

The Sermon of a Lifetime

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It was almost five years ago that we started Truth Community Fellowship, now Truth Community Church, and I am delighted that you're here at this particular day in the life and in the history of our church because there is a sense in which the past five years have merely been prelude and preparatory to this very day and what we're about to do over the coming months here on Sunday morning as we look to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. We will not be the same individually or as a church once we have gone through this sermon, and more importantly as the Sermon on the Mount has gone through us. This is a magnificent time for me. I preached through the Sermon on the Mount some 10 years ago and I really never thought that I would have the opportunity to do it again and so it is a signal mercy and grace and gift from God to me to be able to do it, but not simply to do it on this side of the pulpit but able to be able to share these things with you. As we have formed relationships and as our church has come together over the past few years, God has divinely prepared us for precisely this time and precisely for this text. The significance of what we're about to embark on cannot possibly be overstated and it's not just corporate, it's for you personally individually. Knowing what's ahead, I just can't help but barely contain my excitement about what lies ahead and especially for those of you who are perhaps not in Christ and you know that, this is a signal time for you as well and so there is something for everyone here.

Let me say this: for too many in the church at large today, speaking beyond the walls of Truth Community Church, we cannot contest, seriously contest the idea that Christianity has been reduced to a means to another end. It has become something that you use to get something else as opposed to being the goal and the end in and of itself. You know what I'm talking about. "Jesus has a wonderful plan for your life. He can help you with your problems. He can even tell you how to vote," as if that had anything to do with biblical Christianity. Or churches reduce the Lord Jesus, the Lord Christ, to a two-step old time Shirley Temple song, "Let me entertain you. Let me make you smile. If you're real good, I'll make you feel good. I'm very versatile," these churches say. Well, the Sermon on the Mount will hit all of that stuff head on and demolish it under the weight of the authority of our Lord Jesus and his teaching.

Closer to home, closer to this room perhaps, I realize that some of you have an unsatisfying spiritual routine. You are outwardly moral in your suburban prosperity but the truth of the matter is that your love for Christ is lukewarm, indifferent and very

inconsistent and your heart cries out, "Is this all there is to Christianity is what I am doing and what I am experiencing? Where is the transforming dynamic of which Scripture speaks?" Well, the Sermon on the Mount will address those things. You see, apart from and over against these false views of Christianity, against the false philosophies of ministry, and as a beacon directing you out of your own mediocrity until something better comes with power, towering over it, biblical Christianity, biblical Christianity as it is found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Over the next several months starting right here right now, starting today, Christ will change you. Christ will change our church through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7. I invite you to turn actually to Matthew 3 is where we're going to begin. Matthew 3 is where we're going to pick up. What we're going to do today is we're going to introduce the Sermon on the Mount in very broad themes. I love to be able to handle Scripture in its broad themes and to bring things out that perhaps you would otherwise miss if you are focused too much on individual details. So this is a bit of an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount today but let me hasten to say this: that this is no ordinary introduction to a series of messages like what you are perhaps accustomed to. What we find in the Sermon on the Mount is you find the sermon of a lifetime. What we mean by that is you find that Christ intends these broad themes that we're going to see today to define the purpose of your existence. What we are about to see from the Sermon on the Mount today and in the coming weeks and months, is the whole reason that Christ saved you. It is the whole outworking of a life of repentance. It is what you are to gear and to guide and to seek after in the whole way that you live your life, and beyond the way that you live, who it is that you are. Nothing less than the whole purpose of your existence is laid out before us in the Sermon on the Mount.

So we come today gladly, joyfully, expectantly, and as it were, we bend our knee before Christ who is the one who speaks in this sermon. We bow before our Lord and we say, "What would you have for us? How would you teach us? Speak, Lord, your servant listens with a willing heart, willing to receive what you have to say to appropriate it, to change and to respond to you as is only right for those who call themselves disciples of Christ." It's a magnificent time for us. Let's begin. Let's take our first step on this wonderful journey that lies just ahead.

