

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

The Ethics of the King

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-85

We are privileged again to sit at the feet of Matthew, the Apostle, as he speaks to us about the King of kings and Lord of lords. And as we have been learning in our study of Matthew, he presents Jesus Christ as God's anointed King who rules over a spiritual Kingdom. Jesus Christ came into the world to be the sovereign ruler over all who would willingly acknowledge Him as their King. We have learned from the gospel of Matthew that God anointed Him as King, God anointed Him as Christ and Messiah, the promised ruler, the Lord of heaven and earth. And He earned the right to be called that through His death and resurrection and was exalted to the right hand of the Father and sits there on the throne with the Father as co-ruler and regent over His Kingdom. Everything in the early chapters of Matthew points to His royalty, His ancestry is the genealogy of a king. His virgin birth is the birth of not only man but the Son of God. His adoration by the ancient Persian king makers that we know as wise men who searched the world for one who would be king affirms again His kingliness. His baptism at which time the Spirit of God descended upon Him. The Father from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," indicate again heavenly affirmation of His kingliness.

And then we also were able to look at His conflict with Satan who is the current ruler of the world, the usurper of a role that belongs rightly to Jesus Christ and we saw that at the time of the temptation, Satan gave his best shot at Jesus Christ and was totally and utterly defeated, proving again that Christ is the rightful King who has defeated the usurper and can rescue men and women from the kingdom of darkness and bring them into the kingdom of light.

So Matthew has been presenting to us all of the credentials of King Jesus. Beginning now in chapter 5 of Matthew, the King speaks. He brings His message. He presents the incomparable sermon that is known as the Sermon on the Mount. And it gives us His standard, the ethics of the King, the standards for all of those who would be a part of His Kingdom. To put it another way, how to get into His Kingdom, how to become a subject of this King. It contains the law, the standards, the requirements for all who would be under His sovereign rule. And His standards so clearly given in this portion of Scripture do not agree with the current religious standards of His time or of any other time. In fact, He takes the highest and noblest of man's religion, Judaism, the Judaism of His own time and literally dismantles it. He shows how inadequate it is, even man's religion at best, even man's religion that is somehow wed to the Old Testament falls woefully short. And throughout this Sermon on the Mount which occupies Matthew 5, 6 and 7, several things happen. One, Jesus shows clearly the inadequacy of existing Judaism. Secondly, He demonstrates His standard. And thirdly,

He calls people to make a choice. Do you want the religion of salvation by works, the broad way that leads to destruction? Or do you want salvation by grace through faith, the narrow way that leads to life everlasting? And we'll learn more about how the sermon concludes in some of our future studies.

But as we come in to this sermon, there's one portion of it that stands out as the highest ethical standard for those who are subjects of the King. And I will draw your attention to Matthew chapter 5 and verse 43 and let me read down to verse 48. Jesus speaks, "You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven, for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax gatherers do the same? And if you great your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the pagans do the same? Therefore, you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Now there you have the epitome of the standard of a subject of the Kingdom. He is to be perfect as God is perfect and that perfection will demonstrate itself in an unhuman, supernatural love. Love is the supreme ethic. Love, said the Apostle Paul, is the fulfillment of the whole law. All the law and the prophets are summed up in this, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself." This is called by the New Testament writers, "The Royal Law," because it is the law of the King. Loving as perfectly as God loves is not a new ethic. You can find it back in the eleventh chapter of Leviticus where we are reminded that we are to be as perfect as God is. You can find it in the writings of Peter who says in chapter 1 of his first epistle, verses 14 to 16, that we are to be as holy as God is and that means we are to love with the same kind of perfect love with which God loves.

The standard then for the Kingdom is to love as God loves. And believe me, the religion of Judaism at the time of Jesus fell woefully short of that. And so does any self-righteous religious system, no matter how elite it might imagine it is. In fact, back in verse 20 of chapter 5, earlier in the sermon, Jesus said, "I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the Kingdom." You have to live at a higher standard. You have to have a greater righteousness. You have to love with a love way beyond the love that defines their religion. Nothing is more godlike that a perfect love. The Bible tells us God is love.

