

True Tone Week 3

Echoes of the Kingdom

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

In Matthew chapter five, verses 17 through 20, Jesus says this. Don't even begin to think that I have come to do away with the law and the prophets. I haven't come to do away with them, but to fulfill them. I say to you very seriously that as long as heaven and earth exist, neither the smallest letter nor even the smallest stroke of a pen will be erased from the law until everything there becomes a reality.

Therefore, whoever ignores one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called the lowest in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps these commands and teaches people to keep them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus says, I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

After reading this passage, you likely do one of two things one, you ignore it because what Jesus seems to be saying is really, really hard. Follow every single law. For now, we talking about the law. We're talking about the Ten Commandments. We're also talking about the 600 other laws that are found in what we now call the Old Testament.

There's also the oral laws of Jesus's tradition to there's laws about eating shellfish and how to cut your hair, and not wearing clothes with two different fabrics, or how to plant your garden about stoning disobedient children to death. So even though Jesus seems to be saying it, follow all of these laws. We often say, well, that doesn't apply to us anymore.

Now the other way to read this passage is this we use this passage as a weapon to point out other people's sins, with no intention of actually following the laws ourselves. I'm pretty sure that God doesn't want us to use Jesus's words or any other words in the Holy Scripture as weapons. But yet, as long as there has been written words, people, we have used these words to control people, to exclude people, to attack people.

And even in Jesus's time, the Pharisees use the Scripture. They use the laws to challenge and discredit Jesus. Still today, we hear it today, we do it today. And this passage gets brought up a lot in hot button topic issues, right? Issues on almost sexuality and gender roles and immigration and poverty and politics and race and so on.

As if Jesus is saying, see, every single law in the Old Testament still applies exactly as written. So no matter what you believe about any of the hot button issues, when we read these words of Jesus, we'll discover that's not that's not at all what Jesus is saying. And in

fact, when we read the words of Jesus, we'll find and we'll discover that we all have work to do.

Now, we are not Jesus. We need to be really careful not to use Scripture, the words of Scripture, the words of Jesus to reinforce our own agenda, especially when we pick and choose which parts of the law to weaponize. It's tempting to do I do it sometimes. I want to do it more, right? There are people in my social media world.

There are people in my life, my family and friends circles who make it a point to pick out certain scriptures to support their opinion, sometimes even support their hate. And I want to call them out. I want them to stop oppressing the very people that Jesus is telling us to love. By proving that I'm right, by picking out the Scripture and passages that I want to use to support my opinion.

But is that what Jesus is asking me to do? Is Jesus instead asking me, how are you, Mandi? Living with integrity and humility and a heart aligned with God's purposes. Now insert your own name. Right? How are you? Name living with integrity, humility and a heart aligned with God's purposes. Now this sermon is for you if you are a follower of Jesus, if you are not a follower of Jesus yet, if you're still trying to explore, you know you might learn something today about living a life with integrity.

But, but, but this. That's not a command for you, as it is for us who claim to follow Jesus. Today's sermon is personal, and I want us to say this, this what's on the screen I want that's all of this to say this together. The message today is about me and what's in my heart. Today is not about pointing a finger about the sins of others.

And I get that there is a lot going on in the world today. There's a lot of things that we could be talking about, but today's sermon is personal. Now, we have had, several guest preachers over the last couple of months, like a little bit more than I would normally have in my rotation should, Lauren Wachter preached last week and she did a great job.

I heard so many great things about her and her message, and it was wonderful. But several of you, after last Sunday, several of you, came to me joking, saying things like, do you even work here anymore? Or what do you do all week if you don't have to prepare for a sermon or, you know, are you even our pastor anymore?

But there's probably a good chance that you're going to be asking for more guest preachers. After today's message, because today you might be a little uncomfortable because today's message gets personal. So Jesus says, I Jesus says he did not come to abolish the laws. He said he came to fulfill them. So we first of all, let's recognize how Matthew and the other prophets in the other, disciples of the time, how they view the law, and for them, the law was absolutely holy and divine.

There was no challenging it. There was no changing it. There was no questioning it. Yet Jesus will challenge it five times in this part of the sermon on the Mount and substitute his own teaching. So we're going to get to some of those in a minute. But there had to be the law before there was the gospel, before there was the good news.

Now, if we look at the word fulfilled, it means to bring to completion, to embody or to fill full with meaning. And Jesus. Jesus is not saying go back and follow every single law to the letter. Instead he's saying, I am the heart of the law. He's saying I am what the law was pointing to all along. Jesus is saying, this is what the Israelites longed for.

And now here I am, and I'm going to show you a new way to interpret these laws. The law was never meant to save people. The law was there to prepare people to recognize their need for a savior. Think about it this way. Let's say we try to follow all of the laws that we find in our Scripture.

Very soon we are going to recognize our failure. We're going to recognize our failure to meet God's standards. And this can lead us to a sense of humility, because we know that we are inadequate. We know we have an inability to be righteous on our own. So this realization prepares us to receive the gospel message, the good news of Jesus, the message that Jesus meets the standard for us and offers us forgiveness.

