

A Righteous Feast

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[0 : 00] And before we read the passage, let me remind you of the context of the Beatitudes.! Jesus had just embarked on his ministry. He'd just been proclaimed to be the Son of God in his baptism!

And he clarified the teaching of the Old Testament. He taught what the Old Testament was about and that it was about him.

And then, as proof that his teachings were authoritative, he healed all the physical diseases and all the spiritual sicknesses of the people of Israel that he came into contact with.

This proved that he was the Messiah. And this leads us to the Sermon on the Mount. This leads us to the Sermon on the Mount, because at this point he's gathered quite a following, and crowds were following along with him.

The Sermon on the Mount confronts Jesus' original listeners with the difficulty of being a good person. And that's something that you and I share with Jesus' original listeners.

[1 : 22] We find it difficult to live righteously. So as we read Matthew 5 together, we're going to ask, according to Jesus, how do you live righteously?

How do you live righteously? We're going to see that Jesus teaches that you live righteously by acknowledging your lack. You acknowledge your emptiness, and then you live out of your fullness. You acknowledge your lack and live out of your fullness, because God is the one who fills you with righteousness. So with that framework in mind, let's read Matthew 5, verses 1 through 11 together. And remember, this is the word of God. Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down.

His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

[2 : 30] Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

Would you join me in prayer and ask God to bless our time in his word. Lord, you declare to the prophet Isaiah, For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent. Almighty God, may that passage be true of your word this morning.

[3 : 46] May it accomplish the purposes that you have for it, and may it create faith in those listening in Christ Jesus. In your son's name we pray. Amen.

So according to Jesus, according to these beatitudes, how do you live righteously? Well, look at the context of Jesus' teaching for answering this question. Look at verses 1 through 2.

Matthew writes, Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. So immediately this passage distinguishes the crowds from the disciples.

As I mentioned earlier, there were crowds that were following along Jesus' path. They wanted to see miracles. They wanted to see the wonders that he did. But they weren't necessarily disciples. They were more concerned about some of the material benefits that the supposed Messiah might offer. But then there are the disciples. There are those who believe in Christ.

[4 : 52] They believe he's the Messiah. They are committed to following him. And it says that Jesus sat down and taught his disciples. That's important to understand the beatitudes.

The beatitudes are for disciples, primarily. The crowds, the uncommitted, they're there. They're listening in. But these words are for disciples, his followers.

Now in the 21st century, so many people think of Jesus as a good ethical teacher, as a spiritual guru for how to lead your life.

Just simply one option of many other spiritual teachers, how you walk the road and get to God. But Jesus' teachings, his beatitudes, his Sermon on the Mount, they're for disciples.

They're for those who already follow the Lord, who are already following Christ. This is not how one gets into the kingdom. This is how one lives when already in the kingdom.

[6 : 00] This is how one lives when one is already in the kingdom. And according to Jesus, how does one live in the kingdom? This brings us to the beatitudes in verses 3 through 12.

And you may have noticed that each verse begins with the phrase blessed. Blessed are, blessed are, blessed are. In Latin, the word for blessed is *beatus*.

And so that's where we get the word beatitudes. This is the blessing section. And it serves as the poetic intro to Jesus' teachings. This is something that his disciples could have easily memorized and easily kept in their head as they thought about how Jesus teaches them to live.

And then you can use the beatitudes as a fuller explanation for the Sermon on the Mount. Now look at verses 3 through 6 with me. Jesus said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

[7 : 15] This phrase blessed are is very important. Who is doing the blessing? Who is doing the blessing?

Well, in the first century Jewish world where Jesus lives, the Jews were so concerned about falsely taking the Lord's name in vain, about misusing God's divine name, that they would often indirectly refer to him.

They would indirectly refer to God. So when God is doing something, they would make an active verb passive. So instead of saying, Sharn paid the bill, you could say, the bill was paid.

