The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 18 June 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

What Does Righteousness Look Like? Matthew 5:19-22

On 10 March of this year, on an American television talk show called **"The View,"** a well-known actress and activist named **Jane Fonda** appeared as a guest on the show. As she spoke on the subject of abortion, she said, "We have experienced many decades now of having agency over our body—of being able to determine when and how many children to have. We know what that feels like. We know what that's done for our lives. We're not going back. I don't care what the laws are. We're not going back." As the audience erupted in applause, the host of the show, **Joy Beher**, asked Jane, "Besides marching and protesting, what else do you suggest?" Without hesitation, Jane said, "Well, I've thought of murder!"

With a stunned and nervous look, another panellist asked, "What did you say?" Once again, Jane Fonda repeated, "Murder!" Instantly, the other ladies on the panel tried to do damage control. One lady said, "Don't say that!" Joy Beher interjected, "She's kidding. Wait a second, she's just kidding. Oh, you don't know, they'll pick up on that and run with it. She's just kidding." All the ladies laughed nervously, and the audience laughed nervously; and they all looked to Jane, with the hope that she would assure them that she really was just kidding. However, she did not give one word, smile, or any kind of body language, to indicate that she was kidding. She simply looked off into space, with an incredibly angry glare in her eyes. Folks, if looks could kill, that look would have wiped out a whole neighbourhood! Jane clearly was *not* kidding. This same woman who has advocated the murder of infants in the womb evidently has the desire to murder people *outside* the womb. Jane may not have *physically* murdered anyone with her so-called "joke"; but *in her heart* she did. The venom that came out of her mouth was an expression of what is in her heart. Jesus said, **"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."**

My friends, God does not look on the outside, as we do. He looks on the heart; and what He sees in our hearts is not pretty! Though we may shake our heads and cluck our tongues at the murderous words of Jane Fonda, the fact is that we have *all* been guilty of murder in the heart: and God's Word says that no murderer shall enter the Kingdom. That is why, in order to enter that wonderful Kingdom that Christ will establish on this earth one day, we must have a righteousness that is not our own. We must have a *perfect* righteousness, which God can accept. We must receive *Christ's* perfect righteousness. This morning, as we continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount, we will be talking about what the righteousness of Christ looks like. The title of this message is *What Does Righteousness Look Like?*

Read Matthew 5:18-20.

I. Christ's definition of righteousness (vv. 19-20)

Over the last month, we have been talking about Christ's promise to *preserve* every jot and tittle of the Law. Till heaven and earth pass, not one jot nor tittle of His Word will pass away. This is God's solemn promise! Yet, with this promise, there comes a great responsibility on our part. Look again at what Jesus said. He said, *"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* In other words, *since* God has guarded every one of His words, and has

kept them accessible to us, we "*therefore*" have the responsibility to *obey* every one of His words. In short, we have the responsibility to live *righteously*.

What is *real* righteousness like? What does the righteousness of *Kingdom* citizens look like? According to Jesus, **it is an** *incessant* **righteousness**. It is unceasing, and unfailing. **It doesn't stop!** The righteousness that *Jesus* gives to His followers is not a "hit and miss" righteousness. It doesn't overlook or disregard "little" commands. When you are walking in the Spirit, and are allowing *Him* to control you, you will have the desire, and the *power*, to obey even the "*least*" of God's commands, all the time. That is why Paul said, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye <u>stedfast, unmoveable, always</u> abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." If we did not have the <i>power* to be "*stedfast*" and "*unmoveable,*" Paul wouldn't have given us this command!

Now, remember, to whom was Jesus speaking, here? He was preaching to His disciples. This message was directed to those who were already citizens of the Kingdom. No doubt, there were many lost people who found Jesus there on the mountain that day, and who crowded in to hear Him; but the people whom Jesus was addressing in this sermon were those who had already repented of their sin, and placed their trust in Him. The question, then, was not whether these disciples *would be in* the Kingdom: the question was *what place* they would have in the Kingdom. Jesus says that there are some who will be *"great"* in the Kingdom—people who will be given great authority. However, there will also be believers who will be *"least"* in the Kingdom—people who will have little authority, and small rewards. Why? Because during this mortal life, they often disobeyed what they need to obey God!