So the law points to Jesus. And then Jesus continues on and on the same path. But in just this slightly new direction, Jesus doesn't go around reinforcing the law. He is not saying, let's get rid of the law. In fact, he's actually deepening the law. He takes the law to the heart level because that's how the law was always intended to be.

So the laws were made so that God's people would have reverence for God and respect for others. So think about the Ten Commandments. You, worship God alone, have no other idols, right? Reverence for God. Think about the other ten commandments. Do not, steal. Do not murder, do not lie. Do not cheat. Respect for others. The law was created to reveal God's expectations for humans, reverence for God, and respect for others.

So here's where, Jesus, if we continue on reading in the Scripture, now, we see where Jesus starts to challenge some of the laws and he begins to say things like this. You know that law about do not murder. You know, the disciples are like, oh yeah, yeah, I know, I know that law do not do not murder.

Well, well, now Jesus is saying, you know what? If you have anger in your heart, that's the same thing. And I'm sure the disciples are like, whoa, what? What do you mean? Murdering and anger? Now, these are the same things. Now, there's four more sayings that Jesus will say. You have heard it said, and then he will say, but I say this.

So, verse 43, you have heard that it was said, you must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your father who is in heaven. So this is the kind of righteousness or justice that Jesus demands from us.

So, and why does Jesus demand this kind of righteousness? Because God is righteous. Because God is just my CSB study Bible put it this way. It says God allows good things like rain to happen to the just and the unjust. So, so must God's Father. Followers treat others, whether good or either with consistent love. So God allows good things like rain to happen on the just and the unjust.

And we are supposed to love, whether good or evil. It's a matter of the heart. That is what Jesus is saying in these passages. Here's another challenging one. You have heard that it was said, Jesus says, don't commit adultery. But I say to you that every man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery, where in his heart and in.

And if you're right, I causes you to fall into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better that you lose a part of your body than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And I can't see how many men have glass eyes out there. Just kidding. I'm just kidding. Women. This is for us too, right?

Jesus is saying this is serious. This is not just about, following some rules. This is about integrity. This is about what's in our heart. Not just our actions. Now, in this teaching, Jesus moves us from, a conversation about behavior management to heart transfer. Mason, think about when our kids were little. Right. And we teach them not to hit people.

Right? We say don't hit people. That's we don't want to do that. That's not a very nice thing. We want our kid to stop hitting people, but we don't want our kid to stop hitting people because, well, I'm not going to hit somebody because that's the rule, right? We want them to say, I don't want to hit somebody because that's not a kind thing to do.

Right? Because my heart tells me that that's not right to do. That is exactly what Jesus is asking us to do. Don't just follow the rules, but allow your heart to be transformed. So this passage isn't about using the law to judge other. Judge others harshly because of their behaviors. It's about us being formed into people who live from the inside out with righteousness and integrity.

That goes deeper than just checking boxes or following rules. It's a righteousness that's rooted in love and mercy and justice. The very things that Jesus embodied. That's the kind of righteousness that Jesus is after. There was a recent Barna Group study, and they conducted a study showing that 64% of Christians say that integrity is the most important quality to have as a leader.

More than charisma, more than communication, more than strategy. Integrity is the number one thing. And that's really encouraging. That's awesome. Right? The 64 4% of Christians said that is the most important. It's a it's encouraging, but also challenging because integrity doesn't just mean being honest or doing the right thing. When it's easy, it means being the same person in private that you are in public.

It means choosing humility when pride would be much easier. It means refusing to weaponize Scripture even when we really want to be right. Jesus is asking our hearts to be so transformed that in the quiet places of our lives where no one's watching but God, God will find honesty and honor, reverence for God, respect for others. And this isn't just for pastors.

It's for all of us leaders. It's for staff leaders. It's for our leaders on our steering team and our PRC and our PMT teams. It's our care team members. It's our VBS volunteers. It's our life group in DC and Arise and Fusion leaders, right. All of us. And then beyond the church, this is for teachers and business owners and managers and parents and grandparents and siblings and, if people are watching you and paying attention to how you show up, especially as a Christian, you're leading whether you like it or not, whether you want it or not.

And you're and if your leadership doesn't come with integrity, trust disappears fast. Like really fast. So here's what integrity might look like. Here are some examples. You're at the grocery store at the self-checkout lane, and you scan everything except you accidentally forget that one thing that's in the bottom of your cart and nobody's watching. No alarm sounds right.

You or, you know, they should have paid for a cashier if they really care. The store makes a lot of money, right? We make excuses. I'm struggling right now. This would really help me out if I didn't have to pay for this. But integrity is what you do when no one is watching. Do you correct the mistake or do you walk out and it reveals a lot.

It seems like a little thing, but it reveals a lot about the person you are becoming. A teenager is in a group chat and they start making fun of another classmate, and it would be pretty easy to just stay quiet. It'd be pretty easy to just join in, pretty easy to pretend that you don't hear or see those text messages coming through, but instead you say, you know what?

