

Salt and Light

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Bible Text: Matthew 5

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At this time, I invite you to take out your Bibles and turn to Matthew 5. If you're using the Pew Bible, that can be found on page 809. We'll be reading Matthew 5:1-12. Hear the word of the Lord.

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. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

This is God's word.

Do keep your Bibles open at Matthew 5. We're going to come back to Isaiah. We've been working through the book of Isaiah and we put him on hold, really, for the summer and I've given him extra vacation time and told him to come back sometime in January. So between now and then we're going to look at the Sermon on the Mount because I don't think any passage of Scripture has been more misrepresented, misquoted or misunderstood than this sermon of Jesus. I also think that there is no passage of Scripture more relevant to us as a congregation, than this section of Jesus' teaching. There are some people, for example, who today don't see how the Sermon on the Mount applies to Jesus' people, to Gospel people. Some people who are not believers, they refer to the Sermon on the Mount as the summation of what their understanding of Jesus is and they'll sometimes say something very silly like this, they'll say, "The Jesus I want to know is the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount, not the Jesus of Paul," which only goes to show that they've

not read the Sermon on the Mount. Then there are those, as there were once in a church where I was pastor, who immediately, I announced that I was going to speak on the Sermon on the Mount and I was only about 24 at the time, left the church because they said the Sermon on the Mount is not for Christians, it's for Jews in the millennium and not for Christians today. Well, I hope you're not in that category. If you are, you may want to exit the building right about now.

But seriously, the Sermon on the Mount is, of course, Jesus speaking and therefore has absolute authority in the lives of those who are Jesus' people. Let me put it in its context in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew has set about to introduce us to Jesus as the Messiah and as you read the Gospel of Matthew, you will find that there is one expression that is used three times that punctuates the book and divides it into three major sections. You can see the first of them if you just glance down at your Bible and look at chapter 4, verse 17, "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" That verse marks a break from what has happened up to then and ends in chapter 4, verse 16, and now opens a new section that will run from there to chapter 16, verse 20. Up to that point, Matthew has introduced us to the identity of Jesus as the King, that is the Messiah King. From 4:17 through to 16:20, we see Jesus' authority as a priest. So his identity as a King, his authority as a prophet, rather and then in chapter 16:21 through 28:20, we see Jesus' superiority as the Lord of all and eventually at the end of the book, we see him sending out his disciples to make disciples of all the nations and bring them under the reign of Christ as the Messiah King.

So what Matthew has been doing then has been introducing people to Jesus. He's been introducing us to Jesus' message which is, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." You see, the kingdom of heaven, how close it is, when in verse 18, of chapter 4, Jesus calls people to follow him. "The kingdom of heaven is here, therefore, follow me," Jesus says. "I am the King, follow me." To follow him means what? It means to repent. What does repentance mean? What does the life of repentance look like? What is the shape of repentance? What is the character of a person who has repented? Well, that is the question that Jesus begins to address in chapter 5, verses 2 to 12. He's addressing it, do you notice, to his own. There are crowds of people who are coming to him in verses 23 to the end of chapter 4 and seeing the crowds, seeing that they recognize him as an authority figure, as a prophet, seeing that they see him as a kind of celebrity and have come to hear him, Jesus distinguishes between the crowds and his disciples and he sits down and his disciples come to him.

So if you see yourself this morning as a follower of Jesus, as a disciple of Jesus, as somebody who knows him or recognizes him to be the Messiah and to be the world's Savior, then Jesus is now going to speak to you. "He opened his mouth and taught them, saying, 'These words are for you. They're vital words for you.'" And he talks not only to his own people, he distinguishes his people from the rest, from the crowd and he talks about the kingdom. You'll find this word "kingdom" used in a couple of ways in the New Testament. You'll find it used of a universal kingdom of God: God reigns over everybody, everywhere, all the time. But here it's being used in a very narrow sense, in a particular sense: There are those who are part of this kingdom but not everyone is. There

are those who share the benefits of this kingdom but not everybody will. There are those who enter this kingdom but not everyone can.

