

Matthew 6A

- Let's transition out of Part 1 of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and move into Part 2
 - Before we do, we have one more of Jesus' examples from the Mishnah to study
 - Remember, Jesus gave six examples from the Mishnah to expose the Pharisees' distorted teaching on the Kingdom and righteousness
 - The Pharisees made rules for Israel that supposedly helped Israel keep God's commandments
 - The Pharisees recorded their rules in a book called the Mishnah
 - Soon, that book had become more important than Scripture itself in regulating the daily life of Jews
 - But in reality, the rules of the Mishnah contradicted what Scripture said
 - So Jesus is working to set the record straight in His first sermon
 - He says the Kingdom saint doesn't look like a Pharisee
 - And that a saint won't follow the Pharisees' rules
 - Instead, that saint follows the spirit of God's Word
 - And each of Jesus' examples illustrates how demanding that standard is
 - Today, we reach Jesus' final example, which concerns the Mishnah's teaching on showing love to others
 - This final example will bridge us into the second part of Jesus' sermon in Chapter 6
 - And it also explains God's purpose in commanding His disciples to live righteously now, while we await the Kingdom

[Matt. 5:43](#) "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'

[Matt. 5:44](#) "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

[Matt. 5:45](#) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

[Matt. 5:46](#) “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”

[Matt. 5:47](#) “If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”

[Matt. 5:48](#) “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

- Jesus says you have *heard* it said, “you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy”
 - Once again, Jesus prefaces His quote with the phrase “you have heard it said”, indicating He’s quoting from the Mishnah, the so-called “oral law”
 - In fact, this example shows clearly that Jesus is quoting from the Mishnah, not directly from written Scripture
 - Because the quote Jesus gives us in v.43 isn’t found in Scripture
 - The first part of the quote, to love your neighbor, is a restatement of Leviticus 19:18
 - But the second half of the quote, to hate your enemy, is not found in Scripture at all
 - This is confirmation for us that Jesus was quoting a rabbinical teaching found in the Mishnah, not Scripture
 - And in the Mishnah, the Pharisees modified the Bible’s teaching to love your neighbor so that the spirit of God’s Law was lost
 - Specifically, they created rules for how and when a Jew should love and when love wasn’t required
 - First, the Pharisees decided God’s command to love your neighbor only applied to other Jews
 - Now, the context of Leviticus 19:18 *does* specify fellow Jews
 - But as Jesus explains, that wasn’t the spirit of the Law
 - God expected Israel to show love to all humanity

- Secondly, the Pharisees concluded that since God only expected Jews to love fellow Jews, then it was permissible for Jews to hate Gentiles
 - So from that analysis, Pharisees taught love your neighbors and hate your enemy, which is the rule Jesus quoted
- Pharisees' supported this by other Scriptures, like Psalm 139:21

Psa. 139:21 Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?

- The Pharisees said if David could rightly hate those whom God hated, then surely it was appropriate for Jews to hate their enemies too
 - David was referring to his shared hatred for unrighteousness
 - Just as God hates unrighteousness, so did David
 - But just as we say "hate the sin, but love the sinner", so God told Israel to love others so that they might bring them into the knowledge of righteousness – they were to be a light among the nations
- That was the spirit of God's Law, but the Pharisees were spiritually blind, so they never understood the meaning of these things
 - Instead, they were slaves to their own rules, and that slavery led them farther and farther from the truth
 - Instead of looking for greater ways to show love (which was the intent of the Law) later generations of Pharisees expanded the number of ways Jews could legitimately hate others
 - For example, by Jesus' day, the Pharisees had defined other Jewish political parties like Sadducees or publicans as "enemies" rather than "neighbors"
 - So as a result of the Mishnah's teaching, it was considered godly to withhold love from a Sadducee, even though he was a fellow Jew
- We've see this pattern with Israel's religious leaders over and over
 - Rather than seek to understand the spirit of God's Word and conform to it, they preferred to dissect the Law with mindless rules

