

# Majoring on Minors and Minor on Majors

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[ 0 : 00 ] And before the preaching of God's word, let's read again from Matthew, the book of Matthew. Just a couple of verses. Matthew chapter 23.

First book of the New Testament. Matthew chapter 23. I will read verses 23 and 24. Matthew chapter 23, verse 23.

Let's hear God's word. Woe to you, teachers of law, of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill, and cumin.

But you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former.

You blind guides. You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Amen. Let's hear the word of God preached. Well, the main point of our text today is to keep the main things the main things.

[ 1 : 16 ] Now, many institutions begin with a clear-cut, simple mission statement. This is why we exist. This is what we want to distinguish us.

What we want to be known for. What we aim to do. But few institutions are able to keep the main things the main things. They go wandering off into other things, often lesser things.

Think of our own nation. Think of our own nation. Think of our own nation. Think of our own nation. And the rather simple, clear-cut constitution that set out our reason for existence and several purposes for our government.

Think of our own nation. And then see how far we've drifted from the main things to hundreds of other things, many of which are commendable, but are lesser things, which were never meant to be the province of the federal government.

And this has inevitably led to the neglect of the main things. We can't focus on lesser things without neglecting the main things.

[ 2 : 27 ] Now, that not only happens to nations. It happens to seminaries. It happens to associations of churches, mission organizations, churches, marriages, and individuals.

And this morning, we're going to see this so glaringly in the religion of the Pharisees. They majored on minor things, and they minored on major things.

Now, we're in Matthew 23, where Jesus is condemning the Pharisees and teachers of the law for their hypocrisy and false religion. It was not only wrong for them, they were using this to lead others into the ditch of hell.

So Jesus warns them. And he did it in front of the crowds that had assembled in the temple. The last message that he's given to the public is on this warning, that they might take warning and be saved instead of following their religious leaders to hell.

And it's interesting that God included it in our Bible so that we will not be deceived about false religion, but that we might know the essence of true religion.

[ 3 : 46 ] So we're blessed to have God's word before us this morning. We come today to the fourth of seven woes that Jesus pronounced judgments upon the Pharisees.

Verse 23, woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill, and cumin, but you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. So first of all, this morning, let's look at the essence of their fault.

In other words, let's be clear what they did wrong. Well, they failed to keep the main things the main thing. Instead, they majored on minors and minored on majors.

Indeed, the greater part of their religion was a fastidious preoccupation with lesser things, while the greater things were ignored and left undone.

[ 4 : 59 ] So right away, we learn from Jesus that some things in true religion are more important than other things. We see this in the previous chapter, 22 of Matthew 36 and following.

A scholar in the law of God asked Jesus, Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law? And you notice Jesus didn't reply, Well, there is no greatest commandment.

They're all of the same importance. No, no. He answered the man's question about the greatest commandment this way. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind.

This is the first, the primary, the greatest commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

And all the law and the prophets hang on these two commands. So there we see, and we see it again in our text in chapter 23, 23. Jesus is making a distinction.

[ 5 : 58 ] He speaks of the more important matters of the law. Literally, the more weighty matters of the law. That there are some commands that carry heavier weight of importance to God and therefore should carry heavier weight with us as well.

Now, to be sure, all commands from God are important. If He has told us to do something, it's important to obey Him.

But that does not mean that all commands, therefore, are of the same importance. And we find the Pharisees' preoccupation with lesser things led to the inevitable result of the greater things being neglected.

And that was their serious fault. Now, the second point this morning. Look at the example Jesus gives us of this fault of the Pharisees.

Verse 23 says, You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill, and cumin. These were common herbs grown in their family gardens. So, he's talking about God's law there in Leviticus about tithing.

[ 7 : 15 ] And Leviticus 27, 30 says, A tithe, which means a tenth, of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord.

It is holy to the Lord. Something's holy. It's set apart to the Lord. And so, what he's saying is a tenth really belongs to the Lord.

So, you need to set apart a tenth to the Lord. Now, the intention of God in this command to give a tenth was a tenth of their harvest, whether from the fields or the trees, a tenth of their income.

