

Matthew 5D

- We're going through Matthew's Gospel verse-by-verse
 - And over the past few weeks, we've been studying Jesus' Sermon on the Mount
 - It probably took Jesus about 20 minutes in total to deliver this sermon to the crowd
 - But as you can tell, it's taking me considerably longer to understand and explain it
 - I guess that's to be expected
 - Last week, we ended at v.20, as Jesus told the crowd that if they expected to enter Heaven by following the example of the Pharisees, they'd better understand and think again
 - Jesus says that they couldn't reach heaven by merely equaling the Pharisees' righteousness
 - Because as scrupulous as the Pharisees were in keeping the law, they weren't good enough
 - No, a person must *exceed* the righteousness of the Pharisees to enter the Kingdom
 - As we learned last week, this is true for two reasons
 - First, the Pharisees weren't as righteous as they appeared
 - In reality, the Pharisees were a study in style over substance
 - They were hypocrites who portrayed themselves to be perfectly righteous, yet were far from it
 - So a Pharisee wasn't the right example to follow...you would have to do better
 - And secondly, if you want to enter Heaven, you must exceed the piety of a Pharisee, because Pharisees judged using the wrong standard
 - The actual standard for entering heaven – the standard God uses – is His Son's example of perfection

- We have to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees because we have to equal Jesus' righteousness
- That's the real standard for entry into Heaven, and it's a standard that demands absolute perfection
- That standard is much tougher than the Pharisees' example
- But of course, we can't equal Jesus' standard of perfection
 - If you've ever sinned, even once, then you're already below the standard God sets for Heaven
 - Now mature believers who know the Bible already know this
 - We know we can't enter Heaven by our own merit...we need Jesus to do it for us
 - But there are many well-intentioned, religious people who have never understood this truth...both today and certainly in Jesus' day
 - So let's go back in time once again...back to the day Jesus delivered this sermon, and put yourself in the crowd
 - You're a typical Jew in Jesus' day...committed to pleasing God, observing the Law according to the instructions of the Pharisees
 - And you've been taught from your earliest days that the Jews are God's chosen people
 - Therefore, the Kingdom has been promised to you and so you're probably feeling pretty good about yourself
 - The Pharisees tell you that if you follow their instructions and their example, you'll be well-received in the Kingdom
 - Your Jewishness ensures your entrance into the Kingdom
 - And following the Pharisees' rules assures you a good place in the Kingdom
- But now Jesus says that isn't good enough
 - In fact, not even the Pharisees themselves are going to enter the Kingdom
 - And of course, you think to yourself, that can't be right

- I'm a good Jew...I haven't killed anyone, I haven't committed adultery, I give to the temple, I keep the dietary restrictions, etc.
- Surely, God is pleased with me
- Just like today, when people say I'm a good Catholic, or a good Mormon, or a good Baptist, or whatever
 - I haven't killed anyone
 - I go to church on Sundays, I give my "tithe"
 - I don't drink, smoke or chew or date girls who do
- But in that kind of thinking, we find one of the dangerous consequences of Pharisaic Judaism or its modern equivalents: we grade ourselves on the curve
 - When a person practices a religion of rules, as the Jews did in following their Mishnah, we will always rig the game in our favor
 - It's human nature to emphasize rules that we *can* follow, while ignoring or eliminating the ones we can't or don't want to follow
 - In that way, we tell ourselves we are righteous, when in reality, we're simply doing what we prefer and calling it righteousness
- We saw examples of this last week, when we studied the background of the Mishnah
 - We looked at that example of the Mishnah prohibiting the combing of meat and dairy
 - Those restrictions grew out of a single law God gave in Exodus, which prohibited a certain style of Canaanite idolatry, which involved boiling a kid in its mother's milk
 - But religious leaders perverted God's purposes by inventing new rules that had nothing to do with idolatry and thus, obscured God's intent for His people
- Why did this happen? Because abstaining from idolatry is a tough task...it requires disciplining the flesh and remaining faithful
 - By comparison, it's much easier to simply outlaw mixing meat and dairy and declare that to be obedience to God's Law

