

The Heart of God's Law

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Matthew chapter 5. We're going to be looking at this long section this morning, so it will be a real help if you have the Bible open in front of you, and if you can follow.

The last couple of weeks we've been looking at the beginning of Jesus' preaching of his revolutionary kingdom. First of all, in the Beatitudes, he describes his followers.

The king's people. And then he goes on immediately to declare what they're for, that his people are his ambassadors, carrying his rule and his influence into the world, the salt to preserve and to flavour the world, and to demonstrate his message, the message of the kingdom in the world.

And then we saw that Jesus means that we, his people, his ambassadors, are to fulfil the whole of the Old Testament, the law and the prophets.

At last, with his coming, and with his calling out of his people, his people will at last be truly lights to the whole world, bringing salvation, not just beyond the borders of Israel, but to the ends of the earth, making disciples of all nations.

[1 : 20] And in doing this, he's fulfilling that very first promise to Abraham, that through him and his seed, all the peoples of the earth would be blessed.

And remember we saw last week that the power of that kingdom witness lies in the submission of God's people, his ambassadors, to his kingly rule.

The power of that witness lies in a radical obedience to the king. It's a counter-cultural life lived in submission to the king that gives rise to counter-cultural witness.

And that is the power of kingdom mission. And that's why Jesus is so emphatic in verse 17. Don't think I've come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them.

He honours the law, he honours the commands of God in verse 18. Affirming their abiding validity. Heaven and earth will not pass away. These commands will remain.

[2 : 24] He's clearly establishing the continuity with God's Old Testament law. Verse 19, it's those who teach and do these things that will be great in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' call to kingdom righteousness is a call to the righteousness of God's holy law. God's holiness hasn't changed because God hasn't changed.

But he is also calling us to something else, something new, to climax to the realisation of everything that the law promised. Therefore, as the privileges of God's people in the new age, the age of the kingdom, as our privileges are much greater, even than they were under the old covenant, so also our responsibilities are much greater.

And the kingdom righteousness that we exhibit, verse 20, must exceed that of even the scribes and the Pharisees. Must exceed everything that's gone before.

And so what follows in verses 21 to the end of the chapter is Jesus' explanation of what this greater righteousness is. The basic text, if you like, is verses 17 to 20.

[3 : 37] Now he's expounding it by giving some examples. He's demonstrating what the attitude and behaviour is that he demands from his people.

And in doing so, Jesus is taking us right to the very heart of God's law. He's showing us that God's law has always been right from the beginning, and all the more so now in his kingdom.

Not about rules, but really all about relationship. Now it can be hard to grasp this whole area of discussion about the relationship between the gospel and the law, or between grace and law, or the righteousness that comes by faith and not by law, and so on.

In fact, it's a misunderstanding of that that Jesus is actually addressing in these verses. Do not think I've come to abolish the law. Well, obviously, some of them were saying that. They were thinking that.

Because they saw the way that Jesus lived and acted, and they thought to them that he was going against some of the things that Moses had said. And that's why he explains himself here.

[4 : 46] So let's try and grasp this teaching under three headings. This exposition of God's law by Jesus himself in terms of kingdom righteousness.

Let's think about it in terms of not rules, but relationships. First of all, as evidence of a right relationship with God. Then as expression of that right relationship.

And then as exposure of our need for right relationship. First of all, kingdom righteousness, the righteousness that Jesus describes here, is evidence of a right relationship with God.

The kind of radical obedience, the kind of radical holiness that Jesus talks about is only possible if it's flowing out of lives that are marked by the liberation of God's grace in Christ.

This that he's talking about here is the fruit of true repentance. That's what John the Baptist was calling for in chapter 3 verse 8. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. It's the fruit of trees that are transformed by God's grace.

[5 : 58] That's what Jesus speaks of in chapter 7 verse 15. Only a good tree can produce good fruit. The kingdom righteousness that Jesus is describing here then is what we would call the obedience of faith.

It's expressing response to the forgiving grace of God. It's not the obedience of works that tries to seek God's approval by doing these things.

And that justifies ourselves and say, well, we've achieved them and therefore God must accept us. No, it's the opposite of that. Jesus, you see, has rescued the law from the realm of religion and brought it back into its proper place.

