Going There: Jesus Say What!?!?
Week 1: Be Perfect

I. We're kicking off a new series today called, Going There: Jesus Say What?!?! Everybody say it with me one time: "Jesus say what?" You had to go there! Some things that come out of Jesus's mouth are downright shocking!

A. The Bible describes itself in Hebrews like a double-edged sword. Check this out:

Hebrews 4:12-13 (CSB) [Slide]: 12 For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

1. Here lies an important first question we need to ask:

[Slide]: How do we engage God's word?

a. God's word is encouraging but that's not the primary focus.
The sword in the ancient world was a tool or weapon designed to do one thing:

[Slide]: Cut

b. We lay our lives open before God as we engage with His word, and it's designed to cut! Like a surgeon's scalpel, the intent isn't for harm. It exposes our sin and where our lives are lacking in comparison to the holiness of God. We honestly evaluate, yield to the Spirit, and we engage in the process of sanctification. That's a fancy word for the process of molding our lives to be like Christ! That's why we often say:

[Slide]: We bend to the Book!

c. God has given us His inspired, inerrant word as the standard because it expresses fully the holiness of God. Everything we need to live a life pleasing to God has been communicated to us through the word! None of us will be able to stand before God one day and give an account for our lives and say we didn't know what the expectations were. We all fall woefully short. That's why it's pretty ridiculous to play the comparison game. But the question still remains the same, how are we engaging God's word? We would do well to see God's word as the standard and our lives as in process to bending to the Book.

II. Over the next few weeks, we're going to look at some of Jesus's sayings that shocked people then and still shock people now. Like a speedbump that catches us by surprise, these are sayings that can often leave us thinking, "Jesus, you had to go there?" But we can't ignore them and be in process of bending our lives to the Book. Like a flavor gauge at a hot wings restaurant these sayings vary from mild to atomic, but God has placed them in His word for a reason. Therefore, we're going there! Why? Because Jesus went there.

A. Our saying today is comparatively mild not because it's less shocking but because we're all in the same boat on this one. When we read this one, our initial first thought will likely be, "I'm out!" "I messed that up on my way to church!" Maybe not but then you'd be lying so there you go!

Turn with me to Matthew 5:48 and here's what Jesus says:

Matthew 5:48 (CSB) [Slide]: 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

1. That's simple enough, right? Does everyone have the application point for the message today? Go be perfect like God is perfect and we'll all report back next week. We could even take turns coming up to the front and sharing how that goes!

2. No thank you! This verse leaves us thinking, "Jesus say what?!?!" What happened to all that love and grace stuff? Perfect, really?

..B. As we unpack the verse, there are two extremes we can go that miss the point.

1. One extreme is to interpret this verse as a call to achieve a sinless state in this lifetime and achieve a godlike status. That's extreme but it's the way the Church of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) interpret the text. I don't ever want to belittle anyone's faith and that's not my intent. We do need to be honest and clear though on

how the Christian faith differs from other faiths. This is why a Mormon might claim to be a Christian, but Mormonism has stepped away from the faith passed down from the prophets and apostles.

a. There are several hang ups with that interpretation but a few biggies:

(1) There is only one God. The Bible is clear on that from start to finish and

(2) just one chapter over Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray and that prayer includes the forgiveness of sins. We're called to pursue Christlikeness, but we fail forward time and again. A sinless state on this side of heaven isn't possible.

b. I've gone through Mobile Alabama a decent number of times. And some of my kinfolk would always remind me to not breathe in the tunnel or I might get sophisticated. Like I'd enter one end with a mullet and come out the other side in a suit and tie. I believe they meant asphyxiated. I could make it through the Mobile tunnel to this day without getting "sophisticated," but when I got to Norfolk, well, now that's a different story. If you catch that tunnel traffic at the right time, it doesn't matter how good you are at holding your breath, you're not going to make it.

Same thing in our Christian walk when it comes to sin. We don't take sin lightly. We recognize that sin is always deadly. But we will always battle with our sin nature, which has been dethroned but not deactivated until the day we die.
At that point we will be totally free of sin and enter a new state of being in the eternal state called:

[Slide]: Glorification

Can I get an amen to that!!

2. On the other extreme we must also be cautious to conclude that Jesus must have had a bad burrito before He said this and must have been mistaken. If we write this off as being so outlandish that we shouldn't even take it seriously that would be the serious mistake. So, what's happening here?

