

# EXCEEDING RIGHTEOUSNESS

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: MATTHEW 5.21-48



*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

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The Sermon on the Mount: Exceeding Righteousness: Matthew 5.21-48  
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## Matthew 5.21-48: Introduction

Jesus has just said that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees won't cut it in the Kingdom of God. While the Law is still valid, and keeping it remains important, the righteousness of the Kingdom exceeds that of the religious leaders.

And that's because it begins within, in the soul, and especially, in the heart. Kingdom life is inside-out living. It always has been, but now that Jesus is actually bringing the Kingdom near, He needs to refocus everybody's attention on the ways this Kingdom operates. And that means guarding our souls and living in self-denying love.

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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 Righteousness Within

Pray Psalm 42.1-3.

As the deer pants for the water brooks,  
So pants my soul for You, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When shall I come and appear before God?  
My tears have been my food day and night,  
While they continually say to me,  
“Where *is* your God?”

Sing joyously Psalm 42.1-3

([Nettleton: Come Thou Fount](#))

As the deer pants for fresh water let my soul, Lord, pant for You!  
Let my soul thirst as it ought to for the Savior, ever true!  
Tears by day have been my portion, tears by night have been my food,  
While my foes add to my sorrow, saying, “Where now is your God?”

Read Matthew 5.1-22; meditate on verses 21, 22.

Prepare.

1. To what does Jesus compare murder?
2. What kind of relationships does Jesus want us to have with our fellow believers?

Meditate.

Jesus has established righteousness as the defining characteristic of the blessed of the Kingdom of God (vv. 13-20). But He warns that the righteousness He commands is not like that of the scribes and Pharisees – merely superficial, based on traditions rather than Scripture, and meant to be displayed for selfish gain. Jesus insists that true righteousness is *inward*, and in the rest of chapter 5, He will elaborate on what He means by that.

He begins with murder. Surely there were no murderers in that crowd gathered around Jesus. “Murder?” someone present may have thought. “Well, at least He’s not pointing the finger at *me*?” Then, BANG: If you fly off the handle at your neighbor and are angry for no just cause, you are just as much a murderer as if you clubbed him to death (vv. 21, 22). Unrighteousness begins in the heart, where our affections are lodged and nurtured, and from which we engage them. If our hearts are not right toward our neighbors, then we have broken the Law of God *before we take the first step of outward sin!*

The same is true with passing judgment: If you call your neighbor a fool, or talk about them as such, you have passed judgment on him. To refer to someone as a fool is to condemn them as not believing in God (cf. Ps. 53.1). Who are you to make that determination? You’ve transgressed in your thoughts and your heart by usurping a prerogative only God can exercise. You’ve set yourself up as God in the very place of God and judged your bother, if only in your mind (v. 22).

And now we can see that all the “non-murderers” in the crowd around Jesus are beginning to squirm. We should, too, because our hearts are no different from theirs. We must exercise constant vigilance in our attitudes, and neither destroy our neighbor with anger nor condemn him by a

judgmental spirit. We should all squirm to know that Jesus knows what's in our hearts.

But let's make sure that, as we squirm, we're squirming closer to Him Who has fulfilled all righteousness for us.

*Reflect.*

1. What is the heart, and why is it so important for true righteousness?
2. How does the mind work to help us grow in true righteousness?
3. How can we keep a close watch on both our hearts and minds?

*This is what the Lord said: "I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it." In other words, to accentuate what was considered least; that is to say, to reform for the better the precepts of the law. For this reason the holy apostle says, "Do we, then, overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law." ... The law commands us not to murder. The gospel commands us not to get angry without reason, that we may remove every root of sin from our hearts, because anger can even lead to homicide. Chromatius (fl. ca. 400), Tractate on Matthew 21.1.1-2*

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

*Pray Psalm 42.9-11.*

Weep and mourn for the condition of your heart, and ask the Lord to cleanse, renew, and uplift you, as you repent of your sins and go forth to serve Him today.

