

“It’s a Mad, Mad World”

September 9, 2007

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Scriptural Foundation: Matthew 5:21-26, NIV

Murder

²¹ *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’”* ²² *But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

²³ *“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,”* ²⁴ *leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

²⁵ *“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.”* ²⁶ *I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”*

Anger, like lust, is a sensual sin. Anger produces a feeling within us that is very difficult for us to let go. If we did not enjoy the sensation of anger we would naturally spit it out like a rotten cashew or spoiled milk. But, we do not spit anger out of our hearts because we enjoy its taste.

Frederick Buechner said it well, as he wrote: “Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back. In many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.”

This, I believe, is what Jesus is pointing us toward in Matthew 5:21-26. Jesus points His people, His disciples, toward loving kindness and patience and away from anger in our relationships with others. Jesus will address the destructive nature of anger and the peril which anger poses to our soul. Everyone in this congregation has experienced, sometime in your life, the destructive force of anger. Each one of us can immediately call to mind a time when someone else’s anger stung us, sometimes with crushing force, but Jesus focuses upon the destruction which anger brings to the life of the one who holds it and to the life of the one who would vent it.

Someone has said, “Anger is one letter away from ‘danger,’” and that is certainly what Jesus teaches here and what Paul teaches in Ephesians 4, as he writes,

²⁶“In your anger do not sin”¹: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold.

The Bible is teaching us that anger is a place in which the Devil himself will stick his foot, find a wedge, and force his way into greater and greater influence in our lives. Satan will use our anger to gain demonic influence and even control over our lives. We must not trivialize our anger as merely a natural part of our personality or our background or our upbringing. We cannot afford to tolerate our anger as something small and harmless.

Jesus calls us today to a righteousness of heart; a righteousness that repents of the sin of anger and that cries out to God in faith for deliverance from it. We must understand that anger, by its nature, is very, very deceitful, and as such it often hides itself from the eyes of its owner. So, we must not begin the day, as we consider Jesus’ words, of thinking of this message as being something that is important for someone else we know to hear and to apply. We cannot think, in this message regarding anger, that we wish our brother or our sister were here and we hope that “so-and-so” is

¹ Psalm 4:4

listening really well because they really need it. No, we, each one of us, need to hear God's voice for our own sake in this matter, and may God be gracious to each one of us and to speak to us directly.

There are four precepts which Jesus presents to us concerning man's anger. Man's anger, first, breaks God's commandment concerning murder. Man's anger, second, employs the heart and tongue. Third, man's anger imperils his soul. Finally, man's anger must be addressed immediately.

The first precept Jesus teaches is that man's anger breaks God's commandment concerning murder. God gave ten great Commandments in Exodus 20 and one of those, "Thou shalt not murder"², breaks that command.

Let's look at Verse 21,

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'"

At first, when we read this, we say, "That is exactly right. There is nothing wrong with that statement," but Jesus is going to refute it. It is a wrong understanding of this Commandment that He is addressing. To understand Jesus' meaning we must observe the context. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus opens with these words,

²⁰ "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus was making a statement regarding the entrance requirements into Heaven when He says that we must have, in order to get into Heaven, a righteousness that is greater than the righteousness that the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law possess. The people of Jesus' day were very much like people in our own day in that they were satisfied and content with external righteousness and external goodness, but Jesus teaches us that such a righteousness is not accepted by God. The only kind of righteousness which God accepts is a complete righteousness; a whole-life righteousness and an infinite righteousness and a righteousness which brings about the transformation of the entire person, both on the inside and on the outside as well. This complete and perfect righteousness is available to us, not through the works of our own hands as the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law intended to acquire it, but it is offered to us as a free gift that comes from God through His Son Jesus and we receive this righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees through faith in God's Son Jesus.

The Bible is very clear as to how we might obtain this infinite righteousness for ourselves and the need we have in order to obtain it for us to be accepted by God. In Romans 3, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, would teach us,

²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law...

We need to be declared righteous in order to be accepted by God into Heaven and Paul is saying that no one is going to be declared righteous by God simply through the hard work they place upon keeping The Ten Commandments; upon keeping God's Law. Paul goes on to say,

...rather, through (our attempts to observe) the law we become conscious of sin.

We become conscious of how feeble and frail we are to live up to the standard which God has laid before us. This is bad news: that we cannot obtain righteousness through our own efforts, but Verse 21 says, and this is the good news when the Apostle Paul turns a corner and shines the light of Grace,

²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

This is what the Old Testament Scriptures have been pointing us toward. If you and I are to have the righteousness that is accepted by God we must believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord.