Now, make no mistake about it: during the 1,000-year Kingdom, we who were saved during this church age will be perfectly righteous. We will have sinless, resurrected bodies. However, our rewards in the Kingdom will depend on how faithful we were to Christ's *"least"* commands during this lifetime. Many who we thought would be *"great"* in the Kingdom will be the smallest; and many who we thought would be smallest will be the greatest! It will all depend on how faithfully we kept Christ's *"least"* commands.

Now, what *is* the *"least"* commandment? Well, according to the rabbis, the "least commandment" was the command that God gave to Israel in **Deuteronomy 22:6-7**.

Read Deuteronomy 22:6-7.

This isn't a command that we hear about often, is it? This seems like a "small" and insignificant command. (At least, the rabbis considered it to be so!) Yet, even this "little" command was very important to God! How do I know? Well, for one thing, God attaches the promise of long life to this commandment! God commanded Israel to do this command so *"that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days."* This sounds very similar to the promise that God attached to the Fifth Commandment, doesn't it? Remember that one? God said, *"Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee."* That was one of the *Ten Commandments*—one of the "biggies"! Yet, God attaches that same promise of "prolonged life" to this "little" commandment about not taking the dam with her chicks. Clearly, those "mama birds" are important to God! Of course, God cares for *us* much more than He cares for birds; yet, He *does* care for the birds. That is why Jesus said, *"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?"*

Clearly, God looks at all *disobedience* in the same light, no matter how "big" or "small" the command may be! Likewise, God looks at all *obedience* in the same light. God rewards *faithfulness* to even the smallest commands in the same way that He rewards faithfulness to the "big" commands. In fact, when we are faithful in the small things, He rewards us with

bigger responsibilities. Jesus said in Luke 16:10, *"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."*

So, were the rabbis right when they said that there are "greater" and "smaller" commandments? In a sense, yes. Jesus said so. Two times, Jesus used the word "*least*" (*helechiston*), which means "smallest." In **Matthew 23:23**, Jesus said that there *are* "*weightier matters of the law.*" Some laws are "weightier" than others; and likewise, some sins are more grievous. That's why God destroyed the people of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone from heaven. They were called "*sinners before the LORD exceedingly*" because of their depraved, unnatural sexual sins. There definitely *are* weightier commands.

Yet, God requires the citizens of His Kingdom to keep even the *"least"* of His commandments. When we keep the "big" commandments, but disregard the "smaller" ones, because we think that they aren't so important, what does that reveal about our hearts? It reveals a *disdain*, and *contempt*, for God's words. Even worse, when we disregard God's "little" commands, yet tell *others* that they should obey God, we compound our guilt. How can we tell "little white lies" when it's handy, yet tell others that they should be truthful? How can we hold bitterness in our hearts, and tear people down with our tongue, yet tell others that they should be in church? How can we skip church now and then, yet tell others that they should be in church? How can children disobey their parents in a "little" instruction, then try to tell their friends about Jesus? How can we who are saved refuse to be baptised, yet tell others that they should obey the Great Commission (which includes baptism)? *We* may consider these things to be "little" disobediences: but to God, no disobedience is "little"!

Read 1 Samuel 15:10-23.

The pronouncement that Samuel made to King Saul should make every one of us pause for self-examination. How often have even we, as Christians, rebelled, and been stubborn? To obey God only "halfway" is to *dis*obey. Yet, how often have we been guilty of "half" obedience? When we do honest inventory of our lives, we find that we have rebelled against God's commands far more times than we can remember!