*Sing Psalm 42.4-11.*

**Psalm 42.4-11** ([Nettleton: Come Thou Fount](#))

Now I pour my soul out in me as these thoughts come to my mind.  
And I long to once again be where true worship I might find.  
Oh my soul, be not despairing! Hope in God, and praise His Name!  
For the Lord, your burden bearing, will restore your peace again.

Oh my God, my soul is weary, therefore I remember You.  
Let Your grace and goodness near be, and Your promise, firm and true.  
Lord, when trials and fears surround me, Your commands will be my song;  
when distresses sore confound me, Your great love will keep me strong.

Lord, forget me not in mourning 'neath my foes' oppressing hand.  
See their mocking, hear their scorning; help my weary soul to stand.  
Hope in God, praise Him forever when despair on you has trod.  
Look to Jesus; never, never doubt your gracious, saving God.

## 2 Peacemakers

*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 5.1-26; meditate on verses 23-26*

*Prepare.*

1. What kind of relationships are indicated in these verses?
2. What does Jesus want from these relationships?

*Meditate.*

The righteousness which characterizes the Kingdom of God is real righteousness. It works from the inside-out, and goes beyond mere appearances and to bring the blessings of the Kingdom to the world. Where righteousness is at work, peace obtains, leading to joy (Rom. 14.17, 18). This is why it's so important that Christians take their relationships seriously, and that they work, by the mercy and grace of the Lord, to maintain peace with the people in their lives.

We can't expect our offerings – of prayer, worship, gifts, or efforts – to be acceptable to God as long as peace eludes our relationships, and there is something we should do to restore them. If we have offended a neighbor – if someone has reason to be offended by us, and we are aware of that – we must do whatever it takes to restore that relationship, so that peace can exist between us (v. 24). Jesus mentions especially a “brother”, but as peacemakers in the Kingdom, we must seek peace with all people. We can't guarantee that we'll have peace with everyone; but as far as we able to seek it, we must (Rom. 12.18)

And this includes even those we might regard as adversaries, as people who wish to do us harm (v. 25). The context Jesus describes sounds like a business or legal situation, which is headed to court. The one Jesus instructs to “agree” with his adversary seems to be the offender. He must try to reach agreement before legal action comes into play. We must try to do what's right in every situation where relationships have been strained. It may not always be clear to us what steps we should take, but if we'll wait on the Lord in prayer, He will direct our paths in the way of peace (Ps. 25.4, 5).

Peace – that overall sense of wellbeing and safety – is in short supply in our world. It takes people who hunger and thirst for righteousness to bring the peace of the Lord to relationships. We need to

work hard to establish and maintain peace, especially with those who know the Lord (Eph. 4.3), for this advances the rule of the Prince of Peace on earth. Let our hearts be at peace with our neighbors, and we will know the peace of the Lord as well.

*Reflect.*

1. Why is righteousness so closely associated with peace?
2. Why do we have to work hard (Eph. 4.3) to keep peace among the brethren in the Lord?
3. Why is peace so much to be desired in the Kingdom of God?

*He did not say, "If you have anything against your brother" but "If your brother has anything against you," so that a greater need for reconciliation is imposed on you. As long as we are unable to make peace with our brother, I do not know whether we may offer our gifts to God. Jerome (347-420), Commentary on Matthew 1.5.23*

*Make me an agent of Your peace today, O Lord, as I...*

*Pray 97.1-9.*

Where the King reigns in righteousness, His peace will obtain. Pray that Jesus will show His peace through you to the people you encounter today.

*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 Guard Your Heart

*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 5.1-30; meditate on verses 27-30*

*Prepare.*

1. What does Jesus mean by the "heart"?
2. How would you describe Jesus' attitude toward sin?

*Meditate.*

I want to summarize this passage by saying that Jesus doesn't want us plucking out our eyes or cutting off our hands. He uses hyperbole here to show just how serious sin is. Sin will destroy us, and if there's anything we can do to keep from falling into habitual, unrepentant sin, we should do it.

