

Reading: Psalm 119:1-16; Matthew 5:17-20

Theme: Satisfying Righteousness.

The UK has some weird and wonderful traditions! Queuing in line for things! Bonfire Night; what about Morris dancing or Gurning competitions! The UK hosts the World Stone Skimming Championship, the World Nettle Eating Championship, the World Pooh Sticks championship and many conker contests... Then there are a whole host of traditions associated with the Royal family - all their pomp, pageantry and colourful displays e.g. changing of the guard or the trooping of the colours or the State opening of Parliament. We range from the grand to the odd, but there are local traditions and no doubt family traditions that can be considered weird by outsiders! Some traditions seem to be part of British law, but are just traditions and may set a precedence that will bring them into British law.

Last week we saw something of how Jesus began to challenge the traditions and traditional emphasis of the Pharisees as He burst onto the scene as **1.The Revolutionary Teacher**, seeming, to them, to give **2.The Revolutionary Teaching**. Jesus' teaching was taking the Pharisees and all back to OT, to God's word. He showed how God's word was to be applied correctly, not misapplied and twisted to fit their ideas and traditions. Jesus gave God's word it's true and right honour and place in people's lives and showed it was to touch and deal with the innermost part of our beings and not just be an outward show of doing it. Under the overall heading of The Revolutionary Teaching we noted that Jesus spoke of **The Fulfilling of God's Word** (v17) - the law and the prophets, now see:

The Permanence of God's Word (v18)

Jesus showed that He not only came to fulfil God's word, but also He had not come to do away with God's word, the OT. In this verse He shows that God's word cannot be changed or modified at all, for

God's word is permanent, as are all its demands and truths. God's moral law and His holy ways for our lives do not become out of date, or have a *use by date*, but are permanent, relevant and applicable for all people throughout all time, especially to those who profess to love and serve Him. God's word has demands upon us all. We saw last week that the moral law applies to all people, whether Christians or not. Even though Christ has come and fulfilled the Law and the Prophets does not mean that we can ignore or cast aside the OT and dump it as useless or irrelevant.

Jesus underlines the permanence of God's OT word and He does so in a graphic way and says that 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, or as AV says not "*one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law*" In original this referred to the smallest Greek letter which corresponded to the smallest letter in Hebrew and then a little mark that seemed like a hook on a letter that altered its pronunciation. In modern terms we'd say "*Not a 't' be uncrossed or an 'i' undotted!*"

God's word is permanent and cannot be altered or discarded on a whim or a fashion change or even because it does not suit our point of view. Its truth, teaching and principles all stand and is useful, profitable for a person of God in their lives (2 Timothy 3:16 "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"). We learn from OT much NT truth in seed form and we see NT truth in its picture form in OT - the types of Christ and His sacrifice; the holiness that God demands from His people; principles of how God deals with His people and what He expects from them. We must not ignore or dismiss the OT, but must read, know and rightly

apply it for our own lives in the light of all that Christ has fulfilled and accomplished for us.

From what Jesus says it seems that only when we are in heaven will the word of God, OT and NT, be finished with. It is not traditions, stories or myths we read and preach from the Bible, but it is God's word and that will never be surplus to our requirement until we get to heaven. We are to realise that God's word is still being fulfilled and accomplished even in our day. It **still tells** people of God, of their need of God and the Saviour He has provided - the Lord Jesus. When people realise that is so, then the word of God **still promises** they can be accepted by God because of what Christ has done. The word of God is **still to be fulfilled** as it still speaks of the end of time, of heaven and hell, of a day of judgement, of a glorious eternity, of a new heaven and a new earth and what it says will be carried out completely. Jesus says it is a solemn truth He spoke here. We need to pay attention and not dismiss any part of God's word. We've seen Jesus **fulfilling God's word, the permanence of God's word** and now we see:

The Respect of God's Word (v19)

Jesus establishes the need to respect God's word - not in a superstitious way, but to respect it enough to let it loose in our lives, to live it out and teach such. The Pharisees had buried God's word under their traditions and in reality respected their rules, regulations etc. more than God's word. The 613 commandments they saw, their subdivisions and interpretations were the thing they lived by. They went by the letter and not the spirit of God's word and they robbed it of its force and life. It was caged up in the bars of ritualism and legalism, was robbed of its claws and teeth and not allowed to be free to roam and pounce on peoples' secret thoughts and desires.

They even provided escape clauses for people e.g. they allowed people to give gifts to God's temple and said this freed them from the need to give gifts to support their parents - so breaking the 5th commandment of honouring our father and mother. To do this the Pharisees split hairs to get meanings out of commands, out of OT teachings and they applied these in a legalistic way and in practice they ended up denying God's word and taught others to do so. We also must be careful not to break God's commandments and especially not to teach others to do the same by our words, actions or example and we are certainly not to make Christian superstitions from it!

Such ones are termed insignificant, the least in God's kingdom. Jesus sets as least those who do not obey His word, especially if they teach others to do the same and cause them to follow their example and teaching as the Pharisees did. In contrast to this Jesus says that whoever lives out, does (practises) these commands and encourages, teaches others to put such into practise, to keep them as applicable in their lives, such ones will be called great. Now we need to apply this to our own lives – what do we teach by word or example? Do we show and teach disobedience to the word of God or obedience? It can be too easy to build up our witness with our mouths and then knock or tear it down by our example, words, actions and attitudes and end up destroying our witness for the Lord Jesus.

