**The Standard of a Righteous Life (Matthew 5:17-20)**

The true righteous man is one who does and spreads the Word of God.

Greetings to you dearly beloved as we continue today to hear Jesus’ words which defines our spiritual life for us. Often, we think about righteousness because we’re seeing the many examples of unrighteousness and corruption all around us. We long for and say “if only” there was justice everywhere. That righteousness, however, according to God’s Word, comes from obeying and putting into action the Lord’s words. Today we’re going to talk about that, since the “talkers” are many, but what is important is to perform that which is spoken. Again, a righteous man is one who does and spreads the Word of God. Let’s talk about how that is…

The standard of righteousness for a Christian is based upon Christ, beyond the Mosaic Law. Up until Jesus’ Resurrection, all of humanity had only one means by which it could come into relationship with the True God. That was the Law of Moses, in other words the various instructions of the Old Testament. When Jesus said that he had come not to abolish the Law and the Prophets, however, he was of course referring to both the Law of Moses and the prophets’ messages. Instead of putting the latter aside because He was now on the scene to solve problems, He had come to fulfill them and make them complete. He assured his hearers that all that was written was definitely going to be accomplished, and He would be the one to do so. He also assured them that the teachers of His Word were on the right path, while their opponents would be “small” in the kingdom of heaven, which is actually God’s Kingdom. Incidentally, the word “heaven” was often used as a pious way of expressing God or Yahweh, without using the latter two words, no matter how extreme that level of carefulness we would consider today. But the most important message was that the righteousness of God’s people needed to exceed that of the Pharisees and scribes of the day. In other words, God’s righteousness needed to happen by performing God’s Word with an intention to connect with God, the practice of which would bring them to the Messiah, and not to simply perform the external duties without any spiritual intentions.

Of course, we are talking about the problem of hypocrisy here. There is a story of a Nova Scotia sailor who has the Lord's Prayer tattooed on his back. He says that his dying mother asked him never to part with the back cover of a family Bible, on which the Lord's Prayer was printed in letters of gold. For many years he carried this cover on all his cruises; but one day, having a tussle with a sailor, he lost it overboard. Bad luck pursued him after that; and finally, a companion who had heard him lament the loss of the talisman suggested his having the prayer tattooed on his back. He did this, though he suffered very much during the process. Painfully, there are many who are making the mistake of this poor, ignorant, superstitious sailor. There are multitudes who are putting their faith on the outside rather than on the inside.

Jesus is saying the same thing here in this passage – and the issue remains the same for all of humanity, even for us, as one of the biggest spiritual issues. We know the laws; we know the theories and what is right or wrong. But there is knowing them and doing them with a right heart. The Pharisees were so tied up with their Law that it was no longer God’s Law, but their own. Today, we also, as spiritual people, are to live our faith in light of God’s Word, and not human rules which change often and can even ignore the Lord’s Will altogether. Let us remember that by worshipping the Law itself instead of the Lawgiver, the Pharisees were blind to their own Messiah’s presence, even though He was preaching right there in front of them!

May our spiritual life, our standard of righteousness be based not upon the Law itself, but beyond it, upon the Lawgiver, Christ Himself, who has already fulfilled the whole Law by paying the price for sin once and for all. May our righteousness be true, and not Pharisaic or a hypocritical and purely external show. The standard of righteousness for a Christian is based upon Christ, beyond the Mosaic Law. The true righteous man is one who does and spreads the Word of God.