

The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Much And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger And Thirst For Righteousness

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Matthew 5:6

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I want to share something with you this morning that I am convinced is the secret to happiness and peace in this world. We all want those things – we all pursue those things – but for many of us it seems like the things we want the most are always moving away, always eluding us, always escaping our grasp. But in this beatitude we are offered the chance to receive them – to be presently and eternally satisfied.

Are you interested in that?

Well then turn with me in your Bibles now to Matthew chapter 5. We’re taking a long slow walk through the Sermon on the Mount and this morning we are looking at the fourth beatitude: blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.

Hear now the Word of the Lord; we’ll begin reading at verse 1:

¹ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matthew 5:1–6 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

The promises in this beatitude are absolutely staggering. Jesus is offering here, nothing less than happiness and peace. He says that we can be BLESSED and he says that we can be SATISFIED. That’s pretty much everything we are looking for in life, so let’s take a few minutes and see if we can’t unpack what he is saying here.

The first thing we need to understand, obviously is what Jesus means by ‘righteousness’.

What Is Righteousness?

The word “righteousness” is one of the most important words in the Bible. And not just in the Old Testament – in the New Testament. And not just in the letters of Paul – it was pretty important for Jesus as well, in fact a little later in this Sermon on the Mount Jesus says to his disciples:

“For I tell you, unless your **righteousness** exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20 ESV)

So righteousness is a really big deal!

Now most of us hear Jesus saying in Matthew 5:20 that we need to be better Pharisees than the Pharisees in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven – but that’s not at all what he is saying. He is saying that the Pharisees are right for pursuing righteousness – but they are pursuing it the wrong way. They don’t really understand what it is and so they are running really fast in the wrong direction.

Follow me, Jesus says, and you'll get the right kind of righteousness. You'll get the righteousness that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Alright, so what is that?

Generally speaking, theologians say that righteousness in the Bible is about two things. It's about a right relationship with God and a right relationship with other people. Charles Spurgeon put it just that simply when defining the people Jesus was promising to bless and satisfy in this beatitude. He said:

“They pine to be right themselves both with God and man, and they long to see righteousness have the upper hand all the world over.”¹

So that's what we're talking about. These are people who want to be right with God and right with other people. So let's dip back into the Bible and see if we can understand what that looks like.

In the Old Testament we get all kinds of imperfect general pictures of what that looks like and then Jesus comes and fills them all in. So let's honour that pattern. We'll start with an imperfect Old Testament outline. This will get us started on the road to understanding what it looks like to be right with God.

1. Being right with God

Turn in your Bibles to the Book of Job chapter 1. The Book of Job is really helpful here because Job is declared as a righteous man – right at the start of the book. Job 1:1 says:

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. (Job 1:1 ESV)

¹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Commentary On Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 37.

So Job wasn't perfect – but he was blameless and upright. He had a right relationship with God – he FEARED GOD – to FEAR GOD in the Bible means to live before him with all due reverence, respect and obedience. So he was in right relationship with God – he worshipped, he prayed – we're told in verse 5 that he prayed for his kids and he functioned as sort of priest for his family.

And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, “It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus Job did continually. (Job 1:5 ESV)

So Job was a righteous guy. He was always worshipping, praying and relating to God as he should – even after he suffered a tragedy. When Job's children died and his property was consumed in a series of Providential disasters – still Job worshipped and honoured the Lord. Job 1:20-21 says:

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1:20–21 ESV)

So from that picture – imperfect but useful – I think we could say that a person who is right with God acknowledges God as the source of all life and blessing, he OR SHE worships God, reverences God, respects God and strives to obey God carefully in all things.

And that leads us to our second consideration. To be righteous is also to be right with your fellow man.

2. Being right with your fellow man

The story of Job helps us out here as well. As you may know, in the story of Job God allows the devil to take pretty much everything from Job so as to demonstrate Job's faithfulness before the world. So Job's suffering was a test of faith and it was a display of faith but we know that it has nothing to do with any unrighteousness on the part of Job – and that's helpful to us in our discussion today because 3 of Job's friends arrive and they ask him some pretty tough questions.

They ask him if it is possible that Job may have sinned in some way and thereby invited all these difficulties into his life. But Job responds – and later God confirms – that he has acted righteously both toward God AND OTHERS throughout the course of his life and he details some of what that means to him and so we get these speeches where Job basically outlines what it means in the Bible to be socially righteous. So in his defence in chapters 29-32 we have this exhaustive accounting of Job’s righteous behaviour toward other people. He says:

¹² I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him.

¹³ The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.

¹⁴ **I put on righteousness**, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. (Job 29:12–14 ESV)

I LIVED righteously toward other people, Job says. Not just from time to time – I wore righteousness like a ROBE and a TURBAN. It was my daily outfit!

He goes on to say:

¹⁵ I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame.

