

Exceptional Righteousness

by Dick Woodward

Dick Woodward's sermon emphasizes the call to exceptional righteousness as taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, contrasting it with the superficial righteousness of the Pharisees.

Duration: 21:58

Topics: "Righteousness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being a positive example to others. He references Psalm 4, which encourages offering sacrifices of righteousness and trusting in the Lord, as a way to show others something good. The speaker then discusses how Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross allows us to be declared righteous by God. He goes on to explain that the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, particularly the beatitudes, provide guidance on how to live as a solution to the problems faced by others. The fourth beatitude, 'blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,' is highlighted as a key attitude to adopt.

Transcript

I welcome you to the Mini-Bible College, where we are studying the Sermon on the Mount, and I invite you to listen carefully to our teacher as he continues sharing with us deep and practical truths from the teachings of Jesus Christ. In this lesson, our teacher will explain to us that Jesus taught that God-like righteousness sometimes goes far beyond what we think of what God would require of us. Here is our teacher to explain.

Jesus had been addressing his disciples along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. In order to do something about the multitudes of people at the bottom of the mountain and their multitudes of problems, Jesus has organized what Dick Woodward calls the first Christian retreat. According to Mark 3.13, Jesus personally invited certain of his disciples to join him on the upper slopes around the Sea of Galilee.

We call it a mountain. It's really just some hills that gradually slope up from the sea. Higher up on that hill he addresses his disciples.

The essence and the thrust of the retreat seemed to be, let me show you how you can become an answer to all the problems we find in those multitudes of people at the bottom of the hill. Let me show you how you can be part of the solution to all of that need. All the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount should be seen in that perspective.

The first thing that Jesus taught his disciples who wanted to be his solution and his answer was about attitudes. And remember, the first attitude was, blessed are the poor in spirit. The second one was, blessed are those who mourn.

The third one, which we looked at in our last Bible study, was blessed are the meek. Now we come to the fourth of these beatitudes. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

We saw when we looked at the first two attitudes that the beatitudes can be grouped in pairs. They come in couplet form. Blessed are the poor in spirit who mourn while they are learning that they are poor in spirit.

Last time we looked at blessed are the meek and we saw that meekness is tameness. Meekness really is what the Apostle Paul experienced on the road to Damascus when the living Christ, the risen Christ, asked him, why are you pulling against the bit? It is so hard on you. And then Saul of Tarsus said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? That is when he took the bit.

That is when he became meek. Meekness has to do with our will, what we want, perhaps in conflict with what God wants. But think of how meekness and hungering and thirsting for righteousness might go together.

Once we accept the bit, and figuratively speaking, of course, once the Lord gets the bridle in our mouth and the saddle on our back and we are willing to submit to his control, then what is the next attitude we ought to have? The Apostle Paul in Acts chapter 9 expressed it in these words, Lord, what will you have me to do? Once we are under the Lord's control, once we are spirit controlled, or once we can say Jesus is Lord and we are submitting to his control, the next attitude is that we hunger and thirst to know what he wants us to do. We hunger and thirst after righteousness. Righteousness is rightness or living right.

To hunger and thirst after righteousness is to hunger and thirst to know what is right, especially to know what is right for you. The promise that goes with this beatitude is that we will be filled full of righteousness if we really hunger and thirst after righteousness. The Greek text suggests the idea that we'll be so full we'll choke on it.

Are you thirsty for right living according to God's expression of that right living in and through you? The promise is that you will be full of righteousness, God's righteousness. Please notice we are talking about verse 6 of Matthew chapter 5 and notice that the beatitude here is not blessed are those who hunger and thirst after happiness, for they shall be made very happy. There are many people who feel that their commitment to Christ ought to bring them happiness, but that is not what this beatitude is saying, not at all.

It is not saying blessed are those who hunger and thirst after happiness, but rather righteousness. Many have interpreted this beatitude and other statements of Christ to give the idea that Christianity is a bless me club and the intention of God in Christ was to make all my problems go away, but that's not necessarily so. The beatitude is not to hunger and thirst for happiness, fulfillment, pleasures, money, joy, peace or whatever.

This beatitude specifies the true believer's heart, which is a hungering and a thirsting for the righteousness of God. There are many things we could put in here that people think we should put in here. There are many today who believe that the beatitude should read blessed are those who hunger and thirst after

prosperity for they shall be very prosperous.

That is not what is promised here. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. They shall be filled, filled full of what filled full of righteousness, filled full of the Holy Spirit who is God and is righteous.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, righteousness is the theme of the first four chapters. In that magnificent theological treatise in the first four chapters, Paul says God is righteous. That means God is right.

