

**Jan. 17, 2016**  
**Jesus and the Kingdom Pt. 4**  
**For Theirs is the Kingdom**  
**Jeff Kennedy**

**Recap:** 5:17-20

Insufficient righteousness is...

Jesus cautioned us against...

**1. Practicing our faith as a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ (6:1-18).**

- Ex. 1: Giving in secret (1-4)
- Ex. 2a: Private devotion (5-7)
- Ex. 2b: Praying in simplicity (8-15)
- Ex. 3: Surreptitious fasting (16-18)

**2. Don't serve the wrong \_\_\_\_\_ (vv.19-24).**

- Set your \_\_\_\_\_ on heaven's kingdom (19-21)
- Set your \_\_\_\_\_ on healthy things (22-23)

**3. Don't succumb to the world's \_\_\_\_\_ (6:25-34).**

- Avoid anxiety over God's provision (25, 27, 31, 34)
- Because we are \_\_\_\_\_ to God (26)
- Because we can't \_\_\_\_\_ our lives through fear (27)
- Because we serve the \_\_\_\_\_ God—a heavenly *Father* (32)

**4. Use good \_\_\_\_\_ but don't \_\_\_\_\_ (7:1-6).**

- Judgment is \_\_\_\_\_ alone (7:1-2)
- Sin disqualifies \_\_\_\_\_ (7:3)
- We should clean up our \_\_\_\_\_ before we \_\_\_\_\_ others (7:4-5)
- Even when we're \_\_\_\_\_, we shouldn't \_\_\_\_\_ the truth on the unwilling (6-7)

**5. We can trust the Father's \_\_\_\_\_ (7:7-11).**

- Be \_\_\_\_\_ seekers of God (7-8)

**6. We should take the \_\_\_\_\_ less \_\_\_\_\_ (7:12-14).**

- There are two \_\_\_\_\_ (7:13-14)
- There are two \_\_\_\_\_ (7:15-23)
- There are two \_\_\_\_\_ (7:24-27)

**Conclusion:** There are two responses today...

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Introduction: Last week we looked at Jesus' first recorded sermon in Matthew and zoomed in on the Kingdom values taught in the beatitudes, the influence of the Kingdom by those who live out Kingdom principles, and the fact that Jesus fulfills—or brings the entirety of Jewish religion to its intended completion. Lastly, we established that Jesus assumed an unprecedented Kingdom authority to instruct them and to tell them God's word. Jesus doesn't speak as a representative of God (like Moses or the prophets)—Jesus is speaks with God's authentic voice to the people.

In 5:17-20, Jesus says “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Jesus then gives them 6 legal texts from the Torah—6 examples of how the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees has not cut it.

- Murder—expanding the commandment to murderous rage.
- Adultery—expanding the commandment to avarice and covetous desire.

With these two commands, Jesus teaches that insufficient righteousness is:

- Legalism: mere outward compliance to the regulations of the Law.
- Externalism: One-dimensional obedience absent the engagement of one's heart.
- Hypocrisy: Jesus follows these two legal texts with examples of hypocritical religion—which is worse than mere outward obedience—this is deception—it is pretending to be something we're not. The word hypocrisy is *hypocrites* in Greek, and means “play actor. One who wears a mask on stage and removes the mask to reveal his true face off stage.”

Jesus mentions...

- Divorce—Frivolous divorce was rampant among the Pharisees and Scribes... The religious leaders appeared to be the models of stability and morality—yet, their home lives were in shambles.
- Oaths—Religious vows that were easily broken on legal precedent. Publically committing oneself to fasting or giving large sums and then breaking that vow based on the fine print of rabbinic loopholes was abhorrent to Jesus. Jesus commanded them instead to follow through.
- Retaliation—Retribution for being crossed or slighted ignores entirely the mercy teaching of the Torah. Moses had lots to say about forgiveness and welcoming outsiders.
- Prayer for political enemies: Which should lead to a love for your enemies.

Summary: Jesus summarizes this teaching section by saying so be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect (*teleios*)—meaning be a complete follower of God. And any righteousness that fails to engage the heart in outward obedience, any form of phony righteousness that fails to practice what it preaches is insufficient righteousness. It's incomplete and therefore falls short of God's righteous standard.

Transition: Now we come to chapter 6 and 7 where Jesus is essentially showing the opposite of the blessed life—here's what it looks like when the pious, the revolutionaries, the compromisers, and when they follow their own path.

Jesus is showing us that “almost good enough” isn't good enough.

Jesus cautioned us against...

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1. Practicing our faith as a badge of spirituality (6:1-18). We must seek to impress God alone. And Jesus gives several examples of first century religion to highlight this point...