Folks, this is serious stuff! When we have a rebellious attitude, it *really* is like witchcraft! You see, the age-old tenet of witchcraft is **"Do as thou wilt."** Every poor, deluded soul who has strayed into witchcraft knows this principle well. It is the motto that Lucifer adopted 6,000 years ago, when sin first entered his heart. With a heart that was now corrupted by pride, Lucifer made the insane declaration, **"I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." He quickly corrupted one third of the angels of Heaven with his rebellious spirit, and tried to overthrow God, and sit on his throne. Even after God cast him down from Heaven, he refused to surrender. He persuaded our parents, Adam and Eve, to rebel against God, and eat the forbidden fruit; and we have been following this satanic principle of rebellion ever since then.**

Doubt it not: rebellion *is* just like witchcraft in God's eyes! By the way, the Hebrew word for "rebellion" that is used in this verse is *m'rey*, which is also translated as "bitterness." The connection between "rebellion" and "bitterness" is obvious: people who have a rebellious attitude truly are bitter inside. Rebellion against God cannot co-exist with joy and peace!

How about *"stubbornness"*? Is a stubborn attitude really on the same level as idolatry? Yes, it is! The word *"stubbornness"* is translated from the word *pawtsar*, which means "to peck at; to stun or make dull." By extension, this word takes on the meaning of "stubbornness," since a person with a stubborn attitude is dull to God's Word. It is as though he is anesthetised to God's commands, instructions, and warnings, and is beyond feeling of conviction.

How is stubbornness like idolatry, then? Well, when a person worships idols, he is, essentially, worshipping himself, and his own desires. This is why Paul said in **Colossians 3** that *"covetousness"* is *"idolatry."* There is a direct link between the tenth commandment (*"Thou shalt not covet"*) and the first commandment (*"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"*)! When you covet, you are following your own lusts and desires, and are, essentially, worshipping yourself. Idols, no matter what form they may be, are an expression of *self*-worship. This is why John urged believers to *"keep yourselves from idols."* Idols of the heart are just as real, and just as offensive to God, as are idols of wood and stone!

Just as Saul lost his kingdom because of rebellion and stubbornness, so we who are saved can lose God's hand of blessing in our lives whenever we decide to do what *we* will, instead of what God wills. Don't be deceived: rebellion and stubbornness are very costly! Don't balk at God's will. Obey Him without delay, and with a cheerful heart.

Real righteousness—the kind that Christ imparts—is an <u>incessant</u> righteousness. There is no rebellion or self-will mixed in with it. Christians who are walking in submission to the Spirit of God have a relentless thirst for righteousness in their daily lives; and by God's power, they are able to obey even the "least" of God's commands. However, there is another truth about righteousness that we need to understand. Let's read verse 20 again. (Read Matthew 5:20.)

What is Jesus saying here? He is saying that in order to *get* into the Kingdom *at all*, you need to have a righteousness that is not your own. He's talking about what the Apostle Paul called **imputed righteousness**. This means that you must have Christ's perfect righteousness "imputed" to you, or "put on your account," so that God can accept you on that basis.

Read Romans 4:1-8.

Read Philippians 3:4-9.

Christ told His disciples that unless their righteousness *exceeded* the righteousness of the Pharisees, they wouldn't even "*enter the kingdom.*" Now, that statement may not be shocking to us: but to Jesus' listeners (particularly, to the lost folks who may have been present), this was a startling revelation! The Pharisees kept the Law to the "T"! (Or, so it seemed.) They fasted, did alms, prayed for long hours, and taught the Law to others; and they kept the ceremonies of the Law scrupulously. How could *anyone* have greater righteousness than the Pharisees had? Most people assumed that they didn't even *need* to be as good as the Pharisees to make it into the Kingdom, since the Pharisees were out there in a "league of their own." Yet, Jesus said that our righteousness must *be greater* than that of the Pharisees!

If the *Pharisees* weren't on their way to the Kingdom, then who in the world *could* make it into the Kingdom? In what way did the *Pharisees*' righteousness fall short? To answer that question, let's look at what Jesus told the Pharisees in the last week before His crucifixion.