Not to encumber them with counting off the leaves of their mint and cumin and anise and their garden herbs. But these Pharisees, remember, want to impress people and impress God with just how over the top they are in their spirituality.

And that is ever the way of legalism. Stretching the law. Extending the law. Far beyond its intended meaning by God.

[ 8 : 29 ] We saw that earlier with what they did with the command on the Sabbath, didn't we? God wants us to set apart one day, the whole day, from our usual labors to give it to God.

God in His worship and His gathering with His people and ministries of mercy. And what did the Pharisees do? They extended it to how many steps you can take on the Sabbath.

They stretched it to make all kinds of ridiculous distinctions on what's allowable and is not allowable. Stretching the law. While at other times, shrinking the law.

If it was a command they didn't like. Like we saw last week. And so here they are. With their mint leaves. One for you, God.

Nine for me. And one for you. Nine for me. And while they're meticulously counting their leaves of mint, dill, and cumin, they were neglecting the more important matters of the law.

[ 9 : 31 ] Like justice. Like mercy. Like faithfulness. Justice. Doing right by your neighbor. Mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Mercy.

Showing mercy to others who don't deserve it from you. Even as God has shown mercy to you.

Faithfulness. Remaining faithful to God as He has remained faithful to you.

These were the more important matters to God. And the Pharisees cared little about them. Oh, but they were so spiritual.

That they are tithing their garden herbs. Wow. Wow. Well, the third thing is Jesus' humorous illustration of their fault.

Verse 24. You blind guides. You strain at a gnat, but swallow a camel. So we're meant to get this picture in our mind. Mr. Pharisee's having his lunch.

[10:34] And the little gnat, about a tenth of the size of a fly, decides to go for a swim in his lemonade. And he refuses to let his lips touch that cup with that unclean gnat until it's strained out. But if there's a camel in his lemonade, he'll gulp it right down. Now it's ridiculous. And Jesus says, And so is this holiness of yours.

Being so preoccupied with little gnats that you swallow the whole camel of sins that you are forbidden from. And this is not the only way they majored on the miners with tithing their garden herbs.

The fault marred the whole of their religion and their lives. Let me give a few more examples of it. We saw it last week concerning the swearing of oaths.

All their attention had to do with their man-made distinctions about the verbal formulas in which they took their oath. Whether they swore by the gold in the temple or just swore by the temple.

[11:47] All man-made distinctions. Gnats. Gnats. And while they're debating their gnats and straining out their gnats, they're swallowing the whole commandment that says, you shall not lie.

You should keep your word. You should tell the truth. Camels. Big things. Important things. As if the words used in the oath were more important than speaking and doing the truth as in the presence of God.

We saw it earlier with their phylacteries several weeks ago. In Deuteronomy 6 and other places, the Lord had commanded them to keep His law before them.

To bind it on their foreheads. To keep it in their heart. So that they might remember it. Know it. Remember it. And live by it. And teach it to their children. Well, they literalized those words. And turned it into just writing out commands of God on little pieces of paper and putting it in little leather boxes and then wearing it around their forehead and around their left arm so that it would be close to their mind and close to their heart.

[13:17] They gave themselves to little things. Nats. Those things were meant to be remembered that they might, to hide God's word in their hearts and minds that they might not sin against Him.

That was the reason. Oh, they've forgotten all of that. Just so people see that I've got it on my forehead and near my heart. They did it with the Sabbath command, as I mentioned.

They did it when they brought Jesus to Governor Pilate to have Him crucified. You know, they had no scruples at all about giving false testimony about Jesus before Pilate. Lying about Him.

Just to get Him crucified. Oh, but they were ever so scrupulous as to avoid ceremonial uncleanness, they would not enter into the palace of Pilate.

Lest that would make them ceremonially unclean for an important Sabbath or Passover celebration. So they made Pilate come out of this palace and meet with them.

[14:17] Again, straining gnats, swallowing camels. Not at all concerned about the huge camel-like thing of killing an innocent man, but so concerned that the bodies not be left up after sundown and it would defile the land.

Nats. They accused Jesus' disciples for eating without washing their hands in a ceremonial washing, which was their tradition.

