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First Baptist Vancouver

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Text: Matthew 5:48

Title: "You Are Going To Be ..."

(Series: Following Jesus Into His Sermon on the Mount)

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Since the beginning of the year we have been following Jesus, the greatest Preacher who ever lived, into His life-changing, history-shaping, counter-culture, culture-making, Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon ever preached. Today we are going to focus on just **one line**. One line shot-through with gospel, with good news. One line oozing with incredibly good, good news, liberating news. It is recorded in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 5, verse 48. Listen carefully. Jesus is speaking. The Messiah, the Lord, the Savior, the Healer, the great King says: "Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

THIS one line is gospel? THIS one line is good news? This arresting initially intimidating text liberating? Yes! And when we understand and embrace the gospel in this one line, the good news of this one line, everything changes. "You are to be perfect."

Let us take a moment and review where this one line is located in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins the Sermon announcing His so-called "Beatitudes." "Blessed are ..." "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Etc. We learned that we can render the word Jesus uses (makarios) as "right-on." "Right-on are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom." "Right-on are the meek, the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." "Right-on are the peacemakers." Etc.

Then Jesus makes the surprising and astounding claim that such people, "Beatitude-people," are what the world desperately needs. "You are the salt of the earth," He says; "You the light of the world," He announces. "Beatitude-people" bring flavor to the world, and check the tendency toward social and moral decay. "Beatitude-people" bring light into the world, and dispel the shadows and lies. Then Jesus launches into the major theme of the whole Sermon. "You must never think," He says, "that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." It turns out that this is Jesus' whole approach to life: not to abolish, but to fulfill.

He has come to fulfill the Prophets. He has come to bring the Prophets' visions and dreams into being. He is fulfilling Daniel 7, the vision of the coming of the Son of Man. He is fulfilling Isaiah 53, the vision of the suffering Servant of the Lord. He is fulfilling Ezekiel 34, the vision of God Himself coming as the Good Shepherd. He is fulfilling Ezekiel 37, the vision of dry bones coming to life. He is fulfilling Isaiah 9, the vision of the child who is born, the son who is given, who causes light to shine on those dwelling in the valley of the shadow of death. And on it goes – "come to fulfill the Prophets."

And “come to fulfill the Law.” Not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill the Law. To “fill it full,” to bring out all its inherent meaning and implications. As I noted a few weeks ago, Earl Palmer suggests we look at the Law, the Ten Commandments, as a giant arc. Jesus comes to draw the arc into its inherent circle, to draw out the intended trajectory of the commandments. Jesus says that the Law is all about “*righteousness*.” A relational word. All about relationship. Righteousness is all about right-relationship. Righteousness is all about right-related-ness. The arc of the Law moves into the circle of right-related-ness in every sphere of life.

He then says, “Unless your righteousness exceeds (or surpasses) that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Mercy! Exceed? Surpass? Yes, because the religious leaders of Jesus’ day had thought that they had kept the Law, they lived righteousness, if they kept “the letter” of the Law. Jesus says, in effect, that we can keep the “letter” of the Law, and not really keep the Law. For the Law is all about relationship. The spirit of the Law is right-relationship. The Kingdom of heaven, invading the earth in Jesus, is all about relationship. And we will not enter the kingdom, we will not enjoy the kingdom, unless we attend to relationship.

So in six “You have heard it was said, but I say to you,” saying Jesus spells out what all this looks like in everyday life. He draws the arc of the commandment, “You shall not murder,” into the circle that includes that un-resolved anger, which spills over into insulting and sarcastic words. He draws the arc of the commandment, “You shall not commit adultery,” into the circle that includes lusting after other people’s bodies, using others as means to one’s own ends. He draws the arc of the commandment, “You shall love your neighbor,” into the circle that includes our enemies, calling us to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, so that we might actually be who He has made us to be, children of our heavenly Father, Who loves indiscriminately and scandalously.

