



Doing the Right Thing

Matthew 6:25-34

January 14, 2018

Today, we are continuing in our SHIFT series. Each week, we will be talking about ways we can SHIFT our lives to be more like Jesus. God has called us as a church to pursue our new church vision. That vision is families first, community-centeredness, and being mission-minded. This "new thing" God is calling us to as a church will require a new level of right living in our everyday lives.

Somewhere along the way, we have created this idea that God is judging us harshly and expects a level of perfection from us that we can never live up to. This thought that God's standards are unreasonable keeps a lot of people running from God and the church. Even believers who attend church faithfully wrestle with condemnation because we feel we can't live up to the high standards of righteousness. This message is personal to me because I know a lot of people who try very hard to do the right things but often feel like we fail miserably.

In Matthew 6:33, righteousness means "**the sum total of the requirements of God.**" That's a tall order! But thank God for Jesus! He had a message for the multitudes who followed Him and He has a message for us today. Jesus's teaching and ministry shows us the way to living lives of righteousness. We have a teacher who will not only show us the way, forgive us when we fail, but – who will also supply all our needs when it comes to how he wants us to live.

Bible says that we as believers already have *everything* we need to live right. If you are someone who struggles with feelings of guilt about not getting things right all the time, I want you to know that the Lord has already made a way for us to win! You already have everything you need. God's power is our key to our success in living righteously.

From looking at Jesus' ministry and our study passage today, we can see that we really only have one job to do to get us into righteous living and that is to turn to God in loving trust. He will help us to do what we need to do to live lives that are pleasing to him.

The Bible says that people were astounded and amazed at Jesus' teachings (Matthew 22:33; Luke 4:32). Like others before him, Jesus taught that God's laws should be obeyed; but Jesus's words and His ministry were revolutionary. In His Sermon on the Mount, He brought a SHIFT to the way that people understood and thought about the law – a shift from doing right to being righteous.

Shift from doing right to being righteous.

When Jesus said "*Turn from your sins and turn to God, because the Kingdom of Heaven is near,*" He was sharing a vision for people to live in victory. The turning toward God in our hearts and our thoughts gives us the strength to stay away from doing those things that break God's law and His heart. It gives us the power to live righteously.

This teaching was a SHIFT in perspective from just doing right by itself, which was the way of the Pharisees. He is teaching that right actions come out of right thinking. The old way of thinking, that still lingers today, is that if do the right things enough your mind will change. If that were true, we'd all be different people because we've all tried to do the right things. Jesus taught that **righteousness is first an inside job**. Righteousness is first an issue of what and how we think long before it is the way we act. If we believe in Jesus and our minds and hearts are committed to

following his teachings, then our actions have no choice but to be obedient to our hearts and minds. Jesus said it this way, what comes out of a person is the result of what's inside that person's heart.

In what has been called the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provides example after example of this shift from just doing the right things on the outside, to challenging us to look inward and to be honest about our motivations and the condition of our hearts. We are much better able to do the right things when we first understand the right reasons for doing them.

Let's take some examples from Jesus's Sermon Message in Chapter 5. Murder, revenge, infidelity--these are of course against God's law. But Jesus SHIFTS the conversation in his teaching to the underlying thoughts and feelings that cause us to behave sinfully.

- Jesus says that before we get to murder, we must deal with our anger (5:22)
- Jesus says that we may not be technically cheating on a spouse, but the sin of being unfaithful starts with how we think and how we spend our time (5:28). Who are we thinking about and looking at other than our spouse?
- Jesus says that before we talk about a fair punishment for a crime, consider extending mercy and forgiveness generously, before things get ugly (5:38-42)

If this were easy, Jesus would never have had to teach on this. This *inside work* that we need to do can't be taken for granted. It can't be overlooked, and we cannot do it on our own. We need God's help to make this change.

Christ can change us from the inside out.

So how? How does this work for us? How do we get this inward change that we need to live righteously? We turn toward God that builds a relationship of trust with God. The Bible dictionaries describes a righteous person as:

- one who *trusts* in Christ to help us become all we could never be on our own.

