

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Who Is an Adulterer? Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 5:27

Code: 2215

I'd like us to bow in prayer and invite the Lord to especially bless our study.

Father, we do come to You now because we would not gather together to hear of man's wisdom. We would not come together to have our ears tickled, something that fits our fancy, but we would have You speak to us. Open the Word so that we can understand it. Enrich our hearts. Fill us with the truth that can meet every need. Enrich us by Your Spirit as we learn tonight. Pray that we might not hear a human voice, but that we might hear You speak, and we'll thank You, in Christ's name, Amen.

We're looking at Matthew chapter 5 in our study. For tonight, we're going to look at the passage in verses 27 through 30, Matthew 5:27-30. While you're turning to it and getting ready for our study, let me say that in the 5th chapter of Matthew, our Lord answered the question in the forefront of the minds of the people who had seen His miracles, the people who had heard some of what He had said, and were really wondering whether He was the Messiah. They were curious about whether this miracle worker was in fact the One who would bring God's kingdom.

There were certain elements in the teaching, and the life, and ministry of Jesus that made them think He might be the Messiah, and so they were quizzical. They wanted to know if He was. They wanted also to know what His standards were for His kingdom. They were curious to know that if He was the Messiah, He should pretty well square with what Moses said. And so they were curious about how He viewed the things of the law of God, the things of Moses.

Now Jesus summarized His message to them in 5:17-20. He said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

In other words, what he was saying was this. "I am the Messiah, and My message is the same message that Moses gave you, not any different. I would not change it. I would not destroy it. I would not alter it. I came to fulfill it."

Then He went a step further. He said the standards for My kingdom must exceed the standards that you are now living by, verse 20. "I say unto you that except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven."

Now there was the basic standard that Jesus gave, that He required for His kingdom a righteousness beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees. And by the way, they were the most righteous people in the Jewish society. And so He's saying, "What I ask is more than they asked, but not more than Moses asked, and not different than Moses. I have not come to alter the law, or to change the law, but to fulfill the law, and the law in itself demands more than you are now giving. It is a higher standard."

As far as the people knew, the scribes and the Pharisees were the most righteous, so this was a very hard saying for them to understand. They did not understand how He could require a higher righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees and still accept Mosaic law. Because they thought the scribes and the Pharisees lived the law of Moses to the hilt. And so their question is, if You believe in Moses - the question in their minds - and You believe in the law of Moses, how can You require a greater standard than the scribes and Pharisees who teach us the law of Moses?

And as we've been learning in past weeks the fact is, though the scribes and the Pharisees sat in the seat of Moses, and though they claimed to be the proponents of the law of Moses, the truth was they themselves had lowered the law of Moses to their own design and were not even keeping that which God originally intended. And so Jesus comes to lift the standard back where it was in the beginning.

Now this is hard for the people to understand, and so point by point the Lord goes through verses 21 to 48 giving them illustrations of how the scribes and the Pharisees, and the people as well, fell short on every aspect of God's absolute standard. He wants them to see that the people were not living up to God's standard. They had lowered the standard, and He wants to raise it back to where it really should be.

And in effect, as you know if you've been with us, what He does here is destroy any system of self-righteousness. You see what man tends to do is this, if he doesn't want to come God's way. He creates his own god. He creates his own religious system. Says, "This is what is required. This is what I'll accomplish, therefore I am justified when I do it." He drags the law of God down to something he can do, does it, and then convinces himself he's okay.

Typical today, a situation would be where you confront a man, "Um, what are you going to do when you die?" Well, I hope I'm going to heaven." "Well, on what basis would you go to heaven?" "Well, I'm a pretty good guy, and after all if I've been pretty good all of my life, God certainly will take me to heaven."

In other words, you invent the kind of god you want, with the kind of standard you can keep, keep it, and then you'll justify yourself. And what we say to a person like that today is, "You know, that's not the way it is. The standard of God is too high. You can't keep it. And that is exactly what Jesus is saying." The scribes and the Pharisees invented a standard lower than the divine one, figured out how they could keep it, kept it the best they could, therefore convinced themselves they were righteous. And Jesus says, "Not on your life. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you'll never enter into My kingdom." And this is not a violation of Moses. This is not adding to Moses. This is not changing the law of Moses. This is just reiterating where Moses put it in the beginning. Let's get it back where it belongs. And that is really what He's doing throughout the 5th chapter.

And as we come to verses 27 to 30, He is giving another illustration of how the people had lowered the law of Moses, and how He must lift it back up again in order to destroy their self-righteousness. And what He does throughout this chapter is contrast the righteousness they thought they had with the true divine standard. And thus, He literally strips all men and women stark naked, spiritually speaking, before God. They have no claim of self-righteousness left.

Now let's look at the illustration in verses 27 to 30. We've already seen the one on murder. Here is the one on adultery. Verse 27. "Ye have heard that it was said - " the phrase there "by them of old," which is in some of your versions is not in all the manuscripts. But it is probably picked up because it's used so frequently in the chapter. It really reads, "Ye have heard that it was said." But of course, He has reference to their traditional teachers. "them of old," the ancients who had taught them. So you can put it in in italics, I guess, because He does have reference to that.

But He says, "You have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery." This is what your tradition taught you. This is what the rabbis have said. This is what the scribes and the Pharisees have said. And you have been told that this is God's standard. If you just don't commit adultery, you're righteous.

"But - " verse 28 " - I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." In other words, Jesus says their standard is too low. Let's put it back where God intended it. God never was really concerned about the act only, but more so about the attitude behind the act.

And in verse 29, He gives them a solution, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, cast it from thee: for it's profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

In other words, you're a lot better off to cut off your arm or to pluck out your eye if it leads you to sin. And sin is not simply what you do, it is what you feel and think in your heart. And so the second example that our Lord uses is the example of adultery. And He is really saying to a self-righteous person, you can't say because you didn't do it you're all right. If you ever thought it, you're wrong. If you ever lusted, if you ever desired to commit this sin, you're a sinner, and you are not righteous, and you cannot claim righteousness.