- Ex. 1: Giving in secret (v. 1-4)—The public nature of almsgiving in the first century did not normally lend itself to “secret” giving. Because there was no social security or social safety net system in their world, acts of altruism were commonly done in the open such as the temple gates, crowded markets, especially during times of national feasts when many wealthy travelers came to town for religious worship and celebration. Jesus’ emphasis here is on the act of generosity with discretion instead giving for public accolades.
- Ex. 2a: Private devotion (v. 5-7)—prayer was another act of devotion often done in groups and in public. While private prayer was encouraged by the rabbis—the community orientation of their culture would often involve broadcasting a prayer in a public forum such as the synagogue meetings.
- Ex. 2b: Praying in simplicity (v. 8-15)—Jesus’ prayer is a striking contrast to the common prayers among the rabbis at the time—namely the *Shemoneh Esrei* (or *Tefillah*) meaning the “18 blessings” recited as a long introduction to the prayer, followed by much ceremony and prayerful readings from the Torah.

“For slanderers, may there be no hope; and may all wickedness quickly be destroyed, and may all your enemies be cut off swiftly. The sinners, swiftly may they be uprooted, broken, cast down and subdued, swiftly and in our days. Blessed are you, L-RD, breaker of enemies and subjugator of all sinners.”

Jesus’ prayer is a lesson in contrasts. It’s personal rather than formal (our Father), it’s far simpler, straightforward, and stresses God’s forgiveness of us and our need to forgive the “sinners” and “slanderers” who oppress us.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> example he gives is the need for...

- Ex. 3: Surreptitious fasting (16-18)—Next, Jesus mentions the need for “invisible piety.” That is, if you’re voluntarily suffering for God—then don’t look like it so that people will remark what a devoted martyr for the faith you are.

Application: Jesus’ first point in chapter six is to tell us to make sure we practice our faith for an audience of one—God—and our faith is not a badge of spirituality—it is a personal devotion to God alone.

Jesus transitions from this and cautions his hearers to make sure they...

2. Don’t serve the wrong master (vv.19-24). Jesus challenges us to be devoted—which meant in his world “to be the property” or to be the sole possession of but one master.

And we do this as we...

- Set our hearts on heaven’s kingdom (19-21). The entire life is driven by the heart—and our lives drift in the direction of whatever we set our passions on. The real issue here is not whether you and I have money—but whether money has us. The real issue here is who’s sole possession are we? If we can have money and serve Jesus with it—the Kingdom will be blessed and enlarged. When we practice being rich toward God—regardless of our relative financial condition—we shake off the tyranny of materialism over our lives.
- Set your eyes on healthy things (22-23). The issue of the “evil” vs. the “good” or “healthy” eye would have been immediately recognizable to Jesus’ ancient audience. The play on words here is to have a “single” or “healthy” eye. Meaning, to set our passions and inner desire (eye) on the Lord.
- Illus. The power ball—it was all over TV, 1.6 billion dollars. I was watching coverage of the mania for the power ball lottery—and I’ve never had so much as a twinge of desire to buy a ticket because

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I have always thought it was a fools errand. Watching coverage of it last week I began to entertain the idea of buying a ticket. Of course so I could dig clean water wells across the globe. Then I began to think “well what if the places I want to dig clean water wells don’t have a way to get there—I should probably buy a luxury plane. And what if those places don’t have good landing strips—maybe I’ll need a luxury yacht so I can get there by sea...” The soul is the storehouse of virtue, the eyes are entry points into that sanctum, and if I make we mistake of filling up my soul with things instead of using things to further the Kingdom—we become slaves to a despotic master—materialism.

Let’s be careful to master our mammon rather than it mastering us. We can’t serve God AND money, but we can serve God With money—and if you can’t serve God with it—then better not to have much of it.

Next, Jesus says...

3. Don’t succumb to the world’s system (6:25-34). Jesus never says that we don’t need these basic things—in fact in the Disciple’s prayer—he explicitly tells us that Our Father knows that we “need them.” The real issue here is have we bought into the world’s system of worrying ourselves to death over the needs of life.

Scripture: <sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

- Avoid anxiety over God’s provision (25, 27, 31, 34)—4 different times Jesus charges his hearers not to “worry” or to be anxious about basic needs. “Do not be anxious” he says.

Why?

- Because we are valuable to God (26)—Nature is clothed in splendor—Jesus uses a rabbinic device that compares the lesser to the greater. How much more valuable are you then the best nature has to offer?
- Because we can’t prolong our lives through fear (27)—We will not add one second to life by stressing over what we don’t have, or worrying about what we should have. Being anxious doesn’t motivate God *more* to solve my issue more quickly.
- Because we serve the true God—a heavenly Father (32)—this one really rang their bell. Ancient deities were thought to be demanding gods who required perfection out of their slaves (human worshipers). Ancient conceptions of God were not fatherly—but despotic. And yet Jesus tells us to think of God as a loving, caring father who isn’t going to turn a blind eye to our needs.

