



Hard Sayings of Jesus

Lesson 8: More Righteous than the Teachers of the Law?

Opening Prayer

Introduction

During the last lesson, we looked at words of Scripture which explained that Jesus is true God and true man at the same time. Explain why Jesus had to be both of these in order to secure our salvation.

Studying God's Word

The teaching of *justification by grace alone through faith* has often been called the *doctrine on which the church stands or falls*. It's the heart of Christianity. If we hold on to all of the moral standards of Christianity but remove justification by grace, we don't have Christianity anymore!

So why, then, does it sound like Jesus is saying the opposite at times? Today we'll look at Jesus' words that seem to emphasize *works*. May God give us insight to better understand his love.

Matthew 5:17-20 "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. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

1. Let's note the context. When did Jesus speak these words? To whom did he speak them? What is his purpose throughout Matthew 5 – 7?

Matthew 5:1-2 Now when [Jesus] saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...

Matthew 5:21, 22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago... But I tell you..."

2. How do Jesus' words seem to deny salvation by grace?

3. These words serve as a mirror to show our sinfulness. Consider **Romans 3:20** “No one will be declared righteous in [God’s] sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” What other Bible passages speak the same way?
4. The law speaks a hard message, but one we all need to hear. Discuss ways to share this truth with others in our society. How would you tailor your words with a Christian or a non-Christian? How do you know when someone needs to hear it, and how can you share it?

Matthew 25:14-30 “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ ²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ²² “The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ ²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²⁴ “Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ²⁶ His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ “ ‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

5. You could be forgiven for considering the “master,” Jesus, the villain of the story! What does he seem to be interested in?
6. This parable isn’t simply about *actions*; it’s about *attitudes*.
 - a. What does the unfaithful servant think the master cares about?

- b. Look at the master's reaction to the faithful servants. Identify his real goal for them.
 - c. When do we need to hear words like this?
7. Let's list some reasons why understanding grace is the most powerful motivation for living our Christian lives.
8. Even when Jesus preaches the law that shows our sins, his goal is to lead us to salvation like a shepherd using his rod and staff. How do the following passages proclaim grace?

Matthew 21:31,32 Jesus said to [the temple leaders], "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

John 3:16 "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered [the criminal], "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Summary

- Jesus preaches that perfect righteousness is necessary because it is. At times he points out our self-righteousness, at times our complacency. When he does this, his words reveal the sin that we like to ignore, and he calls us to struggle against both.
- Grace, when properly understood and received in faith, changes our lives, renews our motives and moves us to action.
- In the clearest terms possible, Jesus preaches the gospel that salvation comes by God's grace and our good works are a response to that grace.

Prayer