Just as back in verses 21 and 22, they said, "Thou shalt not kill." But Jesus said, "Whoever is angry with his brother is in danger of hell." I'm telling you it isn't just a matter of whether you do the murder, it's the issue of what you feel in your heart. And here He is saying exactly the same thing, only using another illustration.

In verses 21 and 22 His illustration was the 6th commandment. And here in verses 27 and 28 His illustration is the 7th commandment. Now the underlying principle of the 6th commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," is the sacredness of life. The underlying principle of the 7th commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," is the sacredness of the basic unit of life, marriage. And so He picks out these two illustrations: "Thou shalt not kill," which speaks of the sanctity of life; "Thou shalt not commit adultery," which speaks of the sanctity of marriage.

And He says you are not righteous before God if you've ever been angry or if you've ever thought a thought of adultery. And what He's trying to do is show them how really sinful they were no matter what the outside of their behavior. And so His concern here is the sanctity of marriage.

In verses 27 to 30, He deals with the spirit of marriage, and in verses 31 and 32, the law of marriage. The spirit of marriage and the law of marriage. And tonight we'll begin to look at the spirit of marriage as we see His comments on the sin of lusting and committing adultery in your heart.

Let me just say another word about the two illustrations He begins with. Anger and sex are two very powerful things. They really reach deep down into human experience. They aptly illustrate the sinfulness of man. In fact, I doubt whether there are any two illustrations that are more apt than these two to really cut us to the very core. We've all experienced the temptations of anger and lust, very common, and they reach deep into the basic sinfulness of man.

And those Jews who were sitting on the hillside in Galilee just as we who are gathered here tonight, hearing the Lord Jesus Christ confronting them about their anger and about their lust in their hearts would have to admit by virtue of their own consciences that they indeed were sinners, and the fact that they never killed anybody, and the fact that they never actually did the act of adultery didn't exonerate them from the sinfulness of sin which reigned in their hearts.

Jesus wants to go right to the heart of man and show them that no matter what they've done, they can't fit into His kingdom. And so Jesus sets a high standard. Just the fact that He says that anybody who looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart is a tremendous statement to somebody living in our society today, when the temptations are so vast.

Temptation has always been around, didn't matter whether a woman was covered from head to foot in a long robe such as in the East in that time and had a veil over her face. The temptation would still be there as Satan would move in. And there would always be those things with which the devil would use to generate lust, and which the flesh would pounce upon to initiate the temptation. But it seems to me that in the society in which live the temptations are so much more rampant, and so much more visible, and so much more common all around us because of the virtueless society that we live in.

It's amazing to me that even the church that calls itself the Church of Jesus Christ panders to people in the area of sex. I read today in the Los Angeles Times a two page article about the new effort in the Methodist Church to teach sex. And it went on to tell about one such sexual - what they call sex, I think they called it "Sexual Activity Class" or something - where everybody was naked and rolling around on a bed, all in the name of instructing people in this issue.

It went on to talk about how that the Methodist Church decided they ought to change some of that, and so they had appointed certain sex teachers, who were going around giving everybody instruction in sex. Frankly folks, that's ludicrous.

I believe that sex in marriage, in the beauty of which God has designed it, was meant to be a very personal discovery, not something plastered all over billboards, and taught in classes and presented in books. I think it's something very private, something very special, something very unique, and I think that the fact that we pander it, and propagate it, and sell it, and teach it, and talk about it incessantly all over the place, all that does is just elicit evil responses out of the heart of evil men and evil women. It doesn't do anything to help the situation.

We find explicit sex seminars and explicit sex books running the gamut. People constantly preaching on the subject, and talking about the subject, and advocating this and that, and I've heard the most strangest kind of counseling supposedly coming from men of God that just boggles my mind.

I heard one man who is a minister and who represents a Christian community speaking around saying that couples ought to take a shower together before they get married so they'll know what they're getting into. That kind of counsel is just exactly the thing that Jesus is saying right here is so wrong and nothing more than a manifestation of sinfulness. A person who gives that kind of counsel has a problem and it's not too tough to figure out what it is.

I don't think ever in the history of the Western world since the death of Greek and Roman paganism have we seen the unbridled indulgence of sexual passion so encouraged, and so elicited, and so praised as we do today. You might be interested to know that this past week the American Civil Liberties Union, which takes up all kinds of civil rights causes, is now suing to remove restrictions on X-rated movies so that children can attend them, because they feel that this is the Year of the Child, and children have rights like everybody else.

It won't be long until you're going to have to take your television and put your foot through it, frankly. Mass media lures with sex to sell its products, and glamorizes illicit pleasure. Sex crimes are at an all time high. Divorce, infidelity, and perversion are being praised. They are subjects for humor in our society. Pleasure-first philosophy is rampant. Hedonism is in full force. Monogamous marriage is threatened. Faithfulness is laughed, and ridiculed, and mocked.

And we could spend hour after hour just illustrating that, but it's not necessary. You know it's all around you. I have to avoid even looking at a magazine rack, I wouldn't - I don't even go and buy a magazine anymore because I don't even want to bombard my mind with what is there, just on the cover, let alone the stuff inside.

A new morality has been espoused with Situation Ethics saying that right is relative and whatever feels good you ought to do as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else. And our whole society is literally sex mad. It's just that we are so preoccupied with sex, it's beyond belief.

C. S. Lewis has a great illustration. He says you can get a large audience together for a striptease act, that is, to watch a girl undress on a stage. And he says, if that doesn't indicate how warped our view of sex and our view of womanhood is, imagine it this way. Suppose you went to a country where you could fill a theater by bringing in a covered plate on the stage, and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, and just before the lights went out there it contained a mutton chop or a piece of bacon. Wouldn't you think that something had gone wrong with their appetite for food? Now why should we think that it's any different in our society when we get all out of shape because somebody takes off their clothes? The Playboy philosophy is nothing but a mutton chop mentality. It's a perversion.

