

# The Question that Will Change Your Life

*Life Changing Question*

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Well, it's a delight to welcome you back after we were together on Sunday, and it's a delight to see our church coming back to life. It's like we've been through winter and we're starting to see the first blooms of spring and flowers coming up through the ground after this interruption that we had with the COVID virus. You know, whatever else you think about that, we were apart for three months and we've been transitioning back and things are starting to come back to life in a way that I'm very excited about. We've had baptisms. We have had a lot of new church members received into the church. This past Sunday our children's choir started up. This coming Sunday we have a membership class. The following Sunday our Fundamentals of the Faith class is renewing. And so it's just very encouraging to me to see the hand of God just kind of bringing things back to life. That's what he's good at doing. He brings things back to life that have gone into slumber, you might say, and so I'm grateful for that.

Now I needed to say that by way of introduction here tonight to explain what I am doing and why I am doing what I am doing from the pulpit here this evening. The title of tonight's message is "The Question that Will Change Your Life," and I don't expect any of you to remember this but this is the last message that I preached on Tuesday night before all of the stuff broke loose with COVID. There is a series that I had started on March 10 with this message that goes for, you know, there's about four messages in the series, I think, and we were interrupted just as I was getting ready to start it. Now I had to ask myself, I want to finish the series but I had to ask myself a serious question: is it reasonable to expect all of you to remember what I said six months ago on this topic? And I thought, "Well, no, that's not reasonable." I don't really remember what I, you know what they say, I don't remember what I had for lunch yesterday and so how can I expect you to remember what I preached on six months ago, and so tonight we're going back, it's like we're in a time warp, think about it that way, we're going back to pick up where we left off so that we are able to profitably finish that series that I started six months ago, and I know that many of you probably weren't even here when I preached it and so review is always good even if you were. So that's what we're here to do tonight. The question that will change your life, if some of this sounds familiar to you, that's why. You know, I didn't want you to feel like, you know, something weird was happening here. Nothing weird going on, just adjusting to a strange year 2020 has been.

So tonight I'm here to give you a question to help you in your spiritual life, my Christian friends. It's a question that is universal in its application. Whether you are in your early 20s and on the front end of your Christian life, or whether you're in your 70s and 80s and you're approaching the end of your Christian life, this question applies equally across the board. It's one that we all need to contemplate and to deal with. It is a question that orients your approach to your circumstances in life no matter what they may be. This is a question that is fitting for a child that is under the authority of their parents and living at home and learning submission to parents just like the Lord Jesus did in his youth in Luke 2. It's a fitting question for a young person, a young adult, who is facing career or educational choices, "What direction should I go in life? What should I do next with my life? What should I do with my life?" This is a proper question for someone like that. It's a question for a couple in the early days, the middle years of their marriage, to understand how you move forward in life. It's a perfect question, it is a perfect question for someone who has just gotten a very bad report from the doctor, "It's terminal. There's nothing else that we can do for you. I'm sorry." This is a question that applies right there as well. It's a question that is fitting in days of discouragement and in days of joy. It's a question that is right when you are frustrated and when you're happy. It's a question fitting in prosperity. It's a question that is fitting in poverty. And as I like to say, this is a question that is fitting for someone lying on their deathbed and they know it. It will drive you to Christ for grace to transform your life. It will help you understand what your responsibility is no matter where you fall in the broad spectrum of all those situations that I just described. That sounds like a pretty valuable question, doesn't it?

Well, here it is. What is the question that will change your life? What is the question that orients you in the right direction, that sets you on a true trajectory for where you should go forward? You just ask yourself this simple question, my friends, you ask yourself this: how can I be righteous here? How can I be righteous here? What would be the right thing to do? What would be the biblical way to respond to this? You could frame it this way in language that we used a few weeks ago: how can I glorify God in these circumstances, is another way to ask that same question.

Now I never get tired of saying this, what I'm just about to say. God, let me put it this way, you have the life today that God has given to you. God has ordered your circumstances and brought you to this particular day, at this particular epoch in history, in this particular circle of relationships and influence that you have. If God, and he does, numbers the hairs on your head, then what the Bible means by that is every detail of your life is providentially ordered and given to you by God and that means, then, that you have a responsibility to respond in a righteous and in a godly way.