Today’s worry will create a deep deficit of strength for tomorrows challenges. Today’s anxiety always borrows against tomorrow’s reserves and resources. Put your worry into perspective—the God of the universe values you above all creation.

Jesus goes on to tell them...

4. Use good judgment but don’t pass judgment (7:1-6). These are two separate uses of the word judgment. One is the idea of discernment—wise decision-making and wise judgment. The other is judgmentalism. Looking down our uppity noses at those who don’t look like us.

Here’s what Jesus says about that...

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- Judgment is God's prerogative alone (7:1-2)—Notice that Jesus says God will judge the judger. God is the one who will ultimately call us to account for actions and attitudes. So realize that the very metrics we've devised for others—Jesus will ultimately apply them back to us.
- Sin disqualifies everyone (7:3)—But everyone is sinful. Who can boast that their lives are free of sin? All of us must surrender to Christ's grace, repenting of sin—which separates us from God.
- Clean up your act before you assist others (7:4-5)—And Jesus does affirm our helping others out—but don't do it until you have the moral authority to. If you aim to help someone with a broken marriage, make sure yours is not in shambles first. If you want to help someone lose weight—make sure you're fit and trim and are practicing what you preach. Nothing worse than a sick doctor who smokes two packs a day. Physician heal thyself before thy start giving advice to me.
- Even when we're right, we shouldn't impose the truth on the unwilling (6-7). Jesus uses this analogy of not throwing pearls before swine or the sacred to dogs. In context, this is referring to the people who don't have any interest in removing the speck lodged in their eyes. Even if we are right—be careful not to impose the truth on someone who will just thoughtlessly discard it or abuse you and see the truth as worthless.

In other words—be careful not to pass judgment on others—but do be diligent in exercising wise judgment in all situations.

Jesus goes on to tell them...

5. We can trust the Father's goodness (7:7-11).

<sup>7</sup>“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. <sup>9</sup>

- Be persistent seekers of God (7-8)

When is the last time your son or daughter came into the kitchen and asked you for a sandwich and you handed him a brick? Or they asked for cereal and you gave them a bowl of mud? You and I wouldn't treat our children that way—and God's character is far more trustworthy than ours.

Illus. The other day I went to Logan's lunch and brought a little bag from McDonalds. He usually doesn't eat his lunch and his eyes lit up when I showed up with that bag. Expecting me to reach in and pull out some delicious fries—what if I unexpectedly pulled out a poisonous viper and handed it to him? Or a bag of hobo spiders?

You and I can trust the Father's goodness. We can rely on his character to provide for our needs, to be found just when he is needed—but we must become persistent, never giving up seekers of God.

Application: Our confidence to be persistent in prayer is grounded in the character of our God.

Lastly, Jesus warns us that...

6. We should take the path less travelled (7:12-14).

<sup>12</sup>“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

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- There are two ways (7:13-14)—the first way is broad and it's the way everyone seems to go. And that is the broad road of selfishness and living this way leads to destruction. But following the narrow path—the path of loving others the way God loves us—that path is a lonely path. It's counter-cultural.
- There are two trees (7:15-23)—Jesus talks about a tree being known for its fruit. Good trees bear genuine fruit. Then in the context, Jesus explicitly draws a contrast between true fruit and false fruit. Those who only looked on the surface to produce good works will present themselves to Jesus some day and say “Lord, did we not do all these miracles and amazing things in your name.” And his answer will be “depart from me. I never knew you.” The issue is not whether your works looked to be genuine—but whether the source and the object of your works was the true one. Otherwise, judgment forever.
- There are two builders (7:24-27)—putting Jesus' teaching into practice is of paramount importance. The builder who builds his life on the sayings and commands of Jesus—it will go well with us.

But the builder who fails to construct a life on Jesus' teaching—his house will fall with a great crash.

Closing story: Visiting Vern in his last hours and the tour of his home. I've never seen anyone so self-absorbed and also so fearful in the last moments of their death. He couldn't speak, he couldn't say a word, but when I walked into his room—he would have sat up in that bed if he could. His whole body reacted and he reached out a trembling hand to me and prayed and in his heart, I'm sure he confessed his sins and his faith in Jesus. Saved for eternity—probably so. But a life misspent on self.

Conclusion: There are two responses today...You can choose another way—you can choose to believe another Gospel—you can choose to build poorly on the wrong foundation.

But unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees—we will not enter the Kingdom. And choosing Jesus' way—to live Kingdom values, to recognize his absolute mastery and authority over our lives—choosing to build a life of selfless service, investing in the Kingdom—only then will it go well for us. Only then can we be sure that the life we've lived won't come crashing down around us.

Pray to acknowledge Jesus as your Savior and Lord. The unique son of the only God—God the son. You'll be saved.

Pray to surrender your life to the kingdom—to seek first the Kingdom and its righteousness and to allow God to add to you all else as well.