The passage begins by Jesus explaining how to deal with sin: Check it at the source. Sin begins in the heart. The heart is that spiritual component of the soul that nurtures and engages our affections, such as love or desire. If we fear the Lord, delight and desire Him and His Kingdom, and love Him with *all our heart*, the other affections of our life will fall into place. This will be true of the affection of hate, which is a valid affection, and ought to be at all times engaged toward sin (cf. Ps. 97.10). If we hate sin, at the same time loving God and His Word, we will be formed for true righteousness. The focus of our heart will be rightly aligned, and our eyes and hands will follow the dictates of our soul. This means we will have the mastery over sin – in the strength of the Lord – so that whatever sin our eye or hand may be tempted to commit, we will turn from it, repent as needed, and hate that sin, and not allow it to fester in our heart.

So when Jesus equates lust with committing adultery, He's only making the point that sin begins in the heart. Check sin there, and you will increase in true righteousness, which is inside-out and not outside-in. Righteousness begins in the heart as well as sin. Cultivate true righteousness, and you will watch over your heart with all diligence, knowing that from it flow all the issues of life (Prov. 4.23).

There is something more to be said about plucking out our eyes and cutting off our hands. While we don't need to mutilate our bodies, we can put out of sight or out of reach any temptations that might lead to sin, whether in our heart or otherwise. We need to recognize temptation from afar, and pluck out or cut off from our lives anything which might become a trap or snare, leading to sin (Prov.

1.17). For one way to guard the heart is to refuse to expose it to what we know may cause us to fall through temptation into sin.

*Reflect.*

1. What do we mean by saying that sin begins in the heart?
2. What is involved in guarding our heart, so that sin cannot find harbor there (cf. Ps. 66.18)?
3. What should you do when you find that the delight and desires of your heart are fixing on other things more than on the Lord and His will?

*He speaks about the numbers [sic] of the body but employs hyperbole. It is not that one should literally “cut off one’s members.” Rather, one is called to mortify them and render them useless for sin, as the apostle has said. One should not spare even things thought most necessary, if through them any bad activity threatens to occur. Apollinaris (310-392), Fragment 23*

*I want to love You supremely, Lord, and to serve You only. Help me today to...*

*Pray Psalm 37.7-9, 34-40.*

Pray about the day ahead. Ask the Lord to give you strength to love Him at all times, to serve Him in everything you do, and to resist temptation as it appears.

*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 On Divorce

*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 5.1-32; meditate on verses 31, 32.*

*Prepare.*

1. Did Jesus condone divorce "for any reason"?
2. What grounds for divorce did Jesus acknowledge?

*Meditate.*

God never intended that married couples should divorce, especially not those who enter into this sacred union before Him and unto His glory. But sin changed everything, so that even something so important and sacred as marriage could be damaged beyond repair. God understood this, and in His Law, as Jesus explained in Matthew 19.8, He graciously provided a means for dissolving marriage under certain circumstances. The Law's concession to divorce is not a weakness of the Law; it is a gracious provision of God's Law which acknowledges the hardness of human hearts. Divorce, Moses taught, may be necessary at times.

But not for just "any reason". These days, divorces are as easy to obtain as a driver's license. This is a measure of how far our society has drifted from its moorings in the Law of God (a fact of America's provenance that Tocqueville found most laudable).

In these verses, Jesus tightened the restrictions on divorce. But we would expect that. In the Kingdom of God, people are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, not for their own way. As we shall see, they have the power of God's Word and Spirit to aid them in their Kingdom-seeking way of life. So we can stay in the stream of mercy and grace, and love one another as Jesus loves us. Sexual immorality – of all kinds – is a legitimate grounds for pursuing divorce (Paul will also add abandonment in 1 Corinthians 7). Those who engage in any unlawful sexual activity – beginning, as Jesus explained, with unfaithfulness in their heart (v. 28) – demonstrate that they are not hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

Jesus indicates that those who are divorced because of sexual immorality should not remarry. And one should not seek to become married to one who was divorced because of sexual immorality. These strictures will seem unreasonable and harsh to our modern world. But they come from the Prince of peace, the King of grace, and the Wisdom of God. We should listen to Him and His Spirit, and not the spirit of the age. If we want marriages that work to fill the earth with the goodness of

God, we have to guard them assiduously against the corrupting powers of immorality.