¹⁶ I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. (Job 29:15–16 ESV)

I was actively involved in helping the poor, the orphan and the needy. That’s social righteousness!

He says:

“I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?” (Job 31:1 ESV)

I was faithful to my wife – even down to the level of the EYE – interestingly, just like Jesus will teach a little later in Matthew chapter 5.

Alright – so again these are imperfect pictures – and this is just one of them – but here, in outline form we see that a righteous person – a person like Job is just in all his dealings, generous to the poor and faithful to his wife and family.

That’s social righteousness.

And of course, as I said – Jesus fulfils these pictures and outlines perfectly. Jesus is in PERFECT relationship with God. Jesus worshipped God – he was a singer of Psalms, he was a hearer and a teacher of the Word – and he was a man of prayer. He was devout and faithful. And Jesus was submissive – Jesus shows us what it looks like to seek and pursue the Father’s will. He prayed in the Garden:

“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39 ESV)

That’s submission. That’s humility. That’s obedience. That’s what it means to be in right relationship with God.

And Jesus was in right relationship with others. He was everything Job was only better! Job said that he was eyes to the blind and feet for the lame – but Jesus went one better, he said:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18–19 ESV)

I’ve come to give SIGHT to the blind, to give LIBERTY to the captive and to make the lame man leap for joy. Jesus hit it out of the park with respect to social righteousness.

And of course – it goes without saying – that he was morally and sexually pure. His conduct was above reproach. He treated all people with the dignity and respect they deserved. He was perfectly and entirely righteous.

Alright – so that’s what righteousness IS. We see it outlined in the Old Testament and then lived and displayed PERFECTLY in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now – back to the 4th beatitude, Jesus says:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” (Matthew 5:6 ESV)

Jesus seems to be saying, that all happiness – all blessing – all satisfaction – all peace – shall be found ONLY in our hunger for and pursuit of righteousness, which seems counter intuitive. We might expect Jesus to say that the people who pursue BLESSEDNESS will be blessed or the people who pursue righteousness will be righteous – what’s the point of pursuing something if you are going to be FINDING something else? Do you see? Chase this and receive THAT – that’s what Jesus is saying here. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones helps us understand this seeming paradox, he says:

“The gospel, which seems to be so remote and indirect in its approach, is actually the most direct way of solving the problem. One of the greatest tragedies in the life of the church today is the way in which so many are content with these vague, general, useless statements about war and peace instead of preaching the gospel in all its simplicity and purity. It is righteousness that exalts a nation, and the most important thing for all of us is to discover what righteousness means.”²

Are you hearing that?

Lloyd Jones is saying that we all have this basket of desires – things that we really want, things that we hunger after. We want a peaceful, happy world. We want a peaceful, happy marriage – but what we often don’t understand is that you can’t WANT your way or TALK your way into possessing those things. You can talk all day long about peace in the world – you can read all books you like about peace in your home – but if you don’t fix what’s wrong inside of you – in terms of your relationship with God and your orientation toward others – then none of that is going to be worth a hill of beans. The paradox of the Gospel – the paradox of this 4th beatitude – is that you can only ever have those things by pursuing something else.

² D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 61.

So how do we do that? How do we PURSUE and how may we OBTAIN righteousness? That's obviously – according to Lloyd Jones and according to Jesus in this verse – the most important thing in all the world.

How Do We Obtain It?

The short answer, as you might expect, is through faith in Christ. But in order to be as faithful and useful as possible here, I want to break that short answer down into two medium sized answers. So first of all we obtain this righteousness by trusting in the saving work of Christ.

1. By trusting in the saving work of Christ

The Apostle Paul in Romans 3 said:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, **through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (Romans 3:21–25 ESV)

So, in street level English, Paul says here, that there is a righteousness we can RECEIVE from God that is not something we can make for ourselves. It is not something that we can OBTAIN just by obeying what we see written in the Law and the Prophets – not that there is anything wrong with what is written in the Law and the Prophets – they're not the problem, we are. Because of sin we are diminished – we can no longer MEET the good standard of the law – and therefore we need to receive a righteousness from outside ourselves. A righteousness from God through faith in Jesus Christ. His life, his death, his resurrection – by means of those things, we can have peace with God.

That's what the word “propitiation” means.

Propitiation means “to make favourable”. Because of our sin, God was not favourable toward us. God has a settled antagonism toward sin and we were covered in and reeking of sin. So he was

not favourable toward us. He was not smiling towards us – be he is smiling on us now – if we are in Christ! If we are in Christ then our debt is paid. Our offense is covered over. Our sin has been thrown into the depths of the sea. We are accepted, we are welcome, we are FAVOURED.

That’s what theologians refer to as “justification”.

It literally means to have a RIGHT STANDING WITH GOD. It’s about being ABLE to enter into the presence of God to do like Job did – or better yet – to do like Jesus did! To worship God, to thank him for his mercies, to rejoice in his goodness and to obtain and distribute blessings for our loved ones – praise the Lord!