Now the people in Christ's Kingdom must have more than a superficial virtue. The Pharisees and the scribes and the people who followed their lead in the Judaism of Jesus time had a very superficial approach to righteousness. And Jesus addresses that in this sermon. For example, in verse 21, He says, "You have heard that the ancients were told you shall not commit murder and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court." You see, they thought if they didn't kill someone they were righteous.

Jesus said if you're even angry with someone you're unrighteous. And then down in verse 27, "You've heard it said you shall not commit adultery and I say to you that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." You think you're righteous if you don't commit adultery. I'm telling you, if you even have the thought you're unrighteous. You see, the standard was much higher than they had set it. Down in verse 33 they were told by their rabbis, "You shall not make false vows, but you shall fulfill your vows to the Lord. I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven...verse 35...or by earth, or any other thing. Just let your conversation be yes, yes and no, no." They thought they could protect themselves with special oaths and vows, very superficial and the Lord says, "None of that pleases Me, I want honesty, I want integrity." Down in verse 38 He says, "You were told an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. You were taught to retaliate. But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil. Whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also and if anybody wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat too. If he wants you to go a mile, go two. Anybody who asks you to give, give him what he wants."

You see, the point was they had established a certain level of righteousness that to them was very high and they believed it pleased God. And Jesus came and said it doesn't. It is external, it is superficial, and it doesn't have anything to do with your heart attitude. In your heart you're angry, you're hateful, you're murderous. In your heart you are adulterous. In your heart you seek to even get rid of your wives, your treacherous against them. In your heart you lie. In your heart you hold vengeance. And even though on the outside you've got this comfortable little ethical code, it doesn't meet the standard. The King came to set a much higher standard, a standard of perfection. The King's people are to be very, very different. And if you're to be a subject of the King, this is the standard.

Nothing is more representative of that standard than the passage I just read to you because here you come to the high point which is love. Look, the greatest virtue, that which is most godlike, that which when expressed allows us to fulfill the whole law and all the prophets. And so the ethic of the king that stands out is to love and as Jesus says, it is to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, verse 44. That was the standard, a love that was really supernatural. That wasn't the Jewish tradition.

Let's talk about the tradition of the Jews. Look at verse 43, "You have heard that it was said," remember that little phrase, it's been used a number of times, I've just read it to you, it refers to the rabbinical teaching. It isn't referring to the Old Testament, it's referring to what the rabbis had taught them. It's referring to the current extant perspective on their religion. "You have heard from your teachers and your rabbis and your tradition you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." That's what they heard. Now, at first, that's a good start....love your neighbor, based, by the way, on Leviticus 19:17 and 18 where it says exactly that at the end of verse 18. That's an old law to love your neighbor.

But they had omitted something. They had omitted to love your neighbor as yourself and they had added something to hate your enemy. And by the way, that was added to accommodate their evil hearts. No matter how religious they were on the outside, it was obvious that they were not righteous on the inside because they were filled with hate. Blatantly they perverted the meaning of the Scripture because even in Leviticus 19 it does tell them to have love toward everyone. They didn't want to love everyone. They wanted to hate some people. And in a blatant effort to justify their hate, they instructed the people to hate their enemies and they told them this was an act of righteousness. And they left out "To love your neighbor as yourself," because they were willing to love others but they were too proud to love others as they loved themselves. What is...what is it to love yourself? What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? Well, think about how we love ourselves. Our love to ourselves is unfeigned. It is fervent, it is habitual, it is permanent. You say, "Well what do you mean by that?" Well we take care of ourselves, don't we? I mean, it was you you were concerned with when you were dressing to come here today. And it is you you are usually concerned with throughout the day and the week and the month and the years. You want to make sure that your interests are fulfilled, your needs are met, your wants and desires somehow accommodated, your hopes realized and your ambitions accomplished. You do everything you can to secure your own welfare, your own safety, your own comfort and your own interests. I mean, that's just built in. There are mechanisms within us that help us toward self-preservation and then there are fallen components in our sinfulness that lead us to a self-preoccupation. We seek our own pleasure and we know very few limits to the satisfaction of our own desires. We want to make sure that we do everything to take care of ourselves, and that is exactly the way we are to love our neighbor. They left that out. They were...they were only interested in a moderate love that could satisfy a standard of righteousness that they believe God would accept. They didn't really want to get too carried away with this and they certainly didn't want to be as interested in others as they were in themselves.