My friends, let me remind you that God has ordered your circumstances like he has for his glory and for your good. If you are a Christian, God intends to bless you in the circumstances that he has given to you. Even if it seems that the sun has set and the night is very long that lies ahead, God intends your good in it. Even if you are looking on a dramatic change in life and looking at things from a new perspective now than what they were 48 hours ago, this is still true. God has brought this into your life and because God is good and God does everything for his own glory, then your circumstances are intended

to be a furtherance of the glory of God and your circumstances today and in life ahead are the platform upon which God will show his blessing to you over time and in the end. I cannot tell you how important it is for you to settle that as a conviction in your mind that is unalterable and that you never let go of because it gives you an entire way to process everything that happens in life. Now if God has done that, if God has given you those circumstances for his glory and for your good, then the question for the Christian is simply this: how can you respond in a godly way? How can you respond in a godly way, which is another way of asking the question that will change your life: how can I be righteous here?

Now it is a question specifically for Christians. If you are not a Christian, I must remind you that you cannot do works that bring you into God's favor. It's not that we do righteous things in order to earn a status before God. The only status that will avail for you before God is for you to repent of sin and put your faith in Jesus Christ. All of the righteousness and the only righteousness that will avail to you on the day of judgment is given to you through faith in Jesus Christ. Apart from that there is nothing you can do to make things right with God. And so that is the preliminary question, you need new life from above, you need new life from Christ if you're not a believer. Titus 3:5 says that God saves us "not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." I say these things to non-Christians to be very clear about what it is that we're talking about here. We are not talking about works that you can do in order to be saved. No, that's not it at all. What we're talking about here is what kind of life does a Christian live? Now that God has saved you, now that the Spirit has brought new life to you and you are born again, now this question applies: how can I be righteous here?

You see, a Christian, you as a Christian, you have a responsibility to grow in Christ-likeness. In 2 Peter 3:18, the closing verse of that book, it is a command, "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." You are to grow. Someone who is not growing is perhaps not alive. Someone who is not growing spiritually, you know, this is a serious problem because the nature of life in the spirit is that you are growing and you are developing. Even if your growth is inconsistent, over time there is a trajectory of growing in grace, growing in Christ, growing in the knowledge of the word of God. And so that's what we're here to talk about tonight and over the next three weeks or so.

Now I think it's important if you're going to make a statement like that to show people from the Bible why it's true. I don't want you to take my word for it. We need to see this from the language of Scripture itself, and if you would turn with me to the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5 through 7, we will take a look at this and I'm going to give you three points for tonight: the priority of this righteousness; the problem with this righteousness; and thirdly, the provision for this righteousness. The priority, the problem and the provision so that we see the objective and we see what God has given us in order to pursue it.

Now so point 1 tonight: the priority of this righteousness. The question, how can I be righteous here, is without a doubt the question of highest priority for the Christian. Look at Matthew 5:6. We're just gonna look at four verses rather quickly here. There embedded in the section of Scripture known as the Beatitudes, the Beatitude indicating a blessing from God, in Matthew 5:6 it says this, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." In Matthew 5:20 it says, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Look at chapter 6, verse 1, this priority of righteousness. Matthew 6:1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." And verse 33 of that same chapter really clenches it when Jesus in warning his disciples against the sin of anxiety says to them, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." And so you see this theme of righteousness is woven throughout the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, what he is doing is he is describing the nature of the life that comes from someone who has truly repented. This is the life that flows from someone who is repentant.

Look over at Matthew 4:17, "Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" And in Matthew 5:3 he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And this "poor in spirit" is an idea of recognizing your spiritual bankruptcy; that you have no merit to offer to God to earn his favor, you need something outside of you and Jesus is calling people to repent and he says that repentance is the entryway, the key that unlocks the door to the kingdom of heaven. Now in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, he explains what a life of repentance looks like.

Now for those of you that are theologically inclined, I just want to clarify that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is not talking about the imputed righteousness of justification. That is not the subject of the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount assumes someone who has already repented and gives them direction for how to lead a repentant life. And so that is an important distinction to make. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is teaching in the direction of sanctification, that ongoing spiritual growth in the life of his disciples, and the question we're asking tonight, how can I be righteous here, this is a question related to the pursuit of sanctification in the life of the redeemed. You have the Spirit of God dwelling within you. You know that God has called you for the purpose of bringing glory to his name. You understand that Jesus said seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you, so that you understand and you are motivated and you are gripped by the priority of conforming your life to what God would have it to be. That is the realm of sanctification in the life of a Christian.