Read Matthew 23:23-26.

The Pharisees were correct in saying that there are "weightier" commands of the Law. However, they were mistaken about *what* the "weightier" matters of the Law really are! *They* thought that things such as tithing, and other *outward, external* commands, were the "weightier" commands. Now, Jesus did not deny that we should tithe. In fact, He commended them for tithing. He said, "Yes, it is true that you should *not* leave tithing *'undone.'* You *should* tithe. However, you have left the *weightier* matters of the Law *un*done." And what are those weightier matters? Jesus said that they are *'judgment, mercy, and faith.''*

What does this mean? This means that if Pharisees had understood the seriousness of God's *"judgment"* upon sin, they would have realised that they couldn't save themselves by their own righteousness. Therefore, they would have understood their need for God's *"mercy"*; and in *"faith,"* they would have come to Jesus, and would have trusted in *Him* to give them mercy,

and to save them from their sins. If the Pharisees had done *this*—if they had placed their faith in *Christ*—then they would have had Christ's perfect righteousness imputed to them; and judicially, they would have been declared "righteous" before God. Then, they would have been able to *do* things that are truly righteous. Instead of priding themselves on the *outward* keeping of the Law, they would have been concerned with the *spirit* of the Law. They would have shown *judgment* to the poor and needy, and *mercy* to others; and they would have lived by "*faith*" in God. However, the Pharisees had none of these things. Their "righteousness" was all outward, and hollow. They did not have God's imputed righteousness; and therefore, they didn't have true *practical* righteousness, either.

You see, you can't separate *imputed* righteousness from *actual* righteous living. They are two different things; yet, the one flows from the other. If you have repented of your sin and placed your faith in Jesus, then you are now called "justified" before God. God sees you as though you have the righteousness of His Son. This is called "imputed" righteousness. Having "imputed" righteousness, you are able to *live* righteously. In **1 John 3:7**, the Apostle John wrote, "*Little children, let no man deceive you: he that <u>doeth</u> righteousness <u>is</u> righteous, <i>even as he* [Christ] *is righteous.*" What John is saying is that a "*righteous*" person (someone who has received Christ's imputed righteousness), will *actually live* righteously. Because a believer has *imputed* righteousness, *actual* righteousness will now manifest in his life; and it will be an *ongoing* thing. Of course, as long as we are still in this mortal body, we still have a sin nature, and we do stumble and fall; but the overwhelming characteristic of a citizen of the Kingdom is that he lives righteously.

II. Christ's descriptions of righteousness (5:21-22)

Christ has **defined** righteousness for us. True righteousness exceeds man's best attempts at righteous living, because it is given to us by *God*, who is truly righteous. It is an *incessant*, untiring righteousness; and it is the direct outgrowth of *imputed* righteousness.

With this in mind, the next question is, "*How* does Christ's righteousness manifest itself practically in a believer's life?" Well, it so happens that Christ spent most of the rest of this sermon answering this question! Over the next three chapters, Christ will be talking about anger; reconciliation with enemies; adultery and lust; divorce; vengeance; love; giving; prayer; earthly and heavenly riches; trust in the Father's care; and judging others. Over the next several months, we will cover all these matters; but today, we will be focusing on **anger**.

Read Matthew 5:21-22.

In this passage, Jesus warns us that there are consequences for anger. First, he warns that being angry at your brother "*without a cause*" can lead to "*judgment*." How so? Because anger causes you to do foolish things. Anger can move you to do actual *harm* to others, or to their property (hence, leading you to be brought before a judge for sentence). Secondly, Jesus warned that anger could put you in danger of "*the council*." What was "*the council*"? It was the *Sanhedrin*. The Sanhedrin was the council of 70 men who judged Israel in all matters pertaining to Jewish law. What, then, did Jesus say could land you before the Sanhedrin? Saying "*Raca*" to someone. And what does "*Raca*" mean? Basically, it means "emptyheaded person." In English, this word *raqa* might be equivalent to "stupid," "dummy," or "idiot." Calling someone by such a name, Jesus warned, could land you in big trouble. However, as bad as it is to face the highest court in the land, that isn't the greatest judgment. Jesus said that those who call someone "*fool*" are in danger of hellfire! By the way, the Greek word for "fool" is *moron*. We get our word "moron" from this word. Do *you* use this word?