And then they added the phrase "And hate your enemy." Why? Well because they wanted it to justify their hatred. And they hated, my did they hate. The neighbor, love your neighbor, they defined as another Jew and if you weren't a Jew, it was acceptable to hate you. If you were a Gentile, justifiable hate was given toward you. Or if you were a tax collector they could hate you. Or according to John 7:49, the Jewish leaders even hated the common rabble among the Jews. They fed their evil, proud hearts by concluding that not everybody was a neighbor. The common rabbles couldn't be considered as neighbors, defecting sell-out traitorous tax collectors couldn't be considered neighbors and neither could Gentiles. And they could justifiably hate them. And in so doing, they violated the law of the Old Testament. Leviticus 19:34, if they had just kept reading, "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you and you shall love him as yourself." It doesn't matter who it is, a stranger, an outcast, an alien, you love him as you love yourself. In Exodus 12:49, "There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you." There is not a double standard. And this perversion, by the way, was not limited just to scribes and

Pharisees. The people joined in on this and there was grave animosity toward Gentiles, toward Samaritans. So they had come up with a perverted standard of righteousness which justified their pride and their hatred. And they considered themselves, nonetheless, righteous. That's how it is with any kind of religion. It sets a sub-standard pattern of righteousness, leaves up to it and believes God is pleased. And that's because, as Paul said in Romans 10 verse 3, "They didn't understand the righteousness of God." They didn't understand how righteous God is. And because they didn't understand how righteous God is, they set the standard too low and they went about to establish their own righteousness which was a far cry from the standard that God set.

So here comes the King and the King attacks the standard and says, "Sub-standard, sub-standard, sub-standard. It isn't righteous at all, it's unrighteous. It isn't goodness at all, it's evil. It doesn't please God, it displeases Him." And He just dismantles the whole system. As He gets in to chapter 6 He even attacks their praying, He attacks their fasting, He attacks their giving, and it's all sub-standard too. And then if that's not enough, He gets in to chapter 7 and basically calls them all false teachers and says they're going to end up in judgment if they continue in that path.

You see, the King came to bring a new standard. And the new standard is articulated in the verses I read you, we are to love at the level that God loves, we are to be as perfect as God is perfect. So we turn from the tradition of the Jews to the truth from Jesus. Let's look at verse 44 and following.

:"But I say to you," now here's the new ethic for the Kingdom, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Not only love your neighbor but love your enemies and pray for the people who are your worst enemies because they persecute you. In contrast to the standard of human religion which is superficial, small minded and limited as Psalm 119 verse 96 says, "God's commandment is exceeding broad." And from verse 44 on, down to verse 48, Jesus gives five principles to correct the faulty ethics of man's religion...five principles, five very short statements.

Statement number one, "Love your enemies." Statement number two, "Pray for your persecutors." Statement number three, "Manifest your sonship." Number four, exceed your fellow men. Number five, imitate your God. This is the King's standard.

Let's start with the first one, "Love your enemies." Verse 44 Jesus said it as clearly as it could be said, "Love your enemies." The idea is that your enemy, watch this one, is encompassed in the term "neighbor." There's only one law, there's not one law for Jews and another one for Gentiles, one law for friends and one for strangers, one law for residents and another for sojourners. No, within "neighbor" is everybody. And what is the most graphic illustration of that in the New Testament? It is the story of the Good Samaritan recorded in Luke chapter 10 verses 25 to 37. Jesus is asked a question, "Who is my neighbor?" And He tells a story about a man who was beaten and left for dead by robbers and He discusses how many people went around him and avoided him. And a Samaritan

came along who was an outcast and ministered to his needs. And Jesus is answering the question, "Who is my neighbor?" And the answer is anybody in your path, friend or foe, who has a need...anybody even a hated person, even someone culturally rejected.