- The Pharisees' rules had the effect of circumventing the intent of God's Law so that their evil hearts could do as they pleased
- This should be no surprise, of course
- Evil and hypocritical hearts are always seeking for ways to disobey God, while still maintaining the illusion of righteousness
- So now, how does true righteousness view the issue of loving others?
 - Jesus says it's simple...righteousness means showing love to everyone, especially those who oppose you
 - In contradiction to the Pharisees, Jesus gives us God's definition of a neighbor and a new definition of love
 - A neighbor, Jesus says, is your enemy
 - Your neighbor is the one who persecutes you
 - In other words, a neighbor refers to someone near you
 - It's the person living near you
 - It's the one you work with, the one you see in the market
 - It's anyone you have contact with in your life, whether someone you know or a stranger
 - In Leviticus 19:18, the Lord defined a neighbor as a fellow Jew because Israel principally lived, worked and interacted with other Jews
 - So obviously, every Jew is a neighbor to every other Jew
 - But as the nation had opportunity to interact with other nations, God expected Israel to show love to Gentile neighbors too
 - Which means, loving a neighbor means showing love to an enemy on occasion
 - Remember, the definition of neighbor is based on proximity, not on affinity
 - Therefore, those who come against you to persecute you, make themselves your neighbor
 - They make themselves targets of your love
 - That was spirit of the Law, Jesus says

- Then Jesus clarifies what God meant by showing love
 - Loving your neighbor isn't merely the absence of malice
 - It means a proactive demonstration of concern and care for them, Jesus says
 - Specifically, Jesus says loving an enemy means taking time to pray for their spiritual well-being
 - Remember, praying for someone means lifting them up before God, seeking that God would bring His favor upon them in some way
 - So imagine a person who you sincerely dislike, someone you know who has hurt you, or treats you unkindly
 - Now imagine spending time on your knees sincerely asking the Lord to bless them
 - To grant them peace, health, prosperity or some other blessing
 - Or most of all, to grant them salvation by faith in Jesus
 - I'm sure we pray this way for those we love, like friends and family members
 - But Jesus says righteousness requires we place our enemies on the same level of importance as those we love
 - In fact, He's asking us to devote as much time to praying for them as for those we prefer
 - I bet few of us have done this
 - And I say that simply because for most of us, it's challenging enough to find time to pray at all
 - So when we do, we naturally use that precious time to intercede for personal needs, our friends and family, our church, *etc.*
 - Knowing that, I suspect we give little or no time to praying for the spiritual good of those we dislike
- Yet Jesus says what God really meant by "love your neighbor", is showing regard for everyone God has placed around you

- If you understand God's sovereignty, you will understand that no one crosses your path without it being ordained by God – it's not a coincidence – there's a reason for it
 - For example, your neighbor is that coworker who contends with you at work, the next door neighbor who annoys you
 - That relative who never liked you, that classmate who mocks you
 - And God placed those "enemies" in your path for a good purpose, as a test
 - The test is whether you will be sons of your Father in Heaven, Jesus says
 - In Jewish thinking, to be a son of a father means to follow in the footsteps of that father
 - As Jesus says to the Pharisees in John's Gospel

John 8:39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.

- So our test in life is whether we will do as the Lord did
 - The Father brought Jesus to earth as a man, so that God could become our "neighbor" in that He associated with mankind
 - Hebrews says it this way

Heb. 2:9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

Heb. 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

Heb. 2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

- Jesus was made a little lower than angels, that is, He was made like man
 - Jesus became our neighbor, in that He became man, interacting with mankind

