

“Righteousness through the eyes of Jesus” Matthew 6:20-26 Dominus
Fortitudo 2025

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our Gospel reading this week is the second part of Matthew chapter 5. We find Jesus on the mountain teaching a large crowd of people.

Let me ask you a question. Say you find yourself at a stoplight well past midnight. You see that the light is bright red, and there's a timer that says 90 seconds left till you can go. You look around, and your car is the only car in the whole intersection. No enforcers around, no cars around, no people around. Will you step on the gas and go? It's a heart question. Honestly, I never thought of it as a heart question because my answer would be, Yes! I would step on the gas and go. And that just points to my need for Jesus. Because unless there is a radical transformation in our hearts, we are all lost in our transgressions.

This brings us to our first principle- that Jesus' radical transformation of our hearts impacts the way we think about righteousness. Jesus' definition of righteousness always includes the heart, and that's the harder thing to get right. Isn't it? Jesus explains that His followers are to live counter-culturally. They are to follow Him in heart righteousness. To be in Jesus' kingdom involves a radical transformation from the inside out, from the heart out to the hands, from the attitudes out to the actions. His transformation of our lives is not just about our behaviour but about our hearts.

How does a clearer understanding of true righteousness give you less confidence in your ability to be righteous? You know, as Christ begins to change our thinking on what true righteousness is, slowly and slowly as He raises the bar, we lose confidence in our ability to be righteous. And He's leading us to appreciate the work that He did on the cross.

“Righteousness through the eyes of Jesus” Matthew 6:20-26 Dominus
Fortitudo 2025

So, we're moving from the right way of thinking about righteousness to something deeper, which is the heart, and how the heart is really at the root of the sins that we do.

Jesus uses a phrase you will see throughout the book of Matthew. It's important. He says at the beginning of verse 21, "You have heard that it was said to those of old." Now look at the beginning of verse 22 - Jesus says, "*But I say to you.*" Here, Jesus explains that His righteousness is different from what His followers have seen in their culture, what they've observed in the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. He was radically redefining righteousness.

Here in verses 21 and 22, Jesus extends God's command "Do not murder" to include the heart attitude of anger. Jesus is following a set pattern in this passage. He begins by stating what the law is, then He goes on to expand it further, moving people from just seeing things on the surface to seeing them more deeply. Jesus is stirring the hearts of his listeners to move from the complacency that they may have been used to.

Jesus is addressing the root cause of sin, which is at the heart. Anger is the heart of the action of murder. Anger and Murder - They're the same in God's eyes. They may have different consequences in the world's system, but Jesus is not concerned about the world's standards -- He's teaching about God's standard.

Jesus took the command against murder deeper than just the external act of taking someone's life. He enlarged the command to incorporate the heart attitudes of hate and contempt and equated abusive language, words such as fool or an attack on a person's intellectual capacities, as equal with the sin of murder. The outward act of murder sprang from those thoughts and emotions.

And Christ says in verse 23, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift

“Righteousness through the eyes of Jesus” Matthew 6:20-26 Dominus
Fortitudo 2025

there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Jesus is telling us here that restoring a broken relationship takes precedence over any offering, prayer, or even service to God.

Righteousness goes beyond what is comfortable. It goes to being kind to those who are unkind to you; by greeting those who are outside your usual circles; by welcoming the ones who are left out; by encouraging those who are battling homelessness, mental illness, addiction or other issues instead of isolating ourselves far away from them.

The teaching of Christ today requires a perfection that we don't have. Jesus raises the bar beyond anyone's ability. At the end of this sermon, in verse 48, He says, *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Oh wow! Jesus raises the standard of righteousness to God's level of perfection. It brings us back to this doctrine of righteousness. It is impossible on our own, and that's what makes salvation sensible. Only Christ's perfect righteousness can make us truly righteous when we believe in Him. It's not our abilities and efforts. It's Christ who does the work for us in making us righteous, but He also does the work in us in transforming our hearts so that we can live righteously.

When I don't believe this doctrine of righteousness, I think I'm doing pretty good. I compare myself to those who may be less righteous, and I set the standard based on the world's definition of righteousness. and that's where many of Jesus's audience were at that point. And that's where many people are today. They don't see how far they fall short of God's holy standard.

But what happens when I believe this doctrine? I see how pitiful my attempts are at meeting God's very high standard. And then what happens? I come humbly to God seeking His forgiveness, help and transformation of my

“Righteousness through the eyes of Jesus” Matthew 6:20-26 Dominus
Fortitudo 2025

heart. And this leads us to the place we need to be: To accept that only Jesus can radically transform our hearts to live righteously.

We need Jesus. And you know, it's liberating to realize that we're completely hopeless without Him. But with Him, you can stop trying to be good enough to be acceptable to God, and you can look to Jesus, who was perfect and who offers you His perfection and His position with God.

Heart righteousness is impossible without Jesus' heart. He must radically transform our lives from the inside out, and we cannot do this on our own. But with Jesus, all things are possible. Jesus credits us with His perfect righteousness; then He gives us His Holy Spirit as a permanent companion to enable us to live in practical day-to-day righteousness.

In what ways does your response to others reflect the true condition of your heart? And where do you need to let go of your confidence in your ability to meet God's perfect standard and instead embrace Christ's help, transformation and righteousness?

If God's standard of righteousness seems impossible, you're right. Jesus is the only one who transforms the hearts of all who come to Him to empower them to live like He did, and respond in the same way that He would. Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner. Please act upon our hearts, transform them to the perfection we cannot achieve on our own. Amen.