In the year 1557 King Philip II of Spain sent the Duke of Alva as governor of the low countries. Alva was notorious for his bitter persecution of all who embraced reformed Christianity. So many people were put to death during the reign of the government of the Duke of Alva that it became known as the Reign of Terror and it was common to refer to his council as the blood council. Among the persecuted people was a poor, Protestant Christian whose name stayed with us, his name is Dirk Willemzoon(?). He was condemned to death for his opinions. Dirk made an escape from his persecutors and he was fleeing for his life. Historians say he was pursued by a soldier, a frozen lake lay in his path. It was early in the year and the ice on that lake was very brittle and likely to break. He had no choice, however, but to chance it. As he went across it, says the writer, it cracked and shook but he ran for his life, avoiding if he could a horrible and torturous death by drowning. The shore lay before him and at last he leaped from the trembling ice to the firm shore. But a cry of terror came from behind him. He looked back and saw the soldier chasing him sinking through the broken ice into the deadly cold water and no one was there to help. Dirk couldn't let him die. And he didn't. He went back over the crackling ice, endangering his own life, and succeeded in saving and reaching shore, carrying his enemy.

That's the heart of the matter. Love your enemy, meeting the need of anybody in your path, no matter who they are, even your own personal enemy. This is, by the way, an amazing command, it defies all human norms. And certainly it defies the mentality of our current day which has justified vengeance and even exalted vengeance. Yet it is clearly the law of the King, the royal law. And by the way, that word "love," *agapao*, there are a number of words, as you probably know, in the Greek that signify love, there is *storge*(?) which means family love. There is *eros* which means sexual love. There is *phileo* which means a friendship love. Then there is this *agapao* and it is the highest and noblest and most intelligent and most willful love, it is the love of the will. It doesn't need emotion, it doesn't need physical attachment. It doesn't need sexual stimulation. It doesn't need attraction. It just is the love of the will. And it is the love that seeks another's greatest good at any expense. God is not calling us to have a friendly affection for everyone. He's not calling us to be passionate toward everyone. He's not calling us to have some kind of family love which is reserved for those who are related to us. He is calling us to love with a love that is sacrificial and seeks the good of another, no matter what the price of that good might be. It is that very love, by the way, that is defined in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 where it says, "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it is boastful, it is not puffed up, it doesn't behave itself rudely. It seeks not its own." It isn't preoccupied with itself. It is always unselfish. It is always seeking others. And it is willing to give itself away even for an enemy. I mean, this was way beyond the conception of the Jews of that time. I mean they couldn't even identify with this. As commentator Lenski writes, "It indeed sees all the hatefulness and the

wickedness of the enemy, feels his stabs and his blows, may even have something to do toward warding them off. But all this fills the loving heart with the one desire and aim, to free that enemy from his hate, to rescue that enemy from his sin and thus to save his soul. It is the noblest of loves."

It can take a criminal, may have robbed me and threatened my life, it can take a false, lying and slanderous person who has vilified me publicly and by the grace of God make them the object of my prayers and longings and desires for the best. It is the kind of love that Stephen exhibited in the book of Acts in the seventh chapter as his life was being crushed out with the stones being thrown at him by the hateful Jewish leaders who wanted to snuff out his life because he had preached the gospel. It is the love that looks to heaven and says, "Father, don't lay this sin to their charge." It is the love that Jesus exhibits on the cross that says, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing," as they mocked Him in His death. It is not a feeling of the emotions, it is an act of the will and it is super-human. But it is the love that is the standard for the Kingdom. Luke 6, by the way, records for us some of the same teaching that we find here. And Luke adds the phrase in Luke 6, "Do good to them that hate you." Our enemy seeks our harm, but we seek his good. This is Godlike.

You remember, don't you, in Romans 5:10 that Paul said, "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God?" And in verse 8, "God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He loved us when we were enemies, it's Godlike to love your enemies.

So first is love your enemies, that's the first standard. Second, pray for your persecutors. Pray for those who persecute you. That's just part of the Christian experience. You look back at verse 10 in this sermon, back to the end of the Beatitudes, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. I mean, it just kind of goes with the territory. Religious persecution has always been the worst persecution. Religious hostility always the worst hostility. The greatest blood baths in the history of the world have been religious wars and they still are. Religious enemies are the bitterest enemies because it is Satan against God.