- And as our neighbor, He showed us love, tasting death for us, to bring many sons to glory
- Jesus loved His neighbors even as they hated Him and persecuted Him
- So now, Jesus asks if we will be sons of our Father in the sense that we will also show love to those God puts in our path, our neighbors
 - And not just to those who are being saved, but even those unbelievers who are determined to remain so
 - Because the Father also shows kindness to the likes of them
 - In v.45, Jesus says God's goodness to everyone, both friend and foe, can be seen simply in the fact that the sun rises on both
 - That's a way of saying that just allowing both to live to see another day is grace from the Father
 - Most people, especially unbelievers, take life for granted
 - But Scripture says the opportunity to live is grace from God
 - For example, consider how long you lived before you came to know Christ? How many years did you sin? How long did you offend God?
 - Yet He gave you food, clothing, shelter
 - Your life had a measure of joy, it had some satisfaction
 - You took all that for granted and probably assumed you had every right to expect it
 - But in reality, you were experiencing the kindness of God, even though you were unkind and ungrateful
- So that's our test...to show love to our neighbors, whether friend or foe, simply because that's how the Father operates
 - And as sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven, we are expected to reflect the Father's character
 - Since this command is a test, the question becomes what's in it for us?
 - And the answer Jesus gives is, "reward"
 - There are eternal rewards on the line

- If we heed this command and show love to our neighbors, we will be rewarded by the Father in the Kingdom
 - But we must seek for that reward, understanding the Heavenly standard for righteousness
 - If we operate according to manmade rules, like those found in the Mishnah – or perhaps according to ones we make up for ourselves – then we are not going to see that reward
- For example, if you only show love to those who love you first, then you're not operating according to the right rules, Jesus says
 - In v.46, Jesus asks rhetorically, what reward will you have? The answer is none
 - Because showing love to those who love you first is not worthy of reward, because that's how the evil human heart thinks
 - Even the worst of Jewish society, a tax collector, will love his own kind
 - Tax collectors were despised, because they were considered traitors
 - Romans used local subjects to collect taxes in the provinces
 - So in Judea, Romans hired Jews to collect taxes from fellow Jews
 - So naturally, any Jew who would cooperate with Romans was considered a traitor
 - Even worse, the Romans assigned each tax collector a quota to collect, or suffer severe consequences
 - So tax collectors were extortionists, using ruthless methods to force fellow Jews to pay
 - Furthermore, a tax collector wasn't paid by Rome
 - So the collector made his own income by collecting above and beyond the quota set by Rome
 - So for Jews, the worst enemy imaginable was a fellow Jew who served Rome as a tax collector
 - Which meant tax collectors had few friends

- Tax collectors were ostracized by their fellow Jews and despised by the Romans who employed them
- So the only friends a tax collector was likely to have were fellow tax collectors
- Which is why Jesus says even tax collectors are willing to show love to those who love them first
 - But this is hardly a standard of conduct worthy of reward
 - It's entirely self-serving and does nothing to glorify the Father
 - Yet, that's exactly the standard the Mishnah promoted
 - Love your neighbor, that is, love those who are kind to you first
 - And hate your enemy, that is, show no love to those who refuse to love you
 - There is no eternal reward for acting that way
 - If you only show regard for your brothers, you're doing simply what everyone does naturally
 - Or as Jesus put it, what even the Gentiles do
 - No, if you want to pass this test of righteousness and gain a reward in Heaven, you must do better
 - You must do as the Father in Heaven has done for you first
 - You must show love to even those who deserve it least
 - And do so before they give you regard
 - Be generous, be kind, be considerate, and even pray for them
 - And when you enter into the Kingdom, you will see your reward
- Now notice that Jesus began this sermon by defining the character qualities of a Kingdom-bound individual
 - Those qualities are made possible by spiritual rebirth
 - That is, we become citizens of the coming Kingdom when we place our faith in Jesus Christ and are born-again

