

RIGHTEOUS MOTIVES

- A. Introduction: Jesus said that the years preceding His return will be marked by false christs and prophets who preach false gospels (Matt 24:4-5; 11; 23-24). We're taking a look at Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible so that we are equipped to recognize and reject counterfeits.
1. A universal religion that will welcome the ultimate false christ—a man known as Antichrist—is already developing (Rev 13:1-18). This new religion uses some Christian language and makes reference to familiar Bible passages. Yet its core beliefs contradict the Bible.
 - a. Proponents of this universal religion take Bible verses out of context. Consequently, an important part of being equipped to recognize false christs and false gospels is knowing how to read and interpret Bible passages in context.
 - b. Everything in the Bible was written or spoken by someone (under the inspiration of God, II Tim 3:16; II Pet 1:20-21) to someone about something. These three factors set the context. Bible verses can't mean something to us that they would not have meant to original hearers and readers.
 - c. Recently, we've been considering the historical and cultural context Jesus was born into. The more we learn about that history and culture, the more accurate our frame of reference will be when we determine whether or not verses are used in context. We'll continue our discussion in this lesson.
 2. Jesus came to a people group that was expecting the Messiah to establish the kingdom of God on earth—Israel, the Jews. They knew from the writings of their prophets (the Old Testament) that only the righteous can enter His kingdom. Dan 2:44; Dan 7:27; Ps 24:3-45; Ps 15:1-5 etc.
 - a. When Jesus delivered His teachings He was not talking to or about Christians. There were no Christians yet because He had not been to the Cross. Jesus was speaking to Old Covenant men and women, and gradually preparing them to receive a New Covenant, a new relationship between God and man—that of Father and son.
 - b. Jesus didn't spell everything out during His earth ministry. He introduced concepts that would be fully explained after His resurrection. Remember, His primary in coming to earth was to go to the Cross and die for sin. He didn't want to tip His hand to the fact that He was going to become the final sacrifice for sin, a sacrifice that would make sonship possible. I Cor 2:7-8
 1. Jesus also knew human nature. Because we tend to cling to what is familiar, He had to prepare His audience for the fact that the old and new won't mix.
 2. He used examples familiar to His audience: Men don't put an unshrunk patch on an old garment or new wine in old wineskins because, when the new patch shrinks it will pull away from the old material. And, since old wineskins don't expand with the gases that are emitted during the fermentation process, the bottles (made from skins) will burst. Matt 9:16-17
 3. Jesus also had to broaden His audience's understanding of the righteousness needed to enter the kingdom since their concept was skewed. It came from their religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes. Through the centuries these men added rules and regulations to God's Law and missed the whole point.
 - a. God's Law is His revealed will in regard to men. It has been expressed in various ways for various purposes throughout human history.
 1. 1st century Jews (old Covenant men) were under a specific expression known as the Law of Moses. God gave it to Israel through Moses after He delivered them from Egypt bondage.
 2. Jesus said that God's Law can be summed up in two commands: Love God and love your neighbor. Matt 22:37-40
 - b. Jesus regularly exposed the Pharisees' misinterpretation of the Law. For example, the Law said: Honor your father and mother (Ex 20:12). Also under the Law, men and women could consecrate things or persons to the Lord, which then became *corban* or consecrated gifts (Ex 28:38).
 1. The Pharisees taught that if a man declared something to be *corban* (Mark 7:11) he was relieved

of his duty to help his parents in any way. They further taught that once he was thus released from his obligation to his parents, he could use the gift to help himself or give it to someone else—just not to his parents. Through their traditions they rendered the Law ineffective.