And what should be our attitude toward those who persecute us? Prayer. Spurgeon said, "Prayer is the forerunner of mercy." We pray for God to show them mercy. We pray with Stephen, "Don't lay this sin to their account." We pray with Jesus, "Forgive them." We pray, "Father, save them." Chrysostom, the early church father, saw this responsibility to pray for your persecutors as what he called the highest summit of spiritual self-control. The cruel torture of the crucifixion could not silence Christ's prayer for His persecutors. The crushing stones could not silence Stephen's prayer for his persecutors. I wonder what small pain inflicted on us causes us to hate rather than to pray. What small pain inflicted on us elevates prejudice and has silenced our prayers on behalf of our enemies.

I remember when a wonderful young man who was a part of our family, Tim Rae, our nephew, son of Duane and Carmen. Duane served for many years as a pastor here in our church. I remember when he was murdered while working in a market by someone who came in to rob in order to purchase drugs. Tim tried to defend the cashier at the check stand and the gun was drawn and his life was snuffed out while he was still a young man in his college days. And I remember what was in the heart of his father after this horrible and unnecessary murder of his son by a man who would be assumed by anybody in our society to be the riff-raff of the culture of no value at all. I remember that Duane repeatedly was concerned to be able to get to the jail where they had this man incarcerated because he wanted to desperately to share with him the gospel of Jesus Christ...which he did. And prayed so faithfully for the salvation of the one who killed his own son. That is an ethic that rises beyond human religion.

You can tell the truth...you can tell the real thing because there's that kind of love. If somebody says somewhere the Christians are killing the Muslims, or somebody says somewhere that Christians are blowing up the Catholics, may I suggest to you those aren't the Christians. Christians live by another standard.

There's a third principle here. Love your enemies, that will lead you to pray for your persecutors. Thirdly, manifest your sonship. In verse 45, Jesus says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you in order that, or for the purpose, that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." In other words, so that in the eyes of everyone it becomes clear who you belong to. Only as we love as God loves, only as we love as Christ loves can we prove whose sons we really are. If we want to establish the fact in the minds of people that we are the children of God, then we need to love as God loves and God loves His enemies and prays for His persecutors. If we just behave like God behaves, then they'll know who we belong to.

Jesus again teaching as recorded by Luke in Luke 6, listen to verses 35 and 36. "But love your enemies and do good and lend, expect nothing in return and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men." You want everybody to know who you belong to? Then be kind to ungrateful and evil people. That's not human. And we are reminded again of the same truth by the Apostle Paul writing in Ephesians 5 verses 1 and 2, "Be imitators of God." How? "Walk in love." You're never more Godlike than when you love your enemy. You're never more Godlike than when you pray for your persecutor. You're never more Christlike, you never are manifesting greater evidence that you are in the Kingdom than when you love as He loves. We must be more diligent in cultivating supernatural fruit if we would have people know there's a supernatural root.

Now let's go back to this verse. "In order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven," that is to point out that this is not an earthly lifestyle. And then verse 45 further says, "For He...that is God in heaven...causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." What is that saying? It's not saying God loves everybody. Even the people that hate Him, even the people that curse His name, even the people that blaspheme Him, even the people that reject His Son, that hate His Word, even the people that are the children of Satan, His arch enemy wake up every morning to the sun, breathe the air, enjoy the blue sky, the green grass, food, family, love, happiness, adventure. It all belongs to all of us. You see, God doesn't hold back His goodness from His enemies. This is called common grace by theologians, or you could call it providence. And in this sense God's divine love is indiscriminate. Oh I see people in the world who are wealthy, who have everything...the biggest houses, the most comfortable circumstances and situations, the most glamor, the most possessions, the most adventure. I mean, they can afford houses all over everywhere. They can have every kind of climate. They can live any way they want. And yet they would shake their fist in the face of God and curse Christ. Rabbi Ben Nehemiah used to say, "Have you ever noticed that the rain fell on the field of A who was righteous and not on the field of B who was wicked? Or have you noticed...says the rabbi...that the sun rose and shone on Israel who was righteous and not upon Gentiles who were wicked? Hardly. God causes the sun to shine on both...said the rabbi...for the Lord is good to all." That's not like people. Fallen man isn't like that. We would be very selective if we were in control of the sunshine....or the rain.