- As we come to faith in Jesus, God gives us a new spirit in the likeness of Christ, so that we may think and act like Christ
- It's by that new spirit that we may begin to demonstrate the Kingdom qualities Jesus outlined in the Beatitudes
- But we do not obtain the Kingdom by mimicking these behaviors, as we learned earlier
 - Nor do we receive the Kingdom itself as our reward for good behavior
 - The Kingdom is not a reward that we earn – it's a free gift
 - We obtain our citizenship in the Kingdom by faith alone
- But Jesus says now that we do have opportunity for eternal reward in the Kingdom
 - And that reward is based, in part, on whether we show love to our neighbors, to those God places in our path, whether friend or foe
 - And in those moments, when you don't want to do that, ask yourself what you are sacrificing as your reward in Heaven
 - Let that be an encouragement to us to serve the Father in those moments
- Because let's be honest, it can be difficult to show love to someone who hates us or mistreats us
 - We want retribution
 - Or we feel like a hypocrite when we do nice things for someone we secretly detest
 - Well, remember the spirit of God's Law
 - He didn't say *act* like you love your neighbor...He said *love* your neighbor
 - So God's intention is that we find love in our heart for them
 - And the best way to do that is to remember how Christ showed you love before you loved Him

- Nothing softens your heart toward someone else faster than remembering what you've been forgiven of yourself
- Remember Jesus' words to Simon the Pharisee

Luke 7:47 "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

- Remembering how much Jesus has forgiven in your life, how many offenses, how many unkind actions and thoughts...
- That will instill in your heart a desire to show love to others
- So that the moment you begin to feel hesitation to show love to another, just remember how much you owe Jesus
- You cannot judge another without putting yourself in a place of superiority, so allow yourself to be brought down to their level
- Now, if that still doesn't seem possible, and you're still struggling to love your neighbor at times, then consider this...
 - If you can't find it in your heart to show love to your neighbor for their sake
 - Then do it for your own sake
 - Because reward is on the line
- Jesus summarizes this entire chapter with the final verse
 - Our goal in life should be to be as perfect as our Father is perfect
 - First, because that is the standard for entrance into Heaven, into the Kingdom
 - Perfection is the standard, and the only way to meet that standard is through faith in Jesus Christ
 - So entrance into the Kingdom is by obtaining Christ's perfection through our faith in Him
 - Secondly, we are called to live in righteousness by striving to equal the Father's standard
 - Which is why it's so important to understand the spirit of God's Word

- Obviously, we don't live in a Jewish, Pharisaic culture
- So we're not in danger of following the Mishnah rather than sticking to Scripture (though some unhealthy Christian movements are doing just that!)
- But that doesn't mean we aren't susceptible to missing the spirit of God's commandments in Scripture
 - We may know that we obtain Heaven by faith alone, so we're already resting in Christ's righteousness and not our own
 - But what about your walk of sanctification?
 - How are you endeavoring to live-out that righteousness?
 - Are you doing it according to the spirit of God's Word or merely according to the letter, which means following your own Mishnah?
- For example, when Jesus says love your neighbor, are you loving everyone or only the ones you like?
 - Or when Jesus says turn the other cheek, do you forgive those who harm you?
 - Or when He says don't commit adultery, do you actively fight the urge to indulge your lustful thoughts?
- You see, the issue of being perfect is two-fold – and as Christians, we typically only think of one side of this coin
 - We rest in Christ's righteousness to enter Heaven, but we forget that we have a work to do in the meantime
 - And that work is our sanctification
 - By our faith, we are made perfect before God in our Spirit
 - And by our willingness to obey God's Word, we can become more like God in our behavior
 - But only if we pay attention to the true intent of God's Word
 - Don't be like a Pharisee...don't seek for the minimum
 - Don't try to find excuses or exemptions or loopholes

- Don't make your own rules for when God's rules apply to you and when they don't
- Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect
- And as you do this, you please Christ, and as you please Christ, you stand to gain reward
 - This is the walk we are called to live-out
 - And this walk of sanctification is the single most important challenge and duty of the Christian life...
 - Nothing else comes close
- You can summarize what we're learning in this chapter this way
 - Know Christ to enter the Kingdom
 - Know Christ's Word to represent the Kingdom
 - Obey Christ's Word to obtain the Kingdom (to obtain the rewards in the Kingdom)
- Those are areas the Pharisees corrupted, and in the next chapter we will see Jesus set the record straight showing how godliness works in those areas of life when we live out our righteousness