² Exodus 20:13

True righteousness can only arise from a new heart. We cannot make our own hearts new. Only God can produce that. What we find, after Jesus is explaining God's standard in which we have to have a righteousness which surpasses the righteousness of the Pharisees, Jesus goes on to explain what He means by that statement and that explanation is going to be Matthew 5:21-48. This is what Jesus is going to explain what He means by this "righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees".

He is revealing, in very specific terms, the kind of righteousness that God requires and He uses six specific illustrations to help us understand true righteousness, and with each illustration He uses a specific phrase to identify the false teaching of the Pharisees and the true understanding He is presenting as the Master Teacher of the Law. The phrase He is going to use in those six occasions is: "You have heard that it was said..." You can follow along in your Bibles, in the next several paragraphs, the six times Jesus says that. Then He is going to follow that with, "but I say to you..." He is going to refute the teaching that the disciples had already heard.

The big question we have to answer is: who had been teaching these wrong ideas about righteousness? From whom had the people heard the ideas which Jesus was refuting? I believe that the answer is very clear: He is referencing the Pharisees' teaching of The Law and that people were listening to the Pharisees' teaching and they were becoming confused about God's righteous requirements about God's righteousness as a result of listening to the teaching that they were receiving in the synagogue in the 1st Century church week in and week out. By listening, their soul was being destroyed.

It is important for us to understand that Jesus is not combating the Old Testament Scriptures. He is not refuting the Old Testament Scriptures in this sermon, but He is rather refuting the wrong interpretations of the Old Testament Scriptures which the Pharisees were holding.

How do we know that? He seems to be quoting the Old Testament? How do we know that He is refuting the Pharisees' interpretation of the Scriptures and not the Scriptures themselves? There are three reasons. First, Jesus has already affirmed the absolute, authoritative truth of the Old Testament Scriptures. He does so in Verses 17 and 18, when He says,

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

He affirms the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus will teach us that there is everything right about the Old Testament Scriptures and there is nothing wrong about them.

The second reason why, I believe, that Jesus is refuting the Pharisees' interpretation and not the Scriptures themselves is that Jesus clearly identifies the Pharisees as the people who have a problem in their practice and in their teaching in regard to the Scriptures. In Verse 19 Jesus talks about those who fail to practice "even the least commandment" and those who teach others to do the same, and in the very next verse He is going to talk about the Pharisees. It is very clear that Jesus has the Pharisees in view throughout this entire message. In fact, He has the Pharisees in view throughout His entire life of ministry.

The third reason why it is the interpretation of the Pharisees which Jesus is refuting, and not the Bible itself, is found in Verse 43. Up to this point in the illustrations we could say that is what the Old Testament Scriptures teach, until we come to this sixth illustration. This sixth is in a line of six that are all similar and fit the same category. Here Jesus says,

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"

No where in the Old Testament Scriptures does this appear. In fact, it is rejected by the Old Testament Scriptures, but this is exactly what the Pharisees were teaching in Jesus' day.

Jesus is correcting the Pharisees and their twisted understanding of righteousness which focused merely upon the externals rather than upon the heart. Jesus will continue to address this because this is such a dangerous doctrine for

the disciple. He will continue to refute this all through His life. When we get to Matthew 23, toward the end of Jesus' life, He is going to pronounce "woes" upon the Pharisees; He is going to pronounce judgment upon them.

One of these statements of judgment is,

²⁵ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."

I want to draw two practical observations regarding Jesus' statement refuting the Pharisees' teaching. First, false teaching tarnishes right living. What we believe really matters and has great consequence upon our lives before God. Jesus understood that if a person listened to the teachers of the Law, if they listened to the Pharisees, and they listened to teaching that twisted God's revelation and if they listened long enough there was a high likelihood that they would believe the teaching that they were sitting under. If they believed the teaching that they were sitting under it would have tragic consequences upon their lives, their relationship with God, their relationship with other people, and their ability to enjoy God and bring Him glory.

The second observation I would make is that false teaching must be combated head-on. Jesus does not adopt today's axiom: we should only teach the positive truths of the Scripture and not become negative by exposing false doctrine. Jesus did not believe that for the sake of unity and harmony among the brothers that He should content Himself with mere positive statements, but rather, Jesus deliberately and decisively and forcefully criticized the Pharisees and their teaching. He created quite a stir when He did this, but He refused to treat false doctrine benignly, as though it was a matter of a few harmless points of disagreement.