The righteousness, the right way of living Jesus expects from those who are His people is in full accord with God's standards revealed already in OT and enlarged and amplified in NT. The Jesus way of righteous living is here being contrasted with the traditional interpretations of God's word by the Pharisees and Jesus opens up on this more in 5:21-48 as His revolutionary teaching is shown and applied. Before that happens He speaks of:

3. The Revolutionary Righteousness. (v20)

This was something that needed highlighting and emphasising and Jesus emphasises this when He says *“For I tell you...”* This is something to be noted; something very important as it concerns 2 types or ways of righteousness - on the one hand was the righteousness of the Pharisees, while on the other is a superior kind of righteousness, which delights God and provides access to heaven. The rest of chapter 5 concerns this contrast *“It has been said... You have been told... But I tell you”*. 6 specific areas are contrasted - giving the traditional interpretation and the interpretation of the Lord Jesus as to how it should be applied and this gives us principles for other areas in our lives. Basically this contrast is made between the righteousness of man and his ways and the God acceptable righteousness and ways and is also interwoven into the teaching of chapters 6 and 7.

We are to recognise the teaching here in this verse was quite staggering and revolutionary, for a apparently a saying of the day was *“If only 2 men were allowed into heaven, then one would be a teacher of the law and the other a Pharisee.”* Here Jesus says that the righteousness of the lawyers (*teachers of the law*) and the Pharisees was not enough to enter the kingdom of heaven and another righteousness was needed. This righteousness needed is not man-made, but God given and is the result of the work of God in a person’s life so that they would from the heart want to live in conformity with God’s law in all they were and did. It would not just be in outward things, but in the thoughts and motives of those who have experienced God’s saving grace. The Pharisees always had an emphasis on their outward appearance and reputation - to be seen and to be highly thought of! Jesus contrasts the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law with the righteousness that God provides and freely gives in the gospel.

The Pharisees were the outstanding people of their day; they were religious, trying and often succeeding to keep externally all the laws and regulations the teachers of the law had set. As marvellous as they appeared they could never do enough to make themselves acceptable to God. Perhaps someone here feels that if they do their best, be very religious they will be acceptable to God. Yet as moral and as nice as you are and become, you will fail and you will be trying to earn your way to heaven like the Pharisees whose righteousness failed and failed for a number of reasons. Let's consider for a short while why the righteousness of the Pharisees failed and also see that for the same reasons our own attempts at earning righteousness will fail:

A. It fails to satisfy the heart: the Pharisees had a formal, external righteousness and although they looked great before men, yet God saw their minds and hearts (5:8; Luke 16:15 *"He said to them, 'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.'"*) The righteousness of God in the gospel deals with our hearts, it is internal, genuine and makes a change in and not merely upon us. It is an inward change and not just an outward conformity. Do we know this righteousness that satisfies the heart?

B. It fails to satisfy: they so often said one thing, but thought another, so were really liars and hypocrites. They plotted and planned to kill Jesus and yet said you are not to murder! They thought many things, but did not dare show such and so their minds would be restless, ill at ease with what they professed. Are we like this? We say one thing and yet think and long after another? The righteousness provided by God gives us rest c.f. 11:28 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* He sets our hearts and minds at rest, we are given new motives and principles by Him and our minds are to desire more and more what He wants of us.

Someone has said “*Religion is that which man does with his own solitude*”, by which they mean that if you want to know what you are really like, you can find the answer when you’re alone with your own thoughts, desires and imaginations. What are we like then, not just concerning external show, but what are our internal thoughts and imaginations in our quietness?

C. It is self promoting: these ones were self-righteous in Luke 18:9-14 the Lord Jesus describes the Pharisee who went to the temple to pray as an iMan “*I...I...I*” They observed so much concerning the outward, not the inward; they wanted to be able to say that they had done this, that and even the other. Are we like this, concerned with the outward rules and regulations which we or others have made or want? Perhaps we make a show things on Sundays when with religious people, but the rest of the week our language, jokes, motives and behaviour show that they are self-made standards of behaviour that vary with the company we are in. Jesus speaks of freely God-given righteousness (5:6), available to all, but only known by those who receive the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.

D. It glorifies self: it shows it wants to be thought well of. The Pharisees did many displays of praying, letting people know when they fasted or gave gifts and when they did their duty. It was to draw attention to self (6:2). The Pharisee in Luke 18 was full of self, self activity and all he had done and because of that he was smug and self contented. Sadly we can be like this. We want people to think well of us, of our reputation, our spirituality, of our families, of our church and of us as people, maybe even so as true Christians. Yet the righteousness given by God in the gospel should cause us to glorify God and humble our pride for nothing else could do us good. Yes we are to do good works to glorify our Father in heaven. Finally see:

E. It caused them to look down on others: they felt they were the ones and it was an honour for others to know them, were privileged to have them about! Others were lesser creatures, mere mortals who were nowhere as good and great as them! They were so good they even tithed herbs and yet Jesus said they neglected the weightier matters of the law - the love of God and man. We are to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and beings and also we must love our neighbour as ourselves. Both are to go together. Yes it is love for God 1st and foremost, but it never ignores the 2nd - to love our neighbour as ourselves. The reality of our love to God, who we have not seen, is shown in our love to those who we have seen. The righteousness from God affects our motives, attitudes and our external deeds.

I wonder what we show in our lives! What would we see if our minds, thoughts, motives could be presented and displayed by the projector for us all to see? Are we formalists, having a knowledge about God, but not knowing Him or the power and reality of the gospel? Perhaps we are Christians and yet we may have the attitudes of the Pharisees and feel superior to others, we may have slipped into a legalism and fail to truly show the righteous love of God in and through our lives to all people. There is a danger we can so easily slip into dos and don'ts, lists of traditions that do not demonstrate true spirituality and true Christian freedom.

My prayer and desire is that we would all know the true freedom and wonder of God's righteousness given in the gospel and not be bound by dos and don'ts, by trying to do our best to get to heaven using man's righteousness, but we would come and trust Christ as our only hope of having the God satisfying righteousness freely given to us and live out that gospel freedom in joyful righteous living.