The realm of relationship. That's where it belongs. He's restored it to its rightful place. That's the only place where it can be a blessing and not a curse. Religion, you see, is taken up with rules but it's forgotten all about relationship.

Rule keeping and rule breaking becomes the focus of everything. That's what's all important. And all the emphasis becomes on ensuring whether you can keep the rules properly and therefore feel in some way assured and satisfied.

[7 : 08] And so you become, of course, intent on working the law to your advantage. That's the legalistic mentality, you see.

It very quickly loses the whole point in the minutiae of all sorts of legislation. It's endemic in the human spirit. I mean, we see it today, don't we, in the crippling bureaucracy that's all about us.

Nit-picking officials. Whenever you phone up to ask about something, you're told, oh, well, we can't possibly do that because it's in the rules or something. We tend to that sort of thing.

I was away this week on Tuesday at a day of child protection training. Compulsory for all ministers so I had no choice. It was useful in some ways.

But during the course of the day, there was one woman there in particular who was an absolute nitpicker for the rules. She'd read through every word of every page of the child protection handbook. And because she hadn't found anything that's specifically related to what to do about changing babies' nappies, she was in a terrible fuss.

[8 : 16] And there's rules about what to do when you take children to the toilet, but there's nothing about nappies. And I've looked at somebody else's organisation and they've got something about nappies. And she went on and on and on about this. And eventually, the woman who was giving us the talk said, look, it's all about looking after children well.

It's all about protecting children, not protecting you. And you can't leave a child there in a nappy stewing for hours. I mean, that's child abuse. You see, she totally lost the plot about what the whole thing was really about and got tangled up in this morass of being obsessed with the rules and knowing whether she could stick to them.

And that, you see, was the scribes and the Pharisees. In chapter 5 here, Jesus focuses on true morality against the kind of ethical casuistry, the complications of the scribes, the teachers of the law.

In chapter 6, he's doing the same thing against the Pharisees, against their false piety. They were the great keepers of the law, the doers of the law. Jesus exposed them as hypocrites. They were so concerned with the process of law keeping that they totally lost sight of the whole purpose of it all.

The living out lives of faithful trust in God, of displaying his gracious loving kindness to everybody else. They domesticated the law, surrounded it with all kinds of other regulations so that they could be happy that they had kept it to the letter.

[9 : 48] But who cares about what the purpose is really about? That gets lost. That's whether you can keep the rules or not. They hedged it in with all kinds of oral tradition, hundreds and hundreds of laws which interpreted the laws of Moses.

What they generally tended to do was restrict the commands so as to make it easier to keep them outwardly. And then they did the opposite with the permissions.

They extended the permissions. So when Moses gave a specific permission in certain circumstances about divorce, they extended that to make it easier, make it much less troublesome.

And that's the hallmark of religion. It's something that's deeply rooted in all of our hearts. It's deeply rooted in the human condition. And we do all we can to remove the cutting edge of God's real demands on us, either by adding to them or or subtracting, somehow domesticating it so we can manage and feel pleased with ourselves that we're keeping up and doing our best.

But Jesus says of the Pharisees and the scribes in chapter 15 verse 6 of Matthew, you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. By doing all that you actually make the whole thing void.

[11 : 10] And it's that, you see, it's that attitude of traditions, of additions, of subtractions, of perversions. It's that that Jesus is attacking here. Not God's law itself, not God's holy law itself.

You have heard that it was said, in other words that's the interpretation of the teachers, the elders, the Pharisees. That's not the real meaning of God's law, Jesus is saying.

I say to you this. This is the real truth. And the real truth, says Jesus, is that observing the commands of God expresses a right relationship with God.

Jesus rescues God's law out of the realm of religion and brings it into relationship. There's nothing wrong with the law, you see. The problem is who's got it in their hands.

I don't know if any of you are rugby fans. I'm sure some of you are. But you'll know that in a game of rugby the referee is absolutely vital to the game just as he's in the game of football.

[12 : 19] The enjoyment of the game for the players and for the spectators really all depends on the referee's view of the laws of the game. What it's for. How he applies the law.

Some referees you see are men of religion. They're sticklers for the rules. They don't really like the players. They think they're a rotten bunch. If it's footballers they think they're vastly overpaid.

Of course they are. And the religious referee just loves to blow his whistle. He loves to stop the game. He loves to see an infringement and stop the game immediately.