As you come to the Sermon on the Mount, as you come to the beginning of the public ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, God had been silent with his people for the prior 400 years. Prophetic ministry had stopped at the close of the Old Testament. There had been no new prophets, there had been no new word from God, and for 400 years the people were waiting for another voice to arise. They were looking for the Messiah but he never did seem to show in their lifetime. Think about it: 400 years ago from today's date would take us back to what? 1616, the founding of Jamestown. 400 years. The New World was just being discovered 400 years ago and in all of that period of time there was no prophetic word for the people of Israel in a similar window of time. They had been used to the ministry of the prophets, they had been used to kings leading them in a theocratic way over the course of their history and yet they had been in this period of silence; they had been in a spiritual drought; there was no word from God and there was thirst all

about them. But now as you come and you open the Gospel of Matthew and you enter into the beginning of the story, you see that that night is ending. The dawn, the sun, as it were, is beginning to rise and there are the early signs of light on the spiritual night sky.

John the Baptist appears on the scene. That's where we will pick it up. John the Baptist appears on the scene and he appears as the forerunner, as the one who goes ahead of Christ in order to announce his coming and to prepare the way for him. Look at Matthew 3, beginning in verse 1, and you see in verse 1, "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!"' Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey." Now watch this, this is very important here in verse 5, "Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins." Suddenly there was a clarion voice of God that was on the scene and it was in the person of John the Baptist. So the people flocked to him because after this spiritual drought, now they see that somehow God is speaking, God is working again. There was a special manner about John the Baptist. It was clear that he was the one, that he was appointed by God in order to speak at this particular time. So being the people of God hungry for a word of God, they flocked to him and what does he preach? Well, you get the summary message there in verse 2, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God for which you have been waiting is just about to dawn upon you and he says, "Repent. Turn from your sin. Be ready because something is about to happen. It's right at hand."

Why was the kingdom of heaven at hand? What did he mean by that? Well, the kingdom of heaven was at hand because the King was here. The King was here and when the King is present, he brings his kingdom with him. The Lord Jesus was on the scene. He had been born some 30 years earlier as the first two chapters of Matthew brought, and now it was time for him to enter into his public ministry. So John the Baptist is like a trumpet call to the people gathering their attention, preparing them for the King that they would soon meet. You see, John's preaching gave him a platform. John's preaching gave him, as it were, temporarily, briefly, the divine spotlight, and God is shining the light on John the Baptist and he is on the platform and everyone is listening to him.

And what does he do with that platform? He does what every preacher should do, he turns the spotlight and shines it on Christ. He said in John 3:30 at a later point, he said, "He must increase but I must decrease." John existed for the sole purpose, God gave him that platform so that he could be the one who introduced the King to Israel and to his people. What is John the Baptist doing? He says, "You've come to hear me preach. I'm glad. Let me tell you what I do, I baptize with water for repentance, but let me tell you, I'm not the end, I'm not the goal here. I am here simply to point you to one who comes after me, one who is greater and mightier than me. I am not worthy to untie his sandal." Now, put yourself in the position of the people of God, the people of the nation that were hearing him at that time. They had been famished for a word from God and finally it

comes and it's with great power that John the Baptist preaches, and all of a sudden the preacher says, "It's not about me at all. It's about the one coming after me. He is mightier than me. He will do a supernatural spiritual work among you that I can't begin to touch."

And true to form, John having said those things, in verse 13 what happens? Jesus arrives, as it were, enters in on the royal carpet that John had laid for him, royal in the sense that the King was now here. And in verse 13 you see this, "Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him," verse 14, "saying, 'I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?'" But Jesus answering said to him, 'Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he permitted Him." Jesus identified, as it were, with John's ministry in the preaching, not because he had any sin to repent of. Perish that thought. That was not the case. But identifying with the flow of John's ministry and entering into the pointing that John was doing to him.

