

RIGHTEOUSNESS

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: MATTHEW 5.13-20



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

T . M . M O O R E

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Sermon on the Mount: Righteousness: Matthew 5.13-20
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Matthew 5.13-20: Introduction

Having proclaimed hungering and thirsting for righteousness as a defining mark of those who are blessed in the Kingdom of God, Jesus proceeds to unpack that virtue and show why it defines the essential character of the Kingdom of God.

The people of Jesus' day were familiar with the idea of righteousness. They had a whole class of people who loved to parade theirs before the public in a wide variety of ways. But Jesus explains that this is not what He has in mind, nor what life in the Kingdom requires.

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We hope you find this study of Ecclesiastes a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Salt of the Earth

Pray Psalm 24.1, 2.

The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell therein.
For He has founded it upon the seas,
And established it upon the waters.

Sing joyously Psalm 24.1, 2

(Foundation: [How Firm a Foundation](#))

The earth is the Lord's, as is all it contains;
the world and its peoples He daily sustains.
He founded it fast on the seas long ago,
and bid gentle rivers throughout it to flow.

Read Matthew 5.1-13; meditate on verse 13

Prepare.

1. To what does Jesus liken His followers?
2. What are they supposed to do?

Meditate.

Having explained that righteousness is one of the aims and aspects of life in the Kingdom of God (cf. Rom. 14.17, 18), Jesus now turns to a somewhat fuller explication of the nature and power of righteousness (vv. 13-20).

He begins in a way that will characterize much of His teaching. He uses a metaphor. The beauty of metaphors is that they invite us to take something unfamiliar and think of it in more familiar terms. Metaphors appeal to both the mind and the heart; they are to be understood, but also to be enjoyed and embraced.

Being a citizen in the Kingdom of God is a fairly abstract idea at one level. Jesus has already outlined the most characteristic aspects of life in the Kingdom. Kingdom citizens mourn for their sins; they keep focused on God in His purity; they work to be righteous and to show mercy and peace; and they prepare themselves to rejoice whenever anyone reviles or otherwise persecutes them. And, at all times, they have an eye to their home beyond this space/time framework, in the Kingdom that exists in its fullness in the world to come.

Now Jesus zeroes in on righteousness. He says it's like salt. Or rather, He says that citizens of the Kingdom, who have as their *aim* growing in righteousness, are like salt. We are the salt of the earth. We have been invested with a value and a power as citizens that can only result in one of two outcomes. Either we "season" the earth, or we will be "thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." There's no middle ground. There is no place for those who are the salt of the earth to simply sit in the shaker, enjoying the company of their fellow salt crystals, with no intention of fulfilling any larger calling. Sooner or later, salt that does not season is salt that will be thrown out.

The application Jesus makes here is salt as a savory seasoning (the meaning of the Greek verb, *be seasoned*). Salt brings out the flavor of things, making them taste even better. Believers are the salt of

the earth. The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. He made it all good, but at present, it groans and travails under a burden of sin (Rom. 8.20-22). Everything on the earth and in it has rich potential for good, for expressing that which refracts and reflects the very character of God. But the environment groans – from abuse, neglect, and indifference. Species die. Forests are depleted. Streams and lake are strangled by pollution. Human culture – also fraught with potential to glorify God (Acts 14.17) – is likewise in a period of decay. Consider the state of the arts, music, film, literature, and other cultural forms in our day, not to mention the vast wasteland areas of the Internet and the increasingly dehumanizing educational and political systems. These all have potential for good; but they are becoming unpalatable to God, and should be to His people as well. Our calling is to salt these areas – the whole earth and everything in it – with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, so that beauty, goodness, and truth might once again flourish throughout the earth.

Salt had another use in Jesus' day. It was a preservative for meats. Thus, not only does salt *bring out* the inherent goodness of things – a goodness put there by the grace of God – it also *preserves* the goodness that exists, so that it will not quickly decay. We are the salt of the earth. You are the salt of your Personal Mission Field.