And the game becomes one long series of scrums and penalties and so on and so on and it just kills the game. That's the religious referee. Kills the game by his use of the law. But other referees you see are not religious men.

They're relationship men. They're in love with the game of rugby. And so they live to make the game a great spectacle for everyone, for the players, for the fans. They're not lax on the laws.

[13 : 17] No they're not. They give constant warnings. They give warnings in advance. Stay on side. Stay on side. Get back. Don't touch the ball. Hands off. Hands off. They know the rules.

They know what they're for. They're to keep the ball in play. They know you must have the laws of the game. Otherwise they'll never be a game. You can't possibly. It'll be chaos.

You must have the referee with his whistle to enforce the law. But you see the two are totally different aren't they? The one sees only the rules and blowing the whistle to stop the game.

The other sees all the rules and everything there to serve a great game of rugby. And that's the difference between religion and relationship. The scribes you see were focusing on the whistle and when to blow it.

Jesus was focusing on the goal. The game. The law serves the goal. It enables the expression of top class rugby. And so Jesus you see takes us back to the heart of the law.

[14 : 20] It's all about relationship with God by grace. It enables us to express that relationship in our lives and to the world. So Jesus is not against the Old Testament law.

Rather he's restoring it to its proper place. John Stock quotes John Calvin. Jesus is not a new legislator but a faithful expounder of a law already given.

So you see this continuity. We've seen that all the way through Matthew's gospel. Jesus affirms Moses. He affirms the faith that Moses taught. John chapter 5. Remember he says if you believed Moses you would believe in me because he wrote and spoke of me.

In fact he challenges the scribes. The scribes thought they were the real Moses men. Jesus says to them no listen you're not taking Moses nearly seriously enough.

Chapter 23 verse 27 he says you're a bunch of whitewashed tombs. You look lovely and white and clean and pristine on the outside but inside you're rotten and filthy and decaying.

[15 : 24] You look great in your synagogues with all your religious chums and your religious subculture but God can see into your heart. And that's really rotten. Jesus affirms God's holy law.

There's great continuity but there is also climax. Jesus does give a new and a definitive exposition of God's command because he is the final word from God. He is himself the final revelation.

And he alone has authority to expound God's commands for that new age. The age which he brought in. So although Jesus restores the law to what it always truly was, a way of life expressing relationship with God, that hasn't changed at heart.

He does add something new. He adds himself. Jesus, if you like, puts flesh and blood on the commands that Moses gave in stone.

Moses was a faithful servant bringing God's word to the people but Jesus is the son, he's God himself. And so if that's the case, now that he's come, it's no longer possible to obey God's commands without obeying Jesus himself.

[16 : 45] The king is here, we've had his word. So in a sense the words of his servants that have come before, well, begins to fade into the background. there's only one presence that fills the room now and that's Jesus Christ, the king himself.

It's a different order altogether, you see. It's the same but different. If you've looked at pictures of a foreign country, maybe Africa, somewhere like that, you've seen the wild animals, the landscapes and all the rest of it, you've got a great sense of what Africa is like.

But once you've been yourself and gone there and seen it with your own eyes, you've had the smells, the sensations, the atmosphere, all the rest of it, well, it's the same but it's totally different.

Come alive. You've listened to a piece of music played by an orchestra, it might be wonderful and you've come to love it and enjoy it, but then one day the composer comes and conducts the orchestra.

Oh, you see, that's just totally different because it's the definitive interpretation of the music. Before I went to live in London and worked with the Proclamation Trust, I'd often listened to tapes of Dick Lucas.

[18 : 06] I'd read some of his material. But once I went there and got to know him and became a friend, sat at his feet, listened to him teaching, had tea in his kitchen, it's all just totally different.

I still listen to his tapes, I still read what he's written. But it's so different now because I know the man himself. There's a fuller understanding than there ever was before.

And that's the way it is with the Old Testament commands and the coming of Jesus. Jesus said the Old Testament law will never pass away, not ever. But at the same time, we can never see it again in the same way without the definitive interpretation and fulfillment in the hands of Jesus himself.

It's the same but it's changed forever. There's a good illustration of that in Matthew 19 verse 21 when the rich young ruler comes to Jesus and says, what must I do for eternal life? And Jesus says to him two things, doesn't he?

He says, obey Moses. Keep the great commands that Moses taught you, obey the commands. But he also says, obey me, come and follow me.