You see that. The agency is covered up. But it's understood who is the agent. God is blessing. God is blessing all these different people.

And notice who God blesses in these first sections. God doesn't bless people who do good things. God isn't blessing those who do good things.

[8 : 26] Instead, it seems to be that God blesses those who are lacking in something. God blesses those who lack. Look at the verse, Beatitude in verse 3.

Jesus starts the Beatitudes by saying that God blesses the poor in spirit, which can also be translated as spiritually poor. God blesses the spiritually poor man or spiritually poor woman.

And this introduction frames the Beatitudes as focusing on spiritual poverty. Jesus is drilling in on spiritual poverty here in the Beatitudes.

And this is something that the Old Testament talks about a lot. In Isaiah 64 verse 6, The prophet says that even our most righteous acts are nothing but filthy rags.

Our righteousness is filthy rags in the eyes of God. And then God further in Isaiah 66 too says these words, These are the ones I look on in favor, those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.

[9 : 42] Jesus is echoing the teachings of the Old Testament here. God blesses the spiritually poor. God blesses those who are spiritually poor.

And then look at the second Beatitude in verse 4. Jesus says that God blesses those who mourn, and he will comfort them. I think given the nature of the previous verse that we're talking about spiritual poverty, Jesus is talking about those who mourn their sins.

In the Old Testament, when people committed a sin, they mourned. They fasted. They put on sackcloth. They covered themselves in ashes. They demonstrated their sorrow at their sin.

I mean, we can all relate, right? When you or I have done something that we're particularly ashamed of, a particular sin that we wish we hadn't done, doesn't it make you feel sad?

You might even have a physical expression of that sadness. You might forget to eat a meal because you are mourning your sin. Jesus says that God blesses those who mourn their sins, and

that he will comfort them in their mourning.

[11 : 01] Then look at the third Beatitude in verse 5. Jesus says that God will bless the meek, or the humble person. And the humble person is those who properly understands their relationships between themselves and the Lord.

They understand that they are spiritually poor. They understand that they bring nothing to God. They bring nothing to the table. In fact, the only thing they bring are sins, and they mourn their sins. They're humble because they understand that they are the creature, and God is the creator. The meek person understands who they are in the eyes of the Lord.

And God blesses this person. He blesses the meek person. It says he will give them the earth. The meek shall inherit the earth. God will take away the earth from those who own it now.

The rich, the proud, the powerful, the arrogant, those who glory in sin. And he will take the earth from them and give it to the meek person.

[12 : 10] The spiritually poor person. The one who understands that they are sinners and mourn their sin. Do you see the pattern in the Beatitudes at this point?

Do you see the pattern? God is blessing those who lack righteousness. God blesses those who lack righteousness. And so, according to Jesus, living righteously does not begin with being righteous.

It begins with the opposite. Living righteously begins with acknowledging your lack of righteousness. Living righteously begins with spiritual emptiness.

And then the fourth Beatitude in verse 6 proves this. Look what Jesus says. He says, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

God blesses those who have an empty belly of righteousness. When you're hungry, you don't have food. You're hungry for food.

[13 : 20] You're thirsty for water. You need someone to give it to you. And God is the one who provides a spiritual feast. He fills the person with no righteousness.

And Jesus does not say that God will bless the person who wants a taste of goodness, or a sip of righteousness, or a snack of righteousness. He blesses them with a feast.

He blesses those who hunger for righteousness, who have growling stomachs for righteousness. And how do you get this feast of righteousness?

Well, this was less clear to Jesus' original listeners. It was revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus, specifically of him dying on the cross for the sins of his people.

Jesus, throughout his ministry, describes himself as the feast of righteousness. In the Gospel of John, chapter 4, verses 13 through 14, he says, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.

[14 : 38] Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water dwelling up to eternal life. And again, in John, chapter 6, verse 35, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. And then again, in John 7, verses 37 through 39, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. The feast of righteousness that you crave is Jesus himself.