So let's define sanctification for a moment as we're talking about this priority of righteousness. Question 35 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks this question, "What is sanctification?" What is sanctification? And it answers it with these words, "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness." Sanctification is a reflection of the work of God in your heart drawing

you, causing you to grow in grace, that grace being manifested by the fact that you increasingly separate yourself from sin in your life and grow in your pursuit of righteousness. You want to forsake the sins that formerly dominated you, you now hate them because a new life has been given to you, and instead of pursuing your former lusts of the flesh, you want to pursue the things of godliness, of righteousness, of biblical integrity and biblical priority. You want to be like Christ who saved you. His life appeals to you. The righteousness of Scripture is what you want in your heart. And so what we're doing here tonight and over the next couple of weeks is we're saying what that righteousness looks like. We want to help you understand what that righteousness is.

Now as a general statement. For some when we talk about righteousness, I realize painfully that for some of you the thought of that takes you back to your days in legalistic churches who had all kinds of rules and regulations for what you were to do, the way that you were to dress, the shows that you could watch, the cards that you could or could not play with. That's not what we're talking about here. That's not the biblical emphasis at all. This is a matter, this righteousness is a matter of practical daily life in your inner man as well as your outer man. It's a matter of the heart as well as a matter of behavior. Jesus said in Mark 7 and other places that the life of a man flows out of what's going on in his heart so that we understand that this priority of righteousness is something that starts in the inner man as an inner priority, as an inner affection of what matters and why you live, what it is that you understand to be the reason that you exist. So it's a negative righteousness that avoids sin in all of its forms, thought, word and deed, and corresponding to that, it is a positive righteousness of heart attitudes, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, heart attitudes like that that the Spirit of God works into the people of Christ. It's a positive righteousness of what we say and what we do. It's comprehensive in life.

Now we're still talking about the priority of this righteousness. The biblical emphasis on this theme may very well surprise you. It may very well surprise you to realize how much importance, how often this is repeated in Scripture as the matter of the things of the kingdom, that which occupies the man of God. Let's look at three verses, I'll have you turn there. Let's start, first of all, at Romans 14. Romans 14. Paul after explaining the doctrine of salvation in the first 11 chapters of the book of Romans, goes on to discuss the outworking of that. In light of the work of Christ in securing your salvation, in light of the fact that the Spirit of God has brought you into the body of Christ, how then shall you live? And we see, I'll keep myself from going way off track here. I'll just stay with what I've got in front of me here. In Romans 14:17 in the midst of his discussion of the practical outworking of the Christian life, Paul says this, he says, "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men." He states it plainly, the kingdom of God is about righteous living. Once you have been saved, you are to live righteously.

Go over to 1 Timothy, jumping over the books of Ephesians and Philippians and Thessalonians, going to 1 Timothy there in your Bible. 1 Timothy 6 and we'll start with, let's go all the way back to verse 7 just to see the contrast that Paul is making with

worldly thinking and worldly priorities compared to what the priority of righteousness is. So he rebukes the worldly mindset and warns his disciple Timothy against it. In verse 7 he says, "we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." You see that materialistic, selfish, greedy approach to life that marks the unbeliever, but Paul gives a contrast and sets forth the right priority for Timothy as he speaks to him in verse 11. He says, "But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness."

You see, there is this understanding in the Christian heart that says, "I realize that there are foreign hostile forces that would draw me away from the priority of this righteousness, and so I have to recognize them. I have to think through them. I have to consciously decisively reject them. My life will not be about the pursuit of the things of the world, rather the priority of my life will be this righteousness that is fitting for the man of God." If a righteous God has saved you out of your life of unrighteousness and you love him for that, and you understand that God is righteous, that God is holy, then you understand that by definition, by necessary implication, your life has to be oriented toward the nature of the character of the God who saved you. In the language of Peter and the language of Leviticus, "Be holy," God says, "for I am holy." God is holy. God is righteousness. God is righteous, I should say, what he is by nature and in the indwelling Holy Spirit, that life of God, that nature of God is active in your life and in your affections.