But they didn't even blink about throwing away the fifth commandment to care for their aged parents if they would just say, well, this money is dedicated to God instead. You have a fine way of setting aside the command of God for your own traditions.

You see, little things, preoccupation with, they neglect the big things, swallow the camels. And it tended to be the areas of ceremonial laws that the Pharisees really focused in on.

The sacrifices of the temple, the dietary laws, the laws about what's clean and unclean. Those were the ones that they were so meticulous about.

[15:30] They were temporary laws, temporary regulations that were to be laid aside when Jesus came with the new covenant. And all the while, they neglected those eternally abiding moral commandments of God upon their heart and life, like justice, like mercy, like faithfulness.

Those three main things mirror the three important commands found in Micah chapter 6, 700 years earlier, before there were such things as Pharisees.

So we learned that the Pharisees' serious fault was nothing new. It was the age-old problem of Israel. So Micah 6, 6-8, with what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?

What's the important thing He wants from me? You know what they thought? Sacrifices. So the question goes on. What shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God with?

Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings? With calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams? With 10,000 rivers of oil?

[16:48] Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression? The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Now these were the things that backslidden Israel tried to pacify God with for their sins, as if they would make up for their lack of justice, mercy, and faithfulness with these extravagant sacrifices.

And it's just blown clear out of exaggeration just to prove the point. But God's answer in Micah 6-8 says, No, that's not what God's after. He has shown you, O man, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. There it is. A summary of true religion.

The important things that God is after. The very things neglected by the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They say justice and mercy to their fellow men.

Treating them fairly. Showing loving kindness and mercy. And faithfulness to God. Walking humbly before Him. Isaiah was a contemporary prophet of the Lord along with Micah.

[18:08] About 700 years before Jesus was born. And we find Isaiah, from the very get-go of his prophecy, God sending him to Israel, the very first chapter is loaded with this condemnation of swallowing camels while they're picking out gnats.

And so Isaiah comes condemning the same fault as Jesus would condemn in the Pharisees 700 years later. Isaiah 1, 11 and following. And you must know the background to this is that the Israelites are taking advantage of the poor and helpless among them.

They're stealing. They're mercilessly murdering the innocent. And yet so, ever so meticulous in keeping the temple sacrifices up. So that's the background.

We'll just go into the temple and make the appropriate sacrifices God has commanded and all will be well. And God's not having it. Listen to what He says. The multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me?

Says the Lord. I have more than enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened animals. I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who's asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?

[19:27] Stop bringing meaningless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me. New moon, Sabbath, convocation. I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your new moon festivals, your appointed feasts, my soul hates.

They become a burden to me. I'm weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you. Even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen because your hands are full of blood.

Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong. Learn to do right. Seek justice. Encourage the oppressed.

Defend the cause of the fatherless. Plead the case of the widow. These were the very people they were killing and taking advantage of. Isaiah chapter 58 condemns them for their religious fasts that they were so meticulous about, but God takes them to task that on these same fast days, you end up fist fighting with each other.

Should I pay attention to such? These are detestable to me. Stop it. Stop the whole thing. Majoring in minors while minoring in the majors.

[20:51] Remember, Jesus called Matthew, the tax collector, to follow him as his disciple. And so he left his tax collecting business and followed the Lord Jesus.

Later, Matthew had invited a lot of his friends. And he wanted them to meet Jesus. And so in Matthew 9, while Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?

Such scum of the earth. Well, they're scorning them. They're looking down their noses at them. They are so holy. These people don't deserve to have holy people around them.

And Jesus says, it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Go learn what it means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

[22:02] Jesus is putting these self-proclaimed experts in the law, he's putting them to public shame. You do not even know what that text means in Hosea 6.6.

I desire mercy and not sacrifice. Go learn. Go back to school, you scholars. What does Hosea 6.6 say?

Well, it says, for I desire mercy, not sacrifice and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings. It's the same problem that Isaiah and Micah were talking about.

I am desiring merciful love to each other and to me. Love to me and faithfulness to me, acknowledgement of me, but that's not what I'm seeing.

