affirmation of the Law and the Prophets, Jesus essentially aligned Himself with the OT. By aligning Himself with the words of the OT, originally spoken by God, Jesus claimed for Himself the ultimate authority, the authority of the Lawgiver – the authority of God.

Now listen carefully, please. The OT prophesies the NT, the NT fulfills the OT. What were they prophesying and fulfilling? About Jesus as the Messiah. In case, anyone wondered if there is any mistake or the expiration date in the Word of God, you ain't gonna find either one of them.

The jot and the tittle were small marks in Hebrew writing. Jesus here told us that not only the ideas of the Word of God are important, but also the Words themselves – even the letters of the words – are important. This shows us how highly God regards His Word.

There are so many individual Christians and denominations that discard this Book, the Bible, as nothing more than a nice moral story book instead of the actual words from God Himself with the full authority and truth from Him. It is no wonder those people and denominations stray from the Lord.

Whether people believe this Book, the Bible, or not, what it says is true and what it prophesies has come and will come to reality. If you say, "I believe that the Bible is God's Word," then, you'd better believe and follow what it says, otherwise, you are lying.

As Jesus mentioned in v20, when it came to the rituals for righteousness, no one could beat the Pharisees in their own game. They were proud of their self-prescribed righteousness through their religious acts that went well beyond anybody's standards and demanded others to follow their ways. But their righteousness was external. Jesus is telling us to have the righteousness from inside out.

### **C. MURDER IN THE HEART**

*Matthew 5:21-26 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' 22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. 23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.*

Did you notice that Jesus said to them, "You have heard"? Why? Because the Pharisees told people what to do, since the majority of people didn't have access to the Scripture. But the Pharisees could not and would not do according to the Law of Moses from God. So what did they do? They started to change the law of God according to their opinions and put theirs ahead of God's Law and demanded people to follow theirs.

Until now, all the OT prophets used to say, "Thus says the Lord," but Jesus says, "I say to you" with complete authority as God. That is why He was getting a lot of attacks from the Pharisees.

According to what the Lord said in v22, all of us in this room are in danger of the judgment. Ah, you may say, "Not me." For that, my reminder for you would be, "I-19?!?!!" I am guilty as charged, especially when I watch the nightly news on TV that shows particular politicians.

Some of you may have thought, "I've never murdered anyone in my life." But the Master of the universe, our God, who knows all of our thoughts and intentions says otherwise. In His all-seeing eyes, you've murdered your brother, sister, parent, children, spouse, coworkers, your boss, and many others, especially your in-laws. You might be in the process of murdering me, because I am talking about this.

Jesus exposes the essence of the Pharisees' heresy. To them, the law was really only a matter of external performance, never the heart. But Jesus brings the law back to the matters of the heart. Anger forms the roots of murder, and Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount consistently aims at the roots of our actions, not just the results.

To call someone "Raca" expressed contempt for their intelligence. Calling someone a 'fool' showed contempt for their character. "Fool" comes from the Greek word 'Moros,' we get an English word 'Moron' from this. It means a morally wasted person.

Please note v23-24. This is the only place in the whole Bible, God tells us to leave the altar which means worship of God and go do something before we offer our gift of sacrifice to God.

Are you angry with someone in this room, or do you have anyone who is holding a long-standing grudge against you? After the service, go over to that person and make peace with that person in the love of God. That's the obedient heart.

Does this mean that we cannot be angry? No, there are places for righteous indignation. Jesus was angry when He saw the money changers and the merchants in the temple abusing the worshipers. He turned the money tables upside down and whipped the merchants out of the temple in John 2 and Matthew 21. We see God getting angry at the wayward Israelites' idolatry in the OT. That is righteous indignation.

But most of the time, that's not the case with us. Jesus lived a life of obedience to the Father and He expects us to do the same. That starts with the recognition that following Christ begins within. Righteousness is about more than looking pure and holy on the outside. It also involves the painful work of striving for purity and holiness in our hearts. We can start that journey toward inward purity by examining our anger and dwelling upon its murderous effects.

Paul expresses the same idea in Ephesians 4:26-27.

*Ephesians 4:26-27 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.*

Most of us would never pick up a weapon in our anger to whack someone, but just about all of us have thrown our fair share of angry words. As you reflect on these teachings of Jesus, take the opportunity to practice increased obedience in the body as well as in the heart.

#### **D. APPLICATIONS**

**1) Jesus never challenges us to become salt or light. He simply says that we are.**

We are either fulfilling or failing that responsibility.

**2) The principles of Scripture go deeper than external.**

They demand our immediate obedience.

**3) The power of reconciliation is stronger than revenge.**

We are most like beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we forgive.