[19 : 17] Now that Jesus has come, you see, you can't have the one without the other. So there's great continuity. The biblical faith, Jesus says, always was about true heart religion.

Law keeping was always about expressing a real relationship to God and Jesus restores the law to that out of the hands of these men of religion. But also it is a climax.

Something new has come. The kingdom has come. The new age has dawned. The stakes now are so much higher. The days of judgment are upon us, he says. And so Jesus is calling for a radical kingdom lifestyle for these last days.

We've got a greater revelation now than the people did under Moses. We've got the king in person. We've got his own direct commands. And his commands are for greater righteousness.

And living that out, Jesus says, is evidence. of a true relationship with him. So the key question for us today in the 21st century is whose rule do you recognize?

[20 : 26] That tells you, you see, whether you've got a right relationship with God or not. Kingdom righteousness is evidence of a right relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the ruler you submit to. But what does that look like in practice then? What does it look like in the day-to-day life? Well, in Jesus' exposition of God's law for the kingdom age, he's showing in these series of examples throughout the rest of chapter 5, just what that right relationship to God looks like in the humdrum of our daily life.

And what he says is this, that that right relationship to God is visible in right relationships with men and women in the world. Kingdom righteousness is expressed by right relationships in the world.

That's how we know we're right with God. Since the heart of the law is love for God with all our heart and our soul and our mind and loving our neighbour as ourself, so then kingdom righteousness, the right relationship with God is visible in the followers of Jesus by an all-pervasive holy relationship with the world.

And that's what we have in chapter 5. A relationship that expresses the character of our Father in heaven. And they're relationships characterised by three things.

[21 : 50] They're radically loving to brothers and sisters within the Christian community and to outsiders and even enemies. They're radically pure in our personal private lives and radically pure in our personal public lives.

and they're radically faithful and true in our most intensive and exclusive relationships of marriage and also in our most extensive and inclusive relationships.

We can only skim over these verses 21 to 48 to get the main message here. I recommend to you John Stott's book and also a little book by Sinclair Ferguson on the Sermon on the Mount too for a much more in-depth study.

But nevertheless even in skimming over these verses we can't miss can we? The searching nature of these demands. They truly are demands that go deep right to the very heart.

Right to the very heart of what righteousness means before a holy God. How radical the way of life of the kingdom really is. Notice it's all about right relationships in these paragraphs not about rules.

[23 : 01] That's what we're going to see. Jesus shows how the laws that are written down in scripture are like signposts and they point us in the right direction and when we start going in that direction we realise just how far we can go.

Much further, much deeper, much more all pervasive than we could ever have believed. It's not an exhaustive ethical text group he has here nor is it a sort of statement of principles but it's a series of examples just from real life.

Showing us how the spirit of what he says in verses 17 to 20 translate into the practice of Christian living. It's very carefully ordered. There are six, what the scribes call six antitheses.

They say this but I say this. Notice not the Old Testament says this but I say this. but rather relationship says this, religion says that.

All the emphasis is on fulfilment, on deepening, on fulfilling the demands of the law. I think these fall into two groups of three separated in verse 33 by the word again.

[24 : 19] The first three speak about relationships to our nearest, our most private relationships, our most intensive personal relationships and the second three broaden that out and speak about our widest relationships, our public life, our most extensive.

I think the first and the sixth correspond to each other and speak of radical loving. The second and the fifth speak of radical purity. And the third and the fourth, the middle two, of radical fidelity.

So follow carefully then. We're just going to gallop through these. How is kingdom righteousness expressed? First, verses 21 to 26, expressed in radically loving relationships within the Christian community.

The sixth commandment says, do not murder. Most of us feel very happy about that. We say, great, that's one run on the board. That's not one I'm likely to break. I won't be up before the sheriff for judgment.

Wrong, says Jesus. That's religion speaking. You want to limit the command to that final desperate act. But God means you to see that right from the very beginning, the first seed that leads to that act is sin.

[25 : 33] The anger that leads to that is utterly wrong. Verse 24, even that anger is going to be judged by God. Judgment of hell. It's pretty drastic, isn't it?

But we know that it's true. We know that we can murder without knives, can't we? Words can be so wounding, so destructive. That's why Jesus says in chapter 12 verse 36, that on the day of judgment we will give an account of every careless word that we've spoken.

