

Matthew 5:21-37. ²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. ²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. ²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. ³¹ "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. ³³ "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' ³⁴ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

The Savior's Sermon: Live a Holy Life!

- 1. Our holy God exposes our slightest imperfections***
- 2. His Word shows us how we are truly blessed and fortunate***
- 3. Jesus challenges us to be better and better***

The Olympic Games could be described as the endless pursuit of athletic perfection. Perhaps you have had the chance these past few days to enjoy watching these remarkable athletes push themselves to the limit. It is exciting to see them strive for every inch. You hear their stories of how they train and strain and risk life and limb to shave off a second here or there because they know even the slightest miscue or imperfection could cost them. An inch off to the left of the right, a lean or a misstep, failure to execute at just the right time could spell complete disaster. These athletes are driven to strive for perfection. In some events hypercritical judges watch with a trained eye noticing the slightest imperfection or movement. These judges watch for a slight wave of the hand, a hesitation, a lean or a wobble. These judges insist for perfection in every single aspect. Good, very good, and personal bests *all* fall short of perfection; and an athlete who does the best that he or she has ever done still may fall few seconds or a few points short of the prize. The smallest mistake, a few hundredths of a second, could mean the difference between the agony of defeat and the joy of victory.

In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus reminds us that God is a judge who insists upon absolute perfection. He does not simply tell us to do the best that we can, but instead he demands perfection. He demands it in every way. And his law exposes our imperfections, even at what

seems like the most miniscule of levels. Even more demanding than an Olympic judge God says, "Love me and love each other with all your soul, with all your heart, and with all your mind; and do it perfectly."

And so Jesus addresses those who may have thought that they were doing ok in their obedience to God and he takes out the magnifying glass of the law for them. He takes and explains the true meaning of God's commands. Jesus explains to them and to us that God's command "Do not murder" is broken not just by those who have murdered and killed, but his command is broken by anyone who has felt anger and hatred in the heart. Jesus reminds us that when God tells us to not steal that means we are to be honest with our neighbor and we do not cheat him even in the slightest. God tells us that we should not hold a grudge or be reluctant to ask for forgiveness or forgive but instead we should settle matters quickly. God notices even the smallest hesitation and imperfection because he is completely holy and his divine law demands complete perfection.

God's law reminds us that we are to be absolutely holy. And so Jesus reminds the people that God commands that we are to honor marriage in every way. God's command, "Do not commit adultery" is broken not only by those who commit marital unfaithfulness and treat marriage as cheap and disposable by getting divorced and remarried without thinking twice, but this command is also broken by all those who have ever had a single impure thought. God sees the slightest imperfection not only in our blatant actions of disobedience but in the things we say and do without thinking. He hears when we use his name needlessly and thoughtlessly in our every day conversation just to add weight to a statement or a lie.

Our holy God exposes our blatant sins as well as our slightest imperfections. We all fall short and in many different ways. When we take an honest look into the mirror of the law none of us deserve the reward and victory of heaven, but rather we all deserve the punishment and agony of hell. We all deserve to be thrown into the fiery garbage pit of hell where the imperfect, and the broken, and those who fail to measure up deserve to be thrown into for all eternity.

But as impossible as these demands are for the sinner, the holy commands of God also show us how truly blessed and fortunate we are in Christ. Remember again how Jesus began this Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the poor in spirit. The holy law of God rids us of any delusion that we can earn heaven. God's holy law exposes our hearts and minds as innately impure and in inherently corrupted by sin. We cannot find favor with God on our own. And we need to know that, so that we can truly appreciate this free gift that he gives to us. In his love God sends Jesus as the only one who can fill in and provide the perfection that his law demands. In Jesus we have one who loves with a perfect and everlasting love, who was honest and trustworthy in every way. We have Jesus who never fell short of God's demands and was nothing but perfect in the eyes of God. We have Jesus who paid the price for our sins, both those sins that are obvious and glaring and those sins that only God's watchful eye notices. Jesus has suffered in our place and paid the debt of our sin all the way down to the last penny – so to speak. Jesus is our perfect substitute who gives us the victory through his perfect life. He is our salvation that we sinners so desperately need.

The good news compels us to live for him. Jesus has forgiven our sins, paid our debt, kept God's commands in our place, defeated sin, death, and the devil, and gives us the sure hope of heaven. He makes us poor miserable sinners holy and blameless in God's eyes and he brings us to faith so that we may fully enjoy these eternal spiritual riches and be spared from the

punishment that we deserve. He does all of this because just because he loves us. So when he calls you and me to live a holy life, how can we not respond with love and listen and obey?! How can we not heed his warnings and listen to his instructions about how we are to live?!

Yet in our dreadful sinfulness we still do all we can to try to lower the bar. We try to justify ourselves in our own minds, by our own standards. We might insist that at least we haven't done anything really bad or committed any major offense. We might compare ourselves to others and say, "Well at least I'm better than him." "I know that I am not nearly as bad as her." We might even try to change God's expectations, and update and adjust his commands, because we who live in this modern day and age just know better. And perhaps most often we simply insist that we are doing our best and God should just accept that.