- So while orthodox Jews today won't eat a cheeseburger, many still engage in idolatrous practices
- You see the problem...we move the goal posts so we can still declare victory without actually doing what God requires
- Religious thinking like that leads us to *feeling* righteous without actually making us righteous
 - And sadly, many a religious person has died in their sins and woken up the next instant surprised to find themselves in eternal punishment
 - They thought their system of rules would get them to Heaven
 - But Jesus says if you want to enter the Kingdom, you have to meet God's standard, not one you invented for yourself
 - And God's standard is the one Jesus established: perfection, equaling the glory of God
 - But as we learn today, God's standard is even tougher than living perfectly
 - God's Law requires that we obey perfectly in heart, mind, soul and strength
 - Our words, thoughts, motives and attitudes must also agree perfectly with God
 - That's what Jesus means when He says you have to exceed the example of the Pharisees
 - And to help us see this standard clearly, Jesus provides six examples that demonstrate how demanding God's standard of perfection truly is
 - In other words, when Jesus said your righteous must exceed that of the Pharisees, here's what He meant

Matt. 5:21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'

Matt. 5:22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

- Jesus opens each of his six examples with the phrase “you have heard it said...”
 - Notice this statement appears in vs.21, 27, 31, 33, 38 and 43
 - That phrase was a customary rabbinical saying that always preceded a reference to the oral law, the Mishnah’s instructions
 - Saying “you have heard” distinguishes the quote from actual written Scripture, which rabbis quoted with the phrase “just as it is written...”
 - So in this case, Jesus saw “as you have heard” because He is quoting not from Scripture, but from the Mishnah, the oral law
 - In these six examples, Jesus chooses some of the most challenging – and even offensive – rules in the Law of God
 - The first of Jesus’ six examples concerns the Mishnah’s teaching on the sixth commandment to not commit murder
 - And in the case of murder, the Pharisees taught that a person found guilty by a rabbinical court was liable for murder
 - The Mishnah said that you could not be considered to violate the sixth commandment unless and until you were duly convicted for the crime
 - That’s the oral law Jesus quotes in v.21, and it certainly makes sense to us
 - A Jew who killed another person, but was declared not guilty by a rabbinical court, would not be considered a murderer
 - Our own law today works the same way
 - So naturally, we assume God follows the same standard...or does He?
- This example exposes how following manmade rules like the Mishnah leaves us with a false sense of security
 - When someone gives us a list of what we need to do to get to Heaven, we begin to think, “I got this.”
 - We take that checklist and start working the plan, confident we can earn our way to Heaven

- Once again, the game is rigged, because we're following rules men made, rather than following the standard God enforces
- We could accomplish everything on our list, yet we'll still be disqualified from Heaven in the end
 - Because when it comes to entering Heaven, the only standard that matters is the one God established
 - And if our list of rules isn't EXACTLY the same list God uses, then our list is worthless, no matter how well we do in following it
- Guess what? The Mishnah isn't God's rule book
 - In v.22, Jesus explains God's standard for keeping the sixth commandment
 - First, Jesus agrees that taking another person's life unlawfully is a violation of the sixth commandment and therefore, is sin
 - But just because you haven't (yet) killed someone, that isn't enough to get you into Heaven
 - Jesus says you have to keep both the letter and the spirit of the Law
 - And the spirit of keeping the sixth commandment goes much deeper than simply not murdering
 - Jesus says meeting the requirements of "thou shall not murder" includes not expressing anger, unrighteously, against another person
 - You cannot even speak a word against a person
 - Even just calling a person a fool is enough to bring you under the condemnation of the sixth commandment
 - That's God's standard for righteousness, and it's much higher than anything the Pharisee's imagined in the Mishnah
 - We're learning that measuring righteousness goes much deeper than just actions
 - It includes considering our attitudes and thoughts
 - Said another way, the measure of our righteousness is found inside ourselves