*Reflect.*

1. Why would Jesus grant any grounds for divorce?
2. We all know people who've been divorced for various reasons. Should we condemn them? Why not?
3. How can believers help one another to be faithful to their marriage vows?

*One who does not look with unchaste eyes upon another woman will certainly not commit fornication. By not committing fornication he will give no occasion that they should become alienated. Thus you see Jesus presses his point without reserve and builds up this fear as a bulwark, urging on the husband great danger, who if he does cast her out, makes himself accountable for her adultery. John Chrysostom (344-407), *The Gospel of Matthew*, Homily 17.4*

*Thank You for the gift of marriage, Lord, and that we may glorify You in marriage as we...*

*Pray Psalm 19.9-14.*

Can you see how keeping God's Law strengthens us in the pursuit of righteousness? How can the Law of God help you improve your relationships today?

*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 As Good as Your Word

*Pray Psalm 145.1-3.*

I will extol You, my God, O King;  
And I will bless Your name forever and ever.  
Every day I will bless You,  
And I will praise Your name forever and ever.  
Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised;  
And His greatness *is* unsearchable.

*Sing joyfully Psalm 145.1-3.*

(Brother James' Air: [\*The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want\*](#))

I will extol You, God, my King, and ever praise Your Name!  
I bless You, Lord, for everything each day, and e'er the same!  
Great are You, Lord, my praise I bring; unsearchable Your fame!

*Read Matthew 5.1-37; meditate on verses 33-37.*

*Prepare.*

1. What kind of speech does Jesus command?
2. Where does speech other than this come from?

*Meditate.*

I used to have an acquaintance who would frequently say, in conversation, "To be perfectly honest..." A mutual acquaintance, when he was present, would never fail to interrupt him when he said this, to ask whether he had been "perfectly honest" to this point.

Jesus wanted our words to matter, no matter how many or few, and in every situation or instance. We should not have to bolster our words with things like "To be perfectly honest..." or "To tell the truth..." or "I swear..." In Jesus' day, it was not uncommon to hear someone support a point or insist on the truth of a matter by swearing or taking an oath, often invoking God or heaven or God's throne, to emphasize the truth of what he was saying.

There is a place for vows and oaths in human speech, but usually in the most solemn of situations, as in a marriage ceremony, or a court of law. We should not require such devices in ordinary speech. Rather, we should say what we mean and mean what we say; and we should be so consistent in doing so that there is no need to prop up our claims or points beyond our plain words. It is surprising to see how much the Bible has to say about how we use our tongues. Jesus' words in the sermon on the mount summarize quite well what the Bible insists on throughout: We should endeavor to have righteous speech – always speaking the truth, doing so in love, and seeking to edify others with our tongues.

Jesus spoke the truth, even if people were offended by it. He shows us what righteousness looks like in speaking, and we should strive to emulate Him in this, as in everything else. Anything other than plain speaking – gossip, gross exaggeration, putting others down, equivocation or dissimulation – is "from the evil one."

*Reflect.*

1. How can believers help one another to improve in the ways we speak? Why should we?
2. Do you think that if we spent more time praising God, celebrating His attributes and works, and giving Him thanks, this would improve our daily conversation? Explain.
3. What would you recommend as the best ways of making sure your speech doesn't become an instrument of the evil one?

*Christ now prescribes...a remedy; which is, that men act towards each other sincerely and honestly: for then simplicity of speech will have quite as much weight as an oath has among those who are not sincere.* John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Matthew 5.37*

*Thank You for the gift of speech, Lord. Help me to use my words today to...*

*Pray Psalm 145.15-21.*

Look to the Lord and give Him abundant praise and thanks. Thus you will train yourself always to speak what is true and edifying.