So the reign of God can be terrifying to some because it spells disaster and it can be a blessing to others because it brings salvation. Don Carson in his commentary on Matthew, has us think of two concentric circles, one inside the other. The outside circle represents the universal reign of God in Christ over everything, everywhere, all the time, the universal reign of God. There is nothing that exists, angelic or human, material or otherwise, that is not in that universal reign of God. He rules over everything. But within the inner circle, that is a reference to the saving reign of God in Christ that embraces only Jesus' people, his elect, those who are believers, are included within this narrower sense of the kingdom about which Jesus is preaching. You can see that back in verse 17 of chapter 4, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." To be part of the kingdom of heaven, you have to repent. And so when he comes to describing his people in verses 3 to 10 particularly, verses 11 and 12 are an extension of verse 10, you'll notice that what distinguishes his people is this, that they are part of, they belong to the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven characterizes these people. Notice what he says, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It belongs to them. It doesn't belong to the world. It belongs to them, to these people.

So in these verses we're about to study together, verse 3 to verse 12, Jesus begins to delineate, to describe, to unpack for us what it means to be his people. I want you as you read these, to understand that he is describing elements all of which describe his people. This is not a supermarket. You cannot decide to pick this one and leave that one. This all belongs together. It is a composite picture of what it means to be a Christian. What does it mean to be a Christian? It means to belong, first of all, to the humble poor. Luke in his Gospel refers to the poor. Matthew expands it so that we understand precisely what Luke is referring to, it is the poor in spirit and that language that Jesus uses there, would immediately register with the people to whom he's speaking. This is language that was familiar to them from their understanding of the Hebrew Scripture. The poor that he's referring to are not the financially challenged though they might be, it's not the materially impoverished, though they might be, rather it's a reference to the spiritually pious. In Isaiah, for example, that we've been studying together, the thirsty are those for whom God provides rivers and fountains of satisfying water, Isaiah 41. The poor are those who are humble and contrite of heart and the amazing thing is that the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, makes his home in the hearts of the poor who are humble and contrite of heart, that's Isaiah 57 and Isaiah 62. And the poor, Isaiah says in Isaiah 61, have the good news of the Gospel preached to them and Jesus quotes that and applies it to himself and to his ministry and says, "Go and tell John the Baptist the poor have the Gospel preached to them." The Gospel is addressed to whom? It is addressed to those who repent because the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Calvin wrote, "He only who is reduced to nothing in himself and relies on the mercy of God is poor of spirit." In other words, what poor in spirit describes is a sense of our spiritual poverty before God. It is a sense, to use the language of the Lord's prayer, of our indebtedness to God, that we owe more to God than we could ever pay. It is a sense that

we have nothing to bargain with, nothing to plead before God. We have nothing in the presence of God. We are naked. There is nothing to cover us, nothing to clothe us, nothing with which we can negotiate in our relationship with God. We are spiritually poor. "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling."

And a Christian is someone who has come to see their spiritual poverty and in seeing their spiritual poverty, a Christian is someone, therefore, who mourns and receives the comfort of God. That is, they mourn, they grieve over the thing that causes their spiritual poverty, the indebtedness that leaves them spiritually impoverished in the presence of God. They mourn over their sin. They mourn over sin in themselves; they mourn over sin in the world and in other people; they mourn over the very existence and presence of sin in the world. And for those whose image of the Christian life is the fixed grin and the shiny teeth which you don't get here because I wasn't brought up in America or I would have perfect teeth obviously and the perfect smile. I'm here to remind you what you would be if you weren't American. Or a perpetual bubblyness of attitude, you're going to be disappointed by the fact that here is Jesus describing what a Christian is and he says, "A Christian is someone who feels empathy for the Psalmist when the Psalmist says, 'My eyes shed streams of tears because people do not keep your law.'" Jesus weeps over cities that reject him. Paul weeps over false teachers who are troubling the churches. John Stott writing on this says, "I fear we have angelical Christians by making much of grace, thereby make light of sin."