There's something wrong with us. There's something deep down inside that's wrong, and it's being pandered and played to in our society. Hugh Hefner comes along and says, "Why get all upset about sex. It's only a biological necessity like eating, drinking and sleeping?" That's not new. That kind of philosophy comes right out of the past, right out of Greek and Roman paganism.

In 1 Corinthians 6:13, the apostle Paul reiterates that philosophy as he confronts the Corinthians about their preoccupation with this evil sex thing. And here is what they were saying. First Corinthians 6:13, "Foods for the body, and the body for foods." Now that was a little phrase they were saying.

Somebody would come along and say, "Well, you know, you shouldn't do that. That's evil." And they'd say, "Well, foods for the body, and the body for foods." What they mean is it's only biology. It's a kind of a little proverb they used.

Well, sex is only a biological thing, that's all. "Foods for the body, and the body for foods." It's just biology, that's it, like eating, sleeping, and drinking. Well, it says, "God shall destroy both it and them. Because the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body." The body is not just biological. It is spiritual and it belongs to God, he says to the Corinthians. You just can't give your body over and say, "It's only biology."

That's the mutton chop philosophy. That's the Playboy philosophy. You can't do it. "The body is not for fornication, the body is for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. Don't you know -" verse 15 says " - that your bodies are the members of Christ? Would I take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot?" Or a prostitute - and that's anybody who has illicit sex - would I do that?

"Don't you know that one who is joined to a harlot becomes one body? And he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." So if you go to a harlot, you enter an adulterous situation, you join the Lord to that sin.

It isn't just "food for the body, and the body for food," and in verse 18 he says, "Flee fornication." Porneia, evil sexual behavior. The view that sex is only a biological urge, and you gotta live it up enjoy it, Situation Ethics, don't be restrained, don't be inhibited, live it up with whoever you want, it's just biology anyway; that philosophy is literally drown our society in a sea of sexual perversion.

It has bombarded us with a barrage of propaganda that is shattering homes, destroying families, ruining individual lives, destroying the capability of an individual to do what is right unless he has completely committed himself to Jesus Christ, which just debauches the society at a rapid rate. Relationships have been replaced with perversions. Concern has been replaced by concupiscence. Love has been replaced by lechery. That's the way it is in our society.

And on the other hand, whenever you talk about sex, you not only have the people who lean up in their chair because it's their favorite subject, but you also have the people who grab their Bible and head for the door. They're rather prudish about it and that's the Victorian view. You know, they want to go so far the other way they say sex is shameful, it's depraved, it's less than holy.

And by the way, this is done even today and it's been done in the past. That's not the answer. You can't go to the extreme that it's biology. You can't go to the other extreme that castration, or whatever mutilation will solve the problem. It won't. And one is just as much a perversion as the other, because God has wonderfully designed this as a part of human life.

In 1 Corinthians 7:3 the apostle Paul discusses something of it. He says, "Let the husband render to the wife her due; - " and he's talking about the physical relationship " - likewise also the wife unto her husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Stop depriving one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to prayer; and then come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your lack of self control."

In other words, he says you have every right and every responsibility to give your body to each other in the fulfillment of sexual desire. That's within marriage, God's design.

In the Book of Proverbs, God deals with the same thing, 5:15, "Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well." In other words, enjoy the married situation. Stay away from the harlot, the strange woman that he talked about earlier in chapter 5, who will destroy you. "Drink out of your own cistern, running waters out of your own well. Let thy fountain be dispersed abroad, and rivers of water in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not for strangers' with thee." Don't give your seed to a stranger. "Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind - " or deer " - and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love." Now God has designed this, a physical relationship, and He has sanctified it and blessed it.

In the Song of Solomon God goes on and on in that wonderful letter and revealed inspired way to tell us the beauty of human love in a marital situation. And so it is that this is pure and right, but our world has made a mutton chop out of it. We have gone into some kind of a twisted, jaded, lecherous perversion.

And this, of course, appeals to the heart of sinful, evil men. And so as we come to this passage in verses 27 and following, it's a very fitting word for the society in which we live, and we need to see what Jesus is saying.

Now the Pharisees had their own viewpoint, verse 27, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." And because they didn't do that, they thought they were righteous. They thought they'd go right into the kingdom and have the chief seats. Maybe you're like that. Maybe you say to yourself, "I'm not so bad. I've never actually gone out on my wife. I've never committed adultery. I've never done that kind of thing."

But Jesus says if you ever look on a woman to lust after her, you've done it in your heart, and that's enough to damn you to hell forever. That's the implication of verses 29 and 30. So your self-confidence is shattered here, you see? The external system of law isn't going to cut it because God is after the attitude. And you see what Jesus wants to do is show them they can't help themselves. You see, they could deal with the outside, sure. They could not commit adultery, but they couldn't do

anything with the inside. And so Jesus hits them where they're helpless, hopeless, powerless, which should drive them in desperation to God, who alone can change the heart. They desperately wanted to believe they were okay. Jesus shows them they weren't.

Now, with that in mind I want to digress for a minute, and just cover some things, and next week we'll get back to the specifics of the passage. But notice the beginning of verses 27 and 28. The beginnings again kicked me off into this, and I think you'll find it helpful. Jesus starts "Ye have heard." Then verse 28, "But I say." Now this contrast is tremendously important, and I'm gonna give you a lesson in kind of an overall biblical theology tonight, so I want you to get this because this will answer a lot of your questions.

"You have heard - but I say." This is the same formula, verse 21, "You have heard," verse 22, "But I say." Verse 31, "It has been said," verse 32, "But I say." Verse 33, "You have heard," verse 34, "But I say." It's all the way through here. It points to their misunderstanding of God's law. "You have heard -" from the rabbis, from the traditionalists, from the scribes and Pharisees, from those who interpreted the law. "But I'm telling you -" the truth of the law. What you have is not right. It's not sufficient. They have reduced the law of God to a simple external, and they haven't given you the whole story. They've told you that you don't have to commit adultery and that's it, you're okay. But I'm telling you there's more to this than just that.