It is Jesus and his righteousness. His righteousness is the one that is given to you in your spiritual emptiness. Now, theologians call this the doctrine of justification.

It's Jesus' righteousness being legally transferred or imputed to you because you don't have any righteousness to offer.

[15 : 47] Jesus bears the wrath of God for your sins on the cross. He committed no sin, but he bore your punishment on your behalf. And in turn, he gives you all his righteousness.

It is yours. And he gives it to you through the instruments of faith. So how do you live righteously according to Jesus? Well, you live righteously by acknowledging your spiritual emptiness.

Righteous living is grounded in spiritual emptiness. I'm the father of three kids, ages four, two, and four months. And this is a conversation my wife and I had even as we were driving over here. When our kids wake up in the morning, they're very hungry. Oftentimes, they don't even know they're hungry. They're just falling apart, crying, clashing with one another.

And they can't feed themselves. They cannot reach up into the cabinets and get the bread out and make toast or crack an egg. I have to do it. Laura has to do it.

[16:55] They have to be fed because they can't do it. And if they have a big breakfast in the morning, it's a much better morning. According to Jesus in Matthew 5, God must fill you with righteousness because you have an empty belly.

You have an empty belly, no righteousness at all. You must acknowledge your spiritual poverty. You must mourn your sins. You must recognize your humility before God and crave the feast of righteousness that is found in Christ Jesus.

Because God promises to feed the spiritual poor person. God promises to give the earth to the meek person. God comforts the mourner of sins with Christ.

God blesses you with Christ. So before you begin to live righteously, you must first acknowledge your own spiritual emptiness. Acknowledge your own spiritual emptiness.

Now you may be here this morning and thinking, I don't feel that spiritually empty. I mean, I give to some charity, especially around Christmas. I love my spouse and my kids.

[18:15] I don't cheat on them. I don't cheat at work. I work hard. I know for a fact that I'm better than so-and-so. Well, you might feel like you have some righteousness going for you.

And maybe you feel like you need a spiritual dessert rather than a spiritual feast. A top-off rather than a filling up. But according to Jesus, this is precisely the wrong place to start.

This is the exact road that you do not want to be on. Because according to Jesus, righteous living starts with acknowledging your lack.

If you're feeling good about yourself, you're operating in the category of the good-ish person. Not the good person. And when you read the rest of Matthew 5, Jesus makes it clear that neither I nor you can be the good person.

None of us can. So I encourage you this week, if you're feeling spiritually good about yourself going into Christmas, read through Matthew 5. And then turn to the Lord and acknowledge your spiritual emptiness.

[19:30] Or you might be here today and you're painfully aware of your spiritual emptiness. You know how much you've hurt others. You know how much you hurt yourself. You know how much you disappoint God.

And you hope that something will change. Maybe it's success in work. Maybe it's a little more therapy. Maybe it's a better Christmas.

Maybe it's a relationship or a parental win that will improve your circumstances. Because you know that something needs to change.

You know you can do more. You can give more. You can work more. You can love more. But according to Jesus, or I should say according to Jesus, this is the exact right way to start living righteously.

This is where you should begin. If you're feeling this way, you are on the right path. You are aware of your spiritual emptiness. And you can turn to the Lord and ask for the feast of righteousness.

[20:40] Acknowledge your spiritual poverty. Don't cover it up with self-soothing behaviors such as binge doom scrolling, binge reading, binge exercising, binge working, binge drinking or eating, binge watching.

There are so many different binge behaviors that you can list here. Don't do that. That is just a self-soothing mechanism to help cover up your own feelings of lack.

Instead, take what you know to be true, that you lack righteousness, and acknowledge it.

Acknowledge it to the Lord. Tell him how you fail to love.

Whom you fail to love. What you fail to do. What you have done that you shouldn't have done. Tell it to the Lord. Because God will not turn you away.