This is a serious business. Stott quotes of David Brainerd. David Brainerd, one of the great missionaries to North American Native Americans in the 18th century, a son in law of Jonathan Edwards, the first president of Princeton, who wrote in his diary this as a young man, he died about the age of 28, "In my morning devotions, my soul was exceedingly melted and bitterly mourned over my exceeding sinfulness and vileness." That was his personal diary. People applauded Brainerd for his holiness but, you see, in the presence of God, he grieved and he mourned over his sin because people who mourn over their sin are people who take sin seriously. That does not mean that someone who mourns over their sins is morose or miserable. They are serious but not necessarily solemn. They take sin seriously. They view it realistically. They grieve over it genuinely whether in themselves or in others but it does not diminish their joy in the Lord. Dr. Lloyd Jones says this, "The Christian is not superficial in any sense. He is fundamentally serious and fundamentally happy. The joy of the Christian is holy joy. The happiness of the Christian is a serious happiness."

This is the glorious paradox of the Christian life. The glorious paradox of the Christian life is that he or she holds intention both a high doctrine of sin on the one hand, and a high doctrine of joy on the other. That's why Jesus can say, "Blessed, what a happy state it is to be one who mourns over their sin." Why? Because the mourner over their sin is comforted by God. God speaks pardon into their ear; he comes close to them and he says, "My child, I have covered your sin. I have cleansed your sin. I have removed your sin as far as the east is from the west and I have put your sin in the depths of the sea and I put a sign up saying, 'No fishing in these waters.'" Comforted by God.

Those who are aware of the poverty of their spirit mourn over their sin and such people, therefore, are radically meek. You see, it's at this point that it all gets very countercultural. How does a believer conquer the world? Look at what Jesus says here, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." This is an amazing thing. How does a believer conquer the world? How does the believer inherit the world to come? How is it that Jesus' people will inherit the earth and possess the whole universe? Is it by asserting themselves, expressing themselves, promoting themselves, advertising themselves? Oh yes, we have to do that in the world, don't we, to get on? If you're going to be a politician, you have to put pictures of yourself up on walls so, therefore, you've got to be photogenic or don't even bother going into politics. You've got to be an actress, you've got to look good partly in order to make it in acting. We have to do that. That's the way the world works. You want to bring something of quality into it, of course, as a believer but that's the way the world works. It doesn't happen in the church, well, it ought not to happen in the church.

"Blessed are the meek." A meek person is a Christian person. A Christian person is altogether different from the world. That was the problem they had with Jesus. You remember their view of the Messiah was that when the Messiah came, it would be an absolutely worldly event. He would come and he would achieve greatness by political, personal, military means. His personality, his power, his armies, his ability to lead and go forward and marshal the movers and shakers to overthrow Rome, that's how they saw the Messiah. When Jesus came, he disappointed them and sometimes the church thinks that's the way we're going to win the world. We're going to win the world if we're able to marshal loads of people together, great wads of cash behind all our enterprises, numbers and statistics and influence and access to the leaders of power within the nation, that's the way forward and Jesus says, "It isn't that way for me. Not for my church. Not for my people." He regularly challenged that image of the Messiah and he said to the people, "I am meek and lowly of heart. My kingdom is not of this world." And here he turns to us and he says, "Blessed are the meek."

Do you see, meekness flows from these first two beatitudes? Being poor in spirit recognizes my spiritual poverty that leads me to mourn over my sin. Meekness, therefore, takes me deeper into what it means to be a Christian person. And meekness is once more difficult, more radical than I ever imagined. Those first two beatitudes have to do with how I see myself, this third beatitude has to do with how I allow other people to see me. You see, it's one thing for me to pray as we sometimes do here in our opening prayer of confession of sin, admitting to God that I am a miserable sinner. It is quite another thing for you to say to me, "You are a miserable sinner." Do you see? We bristle at someone saying something negative about us or about our lives. Oh, we're quite prepared to say it to God but we don't want anybody else to say to us and it's right at that point, you see, that this is where meekness challenges us. It challenges us to the root of the matter because meekness is letting other people say about us what we confess to God that we are. Isn't that a remarkable thing?