Now you see again, I say what I said at the beginning. You can always invent a system that you can live up to and then convince yourself you're righteous. They could avoid committing adultery, but they couldn't do anything about their secret life. And so they missed the whole point of the Old Testament. When God said, "Thou shalt not kill," when God said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," when God gave any other precept in the Old Testament, He was talking about far more than the deed itself, and that's what Jesus wants them to understand.

Now let me show you what I mean. Just stay with me in this. The basic revelation of God's message to man came through Moses, all right? In fact, the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, are basically the heart, the center, the core of the Old Testament. The prophets and the writings that follow the Mosaic writings are simply explanations, commentaries, elaborations of what is contained in the law of Moses.

Many, many times as you read through the prophets, you find the prophets indicting the people because they didn't keep the Law of Moses. You find the prophets going back and saying, "Moses said unto you." Or, "Have you forgotten what Moses said? Have you forgotten what God did during the time of Moses?" In other words, the Pentateuch sets the pace. There you find the gospel of Moses, the gospel of God given through Moses. The rest of the Old Testament elaborates on the Pentateuch. It elaborates on that law of God, that set of standards which God laid down through Moses.

Now, the whole thing goes this way, then. God gives the basic definitions of what He requires through Moses. He elaborates on it in the law and the prophets. He consummates it in Jesus Christ, so that Christ comes not to change anything, but to clear up the issue that the law, the gospel of Moses hasn't changed.

Now, the essence or the heart of the gospel of Moses is found in the Book of Deuteronomy. Now let's look at it together. Deuteronomy is the 5th and last of the five books of Moses, and in this book we have a summary of the law of God. I believe - I don't know if you agree with me on this, but stay with me and maybe you will - I believe that Deuteronomy is the most important book in the Old Testament.

"Deuteronomy" is coming from two Greek words, deutero meaning "second" and nomos meaning "law." It is the "second law." It is the reiteration of the law given by God. It is the summation. As the book of Deuteronomy opens, the people are ready to enter the promised land. They are about to go into Canaan. They have been delivered from bondage in Egypt. They are God's people. They have been identified as God's people and now they're going to take their land. They're going to take the possession of the land God gave them.

Now as they move into the land, God reminds them of all they need to know. And so we have here the summarization of all the gospel of Moses, of all of the standards for living in God's kingdom. They're here in the Book of Deuteronomy. In fact, even the ten commandments are repeated in the 5th chapter of Deuteronomy.

Did you know this? Did you know that Jesus quoted Deuteronomy more than He quoted any other Old Testament book? And did you know this? The New Testament writers quote Deuteronomy more than they quote any other Old Testament book. So it is a critical book. It is the summarization of the whole Old Testament because all that comes after Deuteronomy comments on the Pentateuch, and Deuteronomy is the summary of the Pentateuch. So it is really the key, the high point of the Old Testament.

Now by the way, I believe the summary of the entire Old Testament, in fact, I believe the summary of the entire Bible is in Deuteronomy 6:5, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, with all thy might." That is the pinnacle of the whole Bible. Elsewhere in Deuteronomy it says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Now there you have the consummation of all of God's truth.

In fact Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, soul, mind, and strength. And thy neighbor as thyself. On this hang all the law and the prophets." The law is what's in front of Deuteronomy, the prophets what comes after, and the whole thing hinges right here.

Now then listen. I want you to listen to this, really critical. As we go to the Old Testament, we find the key is in the Pentateuch. As we look at the Pentateuch, the key is in Deuteronomy. As we look at Deuteronomy, the key is in 6:5, "Thou shalt love the Lord." Now listen to me. The Old Testament is not building a relationship on law. It is building a relationship on what? Love.

And people do not understand this. They think the Old Testament economy was an economy of law. It is not. It is an economy of love. It is a relationship that God is after. Love is the key to a relation to God, and all throughout Deuteronomy God continues to say, "I want you to love Me. I want you to love Me. I want you to love Me. I want a heart commitment. I want a heart devotion. I want a wholehearted kind of genuine affection for Me."

Now listen. Moses, throughout Deuteronomy - and if we had time we'd go right through the book, and you can do it yourself - over, and over, and over, he says to the people as they enter the land, "You must love the Lord, You must love the Lord, You must love the Lord." Why? Because it is a relationship of love that God has always sought with man, always.

Now let me tell you something that'll help you. Before God ever gave the law as we know it, the ten commandments, the decalogue, and all the other statutes and commandments - listen to this - before God ever did that, He established a relationship with Israel. He first loved Israel. Well, we'll see it later in chapter 10, but He first loved Israel.

And because He loved Israel, He called Israel out of Egypt. He saved Israel. He redeemed Israel. And it was only after the loving relationship and redemption that He gave them the law. Do you understand? The law was not the cause of the relationship. It was the result of it. It is the relationship God was after. You have to understand this, and I'm gonna build on it, so I hope you getting it.

God's love had been exhibited to generations earlier when they were freed from Egypt, and when they were freed from Egypt, God had redeemed them. God had saved them, as it were. God had made them His people. And because they had a relationship, He then said, "This is how you live."

And so the New Testament says the same thing, the gospel of Moses, the gospel of Jesus, the gospel of Paul, the gospel of Peter, the gospel of James, and the gospel of John are all identical. We love Him because He first what? Loved us. God loved Israel. That's how it all began. God loved us. That's how it all began. First we had a relationship of love, and then we had a response of obedience to His law.

Look with me now at the 10th chapter of Deuteronomy and I'll show you this. I read it this morning in the service. I'm gonna go over it again. And what Moses is saying is, "All right, people, you're going into the land. You're gonna go in the land and I want you to remember this one thing, 'Love the Lord

your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.' ”

Now what I'm saying to you, people, is that it is the attitude that God has always been after. Listen to me. It is not that God wanted them to keep a bunch of external laws. It is that God wanted them to love Him on the inside. And that's why Jesus says it isn't an issue that you don't murder, and it isn't an issue that you don't commit adultery. What is the issue is what's in your heart, you see?