He won't turn you away. In fact, he says that he blesses you because you acknowledge it. When you acknowledge your lack, God blesses you and gives you your feast of righteousness in Christ.

[21:50] Righteous living begins by acknowledging your spiritual poverty. But where does that lead? How does the alien righteousness of Christ that's outside of you translate to righteous living?

Well, Jesus goes in to explain that. Look at verses 7, 8, and 9, just at the beginning. Jesus says that God blesses the merciful.

God blesses the pure in heart, or the heart without sin. And God blesses the peacemakers. Now notice that these are fundamentally different characteristics from the previous set of Beatitudes.

Verses 3 through 5 were about emptiness. Verse 6 was about filling up. And then 7 through 9 is about living out of that fullness.

It's about righteous living. Living out of the righteousness that you've been given. Verses 7 through 9 are positive aspects of righteousness.

[22 : 57] Mercy, purity, and peacemaking. Those whom God fills with Christ's alien righteousness have hearts that are purified.

They show mercy because they've received mercy. They make peace in situations of conflict because they have their own peacemaker in Christ Jesus.

And it overflows out into their life. And then notice how God just blesses and blesses. God takes the spiritually empty person and then gives that person the kingdom and new hearts and righteousness.

And then the purified person gets more blessings. They get blessings for the righteous living. God blesses the pure in heart.

God blesses the merciful. God blesses the peacemaker. God blesses the spiritual empty with something they haven't done.

[24 : 03] Alien righteousness. And then God blesses you for the righteousness that he's already given you. Double blessings of righteousness. God doesn't first ask you to be righteous and then rewards you for your good works.

Rather, God gives you righteousness and then rewards you for the righteousness that he's given you. It's God from A to Z.

It's like if God gave you a billion rand for being a beggar and then gave you a billion rand because you're a billionaire.

That is what's happening in the kingdom of heaven. That's what happens with the life in Christ. Paul writes it this way in Ephesians 2, verse 10.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

[25 : 09] God himself prepares your own good works. Notice how Jesus explains the righteous life.

It starts in emptiness. It results in change and then proceeds to righteous living. For Jesus, there is no unchangeable people.

There is no unchangeable person. People don't get filled with righteousness yet continue living their old lives. When righteousness comes, a change also comes.

Now, that doesn't mean that the person becomes perfect. Paul writes in Philippians 3, verse 12 that he's not yet attained the goal that he's striving for, that of moral perfection.

And the Apostle John, in 1 John, chapter 1, verse 8, says that we deceive ourselves if we claim to be without sin. So God justifies us with the righteousness of Christ, and then he changes us with the righteousness of Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

[26 : 22] This is what theologians call the doctrine of sanctification, and it's different from justification. You are made right with God, declared just, with a righteousness that's not your own.

That's the doctrine of justification. And then, in the doctrine of sanctification, you are renewed in the whole person after Jesus Christ.

Paul talks about putting off the flesh, putting on Christ, and you walk in him. It's a whole lifelong process of putting off and putting on.

And you won't be perfect until you die, until you go to glory and see Christ in person. But there is true, genuine, actual change.

There is true, genuine, actual change in Christ. And the world notices that change.

[27 : 28] Look at verse 10. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. God blesses those who are persecuted because they live righteously.

He blesses them with the kingdom of heaven. Now, you may notice that I'm stopping at verse 10 this morning and not continuing on to verses 11 through 12.

And I'm doing that because Jesus begins to transition to a different topic in that last beatitude in verses 11 through 12. When you look at verses 3 through 10, you see that the beatitudes are short. Blessed are for. Blessed are for. Da-da-da-da-da. But then, in verses 11 through 12, Jesus goes from blessed are to blessed are those to blessed are you.

And then he has a very long explanation section. So next week, I will get into verses 11 through 12 as we, with Jesus, transition into a slightly different part of Jesus' introduction.

