

Real Righteousness

Joe Slater

In His matchless “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus made a shocking statement that really serves as the theme of the whole sermon: *“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5:20). What was He talking about? What was it about the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees that was deficient? How are we to exceed their righteousness?

I’ve heard people say that since the Pharisees gave a tithe (10%), we must give at least 11% to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. Let me say it kindly but firmly: **They Have Missed The Point!** In fact, that sort of thinking demonstrates that they have fallen into the same trap that ensnared the Pharisees: thinking that a right relationship with God depends merely on rote obedience to commands.

The sixth commandment forbade murder. The Pharisees thought that as long as you don’t murder anyone, you’re covered. But Jesus taught that the unjustified anger and hatred leading up to murder offends God, not just the physical act of murder (Matthew 5:21-26).

The seventh command forbade adultery. Don’t have sexual relations with another’s spouse and you’re good, so the Pharisees would say. But Jesus taught that the lust leading up to the physical act was sin. The heart is important, not just the physical act (Matthew 5:27-30).

The rest of the sermon on the mount continues to emphasize the heart, not just rote commandment-keeping. God’s commandments are important! But God has ever and always wanted obedience from the heart, not mere mechanical compliance.

Over And Over

Recently, I made an unsuccessful attempt to visit one of our elderly ladies who now resides in a nursing home. I later texted her daughter and found out where both of the ladies were at the time. I told her that I’d give it “the old college try” later.

The daughter thanked me for my attempt and for the fact that I check on her mother from time to time. She also shared with me the following information:

“She has received cards from some and it really makes her feel good. She reads them over and over.”

I read that last sentence over and over. I hope you will as well. I also hope that all of us will think of some of the implications of that sentence.

It seems to me that it can be all too easy for all of us to forget, fail to do, or just put off what might be considered “little things.” A few minutes spent in writing a note may seem to me to be a little thing, but it may be very important to somebody else. It could, as we say, “make the day” for somebody who has very few good days.

The same could be said for a short visit, a phone call, a text message, or any of any number of other things that we might consider to be “no big deal.” Those things may be a very, very big deal to somebody who is lonely or is going through something that makes them wonder if anybody cares – or even remembers them.

It might be possible that, in a very short time, you will totally forget what you did. While you are going on with your life, somebody else may be rereading for the “umpteenth” time that note you wrote, or continuing to relive the few minutes you spent with him or her.

Come to think of it, those “little things” may be more important than we think they are. If you question that, take just a few moments and read Matthew 25:31-46.

--Jim Faughn (via legacyoffaith.com)

HOW TO BEAT THE DEVIL

In 2002 The New York Times ran a story by Rick Bragg about the unusual events in Inglis, Florida. The town's mayor, Carolyn Risher, took the unprecedented step of issuing a mayoral proclamation banning Satan from the community's city limits. The restraining order declared: "Be it known from this day forward that Satan, ruler of darkness, giver of evil, destroyer of what is good and just, is not now, nor ever again will be, a part of this town of Inglis. Satan is hereby declared powerless, no longer ruling over, nor influencing, our citizens" (www.nytimes.com). The Times article went on to say that the proclamation was printed out and placed in four hollowed out posts staked at the town's four entrances.

Wouldn't it be nice if it were that easy to banish Satan, or even strip him of his power? This spiritual enemy has plagued those who seek to follow God since his lies in the Garden of Eden. But John has good news for the readers of Revelation. Satan CAN BE defeated!

John lays out the formula for us in Rev. 12:11: *"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."* First, we must have been washed in the Lamb's blood (i.e. baptized; Acts 22:16). Next, we must obey His will (the New Testament teachings). And finally, we must *"be faithful unto death"* (Rev. 2:10)

--David Bragg (via *Bulletin Gold*)

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