The righteousness to which we're called is not exhausted in personal ethics. It extends to cultural transformation, the care of creation, and the rebuilding of institutions so that they honor God and do good work (cf. Rom. 13.1-4). We are the salt of the earth! And because we have neglected "the earth and its fullness" as a proper focus of our Kingdom-and-glory calling (1 Thess. 2.12), all its fullness is falling to the decay of sin, and it groans and travails, waiting and yearning to experience the freedom we have in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.

Seeking righteousness means fulfilling our calling as the salt of the earth – and all its fullness.

Reflect.

1. What does it mean for you to be the salt of the earth?
2. How can Christians salt relationships in their Personal Mission Field?
3. What can we do to salt other aspects of the earth and its fullness?

Why must you be salt? Jesus says in effect: "You are accountable not only for your own life but also for that of the entire world. I am sending you not to one or two cities, nor to ten or twenty, nor even to one nation, as I sent the prophets. Rather, I am sending you to the entire earth, across the seas, to the whole world, to a world fallen into an evil state." For by saying, "You are the salt of the earth," Jesus signifies that all human nature itself has "lost its taste," having become rotten through sin. John Chrysostom (344-407), The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 15.6

Use me to salt the earth and its fullness today, O Lord, especially as I...

Pray 24.3-10.

God takes care of His earth by the clean hands and pure hearts of His saints. Pray that He will use you as salt in your Personal Mission Field today.

Sing Psalm 24.3-10.

Psalm 24.3-10 (Foundation: [How Firm a Foundation](#))

Oh, who may ascend to the Lord's holy place?

And who may appear to His glorious face?

All they who are clean in their hearts and their hands

and true in their souls with the Savior shall stand.

A blessing all they from the Lord shall receive
who seek Him and on His salvation believe.
For these are His people, the children of grace,
who earnestly, eagerly seek for His face.

O lift up your heads, all you gates of the soul,
for the Savior would enter and render you whole!
The Lord strong and mighty in battle draws nigh;
He rules in His glory above us on high.

O Who is this King, Who approaches our gate?
His might is before us, His glory is great!
This King is the Lord of all glory above,
Who comes to indwell us in mercy and love!

2 Light of the World

Pray Psalm 97.10-12.

You who love the LORD, hate evil!
He preserves the souls of His saints;
He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.
Light is sown for the righteous,
And gladness for the upright in heart.
Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous,
And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.

Sing Psalm 97.9-12.

(Darwall: [Rejoice, the Lord is King!](#))

All you who love the Lord, despise sin's wicked ways!
Praise Him Who guides us by His Word through all our days.

Refrain v. 9

Beyond, above all gods and nations be exalted, God of love!

Read Matthew 5.1-15; meditate on verses 14, 15.

Prepare.

1. How does Jesus describe His followers in these verses?
2. What does He expect of us?

Meditate.

Light is an image frequently associated with Jesus, and with good reason. He is the light of the world (Jn. 8.12). His coming to earth brings light to expose sin and illuminate the darkness (Jn. 3.19-21; 1 Jn. 2.8). By the light of Jesus, people come to the truth of God and are saved. Jesus is the Morning Star, Who dawns to bring the new day of salvation to the world (2 Pet. 1.19). We are familiar with all these applications of light to Jesus, and we know they are most appropriate.

But Jesus says to us that *we* are the light of the world! How can this be?

I'm sure those words must have startled the people who heard them. But Jesus was again drawing on Old Testament revelation to remind them of God's promises, and to establish Himself as the Bringer of those promises to all who would follow Him. For the righteousness, for which Kingdom citizens hunger and thirst, has the effect of making them shine like the noon day sun: "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday" (Ps. 37.6). Righteousness is God's doing, and when He does it, we shine like light, and like the sun when it casts no shadows. But we must commit our way to the Lord, and trust in Him, for only then will He bring forth in us the righteousness for which we hunger and thirst (Ps. 37.5; Prov. 4.18).

Jesus pictured His followers as a well-lit city on a hill (Matt. 5.14), shining its light into the dark valleys below (cf. Mic. 4.1-8). When we live according to the holy and righteous and good Law of God (Rom. 7.12), the Light of Jesus in us shines into the darkness of the world, illuminating the way of salvation, and showing the character of the Kingdom of God. But we must let our lights shine, and not try to conceal the fact that we live by truths and walk in paths other than those pursued by our secular age (Matt. 5.15; cf. Ps. 1).