It's always been that way. This isn't anything just New Testament. Look at 10:12. “And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee?” What does God want out of you? And you might say, “Well, boy, we better get those ten commandments straight.” Well, that isn't what he starts with. “Fear the Lord thy God, walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” And then, “To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?”

That's no different than the gospels. That's no different than Paul. That's exactly what the New Testament says. Love God and do what He says. Why, 1 John even tells us that if you say you love God and you don't keep His commandments, you're a liar, right? But the love comes first, and then the obedience. It's a relationship, and that's what He talks about all the way through this passage.

Verse 19, He adds the second dimension. Not only love God but, “Love therefore the stranger: for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” And so this is the whole sum of everything. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

“Fear the Lord, - ” verse 20 “ - serve him, cleave to him.” I love that. 11:1, listen to it, “Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, keep his charge, his statutes, his ordinances, his commandments, always.” You see? It's love. It's the love that He's after. The key is verse 16. “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your - ” what? “ - your heart.” Your heart. That's what He's after. He was always after a heart relationship, always after a heart attitude. Never, never was He satisfied with something external. It was love from the heart.

So the sum of it all in the first 11 - the first 11 or first 10 and 11 - chapters of Deuteronomy, you could see the whole sum of this first 11 chapters is this: Love God and love your neighbor. That's what God requires of you. And that is exactly what Jesus said in the New Testament. That is exactly what the Epistles say, love the Lord, love Him so that you're obedient, love one another, love one another. It's the same message, nothing different.

And then in Deuteronomy chapters 12 through 26, that next big section, you don't need to follow, just listen. In Deuteronomy 12 through 26, Moses interprets and applies these two basic principles. He then takes the principle of loving God and the principle of loving your neighbor and applies them to every daily situation, to every kind of living matter, to everything that goes on in life. He does that all

the way through chapter 26.

Now finally when he comes to chapter 26, he decides that having said all of this, having said the key is to love God and love your neighbor, and having given them statutes that make this apply to every kind of living situation, statutes that show how each of these things is applicable in life, having done that he decides that he'll have a great big service of dedication.

So Moses gets everybody together in chapter 26 and they confess their sins, and they dedicate their lives, and they reaffirm their love to God, and they renew their heart commitment to the Lord. And chapter 26 is a time for their hearts to be given to the Lord, a time of great praise, a time of worship, a time when they acknowledge that God will be served from their hearts.

And so they will be obedient, 26:16 - this is the key. "This day the Lord thy God has commanded thee to do these statutes and ordinances: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thy heart, and with all thy soul." You see? It's that heart that He was after, and that was the sum of it all.

All right, chapter 27, you know what happens? Moses tells them, "Look, when you get in the land, I want you to - Joshua is going to take you in the land, I can't do it." He had sinned, and so he didn't get to go. He says, "Joshua's gonna take you in the land, and when you get there I want you to do this first. When you arrive in the land, get all together again and renew this same commitment, that you will love the Lord and you will love each other. Renew it when you get in the land."

Then in chapter 28 he says to them, "Now you have two choices, two choices. You can be blessed or you can be cursed. Look at it, 28:3, "Blessed," verse 4, "Blessed," verse 5, "Blessed," verse 6, "Blessed." Go down to verse 16, "Cursed," verse 17, "Cursed," verse 18, "Cursed," verse 19, "Cursed." He's offering them two options.

What he's saying is this. You get in the land. You choose to love the Lord your God with all your heart. You get in the land, you choose to love your neighbor you will be - what? Blessed. You get in the land, you choose not to love the Lord your God, you choose not to love your neighbor you will be - what? Cursed. So he's offering them these two possibilities: The way of blessing and the way of cursing. And that goes all the way through the 28th chapter.

And then the 29th chapter, he appeals to them to make a decision. He calls upon them to make a decision, to make a commitment, to choose what they will do. And that goes from chapter 29 into chapter 30. And let's pick it up at 30:11.

"For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the

sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very near unto thee, in thy mouth, and thy heart, that thou mayest do it.”

In other words, you have a choice to make and the information is there. You have enough information to make a choice. You can choose blessing, you can choose cursing. You can choose to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself, or not to do that.

But don't complain that you didn't have the information. Don't tell me that you never had it available. It's here. “See - ” verse 15 “ - I - ” he says “ - have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil.” I've given you the choice. You're entering the land, make the choice. “In that I command thee this day - ” verse 16 “ - to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his commandments, his statutes, his ordinances, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land to which thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I declare unto you this day, that you shall surely perish, that you shall not prolong your days on the land, to which thou passest over the Jordan to go to possess it.”

And he says, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, - ” let the record be in heaven “ - I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.” And what is the choice? “That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, thou mayest obey his voice, thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Now there is the sum of the whole Old Testament. Love God. That's the choice. God has always wanted a heart relationship. Listen people, somebody in the Old Testament who just mechanically kept the ten commandments didn't fulfill the plan of God. The ten commandments were only given to regulate a relationship that was based on love, and if the love relationship wasn't there, the regulation didn't mean anything. That's the point. And the final chapters of Deuteronomy, chapters 31 to 34, provide for the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua.

Now, having said all of that - and I hope you stayed with me on it cause it really is important - let me say this. The centrality - and this is the sum of it, if you don't get this you'll miss the whole point for the last 15 minutes. So you that have tuned out tune back in, all right?

The whole point in what we are learning is this. The centrality of God's concern is the heart, you see? It is not the externals. It never was with Moses and it isn't with us. But the Pharisees were satisfied with the externals, and thus they had missed the point. That's why Jesus said, “You have heard it said - But I say unto you.” You're messing around with the outside, and God is concerned with the inside. It is a relationship of love that God wants, and the law only regulates it, just as the standards

of the New Testament regulate a new covenant relationship with the Lord.