And there's a rabbinic tale which tells about the instruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. When the Egyptians were drowned, the angels began to praise but God said, sorrowfully, "The work of My hands, the Egyptians, are sunk in the sea and you would sing before Me?" In Psalm 145 and verse 15, the psalmist wrote, "The eyes of all weighed upon Thee and Thou givest them their meat in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." It's universal benevolence. God is a Savior of all men, 1 Timothy 4:10. God so loved the world, even His enemies. So love your enemies. Pray for your persecutors. And manifest your sonship by loving and praying for those who are against you, you will reveal that you belong to God because you're like Him.

Fourth, exceed your fellow men...exceed your fellow men. Verse 46, "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax gatherers do the same?" The point here is if your love is limited only to people who love you, what's noble about that? I mean, even the worst and, you know, the tax gatherer was the term used to describe the most despicable person in the culture because they were Jews who had basically bought the right to collect Roman taxes from their own people which amounted to extortion which was kind of a mafia operation, even sinking to a protection racket. The most despicable people in the culture of the Jews were the tax collectors who had sold themselves to Rome to extort their own people, even they knew how to respond to themselves, even they loved their own kind. That isn't noble, to love only those who fit your scheme, to love only those who agree with you, to love only those who love you, or belong to your race, or your niche, or your

religion, or your culture and hate somebody else beyond that. That's not...that's not an inch above the worst of humanity. The lowest level of people do that. Love those who fit in with their selfish, proud prejudices. There's nothing noble about that. The despised renegade Jew who became a traitor and an extortioner of his own people was despised and hated but Jesus said he ought to be loved. And if you don't rise to love them, you're no better than them because even they love their own. There's no place for just loving your group, that's exclusivism, cliquish, racist occasionally, in fact a lot. You need to rise above that. You need to exceed your fellow man who loved those who loved them. There's no reward for that.

Verse 47 adds, "And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles or the pagans do the same?" Oh, you've got your clique, you've got your brotherhood. And you hang tight with your brotherhood and you hate people beyond that. There's nothing commendable about that. If you just love the people in your group, you're no better than the worst. The worst do that, criminals do that.

And you see, the whole essence of this sermon is just cracked open again here because Jesus is showing them that they are vile sinners in spite of their pious hypocrisy. They applaud the love which they give to their own kind and Jesus says it is no better than the worst. They love each other. What reward have you? What do you expect to gain from that? What do you more than anybody else? That just puts you in with the rest of the pagan world. The Master expects from His disciples such conduct as is inexplicable on human terms. He expects us to act and to think and to talk and live at another level. We can't have the attitudes of the world. We can't have their values. We can't have their morals. We can't have their priorities. We can't have their kind of love and expect people to call us children of God. We have to be unusual. We have to be unearthly. There has to be something so different, transcendent that the only explanation is that we belong to another order, another level of life. We have to return evil with good. We have to love our enemies, pray for our persecutors, thus manifest our sonship and exceed our fellow men.

Now if you're gasping for air about now and saying, "How in the world do you expect me to live like this?" you're right where we want you. If you're starting to feel that this is a little beyond you, that's perfect. If you think it's been tough up to now, wait till you hear the next one. Point five, love your enemies, pray for your persecutors, manifest your sonship, exceed your fellow man, how about this? Be like God, verse 48, "Therefore, the sum of it all is you're to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Oh, that's all. Ahh, well, now we understand. That's the ethic. That's the standard the King has set. That is the standard for His subjects. Whoa...I mean, that's just plain impossible. You've got it. That is exactly right. And that is the reason that no man-made religion will ever achieve it. We are to be holy as He is holy. It says that in Leviticus. It says that in 1 Peter. We are to be perfect as He is

perfect.

You say, "But...but...but I can't be." You're right. And that puts you in exactly the position that the King wants you in, where you recognize the standard is unattainable. Can't meet it. He is calling for a level of righteousness that is way beyond all of us. He is calling for something so profound, so deep, so divine, so transcendent that we can't fulfill it. And so what you do is take human religion and trash it. That's what Paul did. In Philippians 3, do you remember what Paul says? "I spent all my life accumulating the achievements of human religion." Listen to his testimony. He said, "I was circumcised on the eighth day. I was of the nation of Israel. I was of the tribe of Benjamin. I was a Hebrew of Hebrews." In other words, I kept the traditions. "As to the law, I chose to be a Pharisee." There were only six thousand of them in all of Israel and they were fanatical about the law. "As to zeal, I was so zealous for my religion I persecuted the church. As to the righteousness, superficially which is in the law, I was blameless on the outside, I toed the line." And he says, "I considered those gain to me. And I considered that I had achieved righteousness." And then he says in Philippians 3, "I saw Christ. I saw the true standard, and immediately I counted all those things not gain, but...what?...loss." They would just damn me. "And I counted them but rubbish, dung...says the old version." And he says this, "I found in Him...in Christ...a righteousness not of my own but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." Wow.