And then the one line. “Therefore.” In light of everything He has just said. In light of “I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill.” In light of the six “You have heard it was said, but I say to you.” “Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” One line shot-through with gospel, with incredibly good, good news, liberating news! Really? “Perfect.” Like, Jesus, I know how imperfect I am. And how the more I try to make myself perfect, the more imperfect I become. Perfect? “As your Father is perfect.” “Your Father.” This is the third time in His Sermon Jesus has spoken of “your Father.” 5:16 – “Let your light shine before others in such a way that they see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” 5:45 – “... in order that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven.” And in the one line, 5:48 – “... as your heavenly Father is perfect.” “Your Father.” The point? God becomes our Father before we are perfect! Becoming perfect does not make us children of the Father. We are His children while still imperfect. The one line is not saying, “Get with the program and become perfect so that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ will make you His child.” The one line is not saying, “Work hard to be perfect so that the Father will finally love you.” In Jesus, the Father already loves us. In Jesus, the Father has already adopted us. The papers

have already been signed and sealed. Already we are children with Jesus the only-begotten Son of the Father. Now, says our older Brother, you are to be like your Father. Which is why J.I. Packer calls the Sermon on the Mount, “The Royal Family Code.” Jesus is spelling out what being a royal child of the King looks like in the ruff and tumble of life in a broken world.

“Your Father.” Jesus knows the Father. Jesus loves the Father. Jesus trusts the Father. Even in the face of evil and death: on the cross, “Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit.” And He wants us to know the Father. He wants us to love the Father. He wants us to trust the Father. He wants us, like Him, to be like the Father. We were created in God’s image. And He wants us to actually live out being in God’s image. “Therefore, you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Perfect. The word Jesus uses is *teleios*. It is related to the word *telos*. Not *Telus* ... but *telos*. It is crucial that we understand this word group so that we understand why Jesus calls us to follow Him, why He takes hold of us. The apostle Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, “I press on in order that I may take hold of that for which also I was taken hold of by Christ Jesus” (3:12). *Teleios*. He has taken hold of us for *teleios*.

*Teleios*. It means, arriving at the *telos*. Actualizing the *telos*. *Telos*. Goal, end, completion. The inherent destiny of a thing. The *telos* of an acorn is to be an oak tree. The *telos* of a caterpillar is to be a butterfly. The *telos* of a little baby is to be a fully grown adult. *Teleios*. Actualizing the *telos*. Arriving at the inherent destiny. Paul tells Timothy, “The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart ...” The *telos* of our instruction is love. Our teaching reaches the *telos* when there is love. Peter tells the people he serves, “obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls” (I Peter 1:9). The *telos* of our faith is salvation. Our faith reaches the *telos* when our souls are saved. *Teleios*. Actualizing the *telos*. Arriving at the inherent destiny. Biologically, the term means “full-grown.” Relationally, psychologically, intellectually, spiritually, the term means, “Complete.” “Whole.” “Mature.” “Undivided.”

Later in Jesus’ ministry, a man asks Jesus, “what good things shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” Jesus, “if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” “Which ones?” the man asks. Jesus then recites some of the Ten Commandments. The man replies, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?” Jesus says, “If you wish to be complete ...” *teleios*. “If you wish to be *teleios* ... whole, complete, mature, undivided... sell your possessions, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 20:16-21). Follow Me undivided, completely.

The Father is *teleios*. The Father is whole. The Father is complete. The Father is mature. The Father is undivided. Which is why He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good; and why He sends rain to righteous and the unrighteous. Mature, undivided in His love for the world. “Therefore, you are to be whole, you are to be complete, you are to be mature, you are to be undivided, as your heavenly Father is.”

The apostle Paul tells the disciples in Colossae that this is the reason he preaches. “We proclaim Christ, admonishing every one and teaching every one with all wisdom,

that we may present everyone complete in Christ,” (1:28) teleios in Christ the telos.