- Long before you decide to raise your hand to take the life of another person, you've harbored animosity against that person in your heart
 - You have likely harbored sinful feelings, entertained sinful thoughts, and spoken hurtful words against that individual too
 - So that the act of taking the person's life was just the final link in a long chain of sin that lead up to that violent moment
- Obviously, few of us have taken another person's life in violation of the sixth commandment
 - So if I were to ask you, "Have you ever committed murder?" most of you could confidently answer, "No"
 - Nevertheless, according to Jesus, every single person in this room is guilty of violating that commandment
 - Not because you violated the letter of the law but because you violated the spirit of that law
 - Even though you've never taken someone's life, you are equally guilty for having hated another person or said a word against them
 - Notice at the end of v.22, Jesus says violating the spirit of a law is enough by itself to cast you into fiery hell
 - The standard for entering Heaven is perfection, and insulting a person is a sin
 - One sin is enough to bar you from Heaven, therefore hating is enough to get you thrown into Hell
 - So if you've assumed you're going to Heaven because you've never killed someone, think again
 - When you get to Hell and meet true murderers like Hitler and Stalin, you might say "Well, at least I never committed mass murder."
 - But you're still going to be just as hot
 - Jesus' point is, that manmade rules like the Pharisees' oral law won't guide you to Heaven...they're only fooling you
 - You have to do better, much better

- You have to understand God's standard for Heaven
- And that standard is Jesus
- So if that's us, what do we do now? Jesus explain with two illustrations

[Matt. 5:23](#) "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

[Matt. 5:24](#) leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

[Matt. 5:25](#) "Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

[Matt. 5:26](#) "Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.

- In His first illustration, Jesus describes a worshipper at the temple preparing to make an offering to God
 - Suddenly, he remembers he has a fellow Jew ("brother") who has something against him
 - At some point in the past, this worshipper offended his brother, yet has never repaired that relationship
 - In effect, he has broken the sixth commandment
 - He didn't kill anyone, but his offense to his brother violated the spirit of that law
- Jesus' point is, that the worshipper's heart knows that hatred for a brother was a sin
 - The Law didn't say that this man's offense was a sin, but his own conscience convicted him
 - And that was enough for that worshipper to realize he had to make amends
 - He recognized that his actions put him in violation of the spirit of the commandment
- So rather than coming before God bearing this guilt, the worshipper leaves to make things right

- After all, this man would never walk into the temple expecting God's approval if he had just killed his brother
- So no more then, should he expect God's approval if he has offended his brother
- One offense may be more severe than the other, but both are equally disqualifying from Heaven
- So having set aside his sacrifice to reconcile with his brother, the worshipper can then return and approach God in the temple with a clear conscience
 - Jesus' point is, that we don't need the Mishnah or any rule book to understand what righteousness requires
 - Our own conscience convicts us of our sin
 - And so those who rest on a technicality, like not having killed someone, know full well there's more to pleasing God
 - Your conscience testifies that you've sinned
 - And therefore, if you are truly seeking to please God, you will acknowledge your sin and do what righteousness requires
 - This leads us to Jesus' second illustration in v.25
 - Jesus describes two people involved in a legal dispute
 - One person is taking the other person to court to settle the matter
 - In the illustration, Jesus puts His audience in the place of the one being sued
 - And it's clear from His illustration, that you are guilty of the charge made against you
 - So Jesus says, knowing that you are guilty of the crime, you should act sensibly in resolving the situation before you get to the court
 - Don't persist in your denials and don't perpetuate the dispute
 - Because where will this lead? Ultimately, if you don't resolve the situation, you will end up in court
 - And in court, the judge will look at the facts and render a decision