I'm seeing you treating each other wickedly. Murder and marital infidelity filled the land and they think they can win back God's favor by offering the required sacrifice.

[ 23 : 12 ] That's to use God and manipulate Him like they did their idols and God's not having. I'm not after the sacrifice. I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

Now, this is a comparative statement. Of course He desired sacrifices. That's why He commanded them. They pointed forward to the coming one sacrifice that would take away sin.

It was an important gospel message to them. But they acted like that's all they needed, just a sacrifice. And we'll go on merrily with our sin. No, God's looking for that pure heart, that inward heart that's merciful to others because you've received mercy.

God is saying, I own the cattle on a thousand hills. I don't need your cattle on the altar. I want your heart. Give me your heart. You know, David knew this distinction between mercy and sacrifice.

In Psalm 51, he is brokenhearted. He is crushed for his sin. And he's pouring out his confession to God, pleading for mercy. And he comes to verse 16 of that wonderful Psalm 51.

[ 24 : 28 ] You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it. If that's what you were really delighting in and wanting, then I would bring it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

That's not what you're after, God, and I know that. Rather, the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

A broken and a contrite heart of God, you will not despise. You will rather delight in. That's what you delight in.

And that's what God's after. Not the carcasses of animals on the altar, but a broken, humbled heart. You know, Samuel had to correct King Saul on this very matter.

In 1 Samuel 15, 22, God told him to go and destroy the Amalekites completely and to spare nothing. And Saul disobeyed, kept some of the best sheep, but of course he had an excuse.

[ 25 : 28 ] We're going to use them in sacrifice to your God, Samuel, to the Lord. Samuel says, does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

To obey is better than sacrifice. And to heed is better than the fat of rams. There are more important matters of the law than just sacrifices that were temporary pointing forward to Christ.

There is obeying, having a heart that bows before this Savior and Lord and obeys all he says. So there's some examples of the ways that these Pharisees and scribes were at fault and straining out camels or gnats and swallowing camels, majoring on minors, minoring on majors.

I want to come fourthly to what drives such a wrong emphasis. Why do they do this? Why are they so careful about little things all the while ignoring the big things of true religion?

Well, I think it really comes down to just two words. Ease and convenience. Ease and convenience.

[ 26 : 56 ] You know, it's far easier to count out the mint leaves than to show mercy to someone who's done you wrong big time. It's far easier to offer a sacrifice of a lamb on an altar than it is to stop lying and lusting.

Than it is to stop cheating and stealing. It's quite easier to fast for a day than to remain faithful to God and all His commandments.

And so the Pharisee shows his hypocritical religion by picking and choosing which commands he will obey and which ones he will ignore. And surprise, surprise, the ones he chooses to obey are the ones that cost him little that are convenient for him like tithing his garden herbs.

Oh, but denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Jesus, now that can get costly. I just heard this morning of a man who worked 30 some years for an employer and now is not going to go along with the gay pride month and he's lost his job.

That's coming for Christians. It could cost you something to obey all God's commands. It's putting your life on the line.

[ 28 : 24 ] No longer my way, God. Your way. That can be costly. So such commandments are often neglected, ignored. So what we find is the Pharisees turning their religion into things they could do without the grace of God.

It doesn't take the grace of God to tithe, to fast, to keep those outward forms. It was a form of religion without the power, the inward power of God's spirit within them.

So they found those things that they could do without God's grace, without that supernatural divine energy working in them. So it was a self-help religion.

It was a do-it-yourself religion. We don't need a Savior. We can do. And you see that kind of religion makes few demands of you in the things that count most to God.

I heard a man say, and I believe it's right, that churches and preachers that make the least demands of their people are the churches most in demand today.

[ 29 : 30 ] Let me say it again. Churches and preachers who make the least demands of their people in their preaching are the churches most in demand today.

Because fallen nature has not changed since the garden, since 700 years before Christ when Hosea and Isaiah and Micah prophesied, since Jesus talked to the Pharisees and indeed with us today.

The only thing that can change human nature is God. That supernatural divine energy. So the yeast of the Pharisees is still with us.