Well, isn't it obvious that if God is like that and God is at work in you, that your life is going to be oriented toward that which is intrinsic to the very essence of God. It could be no other way. A Christian who loves and pursues sin is a contradiction in terms. We do not accept the idea of a Christianity that says you can pray a prayer, ask Jesus into your heart, be saved forever on the basis of that momentary prayer but have no change in your life and continue living exactly as you did beforehand. That is a denial and a lack of understanding of what happens in salvation. God makes you a new creation. God gives you new life. You've been born again. The old things have passed away, behold new things have come. The new things are the things of righteousness. It could be no other way.

Turn over a little bit further to the right in your Bible, or scroll down on your device. Titus 2:11 says this, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men." What does that grace in salvation do to us? What does it say to us? What does it build up in us? What does it direct us toward? Verse 12, "instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." The grace of God in salvation orients your life toward righteous living. Someone who is not oriented this way, I'm sorry to be so explicit but I'm not being any less explicit than Scripture, someone who is not somehow oriented toward godliness and

righteousness needs to seriously examine whether they're in the faith at all because there's only one salvation, the one salvation that comes through Christ is a salvation that transforms lives, that transforms hearts, and orients someone toward this righteous path.

And he goes on to say in verse 14, Christ "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Do you see it? I mean, this is just stamped all over the Bible. The people of God live differently than the people of the world. The people who are in the kingdom of Christ live differently than those who live in the kingdom of Satan. The kingdom of light is different by nature than the kingdom of darkness. It could be no other way, and the way that this manifests itself in the one who has been redeemed is in the nature of their life.

Now let me give you a contrast that I used six months ago, but a little contrast will help you see what I mean by this, and it's a constant burden on my mind that people are deceived on this very point, that people think that they are in the kingdom and that these things are true in their lives but they're really not, and a contrast will help you see what I mean. I knew a woman a long time ago in a place far far away. I don't watch "Star Trek" and I never did but I know that somehow fits in with that. In a land far far away from here in Cincinnati, I knew a woman who was great at God-talk, and you probably know professing Christians like this. You get together with them and God is on their lips all the time, but it's a little weird, it's a little distorted the way that their experience of God is so trivialized into earthly life in a way that is no different than what a unsaved person would want. And so this woman, God guided her to just the right carpet for her living room. God helped her get a good price for appliances. And on and on it goes. "God gave me the parking spot at Walmart at just the right time." And it all sounds super-spiritual, doesn't it? It seemed like her conversations about God never got beyond that. There was never a talk about Christ, my Redeemer. There was never a talk about the cross. It was all this superficial sentimental stuff about earthly things that are just preoccupied with God making her life go right in the very spirit of what we taught about on moralistic therapeutic deism a year and a half ago, or whenever that was.

At the time when I knew this woman, I could not put my finger on what was wrong with that, and it's almost intimidating to hear someone talk that way all the time because it just sounds like God's in the middle of everything in their life. What could possibly be wrong about that? Well, here's the problem. Her expression of her experience of God was entirely about earthly priorities, selfish things, temporal matters, materialistic things that had nothing to do with righteousness. And when you see it in light of the Scriptures that we've looked at, it becomes rather frightening to realize how easy it is to be deceived talking that way and realize that you're not manifesting any of this heart priority of righteousness of which Scripture speaks.

Contrast that with a different Christian woman that I knew in another place far far away. Her spouse had sinned. Enough said. It's enough for you to know that Christians go to divorce court over less than what her spouse had done. Her response illustrates in a positive way what I am driving at in this message. She said words to this effect, if not a direct quote, pretty close. She said, "My husband has sinned. I do not want to sin in my

response to that. I will keep my wedding vows. I will stay with him. I will trust God to work it out." Do you see the difference? She had just been betrayed by her spouse, she recognized the gravity of what had happened, but her response was, "I need to be righteous here. My spouse may have fallen short, may have fallen short of the goal line here, but I don't want to be like that. I want to be righteous here. I want to show integrity before my God. I'm a sinner too." And years later they're together, by all accounts they're happy. God honored that godly response from a woman who could have gone a different direction.

