

Weighed And Found Wanting.

Text: Matt 5:20

Suggested Hymns:

277, 364, 327, 291, 332

1) Why This Verdict Was True

2) How This Verdict Is To Be Avoided

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 5:20, 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.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We stand in the presence of God who is holy. His eyes pierce the deepest thoughts and discern the secret motivations of the heart. This being an undeniable fact, it is fitting that we look into the secret chambers of our hearts and note the desires, motives, and imaginations that find room there.

To do so, let us completely black out all outward accomplishments. Let us cast out those things in life that appeal to the pride of our flesh, and permit the piercing beams of the light of the text to shine into the very secret chambers of our hearts.

By so doing, let us see if any of us are in the same category with those men, the scribes and Pharisees, mentioned in the text.

In the presence of Jesus, who is the Judge of the living and the dead, they were *Weighed and Found Wanting*. Let us note why this verdict was true, and how it is to be avoided. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Weighed And Found Wanting

Why This Verdict Was True

The Word of Jesus was a shock to the Pharisees. Our text says, 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.*

This is a hard saying. These very men to whom Jesus is referring to were men who, in the eyes of other people, led almost blameless lives. The average person envied them because of their outward godly living.

The scribes and Pharisees prayed, they tithed, and they fasted. In short, the people of the world could find no fault in them at all. How the words of the text must have come as a shock to the people who heard Jesus on this occasion. Yet, why did Jesus say it? He said it because in the scale of divine justice they were weighed and found wanting.

Why was this verdict true? Just a glance at the scribes and Pharisees and their attitude toward the laws of God gives us the answer. They observed only the letter of the Law. They believed and taught that if one did not actually kill, one was keeping the Fifth Commandment.

They did not realise that hatred and anger are sinful. They had blinded themselves to the true meaning of the Law of God. They denied the sinfulness of words and thoughts against the divine precepts.

They were satisfied as long as their outward living was beyond reproach. Moreover, they were, as Jesus asserted on another occasion, *“whitewashed tombs.”*

We read of them in Matthew 23:27–28, ²⁷ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

They veneered their sinful hearts with outward sanctity. While they harboured malicious thoughts in their hearts against their fellow men, they piously knelt in prayer. While sitting, as it were, in the front pews of the Temple, putting on a show of worship, they were thanking God that they were not as other men are, sinners.

But the height of their hypocrisy and sinfulness is evident in their attitude towards Jesus, God’s Son. They hated Him and despised Him. Yet with this burning hatred in their hearts against the Christ of God, they posed as God’s children.

The Pharisees refused to accept the verdict. These men, filthy with sin, did not see it, simply because they did not permit the Law of God to reveal the secrets of their hearts.

Blinded by self-righteousness, they did not, could not, and would not see their sins and therefore spurned the love of God in Christ Jesus who came “*to seek and to save that which was lost.*”¹ Lacking the perfection which the Law of God demands and trusting only in their own righteousness, in the presence of Jesus they were weighed and found wanting. In God’s sight all that the scribes and Pharisees had to offer were the empty husks of self-righteousness.

Let us consider our estimate of ourselves against God’s estimate. Permitting ourselves to stand in the light of the text, just where do we stand?

Can other people say of our outward living what they said of the outward lives of the scribes and Pharisees? Can my fellow men find a just fault in me? Can anyone in this world point an accusing finger at me and show me where in a single thing I have said or done that which is not in keeping with the will of the Holy God?

Must not all of us, without a single exception, admit: Oh, not only in one thing, but in many things my fellow men, who are also sinners, can show where I have done wrong.

Now, if our fellow men can see many things that are wrong in our lives, how about the all-seeing and all-wise God? Jesus detected in the scribes and Pharisees what men could not detect, and of them He said, “*unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*”

Where do we stand? In the presence of Jesus, because of our sinfulness, we stand in the balances of divine justice, weighed and found wanting.

Outwardly we commit sins known to men. But what of our secret sins, the sins of the heart, the evil thoughts, the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life! The Lord knew them concerning the scribes and Pharisees, and rest assured He knows ours, too.

It is well for us if we permit the Lord to show us that sinful thoughts and evil motives are actual sins as truly as heinous crimes. But, someone may ask, “*Am I responsible for my thoughts? Does God demand that my thoughts be perfect?*”

If God does not, then why did He give two Commandments, not just one, but two, forbidding evil thoughts? The Ninth and the Tenth Commandments command us: ***You shall not covet.***

This means that, yes, we are accountable to God for our very thoughts. A perfect righteousness, beginning with the very thoughts of the heart, is demanded. God is not and will not be satisfied with a hollow, empty pharisaical righteousness. The Pharisees stood in the presence of Jesus with only an outward righteousness. You heard His verdict, and you have seen that it was true.

“But,” say others, “*Surely, the Lord does not expect the impossible of us. If we try to do the best we can, surely He will take that into consideration.*”

Just where does the Lord say that? “*Oh, no place in so many words, but, after all, the Lord is good, and even sinful mortals give credit to the person who tries but fails. Those who do not try are those whom people detest. Let a person sincerely try to do his best, and people give him credit. Now, if others do so, surely the good Lord will.*”

This sounds reasonable, but, after all, the Lord does not leave things to our reason. His Word stands above reason, and His Word declares in James 2:10, ***10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.***²

And, again, in our text He says, “***unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.***” That Word is final.