What do you think of that? It's not just words though, is it? It's evil thoughts of the heart that he's speaking about here. And God knows it, he says. That's why in verse 23 he says there's no point in coming to church and singing hymns and saying prayers if your heart isn't right, if your heart is at odds with your brother.

No point at all. God sees the truth. Anybody's come here this morning, you've done wrong to a fellow Christian, either in deed or in word or even in your own thoughts.

Jesus says, no point in you being here until you've sorted that out. They might not even know you've done them any wrong because it's all in your head. Jesus says, get that sorted out.

[26 : 51] before you even feel about coming to church. You're in danger of hell. It's pretty drastic, isn't it? There's nothing new here.

God has always demanded mercy, not sacrifice. That's what the law's great word always was. But notice the urgency, verse 25. Come to terms quickly with your accuser.

Get right with him quickly. Why? Because, friends, the day when we're going to stand before that judge is much nearer now than it was then. And if you've not repented, there'll be no mercy.

That's what Jesus is saying. Kingdom righteousness lives out from the heart the righteousness that we have received by grace and mercy. Peace making among men is a mark for having peace with God.

Reconciliation with our brothers and sisters is a mark that we are indeed reconciled to God. And if not, betrays the truth. Radical love, radically loving relationships overcome anger in the Christian church.

[28 : 02] That's what Jesus says. And if that's not evident, we've got to ask ourselves, where is the mark of God's grace? Second, kingdom righteousness is expressed in radically pure relationships inwardly, verses 27 to 30.

It's expressed by radical inner purity in our personal lives, in our private lives, in our thought world, in our imagination. Again, many of us may think, well, I'm not an adulterer.

Seventh command, that's me, I've got that one at least. That's what the Pharisees thought. The Pharisees, you see, didn't need to commit adultery. They'd made so many provisions for divorce to be so easy, that if they wanted another woman, they just got rid of the one they had, took the other one, all legally.

That's Henry VIII type of ethics, you see. Get my marriage annulled, that'll keep the almighty happy. Jesus says, you absolute fool.

That signpost, the command against adultery, also points right into the deepest, innermost, private thoughts of your hearts, the personal world that nobody else can see.

[29 : 10] If you're thinking about sexual fulfillment with another who is not your rightful spouse, if you're having fantasies in your mind about taking that which is not yours, that's idolatry, he says.

That's a divided heart. You're worshipping the God of self-fulfillment in sex. That's what leads to coveting, to stealing, to adultery.

purity. Any men in the church want to stand up and claim purity? And Jesus says, notice, this is deadly.

See where it's all going to end up, verse 29. Your body being thrown into hell, verse 30. Your whole body going into hell. Now, friends, this is a crucial issue for many of us today.

We live in a sex-mad society. Temptation is all around us, on billboards, on TV, on our computers, everywhere. Be realistic. Here's a quote from Sinclair's book.

[30 : 18] Sexual relations have become the door through which many professing Christians have wandered to their destruction. That's your previous minister giving you a warning.

Let your present minister at his shut that door. Shut that door. Walk away from that door. That's what Jesus says here.

Far better to take action that seems to be deadly difficult, deadly painful. Something even feels like mutilating your own body. Ripping apart a relationship. Better to stand that pain now, says Jesus, than endure far worse for eternity.

Radical purity, ripping away all such idols in our minds as well as our bodies. That's kingdom righteousness, says Jesus. Third, kingdom righteousness is expressed in relationships of radical fidelity in marriage, verses 31 and 32.

Truth and faithfulness in the most intimate, the most exclusive, the most intensive of all relationships, the marriage bond. The marriage bond is a bond, says Jesus. The rabbis were guilty, you see, of turning a concession in the law of Moses into a permission of break down an easy divorce whenever you wanted it on virtually any grounds.

[31 : 50] We can't go into that whole area today. You'd have to read Matthew 19 as well to see the expanded teaching of Jesus on divorce and it's not all straightforward. What is clear is this. You see, the scribes were interested in divorce and how easy it was to get that divorce.

But Jesus is interested in marriage and its purpose. Its purpose in God's eyes is a lifelong union. Moses' law in Deuteronomy 24 that's alluded to here was a concession, it wasn't a command.