Here's what I want you to see, my friends, is this, and to examine your own heart in light of the contrast. One woman wanted God simply to fulfill her objectives in life. The other woman wanted to live righteously in his sight even if it caused her pain in the process. The question for you tonight is which kind of Christian are you going to be?

Look over at 1 John. We can continue in our walk toward the back of the Bible. 1 John 3. You know, I kind of laugh to myself as I contemplate these verses that we're about to read. Scripture is not difficult on this issue. Do you understand that? Do you see that? This is not difficult. This is not hidden in the deep recesses of the Bible. This is right on the surface. The only thing that makes it difficult for some people to receive and accept it who have been brought up in the church, is that they have been conditioned by false teaching to miss it that has blinded them to the clarity of Scripture on this point. This is not difficult. I'm not quoting early Christian fathers that you have to read in Latin to know what they said. I'm not doing that. I'm not giving you detailed Greek terms that you're not familiar with. It's all right on the surface. It's right there for you to read in your own Bible. This is plain as day and the Apostle John speaks about it in precisely these terms, chapter 3, verse 7. He says in a term of endearment, he says, "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as [Christ] is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning." He says you don't have to think real long and hard and deep about this, this is plain and obvious on the surface.

In the language of Jesus in Matthew 7, you can know a tree by the fruit that it produces. You go up to a tree and you see red juicy apples, you automatically say, "Ha, I'm looking at an apple tree." No kidding. Isn't that obvious? The fruit makes it plain. You walk up to a life that is devoted to the righteousness of Christ and you say, "Ah, there's a life that's been redeemed." You walk up to a life that has no interest and no concern for those things no matter what they say with their lips, and you say, "Ah, the fruit gives it away here. I can know a bad tree by the bad fruit that it bears."

John repeats himself essentially in verse 10. You see, we are prone to deception on this very point. Even though this is obvious and plain and could be no other way, our hearts are deceptive, our hearts are wicked. Satan blinds us to the truth. And so he says in plain language, "Don't be deceived on this point. This is obvious." Verse 10, "the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."



Chapter 2, verse 29, he ties it to the doctrine of regeneration that we've studied many times together. Chapter 2, verse 29, "If you know that He is righteous," if you know that Christ is righteous, "you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." The one who displays biblical, approximates biblical righteousness in his life, pursues it as a priority of life is showing that sometime in the past he's been born from above and the results of that are continuing and that explains the nature of his heart affections. You see, my friends, a man or a woman is not even a Christian if they're not somehow seeking righteousness in their lives. This is obvious Scripture says. Don't be deceived on this point. If you know something about the righteousness of God, you can reason down to what it means and how it works itself out in one's life.

So a person's interest in the question, how can I be righteous here, is a mirror into the nature of their true self. That's how important the priority of that righteousness is. So let's move on to point 2: the problem with this righteousness. The problem with this righteousness. None of us perfectly hit the mark on this, do we? The book of James says, speaking to Christians says we all stumble in many ways. We stumble in word. We stumble in the way that we think, what we let our hearts incline after. Sometimes we get angry when someone confronts us and, man, the temper just explodes all over the place. I'm sure none of you are like that. I don't even know why I said it. Right. The problem with this righteousness is surprising speaking in a room like this, predominantly to those who know Christ. The problem with this righteousness is shocking because the problem in the pursuit of this righteousness is you. It's you. The problem and the reason that this becomes difficult in working out is in your own heart and in the nature of being a fallen creature not yet glorified, living in a world like this.

You see, and I say these things to clarify, of course, but also to help you and to encourage you. Sometimes you will not know what righteousness requires. You just won't know. "What do I say to this friend who is struggling? What do I say and how do I respond to difficulties that are presented to me and I've got to make decisions for someone else based on what a doctor is saying? I don't know what the right thing to do is." Sometimes we're just ignorant about what righteousness would require. We need help. Other times you find, don't you, that you simply don't want to be righteous. "I know I shouldn't be angry but by honest admission, I'm angry and I kind of like it that way. I think I've got a reason to be angry here." Or whatever it may be, and in the moment, in the moment your heart isn't inclined to righteousness even if the general trajectory of your life is in that direction. Sometimes we fall short. Sometimes you're selfish, just like I am. Well, I hope not just like I am because that would be bad. You're selfish in some circumstances, in other circumstances you're anxious, you're not trusting God, and it seems like you can't get your heart lined up in the direction that it ought to go, and you can acknowledge the priority of the righteousness and recognize that you struggle in the midst of it, and that there's this tension that goes on so that your inadequacies of wisdom and your sinful desires battle against you as you seek this righteousness. You can understand with the Apostle Paul what he said in Romans 7, "The good that I want, I don't do it, but I practice the very evil that I do not want." And sadly with a sense of burden, you acknowledge, "Man, I fall short in this pursuit of righteousness. I'm not okay with that but I have to be honest enough to admit that that is the reality of my heart. I want it and yet I fall short."