C. The Greek word for perfect is the word:

[Slide]: τέλειος

1. It has a fairly wide semantic range which simply means there's a lot of ways the word can be used. Much like words in English. In verse 48 of Matthew 5 τέλειος pertains to:

[Slide]: meeting the highest standard.

a. That's why τέλειος is translated perfect in this verse. If something or someone is perfect, then they've achieved the highest of standard. There's nothing beyond perfect. In the event there might be any confusion, Jesus pulls τέλειος up to the very front of the sentence and uses a Greek verb tense known as the futuristic imperative. That means that it's not a suggestion but a command and there's no expiration date on our marching orders. Raise your hand if you're feeling encouraged?

b. So, what do we do with this verse? We've got to back this thing up.

Matthew 5:43-48 (CSB) [Slide]: 43 "You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

c. God is the One who sets the moral standard, and His standard is perfect. There is no character flaw in God. God's actions do not fluctuate based on our worthiness or unworthiness.
But we allow ourselves to go down that path easily.
It's not a good path and the reason it's not a good path is because we start to misunderstand:

[Slide]: our righteousness in Christ.

d. Our righteousness, or right standing before God, is comprised of two components.
The first is our:

(1) [Slide]: Imputed Righteousness

Another way to say this is we have been declared justified before God in Christ. Our justification is a legal term that simply means we've already been declared "not guilty" when we accept the gift of salvation. Positionally you and I are made perfect in Christ not because of anything we've done but because God now looks at you and I through the perfection of our Lord Jesus Christ! That's extremely great news!! Remember when your grandma used to pinch your cheek and declare your perfection? God does the same thing for those who are in Christ because our sins are covered by the perfect sacrifice of His Son. We can't do anything to earn imputed righteousness, add to it, or lose it. It's a free gift of God!

But our imputed righteousness is made evident by component two. Our:

(2) [Slide]: Imparted Righteousness

Imparted righteousness refers to the very real experience of our imputed righteousness in our daily lives. This is a fancy term known as our:

[Slide]: Sanctification

When we receive a spiritual heart transplant through the power of the Holy Spirit, God changes our taste buds toward righteousness, but we still have to make the wise choice.
We yield to the Spirit's work in our life allowing Him to do the heavy lifting, but we have an active role in our experience of God's righteousness.
Our salvation is sealed through the imputed righteousness of Christ but the daily experience of Christ in us is in conjunction with our yielding to the Spirit and modeling our lives after Christ.

D. Jesus commands us in Matthew 5:48 to be perfect. In a vital way that's not a tall order because we've already been declared perfect because of our position in Christ. Yet on the other hand Jesus challenges us to experience His imparted righteousness by fully surrendering our lives to Him! We do that by running our race measuring our life against the standard set by our heavenly Father and displayed in full view by Jesus!

1. We encourage and love one another as we each pursue Christ and His standard. We can celebrate and learn from one another, but I don't set the standard nor does anyone else. That standard has been set by God and lived out for us in the person of Jesus Christ. That is the standard by which we are measured. There isn't a group presentation when we stand before God and give an account for our lives. And yet we go through our lives thinking that don't we. We're like, "I saw Billy coming out the ABC store last week. It would sure be good to be right behind Him when I stand before the Lord." Or "Molly reads her Bible every day and hasn't missed for years, I hope there's a few between us when it's my time."

2. Jesus reminds us that the standard doesn't fluctuate. We'll stand before God one day and we'll be declared perfect not because of our actions but because God is viewing us through the blood of Christ. Forgiven and redeemed! Or we will have to stand on our own merit, but the standard isn't our peers. The standard remains to: [Slide]: Be Perfect

a. As we kick off a new year and a new series, I want to plead with each of us today to think about the perfect standard our lives will be measured against.
For some of us it makes us really thankful that in Christ we unite in His perfection.

b. Some of you today may be thinking about this for the first time. Maybe you've even been banking on God measuring your life based off religious performance in comparison to others. God is holy. He has no blemish, therefore, the standard by which we are measured is perfection.
That's really bad news if we're banking on our own merit to gain God's approval.

3. But we don't have to bank on our own merit. God has done everything by providing His righteousness to us in Christ! We simply accept the gift and begin a life surrendered to God by the power of His Spirit.

Matthew 5:48 (CSB) [Slide]: 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.