*Sing Psalm 145.15-21.*

**Psalm 145.15-21** (Brother James' Air: [\*The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want\*](#))

The eyes of all look up to You to meet our needs each day.

Open Your hand, provide the food we need, O Lord, we pray!

Kindness and righteousness You do, O Lord, in every way!

Be near to all who call on You; all those who fear You, bless.

Preserve all those whose love is true; save us in our distress.

Our mouths will speak with praise of You; Your holy Name we'll bless.

## 6 Like God's Love

*Pray Psalm 19.12-14.*

Who can understand *his* errors?  
Cleanse me from secret *faults*.  
Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous *sins*;  
Let them not have dominion over me.  
Then I shall be blameless,  
And I shall be innocent of great transgression.  
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight,  
O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

*Sing joyfully Psalm 19.12-14.*

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

*Read Matthew 5.1-48; meditate on verses 38-48.*

*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.*

Righteousness is about being like God – like Jesus, Who is all righteousness. They who hunger and thirst after righteousness long to be perfect, as God their Father is perfect (v. 48). They will seek to learn what righteousness requires of them in every area of their lives, keeping their natural – and sinful – inclinations in check as they submit to the Law of liberty and love in God's commandments.

Thus, they will not allow their hearts to make them vengeful, nor to bear a grudge (vv. 38, 39). Instead, they will exercise patience and generosity (vv. 40-42) toward those who mistreat or take advantage of them. The “eye for an eye” provision of God's Law is not hereby nullified; justice must be served for righteousness to obtain in any society. In courts of law, retribution and restoration are still legitimate applications of justice. Jesus is speaking here more of matters of personal insult and injury. We must be willing to be wronged, but not allow wrongs done to us to deter us from patience and generosity. Jesus Himself would demonstrate just how far the righteous must be willing to go in satisfying the perfect demands of God. Persevering in righteousness is more important than “getting even”, holding grudges, clinging to fading material possessions, or resisting inconveniences.

In case the teaching of verses 38-42 was not sufficiently clear, Jesus continues by saying we must love our enemies and bless those who do us ill (vv. 43-45). This, after all, is what God the Father does – and aren't we glad about that! Mercy and grace are the chief byproducts of a heart disciplined for righteousness, and, as God the Father shows us, we may not withhold these from anyone.

If we love only because we expect something in return, we're no better than the unbelievers (vv. 46,

47). The love that Jesus enables goes way beyond what people experience in this world. It demonstrates a *new* kind of existence, and *new* realm of authority and power, and a *new* agenda for glorifying God. Christians are not perfect, but we must never cease striving to improve toward perfection, for thus we increase in the righteousness of God and of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Reflect.*

1. We are not naturally inclined to the kind of love Jesus describes here, because of the law of sin that is at work within us still (Rom. 7.21-23). How do you see this law of sin at work in yourself?
2. What kinds of things get in the way of our showing love like the Father's (Jesus suggests several things in vv. 38-42 and 46, 47)?
3. What are some ways that you can see God's love for all people? How does this encourage you in your relationships, roles, and responsibilities?

*The Lord has shown that we cannot have the good work of perfect love if we love only those from whom in turn we know the return of mutual love will be paid in kind. For we know that love of this sort is common even to nonbelievers and sinners. Hence the Lord wishes us to overcome the common law of human love by the law of gospel love, so that we may show the affection of our love not only toward those who love us but even toward our enemies.* Chromatius (fl. ca. 400), *Tractate on Matthew 21.2.1*

*Let Your love guide, fill, and use me today, O Lord, as I...*

*Pray Psalm 19.1-11.*

Jesus is the light of every new day, shining like the sun to guide us along His path. Recommit yourself to reading, meditating in, and obeying the Law of God, and thank Him for this great gift of love, that shows you how to love Him and your neighbor (Matt. 22.34-40).