We are the light of the world as those in whom the light of Jesus has come to dwell, and through whom the light of Christ shines on the world. We must hold our lamps high before the dark world, that any who may be seeking a way out of the darkness can now to come to us, so that we may tell them about Jesus.

Reflect.

1. In what ways do believers function as lights to the world?
2. What is our responsibility as bearers of the light?
3. How should we expect to respond to the light of Jesus shining in us?

For, illumined by his very own self who is the true and eternal light, they too become light within the darkness. For since he himself is the sun of righteousness, he rightly also calls his disciples "light of the world." Through them, as if through shining rays, he poured the light of his knowledge on the entire world. For by showing the light of truth, the Lord's disciples made the darkness of error flee from people's hearts. Chromatius (fl. ca. 400), Tractate on Matthew 19.1-2

Shine Your light on me, Lord Jesus, and send me forth as the light of the world today as I...

Pray 97.1-9.

Pray that the Lord's Presence will be known through you today, as you let your line shine in all the places and on all the people in your Personal Mission Field.

Sing Psalm 97.1-9.

Psalm 97.1-9 (Darwall: [Rejoice, the Lord is King!](#))

Rejoice, the Lord is King! O earth, lift up your voice.

Be glad, you islands, shout and sing: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Refrain v. 9

Beyond, above all gods and nations be exalted, God of love!

His just and righteous throne 'mid clouds and darkness stands;

His fiery wrath consumes His foes in every land.

Refrain

Earth trembles at the sight of Jesus' holy face;

the mountains melt before His might and praise His grace.

Refrain

The heav'ns above declare His glorious righteousness.

and tribes and peoples everywhere; His Name confess.

Refrain

While Zion gladly sings, let all be brought to shame

who to vain idols worship bring and scorn His Name.

Refrain

3 Lighting the Way to Glory

Pray Psalm 37.4-6.

Delight yourself also in the LORD,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring *it* to pass.
He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,
And your justice as the noonday.

Sing Psalm 37.4-6.

(Neumark: [*If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee*](#))

Delight yourself in God's salvation; He'll give you all your heart's desire.
Commit to Him your every station, and His good purpose will transpire.
Your righteousness a blazing light He will bring forth against the night.

Read Matthew 5.1-16; meditate on verse 16.

Prepare.

1. To what end does Jesus shine His light in and through us?
2. What is our responsibility for seeing this happen?

Meditate.

In this verse, Jesus clarifies His metaphor from verses 14 and 15: The light stands for good works (even *beautiful* works). The light that is in us shines through us good works, that is, works that refract the light of Christ in loving service to others. Our righteousness is supposed to be a blazing light before the people in our Personal Mission Field. But it is not enough that people *see* our good works.

Jesus says we must be so diligent, so focused, so thorough, and so open about good works, that people will see them *and* give glory to God. That is a tall order, indeed. Our goal is not to impress people with how good *we* are, but how good *God* is. Following the example of Jesus, we must tie our good works to true words, and be always ready, when people remark our good works, to give thanks to God, and to let them know that our good works are merely His instruments for bringing grace to the world.

The righteousness for which we hunger and thirst in the Kingdom of God is not merely a disposition of the soul. Our righteousness works out in good works, like those Jesus did, to bring mercy and peace to our world, and to provoke others to seek the hope that can be theirs in Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3.15). We must not fear to talk about Jesus with the people around us, nor to explain the ways His love reaches us, and reaches through us to touch others.

We may incur some form of persecution by so doing, but God will be glorified in our witness nonetheless. And when we receive their retorts and harrumphs with a smiling face and joy in our hearts, the Presence of Christ shows through us, and we will know His blessing (Matt. 5.11, 12).

We must prepare to *let* our light shine. Study to understand what good works are, and what they would look like as you go about in your Personal Mission Field (Rom. 7.12; Matt. 22.34-40). Plan to

do good works (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17). Go out of your way, if necessary, to be a channel of God's grace to those around you. Your good works will beautify your Personal Mission Field with the light of Jesus Christ. Imagine what the world would be like, if all Christians hungered and thirsted for righteousness in this way.