And in verse 16, so John the Baptist has affirmed Christ and then a greater voice affirms him in verse 16, "After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'" Step back and let's think about what we've just seen here. John the Baptist preaches with great manifest power and the people are attracted to him. He says, "It's not about me. It's about the one coming after." And immediately in the flow of the text, there is no doubt about who the one coming after his, it's Jesus Christ, and after Christ is baptized an even greater, and even more authoritative voice lends its affirmation as God the Father speaks from heaven and says, "This one is my beloved Son. This one is the one in whom I am well-pleased."

So the stage has been utterly cleared. It's obvious that the 400 years of silence is over. It's obvious that John the Baptist is now going to recede and a supernatural spotlight has been shined on the Lord Jesus Christ as he enters into his public ministry. Mark it, beloved, a new era is now dawning in redemptive history. No longer would God speak through human prophets. Now God was speaking in his Son. God was speaking and God in human flesh. The fullness of the revelation of God was on display because God had come in the person of Christ and now was on the scene. This is something brand-new. There had never been anything like this before and so there is this upheaval, or maybe better stated, there is this great step forward in the advance of the plan of God because Christ is now on the scene. Now God speaks in his Son. Magnificent day.

And what did the Son have to say? What did Jesus have to say once the spotlight was on him? It is word for word identical with the message of John the Baptist. Matthew 4:17, "From that time," after Jesus had experienced the temptations of the devil, he had gone about conducting his ministry, on chapter 4, verse 17, "From that time, Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Now the King is there, now the King speaks and what does he say to his people? What does he say to the nations as the King of the nations? What does he say to you here today in the audience, to you

over the live stream, to you who are hearing on subsequent media? What does he say? He says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Now, I don't know if you have ever thought about it as you read through the Gospel of Matthew, but a very simple question is worth asking: what does it mean to repent? What does the call to repentance mean? What is it about? What is its substance? What is its content? If you notice in Matthew 4:17, there is no explanation. There is no expansion. There is no clarification. There is no exposition. Why? Why is that? It's because Matthew 4:17 is a summary statement that represents the whole of the content of what Jesus was driving at. It is a summary statement that is waiting further explanation as you're going through the text and Jesus summarizes the thrust of his message with a single word, "Repent."

Now, for our purposes just to tie a little tag on it here, I'm going to give you a very simple definition of repentance that is more than adequate for what we're going to see in the rest of the message. It's important to define your terms if you're going to teach Scripture. Those of you that aspire after teaching in some time in the future, it is very important for you to define your terms so your audience knows exactly what you're talking about. That is part of clarity in teaching. To repent – write this down – to repent is to turn from sin to serve Christ the King. That's the simplest way that I can put it. There are more technical definitions but it will serve us well for what we have in front of us today. To repent is to turn from sin to serve Christ the King. There is a negative and a positive aspect to it that will fit in with what we're going to see a little bit later on. To repent is to turn in a negative sense away from sin, and in a positive sense, to turn to Christ and to embrace him; to follow him; to have this inner turning in your heart, in the core of your being, that says, "I have been a servant and a slave of sin and myself. Stop. I stop here. I turn away from that in order to embrace Christ and to follow him."

Now, as Jesus preached that message he drew devoted disciples and he attracted crowds of his own. Look at chapter 4, verse 23, "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people." Well, something like that gets around. Verse 24, "The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan." Jesus Christ was a sensation. This was sensational. God was in human flesh and he was exercising his power of healing and of ministry. Why? Not simply to make people better physically but to authenticate the verbal communication that he was in the process of giving. His miracles were not an end in themselves, they were designed to show that supernatural truth was now on the scene and that supernatural miracles verified and pointed to the supernatural teachings that Jesus gave.

Now, in the flow of Matthew's Gospel, you finish there at Matthew 4:25, you see the crowds are gathered around him, everybody is hanging on this man, as it were, and what comes next? Jesus has said, "Repent." The crowds are following him and what comes

next, remembering that up to this point there has been no definition in the text of what repentance is. This is so important for you to understand. What comes next is the Sermon on the Mount. What is the Sermon on the Mount? The Sermon on the Mount is the exposition of Jesus Christ on the doctrine of repentance. It is Christ telling us what the repentant life looks like. It is Christ exercising his authority now through his word over your own heart and saying, "This is what I call you to." And you can see the connection; there are markers in the text to help you see this.