- If you are truly at fault, then you can safely assume the judgment will go against you
- And when the court convicts you, there will be consequences that you can't escape from
 - In Jesus' illustration, the judge would throw you into prison as punishment for your offense against your neighbor
 - But if you had resolved the situation before you met the judge, you could have determined your own fate
 - Now you're at the mercy of a merciless judge
 - Only a proud and self-deceived person would persist in going to court knowing they were guilty
- Can you see Jesus' point in these illustrations?
 - First, true righteousness begins with understanding we are inherently unrighteousness
 - Even when we're busy following our little rule books, thinking we're being righteous, our conscience tells on us
 - We know we're not perfect, that we're not righteous
 - But if we persist in our little game, we're only deceiving ourselves
 - Our righteousness needs to exceed that of the Pharisees
 - Secondly, given the fact that we know we're guilty of sin, and since we will face God for judgment in a day to come, what ought we to do now?
 - If we're sensible, we would act now to resolve our jeopardy
 - In Jesus' illustration, there were two men involved in the dispute
 - One man had offended another, so resolving the dispute involved reconciling with that other man
 - But when we're talking about sin, the One we offend is God
 - So we need to reconcile with Him
 - So not only is God our Judge, He is also our adversary
 - So we need to make peace with Him, Jesus says, before we give an account to Him

- If we don't, Jesus says, we will pay the full price for our sin
- And how do we reconcile with God? How do we make friends with God? The answer is simple...we can't on our own, but God has made a way available
 - First, the Bible says you must repent, which means to confess your sin, acknowledging you're guilty of offending God
 - And then secondly, seek God's mercy by accepting His provision of grace through faith in Jesus Christ
 - When you place your faith in Jesus, you are accepting the free gift of Jesus' perfect life in place of your sinful life
 - By faith, you receive credit for Jesus' perfection, and God accepts Jesus' death on the cross as an acceptable payment for your sin
 - That's how you reconcile with God, as Paul says

Rom. 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been **reconciled**, we shall be saved by His life.

- We aren't good enough to get into a Heaven that only accepts perfection...not even the Pharisees were good enough
 - That standard of perfection is so demanding, that it even requires perfect thoughts and attitudes...who can meet that standard?
 - Only Jesus...Jesus did what was required for us, because God knew we couldn't do it on our own
- With the time remaining, let's look briefly at the second example Jesus gives

Matt. 5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; **Matt. 5:28** but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- Again, Jesus quotes from the Mishnah, saying, "you have heard..."
 - This time, Jesus uses the Mishnah's teaching concerning the seventh commandment not to commit adultery
 - Once again, the Mishnah's definition of what constitutes a violation of this commandment falls short

- The Pharisees said that when a married person engaged in sexual relations with another, they committed adultery
 - And certainly that was adultery
- But the Pharisees did not realize how lofty God's standard was for keeping the seventh commandment
 - Jesus says that this commandment also covers lustful glances
 - Simply looking upon someone with lust is a sin
 - Lust is not equal to adultery, but it violates the spirit of that law nonetheless
 - So once more, I could take a poll in here of how many people have committed adultery, and perhaps a few hands would go up
 - But if I asked how many people in here have violated the seventh commandment, every hand should go up
- Are you beginning to see the danger of following manmade rules – even rules that are supposedly based on the Bible?
 - Inevitably, we contrive them to give ourselves a false sense of security
 - It's easy to avoid the act of adultery, so we say that's enough and feel pretty good about ourselves
 - But God's standard is much higher, and we can't measure up
 - And then to add insult to injury, we usually don't even follow our own rules that well
- So once more, Jesus uses two illustrations to make His point

Matt. 5:29 "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Matt. 5:30 "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

- Jesus says it's better to pluck out our own eye, rather than allow it to lead you into lusting