Friends, if we refuse to combat false teaching head-on we will become morally and intellectually flabby and we will become useless as instruments in God's hands. A pastor today cannot be faithful to God unless he frequently exposes and denounces the false teachings that many Christians hear and believe, regardless whether or not those teachings come from the most popular authors and the most loved preachers on the radio or television. Please understand, when Jesus said, "You have heard that is was said, but I say to you...", the Pharisees did not mistake who He was talking to and that He was forcefully confronting and denouncing and contradicting their influence. They were the famous authors and they were the "television preachers" of their day whom everyone was listening to. That is why Jesus could confidently say, "You have heard...", because everyone was listening to these teachers. Truth is worth holding onto even if we have to fight to keep it.

Jesus is going to say, in Verse 22, something rather shocking,

²² "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

With these words we marvel at the exceeding holiness of God. Man's anger breaks God's Commandment concerning murder. Up to this time the Pharisees had been teaching that if you avoided the physical murder of another human being, you were in keeping with the Sixth Commandment.³ They defined murder simply as an external act and when they defined murder in such a way they relieved themselves of the risk of offending many people. Such an understanding of the Sixth Commandment makes us rather safe when we are around it. This, then, becomes the most non-threatening of all of the Commandments. We can say, "I may have broken many of the Commandments, but there is one Commandment that I certainly have not broken, and that is the Commandment of the Sixth Order: Thou shall not murder.

Most people will be able, when a poll is taken, to say, "I have not broken that one. That is the one that I feel as though I have passed the requisite requirement that God has laid before me." However, Jesus comes along, and rather than making this the safest of all Commandments to be around, He makes it one of the most dangerous and threatening Commandments to our lives, for He says that it is not only the external act of committing murder and of committing violence against another person, but it is the internal heart of anger and the words that are used that causes us to feel

³ Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder."

the weight of this Commandment and to feel the force of its condemnation upon our life. He applies it in such a way so that everyone of us would feel its weight and would feel as though we were about to stumble underneath it because who among us has not grown angry at another and who has not said a careless word.

I wonder if we consider our anger to be so serious. It is shocking that Jesus would lay upon us the guilt of murder for the sin of anger. How many of us sense that our anger is so destructive and so defiant toward God and so ruinous to our own soul and our relationship with God? When was the last time that anger grabbed hold of your heart and your tongue? What did you feel about it when it did? Perhaps you do not have to think very far into the distant past to consider when anger grabbed hold of your heart or your tongue, perhaps even in the past twenty-four hours. Anyone getting their family ready for church have a child who was a little slow? Any children have a parent who was a little sharp and a little harsh? On the way to church was there any driver who was a bit too aggressive, or worse, a driver who was too passive? What did we do and did we consider that to be a serious matter or something that was rather light and trivial?

It is vital to remember that God is Sovereign in all of His dealings with us and in God's Sovereignty He has a specific design for every circumstance; those irritating circumstances, those foolish decisions that others make that affect us and hurt us, for the difficult people that He has our lives bump up against, for the hurtful words that another would say to us, even for the sin that another authored, but that God uses, a sin that is committed against us and that pains us. God's design for us is to use these provoking circumstances to move us toward true righteousness to reveal the authenticity of our faith and to praise God for His sufficient grace and as One who gives us joy in everything.

Man's anger does not accomplish God's design, but rather it causes those events to lay empty and futile at our feet. Our anger kicks against God's design and keeps us from enjoying God and glorifying Him through those circumstances. Friends, it is a truth that no one can hold onto anger toward another person and hold onto the enjoyment of God at the same time. One must give way to the other. We must choose between the pleasure that our anger brings to our heart and the pleasure of delighting in God, but we cannot do both. It is a choice of faith and which do we believe will bring the greatest blessing to us? Anger will keep us from enjoying God and from glorifying Him, so we must choose. James will say, in the first chapter of his letter,

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds...

Later in that chapter, he is going to say,

¹⁹...be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for the anger of man does not (accomplish) the righteousness of God.

Unless a man is more righteous than the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, he will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.⁴ God has designed for our lives that anger would destroy.

The second precept we want to look at is that man's anger employs the heart and the tongue. Jesus is going to specifically speak of the response to anger regarding our language and the words that we speak. He talks about someone using the word "raca", which means empty head, idiot, numbskull, and dummy. It means all of the words that we are tempted to apply to others. He also used the word "fool", which is a reference to an evil doer or a reprobate. The word raca expresses contempt for another person's intelligence. The word expresses contempt for another person's moral or spiritual condition.

Someone, though, may easily justify their anger by saying, "I may have been angry and said some words that I should not have, but I didn't act in anger. I never retaliated. I never took revenge. I never struck out. I never made any physical assault." But, Jesus teaches us that murderous anger is often content to control our hearts and our tongues. Such sinful anger does not need to control our bodies in order to destroy us and to rob God of His rightful glory.

