

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.

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**

A champion athlete often uses this elevated title as motivation to continue in their pursuit of excellence. These athletes often train and strain in this unattainable pursuit of perfection. Champion downhill skiers may risk life and limb to shave off a second here or there, to execute precisely because they know even the slightest miscue or imperfection could cost them their title. Some athletes are motivated to simply outperform their personal best, some are motivated to outperform the competition. A certain championship quarterback, who some laud as the greatest of all time, has been known to study game film and stay out on the practice field after everyone else has gone, because he possesses a relentless determination to be the best. In

other events, hypercritical judges watch with a trained eye noticing the slightest imperfection or movement. A champion gymnast worth her salt does her best to reduce or eliminate from her performance the slightest wave of the hand, hesitation, lean or a wobble. She knows that these judges insist for perfection in every single aspect. Good, very good, and personal bests *all* fall short of perfection; 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. Champions, those who have reached the top of their sport know that a lack of execution, a slight hesitation here or there, the smallest mistake could mean the difference between the agony of defeat and the joy of victory. The title champion serves to encourage and motivate.

The last few weeks we heard Jesus refer to his followers as blessed. He called them the Light of the World and the Salt of the Earth. But these titles aren't given to his believers so that we can rest on our laurels, instead as they are given Jesus challenges his disciples to be the best that they can be. To shine brighter and brighter of the Light of the World. And so as Jesus continues 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, or better than the next guy, but instead he demands perfection. He demands it in every way. Jesus demonstrates how the law of God exposes our imperfections, even at what seems like the most miniscule of levels. *"Love me and love each other with all your soul, with all your heart, and with all your mind; and do it perfectly."* Live a holy life! our Savior declares. In a previous section, he says to those listening he says, *be better than the best*. With these words spoken on that mountain Jesus addresses those who may have thought that they were doing ok in their obedience to God and he compares their daily performance with the holy standards of the law. In this section of Scripture along with so many other places we are reminded that perfection is in indeed unattainable, but that does not mean that we should stop trying to be the best that we can be.

For those of us who are in Christ Jesus are divinely blessed. Through his perfection we are victorious and out of thanks to God we will be the best that we can be. Jesus explains that in him we are the light of the world and now Jesus shows us how to shine as brightly as we can. Jesus shows us that this elevated position, being champions and righteous through him doesn't mean that we lower the bar because we know we are forgiven anyway, but on the contrary this elevated position provides further motivation to live a holy life!

In this portion of our Savior's Sermon Jesus takes the laws of God and going beyond a mere surface understanding as he explains the full measure of God's commands. In doing so our Holy God exposes our sins, helps us realize how fortunate we are that God sent his Son for us, and then we are also challenged to live a life of obedience thankful for the eternal victory we have in Christ. With these words, Jesus calls us to and teaches us how to, ***Live a holy life!***

As the Savior expounds upon the commands of God Jesus digs deeply into the commands of God and explain to all who would listen 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. Jesus exposes the truth 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 also in the things we say and do without thinking. He hears when we use his name needlessly and thoughtlessly in our everyday 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 the law of God takes us into “the film room” and causes us to take a frame by frame look at each moment of our lives, our mistakes are many and we see how obviously short we fall of perfection. The holy commands of God when understood to their full extent show us how imperfect we are, but in a way, they 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. Even the greatest among us, the holiest one cannot find favor with God on our own. We all deserve to be thrown into the fiery garbage pit of hell and to be condemned and lost forever. But God does not treat us as our sins deserve.

Knowing all of this we can begin to appreciate this free gift of salvation that Jesus 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 truly the absolute greatest of all time. He is our perfect substitute who gives us the victory through his perfect life. He is our salvation that we sinners so desperately need. This is the good fortune, the blessing of God that he gives to us so that all of us, from the greatest to the least, are given the victory in Christ. In Christ, he crowns us with victory and calls us champions, and so let us live as champions. Let us live as the light of the world that he has called us to be by following his instructions which show us how to shine as brightly as we can.

As those who are covered by Christ’s righteousness we know that, despite our many failures and sins, we are not condemned. The blinding light of the law that once condemned us 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 athlete driven towards excellence and the pursuit of athletic perfection we are given motivation to become better and better because we have been declared perfect in God’s sight through faith in Jesus Christ. Our new life in Christ is more than a noble 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.

Jesus uses rather descriptive language in this section of scripture to teach us that. However, Jesus does not want us to literally chop off our hands, and to gouge out our eyes, but he is trying to teach us that does want 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 Sermon on the Mount, ***Blessed are the poor***

in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3). God calls his holy 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. And this holy God offers personal instruction on how to live. Each of us can say that my Savior calls me to live a holy life. Christ's love compels me and his law serves to challenge me. It lays out that demanding course that is constantly begging me to improve. 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 knowing the victory that we have in Christ.

As you watch champion athletes compete you may easily conclude 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, and something inside of each one of them pushed them to be better and better.

In a similar way God pushes us to be better. We shouldn't be ok with being pretty good, but instead we 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 who willingly gave us his perfection. Thankful for his perfection and his salvation, the love of Christ compels us. And 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.

We will do our best to honor marriage. We will strive to be the best husbands and wives, the best single people that we can be. We will be helpful and honest with our neighbor. We will speak the truth and build up a reputation of honesty so that there will be no need to add any unneeded and colorful language to our promises. We will simply let our yes be yes and our no be no, and that will be enough.

So in short, it is only because of God's good favor in Christ that we have been given the victory. And Jesus, who brought us that good fortune, who has saved us and declared us to be champions now calls us to live a holy life and in faith we listen and gladly follow Christ our Leader. Our Savior places his law before our eyes and we who are no longer condemned by are imperfections are set free by God's grace and challenged to be better men and women, better husbands and wives, better mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, citizens and neighbors. We are declared champions and challenged to live up to our title. We are the light of the world and our goal is to shine as brightly as we can. May God bless each one of us as he leads us and guides on this daily pursuit. 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. In him we have the victory. In Christ we are blessed. In him we shine brighter and brighter as the Light of the World. Amen.