Friends, God takes the use of angry, demeaning words very seriously! On this count alone, not one of us could make it to Heaven on his own. We have *all* used these kinds of angry words. That is why our own righteousness won't do. In order to avoid hellfire, our

righteousness *must* exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. How is it possible to have that kind of righteousness? There is only one way: by having *Christ's* perfect righteousness put on your moral account book, as though it were yours. The Bible says that when you repent of your sin and trust in Christ and His sacrifice for you on the cross, Christ's righteousness is imputed to you, and God is able to accept you, and translate you from Satan's family to *His* family. If you have received Christ as your Saviour, this translation from Satan's kingdom to God's kingdom has already occurred; and you are saved for eternity. However, this does not change the fact that *being angry* with someone is very grievous to the Lord. It is a sin for which you were, at one time, condemned to hell!

Now, this brings me to the matter of justifying our anger. Many angry Christians actually think they have a just *right* to be angry. They look at this verse and say, "I'm not in the wrong. Jesus said, *'Whosoever is angry with his brother without a <u>cause</u>': and I <i>have* a cause! Do you know what my husband said to me? Do you know how my wife treats me? Do you know what my mother did to me? I have a *right* to be angry!"

Is this really what Jesus was saying? Is He saying that there are just causes to get angry at someone? No! As always, we must compare Scripture with Scripture. That phrase "without a cause" appears 6 other times in the Bible—in 1 Samuel 19:5, Psalm 35:19, Psalm 69:4, Psalm 109:3, Psalm 119:78, and John 15:25. In each of these verses, the phrase "without a *cause*" means that the person literally *had no cause* to be angry! For example, in **1 Samuel 19**, Jonathan was trying to reason with his father about his murderous anger against David. He asked his father, "Wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause? In other words, he was saying, "You have no cause to be angry, dad!" In all the Psalms passages that I just mentioned, David used this phrase "without a cause" in the same way that Jonathan did. Repeatedly, David cried out to the Lord that his enemies hated him "without a cause." They had no cause or justification for their anger against him. Likewise, Jesus said in John 15 that His enemies hated Him "without a cause." What does this all mean, then? It means that when Jesus says that those who are angry "without a cause" are in danger, He is not saying that there are some justifiable causes for anger. It's just the opposite! Jesus is saying that there is no cause to be angry with your brother! Whenever you are controlled by anger, you are angry "without a cause."

Now, there is one other passage that some Christians use to justify their anger. Let's look at it.

Read Ephesians 4:26.

This is the only passage in the New Testament where Christians are commanded to "be angry." This verse is actually a quote of Psalm 4:4, which says, "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." That Hebrew expression "stand in awe" has the idea of being excited, stirred up, or trembling about something—whether in fear, or in anger. In this case, it means "in anger."

Now, how is it possible to be angry, yet not sin? After all, only a few verses later, Paul says, "Let <u>all bitterness, and wrath, and anger...be put away from you.</u>" Are we allowed to be angry, or are we not? Perhaps the best way to explain this is to compare it to what the Bible says about hatred. In **Galatians 5:20**, Paul listed "hatred" as one of the works of the flesh, which should be put to death. Yet, in **Psalm 101:3**, David says, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside." In other words, David hated the sin of those who turn aside from God. Do you see the difference between these two kinds of hatred? Hating people is sin. Hating people is a work of the flesh. However, we should have a holy hatred of sin. Because we who are saved have been given God's holy nature, our spirits should be stirred to indignation against sin. We who are saved should not have a casual attitude toward sin. Our new nature hates and abhors sin. Need an example? Consider Paul.

Read Acts 17:15-34.