Reflect.

1. The Law of God teaches us what is holy and righteous and good. What role should the Law have in helping us let our light shine through good works?
2. How would you counsel a new believer to plan good works for each day?
3. What can we do to make sure God is glorified in the good works we do for others?

That person places the lamp under a bushel who obscures and conceals the light of good teaching with earthbound interests. Rather, one should place the truth up high "on the lampstand." That indicates the light that shines as a result of bodily service, so that it is presented to believers through their embodied ministry. In this way our voices and tongues and other operations of the body are conveyed into good works by those who are learning. Augustine (354-430), Sermon on the Mount 1.6.17

Help me to shine Your light today, Lord, because I see opportunities for good works in...

Pray Psalm 37.7-9, 34-40.

Wait on the Lord, and ask Him to give you strength to keep His way. Keep your eye on the promises of God, and ask Him to show you what righteousness and blamelessness must look like in all your activities today.

Sing Psalm 37.7-9, 40.

Psalm 37.7-9, 34-40 (Neumark: [*If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee*](#))

Rest in the Lord and wait on Jesus; fret not at those who practice sin.

Forsake all wrath till anger ceases; let anxious fears not enter in.

The wicked perish from the Lord, but they are blest who heed His Word!

Wait on the Lord, His way observing, and He will lift you up on high.

Those prone to wicked ways preserving, your eyes shall see cast down to die.

The blameless man shall stand upright, for God preserves him by His might!

Salvation comes from Christ our Savior; He is our strength in time of need.

On us does He bestow His favor, who all His holy judgments heed.

He is our help in troubled times; our refuge He, in Him we hide.

4 Fulfilling the Old Law

Pray Psalm 19.7, 8.

The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple;
The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord *is* pure, enlightening the eyes...

Sing with a grateful heart Psalm 19.7, 8.

(St. Christopher: [*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*](#))

The Law of God is perfect, His testimony sure.
The simple man God's wisdom learns, the soul receives its cure.
God's Word is right, and His command is pure, and truth imparts;
He makes our eyes to understand; with joy He fills our hearts.

Read Matthew 5.1-18; meditate on verses 17, 18.

Prepare.

1. Did Jesus think the Law of God was no longer valid?
2. How much of the Law did Jesus consider to be valid?

Meditate.

The apostle Paul insisted that the Law of God is righteous (Rom. 7.12). That lines up perfectly with Jesus' teaching about the Law in this section, where He is expanding on the idea of righteousness. If we want to know what righteousness looks like, all we have to do is read the Law of God.

Jesus came to fulfill the Law. He did this in two ways. First, He completely obeyed it, without failing in one jot or tittle. Second, He bore the judgments of the Law of God for us, who cannot fulfill the Law of God, although we are expected to obey it. All the Law is fulfilled in Jesus, but not so that we can regard it as having passed away, or that we need no longer obey it. All of our salvation is fulfilled in Jesus; but that doesn't mean everyone will be saved. Only those who fulfill their end of what God requires – repentance and faith in Jesus – will know the salvation of the Lord. And only those who work out their salvation in fear and trembling, day by day, will know more of our great salvation. Jesus' fulfilling the Law shows us what our responsibility is as well. We work to fulfill the Law, not to *be* saved, but because we *are* saved, and seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God as the defining priority in life (Matt. 6.33).

All the apostles are agreed that we are still in the process of fulfilling the Law according to our part (cf. Rom. 3.31; Jms. 2.10-12; 1 Jn. 5.1-3; etc.). By obeying the Law, Jesus showed us just how important the Law is, not how irrelevant – as some Christians today seem to think. By neglecting the Law, we encourage lawlessness (which leads to a lack of love, Prov. 28.4; Matt. 24.12), and we hinder the efficacy of our prayers (Prov. 28.9).

The Law and the Prophets teach us how to love God and our neighbors (Matt. 22.34-40). Why would God ever want these to be neglected or ignored? Even the smallest details of the Law (jots and tittles) have power to teach us how to love God and our neighbors. And good works of love are the hallmark of true righteousness.