Go back to Matthew 4:17, "Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Now look at Matthew 5:2, "He opened his mouth and began to teach them saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'" Do you see it? Do you see the link, that verbal link of the phrase "the kingdom of heaven" is designed to help you see that Jesus is now expanding on what was first introduced in a summary way in Matthew 4:17. Don't miss that. Verse 17, chapter 4, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and he opens the sermon saying, "Let me tell you about the kingdom of heaven."

He goes on and repeats it in verse 10 referring to the kingdom of heaven, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And on and on it goes. Go to Matthew 7:21, again, just seeing this phrase that links these things together. Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."

So Jesus says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and then you move right into the Sermon on the Mount and it is the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven. You are meant to see that this sermon is the explanation of the summary statement, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7, Jesus is explaining what he means when he commands men to repent.

Now, that leaves us with a wonderful question: what is the content of the call to repentance? If repentance is central to entering into the kingdom of heaven and if this is central to the message of Christ, you would expect it to be clear what he is after. You would expect there to be marks and posts that help us see, "Oh, I get it." And as you go through the Sermon on the Mount as we're going to do in coming months and we're just going to do it in an overview fashion today, I think that you can fairly summarize the broad call to repentance under two separate headings. Two separate headings. The call to repentance is, first of all, a call to righteousness, you could say, a call to holiness, number 1; and secondly, and this is what is so often neglected when anyone speaks on repentance, it is a call to blessing. Basically what we're doing here is this: we're going to look at the Sermon on the Mount in the coming half hour or so, we're going to look at it from a space shuttle view. We're going to go up however many miles the space shuttle operates at and you can look down and you can see the whole earth in your view of vision. We're going to go to a great height and look at the Sermon on the Mount in that great broad way and see what the primary themes are and then we start to see that the individual passages and the individual commands and exhortations fall within the two

categories of a call to holiness and a call to blessing. So it's just very essential for you to be able to break it down this way. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and that breaks down into two sub points: a call to righteousness and a call to blessing. And as we go through this now, you're going to be perhaps astonished if you've never seen this before and you've read the Sermon on the Mount many times and you say, "I never saw it like that. How could I miss it? It's right there on the surface." Well, that's why we look at these things together Sunday by Sunday.

When Jesus calls you to repent, what is he calling you to? First of all, he is calling you to holiness. He is calling you to righteousness. Christ in his call to repent is calling all men everywhere to a righteous life that reflects the character of God himself and we're going to see this right now. Look at Matthew 5:6, and we're just going to see verses on this theme. We'll come back to all of these in future days. Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." "Blessed" being a word that it says that divine favor rests upon this person. God has blessed a person like this. A person that has this characteristic is somebody who is under divine favor. And what is that divine favor? It's that ongoing hunger and thirst. Not in a physical sense for the things of this world, an ongoing unquenchable desire to live out, to know, to be transformed by the righteousness of God. Jesus says, "A person who wants that out of life is blessed." And you know how hunger and thirst work, don't you? It's a recurring ongoing desire in the physical realm. Hunger and thirst are satisfied, then they come back and they come back and they come back, and that is the way that Christian living is supposed to be. That is meant to be the defining desire of your existence as a believer in Christ, is to have this desire that above all other things, that I would manifest the righteousness of God and that I would experientially know that and express it with my life. That's what I want out of life is that. All of a sudden you're immediately confronted with all of the other competing motivations that you have in life. "Well, I want this. I want money. I want fame. I want glory. I want whatever. I just want to live in peace with my family." Well, you know, those things are all okay in their sphere but they're not primary. They're not defining. They can come and go. To the true disciple of Christ, the defining aspect, the nerve center of their existence is, "I desire the righteousness of God." God says, "Blessing rests on one like that."