It predated the Pharisees and it afterdates the Pharisees. Send it up all week but just visit the Roman Catholic priest and confessional with a few prayers and works of penance.

All your sins are absolved and you can return to your life of sin like a dog to its vomit and like a sow to her wallowing. And the Protestant versions are just as damning.

[ 30 : 40 ] It's a gospel without repentance. A gospel without repentance. repentance. Just 1 John 1 9 it.

Just, you know, we're all sinners so just acknowledge you're a sinner. Pray this prayer and you're good to go. No call to repentance. So people think they can just add Jesus to their life and then carry on life as usual ignoring God's commands that they don't like.

That's the form of religion that's filling churches today. But you must know it's not enough to confess your sins. You must forsake them.

Proverbs 18 23 whoever confesses and forsakes their sins and renounces them.

That's what it means to forsake. You say, I've been living this way and I see what a wretch I am. How wicked it is to turn my back on God and go my way. I renounce that way.

[ 31 : 48 ] I turn around in disgust with myself and I seek mercy from God. That's that turn. That's what it means to forsake it. Saying I'm done with it.

Whoever conceals his sin will not prosper but whoever confesses and forsakes it will find what? Mercy. Mercy with the Lord.

Isaiah 55 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts forsake them. They're yours not God's.

And do it now while he may be found. Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him and to our God for he will freely pardon.

sin. Yes the promise is there but it's not just believe a few facts about Jesus and you're absolved of all sin and good to go. No it's yes put your faith in Jesus but you turn to God from idols.

[ 32 : 53 ] The dearest idol I have known whatever that idol be help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee. I turn to God from my idols from my past way of life.

Jesus said it most clearly unless you repent you will all likewise perish. We're born with our backs to God and our face toward hell and we can be the most religious people in the church like the Pharisees were and Jesus says unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

we must confess our sins and renounce them. Go and sin no more Jesus can say to the wicked woman. Not go and sin as much as you can as we're hearing today.

Now the Lord Jesus is so kind to warn us against this faulty and damning religion and if we are honest we'll have to admit that there is something of the Pharisee in all of us me included.

Remember I said a couple weeks ago there's a difference between being a hypocrite and being in the fight with hypocrisy. I don't always find that I'm practicing all that I expect other people to do.

[ 34 : 22 ] That was the Pharisee. sometimes doing the good I do in order to be seen by man. Not always speaking the plain truth as in the presence of God as my witness and judge.

Finding ways to justify and excuse my sins to get around God's hard commandments that rub me the wrong way and my flesh kicks and screams against.

Picking and choosing which commands of God then that I will be very careful to keep because I find them more convenient and less costly while ignoring the commands and duties that I find more difficult.

So let me just give a couple examples. God's word commands repent and believe I'm sorry repent and be baptized every one of you.

have you done both or are you picking and choosing which ones you'll do? Are you concerned about treating others fairly as much as you're concerned that you get treated fairly?

[ 35 : 35 ] Are you being merciful to your friends and your enemies? Or are you holding grudges against those who've mistreated you? Are you majoring on the easy parts of religion while ignoring the harder more important parts?

And according to Jesus keeping the main things the main things means loving God and loving your neighbor can be all boiled down to those two things. Loving God with all your heart that means no rivals there they must go there's but one Lord and it's my God.

True religion is an unrivaled love relationship with God and he frowns as much on you having other lovers as you husbands would if your wife had other lovers.

That's the kind of God he is. Read the book of Hosea. Read the Jeremiah and Isaiah the prophets.

That's how God wants us to know how he feels when we've got other lovers in our life.

Bleeding off loyalty faithfulness to him. And this relationship of love with our God it means walking humbly with him.

[ 36 : 55 ] Not my will but yours be done. It means doing all of life with God. We walk with God. We go to work with God. We come home to our family with God. We recreate with God.

We look on our phones with God. We worship with God. That's part of what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and strength.

Being faithful to him and all his commands. And the second thing is like it. It's loving your neighbor as yourself. Acting justly. Doing as you would have done to you.

Showing mercy even to those who have mistreated you. The Pharisees' false religion says, if you're failing, just try harder.