And so when you come to the New Testament in the Book of Matthew, and you come again, as I said, to Matthew chapter 22, you hear our Lord reiterating the same thing that comes out of Deuteronomy. He says this. What is the first and great commandment? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." Deuteronomy 6:5, "the second is like it, Love thy neighbor as thyself." That, too, we find all over Deuteronomy, but most specifically in chapter 10. And He says, "On these commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

What He's saying there in Matthew 22 is this. I don't care what your functions are, I don't care what your performances are, if you don't love God and love your neighbor, you've missed the point. You've missed the point.

That's why Jesus could say to the rich young ruler, you know, "It's wonderful that you've kept all the commandments from your youth, but you know what you haven't done?" In effect what He said to him is, "Go sell all you have and give it to the poor." Why? Because you haven't manifested a right heart attitude because you haven't loved your - what? Your neighbor. You see? Which betrayed the fact that while there was an external behavior, there was nothing going on inside. It was hypocritical. So this is God's divine internal standard that no one could keep.

And you know, let me tell you how this works - now stay with me and you're going to understand the Old Testament better. In the Old Testament, you see, God put this standard. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." And the people in the Old Testament would say, "That's God's standard. Man, we can't keep that standard." And that's exactly what He wanted them to say.

You say, "But if you can't keep the standard, what happens?" You get guilty, and you get convicted, and you get to feeling sinful. Well, you know something? God didn't just leave them in the sense of conviction. He didn't leave them just boggled by their own sinfulness. He didn't just leave them frustrated with guilt. He gave them not only the standards, but He gave them a system to deal with their inability to keep it.

What system was that? Sacrificial system. And the sacrificial system was given by God in order to give man a way to deal with his inabilities. When a man said or a woman, "I can't keep the law of God and I'm overwhelmed with my sin," God said, "Then confess your sin to Me, and prove the genuineness of that confession by an act of sacrifice." And the sacrificial system didn't make men right with God. It simply pointed out that only God could make them right with Him. It pointed out they needed a sacrifice. It pointed out their inabilities.

And so here's the way it went in the Old Testament. God gave a standard, and the standard was a relationship of love. Men couldn't fulfill all that that standard required, and so they were guilty and convicted of sin. And in order to deal with that, God provided a sacrificial system. And the sacrificial system was itself futile. The sacrificial system never gave a lasting peace. The sacrificial system never really relieved the guilt.

And in its futility, it pointed to the fact that there had to be someday, someplace, some way a full, and final, and ultimate sacrifice that would once and for all do away with this sin. Don't you see? The whole thing pointed to whom? Jesus Christ. Therefore the gospel of Moses was the gospel of Christ. Moses presents a standard of loving relationship that a man in his evil heart can't fulfill.

Convicted of his inability to fulfill it, he gives sacrifices out of a contrition, and that's filling his heart. But even the act of sacrifice is futile because it never ends, and it never really accomplishes anything, and so it all points to someday that one final sacrifice that has to be given. And so it is that in the very beginning it all points to Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is no Johnny-come-lately to the standards of Israel. Jesus Christ is the fruition of everything Moses ever taught. The whole sequence just points to a Savior because He's the only one that could deal with man on the inside. The whole Old Testament was to frustrate man, to show him his desperation, to show him that he couldn't save himself no matter what he did, no matter what he did on the outside, if the heart relationship wasn't right, he wasn't right.

But by the time you get to Jesus' day they'd lowered the standard, they dropped all of the stuff about heart relationship. The very fact that a man had to say to Him, "What's the first and great commandment?" shows how far they'd slipped, right? They forgot what it was. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all - " They knew verse for centuries. It had slipped by their own choice. They did away with the part they couldn't keep and stuck with the externals.

Now you say, "John, how do the ten commandments fit in?" That's easy. The ten commandments are simply a way to regulate love. That's all. That's right. Did you know the ten commandments are just a definition of love? You say, "Oh, ho, ho. I've heard the ten commandments are law. Thou shalt not, thou shalt not - that's just law." No, it's love. They are simply a way to regulate love. Want me to prove that to ya? Very easy to do it.

First of all - listen to this - redemption preceded the giving of the ten commandments. First they were called out of Egypt. They were redeemed. They were ordained as God's people. He set His love upon them. He set His affection upon them. The relationship was first, and then came the code of ethics. Once the relationship was established, the principles of behavior were laid out.

But never forget it. Redemption preceded law because God is always concerned with relationship. The relationship preceded the law or the ten commandments. Now get this. The law did not establish the covenant. Love established the covenant. The law merely regulated behavior within that covenant.

For the Israelites who hear God speak on Mount Sinai, and hear that thunder, and see that flaming finger carve out the law, there was already a relationship. Redemption had already been given as they had been delivered from Egypt. They already had a relationship with the Lord. They already had a rational basis for faith and for love, and this was merely codifying the principles of love. And so the ten commandments become nothing more than a list of how to love God and how to love your neighbor.

Did you know that the first four commandments relate to God, and the last six commandments relate to your neighbor? The first four tell you how to love God, and the last six tell you how to love your neighbor. Let's look at them. Exodus chapter 20, Exodus chapter 20. And I'm going to go through this pretty quick, because I want to get done in a minute.

In Exodus chapter 20 - now watch, stay with me - we find the listing of the ten commandments. And I want you to see how these are nothing but an expression of love. These are qualities of love. Verse 3, first one, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." You know what that's mean? Love is loyal, that's all. Love is loyal.

If I say to my wife, "Honey, I love you," and then I tell her, "I also have three or four others that I love, too," that's not the kind of love she's interested in. Love is loyal. That's all He's saying here. Love is loyal to Him. Having no other gods before Him. You don't say, "Oh, boy, am I really mad I only have that one God and everybody else in the world gets a whole bunch." No, no.

There were some people who worshiped one God because they felt that they would be right in doing it. There are other people who worshiped one God because they loved Him so much they were loyal. I don't worship just the Lord because I'm trying to fulfill some legal obligation. I worship the one God because He's the only one I love, right? Love is loyal.

