

## Matthew 5:33-42 – “Living a Life of Sincerity and Surrender”

We’ve been looking at the Sermon on the Mount in our study through the book of Matthew. And Jesus has been confronting a lot of people that had the perception that they were holy and righteous.

For instance, the Pharisees (the one’s that interpreted and applied the law) and the Scribes (the one’s that recorded and interpreted the law) were boasting in, and prideful of, the fact that they were living and carrying out the requirements of the law. But Jesus comes along and shows that keeping the law is not about outward ability but inward attitudes.

Jesus has been explaining what the Law says, but going further to really explain what the Law means. You see, so many were teaching that to obey the law was only a matter of doing the right things. If you want to be innocent of the 6th commandment (*don’t murder*), then just don’t kill someone. That should be easy enough, right?

But Jesus is making clear for us that our righteousness is not linked to our outward actions – it’s a matter of the heart. And so, with six illustrations from Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus references a portion of the law, but then reveal that these laws are broken even through our attitudes. In other words, it’s not just a matter of action by which we’re declared guilty before God, it’s a matter of inward thoughts and attitudes.

- “True Christian morality must arise from the heart; and, as a result of this, no one but God (who controls the heart) can provide it.” <sup>1</sup>
- This is what Jesus seeks to point out.

So, each of these 6 illustrations begins with **“You have heard that it was said...”** and Jesus will point back to what the law said, and even more so, the Mishna. The Mishna was the oral traditions and interpretations of the law. This is why Jesus said, *you have **heard** that it was said...* He’s countering the oral traditions passed down and which were held even above the law. So now He comes along and says, **“But I say to you...”**, and in so doing He seeks to break down the true heart and understanding of the law.

We’ve already covered the first three, now we’ll cover the last three as we look at the themes of: **Sincerity**, **Surrender**, and **Selflessness**.

<sup>1</sup> Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Sermon on the Mount: an expositional commentary* (p. 92). Baker Books.

## 1. Sincerity – 5:33-37

**5:33-37 - “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’<sup>34</sup> But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne;<sup>35</sup> nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.<sup>36</sup> Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.<sup>37</sup> But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.**

Jesus touches on the law spoken in Numbers 30:2 and **Leviticus 19:12**, “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.”

And by swearing we mean taking an oath or making a promise.

So, the Pharisees said ok we can do that. We won’t swear falsely by the Lord’s name by just not swearing by His name. And then they began to think up all these other ways to add weight to what they were saying by swearing by heaven, or swearing by God’s throne, or by Jerusalem, or by some part of their body.

It’s interesting that at a young age we learn that we need to add something to what we’re saying to really verify that we’re speaking the truth (at least when I was young).

What did we say? “*Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.*” What kind of twisted, morbid generation was teaching me such things?? Now if I really held to this, I’d be walking around with two pin cushions on my face instead of eyes. People would be like, ‘*Did you try and pluck your eyes out because of Matthew 5:29?*’ But we recognize there’s a bit of leeway in our words. That our words, or our promises, don’t always have to be carried through. But we do our best to try and convince people that are words can be trusted.

So again, the Pharisees thought I’ll swear by heaven, or God’s throne etc. and if I don’t carry out that oath it wasn’t really binding anyways since I didn’t swear in the Lord’s name.

- Again, like when we were kids, and someone would say, ‘*ok I’ll do this... I’ll eat this worm if you do.*’ And you make an agreement and then your friend says, ‘*My fingers were crossed, it doesn’t count!*’ And you were so upset but you’re like, ‘*Yea you got me! I’ve gotta eat this worm and you’re exempt.*’ And then it just got even more crazy because then you’d be asking every

time you made a promise to see each other's hands. And then someone came up with the brilliant idea that your shoelaces counted as being crossed which also made you now exempt from upholding your promise.

- This is kind of like what these Pharisees were doing!

So, Jesus says, you might be fulfilling the commandment to not break an oath made in the name of the Lord, but your hearts are all wrong because you're still being deceptive.

Even though these Pharisees were not using the name of the Lord they were still swearing by things representing the Lord: **heaven** - it's God throne; the **earth** - it's God's footstool, it's all His creation; **Jerusalem** - this is His royal city. Even swearing by your own **head** wasn't yours to do so because it's still God's. You have no control over your head otherwise we'd all have thick, lush, natural colored hair!

These things all represented God and these people were greatly misrepresenting God in how they were conducting themselves. Oh, they might have looked religious and Godly outwardly, but inwardly they were deceptive and tricking people. And God was concerned about their heart.

Jesus says, **let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'**

Stop trying to see how you can get around having to uphold your word. Don't look for the loopholes. Be people of your word. When you say, Yes I will do that, Then do that! Let your word be your word. Why? Because anything more than that is not of God, but of the evil one.

- You know the one thing that God can't do? Lie!
- But the devil is called the father of lies (John 8:44).
- So, who are you most representing?
- Let us be citizens of the kingdom by how we speak truth and keep our word.

Before moving on, let me just say, some people have taken this to mean we shouldn't make any oaths at all. But Jesus Himself testified under oath (Matthew 26:63-64). This is simply speaking of using an oath falsely to deceive.

I'm thankful that my wife made vows to me when we got married. One day I hope she will live up to them 😊. But vows or oaths are not wrong.

## 2. Surrender – 5:38-42

**5:38-42 - “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. <sup>40</sup> If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. <sup>41</sup> And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. <sup>42</sup> Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.**

Jesus now quotes from Exodus 21:24. And this is a law that people love to live by today. In fact, some live by the motto: *I don’t get mad, I get even*. Ever heard that? Ever said that? That’s how I lived most of my life. In fact it wasn’t *‘I’m gonna get even, it was, I’m gonna get one up. I’m gonna take revenge and then some.’* But I don’t live like that anymore. The Lord convicted me of this last week.

The point is, this command was never meant to be an **obligation**, it was about **limitation**. This was given to restrict people from going too far in retribution.

But now Jesus comes along, and though He doesn’t deny the legal application of this law, He shows that we don’t need to carry this out on a personal level of revenge and vengeance. We don’t have to live our lives trying to get even when people wrong us. This is not the needed conduct of citizens of the Kingdom.

In fact, Jesus takes it one step further by saying if someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other one too. Now that’s a very hard thing to do, isn’t it? I can imagine Jesus looking over to Peter and asking, *‘Are you paying attention to this Peter? I’m saying this specifically for your benefit! You might want to take notes too.’*

Not only should we turn the other cheek but we should be willing to give up our jacket to those who want to sue for our shirt.

And in this day a Roman soldier could come up to you tap you on the shoulder and you’d be required by law to carry his equipment for a mile. You weren’t required to go longer than a mile. But Jesus says go with them and serve them an extra mile. You had every right to say I don’t need to go further, but there’s something that happens as we lay down our rights. As we surrender our desires and rights, we get to bless others. We get to reveal the Kingdom way. And the Kingdom way is not about our way, it’s about laying down our way to show the way to Jesus!

- “Christians think not of their rights, but of their duties; not of their privileges, but of their responsibilities.” <sup>2</sup>

It's in surrender for Jesus that we have much to gain. Jesus is our ultimate example in this. He laid down His rights, was mocked, slapped, beaten, scourged, and nailed to a cross. He surrendered without retaliating. We reflect our Saviour when we endure abuses and inconveniences graciously and without retaliation.

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<sup>2</sup> Barclay, W. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (Third Ed., p. 193). Saint Andrew Press.