- And He says if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, rather than let it lead you into sin
 - Without being vulgar, I can tell you that in Jewish culture, the right hand was a euphemism
 - It stood, at times, for that unique male body part associated with adultery
 - Since Jesus is teaching in the context of adultery here; He was probably referring to that male body part, not an actual hand
 - So He mentions the eye, because it leads to lust, and He mentioned the other body part because it consummates the lust
 - And in both cases, Jesus says you should be prepared to cut them off to avoid Hell
- To understand His illustrations, let's be clear in what Jesus is NOT saying
 - First, Jesus is not advocating for cutting off body parts, because it does nothing to address the problem Jesus is concerned with
 - That should be obvious to everyone here, but it's worth explaining
 - If you pluck out your own eye or cut off certain other body parts, you don't get an automatic pass into Heaven
 - Nowhere does the Bible teach that self-mutilation is a fast pass into Heaven
 - In fact, the Bible says exactly the opposite
 - Abraham was commanded by God to cut off a part of his body in obedience to God
 - Nevertheless, Paul tells us in Romans, that the Lord declared Abraham righteous by his faith *before* that moment
 - So that by Abraham's example, we would know that circumcision was not the means by which Abraham became righteous
 - Secondly, Jesus couldn't be advocating the removal of body parts as a solution to sin, because it obviously wouldn't work
 - Just because I remove my eyes, that won't prevent me from lusting in my heart

- Sin is committed in the heart (in the spirit), not in the eyes
- So even without eyes, I still have the capacity to sin, even if I lack the ability to act on that desire
- So clearly, Jesus' words were intended to be hyperbolic and ironic, not literal
 - Jesus was illustrating that we should be willing to make any sacrifice necessary now, if it can keep us out of an eternity in Hell
 - If you have not reconciled with God, then nothing else in your life should take priority over that goal
 - Nothing else is even close...because eternity is a long, long time
 - And if we do not reconcile with our Adversary before we come before Him at our judgment, then the consequences will be devastating, eternal and irreversible
 - In fact, if someone is unwilling to do what's necessary to reconcile, then clearly that person doesn't appreciate the jeopardy they are in
 - Of course, the Pharisees weren't willing to do what was required to reconcile with God
 - They weren't willing to cut off their hand, so to speak
 - Jesus didn't expect anyone to literally cut off a body part
 - But He was emphasizing that reconciling with God starts with denying our flesh and humbling ourselves before God
 - But most Pharisees weren't willing to sacrifice their earthly pleasures – their pride, their wealth, their status – to embrace God's provision, Jesus Christ
 - Which is why Jesus said we must do better than even a Pharisee if we want to reach Heaven
 - But some Pharisees saw the light, and when they did, they were willing to make these sacrifices, to become poor in spirit
 - Men like Paul, who wrote of his experience reconciling with God this way

Phil. 3:4 ...If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

Phil. 3:5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

Phil. 3:6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Phil. 3:7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Phil. 3:8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

Phil. 3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

- So if you're planning to get to Heaven by following the Pharisees and their oral law, are you prepared to accept your fate?
 - God's standard for righteousness is so much more demanding than your rules, you can't afford any miscalculation
 - You can't make a single mistake...Are you sure you can succeed against that standard?
 - Are you prepared to remove cherished body parts if necessary to avoid that one disqualifying sin?
 - Search your conscience...doesn't it convict you right now? Don't you recognize that you're not perfect
 - And so, like the man at the altar, shouldn't you be running to the One you offended to seek reconciliation?
 - And shouldn't you be doing it now, while you have the chance, before your time in God's court comes?
 - And shouldn't you be willing to do whatever is required to avoid Hell? Isn't that the single most important thing you should consider in this life?
 - The answer is so simple, because God made it simple for us, because He knew we couldn't obtain sufficient righteousness on our own
 - Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, the sinless man Who died to pay for your sin

- And believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, proving He has the power to grant life over death
- And by your faith in Him, Jesus will raise you from the dead to live forever in the Kingdom...no rules, just grace
- That's what the Gospel offers