That's not the only place that he says it and as you see this theme, you see it repeated over and over again. Matthew 5:20, Jesus says, "I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." There's that phrase again, kingdom of heaven, kingdom of heaven. You see that he is obviously talking about the summary statement from Matthew 4:17. This is so important to the proper interpretation of this sermon. Matthew 5:48, Jesus says, "Therefore you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 6:33, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you." Matthew 7:21, we come back to that again, the righteousness of God expressed in seeking the will of God. Verse 21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." Think about that verse and think about what it is saying and realize that in this call to righteousness, Jesus Christ is assaulting the citadel of human self-will. It is a call to yield your will and your heart

commitments and your convictions and everything that makes you you, to yield that over to him. This is a personal assertion of sovereign authority by a King that says, "I call you to righteousness as I define it." And the response is, "Yes, Lord, I yield."

Look at Matthew 6:10, right at the core of what we have come to know as the Lord's prayer. "Your kingdom come. Your will be done." You see, Christ does not save men so that they can continue on in autonomy and rebellion against him. Christ saves men in order to subjugate them, to bring them under his authority, and the true disciple of Christ embraces that, says, "That is exactly what I want. I honor you as King. I am your servant. Give me understanding that I might do your will and do it righteously."

You see, Christ did not come down to earth, Christ did not leave heaven above, Christ did not go through his public ministry, he did not suffer the agonies of the cross, he wasn't buried in a tomb, raised from the dead and ascended back into heaven, all of that wasn't designed so that somebody could pray a little sinner's prayer and keep on living in their rebellion and think that they were going to heaven. That's nonsense. You say, "Well, that's what the Baptist preacher down the street told me." Well, he lied to you. He did not tell you the truth. Maybe he didn't intentionally deceive you but it was a lie nonetheless. The call of the Gospel, the call of Christ, the call to repent, is a call to reorient your heart toward righteousness as he defines it and anyone who is unwilling to submit to the Lordship of Christ is still in their sins, I don't care how many times they have worn out the carpet walking up the front to an altar call. It makes no difference because the call of Christ is a call on the human heart at its deepest core. Righteousness. Righteousness. Righteousness. No one who is indifferent to righteousness should think that they're a Christian; that they have any share – listen, this is so clear and it is so obvious – no one who is indifferent to righteousness, no one who can live in sin without a pang of conscience, no one who cares nothing about the word of God, someone like that should not think that he has a part in Christ who says, "I call you to righteousness." Those things are just incompatible, they are mutually exclusive and we do people no favors when we mitigate that call to repentance.

Now let me show you something else just by way of summary; we won't look at all of the verses that apply to this. In the midst of the greatness of who the King is, and in the midst of the greatness of what his call is, a call to righteousness as he defines it, and the themes are so lofty and the person of Christ is so exalted, you might get the sense that, "Okay, I'm here in my earthly life and this is way up here and it's something separate, something esoteric, something in a different realm, in a different compartment of life." That would be the most serious mistake that you could ever make. That would be a complete failure to understand what Christ is saying and what he is calling you to when he calls you to repent. Do you realize that the Lord Jesus Christ is calling you to holiness in the midst of real life in a real world? That this call to holiness, this call to righteousness is a call in the middle of the grind and the dirt and the difficulty of present daily life? In the midst of your troubled relationships, in the midst of your financial difficulties, in the midst of your physical decline, Christ is calling you to holiness in the midst of all of it.

Now, I'm just going to summarize this. We'll look at verses in the future but as you walk through the Sermon on the Mount, what you find is the surpassing call to righteousness comes in the middle of things like this: Jesus calls you to godliness in a world of murder, anger, adultery, lust and divorce. In the midst of a world that is like that, he says, "You come out and be righteous. You come out and follow me from a world like that." He calls you to holiness in the midst of a world filled with lawsuits and lies and enemies and hypocrisy and false religion. He calls you to righteousness in light of coming judgment as we'll see at the end of the message. You see, this is not a message of escapism that somehow you come to Christ and then you are insulated from all the problems of life. No, no, quite to the contrary. Quite to the contrary. Christ says, "You will go through this world, you will live through these things, it may be difficult for you at times, but my call on your life is for you to have a heart that desires godliness in the midst of it." Jesus calls you to have a holy heart as a citizen of God's kingdom. So in the midst of all of the chaos, the confusion, the ever-manifest greater degrees of depravity being manifested about us, in the midst of disappointments inside and outside of your family, inside and outside of the church, inside and outside of your job, Christ says, "I call you to righteousness in the midst of all of it." He gives you a call that surpasses it all, that transcends it all, and yet at the same time informs it all. It's a call to righteousness. We'll see what he means by that incoming weeks.

