

## HOW DO YOU GET INTO THE KINGDOM?

The law was an external emphasis and the righteousness exhibited by the scribes and Pharisees was all about externals. It was an external self-righteousness. In contrast, Christ emphasized a response of the HEART, saying, (Mt. 5:8). *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*

### Matthew 5:20 (NKJV)

**20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**

Once again, we see the voice of AUTHORITY in Christ saying, **“For I say to you”**. This phrase is found 14 times in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 5:18, 20, 22, 26, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 6:2, 5, 16, 25, 29).

“This is the first time the Lord uses the clause, ‘I say to you’. By it He shows His authority as King to determine who will enter the kingdom.”

– Stanley Toussaint

The righteousness that will enter the kingdom is based on true repentance as seen in chapters 3 and 4. On the basis of repentance and faith God imputes righteousness to the true believer.

### Genesis 15:6 (NKJV)

**6 And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.**

### Romans 4:22–24 (NKJV)

**22 And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”**

**23 Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him,**

**24 but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,**

But here is Jesus' point. Those who have a true repentance/faith will have the outworking of righteousness in their life. It works from the inside out - not the outside in. The scribes and Pharisees had it backwards. They emphasized an external righteousness, but that never affects the heart and will never get you to the kingdom.

This must have been shocking to hear. After all, in contemporary Judaism, the scribes were the religious scholars, and the Pharisees were the religious conservatives. If anyone in that culture was expected to make it to

the kingdom, it was these people. But Jesus presents a higher standard, saying their merely external/formal/outward/legalistic form of righteousness would not get them there. As Isaiah 64:6 says, **“all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags”**.

All the way through here, Jesus is emphasizing a deeper spiritual dynamic. True conversion results in a changed heart that applies the spirit of the law and not merely the legal code of it. The result is seen in changed lives that are salt and light in the world.

“I have always felt that Matthew 5:20 was the key to this important sermon. The main theme is true righteousness. The religious leaders had an artificial, external righteousness based on Law. But the righteousness Jesus described is a true and vital righteousness that begins internally, in the heart.” – **Warren Wiersbe**

In effect, Jesus is teaching that where there is true repentance and faith there will also be the outworking of practical righteousness in the life – certainly to some degree. The remainder of the Sermon builds on this truth and amounts to being commentary on Matt. 5:20.

“In the verses that follow, Jesus unpacks the full moral significance of the law, and shows that the righteousness the law calls for actually involves an internal conformity to the spirit of the law rather than mere external compliance to the letter.” – **John MacArthur**

### ***Three categories of people...***

#### **1) Salt and Light Disciples**

Keep the commandments – great in the kingdom

#### **2) Disciples who lose their flavor**

Break the commandments – least in the kingdom

#### **3) Those who will NOT enter the kingdom**

If New Covenant realities (the deeper fulfillment of the Law that Christ came to achieve), if these “kingdom ethics” don’t impact your life, then be very sure that you will not even enter the kingdom.

***True story:*** Some Christians were out witnessing to people. They met four young men and began to share Christ with them. However, these young

men insisted that they were already Christians and as evidence showed them their ***“Christian Tattoos”***. Those witnessing proceeded to emphasize to them that their tattoos did not make them real Christians.

Outward religious externals will never get you into the kingdom. True kingdom citizens have had a heart conversion involving true repentance. This then demonstrates itself in the life. Are you merely an external Christian (a “tattoo Christian”), or are you a true internal Christian who has a faith that works from the inside out, thus demonstrating itself in your life?

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*