Reflect.

1. How did Jesus fulfill the Law? How should you fulfill it?
2. We're not saved by the good works of the Law; but we're not saved without them. Explain.
3. What would you say to a fellow believer who said we don't need the Law of God anymore?

The Son of God, who is the author of the law and the prophets, did not come to abolish the law or the prophets. He gave the people the law that was to be handed down through Moses, and he imbued the prophets with the Holy Spirit for the preaching of the things to come. Therefore he said, "I have come not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them." Chromatius (fl. ca. 400), Tractate on Matthew 20.1.1-2

Show me how to delight and walk in Your Law today, O Lord, as I...

Pray Psalm 19.9-14.

Thank God for His Law – the Ten Commandments and the various precepts, rules, testimonies, and statutes that clarify and explain how the Commandments apply to our lives. Ask Him to help you delight in His Law, and in all His Word.

Sing Psalm 19.9-14.

Psalm 19.9-14 (St. Christopher: [*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*](#))

The fear of God is cleansing, forever shall it last.

His judgments all are true and just, by righteousness held fast.

O seek them more than gold most fine, than honey find them sweet;

Be warned by every word and line; be blessed with joy complete.

Who, Lord, can know his errors? O keep sin far from me!

Let evil rule not in my soul that I may blameless be.

O let my thoughts, let all my words, before Your glorious sight

Be pleasing to You, gracious Lord, acceptable and right!

5 Kingdom Greatness

Pray Psalm 119.1-4.

Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
You have commanded us
To keep Your precepts diligently.

Sing joyfully Psalm 119.1-4.

(Ode to Joy: [God All Nations Sing Thy Glory](#))

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, all who walk within God's Law,
who, His testimonies keeping, seek Him, filled with joy and awe.
These are they who, no wrong doing, ever walk within God's ways.
Lord, Your precepts You command us; we would keep them all our days.

Read Matthew 5.1-19; meditate on verse 19.

Prepare.

1. Who are least in the Kingdom of heaven?

2. Who are great in the Kingdom of heaven?

Meditate.

Jesus could hardly be more clear about the importance of the Law of God. He fulfilled it, and He expects His followers to walk the same path (1 Jn. 2.1-6). Those who break even the least of God's commandments – whether willfully or in ignorance – hinder their ability to realize more of the Kingdom of God, and its purity, righteousness, mercy, peace, and joy. Moreover, by failing to keep the Law, they cause others to stumble by their example. Even worse is intentionally to teach that we need not heed the commandments of the Lord. Thus lawlessness spreads, and with it, lack of love (Matt. 24.12).

If your aspiration is to be merely least in the Kingdom of heaven, then you're missing Jesus' point here. When He calls us to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6.33), He does not mean that we should do so a little bit, or when it's convenient, or if we feel like it and aren't otherwise too busy. Life in the Kingdom demands our full-time attention and effort; we seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God *first*, as the defining motif of everything else we do.

But we will not realize all the Kingdom promises apart from learning, obeying, and teaching the Law of God.

Kingdom greatness – flourishing and abounding in the character and power of the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 4.20) – is directly connected to obedience to God's Law. We must learn the Law, meditating in it throughout the day (Ps. 1), and we must work out our salvation in obedience to it (Phil. 2.12). As we do, submitting thus to the rule of King Jesus, the reality of that rule comes to us and through us,

and His Kingdom advances on earth as it is in heaven.

Seek the Kingdom, and seek to be great in the Kingdom. Kingdom greatness is involved with serving others in love (Mk. 10.41-45), and we cannot do that effectively apart from the Law of God.

Reflect.

1. Why should we seek to be great in the Kingdom of heaven?
2. Why is the Law of God so important for life in the Kingdom of God?
3. What can you do to become more familiar with and obedient to the Law of God?

Whoever sets aside "one of the least of the commandments" of the law is set aside by God as God's enemy and as an inventor of laws opposed to God. Cyril of Alexandria (375-444), Fragment 48

Help me to love, learn, and obey Your Law, O God, so that I...

Pray Psalm 119.5-8.