It was there to protect women from being treated as chattels passed back and forward by unscrupulous men as men tend to do. But Jesus protects and liberates women even more here by forbidding divorce, by demanding fidelity from men, by saying to the men, if you do that, you're causing your wife to commit adultery.

You're causing her to sin. It's at your door. It's interesting, isn't it, that Jesus liberates and honours women by forbid divorce, where the world today thinks it liberates women by making divorce easy.

Who is right, do you think? Has easy divorce in our society been a great liberation for women? Well, I'll leave you to decide.

[33 : 12] No, says Jesus, kingdom righteousness is expressed in radical fidelity in the marriage bond. Fourth, it's also expressed in radical fidelity in social relationships, verses 33 to 37.

The same truth of faithfulness in our least exclusive, our most extensive relationships. What he's saying is your word must be your bond everywhere in the world. Otherwise, there'll be no trust, there's no confidence, there's no truth.

Moses' commands about swearing falsely, about taking oaths, are all there to say that truth is important. Truth is vitally important to God.

But you see, the religion, the religious person says, oh well, how can I get around these rules and commands? So we produce a theology of oaths and it says, if you swear by this and that and the other, you have to keep your word, but you swear by this and that and that thing, oh well then, you don't have to bother.

And Jesus just sweeps aside such nonsense, such hypocrisy. It's not about the oaths you swear by, he says, it's about truth. It's about fidelity.

[34 : 20] Isn't honesty and distrust and double talk, isn't that such a huge cause of strife in our world today? The world of national politics and international? In our own relationships, in our work, in our families?

Not in my kingdom, says Jesus. Radical, fidelity must rule. And these two, the third and fourth, you see, are not unrelated, are they?

Private and public truth go together. If a politician cheats on his wife, there's no fidelity in his marriage bond. Won't he also think little of cheating on his voters?

Isn't that true? Of course it is. Radical fidelity in the most intimate, intensive, exclusive relationships and in the most exclusive, extensive relationships everywhere in the world.

That's kingdom righteousness. Fifth, radically pure relationships outwardly, verses 36 to 40, 38 to 42. And that's really what the heart of these verses is about.

[35 : 28] It's not so much lusting for what is yours, for what's not yours rather, but it's worshipping, it's idolising the things that are yours already, your reputation, your dignity, your possessions. Again, this ancient law, the eye for the eye, the tooth for the tooth, was meant to limit revenge taking, not to encourage it.

But religion comes along and says, oh well, how much can I repay evil for evil without getting on the wrong side of this law? Isn't that how people think? How much can I get back at that person without just stepping outside the law myself?

And Jesus says, no, no, no, this is meant to take you in the opposite direction. Others' needs must come before your rights no matter what.

Your responsibilities to others must come before your needs and your rights. Otherwise, you're exposed as an idolater, you're worshipping these things above God.

Your reputation, a slap on the cheek, you see, was an insult. You have to go to law, to defend your honour and your reputation. Jesus says, no, it's the opposite.

[36 : 38] Don't idolise your reputation. It's Christ and his kingdom's reputation. That's the only thing that counts. Don't idolise your dignity to take away an Israelite's cloak.

It was almost sacrosanct. In the law, it was demanded that if you took it as a pledge, you had to return it before nightfall. It was a mark of utter indignity. Jesus says, give in even that rather than worship your own rights.

If one of these dreadful occupying Roman soldiers exerts his right over you to walk a mile, go a second one. Put your dignity in the dust for the sake of the kingdom. Don't idolise your possessions, verse 42.

Be open-hearted, be generous, be open-handed. Why? Because this kingdom righteousness expresses the righteousness of the God who, though he was rich for your sake, became poor.

The God who, though he was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, became in the dust for your salvation. And so must his children be, his disciples, his people.

- [37 : 49] And again, the fifth and the second of these are related, aren't they? Impurity, the divided heart, the heart that is idolatrous, is a heart that's seeking gratification in the flesh, either the lusts of the flesh, the sex, or the same lusts for material possessions, for a reputation, for pride.

All is putting something else of the flesh on the throne instead of Christ, his witness. But no, says Jesus, not in my kingdom. Finally, sixthly, verse 43, we're back again to radically loving relationships, this time even with the outsider, even with the enemy.

Here he extends that radical love way beyond the Christian community, to the whole world. The scribes taught that the law said, love your neighbour, yes, but it added in and hate your enemy.