And if you're honest with yourself and you keep your mind in the word of God and your heart is submitted to the word of God, you come to this recognition and you realize, "I'm not strong enough for this. This pursuit of righteousness which I desire is lofty, it's high and it's beyond my ability in my own strength." That does not mean you give up, it simply means that you need help and the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me, if we were to go off on that hymn. It brings us and points us in the direction of point 3: the provision for this righteousness. The provision for this righteousness and we'll kind of do a little overview here and then save things for the weeks to come. I'm really grateful that the Lord brought us back here to this point.

The provision for this righteousness. Now I want you to think with me just a little bit longer. I realize the hour is getting late. It's been a long day for many of you. But understand this: if God saved you for the purpose of righteousness, if Christ in his redemptive work at the cross paid for all of your sins at Calvary, covered you positionally speaking with his righteousness so that in God's eyes you're flawless even though your experiential living it out is not, if Christ has done that and has taken your sin in his own body on the cross and supplied his righteousness, his obedience is credited to your account, then take encouragement with this recognition and this thought, apparently God is interested in your righteousness. God is interested and wants to develop that in you as well. In other words, you're not on your own, you're not by yourself in this.

Philippians 2:12 and 13, we'll preach on this in a few weeks. Put these things side-by-side, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, in other words, make righteousness a priority in your life, but do it knowing this, that God is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. God has graciously supplied what we need to grow in this righteousness and there's three things, I'm must gonna bullet point these and we'll be done.

First of all, how has God provided for righteousness, for you to grow in righteousness? How has he helped you with that? First of all, first sub point here. What's the provision? The Scriptures. The Scriptures. The word of God points you in the way of godliness. You don't know apart from revelation what God requires but God has given us this wonderful 66 book book, if I can put it that way, that reveals to us everything that he requires for life and godliness so that Jesus could pray in John 17:17, he prays for his disciples, he prays to the Father, he says, "Sanctify them in," what? "The truth. Thy word is truth." Jesus praying to the Father before his crucifixion, he says, "God, they're going to need to grow in righteousness, they're going to need Your help. Father, I pray that You would use Your word in their lives to produce that result that You require." Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."

The word of God instructs us in this and one of the, you know, one of the ways that it does it, you know, we talked about, you know, there are times when we don't know what to do, we lack wisdom. Well, the book of Proverbs is given to supply that lack, to help us in the practical aspects of daily living, to say nothing about all that's been revealed in the

New Testament. You get the point, God has given us the Scriptures, God has given us his moral law to say, "This is what righteousness looks like." I'm hoping in a few months to go through a series on the 10 Commandments. Really excited about that but I've got to do other things before we get there, but the point being is that God has revealed to us in his word, in his law, what righteousness looks like so that the sin in our hearts is rebuked and we have laid out for us in written form what it is that righteousness looks like so that we can aim our life after it. Scriptures are a wonderful transforming gift for us.

Now secondly. That's not all that God has provided. God has provided the Spirit. God has provided the Spirit, the Holy Spirit supplies power for holy living. The Spirit of God comes to indwell every true believer and that means that we have an external source of power given to us from God himself that enables us to transcend our natural abilities. You are not left to your natural strength and your natural desires. God places his Spirit in each believer and the Spirit forms desires, the Spirit stimulates thoughts and stimulates desires through the word of God that strengthen you and help you and equip you to live in a godly way. The Spirit uses the word to produce that result.

