

# Introduction

Two sessions ago we watched Jesus climb a hill and tell a crowd of sick, poor, occupied people that the kingdom of heaven had already arrived. Last week we found out what that kingdom looks like on the people already living inside it. Poor in spirit. Mourning. Meek. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Merciful. Pure in heart. Peacemakers. Every beatitude described a kind of person, not a set of instructions. Jesus never once said do this. He said blessed are those who already are this.

That mattered, and it still matters tonight. But it was only half the picture, and Jesus knew it. You can describe a kind of person all day long, and if you never say anything more, some of us will assume we already qualify. We hear poor in spirit and nod. We hear merciful and think of the one time we forgave somebody. We match ourselves to the description just well enough to feel finished, and we move on.

Jesus does not let that happen. Starting tonight, in verse 17, he stops describing and starts asking. And what he asks for

is not what most people standing on that hillside expected, and it is probably not what most of us expect either.

**Matthew 5:17–20 BSB**

<sup>17</sup> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

<sup>18</sup> For I tell you truly, until heaven and earth pass away, not a single jot, not a stroke of a pen, will disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

<sup>19</sup> So then, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do likewise will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever practices and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Here is where the sermon turns. Everything up to this point has been about character. Everything from here through the end of chapter 7 verse 12 is about what that character actually looks like once it meets real life, real people, and real situations you cannot fake your way through. Six of those situations are sitting in front of us tonight. Murder.

Adultery. Divorce. Oaths. Retaliation. Enemy love. Six places where Jesus takes something that crowd already thought they understood, and shows them they had been aiming at the wrong target the whole time.

I want to tell you up front, this is not going to be a comfortable night. I already promised you, back in week one, that we were not going to soften anything Jesus says in this sermon. So let's see where Jesus starts, with a claim about the Law itself, and about who was actually keeping it.

## The Mark Jesus Is Actually Aiming At

Look at what Jesus says the moment he turns from describing kingdom character to actually asking something of the people he's describing it to.

### **Matthew 5:17 BSB**

<sup>17</sup> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

That's an important sentence to get right before we further, because everything Jesus says for the rest of this chapter depends on hearing it correctly. Jesus is not standing here to replace Moses with something new. He is not adding

requirements on top of what the Law already asked for. He is telling this crowd that He is the one thing the entire Law and every prophet after it was pointing toward the whole time.

Remember what we found in week one. This whole middle section of the sermon, from here through chapter seven verse twelve, is bracketed on both ends by the same phrase, the Law and the Prophets. This verse is where that bracket opens. Later we'll read the verse where it closes, and it's going to use this exact same language. Hold onto that. Everything between these two bookends tonight, every case study we're about to walk through, sits inside a frame that starts and ends with this one claim. Jesus did not come to tear down what came before him. He came to fulfill it.

Now here's where it gets uncomfortable.

**Matthew 5:20 BSB**

<sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

When we looked at hungering and thirsting for righteousness, I told you that word was going to come back around and get tested hard. Here it is. Notice exactly who Jesus is comparing this crowd to. Not the worst people in Galilee. Not the obviously corrupt. The scribes and the Pharisees. The most careful, most disciplined, most visibly

religious people in the entire region. If anyone in that culture looked like they had righteousness figured out, it was them.

So when Jesus says your righteousness has to exceed theirs, the first reaction is probably despair. If the most religious people in Israel haven't cleared the bar, what hope does anyone else have?

That reaction is exactly backward, and getting it right here shapes how you hear everything else tonight.

Sin, at its root, is missing the mark. That's what the word itself means. Falling short of a target. And the target has never been a behavior. It has never been a checklist. The target has always been God's own character. That's what righteousness was aiming at from the very first command God ever gave.

Here's what the scribes and Pharisees had done, without most of them even realizing it. They had taken that target, God's own character, and swapped it out for a smaller one. A target you could actually hit. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't break your oaths. Measurable things. Things you could look at in your own life and at the end of the day say, I didn't do that, I'm clear. And by that smaller target, many of them really were hitting it. That took real discipline.