*Sing Psalm 19.1-11.*

**Psalm 19.1-11** (St. Christopher: [\*Beneath the Cross of Jesus\*](#))

The heav'ns declare God's glory, the skies His work proclaim!  
From day to day and night by night they shout His glorious Name!  
No speech, no words, no voice is heard, yet all across the earth  
the lines of His all-present Word make known His holy worth.

Behold, the sun arises, a bridegroom strong and bright,  
rejoicing as he runs his course from morning unto night.  
From east to west across the skies his circuit he completes,  
And none can hide their sinful eyes or shelter from his heat.

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.

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.

## 7 Exceeding 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 5.1-48; meditate on verses 21-48.

Prepare.

1. In what sense is Kingdom righteousness *exceeding* righteousness?
2. What is the end, and what is the primary expression of Kingdom righteousness?

Meditate.

The idea of righteousness was not unfamiliar to the people of Jesus' day. After all, an entire class of "righteous" made it their business to ensure that everybody but them understood just how *un*righteous they were. External righteousness, paraded before the eyes of men, was the form of righteousness with which most people were familiar. And while some good was done by those who vaunted their righteousness – righteousness that existed only on the surface of life, and mainly to impress or cow others – that righteousness does not meet the standard of *Kingdom* righteousness (v. 20). Life in the Kingdom entails a form of righteousness that *exceeds* that with which the people in Jesus' day were familiar.

True righteousness begins in the soul, where the Law of God shapes us mind, heart, and conscience to *live* the righteous life. Righteousness takes the form of love – for God and neighbors – as it shapes the soul for self-denial and putting others first. It's a struggle, because the natural disposition of our soul is toward self-service, not looking out for others. Jesus taught that people need to watch over their hearts – echoing instruction by Solomon (Prov. 4.23) – and to make sure that the attitude of their heart was always what it should be before the Lord. Only when our hearts are what they should be will we think correctly about righteousness, and value it as the primary Kingdom priority (Matt. 6.33); and only then will we live out *true* righteousness in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

God the Father, after all, is perfect; and He calls all those who know and love Him to be perfect as well. In this life, we can only strive for perfection, by hungering and thirsting for righteousness from the inside-out. But if we will keep a close watch on our heart – our desires, longings, and loves – as instructed by the Law of God, then the righteousness that comes out in our lives will be *true* righteousness. It will be the righteousness of Jesus Christ, in Whom and by Whose example we make

sense out of God's Law and all His Word.

*Reflect.*

1. In what sense is Jesus the key to understanding the Law and all the Word of God?
2. How can we tell, in any situation, whether we're operating out of mere self-love or out of love for God and neighbors?
3. God wants us to be perfect, and perfection – such as we see in Jesus – is where our lives are headed. But in this life, we must strive to improve toward the ideal of perfect righteousness. What does that struggle involve?

*It is merely human to love those who love you, and it is common to cherish those who cherish you. Therefore Christ calls us into the life of heirs of God and to be models for the just and the unjust of the imitation of Christ. He distributes the sun and the rain through his coming in baptism and by the sacraments of the Spirit. Thus he has prepared us for the perfect life through this concord of public goodness, because we must imitate our perfect Father in heaven.. Hilary of Poitiers (315-367), On Matthew 4.27*

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

*Pray Psalm 15.1-5.*

As you pray this psalm, think about the day ahead. Prepare your heart for true righteousness by committing every activity, situation, and opportunity to the Lord now.

*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. With what kind of righteousness were the people of Jesus' day familiar? Why won't that kind of righteousness fit the requirements of the Kingdom of God?
2. True righteousness begins in the soul. Explain.
3. Why did Jesus say that Kingdom righteousness is *exceeding* righteousness?
4. Is acting in Kingdom righteousness always convenient or easy? How can we prepare ourselves for true righteousness?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Matthew 5.21-48? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.