Paul tells the Colossians that their pastor Epaphras prays for them: “always laboring earnestly in his prayers, that you may stand perfect ...” (4:12), teleios ... whole, complete, undivided, mature. Paul tells the Ephesians that Jesus gives gifts to every member of His body, so that working together, we might all become “a mature man” (4:13), “a mature human,” a teleios human, growing up into Jesus the one true teleios human. The one line is shot-through with gospel, with wonderfully good, good news. “Therefore, you are to be teleios as your heavenly Father is teleios.”

Liberating news? Yes, because it turns out to be a promise. A promise? Is it not a command? And an impossible command at that? Yes, it is a command. But the command turns out to be a promise. Why? Why is this a promise? For three reasons.

First, Jesus’ Word is a performative word. As you hear me say often ... I said it last Sunday ... given Who Jesus is ... the eternal Word made flesh ... His word not only informs, it performs. His Word makes things happen. “Let there be light” ... and there was! “Let there be seas” ... and there were! “Be calm” ... and the wind and waves died down! “Be gone” ... and the demons flee! “Get up and walk” ... and a lame dances with joy! “Lazarus, come forth” ... and a dead man walks out of the tomb! “You are to be perfect” ... and we will. “You are to be mature” ... and we will. You see, the Preacher on the Mount is not just another guru speaking. This is not just another holy-man who happened on the scene. This is not just another idealist philosopher. “You have heard it was said, but I say to you ...” I. I. I. This is the Creator come into the world as one of us. This is the One Who holds all things together. And if HE says, “You are to be teleios” ... we will.

Second, Jesus’ command is a promise for a second reason. His commands emerge from His heart and mind. His commands reveal His plans and purposes. In every command He is saying, “This is what I want to see happen in the world.” In every command He is saying, “This is My passion for human life.” And given Who He is, His plans and purposes and passions are going to be fulfilled. This is why the writers of Scripture love God’s Law. The Law reveals God’s passions which God is going to bring to fruition. “You shall have no other gods before Me.” You shall have no other gods between Me and you. One day, there will be nothing between us. “You shall make no image or likeness of God.” You shall not try to figure out Who I am on your own. One day, I will show you Who I am in My perfect image. “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” You shall not call on My name in vain. One day, you will realize that I have heard you every time you cried out to Me. One day, I will answer your prayers in ways you could have never imagined. “You shall not covet.” For one day, when there are no other gods between us, you will be so satisfied in Me that all your desires will be healed. “You are to be perfect, teleios, whole, complete, mature, undivided.” For this is My plan for you, this is My purpose for you, this is My passion for you.

And Jesus' command is a promise of yet a third reason. It is embedded in the actual form of the word "to be" used in the text. "You are to be perfect." It is in the future imperative: the future tense of the command mood. It is so rarely used. And, therefore, hard to translate. The Greek language has ways of nuancing things English does not.

The past tense imperative for instance conveys the sense of "Start doing ..." and "stop doing ..." Clear commands. The present tense imperative conveys the sense of "Keep on doing ..." or "continue doing ..." Clear commands. Later on in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will say, "Do not be anxious." Literally, "Stop being anxious." Jesus will say, "Look at the birds of the air," and "consider lilies of the field." Literally, "Start looking at the birds, start considering lilies."

Many of us grew up quoting the one line as, "Be ye perfect." But that is not how the future imperative is to be rendered. A number of modern translations have it, "Therefore, be perfect." But that is not how the text should be rendered. The version we are using this morning, the NASB, gets closer. "You are to be perfect."

This past week I have read all my Greek grammars trying to understand the future imperative of the verb "to be." And I have concluded that the best way to render it is "going to be." Not "start being". Not "continue being" but "going to be." The best way to render Jesus' one line is "you are going to be perfect." Not, "be perfect." How could we imperfect people ever do that? Not even, "you are to be perfect." How could we imperfect people ever arrive at such a goal? Not a command in the normal sense, but a promise. "Therefore, you are going to be."