Maybe you'll get it. The true religion of the Bible says, if you're failing, come to Jesus Christ, both for pardon and for power. You know, when we come to Jesus, what do we find?

[ 38 : 00 ] We find the only one who ever kept the main things the main things. Perfectly. Perfectly. Let's try him out.

As for justice, that's one of the main things. Well, not only does he do justice, he is just.

Just and right is he. He does no wrong. He upholds the laws of his father's kingdom with perfect equity of justice. Always doing what is right and fair.

He upheld the cause of the oppressed. No one was a better friend to the poor and downtrodden than our Lord. And so committed is he to justice that after his resurrection and ascension into heaven, he left with a promise that he's going to come back to this earth as a judge and judge everybody with perfect righteousness, perfect justice.

He's going to right every wrong. He's going to make sure every wrong receives its due. He's going to restore a world of perfect righteousness. And since righteousness requires hell to pay for sin, he's going to uphold and enforce that law himself.

[ 39 : 21 ] And so just is he that he will not short change justice even for the sinners that he saves. but instead he pays the debt himself that was owed by his people.

As on the cross he suffered all that our sins deserved of God's infinite wrath and anger. For he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

And the punishment that brought us peace was on him. And by his wounds we are healed. That day on the cross many hands were raised to wound him.

None would interpose to save. But the deepest stroke that pierced him was the stroke that justice gave. Not the hammer, not people's words, but God's justice in pouring out his wrath upon his son. And he so endured the suffering of God's wrath until justice smiled and asked no more. You've paid enough.

[ 40 : 39 ] And then Jesus cried in triumph, it is finished. You see, justice was served for my sins on the cross. He's that just that he will be damned in my place rather than to somehow compromise God's justice and sneak me in on some special deal.

No, sin must, there's hell to pay for sin and I either pay it or he does. He's that just that he'd suffer the pains of hell for me that I might enjoy the pleasures of heaven.

Well, there's none just, more just than Jesus. What about mercy? That too is one of the main three that are mentioned. Well, he's the fountain of mercy, isn't he? He's the fountain of loving kindness. You couldn't summarize his life without saying he went around doing good. Wherever he went, he was healing. He never turned one person away. You read the gospels through and note that.

The whole city comes out with their sick and maimed and diseased and he heals them all. He sees the crowd and his heart runs with compassion for them.

[ 41 : 53 ] Mercy for these poor people and not just their physical condition. He saw their hearts. They were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd and they're following these false shepherd Pharisees off the cliff into hell.

And so he preached the gospel to them, the real gospel about the real way of salvation. So merciful. And who did all these kindnesses pour out upon?

Those who deserve to go to hell. Every one of us. Mercy? Oh, he's mercy incarnate. What about faithfulness?

What about faithfulness? Well, there's none more faithful. He always did what pleased his heavenly father. Always. He's the only man that could say that. He perfectly obeyed every command, always saying, not my will, but yours be done.

And he finished the work. He didn't cut out when it got tough. He finished the work that the father gave him to do, enduring the cross to the bitter end.

[ 42 : 59 ] And he's still the most faithful friend in heaven or on earth. I have found him to be such. Faithful to his word, faithful to his every promise.

He's faithful. So our Lord Jesus kept the main things, the main things for 33 years of his life, loving God with all of his heart, loving his neighbor as himself. And because he did, he has a perfect record with God in heaven.

A perfect record to give to us who have a bad record for our sins and failure to love God and man. And contrary to the Pharisees, we can't earn acceptance with God by doing some religious things here this morning.

Just by turning over a new leaf. No, in fact, if we think we can do that and appease God, that's just one more of our wicked offenses against God. That he would send his son to fix the problem and we'd say, oh, we don't need him.

I just need to go to church and put a little more money in the offering and maybe read my Bible a little more and if I maybe add prayer to that, it ought to make up for my sins.

[ 44 : 12 ] No, Jesus freely gives us the gift of righteousness. Not to everyone, but to those who repent, turn, renounce the whole business of the way we've been living and cry for mercy looking only to what Jesus has done for hell-deserving sinners.

To them, they find mercy. To them, eternal life, righteousness before God is given as a free gift.