We bristle at this and yet that is precisely the point Jesus is making to us here and the meek person, therefore, is someone who does not stand up for their own rights. Abraham

for example, when he is given the land, do you remember by God, and he lets Lot choose first and Lot chooses the best part. Or Moses, Moses who was called in the Bible the meekest person alive. Meekness is the most unbelievable thing to say about Moses but you look at his life and you see here was a man who was prepared to kill someone to protect his people. He wasn't meek at that point. At the age of 40, he goes out into the desert, 40 years it takes for God to make Moses the meek person that he was to become. And you see in Moses a willingness to stand up to Pharaoh, the most powerful figure in the earth at that moment. He stands up to Pharaoh on behalf of the people of God. He risks his life for the people of God but when a little while later on, he's in the desert and the people of God are murmuring and moaning about Moses and they're complaining about him and they are complaining to God about him and they are complaining to each other about him and they're saying, "Do you see the mess we're in? It's all your fault, Moses. We were following you and you've got us here in the desert and there's no water and there's no food and there's no this and there's no that and we wish we were back in Egypt because it was so good there, remember, even though we were making bricks for the Pharaoh. It was far better than being here," and Moses never once, never once, never once, defends himself. He leaves God to do the defending. He is like a lion defending others, he is meek.

The Lord Jesus was like that, wasn't he? He intervened on behalf of those who were despised by the people: the woman taken in adultery; he reaches out to that Samaritan woman. He interferes in things in order to protect other people but what does he do to himself? When he's brought before the high priest, he's prepared to tell the truth. When he's brought before Pilate, he tells the truth. But when he's given the opportunity to defend himself, what does he do? He says nothing. He says nothing. The meekness of the Lord Jesus. Dr. Lloyd Jones says, "Meekness is a true view of oneself expressing itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others." And you will never be meek and I will never be meek until I see myself as a vile sinner. Meekness humbles us to the earth. A meek person does not boast of themselves, does not make demands for themselves, does not assert their status in life. To be meek does not mean to be weak but it does mean that you don't take yourself too seriously. Meekness punctures our sense of self-importance. Meekness squashes our arrogance. If a man were ?? they're probably not meek because the meek are small before God therefore they don't mind what people think of them or say about them because they know that God knows all and they are thankful for the mercy they have and they appeal to God for mercy.

The meek person is not hypersensitive about themselves or defensive of themselves. They don't jump to their own defense because they're not convinced that they are defensible. There is no self-pity. There is ultimately no one who can harm them. Sometimes they are embarrassed when people come along and feel sorry for them and offer them sympathy. Why? Because they assume that they have no rights because they see themselves as God sees them. John Bunyan puts it like this, "He that is down need fear no fall." If you're already down there, there's nowhere to fall to and the meek person sees themselves like that. You think of the Apostle Paul writing to that really screwed up church called Corinth and he could have blasted them out of the water with his rhetoric but instead, he rather appeals to them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. The

meek person like the Lord Jesus can suffer unjustly, may be slow to speak in their own defense, is quick to listen and learn from others and above all, they are prepared to leave their cause, their rights and their vindication to God and to that final day. I said about Moses earlier, it took 40 years in the desert to get Moses to that place where God stripped away all his sense of self-sufficiency, broke his pride and turned him into the meek person that God wanted him to be.

You see the counterintuitive thing here? It is the meek that inherit the earth. It's counterintuitive because you would think the meek would get nowhere, everybody would walk all over them. The fact is that they get everything, everywhere. The meek inherit the earth. The world to come belongs to them. The wicked may prosper, the wicked may get on but what they prosper with will turn to fine dust; it will run through their fingers like fine sand but the meek will inherit the earth. They will possess the land. They may have been disenfranchised or deprived or sidelined or marginalized by the world but they will possess everything. That's what Paul is getting at in 2 Corinthians 6 when he describes himself as having nothing but possessing everything.

How do I get to that place? I get to that place by being spiritually hungry. Look at verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled." I want you to look at those Beatitudes we've just noticed. God's word first of all, drives us into ourselves, to show us our spiritual property, to bring us to the place where we mourn over our sin. And then in mourning over our sin, do you see how God's word liberates us from ourselves? So we are quite happy for other people to think about us but we confess to God we are. But now God's word drives us out of ourselves towards God and other people. That's the movement of this passage so far: we're hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Hunger and thirst is longing and desire. We are longing and desiring to be right with God. Mary, the virgin in her song, links the spiritually poor with the spiritually hungry. God fills the hungry with good things.