But it was the wrong target. You can hit the wrong target

perfectly, every single day, and still miss the mark entirely.

So when Jesus says your righteousness has to exceed the scribes and Pharisees, he is not telling this crowd to aim further down the same line the Pharisees were already aiming down. Try harder at the same kind of obedience, just more of it. That would still be the wrong target. What he's about to do, in each of the next six case studies, is point at the real target and say, this is what you were actually supposed to be aiming at all along.

That is the whole point tonight. Watch for it in every case study. Jesus is going to take something this crowd already thought they had handled, murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, enemy love, and show them that handling the behavior was never the same thing as hitting the mark.

I need to stop here and say something plainly, because there's a way to hear everything I just said that would let you off the hook, and I don't want that happening to anyone in this room tonight.

Somebody here might be thinking, so this is really about the heart, not the outward rules, and that almost sounds like relief. Like the pressure's off. Like as long as your heart's in the right place, the specifics don't matter as much.

Wrong.

Heart level righteousness is not an easier target than behavior. It's a harder one. You can fake behavior. You cannot fake a heart. You can go years without murdering anyone while carrying contempt for people every single day. You cannot do that with a heart that's actually been changed. External obedience can be managed, scheduled, performed. What Jesus is asking for tonight cannot be performed. It can only be real or not real. Once you see what the actual mark is, every one of them gets harder to hear, not easier.

One more thing to watch for before the first case study. Six times tonight Jesus is going to say some version of you have heard that it was said. Pay attention to what he's quoting each time, because it's not always the same thing. Sometimes he's quoting the Law itself, word for word out of the Torah. Sometimes he's quoting something else, a tradition that had circulated long enough that people started treating it like Moses said it, when he never did. Jesus handles those two things differently. We'll come back to that.

## Murder and the Heart (5:21-26)

### **Matthew 5:21-22 BSB**

<sup>21</sup> You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'Do not murder' and 'Anyone who murders will be subject to

judgment.'

<sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be subject to the fire of hell.

This isn't a tradition someone added later. This is the sixth commandment, word for word, straight out of the mouth of Moses at Sinai. Do not murder. And nobody in that crowd would have argued with it.

Now look closely at the three courts Jesus names, because they're not just three increasingly serious versions of the same warning. They're three actual, distinct institutions, and the way Jesus pairs them with each offense is the real argument of this passage.

The first court, the one tied to anger, is the local town court, the kind every Israelite town had for ordinary disputes. That's the same court murder itself would go to. Already odd, if you're paying attention, an emotion getting the same court as a killing. The second court, tied to the insult raca, is the Sanhedrin, Jerusalem's highest court, reserved for the nation's gravest cases. And the third isn't a court at all. Calling someone a fool lands you in gehenna, hell, God's own final judgment, with no human court in between.

Watch how badly that escalation breaks if you read it as a

real legal system. No local court in Israel ever heard an anger case. No Sanhedrin ever convened because someone got insulted. That mismatch isn't a flaw in the teaching. It's the entire point of it. Jesus isn't describing courts anyone should expect to actually face. He's showing, by making each pairing more absurd than the last, that human courts are simply the wrong tool for what he's talking about. A court can rule on an act, because an act leaves evidence, witnesses, something visible to weigh. No court on earth, not the smallest town tribunal, not the Sanhedrin itself, can put contempt on trial. They have no way to see it.

Only one court can actually try that. And Jesus is telling this crowd, in the very first case study of the night, that it's already in session.

This is the missing the mark argument from earlier. The scribes and Pharisees measured murder because murder was the only part any human system could ever measure. Jesus just revealed there was a second court running the entire time, one that doesn't wait for the act, because it can already see straight through to what produces it.

Jesus doesn't stop at naming the problem. He tells this crowd what to do about it.

### **Matthew 5:23–24 BSB**

<sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

<sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Not after the service. Not once you've gotten around to it. Leave the gift sitting on the altar, mid act of worship, and go make it right first. That's how seriously Jesus treats an unreconciled relationship. Worship doesn't get to run ahead of it.

Then he closes the case with a warning.

**Matthew 5:25–26 BSB**

<sup>25</sup> Reconcile quickly with your adversary, while you are still on the way to court. Otherwise, he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.

<sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

The picture is a debtor being marched to court with no time left to negotiate. Settle now, Jesus says, while you still can. Contempt you let sit unaddressed doesn't stay still. It moves toward something you won't be able to talk your way out of later.

So here's where the first case study leaves us. The mark was never don't kill. It was never even close to that. Jesus just

showed you, using the very court system this crowd already trusted, that the only court equipped to try the real offense was one they couldn't see. That's the standard the scribes and Pharisees weren't being held to, because their whole system only had jurisdiction over the outward act. Jesus just revealed the court that can see our hearts...

## Adultery and the Heart (5:27-30)

### **Matthew 5:27-28 BSB**

<sup>27</sup> You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'

<sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

This is real Torah being quoted. The seventh commandment, straight from Sinai. And once again, by that commandment alone, most of that crowd could walk away clean. Adultery was a specific act, and most people in that room had never committed it.

Jesus doesn't say lust will eventually lead to adultery if you're not careful. He says it already has. Already committed, present tense, complete, the moment the look happens with that intent behind it. Not a warning about where a road ends up. A statement about where you already are.

This is the same move as murder and anger, aimed at a different part of life. The visible target was the act. The real target was always the wanting. And wanting doesn't show up on anybody's record. You can sit in a pew every week, never once cross the line the Pharisees were measuring, and still be missing the mark completely, because the mark was never just the act. It was purity all the way down, not purity that stops at the surface because nobody else can see past it.

Jesus doesn't leave this as an observation. He tells the room what to do about it, and the language is deliberately extreme.

**Matthew 5:29–30 BSB**

<sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

<sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to depart into hell.

This is not a literal instruction. Jesus used this same kind of overstatement elsewhere in this sermon, a plank in your own eye, a camel through the eye of a needle. It's a teaching method, not a medical directive. But don't let the fact that it's hyperbole soften what it's actually saying. The point of

picking the most extreme possible image, your own eye, your own hand, is to make sure nobody mistakes this for a minor adjustment. Whatever in your life is feeding this, Jesus says deal with it like you'd deal with something you'd genuinely cut off your own body to be rid of. Not managed. Not moderated. Removed.

That's a hard word, and I'm not going to pretend it isn't. But go back to where we started tonight. The mark was never can you avoid the act. It was always what's actually going on in you, and what are you willing to do about it once you see it clearly.

## Divorce and the Design of Marriage (5:31-32)

### **Matthew 5:31 BSB**

<sup>31</sup> It has also been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'

Notice something different about this one before we even get to what Jesus says next. With murder and with lust, Jesus quoted the actual commandment, word for word off the pages of Torah. Here, what's being quoted is a popular summary of a passage in Deuteronomy, and by Jesus's day that summary had drifted a long way from what the passage actually said. There was a real, live debate happening in

Jesus's own culture over exactly how far a man could go in ending a marriage, and the loudest position in that debate had turned a narrow regulation into something close to a standing right. Divorce for any reason at all, so long as the paperwork got filed.

Here's what that popular reading missed, and it's the same kind of miss we've watched twice already tonight. Moses never said divorce was good. He regulated it, the way you'd regulate something you know is going to happen because of how broken people already are, not the way you'd endorse something you're glad exists. The mark was never did you complete the certificate correctly. The mark was, and always had been, all the way back in the garden, one man and one woman, joined by God himself into one flesh. That's the design Jesus points back to. Not a contract two people can dissolve whenever it stops working for them. A union God performs, not one people merely arrange.

**Matthew 5:32 BSB**

<sup>32</sup> But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, brings adultery upon her. And he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

That's a hard sentence, and I'm not going to talk around it. What Jesus is confronting here is the same thing he confronted with anger and with lust, a crowd that thought following the technical procedure settled the matter, when

the real question was never procedural. You could file the certificate exactly right and still be doing violence to something God joined together.