"I have not come to abolish ... but to fulfill. "You are going to be." The telos of My will is going to be actualized in and for you. You are going to be teleios. Your righteousness is going to surpass and exceed.

"You have heard it was said, but I say to you." Six times. Showing us what being perfect, what maturity looks like. **You are going to** move beyond un-resolved anger, so that words of insult and sarcasm are replaced with words of blessing. **You are going to** move beyond being overcome by your lust, so that you delight in others as objects of My affection. **You are going to** move beyond just walking away from relationships when they are no longer what you want them to be, so that you hang in there and watch me heal and renew. **You are going to** move beyond having to prop up your promises with oaths, so that, like me, your simple "yes" or "no" is enough. **You are going to** move beyond the need for revenge, so that, like Me and My Father, you respond to evil with good, indeed, you will overcome evil with good. **You are going to** move beyond the understandable hate for those who hurt you, so that, like your Father, you bless those who curse you, and will the goodwill of your enemies. "You are going to be teleios". Good news! Liberating news!

And how is this going to happen? That is, who is going to make this happen? The Preacher is going to make this happen. The Preacher on the Mount is going to make this

happen. He is the only one who can make it happen. It is a massive job. It involves healing wounds from our childhood. It involves re-forming our sense of self, our sense of identity. It involves de-constructing and re-constructing our world-views. It involves overcoming deep fears. It involves teaching us new habits, new behaviors. It involves literally re-wiring the brain, so that it responds to stimuli more redemptively.

It is a promise, not a command. “You are going to be teleios.” “I am going to make you teleios. Because I am Who I am, you are **going to be** what I long for you to be.” I told you the one line oozes with gospel!

And what is our role in it all? a). We keep saying, “yes.” We keep saying, “yes” to Him Whose Word accomplishes what He announces and commands. b). We keep saying, “yes” to His passion. We keep saying, “yes” to His purposes. “Lord Jesus, I want to be mature.” c). We keep confessing our inability to make ourselves perfect. We get out of the way. We come to the end of self-holification. We own our utter helplessness. And hear again, the first line of the Sermon: “right-on are the poor in spirit.” We confess that trying to make ourselves perfect borders on idolatry. For if we think we can make ourselves perfect without God, we are saying we do not need God; that we can become like the Father without the work of the Son. d). We keep laying our imperfection at the feet of the Preacher on the Mount. We keep offering up all our immaturity to the Lover of our souls. We place all our brokenness in His mercy and grace. e). And we co-operate with His work. We do what ever He then tells us to do to participate in His work. I conclude with a reading from C.S. Lewis. From his *Mere Christianity*. He “gets” the gospel in Jesus’ one line.

I find a good many people have been bothered by what I said in the last chapter about Our Lord’s words, “Be ye perfect.” Some people seem to think this means “Unless you are perfect, I will not help you”; and as we cannot be perfect, then, if He meant that, our position is hopeless. But I do not think He did mean that. I think He meant “the only help I will give is help to become perfect. You may want something less: but I will give you nothing less.”

Let me explain. When I was a child I often had toothache, and I knew that if I went to my mother she would give me something which would deaden the pain for the night and let me get to sleep. But I did not go to my mother – at least, not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this. I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin; but I knew she would also do something else. I knew she would take me to the dentist next morning. I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more, which I did not want. I wanted immediate relief from pain: but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew those dentists; I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. They would not let sleeping dogs lie; if you gave them an inch they took an ell.

Now, if I may put it that way, Our Lord is like the dentists. If you give Him an inch, He will take an ell. Dozens of people go to Him to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of (like masturbation or physical cowardice) or which is obviously spoiling daily life (like bad temper or drunkenness). Well, He will cure it all

right: but He will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if once you call Him in, He will give you the full treatment.

That is why he warned people to “count the cost” before becoming Christians. “Make no mistake,” He says, “if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand that I am going to see the job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life, whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you after death, whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect – until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me, This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less.” (*Mere Christianity* 171-172)