Pray that God will deepen your love for His Law, and that He might help you learn and obey His commandments.

Sing Psalm 119.5-8.

Psalm 119.5-8 (Ode to Joy: [*God All Nations Sing Thy Glory*](#))

Let my ways steadfastly keep to all the statutes of Your Word.
Then shall I, no shame enduring, fix my eyes on You, O Lord!
With an upright heart I praise You, in Your rules will I abide.
I will keep Your statutes wholly; keep me ever by Your side.

6 Righteousness that Exceeds Righteousness

Pray Psalm 115.1-3.

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.
Why should the Gentiles say,
“So where is their God?”
But our God is in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.

Sing joyfully Psalm 115.1-3.

(Plainfield: [Nothing but the Blood of Jesus](#))

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!
Why should the nations cry, "Where is their God on high?"
You rule us, Lord, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Read Matthew 5.1-20; meditate on verse 20.

Prepare.

1. What is necessary to enter the Kingdom of heaven?
2. Did Jesus think the scribes and Pharisees had what it takes to enter the Kingdom of heaven?

Meditate.

Everyone knew the scribes and Pharisees were among the most “righteous” people of their day. This was partly because the scribes and Pharisees made a point of showing-off their “righteousness.” They wore the cool “righteous” clothes, with the little tassels. They sat in the seats reserved for the “righteous” in the synagogues. They prayed “righteous” prayers, loud and long, in the marketplace. They trumpeted their “righteous” giving with a loud show. They told everybody else how to obey the Law if they wanted to be “righteous” like they were.

Jesus had no use for such “righteousness” – except to point out that the “righteousness” of the scribes and Pharisees was not the righteousness that must characterize those who would shine like lights and serve as salt in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said we need a righteousness that *exceeds* that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the Kingdom.

That must have set the crowd buzzing: “How can *anyone* be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees?”

Jesus will elaborate on what He meant by a righteousness that *exceeds* that of the scribes and the Pharisees (vv. 21-30). But before He explained what Kingdom righteousness *is*, He wanted to make sure the people knew what Kingdom righteousness is *not*. It is *not* what they saw in the scribes and Pharisees. The religious leaders were *outwardly* righteous – as everyone could see. But the righteousness of the Kingdom is an *inward* righteousness first, or it is not true righteousness at all.

Since He had already declared that the Kingdom was near, and that many would be blessed and

brought into that Kingdom, there must be a way to realize the kind of righteousness Jesus has been talking about in this part of the sermon on the mount. There is, and He will explain it to us as He continues His teaching.

Reflect.

1. What was the problem with the “righteousness” of the scribes and Pharisees?
2. The righteousness required for life in the Kingdom exceeds mere outward righteousness. How can that be?
3. Paul wrote that the Kingdom of God is *righteousness* (Rom. 14.17, 18). How would you explain the righteousness of the Kingdom to an unbelieving friend?

He finds fault with the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, for they were not concerned with faith in the divine promise but with human praise and worldly glory. Chromatius (fl. ca. 400), *Tractate on Matthew 20.3.1-2*

Let Your righteousness come forth in me today, Lord Jesus, as I...

Pray Psalm 115.9-18.

Only God can give us the righteousness we need to serve Him each day. He does this by His Spirit, as He teaches us the Law and Word of God, and transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Pray that the Lord will allow you to “increase more and more” in His righteousness, so that you shine your light throughout your Personal Mission Field.

Sing Psalm 115.9-18.

Psalm 115.9-18 (Plainfield: [*Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*](#))

All who trust in Jesus yield – ever to His Name be glory! –
find in Him their help and shield – ever to Your Name be glory!
O Israel, trust the Lord! He helps us evermore!
Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious Lord – ever to Your Name be glory –
will attend us evermore – ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless all who fear You, Lord, all who obey Your Word,
all who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase – ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless us with eternal peace – ever to Your Name be glory!
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore
and bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

7 A Kingdom of Righteousness

Pray Psalm 15.1, 2.

Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?
He who walks uprightly,
And works righteousness,
And speaks the truth in his heart...

Sing joyfully Psalm 15.1, 2.