Well, remember the passage I read earlier from Isaiah chapter 1 where God was fed up with their worship because they ignored the more important matters of the law of justice, mercy, and righteousness.

He had said, your hands are full of blood. Wash them and make yourselves clean. Turn from sin to me. Stop doing evil. Take it out of my sight. Well, having held up the law of God to condemn them, Isaiah then holds up the gospel of God that alone can save them from condemnation.

It's the very next verse. He's just read the riot act from God, a righteous riot act, verses 11 to 17.

Then comes verse 18. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet, that blood dripping from your hands, they shall be as white as snow, and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

[ 45 : 53 ] What a God of mercy. What a God of justice. He won't bend justice to have mercy on you. He will in justice damn his son that you might receive mercy if you trust in him.

If you turn to him. Because the blood of Jesus, God's son, cleanses us from every sin. That's how scarlet sins can become whiter than snow.

It's through the blood of Jesus. What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. And that blood has not lost its power and will not lose its power till all his ransomed ones shall sin no more in that new heavens and new earth.

We have a savior to go to. And for all the ways that we still fight against the Pharisee within us, we come and we hear that glorious promise. If you confess your sins, God is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

He's faithful and just, you see. That's our God. justice, mercy, faithfulness and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[ 47 : 06 ] Not only forgive us, but cleanse us. Not only give us pardon, but give us power to not be a Pharisee, but to keep fighting it with every fiber in our being, confessing our sins.

Until we see Jesus face to face and we're made like him and every vestige of Pharisees is gone from us forever. If you've not been reconciled to God by faith and repentance, that's the main thing for you to do today.

There is no other main thing that you need to concern yourself with. Repent and believe the gospel. It's the one thing needful. Don't let anything crowd it out.

Treat it as the most important thing because it is. How will you escape if you neglect so great a salvation? How will you escape if you neglect so great a Savior?

You will not is the answer. Oh, but he's willing. Doubt no more. Don't say, well, I'll wait till I'm doing a little better. No, you try to clean yourself up first and then come to Jesus, you'll offend him.

[ 48 : 16 ] But if you come to him just as you are. Yes, with blood still on your fingers and cry, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

He'll forgive you. He'll have mercy on your soul. He'll save you. He'll make you a new creature. He's just that good.

Well, let's sing this wonderful promise that Isaiah was ever able to announce to to a whole nation of pharisaical religion.

It's number four hundred sixty five. Four hundred sixty five. And this promise is as true as the day it was given some twenty seven hundred years ago.

Let's stand and sing four sixty five. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. No says those are the words to that song of Fanny Crosby, but she borrowed heavily from.

[ 49 : 18 ] Our just and merciful and faithful God, those were straight from him. He said he would forgive. Do you know there are sinners in heaven today that had blood on their hands, innocent blood?

There's Saul of Tarsus that killed Christians. And he believed the promise that if he would turn and throw himself on the mercy of God in Christ, that he would forgive and remember them no more. You know what he's singing today around the throne? Glory, glory to the bleeding lamb. He's giving God the glory. Many like him.

Don't you think that you've out sinned God's mercy? Come to him, as he says. Renounce your way. Throw yourself on his mercy. He not only gives mercy, he delights to give mercy.

Let's pray. Lord, we never find in any man outside of Christ what we find in you. Perfect justice.

[ 50 : 22 ] And oh, how glad we are that our world is not without a policeman, without someone keeping track, without someone who's going to even the score in the end.

Thank you that you are just. But if that's all we had in heaven, Lord, we'd all be in hell. So thank you that the same God is merciful and delights to forgive and to remember sins no more.

How can that ever be? How can he remain faithful as just and yet show mercy? And thank you for the gospel, that wonderful, all-wise plan of God in which his wisdom is seen, whereby he remains just and still the justifier of the wicked who believe in Jesus.

So honor the Son today and bring many to faith in him and send us out then to keep us and forgive us from forgetting the main things, for piddly things, things that will soon be forgotten.

But may the very mark of our Savior, that which is the beauty of holiness, be seen in our lives. We ask to his praise. Amen. Amen.

[ 51 : 42 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.