With these words from his Sermon on the Mount Jesus reminds us that God's holy will and his expectations of perfection do not change and they will not change. God will always insist that we follow his commands exactly as he lays them out before us in his word. He doesn't lower the bar so that we can feel better about ourselves, but rather God insists that we live a holy life.

We can never be perfect this much is clear to us and it is certainly clear to God. God sees our lives, every thought, every word, and every action. The one who has been so gracious to us sees the big gaffs and the slightest wobbles. He sees the smallest of imperfections and the gaping flaws in our character. And so the law condemns the sinner; and yet the awful bitterness of the law brings out the true sweetness of the gospel. Through faith Christ's perfection covers us. God's love saves. When we were still sinners Christ lived and died for his. And now his love, the gospel, motivates us to live for God, and his law sets the course for our lives.

With this undeserved love of God now at the center of our lives we listen to our God when God commands us to show love to everyone. As those who are covered by Christ's righteousness we know that, despite our many failures and sins, we are not condemned. We know we have this substitute who fulfills everything the law demands and so now the law does not lead us to despair but it is the light to our path. God gives the law as a guide to his children to show us how to live lives of thankful service to our just God and our loving Father. The blinding light of the law that condemns the unconverted illuminates the path of those made righteous through Christ. God lays down the path, he sets the course before us, and his law calls us to do serve God better.

So even better than an Olympian who is motivated to do their best for king and county, we are motivated by a loving God who has saved us from eternal death and has called us into his everlasting kingdom. Therefore, we pay close attention to the rules laid out before us so that we can do our best for him. Unlike the Olympics, however, our new life in Christ is not simply an endeavor of the human spirit, but through faith in Christ Jesus we have a new spirit. In him we are a new creation. Now when we do sin God leads us to take every sin seriously. He does not want us to *literally* chop off our hands, and to gouge out our eyes. But he wants us to be alarmed by sin, to hate it, to resist it, and to think about where sin truly originates. Because if you stop to think about it, your hand and your eye, those things don't cause you to sin, but it is your old sinful self, it is the corrupted heart and the sinful mind that needs to be addressed. As it is written in his holy Word, the sacrifice that pleases God is a contrite heart and a broken spirit. (Psalm 51:17)

So we come back around once more to those words with which our Savior started this

Sermon on the Mount, ***Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3)***. God calls his people to a life of daily repentance. We realize that we daily sin much but we have a God who saves us through his righteousness. You know and believe that you don't deserve his love, but in his goodness, in his kindness, he shows you grace upon grace each day. And now he offers you personal instruction on how to live. Each of us can say that my Savior calls me to live a holy life. Christ love compels me, but his law serves to challenge me. It lays out that punishing course that is constantly begging me to improve.

We are compelled by the love of Christ to live for Christ and the law is that constant reminder that shows us how. We know that no one is perfect, but we also know that we can always do better. We live for God out thanks to Christ Jesus and we will strive to do what he commands more and more each day.

As you watch the Olympics a person quickly concludes that it wouldn't have done those athletes any good if their coaches allowed them to settle for mediocrity. It wouldn't have done them any good if they lowered the bar and told them just to do their best, but instead their coach, their trainer, pushed them to be better and better. The insisted that they would sweat the details, that would take the figurative magnifying glass out and look at every moment, every small action, and every big movement. They would also examine each decision and every thought so that this athlete would become better and better.

In a similar way God pushes us to be better. We shouldn't be ok with being pretty good, but we should strive to be the best child of God that we can be. We shouldn't settle for mediocrity because Christ is our perfection anyway, but we should do our best to be imitators of our Savior. Thankful for his perfection and his salvation, the love of Christ compels us. But the high bar, the lofty standard of the law, stands as the goal that we continue to shoot for. Christ's love is our motivation for a life of gratitude, and God's holy law lays down the gauntlet that we are to follow in this life of thankful service.

So in short, Jesus, who has saved us, now calls us to live a holy life.

You may remember that Jesus once told a sinful woman to, **"Go, and sin no more" (John 8:10 KJV)**. He knew that this would be impossible for her or for anyone else to do. But knowing that she was forgiven, but she also needed to be reminded that God calls us who are covered by the blood of Christ to do our best to resist sin and live for him. As forgiven children of God let us struggle each day with that temptation that we trip over so often, let us compete against temptation and live each day for God. Let us press on toward the goal of heaven doing our best to give honor to God and our true homeland, which is heaven.

What magnificent words, these words of our Savior, in this Sermon on the Mount! In love God shows us that we who sorrow over our sin are blessed because we know we need Christ to be our salvation. In love our Savior speaks of our valuable purpose as salt and light on this earth, and then in love he challenges us to let our light shine brighter, to let all our thoughts and conversations be filled with God's grace and always seasoned with gospel salt. Our God, who has saved us, places his law before our eyes and we, who through faith in Christ are no longer condemned, are now challenged by a holy God to be better men and women, better husbands and wives, better mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, citizens and neighbors. Jesus calls us to live a holy life. Let us gladly take up this pursuit, let us give ourselves fully to the high calling of the Christian, to live for our God and Savior more and more. Let us live our whole lives for him who lived perfectly for us, died the death we deserved, and was raised again to give us newness of life. Amen.