



TRUTH IN LOVE

Shedding Light on the Word of God

BETTER THAN MOTHER THERESA

Matthew 5:20

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 5:20 would have felt like an executioner's strike to most of those who heard it. I can imagine the scene—mouths drop open to emit muted gasps. Stunned silence follows. I imagine Jesus may have stopped here to allow the impact of His words to sink in. I can almost see the waves of fear and despair roll across the crowd.

SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

To get a sense for what Jesus is saying, we must understand that the **scribes and Pharisees** were the religious elite. *Everyone* looked up to them. If you were to wrap Mother Theresa, John MacArthur, Chuck Smith, and Zane Hodges up into one person, aside from the very strange mixture of theology, you would still not come close to the way Jews respected and looked up to the scribes and Pharisees of that day.

Modern Christianity has given the scribes and Pharisees a bad rap. They were not the conniving, scheming, beady-eyed, murderous, hypocritical heretics we sometimes portray them as. They were actually very good Jews. They knew Scripture better than almost anyone else in history. They were meticulously obedient to the Law of God. If they were alive today, they would probably be something like a cross between a pastor and a seminary professor.¹

EXCEEDINGLY RIGHTEOUS

And yet Jesus taught **that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.** Jesus is telling His disciples that if they want to get into heaven, they have to be better than the Pharisees. Therefore, nobody can be good enough to get into heaven.

So what is the solution? Trying harder won't work, because a few verses later, Jesus tells His disciples that God doesn't just want us to be better than Mother Theresa. We have to be perfect, as God is perfect (Matt 5:48). And this doesn't mean "become perfect" but instead, we must live our entire lives perfect. Therefore, anyone who has ever sinned, even if it is only one little sin one time, is not perfect and cannot go to heaven. One sin makes you just as guilty as if you had committed all sins (Jas 2:10). We must be entirely perfect in order to get to heaven.

This, as the disciples later recognize, is impossible, but thankfully, Jesus tells them that what is impossible with man, is possible with God (Matt 19:25-26). Since we cannot do enough good works to get to heaven, and we need God's perfect righteousness to get there, God decided to give His righteousness to us (2 Cor 5:21). Anyone who believes in Jesus for everlasting life gets this perfect righteousness of God as part of the salvation package.

ETERNAL LIFE IS FREE

Have you believed in Jesus for everlasting life? Do you know without a doubt, that if you were to die today (or 20 years from now), that no matter what you would go to heaven to be with God? Do you know that it is not based on your works—past, present, or future—but solely on Jesus Christ? If so, then you have surpassed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, for in Christ, you have the very righteousness of God.²

¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 231.

² *Ibid.*, 237. Cf. John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), Electronic Edition, (Parsons Technology: Hiawatha, IA, 1997).

Nevertheless, though we do not have to become righteous by works in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, works are still vitally important, for the purpose of ruling and reigning with Christ in eternity.³ Much of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount is spent laying out the standards of higher righteousness that Jesus requires—not for entrance into heaven, but for a rich inheritance to those who receive the free gift of eternal life by faith in Him (cf. Matt 5:12, 46; 6:1-5).

³ Ben Witherington III, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Matthew* (S&H: Macon, GA, 2006), 127.



The girls have enjoyed playing outside this summer in the cooler weather.

Recently we added two hamsters to our family—Siberian dwarf hamsters. They are better than regular hamsters because they don't bite, love to cuddle, and insist on playing with their human owners, which is great for three little girls who like anything cute and fuzzy! Two years without something fuzzy to cuddle with has been too long for us! Not only are they adored by the girls and myself, Jeremy has been seen pampering them as well. He designed and built a one-of-a-kind Lego playhouse for them which is about two feet long, complete with spiraling stairs and a teeter-totter bridge. We probably have the most pampered hamsters this side of Oklahoma.

Ministry Update

by Jeremy

I just finished third semester Hebrew, and now have a short lull in the classes before they begin again near the end of August. Of course, during that time, I have to begin working on my Master's Thesis (the outline is due August 15), and get caught up on piles of paperwork that has built up over the past year.

The big announcement, however, is that I am updating my website, and along with it, have started a ministry web log (aka "blog"). To read and contribute to it, access my website at www.tillhecomes.org and click on "Blog." It is there that you can interact with me regarding my sermons, these newsletters, various ideas I have about church planting, and miscellaneous theological topics. My most recent post deals somewhat with an article that has recently been published which blasts various Free Grace authors and speakers (myself among them) as teaching a false gospel. You'll have to read the blog to find out more.

Also, we are continuing to move forward with possible plans for church planting. We aren't closing the door on taking an established church (far from it!). It is just that I have some visions and ideas for how to do church that would probably split most established churches, but might work quite well in a church planting situation. I may interact with you on these ideas in the blog and would appreciate your input.

Family Update

by Wendy

We are having a great summer so far. But we are probably one of the few families in Dallas that loves the constant rain. We actually get to go outside and play when it rains because it is not too hot and the mosquitoes don't come out in the rain. My new motto is, "Rain, rain, come again..."

We were also very blessed to travel to Illinois to see my family for two weeks while Jeremy stayed in Dallas for a summer class. It was fun watching the cousins play with our three girls. You'd think they had been best friends forever. And of course, Grandma and Grandpa spoiled them with tons of love and attention.



Our girls love to dress up like princesses! (What girl doesn't?)