

**Text: Matthew 5:17-48 (NIV)****The Fulfillment of the Law**

<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>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. <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>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.

**Murder**

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘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,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

<sup>23</sup>“Therefore, 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 in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

<sup>25</sup>“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or 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>I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

**Adultery**

<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 lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <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 go into hell.

**Divorce**

<sup>31</sup>“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ <sup>32</sup>But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

**Oaths**

<sup>33</sup>“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ <sup>34</sup>But I tell you, Do not 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>And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup>Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

## **An Eye for an Eye**

<sup>38</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ <sup>39</sup>But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup>And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup>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.

## **Love for Enemies**

<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <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. <sup>46</sup>If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup>And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup>Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

### ***Theme: How Seriously Do You Take Your Sin?***

A couple of weeks ago I went to the doctor with regard to a hernia. While I was there, I asked if he would take a look at a small red spot on my arm. He said that it didn't look like anything serious, but he should take it off to be on the safe side. A week later he called and said that it was a serious form of skin cancer; however, it is good that he caught it very early. To be honest, it was quite a shock at first. Monday I have surgery to remove the entire area along with a lymph node to make absolutely sure that it didn't spread. The doctor said that this is probably going overboard, but he wants to take every precaution.

Sin is often compared to a cancer. It is something that will destroy us if it is not dealt with seriously. Just as a tumor will eat away at our life, sin does the same thing. While we, with good reason, take these health issues very seriously, to the point of going overboard, we are often lax in dealing with the greatest threat to our lives, which is our sin. Today, I would like to ask, “How seriously do you take your sin?”

I. Sin is something that must be removed from our lives.

In these verses Jesus gives several examples of ways in which we simply ignore it. In verses 16-48 Jesus confronts the ways that the pharisees had relaxed God's commandments. What they did was to create 618 of their own laws in addition to the laws of the Old Testament. But what that did was to make the Ten Commandments possible to follow. When Jesus says, “*You have heard it said,*” He was not confronting the Old Testament Laws, but the pharisaic interpretation of those laws. What the pharisees basically did, was to say that as long as the sin is small, if it can be excused or if it is hidden, we'll ignore it. This is no different than if the doctor would have said, that the spot on my arm is still small. Let's wait until it gets bigger and spreads. The Lord is encouraging us to nip our sins in the bud.

Jesus begins with **murder**. When we consider the crassest breaking of this commandment, most of us would be able to say, “I've never actually killed another person.” But with pinpoint precision,

Jesus is able to find even the small breaking of this commandment in our hearts. Have you ever been angry with someone? He takes a look at our lips and asks, “Have you ever insulted someone or called them an idiot?” He tells us to get rid of anger and harsh words and to be reconciled with those whom we might consider our enemies.

Then our Lord moves on to the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment – **adultery**. There are many people who can say that they have been faithful to their spouse and unmarried people who have never had sex outside of marriage. But then Jesus takes a look at our eyes. Have you ever looked at someone lustfully? He says that you have committed adultery with that person already in your heart. These sins are so dangerous that He uses hyperbole to tell us that it is better to lose that eye, than for our whole body to be thrown into hell. Paul also shows the danger of these sins, when he writes, “*Flee sexual immorality.*”

The Lord also takes on **divorce**. The pharisees believed that a man could divorce his wife without sinning as long as he wrote her a certificate of divorce, which stated, “Lo, you are free to marry any man.” They even gave the example that it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife if he didn’t like her cooking. Jesus says that it’s not that easy. There are no loopholes. There is no such thing as a no fault divorce. Husbands and wives need to work hard at their marriages and root out anything that will take away their kindness, compassion, and forgiveness for each other. Don’t let anything in your life begin to sever that union that God has made, even so slightly.

Now the Lord takes on the **promises** that we make. The pharisees would make grand oaths to God, so that others would trust their word. Jesus says that everyone should know you as a man of your word. You shouldn’t need those oaths. How often have you broken promises and commitments that you have made? Is there any doubt that someone would have in you when you say, “I promise.”

In next weeks Gospel lesson Jesus moves into **retaliation and love for our enemies**. It is easy to love people who are good to us, but how do you treat those who have hurt you. Jesus says that even the tax collectors do good to those who do good to them. He looks at our attitude and tells us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us.

There are a host of other sins and temptations that we could look at, such as cursing, gossip, stealing, and many other things, but Jesus sums it up when he says, “*Be perfect, therefore as your Heavenly Father is perfect.*” Consider our Lord’s commandments, and as the dermatologist will look at every inch of my body in a couple of weeks, look for any way that you have transgressed our Lord’s Commandments. Our prayer should be the same as David’s in Psalm 139, “<sup>23</sup> *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.* <sup>24</sup> *See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*”

The problem with even the smallest of sins is that they will destroy us. They grow into bigger and bigger sins, and they begin to destroy our faith. Think of King David. He watched a woman take a bath on her roof, and it led to adultery and murder. With regard to greed, Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:10, “*Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*” With regard to the tongue James writes, “*The tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*” All of those verses show just how serious any sin is, and how important

it is that we deal with it by confessing it before it destroys us.

## II. Our sin can only be healed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

In verses 20 Jesus says, *“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the pharisees, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”* The only way that we can effectively deal with our sin and have it cleansed from our bodies is to confess it, and to trust in the healing power of Jesus’ forgiveness. He alone can heal our sins. He paid for them all on the cross of Calvary in our place. He heals us by washing away our sins in Holy Baptism, and then by covering us with His righteousness. Our righteousness can exceed that of the scribes and pharisees, and we can only be as perfect as our Heavenly Father when we are covered in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. His cleansing of our sin enables us to live a blessed and happy life on this earth, but it also saves us from death and everlasting condemnation. When we meet God in eternity, He will welcome us into His presence because He will see people who are as righteous as His own dear Son.

There are so many little things with regard to our health, our education, finances and other things that we take so seriously in this life. It’s good that we do so. While I will not enjoy the pain after the surgery next week, I’m also thankful that I asked the doctor about that little spot on my arm.

How much more important is it, that we take seriously the things that will last for all of eternity? Even those little sins, which we ignore, excuse or hide can end up destroying our faith in Christ. Take them seriously. Confess them. Run from temptation. Pray for God’s wisdom as you walk through life. But especially trust that Jesus Christ can heal you from all of your sins. He cleanses them and heals them with His righteousness. May God give each of us such repentant hearts, that we will have the life that Christ gives both now and for all of eternity.

Amen.