So we go to Jesus to obtain POSITIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS. We receive that by trusting in his person and WORK and we go to Jesus to obtain PRACTICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS as well. We go to Jesus to learn how to live wisely and peaceably in the world – and we do that of course by trusting in the transforming WORD of Christ.

2. By trusting in the transforming word of Christ

Jesus said:

“Take my yoke upon you, **and learn of me**; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matthew 11:29 KJV)

We forget sometimes that we are also saved by the teaching of Christ. YES we need to be born again – but when we rise up out of the waters of death, we need to begin listening to and following Jesus. Jesus said that to his disciples when he gave them the Great Commission. He said:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ **teaching them** to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19–20 ESV)

So according to Jesus – to BE a disciple and to MAKE a disciple – involves two things. You’ve got to be BAPTIZED – that is to say you have to DIE to your self and identify through faith with

the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – AND you need to LEARN everything that Jesus COMMANDED so as to LIVE IT OUT.

That’s what it means to be a disciple! It means to come to Jesus for redemption and retraining – and the TEXT BOOK for that is the whole word of God. Not just the Red Letters mind you - if you are a Bible reader than you know that, actually, the whole Bible, from start to finish, claims to have been written, ultimately by Jesus. In 1 Peter 1:10-11 Peter says:

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time the **Spirit of Christ** in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.” (1 Peter 1:10–11 ESV)

So according to Peter – it was the Spirit of Christ moving in the prophets that produced what we call the Old Testament – which if you think about it only makes sense given the fact that in John 1:1 Jesus is introduced to us as “the Word”.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1 ESV)

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14 ESV)

So Jesus IS the Word of God. When God wants to say something to people the AGENT of that communication is Jesus. So it was Jesus whispering to Moses inside the Tent of Meeting, it was JESUS speaking to Elijah on the Mountain of God inside the still, small voice, it was Jesus giving Daniel his dreams and visions of the future. Everywhere you look in the Old Testament you see Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!

And of course – everywhere you look in the New Testament you see Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! It’s not just the Red Letters – it’s everything written by the Apostles as well. Jesus himself said that, in some of those Red Letters as written in John 16. Just before he died Jesus said to his Apostles:

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on

his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:12–14 ESV)

“So I have more to say – but I’ll say it after I die, rise again and ascend up into heaven. I’ll say it by my Spirit to the world **through you**.”

So actually, if you think about it – the whole Bible should be written in Red Letters. Jesus is the author of it all. So if you want to learn how to live like Jesus in the world – then read, read, read, your Bible. D.A. Carson characterizes the righteous person this way, he says:

“His delight is the Word of God, for where else is God’s will, to which he hungers to be conformed, so clearly set forth?”³

You look at the Word of God written and the Word of God lived and you ask the Spirit of God to make you like that. And slowly but surely – by one degree of glory to the next – you will be changed. For this is the work of the Lord who is the Spirit – thanks be to God!

So, as that happens, WHEN that happens, what should we expect to receive?

What Do We Receive If We Pursue Righteousness?

Well, here our work is pretty much done for us. Jesus says:

“**Blessed** are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for **they shall be satisfied**.” (Matthew 5:6 ESV)

So those who pursue righteousness are promised blessings and satisfaction – or to put it more simply: happiness and peace – which is pretty much everything we are looking for in this world.

And that’s the paradox that I mentioned. Jesus is saying that you can’t OBTAIN happiness. The pursuit of happiness is doomed – it is a fool’s errand! You can’t chase down happiness and

³ D.A. Carson, *The Sermon On The Mount: An Evangelical Exposition Of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 22.

blessing. You can't chase down satisfaction and peace. Those things will always elude you. Those things are like the Road Runner and you are Wiley Coyote. You can run all day long and all your life long and all you will get for your trouble is a giant boulder to the head.

Those are not things you can OBTAIN – but thanks be to God those are things you can RECEIVE. You can receive those things IN COMING – in PURSUING – IN HUNGERING AND THIRSTING AFTER JESUS. Jesus said:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”
(Matthew 11:28 KJV)

So that's the challenge. Are you going to chase all these things over here in your basket of desires – your better marriage, your better paycheque, your better world, your better you – or are you going to come unto Jesus, take his yoke upon you and **in him find rest?** **In him find PEACE WITH GOD and a RIGHT RELATIONSHIP with other people?** Are you going to make THAT your life pursuit – or are you going to play the fool's game of chasing after all these OTHER THINGS that will be constantly exceeding your grasp – constantly moving away just as fast as you can chase them?

That's the question.

The Bible is saying: PURSUE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Make a right relationship with God and a right relationship with other people your highest ambition and priority. Focus on those things – pursue those things through the person and work of Christ – and you will be blessed! You will be satisfied! Because you will have Jesus and in him more than you could ever ask for, hope for or imagine – thanks be to God!

Let's pray together.