If the above reasoning is true, then show me a single person who can come with the excuse, “*I have tried to do my best.*” Every person has the tendency to justify himself behind the high and mighty wall of good intentions. But what are good intentions but chaff, containing no seed. Standing before Jesus in this way, what must the verdict be? Weighed and found wanting. This reminds me of a song called “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” How true!

Like the scribes and Pharisees who tried to balance the scales of justice by their own good works, so numerous people today still seek to justify themselves in the same way.

Many people, instead of examining themselves in the light of God's holy Law, examine their hearts in the light of their neighbour's faults. Show me a person who does not always consider himself better than his neighbour.

Such people follow the same tactics that Adam and Eve followed in the Garden when standing face to face with God. Both tried to justify themselves. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent.

People still endeavour to convince themselves that they are right. But listen, let us analyse the facts: When a person tries to justify himself, is that person not admitting guilt? If an individual is righteous, then why the need of the arguments to justify self?

Do we not see that self-righteousness is self-evidently hypocrisy? And what is hypocrisy but valueless empty husks? So, in the scales of divine justice where will the self-righteous find themselves? Weighed and found wanting.

In the light of God's Law as applied by Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees it is apparent to us all, is it not, that the Lord demands perfection of each and every one of us.

It is not the halfway keeping of the Law. It is not a part keeping of it, nor the good intentions to keep it that avails. All this, as we have seen, is as chaff and empty husks. Standing before Jesus like this, there is only one verdict, there can be but one just verdict — Weighed and found wanting.

2. Weighed And Found Wanting

How This Verdict Is To Be Avoided

But how are we to avoid this verdict? We, the sinners that we are, can offer no excuse for our sins. How then are we to escape the verdict: weighed and found wanting? Is there a way?

Thank God, there is. It certainly is clear from the words of Jesus that self-righteousness, good intentions, and the like, will not avail. Having seen that we are guilty before God, the honest thing to do is to confess the guilt.

God knows the secrets of our hearts, and He has revealed them to us by the Law, for ***“by the Law is the knowledge of sin.”***³ However, is it not depressing to stand condemned? Does not guilt drive one to despair? Yes, it does, but to the despairing, to the guilty, and yes, to the lost and condemned sinner has come the Saviour, Jesus. He declares in Luke 19:10, ***“for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”***

Jesus is our only hope. Again we read in Matthew 20:28 that ***“the Son of Man ... [came] to give His life a ransom for many.”*** That He has done so is clearly taught throughout the Bible.

In fact, the central theme of the Bible is God’s love for the sinner. Begin with the very first sinners, Adam and Eve. To them in the Garden God gave them the promise of the Saviour who would crush the head of the serpent.

Again at the beginning of the New Testament era God declared through the preaching of an angel in Luke 2:11, ***“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*** Now, it is the will of God that the Gospel of the redeeming love of Christ be proclaimed to all creatures even unto the end of the world.

Jesus did become the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, all sins, sins of thought, word, and deed. Upon Jesus was placed the iniquity of us all.

Scripture tell us in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God ***made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”***⁴ In these and countless other declarations of God, Jesus is declared to be the sinner’s Substitute.

That Jesus has gained the complete victory and conquered the sins that the Law shows us, even those secret sins of the heart, and overcome death and hell for us is evident in the resurrection. He died for the sins of the world. That is all-inclusive.

That means that Jesus died for you and me. Now, had the justice of God not been satisfied, then Christ could not and would not have risen from the dead. But

He is risen, and our faith in the forgiveness of sins through the merits of Christ is not in vain. St. Paul declares ***“If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”***⁵

But listen to the preaching of the angel at the open grave that first Easter morning: ***“He is risen!”***⁶ Thus Jesus is the Saviour of sinners, and as we read in Ephesians 1:7, ***“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”***

How, then, are we sinners to escape the verdict: weighed and found wanting? Confess the sins of which the Law convicts us; repent of them, and turn to the forgiving Saviour, for ***“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”***⁷ His blood cleanses us from all sin.⁸

Jesus is the Pearl of great price. Accept this Pearl, Jesus, and His all-sufficient atonement, and you will not be found wanting. Robed in the righteousness of Christ and arrayed in the garments washed white in the blood of the Lamb, we stand justified, for ***“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”***⁹

Trusting solely and alone in the merits of Christ, we will not be found wanting, for that which condemns us, namely, our sins, has been removed by Christ. This righteousness gained for us by Jesus becomes ours by faith, and when we stand as penitent and believing Christians, by the grace of God, the verdict will not be: weighed and found wanting.

Remaining faithful to Jesus until our end, we will hear those blessed words, ***“Enter into the joy of your lord.”***¹⁰ Since the scale of divine justice is balanced alone by the merits of our Saviour, Jesus, let us continue to sing in the words of the hymn:¹¹

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress,
Wherein before my God I’ll stand
When I shall reach the heav’nly land. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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- ¹ Luke 19:10
² See also Matthew 5:19
³ Romans 3:20
⁴ Isaiah 53:5
⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:17
⁶ Mark 16:6
⁷ 1 John 1:9-10
⁸ 1 John 1:7
⁹ Romans 8:1
¹⁰ Matthew 25:23
¹¹ Hymn 327