

Matthew 5:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Analysis

The shocking statement that righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees—the most religious people—reveals that external conformity is insufficient. True righteousness comes from the heart, not mere behavioral compliance. This verse introduces the deeper interpretation of the Law that follows.

Historical Context

Scribes and Pharisees were considered the pinnacle of righteousness in first-century Judaism. They meticulously kept detailed laws and traditions. Jesus's audience would have been stunned to hear their righteousness was inadequate for the Kingdom.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Christ's righteousness imputed to believers fulfill this requirement?
2. In what ways do you rely on external religious behavior rather than heart transformation?

Interlinear Text

λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ἡ
I say For unto you That G1437 G3361 shall exceed G3588
G3004 G1063 G5213 G3754 G4052

δικαιοσύνη ὑμῶν πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ
righteousness your G4119 G3588 the righteousness of the scribes and
G1343 G5216 G1122 G2532

Φαρισαίων, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν
Pharisees G3756 G3361 enter G1525 into G3588 the kingdom G932
G5330 G5216 G1519 G3588

οὐρανῶν
of heaven
G3772

Additional Cross-References

Philippians 3:9 (Righteousness): And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Hebrews 12:14 (Parallel theme): Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

2 Corinthians 5:17 (Parallel theme): Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Matthew 7:21 (Kingdom): Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Revelation 21:27 (Parallel theme): And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

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