## Oaths and the Weight of Your Word (5:33-37)

### **Matthew 5:33 BSB**

<sup>33</sup> Again, you have heard that it was said to the ancients, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill your vows to the Lord.’

What's being quoted here isn't a single commandment the way murder and adultery were. It's a summary drawn from several places in the Law, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, all of them teaching the same thing. If you make a vow to the Lord, you keep it. Don't swear falsely. This is real Torah, not invented tradition, even though it's pulled together from more than one passage.

### **Matthew 5:34–37 BSB**

<sup>34</sup> But I tell you not to swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne;

<sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

<sup>36</sup> Nor should you swear by your head, for you cannot make

a single hair white or black.

<sup>37</sup> Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' Anything more comes from the evil one.

Jesus doesn't tell this crowd to take their vows more seriously. He tells them to stop swearing oaths altogether, by heaven, by earth, by Jerusalem, even by their own head, because none of it is actually theirs to swear by. Let your yes be yes and your no be no. Anything more than that comes from somewhere it shouldn't.

Here's the system Jesus is dismantling, and it's not gone from the world, it's just wearing different clothes now. Somewhere along the way, people had built a two tier system of speech. Ordinary talk, the kind you use every day, and sworn talk, the kind backed by an oath, treated as more binding, more serious, harder to walk back. And once you have two tiers, you've created a problem the Law never intended. It means your ordinary word, the one you're not swearing on anything, doesn't have to carry the same weight. You can be technically faithful to every oath you've ever sworn and still be a person whose plain, everyday word can't quite be trusted.

That's the mark Jesus is pointing at here, and it's the same as murder and adultery, just applied to speech instead of action. The target was never did you keep your sworn

promises. It was always, is your word trustworthy at every level, with nothing extra required to back it up. A person who tells the truth plainly, every time, doesn't need a system of escalating vows to be believed. The need for oaths in the first place is evidence something's already wrong.

This isn't new ground for this church. It's already been said here plainly, that vows are serious enough to think carefully before making them, that it's better not to vow at all than to vow and fail to keep it. What's new tonight is seeing where Jesus wants that seriousness to actually rest. Not on the oath. On you, all the time, whether anyone's asking you to swear to it or not.

If you want to see where an oath culture like this eventually leads, look no further than Herod. A rash promise made out loud, in front of witnesses, at a party, over a dancer's request. By the time he realized what he'd actually agreed to, he had John the Baptist's head brought in on a platter, because breaking that oath felt like a bigger problem to him than murdering a righteous man. That's not an isolated bad decision. That's what happens when a culture trains people to believe their sworn word carries more weight than right and wrong itself. Herod wasn't unusually evil. He was exactly the kind of person this system produces.

The mark was never can you be trusted when you've sworn to something. It was always, can you be trusted, period.

# Retaliation and the Refusal to Escalate (5:38-42)

## **Matthew 5:38 BSB**

<sup>38</sup> You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.’

This one is real Torah again, the same law showing up three separate times in the Law of Moses, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But before we go any further, let’s talk about what that law was actually for, because by Jesus's day it had drifted a long way from its original purpose. This was never a personal permission slip for revenge. It was a limit placed on courts, a boundary on how far a judge could go in punishing a wrong, so that a stolen ox couldn't be answered with a man's life, and a black eye couldn't be answered with a death sentence. It existed to stop escalation, not to authorize it.

By the time Jesus is standing on this hillside, that limit had been repurposed into something else. People had taken a rule meant to restrain a courtroom and turned it into a personal standard for private life. As long as what you gave back didn't exceed what was done to you, you were in the clear. Proportional payback, sanctioned by Scripture, or so it seemed.

**Matthew 5:39–42 BSB**

<sup>39</sup> But I tell you not to resist an evil person. If someone slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also;

<sup>40</sup> if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well;

<sup>41</sup> and if someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

<sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Jesus doesn't just close that loophole, he removes the whole category. Someone slaps you, an insult to your dignity more than a real injury, turn and let them do it again rather than strike back. Someone sues you for your shirt, hand over your coat as well. A soldier conscripts you to carry his gear the legally required mile, carry it a second one he never asked for. Someone asks to borrow, don't turn them away.