I wish I could whistle but I can't but the Sermon on the Mount is as though Christ sticks his fingers in his mouth and whistles and calls his people, "Over here! This is where you are to be. Come hither. Come out and be with me." If you prefer, it's a trumpet call and the true people of God rally around that trumpet, they recognize the call of their Commander, they recognize the beckoning of their King and they say, "Lord, I am going after you. Let everybody else stay behind, I'm going with you. Your will be done, not mine."

You see, Christ comes and calls you, friend, out of the world. He comes and calls you to leave behind those affections and set your affections on him and on his kingdom. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness is the call and, beloved, understand, mark this because it will become very important in a moment, it's important now, what am I saying? I don't know what I'm saying. That Christ calls you – this is so important – he calls you out of the world to himself and as I like to say in the Sermon on the Mount – oh, mark this, I'm going to say this 100 times if I say it once – Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is teaching for keeps. He is teaching for keeps. He means what he says. Beloved, beloved, there is a phrase that I like to say just in general in counseling: words have consequences. What people say in their lives and what comes out of our mouths have consequences for life and relationships. Well, look, listen, multiply that by infinity when the Son of God speaks. When Christ speaks, there are consequences to what he says and the way that you respond or ignore or reject the words of Christ have great consequences. This call to righteousness is a surpassing call of great authority upon your soul by the one who made you in body, soul and spirit. It's a call to holiness.

Now, that's a wake-up call, and in a way that no human preacher could ever do, Christ makes that call to holiness which is so searching and so powerful and so pervasive, it

covers everything in life, your internal and external man: what you say, what you do, what you think, what your motives are. It's incredible. That's how high and lofty and deep and broad is the call to righteousness. But do you know what? That's just one part of the call, one half of the call, you might say, because as Christ calls you to repentance, beloved, he is simultaneously doing something else that is also woven throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Christ is not only calling you to holiness, he is calling you to blessing. That's the second point for those of you that are taking notes. You now have on the back of the bulletin a place to take notes and I encourage you to then make use of that.

Christ not only calls you to righteousness, he calls you to blessing. This is spectacular. To be called to righteousness by a King would be a great privilege and a great honor to respond to and to follow a righteous King, wouldn't it? Wouldn't it just be wonderful to know that you were a child of royalty, of righteous royalty at that, and that your privilege as you walk through life is to walk as a son of a King, a good and righteous King? That would be awesome. That would be enough to give us privilege and meaning that far surpasses the significance of our wisp of smoke of a life. That would be awesome. That would be enough. "God, thank you for the privilege of living for righteousness' sake." That would be enough. But in the unfathomable immeasurable greatness and glory of God, he didn't stop there. Our Lord Jesus is not merely a sovereign King, he is a kingly Shepherd who cares for his people and desires to inject untold favor into their lives. He issues a call to blessing.

My friend, especially those of you, maybe you young people who do not know Christ, you have rejected and spurned him, let me speak to you directly: the Lord Jesus Christ calls you through his word and he announces with authority this call to righteousness, but understand especially on the front end of your life, you're 21 and you're on the brink of starting to really get serious about following Christ, I want you to understand this and to get it straight in a hurry: he calls you in order to bless you. Jesus Christ calls you out of the world and to himself, not simply for the sake of righteousness but because it is his desire as a Good Shepherd to bestow favor on your life. He wants to dispense untold goodness upon you.

