

The Forgotten Jesus Podcast

S7E22

Pure Motives: How to walk after God - Matthew 5:20

Description – Join us today as we look at Matthew 5:20 and ask the question, does our righteousness surpass that of the Scribes and Pharisees?

Don't forget that the live recording is coming up at Long Hollow on Wednesday, December 17, 2025, 6:15pm.

Matthew 5:17-20

¹⁷ “Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

When Jesus says, “Truly I tell you...” or “truly, truly” or “verily, verily” the word there is Amen. It's Jesus saying his words can hold the weight of what he's saying.

Jesus says “Amen” even before he speaks. So it's not just him speaking and then saying “amen” (May it be, or let it be so).

Normally the Higher person says the promise, like the Lord giving a promise and then Jeremiah then saying “Amen.” But in this case, Jesus reverses it and says “Amen” before he even speaks.

He's saying, I have the divine authority to seal the truthfulness of this statement.

It's an unmistakable claim that Jesus is truly, truly who He says He is.

There's a lot of debate on Matthew 5:20

Matthew 5:20

²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

Remember, when Jesus talks about righteousness in the Gospels, you have to think about how it was understood by the hearers.

We jump to Paul and Romans, and our righteousness in Christ being imputed to us by His sacrifice on the cross.

Systematic Theology - a way of cataloging theological topics and explaining them from the totality of scriptures from the Bible.

But is that the way Jewish / Hebraic culture thought about theology? It's a very western / greek mindset, thinking in terms of topics, categories, points, etc.

To the Jew, the theological framework would have been what they called a revealed or biblical theology. Where God over time, through various covenants with his people revealed more and more about himself.

Theology for the Jew is mostly focused on how they live, not how they think.

So for Jesus, when he says, "Unless your righteousness surpasses..." He's talking about the way you live your life.

"Surpasses" - Greek word, "pleíón" - to go above and beyond

To drive the point home, imagine Jesus telling you this in person. You're not nearly as "outwardly" righteous as the scribes or Pharisees. So what are you going to do?

"you will never get into the kingdom of heaven." - This for the Jew was not at the end of their life upon death. They were God's people, of course they were going to Heaven.

But what Jesus says is:

1. It's either impossible, no one can do that
2. Jesus is teaching something different.

Jesus says, "Unless your way of living is different or above the scribes and Pharisees, you'll not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven today." But His way IS better than the scribes and Pharisees. His way of living is better because Jesus is going to rightly interpret and live out the Law. Jesus says, you go under the yoke of my teaching and it will be easier than the yoke that the scribes and Pharisees are teaching you to do.

In the rest of Matthew 5, Jesus is about to lay out his argument against their religiosity, the Scribes and Pharisees have a way of living, a man made righteousness that isn't enough. It's all works based and there is no heart behind what they are doing.

So in the rest of Matthew 5 you see this pattern where Jesus says, "You have heard it said... (from the Scribes & Pharisees)... But I, Jesus, say to you..."

What the Scribes and Pharisees were doing was all based on outward practice of their religious lives.

You need to constantly self-reflect and examine why you do what you do. Are your motives pure? Are you living to make much of Christ and His Kingdom? Have you fallen into the trap of practicing your righteousness in front of others? Only the Holy Spirit can point these things out in your life.