Secondly, love is faithful. Verse 4 - and this is the extent to which loyalty goes. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any carved image, any likeness of anything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy to thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."

Do you see it there? Again it's love. In other words, the point is love will be faithful. Love will not make graven images. Love will not go off and make a carved replica of some non-god. Love is loyal and its loyalty extends into the future endlessly, and thus becomes faithfulness. Toward God, then, if we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, we'll love only Him. If we love the Lord our God, we'll love Him faithfully.

Thirdly, the next commandment says love is reverent, verse 7. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain." Listen. If you love the Lord, will you take His name in vain? If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength would you curse His name? No. So you see, love is loyal, and love's loyalty extends into faithfulness, and love is reverent. That's all He's really saying.

And then a fourth one related to God in verses 8 to 11. "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, maidservant, cattle, a stranger in thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."

You know what that says? Love is set apart, separated. You know something? If I love somebody totally, I am set apart to that person only, right? If I say I love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, but I'm gonna take the one day I'm supposed to spend worshiping Him and go do something else, doesn't say much for my love, does it? So all He's saying here - and this is so simple, people - love is loyal, love is faithful, love is reverent, and love is set apart. Love separates itself totally to its object.

You know, men, when you love a girl, finally you go to her someday and you say, "I want you to be my wife." What are you really saying? You're saying, "I love you so much I just want to separate myself to you, that's all. I'm not interested in any other woman. I'm not interested in any other relationships. It's you that matters." That's love. So you see, this isn't some legalistic code of externals. This is merely a way to define love, love toward God.

Now the final six deal with loving your neighbor, that's all. Verse 12, for example. Love is respectful. "Honor thy father and thy mother: thy days may be long on the land which the Lord thy God gives thee." If you love your neighbor, your first neighbor, what's the first neighbor you're gonna touch in your life? Parents, right? You come into the world and your first neighbors immediately are your parents. And the Bible simply says, "love them," and "love them" means "respect them and honor them," that's all. Love is respectful. Love is never lawless, never disorderly, always respectful. And first of all, to the first category of neighbors, family.

And then toward folks, love is not only respectful but it is humane, verse 13. "Thou shalt not kill." Listen, if you love somebody are you gonna kill them? No. If you love somebody, you don't kill them. If you love your neighbor, you don't kill him. That's why Paul says, "Love is the fulfilling of the whole law." If you love the Lord your God, you're gonna be loyal. If you love the Lord your God, you're gonna be faithful. If the love the Lord your God, you'll be reverent. If you love the Lord your God you'll be set apart unto Him. If you love other people, you're gonna be respectful. If you love other people you're gonna be humane, you're not going to take their life.

Next He says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Listen, if you really love somebody you're not gonna do that, because love is pure is what He's saying. It's respectful, humane, and it's pure. Love doesn't defile. If you love somebody - and I've seen this so often - a guy says to a girl, "I love you," and then tries to shove her in bed when she's not his wife. That isn't love.

Love seeks purity. Don't tell your wife you love her and then go off and shack up with somebody else. You don't love your wife. You're lying. The point is love is pure. It doesn't defile. It only exalts and keeps pure.

Further, He says, love is unselfish. Verse 15. "Thou shalt not steal." What does that mean? That means if you love somebody, are you gonna take what they have? No, you're not gonna take what they have. You're not going to steal from somebody if you love them. Love is unselfish.

Love is truthful, verse 16. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." Are you going to tell lies about people if you love them? You going around giving filthy gossip about people? You gonna say things that aren't true in a court of law? Are you going to do all you can to tell untruths if you love people? Of course not.

Finally, love toward people is not only respectful, humane, pure, unselfish, and truthful, but it is contented. When you really love people you're contented so you "don't covet their house, you don't covet their wife, you don't covet their manservant, maidservant, ox, ass, or anything else that's theirs." Why? Because you love them and you're glad they have it.

Now do you see the point of the ten commandments? They are merely a regulation of love, that's all. Once God established a relationship with people, they came out of Egypt first, the relationship was there. The law was only a way to define how that love worked. And it was twofold: Toward God and toward your neighbor. That's the epitome of the Old Testament in the Book of Deuteronomy. That's the gospel Of Moses, and it is no different that what Jesus said, and it is no different that what the Epistles of the New Testament teach.

You see the point? The whole law is to love God and love your neighbor. And that expresses itself toward God in being loyal, faithful, reverent, and set apart. It expresses itself toward your neighbor in respecting authority established by God, respecting life made in His image, being pure, unselfish, truthful, and contented.

And, beloved, let me tell you something. Every single one of those is a heart attitude, isn't it? Every one of them. "Thou shalt not kill," and "Thou shalt not commit adultery," are much deeper and broader statements than the scribes and the Pharisees ever allowed for, do you see? They were simply statements of regulating a heart attitude.

And the sad thing that happened in Israel was the Israelites began to focus only on the external, focused only on the ritual, focused only on their religious observance, focused only on the outside, so that morality became a matter of what you do rather than a relationship of love. And they missed the whole thing.

Now if you understand what I just told you, in the last 30 minutes, or 40 minutes, or 50 minutes - I don't even know how long I've been talking. But if you understand that and then you understand the background of the sermon on the mount, you see? You understand what Jesus is saying. So in Matthew 5:21 when He says, "You have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not kill; whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment." They stopped there. They just said, "Don't kill and you're all right." "But I'm telling you, if you're angry with your brother, you're in danger of hell." Why? Because you don't love your brother, and that's the thing that's the issue with God.

And in verse 27, "You have heard them say, You should not commit adultery; But I'm telling you if you lust in your heart you are guilty." Why? Because your attitude toward your brother is wrong. You're not pure, and you're coveting something that isn't yours.

