

August 15, 2021

"But I tell you..."

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,' and '...anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'" "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment..."

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."

"Be perfect, therefore, as our heavenly Father is perfect."

Matthew 5:21-48

It is a clear choice. *"You have heard it said...But I tell you..."* Throughout his ministry, Jesus lays down this straight forward challenge over and over again. Here's what the world tells you. Here's what I tell you. Now, whose direction are you going to take? Literally, who will be your God?

In the twenty-one centuries since Jesus made that challenge nothing has changed. The issues have changed, and changed again, and again, but the challenge is still exactly the same. You have heard it said that... Fill in the blank.

You have heard it said that you should eat kale. You have heard it said that you should refuse to eat kale. You have heard it said that you should make your bed every day. You have heard it said that making your bed is actually unhealthy. You have heard it said that...

And, in those same twenty-one centuries the challenge in words of Jesus have not changed. You have heard it said that you should not murder, but I'm telling you don't even let yourself get angry. You have heard it said that you shouldn't commit adultery, or divorce, or swear, or get even. But I tell you live out love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you in every situation and in every circumstance. *"But I tell you..."*

Over and over again Jesus will challenge those who would follow him to choose. We either choose to follow the world or we choose to follow Jesus. Either we are the god we worship or the God of heaven is our God and we will follow only him.

If we choose to follow the God of heaven then every word and every action should reflect that choice. To do otherwise is to try to live two lives at the same time and that cannot be done. So, when believers are wrestling with current issues, regardless of what those issues might be, the question is never 'what do you think?' or 'how do you feel about...?' For the believer the only question is always and only, 'What does Jesus tell me?'

Either we follow Jesus or we follow the world. We cannot follow both. In his 'Sermon on the Mount' our Lord is showing us this exact reality. *"You have heard it said..., But I tell you..."* Our reaction to those words defines who we are. Our reaction to those words makes us light or darkness; makes us salt or sand.

In his final challenge in this section of his lesson Jesus commands us to *"Be perfect...as our heavenly Father is perfect."* There are a number of ways, I think, that you and I can take this commandment. We can seek to love perfectly as our heavenly Father loves perfectly. We can seek to be consistent as our unchanging God is consistent. We can seek to be complete as our Lord and Master is complete.

I am convinced that Jesus is calling those who would follow him to be perfected in their complete surrender to the will of God. For our perfection to be as our heavenly Father's perfection we must perfectly follow him and no other. His control our our existence must be complete with nothing excepted.

