

**Echoes from the Mountain: The Sermon on the Mount**  
**The Un-rulely Heart**  
**Matthew 5:13-20**



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**Reflection questions...** [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

*“Does the realization that God makes allowances for our brokenness and failure make you even more appreciative of grace or more curious about the extent of the boundaries?”*

*“Has your renewed commitment to rigid self-discipline actually made you more loving or simply more demanding: of yourself and others? What if it wasn’t simply about curbing our appetites, but transforming them so we actually desire something else... something more wholesome and less self-destructive?”*

*“I will forgive their wickedness and I will never again remember their sins”.*

*“What kind of response to you think such an unprecedented act of kindness and forgiveness was meant to engender? How does it alter your understanding of God’s approach to us? How does it affect your response to him?”*

*“How does the idea of righteousness anticipate that our lives will be different? Why does it often prove difficult for us to live distinctly without distancing ourselves from the culture?”*

*“...your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees...”*

*“Why do you think Jesus referred to it as the ‘righteousness of the Pharisees’? Why do you think we too often reduce the idea of righteousness to a laundry-list of moral codes? What is the danger in focusing on our behavior and ignoring our hearts?”*

Perhaps, if you have time, you could read Galatians 3 and dialogue about Paul’s understanding of the nature and purposes of the Law.

*“If I really knew the lavish grace of God, maybe I could stop trying to find love in \_\_\_\_\_. In what ways do you find yourself grasping for the blessing already made available to you in Jesus?”*

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**Teaching Notes...**

The S.O.M. is intended to, first, offer an image of God, so robust and so inviting, that we become convinced that there are no limits to his good intentions for us and his determination to carry them out. Such conviction will compel us to, *“love the Lord with all of our heart”*.

The second priority (in response to the first) is for us to re-order our lives so as to nourish the new creation; to intentionally interrupt old practices and ways of life that cannot produce the new life that God desires and has made possible for us.

*“You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of (to) the world...”* Matthew 5:13-14

This is God’s ultimate display of trust in humanity. God says that if people are to notice him--- give him the proper recognition and response (glory)--- it will be because of our capacity to live in such a way that makes him both attractive and available.

**Most often, God will not violate the governing principles that he has established: choosing to work “in”, “with” and “through” creation to restore creation.**

I think this understanding demands much more of God because he has to commit himself to the process of working alongside flawed and often unresponsive humanity in order to re-establish order.

What we call “*Christianity*”, has decidedly Jewish roots and takes the form of a Messianic, Jewish renewal movement.

### **Roots of the Story:**

- Abram/Covenant (Genesis 12)
- Increase/Enslavement/Rescue (Genesis 50-Exodus 18)
- Sinai (Exodus 19)
- Kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6)
- Epic fail and Exile
- Prophets [Isaiah and Jeremiah]

In its most limited sense, the Law (‘Torah’, as the Jews referred to it) is the first (5) books of the OT (Christians refer to it as the “Pentateuch”: ‘five books’).

Within those first (5) books, are the most widely recognized of commands, the “**Decalogue**”: the (10) Words”. But, the Torah contains an entire series of commands (603 more, according to Jewish tradition).

Then, there were not simply the (613) commandments, there were volumes of interpretation of the Law. For instance, the written Law forbade working on the Sabbath, but what “**is**” work? [e.g. since you couldn’t work on the Sabbath, they said it was unlawful to handle tools because tools lead to work which leads to violation of the Law.] One can imagine how burdensome such minutia could become.

For the Jews, the “Law” (Torah), helped them understand who God was and how they were to respond to him. The commands were not merely ‘arbitrary’ rules, but a reflection of the nature/character of their God.

As the movement began to gain momentum and attract many non-Jews (the desires/intent of the original blessing to Abe), the people began to wonder what their relationship to the Law should be. *“I love Jesus, but I like bacon. Is there room for me in the Kingdom if I appreciate a good ham sandwich, every now and then?”*

The Jewish religious leaders (teachers and Pharisees) were insistent upon newcomers adopting all of the laws. Those taking the gospel (good news) to the non-Jews seemed to be a bit more lenient, particularly Jesus, who was accused of being “soft” on the Law.

### **The Law is good, but it becomes immediately clear that we can't keep it.**

The Law even had built-in provisions for failure (Temple: sacrifice). It presumed our disobedience. It's why we build cars now with autonomous breaking- systems: you should drive safely, but we are assuming that you are too easily distracted. It's simply a fair evaluation of the human response.

### **Law can define appropriate and safe behavior, but it cannot inspire it.**

*“Don't handle. Don't taste. Don't touch. Such rules require strong devotion and self-denial, but they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires” (Colossians 2:21-23).*

### **The Law served to 'cut-off' every other route, almost ensuring that we would turn to God.**

The Law highlighted the need for the promise. My sin was meant to frustrate and disappoint me and propel me into the embrace of grace.

*“Why was the Law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But, the Law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised” (Galatians 3:19).*

*“For no one can be made right with God by doing what the Law commands. The Law simply shows us how sinful we are” (Romans 3:20).*

The Law was never meant to be a means through which humanity might dutifully accommodate the commands of God in order to appease him and somehow mitigate his anger over injustice. It was a means by which God's covenant people could demonstrate to the world what it was like to relate rightly to God, to each other and to all of creation: to be truly “human”.

Remember, the exodus preceded the Law. Grace is always fully “front and center” prior to any talk of our ethical response. Grace invalidates every effort at improving our status with God, apart from Jesus.

God is intent on bringing about a new relationship with his people (a new covenant) but how is he going to pull it off in such a way as to not dismiss or devalue the Law?

### **Jeremiahs 31:31-34 [read] New Covenant**

These prophetic promises of a new covenant were at the core of their identity--- central to their hope--- and the very promises that Jesus sees himself taking up and fulfilling (embodying) for the people.

This New Covenant 1) establishes a strong sense of worth and identity, 2) creates an unusual sense of security (because the covenant is already stronger than any wrongs committed against it), 3) invites a profound response of committed love.

### **It's hard to keep the Law if your sole objective is to keep the Law.**

To actually succeed in fulfilling the Law, we must be aiming at something more: our goal must be to love... to become the kind of person from whom the right kind of behavior more naturally flows.

**Loving surrender always involves the gradual and consistent movement from “duty” to “delight”.**

So, when love hears, “*forsaking all others*”, “*in sickness and in health*”, “*until you are parted by death*”, etc., it hears those not as restrictive or suffocating, but as an invitation to the fullest experience of love.

**A Kingdom vision for our lives is somehow less demanding, but always demands more of us.**

The problem with righteousness (or, at least our interpretation of it) is that it has too often been reduced to a laundry list of moral codes which lets us focus on our behavior and ignore our hearts.

**God knew that the only way to restore and recover a disconnected humanity was to place within them a desire for him that was somehow stronger than their urges toward sin.**

Jesus is going to call us to a higher level of commitment and service, but not by imposing his will upon us from without, but by embedding his desires within our hearts. The New Covenant says: You’re not just the same old person with some new religious experiences, you are a new creature!