Now this is the whole background. And so our Lord drives them down deep to the matter of the heart, and says, "That's the issue with Me." Their tradition had obscured the original message and corrupted it. Christ wanted to reiterate it. Now when He gives the law here to the scribes and the Pharisees, what's gonna be their reaction? They're gonna say the same thing the Jews of old would say, "We can't keep that law. It can't be done. We can't do it. We're not that good. We can't love like that all the time. We need help. We can't maintain Your standard, God." And that is exactly what He wants them to say.

In the Old Testament when they couldn't maintain it, they went directly into the sacrificial system, right? And ultimately, the sacrificial system consummated in Jesus Christ, who was slain as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and of whom the writer of Hebrews says, "By one offering he perfected forever them that are sanctified."

The writer of Hebrews said, "He did what the blood and bulls of goats could never do, take away sin." And that's why, beloved, after Jesus died on the cross and paid the final penalty, Jesus brought judgment on the city of Jerusalem. The Roman soldiers came down within about 30 years or so into the city of Jerusalem, and they literally destroyed the city. They destroyed the temple, which by then had its veil rent in twain anyway cause the sacrificial system was done when Jesus died.

But in 70 A.D., they came in and they literally destroyed the temple, obliterated the city of Jerusalem. And since that time to this very hour in 1979 there has never been a sacrificial system in Israel since. Why? Because it was over, because that for which it pointed was there. It arrived in Jesus Christ. And it was the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ that took away the sin that all the system of sacrifices could never take away, but simply pointed to.

You say, "Well, then how would that person in the Old Testament be saved?" Because the efficacy of Christ's death in this period of time when He died went forward to us and backward to them. And if they believed God when they lived, and if they looked forward to the fact that God would take away their sin by His power, and if they knew they couldn't do it on their own and they believed God for a sacrifice that would, then He applied to them the sacrifice of Christ though as of yet He had not even given it.

And us? We're on this end, and though Christ died 2,000 years ago His sacrifice is applied to us today if we believe and accept Him. And so Jesus wants to force us to the frustration and an inability to keep the high exalted law of God, and run for mercy to Jesus Christ, who alone can grant us a righteousness we cannot on our own obtain.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul sums it up in these words, "For he hath made him who knew no sin - " who is that? Christ " - to be sin for us; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." In other words, we couldn't be righteous because we were sinful, but He became sin that we might become righteous. He bore our sins to make us righteous.

And so, beloved, I'm telling you this. The words of this covenant that cemented the relationship in the Old Testament were not legalistic. The ten commandments weren't even legalistic. They simply brought out a standard by which a loving relationship to God and your neighbor could exist. And there had to be the relationship first, or all the law keeping that went on meant absolutely nothing.

You know something? There are people today in our society who live by New Testament ethics, did you know that? They're good fathers, good mothers, nice people, good neighbors, give to charity, go to church, don't kill people, don't commit adultery, they keep the outward law. Some of them come under the name "Mormon." And there are many others. But you know what? They don't have the relationship so the law means nothing because it isn't the outworking of love.

The inner attitude, I'm telling you, was always the issue with God, whether you're in the Old or the New Testament. And that's why Jesus can say, "I didn't come to destroy the prophets. I didn't come to set Moses aside. I didn't come to change one single thing, just put it back where it belongs. And unless you get up to that level, which is higher than the scribes and Pharisees, you will never under any circumstances enter My kingdom."

And of course we realize we can't, and that forces us to Christ. So Moses was pushing people to Jesus, just like Christ was pushing them to Himself. In fact in Luke 16:15, the Pharisees who were so covetous in their hearts, Jesus said to them, "You are they - " listen to this, it's great. "You are they who justify yourselves before men; but God knows your hearts." Isn't that good? And then He says, "For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." It is an abomination to God to keep an external law without a heart relationship. God knows your hearts. The law and the prophets, nothing has changed, it's still the heart.

So our Lord simply redefines the original standard, and in so doing He defines righteousness and sin in true biblical terms. And this is so important. What Jesus is really doing is preaching on sin. And next week I'm going to introduce our continuing study of this adultery passage by showing you why Jesus stresses the doctrine of sin. I'll give you a hint. If you don't understand sin, you'll never understand anything else in the Scripture. Jesus spends a tremendous amount of time dealing with the problem of sin.

Listen, when the memory of John Newton was nearly gone and he was an old man, that great saint of God couldn't preach anymore. He'd forgotten so many things that he couldn't carry on a conversation. But he said this. He said, "It seems as though there are only two things I can remember. One is that I am a great sinner, and the second is that Jesus Christ is a greater Savior." That's the issue. That's what Jesus wanted the Pharisees to see. That's what He wants you to see. You were so great a sinner you couldn't atone for your sin. He did it for you.

I read this week about a child who was bitten by a poisonous snake. And the mother was there when the child was bitten, and the mother was just struck with love for the child, and so she placed her lips over the wound to suck the poison out. She succeeded in doing it and saved the child's life. But she had a little cut on her lip. The poison went into her and she died.

So it is with Jesus Christ, who drained out of us, as it were, the poison of the serpent and in so doing died in our place. We are great sinners. But He is a great Savior, amen? Let's pray.

We thank You Father again for the fellowship we've enjoyed tonight. For giving us insight into Your precious Word. Help us to know that it is a relationship You want, not a set of rules. A relationship that we could never keep in our own strength, and so we fly to Jesus Christ for grace and mercy,

forgiveness and righteousness that He alone can give.

Thank You for a grace that is greater than all our sin, for a love that reaches beyond us, to cleanse and purge us, to see something good past the evil, something redeemable. Thank You Lord for the relationship You established. Thank You for giving us standards by which that love relationship is to function.

May we walk in Your ways, keep Your statutes, obey Your commands, and thus show the world that we love You, and we love our neighbors as well. And Lord, if there are some in our congregation tonight who've never come to Jesus Christ, who've been trusting in their own righteousness, trusting in their own strength, we pray that You'll deliver them from that delusion, show them that in desperation they must run to Jesus Christ, who alone can wash away the sin and the guilt which is too deep for themselves to ever deal with.

And so, Father, we thank You for what You will do and have done for all who believe. In Christ's name, amen.

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