Over in 1 Peter 1 after the book of Hebrews, the book of James, 1 Peter 1, Peter writes to those who are chosen and he says to them you are chosen, verse 2, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure." A Triune verse there, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, given to express the vast spiritual resources that God has placed in us that we might grow in this righteousness. And as you're writing that down, I've already referred to it but Philippians 2:13, "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

And so God has given us the Scriptures, he's given us the Spirit, one final point. How do we appropriate this? How do we take advantage of what God has given us in the Bible? What is our role in response to the indwelling Holy Spirit? There are those who say, more popular in past days than present day, "Well, you just let go and let God. Just sit back and let it wash over you." That ain't true. There are all kinds of commands for what Christians are to do in the New Testament. Those commands are not directed to God, they're directed to us. We are to obey them. We are to make effort to obey them. How do we appropriate it? Supplication. We express our dependence on God, to God in prayer.

And I'll just take you to Matthew 6 for tonight. Maybe we'll pick up other things related to this in future weeks. But in Matthew 6, Jesus, of course, gives this model prayer that I've referred to many many times and I don't apologize for referring to it many many times. It's that vital. Jesus said in Matthew 6:9, "Pray, then, in this way," pray like this, have these topics of prayer in your mind and make them the pattern of your interaction with your heavenly Father. You praise God and you seek his will. Verse 9, "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name." I submit to you, O God. "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." Prayer, supplication, petition to God where you do this, watch this with me: you consciously pray to God and you consciously submit to his will. You say, "God, You have made Your will known in Your word. I pray that You would work out Your will in my life as well as throughout all of

the cosmos. God, Your will be done. I submit to You. I bring myself under Your authority. I depend upon You." And you see this dependence expressed even more in verses 12 and 13, Father "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," it's an expression of the confession of sin. "God, I've fallen short of Your righteousness. Forgive me and cleanse me and renew me so that I would be back on the right track." This is expressed in prayer. And then this beautiful prayer of dependence in verse 13 that says, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever."

Beloved, this, we've come full circle back to the Sermon on the Mount. Remember how I started and all of the priority of righteousness? Hunger and thirst for righteousness. Your righteousness has to exceed that of the Pharisees. Beware of practicing your righteousness before men. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. You remember that. It hasn't been six months now, it's only been 60 minutes. Well, get this even in the way the gospel of Matthew is structured, in the heart of that, those admonitions is this prayer, "Your will be done. Forgive us our debts. Do not lead us into temptation." We seek this righteousness, we appropriate these wonderful provisions that God has given and we take them, as it were, and we own them, we make them ours in the way that we pray.

And so prayer becomes something much different than the negative example that I just gave. "God, help me find the right carpet at the right price." Really? You have access to a holy God and that's what you want to talk about? Are you kidding me? No. No. "God, I long to reflect the image of Christ in my life and I don't have the power to do it on my own, in fact, I'm coming to You having just fallen short again. God, I'm here to tell You I want Your will to be done. I'm asking You graciously to forgive me for the way that I have fallen short and looking forward, I'm asking You to protect me, to clear the way, to direct the steps of my feet so that I'm walking in this righteous path that You've called for me, and that I have the desire in my heart to do, a desire that You first placed there."

So we see the priority of this righteousness. We see that you and I, we're the problem here. The problem's not the Spirit of God. The problem is not the Scriptures. The problem couldn't possibly be on God's side. The stumbling block here is us. It's within us. And so we recognize the problem of our indwelling sin, our remaining corruption, and it becomes a desire of our life to appropriate the provision that God has given us in the Scriptures, in the Spirit, in prayer, that he might work this out in our lives.

How can I be righteous here? We'll see more next time.

Let's pray together.

*Father, help us to respond to Your word. Help us to respond to Your holiness. Help us to respond righteously to the righteous shed blood of our righteousness Lord that was shed on our behalf. For those of us that are in Christ, O God, strengthen us in the pursuit of this righteousness. Your will be done. Forgive us our debts. Lead us not into temptation. Father, may You use these words to convict those who are dead to this kind of*

*righteousness. May the Spirit open their eyes and their hearts that they might come crying to You for mercy, "God, this is not my life, this is not the desire of my heart. I must be separated from You. Have mercy on me the sinner." And when hearts respond to You like that, O God, would You be swift to meet them with Your saving mercy, the life-giving power of Your Holy Spirit to lead them to Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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