The believer is someone who seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and you notice it is God's righteousness and at one level, that's the righteousness that God gives as a gift to those who believe in Jesus. Again, look at the flow of the thing. A person who is aware of their spiritual poverty and who mourns over their sin recognizes the fact that there is none righteous, no not one, then there is nothing you can do to qualify for righteousness in the sight of God. God sees us all as unrighteous. So what are they hungry and thirsty for? Well, they want to be righteous. They want to be right, they want the righteousness of God and that righteousness of God is this: Christ the righteous one suffers the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God and so first and foremost, this hungering and thirsting for righteousness is what drives a person who has seen their spiritual poverty and mourns over their sin and has now opened up for others to accept what others think of them, humbled in the sight of God, therefore, humbled in the eyes of others and who longs to be clothed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus.

But it's more than that. You don't stop there. This hunger and thirst for righteousness goes beyond that point of justification and it goes on to want not only to have that standing and status of righteousness, it longs that the life would be characterized by righteousness, that

my life would be a righteous life. This is the doctrinal heart of these beatitudes and it challenges the reason why you and I are here in church today. What are we wanting? What are we seeking? What are we hungry and thirsty for? What did you come for? Did you come because it was what you do on Sunday mornings? It's kind of boring out there, there is nothing else to do on a Sunday morning so that's why you came. Did you come because you wanted to be with lots of other people who are nice? Well, you came to the wrong place. Why did you come to church this morning? Did you come because you were hungry and thirsty for righteousness? Not just that status and standing before God that Jesus gives but righteousness in the sense of wanting your life to be characterized by the righteousness of God in Christ. Or to put it another way: you wanted to be free from sin; you want to positively be right with God; you want to be holy; you want to live for Christ like Christ. And if you came because you've only thirsted for once in your life recognized your spiritual poverty, you want the righteousness that God gives as a gift in the Lord Jesus. That's the good news of the Gospel. But if you're already a Christian and you've come this morning hungry and thirsty for righteousness, then you've come looking for something you can't get on your own. You can't feed yourself. You can't give yourself drink. You come to God because you need God to make you righteous. You need God's help to conform more and more and more to the law of God and to the word of God. You need the help of God. You're crying out to God for this help. That's why we come together and call upon the name of the Lord Sunday by Sunday. This is the moment where together as God's people, feeling the intensification of God's presence because we're altogether in one place on the Lord's day, that we call to Almighty God, "Give us the grace that we do not have in ourselves to be righteous."

It is those who hunger and thirst for righteousness that are satisfied. Satisfied immediately. When they want that first righteousness that God gives as a gift so that we're able to say,

"The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Savior's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view."

But also, the satisfaction of those who discover that salvation that is real and right and final when I first believe, begins to kick in as God not only gives me that final salvation but begins to save me from myself, save me from my indwelling sin, deliver me from the old man that dominates my life. People who come hungry and thirsty without righteousness want more of Christ. Is that what you came for this morning? You wanted more of Christ? You wanted more of holiness? You wanted more of Jesus? You wanted to be more like Jesus? You longed to be more like Jesus?

Do you understand that people are hungry and thirsty for righteousness not only want righteousness to cover them for their salvation and to characterize them in the way they live their life but they also want righteousness to concern them as they see unrighteous things happening to other people. They want righteousness to concern them so that they are prepared to defend as Jesus did, those who were being treated unjustly and

unrighteously, to defend the unborn, the babies, the children, the young people, the vulnerable from being abused, neglected, marginalized. You want the right thing to be done. I've been reading on the blogs of high profile church leaders who have used their style in an authoritarian way and have abused members of their congregation and so on. One particular individual, they have high profile friends who gather around them, these high profile people, celebrities within the church, have high profile friends who gather around them and they urge us to be praying and supporting this person who has abused his power in the church. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness want to say, "Well, yes we'll pray for them but we want to pray for the people they abused. We want to pray for the people who are under that authoritarian regime. We want to pray for those who are walked all over, whose money was misused in those churches for ungodly ends. We want to pray for those people too." That's righteousness. Righteousness applies to everybody. It applies to the people who are somebody and the people who are nobody. Those who have a concern for righteousness want to see righteousness done in practice and I need to ask myself, "Am I hungering and thirsting for righteousness?"