Let's state it simply: our Lord promises great blessing to you if you turn to follow him on his terms. What does Christ do? He points us in the Sermon on the Mount to the great spiritual resources at God's right hand. The richness of the promises of blessing in the Sermon on the Mount cannot be measured, they will not be exhausted through the unfolding of all of the halls of eternity as epic gives rise to new epic that gives rise to new era in eternity. Whatever the unfolding of eternity looks like, we're straining at the laments of human language because we don't exist in eternity, we exist in time, but ahead for the follower of Christ is an eternity of blessing, unended goodness, bliss and peace. And in all of the unfolding of forever and ever and ever, amen, there will be no exhausting the promises that Christ makes in the Sermon on the Mount. Nine times, nine times in the opening eight verses, Jesus pronounces blessing on the men and women of repentance.

Look at chapter 5, verse 3. Actually nine times in nine verses. In verse 3, he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn." Verse 5, "Blessed are the gentle. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." Blessing after blessing after blessing after blessing. Christ is saying there is divine favor, there is an inexhaustible storehouse of divine favor of those who respond to this call to repent and it is based on the full character, the full trustworthiness, the absolute faithfulness of a sovereign God. He says, "If you come to me, if you repent and come to me and give yourself to me, I will bless you in immeasurable, incalculable ways." And he goes and Jesus makes these promises throughout the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount.

Look at chapter 6, verse 4. We're just going to touch on these things without context. I just want you to see the promise. Verse 4, "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." He will pay you back. He will give you blessing. You will be in the realm of his marvelous favor. Verse 6, "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Verse 18, "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Verse 14 of chapter 6, "your heavenly Father will forgive you." Chapter 7, verse 7, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Do you notice the future tenses? Those are promises from God to his people that says, "This will happen in the realm of my kingdom. You will be blessed. You will be on the receiving end of divine favor. I will reward you. I will give things to you. I will honor you." Chapter 7, verse 11, "how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" And going once more to chapter 7, verse 21, "he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter the kingdom of heaven."

Step back, beloved, see the big picture. We're now looking out the window of the space center looking down on a magnificent word from our Lord and he says, "I call you to righteousness and I call you to righteousness, at the same time I call you to blessing." He calls you to righteousness in order to bless you. Better stated perhaps, he calls you to repent so that you would be on the receiving end of divine favor.

Look, the call to repentance is right. It is the only right thing to do when our sovereign Creator calls us that we would respond in obedience to him and say, "Yes, I repent." That's the only proper response. But when he also calls us to blessing and says, "I am going to out of the treasures of my goodness bestow eternal goodness and blessing and kindness on you," beloved, do you see that there is absolutely no excuse for anyone anywhere in the world at any time to reject the call to repent? You cannot reject the call to repent without defying divine authority and divine righteousness, and you cannot reject the call to repent without thrusting a sword in the midst of your own soul. You walk away, you reject the one source of good blessing for all of life in eternity, why would you do that? Why would you do that? There is no excuse for you if you hear the word of Christ and you walk away and say, "That's not for me." There's no excuse. That cannot be justified. It's not even in your own self-interest.

So what happens in the Sermon on the Mount? What's going to happen to us in the days to come? Well, this is what happens under the teaching of our Lord: Christ makes you conscious of your unworthiness because you realize that you do not measure up to the standard of righteousness to which he calls you, and yet at the same time, while you would think that might repel you and say, "Oh, I can't go there. I'm unworthy and that's just too painful," at the same time there is wrapped around that call to righteousness a call to blessing and Christ says, "No, come to me so that I can bless you." A call to righteousness and a call to his goodness. That's what Christ is saying when he says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Beloved, have you repented or have you been playing games? Beloved, welcome to the fork in the road. Every one of you are at a fork in the road. Whether you're a Christian or non-Christian, you're at a fork in the road. Christian, at this fork in the road, it's time for you to be serious. Christ is calling you out of the spiritual mediocrity perhaps that you've accepted until now, the indifference, the misplaced priorities, all of that stuff. Christ says, "I call you to righteousness and I call you to blessing." Christian, you're at a fork in the road with the rest of your Christian life. This calls you to say, "What is important to me?" You who have refused Christ until now, it's time to get serious. Christ calls you to holiness and promises you blessing. He offers himself to you and says, "Follow me." No conditions. A free offer of divine blessing awaits. Christ says, "Follow me. I will accept you." Why would you turn away?

