

## Week of January 24, 2021

### Matthew 5:13-48

<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet. <sup>14</sup>You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. <sup>15</sup>Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

<sup>17</sup>“Don’t even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven’t come to do away with them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup>I say to you very seriously that as long as heaven and earth exist, neither the smallest letter nor even the smallest stroke of a pen will be erased from the Law until everything there becomes a reality. <sup>19</sup>Therefore, whoever ignores one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called the lowest in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps these commands and teaches people to keep them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup>I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago, *Don’t commit murder*, and all who commit murder will be in danger of judgment. <sup>22</sup>But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment. If they say to their brother or sister, ‘You idiot,’ they will be in danger of being condemned by the governing council. And if they say, ‘You fool,’ they will be in danger of fiery hell. <sup>23</sup>Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift at the altar and go. First make things right with your brother or sister and then come back and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup>Be sure to make friends quickly with your opponents while you are with them on the way to court. Otherwise, they will haul you before the judge, the judge will turn you over to the officer of the court, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup>I say to you in all seriousness that you won’t get out of there until you’ve paid the very last penny.

<sup>27</sup>“You have heard that it was said, *Don’t commit adultery*. <sup>28</sup>But I say to you that every man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart. <sup>29</sup>And if your right eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It’s better that you lose a part of your body than that your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup>And if your right hand causes you to fall into sin, chop it off and throw it away. It’s better that you lose a part of your body than that your whole body go into hell.

<sup>31</sup>“It was said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must *give her a divorce certificate*.’ <sup>32</sup>But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife except for sexual unfaithfulness forces her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

<sup>33</sup>“Again you have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago: *Don’t make a false solemn pledge, but you should follow through on what you have pledged to the Lord*. <sup>34</sup>But I say to you that you must not pledge at all. You must not pledge by heaven, because it’s God’s throne. <sup>35</sup>You must not pledge by the earth, because it’s God’s footstool. You must not pledge by Jerusalem, because it’s the city of the great king. <sup>36</sup>And you must not pledge by your head, because you can’t turn one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup>Let your *yes* mean yes, and your *no* mean no. Anything more than this comes from the evil one.

<sup>38</sup>“You have heard that it was said, *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*. <sup>39</sup>But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well. <sup>40</sup>When they wish to haul you to court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too. <sup>41</sup>When they force you to go one mile, go with them two. <sup>42</sup>Give to those who ask, and don’t refuse those who wish to borrow from you.

<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, *You must love your neighbor* and hate your enemy. <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you <sup>45</sup>so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup>And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup>Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete.

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### A New Way

When we were children, there were countless things we didn’t understand about the way

the world works. That truth was made especially apparent when we became adults and left our parents' houses for the first time. Becoming an adult is a rude awakening for many of us because we believed certain things about what being an adult means that simply weren't true. As kids, we thought our parents had things easy - no homework, money to do whatever they want, they can eat whatever they want, etc. But as an adult, coming home after a long, hard day of work, when multiple bills are due, and when you've put on weight that you can't seem to shake, you realize it was all a lie, being an adult is harder than it looks through the rose colored glasses of children.

While children have those rose colored glasses yanked off at adulthood, many of us never get the tinted lenses of religious piety removed. We believe being a faithful follower of Jesus is simple - all we have to do is trust in him and things will be good as gold. But in Jesus' sermon on the mount he told us that our presupposition wasn't quite right. Again and again he says, "you heard it was said... but I say to you..." and every time he did, it made things more difficult for his followers. It's not just "thou shalt not kill," but "thou shalt not do or say anything that kills someone's spirit." It's not just, "thou shalt not commit adultery," but "thou shalt not look at another with lusty eyes." It's not just, "thou shalt not make a false solemn pledge," but "thou shalt have your words be so meaningful you never have to pledge by anything." Once people could look at the commandments of God (the ten commandments and otherwise) and say about themselves, "I do these, I must be better than others," but Jesus told us that we're all guilty. None of us can proclaim innocence, none of us is better than another.

We try to make things as easy as possible, we have whole industries built on easy, but Jesus has made a new way, and it's the opposite of easy. But following God shouldn't be easy. It should be something we work for, something we strive for with every fiber of our being so that it matters. The easy in our world is usually chosen over the difficult because the decrease in quality is worth the savings in time and effort. Faith simply can't be a place where there are shortcuts. It demands the highest quality, the most commitment, the very best. But all that effort has value, because it brings us closer to the one who also didn't take the easy way for us. Jesus died on a cross in unimaginable agony for us, because it was by that agony that ours would be spared. Our devotion, therefore, is to reflect Jesus' devotion to us.

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*God, you are the author of life and the creator of justice. You have given us a set of rules to follow so that we can live into the justice you've created. As faithful followers of Jesus Christ, whose own love sent him to the cross on our behalf, help us to seek full devotion instead of easy and comfortable. Help us to see that the difficulty of following these commandments isn't because you're an unkind God, but because we've created an unkind world, ignoring your commandments. Guide us. Sustain us. Encourage us. Amen.*