None of these are life or death situations. That distinction matters, and I'll come back to it. What they have in common is smaller, more constant, and in some ways harder to catch, the daily itch to protect what's yours, to make sure nobody gets away with wronging you, to keep the ledger even. Jesus

is going after that itch directly.

Here's the mark this crowd had been aiming at without realizing it. Proportional retaliation felt righteous because it wasn't excessive. Give back exactly what you got, no more. That's fairness, that's justice, that's what the Law seemed to allow. But the real mark was never was your revenge measured correctly. It was, do you trust God enough with your own vindication that you don't need to take it into your own hands at all. Romans 12 says it plainly, vengeance belongs to the Lord, not to you. Every time you insist on getting even, even fairly, even proportionally, you're quietly saying that's a job you don't trust Him to finish. We'll come back to exactly where that trust leads when we get to enemy love in a few minutes, because this case study and the next one are really one movement, not two.

Now, the distinction I promised to come back to.

This passage is about absorbing personal insult and minor injustice without escalating into revenge. It is not a command to remain in danger. A slap on the cheek is a wound to pride, not a threat to your life. A lawsuit over a coat is an inconvenience, not a crisis. Even Jesus himself, when he was struck during his trial, didn't silently offer the other side of his face. He asked the man directly, if I've spoken wrongly, say so, but if I've spoken rightly, why are you hitting me. He named the injustice out loud. He didn't

retaliate, but he didn't pretend it hadn't happened either. If the one who gave us this teaching responded to being struck by speaking up rather than staying silent, that tells you something about what this passage is and isn't asking for.

Getting to safety when you're in danger is not a failure to turn the other cheek. This passage was never written to keep someone trapped somewhere unsafe. It was written to kill the instinct for personal vengeance over personal insult, the small, constant, everyday desire to make sure you never come out on the losing end of an exchange. That instinct, Jesus says, has no place in a life shaped like the kingdom.

## Enemy Love, the Culminating Example (5:43-48)

### **Matthew 5:43 BSB**

<sup>43</sup> You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor' and 'Hate your enemy.'

Here's where the pattern from tonight takes a sharp turn, and I want you to catch it, because we've been building toward this since we first named it back at the start of the session. Love your neighbor is real Torah, straight out of Leviticus. But hate your enemy is not in that verse. It's not anywhere in the Law of Moses. Somewhere along the way,

someone had added a second half to a command God never gave a second half to, and by Jesus's day people had said it long enough that it sounded like Scripture.

That's different from every case study so far tonight. Murder, adultery, oaths, even the eye for an eye principle behind retaliation, all of those were real commands from God that had been narrowed down to something smaller and more manageable. This one is different. This isn't narrowing. This is an outright addition, a line invented by human tradition and quietly stitched onto something God actually said, until nobody could tell where God's word ended and man's word began.

**Matthew 5:44–45 BSB**

<sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

<sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. And the reason Jesus gives is worth thinking on, so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

In the beatitudes, we spent real time on peacemakers, and on that phrase, sons of God. This is where that thread lands. Peacemaking was never just the absence of conflict. It was

costly, active reconciliation, the same shape of love Jesus is naming right now. And the persecution beatitude, blessed are those persecuted for righteousness' sake, wasn't a passing mention either. It was pointing forward to exactly this moment, the moment where persecution and enemy love finally meet in the same verse.

Loving an enemy starts with giving up your right to get even, handing that over to God instead of holding onto it yourself, and praying for the person who wronged you until the bitterness actually loosens its grip. It's the same instruction from the retaliation case study a few minutes ago, taken all the way to its hardest edge. Retaliation asked you to stop returning harm for harm. Enemy love asks you to actively want good for the person who harmed you, and to ask God for it on their behalf.