Righteous people trust God, and our study passage today speaks to the work of trusting in the Lord for all of who we are and all the help that we need. Before we get there, we need to understand that God's ways are different from the ways of the world and that we have a choice to make. Jesus makes no bones about drawing a line in the sand between the things of this world and the things of God and how there is a difference.

Jesus can change us from the inside out, but we have a choice to make. The Old Testament tells us to choose whom we will serve (Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Joshua 24:14-15). The question is not *if* we will serve, but *Whom* or what we will serve. Will we serve the ruler of this world and the things of this world, or will we serve the sovereign God? God gave the law and He said "**I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods**" (Exodus 20:5b). He also says that He will "**lavish unailing love for a thousand generations**" on people who love Him and obey Him (Exodus 20:6). Jesus is calling us to make a choice to serve God and God only. As believers,

We are called to SHIFT from worshipping the things of this world.

We worship the things of the world when they have all our attention, or when they get our attention first before we attend to the things of God. When we are tied to the things of this world, we worry about them excessively. Let's consider our study passage in verses 25-32. If I had to sum it up, I'd say Jesus's message is this: *You are worrying and stressing about worldly things. God has already shown Himself to be a mighty and faithful provider right in front of us in nature. Don't you think God cares enough about you as His own image-bearer and His Kingdom-builder to make sure you have what you need? Don't be like unbelievers. SHIFT from putting these worries first and put God first instead."*

In our passage, Jesus highlights food and clothing are important as part of life--that birds need food and God feeds them, that flowers need some covering and God provides. Verse 32 reminds us that God understands that we actually need these things so yes, it makes sense that we would be concerned about them. There is nothing in this passage that stops us from caring about being alive and well and having our needs met.

What Jesus is saying is that there is *more to life* than focusing first on necessities or on financial gain. Jesus calls these treasures in verse 19. Treasures really could be anything or pursuit that becomes so valuable to us that we focus first on those things instead of focusing first on God. Think about it. Is there something in your life causes you to put it first? Might there be somethings that you do or pursue that has you trusting it more than you trust God? What has you thinking, *Prayer can come later. Church can come next week. Studying scripture or group fellowship can come...after. Serving in missions can come next time.* This THING...is it money or relationships or sports or is it something else? Ask God to show you what it might be in your life and ask yourself where your heart truly is.

Jesus wants us to turn *away* from worshipping and worrying and prioritizing the things of this world. He wants us to turn *toward* God in every way: in what we treasure, in what we care about, in where we put our energy and in what we think is important.

This sounds fairly straightforward, but the stressors in life are real. The appeal of the world is a real, so how do we do that? How can we be sure that we are putting God first?

The SHIFT happens when we trust in God

If we are believers and disciples and any part of our hearts are really worshipping something of this world and putting it before God, it is important that we open up to the Lord and allow God to change us. Our one job is to turn to God in trust, with faith that He will lead us into righteous living. We have to trust God and be vulnerable with Him: "*God, I'm not getting everything right, but I want to. I want to do better. I want to live for You. Please help me.*" God is true to His word to lavish love on us and He will not be angry with us for asking for help.

Putting God first and trusting God goes hand in hand. We can only put God first when we truly trust Him. We can only demonstrate genuine trust when we put Him first in our lives and look for evidence of His faithfulness. These are choices and it's up to us.

Matthew 6:33 in the NLT says "***Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.***" Thinking of God and the things of God...first. Loving our families and caring for our communities--first. Sharing God's love with a hurting and dying world in mission work--first. We can make a SHIFT to value and treasure God and the things of God FIRST.

Living righteously is God-first living. This is an inside job. God's word reveals to us the true desires and thoughts of our hearts. Only the Spirit of God can help us become all we could never be on our own. We only have one job to do to get on the road to living righteously and victoriously, and that is to trust God and turn toward Him. "*The Kingdom of Heaven is near.*" As we move forward into a new year and into a new vision for our church, let's move also into a new level of right living in our daily lives.