That was nowhere in the Mosaic law. The law is full of commands to love the alien, the incomer, the sojourner in your land. The scribes were so taken up by the question, well, who don't I have to love then?

Jesus says, it's the opposite. Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10? One comes speaking to him. Jesus says, love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself. Ah, but who is my neighbour, he says.

- [39 : 11] In other words, who isn't my neighbour that I don't have to love? Jesus tells him the story of the Good Samaritan, smacks him right between the eyes. Who is the neighbour in this story? Well, he's that scumbag Samaritan.

He's the real neighbour, not you, you pious Jew. You see, the way of the world is here, isn't it? Verses 46 and 47. Loving those who love you, rewarding those who reward you.

Repaying good for good, just as in the previous paragraph the world repays evil for evil. We live in a society, don't we, based on merit. Even among the lowest of the low, if you go to prison, there's still a meritocracy.

There's a petty thieves at the top and the child molesters at the bottom. No, says Jesus. Not a world of merit. I say, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be, verse 45, sons of your Father in heaven.

He sends sunshine and rain on the evil and the good. He showers his natural blessings on the whole earth and, and, and, he sent his son to seek and save the lost.

- [40 : 24] While they were still enemies, sinners, he died for our sins. It's all summed up, isn't it, in verse 48. Be like your Father in heaven.

Be perfect. He doesn't mean be morally faultless, of course, none of us can. The word means complete, whole, expansive, all embracing. That's kingdom righteousness.

That's evidence of a right relationship with God. That's evidence that your sons of your Father is in heaven. Like father, like son. It's expressed in radical love within the church community.

Loving one another, says Jesus. That's not a new command, is it? Love your neighbour as yourself. But it is climactic, isn't it?

Love one another as I have loved you. He's asking for the love of those who have learned what bearing the cross really means. And the same love, he says, expressed outwardly for a world lost in sin, a world at odds with God, a world enemies of the gospel.

- [41 : 35] That's expressed above all, isn't it, in giving up all that we have and we are, all our rights, all our dignity, all our possessions, to share with them the good news of the kingdom of righteousness.

These are the relationships that express kingdom righteousness in the world. Relationships of radical love, relationships of radical purity, relationships of radical fidelity, perfectly, expansively, to the nth degree, unlimited.

That you may be sons of your Father in heaven. Finally, and very briefly, kingdom righteousness exposes us, doesn't it?

Don't you feel exposed? Don't you feel reading these verses naked, so if you need to run for cover? Surely, honesty demands that, doesn't it?

If not, if not, then we're exposed as scribes and Pharisees, men of religion, people who have fooled ourselves into thinking that we've passed muster, we've managed it.

[42 : 47] But no, then we'd be so wrong. Jesus rescued the law from such religion, brought it back into the hands of relationship, the hands of grace.

Shows us what the heart of the law always stood for. It promised for God's people a holiness that only God's grace and a divine intervention could place in the hearts of his people.

And so the law and the prophets longed for and looked for a fulfiller, a saviour who would heal our failure, a sanctifier who would plant his holy seed within us and enable us to begin to live out the life of righteousness from within.

In other words, all through the history of God's people, his covenant law promised the Lord Jesus Christ. And now says Jesus as he teaches the people, here I am.

Does this demand for holiness and righteousness have you in the dust? Or has the religion, has the deadening poison in your own heart crushed you with a yoke that you cannot possibly bear?

[44 : 02] And Jesus says, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Take my yoke of righteousness upon you and learn from me because I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your soul.

You will find the grace of right relationship with God the Father in heaven. And you will find his Holy Spirit within you seeking to live out that in right relationships with the world.

But friends, only Jesus Christ, the King, can take you to the heart of God's law. Because only Jesus Christ, the Son and the Saviour, can take you to the heart of God.

You can't do it and you can't have it without him. You can't do without him. So don't let anything or anyone get in the way of that relationship.

Don't let it. You can't be without him. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we are exposed and we bow before you acknowledging our sinfulness, acknowledging how far short we fall of all that you command and desire.

[45 : 37] And yet by your mercy and by your grace you have put within our hearts a desire to be for you the light and the salt of the glory of Christ in this world. We need you.

Help us, we pray, by your Holy Spirit to walk with you and to shine for you. For Jesus Christ's sake.

Amen.