

## REACH FOR THE GODLINESS FEW ATTAIN (Matthew 5:27-48)

The passage that we are covering today, the end of Matthew 5, is familiar to many of us because it is the section of our Lord's "Sermon on the Mount" where He says, "You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you," over and over—six times. As we saw two weeks ago, Jesus takes a truth statement and He, as it were, "stretches it" to increase its importance and impact. "You've heard it said, "You shall not murder." But I say unto you, "Don't even allow sinful anger..." Did you see that? He elevates the truth about murder so that we recognize that truth on a higher level.

Now, this morning, before we get into the text of Scripture itself, I would like to share a story (as I often do at the start).

The only thing I know about the author of the following story is his name---Ken Langely. Langely wrote...

My ten-year-old son was "helping" me paint the laundry room. I brushed; he rolled. When he disappeared to get a Coke, I re-rolled where he'd painted.

I didn't mind this. But I did mind his repeated efforts to reach higher than he should—standing on tiptoe, his arm straight up, wobbly, trying to control the roller heavy with paint.

"Let Daddy get the high stuff," I said. "I'm afraid you'll drop the roller, or lose your balance and fall in the paint."

I'd delivered this lecture several times when I had to leave the room briefly, returning to find Justin once again stretched—ambitiously but precariously—with a shaky and ineffectual roller in his fingertips. "Justin," I barked, "I told you to stop stretching! I'll get that."

"Okay, Daddy. I won't do it again."

In the silence that followed, I wondered how many times over the years I had given my children that message: "Stop stretching." How often had I said, "You can't do this. It's too hard. Let me do it. Don't be unrealistic. Don't reach so high"? Too often, I'm afraid. And now that I think about it, I kind of hope they weren't listening.

What I love about our text this morning in Matthew 5:27-48, is that Jesus is not angry when we attempt to go higher for Him, even if we might be a little wobbly at first. In fact, in this text, He calls all of us to go beyond a "lower-level" spirituality that most people are satisfied with, to one that He desires us to have—to a godliness that looks much more like the one He lived out when He was here on earth.

And it is this head-turning, amazing, higher-level form of godliness that I'd like to speak to you about for a few minutes this morning.

**Title:** Reach for the Godliness Few Attain

(Prayer)

Since 1909, if a product was awarded the “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval” it was a big deal. Today, it would be equivalent to having, say, Good Morning America or Shark Tank, tell people all over America that your product was one of the best ones you could buy.

In our text this morning, Jesus is putting “The Most High God Seal of Approval” on the kind of interpersonal relationships He desires for His children. He doesn't want us to be satisfied with the bare minimum. For example, how would you feel if you asked me, “Bob, how is your marriage doing?” and my response was, “Kelly and I have been married for 37 years and neither of us have killed each other.” You would be like, “Uh, that's *good*...” But that's not what you would have wanted to hear (and neither does Jesus).

So what is this kind of godliness Jesus is speaking of that few obtain?

(The first one we spoke of already two Sunday's ago, but I am including it in our list today.)

### 1. A deep respect for others (5:21-26)

**Matthew 5:21-22**-----“You have heard that it was said ... *‘You shall not murder...’* But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment....”

True godliness goes much deeper than not murdering other people. True godliness involves showing everyone the respect they deserve.

### 2. An inward sexual purity (5:27-30)

**Matthew 5:27-28**-----<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said ... *‘You shall not commit adultery.’* But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus is telling you and I that He created us for something far greater than simply not running around on our spouse (or, if you are single, not going to bed with someone). Earlier in this sermon, Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

True godliness goes much deeper than not cheating on your spouse. True godliness involves inward sexual purity and a resolve

not to objectify others (i.e., reducing people to the status of simply an object to lust after).

### 3. A quest to preserve marriage (5:31-32)

**Matthew 5:31-32**-----“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’”

In Old Testament times, divorce was rampant and this law (and others) were given in order to remind people that God hated divorce and to prevent frivolous divorce. **IF** divorce occurred, the man had to get the proper paperwork and take all the necessary steps. People divorced over minor issues. Jesus elevated it to one:

**“But I say to you** that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except **sexual immorality** causes her to commit adultery...”

It is important to notice that Jesus does not COMMAND divorce.

In Old Testament times, people thought they were spiritual because they obtained the proper paperwork when a divorce occurred. But Jesus shows us that true godliness in marriage was much different and that divorce should only be considered in the case of marital unfaithfulness.

We need to honor our marriage vows to love and to cherish even when it is difficult.

### 4. A life of integrity (5:33-37)

**Matthew 5:33-37**-----“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all ... But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

In Old Testament times people swore oaths that they would keep their promises—“*I swear by God’s Holy Name that I will...*” You get the idea.

But true godliness goes much deeper than swearing by God’s name you will do something. True godliness involves keeping all of your promises without having to say, “I swear to God that I will pay you back” ... or something like that.

### 5. A refusal to seek vengeance (5:38-42)

**Matthew 5:38-42**-----“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’”

In Old Testament times, God wanted to make sure that people did not retaliate too intensely. Under those laws, they had a right to retaliate. But Jesus said:

**39 But I tell you not to resist** (NLT) an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. <sup>40</sup> If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. <sup>41</sup> And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. <sup>42</sup> Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

But Jesus said that true godliness goes much deeper than making sure that your retaliation does not go beyond the offense committed against you. True godliness involves treating those who wrong you better than they deserve. And this is what Jesus did:

**1 Peter 2:23 (NLT)**-----He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.

## 6. **A love for those hardest to love (5:43-48)**

**Matthew 5:43-48**-----<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘*You shall love your neighbor* and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> **But I say to you, love your enemies**, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you ... For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”

True godliness involves treating even those who despise you with Christlike love. True godliness goes much deeper than loving only those who love you.

An article in USA Today states that “Every day, for close to seven years, a man named Walter "Buck" Swords cursed and stomped his feet in his favorite restaurant, **Luby's Cafeteria**, demanding that he get his food exactly as he wanted it. Every day, for close to seven years, his preferred waitress, Melina Salazar, offered a patient smile and did whatever she could to help her most stubborn customer. After years of thankless service, Salazar was rewarded. When Swords died at 89 years old, just days before Christmas of 2007, he left Salazar \$50,000 and a 2000 Buick.

"I still can't believe it," she said ... he was always "kind of mean."

### **Application**

Most of us probably do well on some of these more than others.

(Comments)

Remember! Jesus said: “Without Me, you can do nothing!”