

August 22, 2021

## **"But I tell you..."**

***"For I tell you unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."***

***"You have heard that it was said...But I tell you..."***

***"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."***

***"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also..."***

***No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."***

Matthew 5:20-6:24

As we have noted several times over the past few weeks, Jesus' statement to the crowd that their righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law they would certainly not enter heaven would have confused many. The vast majority of those who heard Jesus say this were probably astonished because they believed that the Pharisees were the most righteous believers among them.

Most of the rest of Jesus' 'sermon' is, I believe, explaining this statement. The Pharisees taught, as many believers still do, that righteousness is all about keeping the letter of the law. If the law says ***"Do not murder..."*** and you never murder anyone you are righteous. You can claim, even as you rage at others and despise them, 'Well, at least I have not murdered anyone.' Keeping the letter of the law will never make us righteous especially if we are, at the same time, setting aside, ***"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you..."***

In our context for today our Lord continues to explain true righteousness. Keeping the letter of the law while raging at, objectifying or condemning others will never make us righteous. In the same way doing 'acts of righteousness' in order to appear righteous in the eyes of others will never make us righteous.

So, the Master would teach us to give, to pray, and to fast without anyone else even knowing about it. Again, it is easy to miss the principle that Jesus is demonstrating here. His words are not just about how we give, or how we pray, or how we fast. Our motives matter in these 'acts' as they do in everything we do.

If we are motivated by a desire to appear to be righteous or religious in the eyes of others, then our 'acts' are pointless and cannot and do not make us righteous. Our Lord is confronting the question of where our allegiance lies. If my 'acts of righteousness' are done to impress others; to look the part; or to appear holy then I am serving the world. If my 'acts of righteousness' are motivated by an overwhelming desire to serve the God of heaven who saved me from damnation then I am serving that God. At no time and in no way can I serve both.

My righteousness and yours will surpass that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law when we really submit to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and let our righteousness come from the only true source, our Father in heaven. Jesus would conclude this portion of his 'sermon'

with this personal challenge; where is your treasure; your heart? Where are mine? Who do I serve? The world or the Master?

For where your  
*Treasure* is,  
there will your  
*Heart*  
be also.  
~Matthew 6:21  