Gaining control over our bodies is an added bonus to sinful anger, but it does not need our bodies. If it has our hearts and if it has our tongues then it can do its work and it can shut us off from God's grace and from His righteousness. Our great conflict with God is not caused by the actions of our hands so much as it is caused by the rebellion and

⁴ Matthew 5:20

corruption of our hearts. This is where our problem is and if anger can invade the heart, then it can invade that heart which would separate us and sever us from a right relationship with God. This is the reason that in the Gospel God's great design for the Gospel is to give us new hearts; to transform us from the inside out.

Let's turn to the Old Testament and the Prophet Ezekiel. I love these verses in Ezekiel 36. God's design in the Gospel is to give us a new heart, so it is the heart that always is the focus. Ezekiel will speak of a transformation of the heart that is possible through God's grace. Ezekiel is going to speak, and he speaks centuries before Jesus comes, of a salvation that is going to be revealed in God's Son. This is the salvation that he speaks and that he describes. God is speaking,

²⁵ "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

Isn't that a great description? God seeks not after mere external conformity to His Law and mere behavioral change, but He seeks after a real, lasting, internal, heart change. Such a heart change is available to us as a free gift from God through Jesus Christ. We have to ask this question as we are faced with this Commandment and its implications, "What kind of heart do I have? Is it a heart of stone or is it a heart of flesh?"

What is a heart of stone like? A heart of stone is cold, hard, heavy, dead, and it is silent. A heart of flesh is soft, warm, light and airy, living, and speaking. The nature of the sin of anger is the nature of the heart of stone.

Let me share a personal observation with my struggle with this sin, the sin of murder through an angry heart. There are times when I will get angry: angry toward a family member, toward a friend, or toward some circumstance. God's Spirit, and I believe God has given me His Spirit by His grace through the Gospel, will clearly communicate to me, "Ritch, you have to rid yourself of this anger and you have to do it now. Don't hold it tight to your vest, but release it and get rid of it." There are sometimes in my willfulness that I will cross the arms of my soul and I will say, "No, not yet! I want to hold onto this anger. That person has wronged me and I don't want to release them and I don't want to release myself." Anger is a sensual sin.

Do you know what happens? It is difficult for me to describe, but it is as a physical sensation to an immaterial part of me that I feel a hardness creeping over my soul and my heart. I feel a heaviness as if there is something in my chest that is weighting my spirit down. I cannot fly up to God anymore. I feel a deadness as though it is still and it grows silent. Then, God in His grace, and this is what God does for true believers who have their heart changed, does not let us alone and say, "Okay, I am going to leave you to a heart of stone," but He perseveres with us so that what He begins is what He ends and He causes us to maintain a heart of flesh. God Spirit breaks through and He brings a humility to our heart that says, "God, it is time for me to confess that sin. It is wrong. Let me confess it before other people." Do you know what happens, and again it is difficult to describe, it is as though there is a warmth that I can feel. There is an airiness and an lightness. There is a beating life within my spirit, and I ask myself the question, "Why did I hold onto my anger so long?"

We have a choice and we have to choose – do we want the pleasure of this heart of stone or do we want the joy of the heart of flesh? Why would we hold onto it for so long when the benefits are so real and so lasting and so strong in God's glory?

The third precept is that man's anger imperils his soul. Jesus speaks of this when He says,

²² *"But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."*

Notice a few things concerning what Jesus believes about Hell. First, observe that Jesus believes that Hell is a very real place. He is not making a threat of judgment that is imaginary. What affect would an imaginary threat have upon any people? He intends for this threat, because it is real, to have a motivating affect upon people to say, "I need to avoid that at all costs!"

What parent seeks to motivate their children to obedience through an imaginary spanking, “I am going to spank you with an imaginary rod.” “Oooohhhhhh!”

No, Hell is a real place. Furthermore, Jesus believes, regarding Hell, that this is a place of God’s Eternal Judgment for our sins. He, furthermore, believes that Hell is hot and that our sins are so grievous to God that they bring us underneath the right condemnation of deserving Hell.