This is the...this is the whole point of Christianity. The King comes and the King says here's the standard. And everybody says hopeless. That's exactly where you need to be. It's exactly where you need to be. I can't do it. You're right. There's no effort within human religion that can achieve it. What do I do? You do what people throughout all of redemptive history have done, you fall on your face before God and you say, "I can't do it. I cannot reach the standard, I cannot be perfect as God is perfect. What will I do? And God says, "Because of your penitence, because of your recognition of your inability I have made provision to give you the righteousness you need." Isn't that it? And when you put your faith in Jesus Christ and receive Him as Lord and Savior, you are given the righteousness of God so that now in the eyes of God you are as perfect as God is and He plants His Holy Spirit in you and love is shed abroad in your heart so that you can love on a transcendent level.

Now, you see, that's the manifesto of the King. And it leads us really to a Beatitude Attitude. It leads us back to the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. It leads us to being poor in spirit. What does that mean? Spiritually bankrupt and saying, "Well I fall horribly short." It leads us to mourning over our condition, to meekness and humility. It leads us to hunger and thirst for a righteousness we cannot achieve. And when we realize our spiritual poverty, and realize the sadness and sorrow of our condition and in meekness and a hunger and thirst for righteousness, then it says we receive the Kingdom, we are comforted, we inherit the earth and we're satisfied. God saves the broken penitent who knows he or she can't attain the standard.

So Jesus came, set a standard nobody could keep, dismantled the religion of Judaism and every other system of human religion. And left the sinner in total despair with nowhere to turn but to fall on his face before God and plead for God to give him a righteousness that would satisfy God. And that is the story of Christianity. Listen to this, God grants us the very righteousness He requires. He gives us the righteousness of Christ.

You say, "How can He do that? How can He do that? How can God just give the sinner the righteousness of Christ?" I'll tell you how, because He gave Christ the sinner's sin. He imputed to Jesus Christ our sins and He imputes to us Christ's righteousness. That was the message of the King. And some heard it and believed. Some did not and so it is, even until now. Let's bow in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You that a Christian is not one who keeps the Sermon on the Mount but one who knows he can't, and comes to You to receive righteousness as a gift by faith. We thank You, Father, that You've made it so clear that we cannot be justified, made right with You by the works of the Law, but we are given, according to Romans 3:22 Your righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. And You require a perfect righteousness and You give it to us. And then, Lord, we can love as You love. Father, work that work in every heart, in Your Son's name. Amen.

In closing, I want to tell you a favorite story. True, a favorite of mine. I've loved Abraham Lincoln for years and found his life fascinating. In my younger days I used to read about him. I'll never forget reading about his relationship to a man named Stanton. In fact, no one treated Abraham Lincoln with more contempt than Mr. Stanton did. He called Lincoln a low, cunning clown in public. He nicknamed him, mocking his looks, the original gorilla and said men were foolish to wander around Africa trying to capture a gorilla when they could be so easily found in Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln never said anything in reply to these statements. And because Stanton, believe it or not, was the best man for the job, when Lincoln was President, he made him his war minister and gave him charge of the fighting men of the United States, treated Stanton with every courtesy as the years passed. And then one night an assassins bullet tore out Lincoln's life in the Ford Theater. And in the little room to which the President's body was taken, there stood that same Stanton and he looked down into the silent face of Abraham Lincoln with all its ruggedness and speaking through his tears he said, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." Once he thought he was a gorilla, now he's seeing him as the greatest of men. That's the power of love, isn't it? That's the same kind of love God chose toward us and asks us to show toward others.

I trust you'll be faithful to do just that. Then people will know whose children we really are.

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