And as you go through the Sermon on the Mount, beloved, it dwarfs you and the content of these things is humbling and you stand and you preach on the Sermon on the Mount, I can tell you from experience, and you start to feel really really small. This is not only humbling for those who hear, it is humbling for the preacher as well because you realize the significance of what is at stake. You see, those of you with the longest life expectancy in our midst have just a few short decades. Some of you, the time is even shorter and may be measured in days or weeks, not in long periods of time. And at the end, you see, we're all, as it were, we're standing on the brink of eternity as we hear the Sermon on the Mount and Christ having given us this teaching, makes no effort to hide what's at stake. This is of incalculable consequence for you, beloved, and I would be derelict in my duty as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ if I did not press this home on your heart. Christ is teaching for keeps. He is not playing games in this call to holiness, in this call to blessing. He's not playing games. The guys who like to ride up in rodeos in their church, they're playing games. Christ doesn't play games and he makes this plain as he closes the sermon. He doesn't hide what's at stake for you. What's at stake for you is life and eternity.

Look at chapter 7, verse 13. Christ does not give you an out here. Chapter 7, verse 13, as he has completed the main substance of his sermon, he says in verse 13, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." There aren't many people who really want to respond to a call to righteousness and a call to blessing. There aren't many people who

really, comparatively speaking, there aren't many who actually want to submit their will and yield themselves to a sovereign King. Jesus urges you, "Don't be among the many who reject, who choose the fork which seems to be broad and more comfortable going down through life with the masses." Jesus says, "Don't do that. Don't take that turn in the road. Stop! Stop, I beg you, and take the narrow way of the call to repentance," as Jesus names it out here in the Sermon on the Mount. He reinforces the point, beloved. I cannot, I cannot possibly overstate the significance of the things that we're talking about here right now because Christ has laid these things out in his word, in this sermon, and he says, "Here are the consequences that follow based on how you respond." You are, in a sense, you are choosing your destiny as you respond to the Sermon on the Mount. Christ makes that abundantly clear.

Look at Matthew 7:24, he says, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock." That's the promise of blessing to those who repent, they will survive the storms of divine judgment and God will carry them safely through because they honored his word, they received Christ in repentance and faith. For some of you, sadly, the passage that applies to you is the last two verses, verses 26 and 27, "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell - and great was its fall."

So beloved, I ask you one more time: have you repented? Are you following Christ like this, with righteousness being the defining desire of your life? Welcome to the fork in the road, my friend. Welcome to the fork in the road. Which path are you going to choose?

Let's pray together.

Father, give grace to everyone who has heard according to the need of their own heart. For those who are Christians, Father, and I thank you that we're in a room sharing together in the life of Christ, may this be an overflow of encouragement that says, "I see the marks of this divine life in my own soul and I thank God for the gift of righteousness and the gift of his blessing and now I can't wait to pursue it more closely as I walk out of this room." Give grace to those that belong to you in that way, O God.

Father, for those that have ignored, maybe never heard, have rejected Christ, refused him either through indifference or stubbornness or just misplaced priorities, that something on earth is more important than Christ, what kind of foolishness is that, God? Father, I pray that you would sober them up in a hurry, that the weight of the eternal consequences of the fork in the road that we find ourselves in as we enter into the Sermon on the Mount would cause them to flee to Christ for mercy, for grace, to say, "Lord, I turn from all that prior rebellion, I turn from my indifference and I humble myself and I receive you fully as God and King of my life." Father, let no one walk out without that being the spiritual reality in their hearts.

Sanctify to us the coming months of this Sermon on the Mount, O God. Bless it, sanctify it to us. Lord, may we come to the end of this time in a few months and look back and say, "We are completely different from what we had been. We went from one realm of glory to another one through the operation of your word on our hearts and in our midst." With a desire for righteousness, with hope in your promise of blessing, Lord Christ, we pray. Amen.