(Arlington: [*This Is the Day the Lord Has Made*](#))

Lord, who may dwell within Your tent, or on Your holy hill?
All those who keep Your covenant and walk within Your will.

All they who with integrity work peace and righteousness,
forever in God's house shall be forgiven, kept, and blessed.

Read Matthew 5.1-20; meditate on verses 13-20.

Prepare.

1. What is the righteousness of God's Kingdom like?
2. What is it *not* like?

Meditate.

Having explained in the beatitudes that hungering and thirsting for righteousness are identifying marks of those who are blessed in the Kingdom of God, Jesus immediately launched into a fuller explanation of what righteousness entails. In verses 13-20, He emphasizes the *effects* of righteousness, indicates its *source*, and then begins a deeper analysis of true righteousness by telling us what it *is not*.

Righteousness is like salt and light. It brings out the goodness God has established in the world, and preserves against decaying influences. Righteousness shines like a light in a dark place. The effect of this salt-and-light presence is that people realize that God is at work, and they give Him glory and honor (vv. 13-16). Our calling is to make ourselves as salty and as light-filled as we can, for the Kingdom of God is righteousness (Rom. 14.17, 18).

That means we must devote ourselves to reading, meditating on, studying, obeying, and teaching God's Law (vv. 17-19). The Law of God is the source of our understanding about the true nature of righteousness, especially as we see the Law fulfilled and explained by Jesus. Jesus embodies the Law. He fulfilled all its righteous requirements, and He calls us to walk the same path (1 Jn. 2.1-6). We will not make progress in seeking or advancing the Kingdom if we neglect the Law of God, or deny its relevance for our lives. Kingdom greatness awaits all those who mine the source of righteousness in God's Law, and show others how to do so as well.

But we must not make the mistake of thinking that righteousness is something we can merely patch-on, or make up to suit our own ideas about what's best. This was the practice of the scribes and Pharisees, and Jesus denounced their merely superficial righteousness as insufficient for life in His Kingdom. In the verses that follow, He will explain the real meaning of inside-out righteousness.

All true citizens of the Kingdom of God hunger and thirst for righteousness. As they do, God fills them with *His* righteousness – our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 5.6). In His power, we become salt and light for a dark and lost world.

Reflect.

1. How can we know when we are hungering and thirsting for righteousness?
2. Why are salt and light excellent ways of thinking about righteousness?
3. Can we learn true righteousness apart from the Law of God? Explain.

Consequently nothing in the divine commandments must be abolished, nothing altered. Everything must be preserved and taught faithfully and devotedly that the glory of the heavenly kingdom may not be lost. Indeed, those things considered least important and small by the unfaithful or by worldly people are not small before God but necessary. For the Lord taught the commandments and did them. Chromatius (fl. ca. 400), *Tractate on Matthew 20.2.1-3*

Make me hungry and thirsty for righteousness today, O Lord, especially as I...

Pray Psalm 15.1-5.

Pray that God will work the righteousness of Jesus into your life, and out into your Personal Mission Field today.

Sing Psalm 15.1-5.

Psalm 15.1-5 (Arlington: [*This Is the Day the Lord Has Made*](#))

Lord, who may dwell within Your tent, or on Your holy hill?
All those who keep Your covenant and walk within Your will.

All they who with integrity work peace and righteousness,
Forever in God's house shall be forgiven, kept, and blessed.

Let truth from every heart proceed, and slander disappear:
Thus shall we know God's grace indeed and feel His presence near.

No evil to your neighbor speak, nor turn against your friend:
Thus shall you know the end you seek – God's presence without end.

Let every sinner be despised; but those who fear the Lord
Shall honor have before our eyes, according to God's Word.

All they who keep their word in faith, though suffering may ensue,
Shall know the favor of God's grace, His presence ever true.

No greed and no injustice shall they do who seek the Lord;
But on His mercy ever call and stand upon His Word.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why does Paul say that the Kingdom of God is *righteousness* (Rom. 14.17, 18)?
2. What effects can righteousness have on the people around us?
3. How can we grow consistently in Kingdom righteousness?
4. What must we guard against as we seek to increase in righteousness?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Matthew 5.13-20? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.