Let me address two questions that Jesus’ reference to Hell undoubtedly brings to our mind. First, how can one avoid Hell? A person cannot avoid Hell by being completely righteous. If you and I were completely righteous then we would not need to fear Judgment and we would be accepted by God upon our own merit. Jesus’ explanation of the Law reveals to us that we are not righteous, so what do we do? How can we go from being a son of disobedience, deserving Hell, to being a son of God, accepted by God forever, enjoying God, and delighting in Him? John’s Gospel will tell us that as many receive Him, to them God gave the right to be called children and son’s of God,⁵ for God so loves you and He so loves me that He sent His only Son Jesus,

¹⁶ “so that whosoever would believe in Him would not perish but would have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

The second question we have to ask is, “Why are mere words in anger so harshly penalized. They do not seem like such a big deal to us.” There are two answers to that. First, words of anger attack God Himself because man is made in God’s image. When we attack another person by calling them a fool we are attacking God’s image in that person as well. This is James point, when he says, in James 3,

⁹With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

How can we, on the one hand, praise God and the next moment curse God through cursing the person who is made in God’s image.

The second reason why this is such a grievous sin is because it destroys people. Our words hurt and maim and keep others from understanding who God is and His grace. An angry word is a blow to the spirit as is a stab to the heart. “A reckless word pierces like a sword,”⁶ says Solomon. “The tongue is a restless evil full of deadly poison,”⁷ says James.

The question I would ask you to consider is: have you wounded any person with your words? If so, this leads us to the last precept – man’s anger must be addressed immediately, as we read in Verse 23, in light of our new understanding of the fullness of the Law that God has given us,

²³ “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

Man’s anger must be addressed immediately. It must not be allowed to settle upon our soul. We cannot procrastinate, not only with the anger, but also with the consequences of our anger, that is the ruined relationships that our anger often leaves in its path and in its trail.

What is important to God in God’s church? Jesus says that there is a priority here and one of the priorities is that loving relationships are of greater value than giving gifts and donations that advance the Kingdom of God and the Gospel. James is telling us that if we are offering an offering, if we are giving a gift to a building fund so as to provide for more evangelism and discipleship, if you are giving a gift for a missionary to reach out into the uttermost parts of the world, or if you are giving a gift for a ministry, stop, if you remember and the Spirit of God comes at that moment, if there is something that you said or if there is something that you did and that person has a right reason to resent you, you must stop your worship because the thing that keeps a church from being effective in a community and in the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and shining the Light of the glory of God is not a lack of funds. That is not the

⁵ John 1:12

⁶ Proverbs 12:18

⁷ James 3:8

greatest impediment. The greatest impediment for a church is when brothers and sisters in Christ are in conflict with each other and are not right relationship with each other.

We justify this by saying, “That person should come first because they were the first to sin against me and I only said those things because they said this!” Here is what Jesus says, “If you are giving your offering and you remember you need to go. If you have sinned against a person through your words and through your anger, you are the one who needs to initiate that.” You may say, “That is really humbling.” Yes, it is, but it will give you a heart of flesh and it will advance it so that your life will be used for the glory of God among His people.

Who is that person you need to go to? It might be a husband or a wife. There is something right there and you know it. It might be a friend or a co-worker. It might be an ex-wife or an ex-husband. Whoever the Spirit of God addresses to your mind and to your heart, go; do not wait. If you wait, Satan has his way and you will never do it. “Go,” Jesus says.

When my son, Daniel, was about three or four years old, he had a difficult time with anger. He would lash out most often at his older brother. It might be that his older brother tempted him toward anger on many occasions. There was one occasion when he lashed out verbally, and possibly physically, so I took Daniel by the hand and told him that we needed to go upstairs. My children knew, when we took the walk upstairs, what that meant; that there was going to be some discipline. I asked him if he knew what he did wrong, and eventually he said that he did and that he knew he was wrong. He asked me for forgiveness and he asked God for forgiveness, then I applied discipline. Afterwards, I commented that this had been a problem for some time and that I wanted to talk with him about it. I asked him what was going on in his heart and if he wanted to have a heart that was loving and kind or did he want to have a heart that was angry. I believe, in that three or four-year old boy, the Spirit of God met him in a real powerful way right there through His Word. Tears began to run down his face and he said, “Help me, Daddy. Help me. I don’t want to be angry. I want to be loving, but I don’t know how.”

Jesus says, “Unless your righteousness surpasses the righteousness of the Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” Help us, Father. Help us. We don’t know how. That is a huge standard.

I opened up the Bible with my son Daniel and I began to tell him a story that I had told him before: how God in His mercy sent His Son Jesus to rescue us and that only through Jesus can our hearts be changed. God calls us to humble ourselves before Him and recognize our great need and that we cannot do this on our own. We cling to Jesus Christ, the One who would rescue us from our sin, not just the condemnation of our sin, but of our sin itself. We prayed that day and I can tell you that I have seen God’s work in a dramatic way to change my son’s heart.

This is what God will do for you and for me if only we would humble ourselves before Him and say, “God, I cannot live up to your standards, but I want to. Deliver me from my sin and I embrace Jesus as my Savior.”