

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Sixth Sunday after Trinity
July 27, 2025
rmcneely+

Except your righteousness shall exceed
The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees
Ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of God.

Today the Summer Survey of Essential Christian Doctrine
Takes us back to the “Sermon on the Mount.”

A time early in Jesus’ earthly ministry in Galilee.

A time when His fame and notoriety were growing.

People came from Galilee

From Syria,

From Judea and Jerusalem

From east of the Jordan

People curious to see the miracles

To hear His words

To try to determine for themselves

whether He was the long awaited Messiah.

They followed Him to a hillside in Galilee

And He sat them down

And gave them a new

startling and revolutionary way to live.

To any Jew of the time,

It challenged all they knew and had learned

from the Rabbis and Temple leaders.

In this excerpt of the Sermon,

Jesus looks to the law

And how a Christian approaches it.

But to grasp the significance of what Jesus was telling them

We need to go back

Back to Sinai and to Moses.

Back 1300 years before Jesus.

To the day Moses descended the mount with the tablets containing
the 10 Commandments

And the regulations and instructions from God
that we find scattered throughout the Torah.
It was all that which formed the basis of Judaism.

Over the centuries, they became engrained into Jewish life.
Devout, learned men studied them and expounded upon their
meaning

Interpreted them to form the very essence of Jewish Life.
It was part of them
And defined who they were and how they lived
Even what they could eat and how to prepare it.
For some it even regulated the length of their hair
And how they dressed.

The Law separated them from the rest of Mankind

It defined who they were
And verified their chosen status with God.
Learned men of the Temple and of the rabbinical schools
Studied and debated scripture
And refined and expanded what was there.
They concluded that the salvation of their race
Was in strict adherence to the law.
Adherence to the point of irrationality
To the very letter of the law
As interpreted by the scribes and Pharisees.

And along comes this itinerant preacher
But this man of miracles
Who, without destroying the law
Put 1300 years of learning and practice on its head.
It is difficult for us to comprehend just how radical
This new relationship with God was.

Jesus put the discussion right in the beginning
 Right after the beatitudes and the similitudes.

And He hit is head on.
 With the shocking statement that
 “except your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and
 Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven”.

How was that even possible?
 There was no one more righteous in their entire world than those of
 the Pharisees and of the Temple.
 Yet, Jesus was telling them, even that was not enough to see
 salvation.
 What was He talking about?

Jesus gave them more.

He started out with the big one: murder.

He uses a formulaic approach:

Ye have heard it said . . .

But I say . . .

Without criticism or detraction, He first states the law

Thou shalt not murder.

OK, no controversy there.

The ban of murder is a universal constant.

However He then hits them with:

“But I say . . .”

and overlays a higher standard.

The pattern is;

This is the law

But you must do more

if you want to see the Kingdom of God.

He is telling them and telling us

That strict and blind adherence alone is not enough.

What you do, matters but your motivation is also in the balance.

He tells them that the act of murder will subject them to the judgment of mankind

But the evil attitudes and motives
from which overt evil acts spring:

anger

hatred

malice

are as deadly a sin in the eyes of God
as the act of murder itself
and will receive a severe judgment from God.

Righteousness must come from the heart

It is not merely an outward compliance with the law

But that which motivates the evil act that God examines.

Jesus then gives them another example

And considers the offense of slander

But with a clever twist.

He recites the law of slander:

Whosoever shall say to his brother; "Raca"

Shall be in danger of the council.

Again reciting the law

And the punishment of the council; the Sanhedron.

"Raca" is an Aramaic word that does not translate well

but is akin to our word nitwit or witless fool, empty headed.

And it was an offense in Jewish law to call someone Raca

And the person saying it,

would be subject to the judgment

And the punishment of the Sanhedron for doing so.

Here is where the twist comes in.

Jesus then posits the case of calling someone “Thou Fool”.
Here our English language fails us.

The English translation connotes to us, foolish or silly behavior,
But the Greek word Matthew used was far worse.
it meant that the person had no soul
was damned to eternity in hell and was tantamount
to murder,
not in this world
but the next.

So in the case of Raca
You could be punished for the utterance
Regardless of your inner intent or motivation
You broke the law by the utterance alone.
But in the case of “thou fool”
You broke no law
Suffered no punishment by the Jews
But you would suffer hell-fire
Not for your act
But for you evil intended heart.

Let’s play out a more mundane example.
Anyone in Jesus’ gathering on the Mount and any of us
Knew of the law regulating vehicular speed.
For us, our cars and for the person on the Mount
Let’s imagine 25 miles per hour on their camel.

The Jew would not ride faster than 25 miles per hour on his camel
Because that was the law
And he must obey it to the letter in the outward sense
To avoid a ticket by the Galilean Camel Patrol.
Centuries later, a Christian in San Francisco
Would not drive a car faster than the posted speed limit
25 mph on Sacramento Street

Because doing so would endanger other people.
 He could not love as Jesus had loved,
 he could not love his neighbor as himself,
 by putting himself and his neighbor at increased risk of harm.
 And that is why a Christian obeys laws.

The Christian ethic no longer dealt only with the veneer of the law,
 the letter of the law,
 but for the first time,
 A people: Christians;
 were concerned with the spirit of the law.
 And with God's law
 that spirit was Christian Charity,
 Christian love.

Notice that is was not against the Hebrew law to be angry with
 your brother without a cause,
 But it was a violation of the Christian principal of
 Loving each other as Jesus has loved us
 Loving our neighbor as our selves.

Notice also that Jesus is talking about the other side of the coin
 too: The evil motives
 and attitudes which foster wrong doing.

If Christian Charity is what motivates us to follow the laws;
 then it is
 pride,
 hatred,
 anger,
 envy,
 malice and
 unforgiving
 that motivates us to break the law.

We each want God's mercy
and so must show mercy for each other.
That is the spirit of God's laws.

We don't deserve mercy,
it is a grace,
a gift from God
that we cannot earn.

We want mercy, not justice for our transgressions.
Justice is the opposite of mercy.
It is cold and it is heartless.
So Jesus tells us in this Sermon on the Mount,
that we should agree with our adversary
where we can,
in the spirit of mercy.

Because if we don't
we will be in the realm of justice,
where we will pay the last farthing.

So the take away from this section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount
The doctrine that we should take with us through those doors
today

Is this:
Salvation requires more than rote compliance with the law.

For us, our actions and inactions matter
But it is as important that we act in the spirit of the law that
Jesus gave us;
Love thy neighbor as thy self.

Pray that the Holy Spirit in us will direct our hearts to follow
God's laws out of a spirit of Christian love
That we may know His mercy
And see the Kingdom of God.

Amen

So by condemning a person to hell
The speaker by

This was not a Jewish offence and bore no human punishment.
But Jesus says: doing so would subject the utterer to “hell-fire”.

In the latter case, there is no offense against man
But a sin against God.
And a penalty paid in the next life.