Where am I to go? I'm to go to Christ. Where am I to find help? I have to go to Jesus. He gives grace. And this is the turning point, really, of these Beatitudes. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness then begins to impact other people, you see. I've become merciful toward other people. I've seen my spiritual poverty. I know my sin and mourn over it. I long for Christ's righteousness to cover me but also to characterize me and to concern me in the way in which I deal with other people and, therefore, I am merciful to others. Mercifulness is the opposite of spiritual superiority. I am merciful to others because I have been shown mercy. What Jesus is describing here, you see, has to do with being rather than doing. He hasn't talked about any doing things yet, this is all being things up to now but now we're to be merciful. Mercifulness is something you show to someone who has done something to you personally. Mercy is not a precondition to being shown mercy by God, rather it is an evidence that you are aware of the mercy of God. A Christian person shows mercy, a non-Christian person is a merciless person.

Mercy is not grace. Grace is a loving response to those who deserve wrath. Mercy is a loving response to those who have a need. They need help; they are miserable; they need you to encourage them. Mercy does not stop at sympathy, mercy shows sympathy. Mercy reaches out to touch and help those who have real need like the Samaritan, the good Samaritan. Being merciful to others answers to my sense of spiritual poverty. I understand my own heart, I understand the mercy God has shown me and when I look at other people, even other people who have done me harm, I recognize that these people themselves are dupes of Satan. The god of this age has blinded their minds to the truth. I regard them in the grip of the evil one yet yes, they're accountable for their actions, yes, they're responsible for what they do but nonetheless, I see them in their need. Mercy reaches out to them.. Even when they're mistreating you, you show them mercy.

Mercy requires purity of heart. In the Bible, the impure heart is both uncleansed and undecided. Actually, more undecided. The double minded man is unstable in all his ways. To have a pure heart is to have a heart that is engaged with one thing: it is focused, it is uncompromisingly dedicated to Christ. "Who can ascend the hill of the Lord?" asks the

Psalmist in Psalm 24. "Those who have clean hands and a pure heart." To have a pure heart, then, is to have a single eye to the glory of God. A single eye to God's glory that God should be honored, God should be glorified throughout the earth. To live for God's glory in the world. Those who are merciful, you see, are merciful because their eye is on God, not on themselves. Their eye is on God and not on others. Their eye is on God. Because their eye is on God, the pure heart, those people become peacemakers in the world. Peacemakers, you notice, enter into God's covenant blessing. They are children of God. Literally, they are sons of God. That is, they have the character and the nature of their Father. In Hebraisms of the period, the sons of God applies to both men and women and it has to do with the nature; they take on something of the nature of God and God is a peacemaker. The God of peace, he's referred to, makes peace by the blood of Jesus' cross. He gives to the church the message of reconciliation. What is that message? We are to preach peace to those who are near at hand and those who are far away. Peacemaking starts with a proclamation of the Gospel of peace. The church is to proclaim that Gospel to anybody and everybody offering the terms of how it may be that a rebel in arms opposed to God, might be reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

But we not only proclaim peace, we have to protect peace among ourselves. The peace of God, the peace that God is given to us, the peace that we now have with God, becomes the referee that blows the whistle on any action or word that might injure the peace of the body of Christ. That doesn't mean that we cannot disagree. It doesn't mean that there is a one size fits all approach to Christian living but it does mean that the word of God dictates what we believe and how we behave. Peacemaking is not an alternative to the responsibility to expose false doctrine or bad behavior, those are responsibilities that are imposed upon the church in other places but protecting the peace of the church, the peace of God, is the very cord he uses to bind the people of God together. And how can I be a peacemaker in the church? I'm a peacemaker in the church when I insist on not viewing everything that happens that I don't like in relation to myself. Once I see something going on and I see it only from the perspective of me, I will begin to sow the seeds of division. I will disturb the peace of the church.