Why does Jesus tie this to being sons of your Father in heaven specifically? Because of what he says next. Your Father sends the sun on the evil and the good, sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. God's own love isn't reciprocal. He doesn't withhold kindness from people until they've earned it back. If you only love the people who love you first, you're not reflecting your Father's character at all. You're just doing what comes naturally to everyone.

#### **Matthew 5:46–47 BSB**

<sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

Do not even tax collectors do the same?

<sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even Gentiles do the same?

And Jesus makes that point almost embarrassing. Tax collectors love people who love them back. Even irreligious, unremarkable people manage that much, without any help from God at all. If that's the ceiling of your love, you haven't done anything that looks like righteousness. You've done exactly what comes standard with being human.

Which brings us to the verse that closes out every case study we've walked through tonight.

**Matthew 5:48 BSB**

<sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

I want you to hear this the right way, because it's easy to hear it the wrong way and let yourself off the hook entirely. Some of you may have just heard that verse and thought, well, nobody's perfect, so that can't really be the standard, that must be some kind of exaggeration like the eye and the hand back in the adultery case study. It isn't. This verse isn't hyperbole. It's the plainest statement in the whole night of exactly what the mark has been from the very beginning of this section. Not a behavior. Not a rule you can satisfy and move on from. God's own character. Nothing less than that.

Go back to where we started tonight. Even the scribes and Pharisees, the most disciplined, most visibly obedient people in that entire culture, were missing this mark, because they'd swapped it for something else. Murder, adultery, oaths, retaliation, all the way through enemy love, every one of these was Jesus pointing at that same target and refusing to let anyone mistake another one for it. This isn't a higher bar than the Pharisees were held to. It's the bar that was there the entire time, the one their whole system had replaced with something you could actually finish.

You cannot finish this one. That's not a flaw in the teaching. That's the point of it.

## Close

Six times tonight we watched the same thing happen. Murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, enemy love, and in every single one, the visible target turned out to be different than the real one. Don't kill anyone. Don't sleep with someone else's spouse. File the paperwork correctly. Keep your sworn word. Don't take more revenge than you were given. Don't hate the people who hate you. Six targets a careful, disciplined person could hit and walk away feeling righteous. And every time, Jesus pointed past the target to

something underneath it. Contempt. Wanting. The design God intended. The trustworthiness of your plain word. The instinct to get even. And finally, at the very end, love that doesn't wait to be earned back.

Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. That's not a bar the Pharisees cleared and you have to clear a little higher. That's the bar that was always there, the one their whole system had swapped out for something smaller and more finishable.

Say that too plainly, and stop there, and some of you will walk out of here tonight in despair rather than in the shape this thesis has been building toward for three weeks. So hear this clearly before we close. Righteousness is not the price of the ticket in. It is the shape of a life once it actually belongs to the kingdom Jesus is announcing.

That verse we just spent this whole night proving you can't reach on your own, be perfect as your Father is perfect, was spoken by the one person who actually lived it. Jesus didn't just describe that mark from a distance. He hit it, completely, the whole time he walked this earth. That's what fulfill meant back in verse 17, before we'd even started tonight. He's not handing you an impossible standard and walking away. He's the one who already met it, on your behalf, and what he's forming in you now isn't willpower aimed at a target you'll hit through enough effort. It's His

own life, growing in you. That's not a loophole out of tonight's demands. It's the only way anyone could ever actually meet them.

Righteousness is not the price of the ticket in. It is the shape of a life once it actually belongs to the kingdom Jesus is announcing.

Next week we move from how you treat other people into how you relate to God directly. Giving. Prayer. Fasting. Right in the center of that section sits the Lord's Prayer, the structural middle of the entire sermon. We'll ask a question that grows directly out of tonight. Once you know where your attention actually rests, is it on being seen, or is it on the Father who sees in secret? That's where your righteousness actually comes from.

Here's what I want you to do this week. Think of one person, right now, who has genuinely wronged you. Someone who actually hurt you. Ask yourself honestly, have I stopped at not retaliating against them, and quietly called that enough? Or am I actually praying for their good, the way verse 44 asks? Those are two different targets. Tonight was about learning to tell them apart. This week, pick one person and aim at the real one.