2. Matt 15:5—But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God, he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. (ESV)
4. The Sermon on the Mount has a number of verses that are often misinterpreted and misapplied, as well as statements that seem very strange. However, familiarity with the historical and cultural context clears up these issues. The bulk of the sermon is an expose’ of the Pharisees’ false righteousness.
 - a. Matt 5:21-48—In the portion we examined last week we noted that by using six examples, Jesus contrasted the Pharisees tradition (ye have heard it said) with the true interpretation of God’s Law (but I say): murder, adultery, divorce, oath taking, retaliation, loving your fellow man.
 - b. Jesus was not teaching on these subjects per se. In other words, He isn’t giving the rules for divorce and oath taking. He used these topics to illustrate what the Pharisees had done. For example:
 1. The Pharisees taught that you can harbor hatred in your heart toward someone and, as long as you don’t actually murder them, you’ve kept the Law. They further said that you can long for women in your heart as long as you don’t touch them. If you wish, you can divorce your wife for any reason and have the other woman, as long as you give your current wife a bill of divorcement. You’ve kept the Law. Deut 24:1-4
 2. Jesus put anger and ill will toward a brother on a par with murder and lust in the heart with the physical act of adultery. Through their traditions the Pharisees and scribes reduced God’s Law to a list of manmade rules and missed the spirit behind the Law.
- B. In His earth ministry, Jesus had to prepare men and women for the fact that the kingdom of God He came to bring would first take a form that their prophets had not clearly seen—the kingdom or the reign of God within them through the indwelling Spirit of God. Luke 17:20-21; John 3:3-5
 1. The key verse in the Sermon on the Mount is Matt 5:20—Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of God. The Pharisees preached and practiced an external righteousness. It was not a righteousness of the heart.
 - a. The righteousness required for the kingdom is not outward only. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus was introducing His listeners to the idea that true righteousness is within a man. It comes from the heart. (No one knew yet that Jesus was going to make inward righteousness possible through His sacrificial death on the Cross.)
 - b. The number one accusation Jesus made toward the Pharisees and scribes throughout His ministry is that they were hypocrites. Outwardly, they appeared righteous but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and sin. Matt 23:27-28
 1. The Bible was not written in chapter and verse. Those were added in the Middle Ages as references to help readers locate specific passages. Jesus did not break His thought between Matt 5:48 and Matt 6:1.
 2. Jesus still had the Pharisees and scribes in mind as He began to deal with motives—why do you do what you do? He will reveal that true righteousness is living with a consciousness of your Father in Heaven, living for His praise, His reward, His approval, His kingdom, His will.
 2. Matt 6:1—Jesus told His listeners not to do their alms (or their righteousness or righteous acts) to be seen of men. He used three examples to illustrate His point: giving to the poor, praying, and fasting.
 - a. Jesus said don’t be like the hypocrites are when they give, pray, or fast. Hypocrite comes from a word meaning play actor, one who acts under a mask, playing a character other than himself.
 1. A hypocrite seems to be or do something that he is not. Outwardly he appears one way, but in

reality, he is not as he seems. Jesus still had the Pharisees and scribes in mind as He spoke.

2. The number one accusation Jesus made toward these religious leaders throughout His ministry is that they were hypocrites. Matt 15:7; 16:3; 22:18; 23:13-15; 23, 25, 27, 29
- b. v2-4—Jesus taught the people that when you give to the poor don't sound the trumpet as hypocrites do. The fact that Jesus called the givers in His example hypocrites means they weren't giving alms for the obvious reason—helping the poor. They had another motive for giving—to be seen of men. Jesus said that they have their reward. Men may be impressed but God is not.
 1. To sound the trumpet meant several things, all with one common theme—making sure that people knew you were giving money to the poor.
 - A. The Pharisees would sound a trumpet when they had something to give. A small band would travel with them to play as they made their offerings in the streets or synagogue.
 - B. In public alms chests there was a hole into which money for the poor was dropped. The hole was wide at one end and narrow at the other (to keep people from pulling money out) so it resembled a trumpet. If you threw your money in with some force it made a noise which drew attention to your giving, and you were said to sound the trumpet.
 2. When Jesus said “Don't let your left hand know what your right hand gives” He was emphasizing the fact that it's not about outward appearance, it's about inner motives. It's about pleasing God. Don't give to be seen of men. Keep it to yourself.
3. v5-8—In His next example Jesus told His listeners that when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who pray to be seen of men. Once again, He had the Pharisees in mind.
 - a. Their prayers were long (three hours) and were prayed at specific times. The Pharisees would make it a point to be in the streets at the hour of prayer so that they would have to pray in public and more people would see them and marvel at their devotion. They also stood rather than knelt when they prayed because it was easier for others to see them.
 1. When Jesus said go into your prayer closet He was not making a rule about praying in a literal closet. He was illustrating a point: Don't pray to be seen of men as hypocrites (Pharisees) do.
 2. Then Jesus told them not to pray as the heathen or Gentiles pray. The heathen think they will be heard if they talk long enough. But Jesus said that you'll be heard because you have a Father in Heaven who knows you have needs.
 - b. In v9-13 Jesus gave them an example of how to pray. This prayer has become the classic prayer of Christendom, the Lord's Prayer or Our Father. But that is not what it meant to the listeners when Jesus taught it. He was giving His listeners an example of how to pray to help them understand true righteous prayer in contrast with the hypocritical righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.
 1. To His audience, righteous prayer was what the Pharisees did. They prayed long prayers to be seen of men. They took money from widows in exchange for praying for them. They took the chief seats in the synagogue to be more easily seen and heard. They made broad their phylacteries and enlarged their borders to seem more pious. Matt 23:5-6; 14
 - A. Phylacteries were strips of parchment with Scripture written on them. They were placed in small boxes that were worn by men when they prayed. The boxes were attached with leather straps either to the forehead or the left arm.
 - B. Borders refers to fringe attached to the hem of their garments as per Moses' instructions to remember God's commandments (Num 15:37-41). The Pharisees made the boxes big and the fringe long so that people would see them.
 2. But through His prayer model, Jesus taught His audience that the righteousness of the kingdom is a life lived with a conscious awareness that God is your Father. True righteousness is relationship with the Father. (more on this prayer in a later lesson)
 - c. In v16-18 Jesus used fasting as a third illustration of true righteous living. According to the Law of