Now these people, Jesus says, these people, these radically minded people, these people who are his disciples, these people who know what repentance means, these people, Jesus says, will be persecuted both by a corrupt church and by the world. They will be persecuted. Wouldn't you think that merciful people and peacemaking people would be applauded by the world? But in fact, they're not. Notice what Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake," that is, for having been made right with God through Jesus, that exclusive relationship. for pursuing righteousness in their own character and behavior, for being concerned about righteousness in the world, they are being persecuted for it. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Now, why is that? It's because of the context of Matthew. These people are Jesus' people and Jesus says, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." That's the way it is. The world is in rebellion against God and Christ. It doesn't usually realize how rebellious it feels until it bumps into a Christian person. Sinclair Ferguson puts it like this, "Real loyalty to Jesus creates friction in the hearts of those who pay him only lip

service." But do you see, pursuing righteousness disturbs people's consciences. When you speak the word of God, people whose consciences are pricked will invariably think you're speaking to them. Isn't that the way it is? "He was getting at me." Sometimes people say that in a good way and sometimes they say it in a bad way but invariably the preacher is unaware of it, you're unaware of it, but if it touches their conscience or their heart, they are aware of it. The world is terrified about people who are pure in heart because those people have a single eye to the reality that God is their only audience. Oh yes, other people are watching you but the person who is meek, the person who is pure in heart is most conscious that they live under the eye of God and that God is their audience and they are performing for God. And there is nothing that terrifies people like someone who knows they have nothing to lose because they put all their eggs in the one basket of God. Those people terrify the world and a worldly church because there is nothing you can do to them. There is nothing you can say about them that will make them look as bad as they know themselves to be before a holy God. Do you see? And there is nothing you can do to them because their final eye is to God alone and they live with a wide-open sense that ultimately their life is lived to God. They have this vertical dimension so there is nothing the world can do to these people or say about these people that will ultimately unsettle these people because they fear God.

Integrity challenges the moral indifferentism of our age both inside and outside the church. Courage challenges the moral compromise of our day. Don't get me wrong, Jesus is not talking here about being charged because you broke the law or did something wrong. Remember, Peter put it's like this, "Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evil doer or a meddler but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God." Jesus says suffering for righteousness' sake. Notice by the way, the persecution there is not just the beheading that's going on in Iraq. Jesus expands it in verse 11, "Blessed are you when others revile you. They mock you. They misrepresent you. They misreport you. They revile you. They persecute you. They utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." Jesus says, "That's what persecution looks like." It may look like the beheadings and it may look like the firing squads but it can also look like the ongoing campaign of disinformation that the world or a worldly church or other people direct against you. Jesus says that's par for the course. I want you to notice that this Beatitude is part of the picture of what a Christian is. A Christian will get this. If you haven't had it yet, you will get it. It will come your way. It is part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian. It is an indispensable aspect. Don't go out of your way to get it, by the way. I'm not urging you to go out there and be rude to everybody so that they persecute you. It will come your way invariably. Be ready for it. Be ready for it. Don't be surprised by it. One way or another, it will come to us. It may be fierce or it may be subtle and maybe in your face, maybe behind your back.

Well, here is Jesus' description of his people and I want you to notice what he says about these people. They are blessed. The Greek word is makarios, they are happy. Not in the sense of that we usually use the word, that's why I don't really like translating the word "blessed" with the word "happy." Happiness is too subjective a word. It's kind of to do what I feel today: bright or down or up or whatever it might be. But the kind of thing

that's being described here is a very objective state of being under the blessing of God, that umbrella of his care for us, his provision for us, his delight in us.

Ultimately Jesus' people are blessed with the kingdom of heaven. That promise wraps around all the others and he's pointing us to the future. We are now but he's pointing us to the future, a day when he shall appear, when our aspirations and our hunger and thirst will be satisfied and we will be like him on that day. We're not perfectly like him today but we will be like him on that day for we shall see him as he is.

Let's pray.

Father, we pray that you would please take your word and we pray that you would make it like a hammer in our hearts but also like the soothing ointment of your comfort to our souls. We pray that we be more like Jesus, more like Jesus' people, find out more what it means to live a life of repentance for when in the words of Martin Luther, when our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ said, "Repent," he intended that the entire life of a believer be one of repentance. We pray that you would hear our cry to you for righteousness to cover us, righteousness to characterize us, righteousness to concern us. In Jesus' strong name we pray. Amen.