This isn't okay. This isn't okay. That's integrity. A parent gets frustrated in traffic and starts yelling at another driver. Minutes later, they're dropping their kid off at church or school, and they say, be kind, okay? And the child hears it. But they remember the yelling.

Integrity as a parent doesn't mean being perfect. It means being consistent and honest and willing to apologize when we're not. You're scrolling through social media and you see the news about South Omaha and the Ice raids, and maybe your first reaction is to judge, well, they shouldn't have come here illegally, or that's what happens when you break the rules.

When you break the law. And it's easy to respond with, a quick opinion and forget that these are real people, real children crying for their parents, real people desperate for safety. But integrity isn't just about what you do. It's about how you see others. Do you react with judgment, or do you pause and let compassion shape and view your words?

Integrity is letting God soften your heart toward hurt the hurting, even when it's easier to look away from these things, even as it's easier to justify why this is not my problem.

Take the spouse who slowly drifts into an emotional connection with someone. It didn't start out as cheating, but over time the messages became a little bit more secretive. The thoughts became a little bit more intrusive and consumed. And you still smile at your spouse at the dinner table, but inside something is broken. Integrity means facing that brokenness with honesty.

It means having the courage to confess to God, to confess to your spouse, to admit when you've crossed a line, even when it's painful, even when you don't know what the outcome is going to be. Because integrity isn't pretending everything is fine, but it's choosing to, choosing the truth even when it hurts. Saying I'd rather rebuild something real than protect something fake.

And yes, we can talk about the public scandals, pastors and politicians and influencers, people who've talked about values in public but have betrayed them in private. And when the truth comes out, the damage is not just to their own lives, but everyone else that trusted them. But those big failures that we read about in the news almost always start out small little compromises, little lies, little justifications, because integrity isn't built in public.

It is built in private, in the small decisions, in the honest conversations, in the quiet moments when no one is watching, no one sees but God. I read this quote the other day in an article. It says, sooner or later we all sit down to a banquet of consequence. Is truth. And while every leader, every human is imperfect, Jesus is telling us what matters most is what's in our heart.

Is our heart. Are our hearts aligned with gods, our lives ones of increasing love and surrender and justice and mercy? Right? Are we growing toward having a heart with integrity? So that is the deeper invitation of this passage, not just don't break the rules, but

be transformed. Be formed into to someone who leads from the inside out, not with self-righteousness, but the kind of righteousness that reflects the very character of God.

So before we rush to judge others, or we try to correct them with our favorite Bible verse, we have to ask ourselves, am I living a life with integrity? Drive integrity in my job, in my relationship and with my work, my money and my words and even my thoughts? Am I becoming the kind of person Jesus would trust to represent him in the world?

We have a team of people who have been working over the last few months, who've been in conversation about what it means to be a disciple, and we've been thinking about, well, how what does this look like for us here at horizons? How can we provide, opportunities and resources for people to continue to learn about Jesus's words and to apply Jesus's words?

We want disciples who follow Jesus, who act like Jesus, and then who eventually bring others along and walk alongside them. And one of the one of the things that this team continues to come back to is the power and the importance of community, but even more so, the power of accountability. Having a core group of people where we can confess our wrongdoings.

We're not very good at this as people, are we? Right? Oh, the Catholics have confession. Good thing we don't have to do that. But I think Jesus kind of says that we supposed to do that. So later this summer and, in the fall, you're going to be hearing more about these core groups, these accountability groups, and why they are so important to our life.

But don't wait until this later this summer or this fall to think about this, because there are things that we can do to start now. If you've messed up, if you've made a mistake, confess. Confess to God. Find someone that you can confess to. Own up to this, to your mistakes. Another thing that we can do is we can, we can.

Maybe we're like, well, there is nothing, nothing, nothing major. I need to confess, one of the things that we can do is watch the little things that may not seem very big right now, but as we said, right. The big things almost always start out as little things. Because when we lead with love, when we live a life with integrity, we don't just follow the law, we fulfill the law.

And Jesus came to fulfill the law, and we are to follow Jesus's lead. So it's time for us to make this personal. It is time for us to pause and stop pointing fingers at others and look within. That is what Jesus is asking us to do if we want to be his followers. Let's pray.

Gracious and holy God, this this passage of Scripture is really hard. It is hard for us to look at your words, to hear your words, and expect us to follow them. Because it's hard to love

our enemies. It's hard to not be angry. It's hard to do the things that you are asking us to do. It seems impossible.

But God, we know that you have grace and that you offer grace to us. We know that you are. You are patient with us as we make mistakes, and we know that we can come to you and confess to you when we've messed up. But God, help us to take a little step toward having a transformed heart. Help us to be a little bit more like you when we are interacting with people, when we hear something on the news, when there's something happening in our lives, help us, guide us, be transformed, be righteous like you are asking us to be.

Thank you for what you've done for us. Thank you for saying, you know what? I got this. The standards are hard. I've got this. You have me now. And now we have Jesus. And now we can begin to be transformed. God, we say all of this in Jesus's name. Amen.