[28 : 40] So I'm going to stick with verse 10 today. The world notices righteous living, that something has changed about the person who's received alien righteousness.

They notice that there's something different between the person and God and that there's something different between them and others. Righteousness works a change in the life of the believer.

As Micah 6 verse 8 says, righteous living involves doing justice, loving mercy, walking humbly with God.

If you're doing justice, if you're loving mercy, if you're walking humbly with God, there's going to be ripple effects in your life. And someone who loves injustice is going to oppose you.

Someone who hates mercy is going to oppose you. Someone who's feeling proud of themselves and doesn't like what God stands for will oppose you.

[29 : 49] And they're going to oppose you because it's going to bump up against them. Your interactions are going to bump up against them. Your own life is going to change things around you, according to Jesus.

The world persecutes people because of what God has put within them, because of Christ.

So how do you live righteously? According to Jesus, not only do you acknowledge your spiritual lack, but you live righteously by walking in Christ's fullness.

You walk in Christ's fullness. My daughter is an extrovert. When we go out to church functions, when we come back from church today on the drive back to Stellenbosch, she will be vibrating with energy.

She will be chatting because of her interactions with people. She will be talking, talking, talking, talking, talking, talking, because she's an extrovert. Her time with people changes her, and it flows out of her.

[31 : 08] Life with Christ is a little bit like life with my daughter. Time with him will change you.

Time with Christ will change you. You will begin to walk righteously, because Christ has given you his righteousness.

Once you put your faith in Christ, nothing will remain the same. So church, live righteously by walking in spiritual fullness.

Live righteously by walking in spiritual fullness. That means showing mercy to those who have done wrong. Mercy is undeserved kindness and undeserved forgiveness.

In order to show mercy to people, they have to do something wrong in the first place. Right now, a lot of podcasts, a lot of pop therapy tells you to cut out toxic people in your life if you don't have capacity for them.

[32 : 14] But Christ calls you to show mercy to toxic people. Christ calls you to show mercy to toxic people, because Christ has forgiven you of your own toxicity.

Now, showing mercy doesn't mean being naive. It doesn't mean enabling addicts. It doesn't mean enabling abusers.

It doesn't mean being in danger. But showing mercy does mean not holding their sins against them. It means praying for the good of the person who's done wrong.

It means not cutting out family members from your life, unless, you know, you're in danger and you need someone to stand between you and this other person. Showing mercy is hard, but Christ has showed mercy to you.

Walking in spiritual fullness also means making peace. It means bringing peace where you are in conflict with another person.

[33 : 23] It means seeking peace when you find other people in conflict, multiple parties. Now, this is a huge topic, and it's too huge to cover today.

But let me say this. True peace only comes when people do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with the Lord.

That is the only way for true peace to come about. And telling other people these things, telling them to do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with God, it's going to be unpopular.

Especially in today's society. Our society, across the world right now, is a very polarized society.

And telling people to do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God, is going to bring scorn upon you from across the political spectrum, wherever they sit.

You still must do it. You still must call for those things. Prepare yourself for this by placing your faith in Christ.

[34 : 36] Because you have a heavenly reward. Lord, you have this earth, the new heavens, and the new earth, awaiting you, where there will be no more injustice, where there will be no more hate.

Church, please spend this week meditating on this final point as you prepare your hearts for next week's sermon, and as you enter into this Christmas season with your own families.

When Benjamin Franklin set out to live a righteous life, he found that it was much more difficult than he first realized.

He found himself to be full of faults. And if you're anything like him, you know that you yourself are full of thoughts. Do not follow the advice of the psychologists at New York University.

Don't settle for being a good-ish person. Settle for being a good person, because Christ is the good person who died in your place.

[35 : 44] Christ gives you his righteousness, and he will transform you completely. Have hope. Will you pray with me?

O Lord, hide your face from our sins and blot out all our iniquities. Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.

Cast us not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from us. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and uphold us with a willing spirit.

then we will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will return to you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.