Moses, the purpose of fasting was to humble oneself before God, or to afflict one's soul (Lev 23:27). Jesus said hypocrites do it to be seen of men.

1. Fasting was a major part of the righteousness or righteous acts of the Pharisees. The Law said fast once a year. The Pharisees fasted twice a week. Jewish law forbade anointing or perfuming the head and washing the face on fast days. The Pharisees took full advantage of this law to make it obvious they were fasting.
 2. Jesus said wash your face, put on perfume so that no one but your Father knows that you fast. Don't live your life to be seen of men. Live your life to please your heavenly Father. God knows why you do what you do and He will reward you.
4. Remember, Jesus isn't setting up rules for giving, praying, or fasting. Nor is He spelling out every detail of the changes that will occur when He goes to the Cross. Jesus is broadening His' audience's concept of righteousness and preparing them for the inward reign (kingdom) of God in human hearts.

C. Conclusion: In this series we have been making the point that the gospel (Christianity) is supernatural. It's about transforming sinners into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God by the power of the Holy Spirit for all who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

1. Once again, it may seem like we are off point in our topic about recognizing false christs and false gospels with tonight's lesson. But we aren't.
 - a. When you understand the historical and cultural context into which Jesus incarnated you can more easily recognized when individual verses are being misinterpreted and misapplied.
 - b. Bible verses cannot mean something to us that they would not have meant to the people to whom they were first written or spoken.
2. The people to whom Jesus came (1st century Jews) knew from the prophets that God would one day establish a new covenant with them (a new relationship). But they didn't know what or how.
 - a. Their prophets saw glimpses of it. Jeremiah wrote that God would one day write His Law in men's hearts and remember their sins no more. Jer 31:31-34
 - b. God gave His Law Israel through Moses in part to show them their need for a Savior and to lead us to Christ so that that we can be made righteous through faith in Him. Gal 3:24
 - c. Fallen humanity cannot keep God's Law, cannot produce the righteousness God requires. It has to be supernatural, by the power of God.
 1. Rom 8:3—For God has done what the Law could not do, [its power] being weakened by the flesh [that is, the entire nature of man without the Holy Spirit]. Sending His own Son in the guise of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, [God] condemned sin in the flesh—subdued, overcame, deprived it of its power [over all who accept that sacrifice]. (Amp)
 2. Rom 8:4—So that the righteous and just requirement of the Law might be fully met in us, who live and move not in the ways of the flesh but in the ways of the Spirit—our lives governed not by the standards and according to the dictates of the flesh, but controlled by the (Holy) Spirit. (Amp)
 - d. Matt 5:17—Early in His sermon, Jesus told His audience that He came to fulfill the Law. There are many layers of meaning to His statement. He came to fulfill all prophecy concerning Himself. He came to satisfy justice according to the Law on our behalf. But there is more to it.
 1. The Law (God's Word) is a revelation of His unfolding plan to have a family of holy, righteous sons and daughters. He accomplished His plan through the Cross of Christ which opened the way for men to be born of God by the power of the Holy Ghost.
 2. One meanings of the word fulfill is to complete or accomplish an end. Jesus successfully accomplished all that was needed so that God can have truly righteous sons and daughters.
3. Lots more next week!!