Acts 17:16 says that Paul's spirit was "stirred in him" when he saw all the idols in the city of Athens. That word "stirred" means "provoked." Now, the Greek word for "stirred" happens to be the same word that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 13:5 when he said that true love is "not easily provoked." So, was it good, or bad, that Paul was provoked? It was good, because he was not stirred to sinful anger, but to righteous indignation. How do we know that Paul was experiencing righteous anger, and not sinful anger? Well, look at his response. Did Paul "blow his top" at the Athenians? Did he yell at them and call them "fools" for worshipping idols? No. He calmly got up, and lovingly preached the Gospel to them; and some of them ended up getting saved, and turning from their idols to the living God! Righteous anger is moved by a zeal for God's holiness; but it does not cause you to use harsh words against people. In fact, it causes you to "commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Righteous anger *stirs* you—but in the right way. Righteous anger does not move you to blow up at the people who are for abortion, but rather to warn them, in love, that abortion is murder, and that they need to repent. Righteous anger does not cause you to use rude, cutting words against sinners. It doesn't move you to tell the drunkard what an idiot he is for destroying his family. Instead, it moves you to warn him to turn from his evil way, and to believe on Christ. Righteous anger against sin does not cause you to scream at your kids for disobeying you, but rather to be stirred to correct them in firmness and love, with a soft voice and a calm spirit.

Sinful anger, on the other hand, is centred on self. Sinful anger is the product of wounded pride; and it seeks vengeance (something which belongs only to God). Sinful anger seeks to do what only God has the right to do-to *pay the person back* in some way. Many people justify anger by saying, "Well, say what you will, but anger works. When my kids are disobeying me, I get angry at them, and they shape up fast." Is this right? Does anger have the desired effect of causing people to do what they should be doing? Perhaps. You *might*, by blowing up in anger, get the kids to quiet down and obey you. You might get your wife to do what she should do, or your husband to do what he should do. However, the consequences of anger far outweigh the seeming "success." You are not fixing any problem by getting angry. You are *creating* a problem. As you lash out in anger at your loved ones, you are provoking them to anger, and to inward rebellion. The rebellion may not manifest immediately; but in time, it will. In time, the child whose parent lashes out at him in anger will (apart from the grace of God) rebel; and as he rebels, the angry parent will *react* against the child's rebellion with more anger; and the child will react with more rebellion. The parent's anger and the child's rebellion feed on themselves. At the very least, you are discouraging your family. You are causing their love for you to wilt. You may survive your own anger; but *they*, most likely, will not. You are wounding their spirits; and in doing so, you are sinning against God.

The line between truly righteous anger *against sin* and sinful anger *against people* is often very hard for us to discern. Why? Because we have a sin nature; and our sin easily blinds us. That's probably why God commanded only *one time* in the New Testament to be angry, and sin not. It is best to leave anger alone entirely! Don't mess with it! Anger has a way of deceiving you into thinking that you are *justified* in your anger—that you have a *right* to be angry! Remember when Jonah got angry because God didn't destroy the city of Nineveh? He had the brass to tell the LORD, *"I do well to be angry, even unto death."* Anger is so insidious, that it sometimes leads people to commit *murder*. When you are angry at someone, you are essentially saying, "Get out of my life!" Essentially, you are "doing away" with the person in your heart. Is it any wonder that God sees anger in the same light as murder?

Conclusion: Christian, don't allow any root of anger to spring up in your heart! Put off the old garment of anger; be renewed in the spirit of your mind, by claiming the promises in God's Word; and put on the garment of love and forgiveness. Submit yourself to God, and let Him empower you to obey even the

"least" of His commands. **Perhaps you have never been saved.** If so, you must acknowledge that your sin is not a mere "mistake," but rebellion against God. You must admit that your sin has separated you from God, and condemned you to hell. You must acknowledge that you need God's gift of salvation, which His Son purchased on the cross, with His own blood; and, in faith and repentance, you must ask Him for it! The Bible says, *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."*