

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In 1 Kings 12, we read about the foolishness of Rehoboam.

Under Solomon, his father, the people enjoyed great prosperity,
but it came with the cost of a heavy yoke of hard service.

The 12 tribes of Israel came to Rehoboam at his coronation and said,

"Your father made our yoke heavy.

**Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us,
and we will serve you."** (vs. 4)

Rehoboam sought the counsel of his father's advisors who said,

**"If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them,
and speak good words to them when you answer them,
then they will be your servants forever."** (vs. 7)

Rejecting their counsel he asked the advice of his friends
who advised, **"thus shall you say to them,**

'My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs.

And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke,

I will add to your yoke." (vs. 10, 11)

He thought that as king he could subject the people under him by force.

But 10 of the 12 tribes rejected and rebelled against him.

As some read Jesus' words in our text,

they consider that He is doing the same thing as Rehoboam,
making a heavier yoke than even Moses gave in the Law.

But this is far from the truth. Jesus is not another law-giver.

He is a righteousness-giver to those who will hear Him.

We read a portion of the Gospel, as follows in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Our text is a portion of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount."

When Jesus finished preaching, St. Matthew tells us that

...the crowds were astonished at His teaching,

for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." Matt. 7:28-29

Consider the authority that Jesus exercised here in our text.

Twice He says to the crowd, **"But I say to you..."**

This is more than just an "Alright, listen up," kind of statement.

This is a statement declaring an authority
that is based on intimate and thorough knowledge.

In the first statement Jesus said, **“For I tell you,
unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

The scribes & Pharisees were the experts in the Law of Moses.
They prided themselves on, not only their theology,
but also their practice, considering themselves to be righteous
or at least able to attain righteousness.

No doubt many of the people would have been surprised
by the implication that the righteousness of the Pharisees
was not sufficient to **enter the kingdom of heaven.**

And probably not a few of them would have wondered how
they could ever hope to be saved if not even the scribes
were righteous enough to enter heaven.

In the second statement, Jesus applies His authority again,
desiring to shake the security of those who thought
they were righteous in regards to their neighbors.

He said, **You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder;
and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’**

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment;

Jesus is not here making a new Law on top of Moses',
or putting a harder burden on the people;
it is that He is showing the people, even you and me today,
the true God-intended depth of the original law.

What had been taught to the people was indeed true,
those who murder are in danger of God's judgment.

But this was just the surface of God's commands.

The old sayings allowed enough leeway for a person to think
that righteousness before God was attainable,
if only he withheld his hand from a lethal act.

But God is not only a watcher of the hand,
but also the heart... and the tongue.

A true understanding of God's Law given through Moses,
would not only deal with how you are not to treat him,
but also how you are to treat him, namely with love & mercy.

It isn't good enough simply to abstain from murder,
you are to protect him, too.

It isn't good enough not to hurt or harm him,
you are to befriend him in every need, to show mercy to him.

It isn't good enough to keep your lips from saying, "**You fool,**"
you are to help him.

It isn't good enough to withhold the expression of your anger,
but you are never to have had unwarranted anger
in the first place.

Now Jesus is preaching the full power of the Law.

Now there is no leeway or any loopholes.

Now we see us as God sees us.

Now man's righteousness, apart from Christ, is totally exposed
for what it really is: utterly worthless for entering heaven.

This was the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

For them, the Law was burdensome, but manageable,

They thought that they had no need of the Messiah's goodness.

And so, they had no confidence or trust in His righteousness.

And therefore, they had no righteousness before God at all.

How easy it is for us to fall into this same delusion,
using our own standards of righteousness as if they were God's.

But Jesus shows us how eternally dangerous this is,
even excluding one from heaven.

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Ironically, it was not Jesus who was burdening the people
by presenting the full meaning of God's Law,
but the scribes and Pharisees.

They were presenting the impossible Law as possible,
and thus burdened the people with unnecessary fear
on account of their failure to attain such righteousness.

That the people felt burdened is shown in their interest
to hear Jesus preach to them.

They wanted a lighter load, not because of laziness,
but because of the unbearable burden.

Laziness cannot find rest in Jesus who said,

**"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;
I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."** Matt. 5:17

Love and mercy for our neighbors are still commanded of us.

No. Laziness finds no rest in Jesus.

The people wanted a lighter load because they were heavy laden
with guilt for their unrighteousness,
and with fear in their uncertainty of their salvation.

Jesus came to take away their uncertainty, their fear,
and their guilt.

That happened when Jesus bore the heaviest burden of all,
the sins of every single one of His neighbors, including yours.
He came to bear your cross, your yoke of unrighteousness,
and serve you in His sacrificial death.

The righteousness that was beyond the scribes and Pharisees...
the righteousness that is beyond you,

not only to keep your hands, tongue, and heart from sin,
but also to use them in love and mercy to all neighbors,
is the righteousness that Jesus came to earth to be and
as He said, **"to fulfill."** (Matt. 5:17)

And not only to fulfill, but also to give to you.

Unlike foolish Rehoboam, Jesus knows the wisdom of the sages.

**"If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them,
and speak good words to them when you answer them,
then they will be your servants forever."** (vs. 7)

One does not gain the faithful service of rebellious people
by trying to dominate them, but by serving them.

Jesus is not a second Law-giver. He is the righteousness-giver.

So Jesus speaks good words to you today and invites you,

Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

**Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.**

For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Matt. 11:28-30

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria