

Least – Great – Reconciled!
Matthew 5:17-26

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Gospel lesson is a portion of what is commonly referred to as Jesus' sermon on the mount. In our text Jesus proclaims that not a single pen stroke of the Law will ever change. He also proclaims that whoever relaxes any part will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

It is interesting how many people will ask, "OK, but what part of the law is Jesus talking about?" Everything! All of it! People think of the Law as that which they do **against** God's Law that other people might see, that is, that you sin against the Law only when you do something. Jesus further explains what He means as this sermon goes on for three chapters, so here is what Jesus mentions that the law contains in this sermon on the mount.

Being angry with your brother, even calling them fool is the equivalent of murder.

Lusting after someone other than your spouse is considered adultery.

Taking of useless oaths, "I swear to God, hope to die," type things are sin.

You are not to retaliate against one who harms you.

You are to love your enemies.

And, you are to help your neighbor who is going without.

You are to pray – but you are not to pray with meaningless repetition.

You are to forgive you neighbor, and if you do not, God will not forgive you.

Your treasure is not to be belonging, but a relationship with God.

You cannot serve God and mammon.

Do not be worried about this things of this life – food, clothing, how long you'll live. Worry about being righteous before God.

Do not be judgmental, but you are to point out to others their sin in order that they might join you in repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

You are to treat all others as you desire to be treated.

And, you are to avoid false prophets, those who claim to teach in the name of Jesus, but teach falsehood.

Of course, this is only the tip of the iceberg. Jesus uses these as examples so the people can see how all the law is to be applied. There are other things in the Law which Jesus does not mention in these couple chapters, but they are also part of the Law. The entire law of God is contained in this imperative from Jesus, for Jesus says about all this, "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until **all** is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven."

Who can relax these commandments? Well, it is obvious of course that if I were to teach you that some of these things are no big deal, that I would be called least in the kingdom of heaven. I am a pastor after all, I am supposed to be teaching these things correctly. There are those who claim to be Christian pastors who are not though. Personally, I do not want to be in their shoes on the last day if they CONTINUE to teach falsehood.

Jesus is not instructing only pastors. He says, "WHOEVER" relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches other to do the same shall be called least. This means dear friends, that when you believe or even say something like, "Doing such and such (which Jesus says you should not be doing – or not doing what He says you should be doing) is no big deal," you are in danger.

What is striking is that Jesus' teaching about the law here is done to get people to realize that we are sinning when we do things in our mind and heart, much less with our body. I do not need to climb into bed with Sheila Schmedlap to commit adultery with her, it can happen in my mind? Hating my brother is murder! Calling them vile names is also murder!

Jesus wants us to realize that we need to be perfect. The Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day were the church leaders of the day, outwardly they appeared to be sinless. OUTWARDLY!!! Jesus wants us to realize that we need to be perfect so that we do not rely upon ourselves, He wants us to know that we are not righteous on our own, we are not right with God by our own works.

Of course, Jesus also says, "but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Not only are we to do them, but we are to teach others to do them as well. Do you like to teach others about God? Do you go around and speak of God's will?

You know, it is not so much just speaking, but do you help others when they have a need? Acts of mercy toward our neighbor speak louder to them than proclaiming, "I am a Christian, are you?" Love your neighbor as yourself isn't telling you what you should not be doing, it is prescriptive of how you are to treat others and assist when there is a need.

But dear friends, there is something even more important in this text. You see, it is a self-description of Jesus. Did you hear it? "But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

There is only one who has kept all of God's Law perfectly, and taught others to do the same. There is only one who is truly great – Jesus, God's Christ.

On the other hand, we are all the least. You and I have not only relaxed one of these commandments, we have taught others to do the same. We have done it by our silence, and we have done directly when we have told people that what they are doing isn't as bad as some people (the pastor) make it out to be, "Pastor just needs to relax a bit."

Thankfully, the Great One was perfect. His righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees – it was perfect inwardly, in His heart and mind, as well as outwardly. While our righteousness would never get us into the kingdom of heaven, His will – and does.

And that is exactly why you are here today. You gathered today to be reconciled to God, to receive the forgiveness that Christ purchased for you. As Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (Col. 1:19-20)

Dear friends, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is nothing more than the Good News of reconciliation of man with God – we are made righteous before God – put again into a right relationship with Him. It is for reconciliation that the Office of the Holy Ministry was instituted, even as Paul says in his second letter to the church at Corinth:

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:18-21 ESV)

Did you hear it? To be a Christian is to be nothing else than one who stands in a right relationship to God – that is, to stand before God in righteousness – to be reconciled to God. This does not happen because of our works, nor because of our deeds, but on account of Christ. We are reconciled to God in Christ Jesus, that we might bring righteousness, that is, right relationships, or reconciliation, to those around us.

Open your ears and hear God speak to you, your sins are forgiven – you are righteous, that is, reconciled to God. Reconciled to God, you are also reconciled to others.

Open your mouth and eat of the flesh pierced for your forgiveness – open your mouth and drink of the blood shed for the forgiveness of your sin. At Christ's table you are reconciled with God, and reconciled with those at table with you.

You are no longer least, but great, for you are reconciled to God in Christ Jesus. You are in Christ Jesus, and His righteousness in you exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. Amen.