God is right on. God is altogether complete. And the argument goes on in Romans chapters one through four that God wants us to be righteous or right or right on.

In fact, Paul tells us that God demands that we be righteous. Paul also tells us in the first four chapters of Romans that God knows that we could never in a million years be righteous enough to satisfy his divine justice. And so the good news in the book of Romans tells us what God has done.

God has come into this world in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, and committed on our behalf the righteous act that can be the basis for our salvation. He becomes the God man, offers up the sacrifice of himself so that God's divine justice can be met so that it can be satisfied. And then based upon his death on the cross, we can be declared righteous by God.

The next four chapters of Romans tells us how we can live as a people who have been declared righteous, how we can actually get right, be right, and do right. That is the argument of the second four chapters of that magnificent letter Paul wrote to the church there in Rome. So the scriptures will tell us we are blessed, we are in a state of grace, we are spiritually prosperous when we have in our hearts a hunger and a thirst for righteousness.

Notice in this teaching that we call the Sermon on the Mount how important the theme of righteousness is. You have the beatitude in the sixth verse, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied, they shall be filled. The last beatitude is this, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

That's Matthew chapter 5 verse 10. Two of the eight beatitudes have to do with righteousness. We are in a state of grace, we are blessed, and we are spiritually prosperous when we have in our heart of hearts a hunger and a thirst for what is right.

The promise is that we will be filled full of it. Among these eight beatitudes we are told also that we are blessed, we are spiritually prosperous, we are in a state of grace when we are persecuted because of righteousness, because we hunger and thirst for righteousness until we are filled full of it, and as a result of this hunger and thirst for righteousness and this filling we get right. We come to the place where by the grace of God we are right, and then we do right.

We get persecuted for that right, but when we are persecuted for that we are blessed. So two of the eight beatitudes have to do with righteousness. Now notice in verse 20 of Matthew chapter 5 another thing that Jesus says in this great teaching at the first Christian retreat about righteousness.

For I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. The scribes and the pharisees had a kind of righteousness, but Jesus was on a collision course with them over their view of righteousness and his view of righteousness. Their

righteousness was an external kind of righteousness.

On the outside they wanted to appear to be righteous. They would take a little trumpet out of their cloak on a busy street corner at noon. They'd blow this little horn and then when people turned around to see what the noise was they would drop a coin into the cup of a beggar, but do it in such a way that everybody who had turned around would notice.

Jesus said they were doing it to be seen of men. They wanted men to think they were righteous and that is why they did that. He said they prayed on street corners at noon because they wanted to appear unto men to be righteous or pious.

Their righteousness was merely an external one. Jesus said to his disciples, your righteousness should not be on the outside, but it should be on the inside. The inner man is more important than the outer man.

It is more important that your righteousness be internal than for it to be external. The righteousness of the scribes and the pharisees was horizontal. It was to be seen by men.

It was directed to men. It was not really directed toward God. When they prayed they were not really talking to God, they were talking to the people on the street corner or in the synagogue or wherever they happened to be praying.

Jesus emphasized that your righteousness must be vertical, not horizontal. Go into your closet when you pray and when there is nobody there but you and God, your Father, who is in the secret place will reward you for that. Pray to your Father.

He was saying that your righteousness or your piety should be vertical, not horizontal. The righteousness of the scribes and the pharisees was legalistic in the sense of how they saw and used the law to their own advantage. They cared far more about dotting their I's and crossing their T's than the spiritual graces found in obedience to that law.

We saw in the Gospel of John that while they were crucifying Jesus they were still concerned about keeping the jot and the tittle of the law, meaning each little mark on the paper written on the tablets of the law, of their ceremonial sacraments and their liturgies. That's legalistic, not a spiritual kind of righteousness. Jesus always wanted to get to the spirit of the law, not the letter of the law.

He deliberately broke the Sabbath law on occasion to make that point. He would say to them when he healed somebody on the Sabbath day and they objected to it, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Mark 2 verse 27.

The spirit of the Sabbath law was man's well-being. When you do something for man's well-being on the Sabbath, that is in keeping with the spirit of the Sabbath law. But they were so legalistic that they lost sight of that.

The apostle Paul later referred to that as the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. Paul said the letter of the law kills, but the spirit of the law always gives life. 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 6. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was legal and Jesus said your righteousness should be spiritual.

Their righteousness was temporal and Jesus said your righteousness should be eternal. The eternal dimension is more important than the temporal dimension. And then largely their righteousness was

traditional.

It was based upon a lot of rules and regulations. They had manufactured in addition to the scripture and often they were not even scriptural. Of course Jesus said your righteousness should be scriptural.

In the gospels of Matthew and Mark especially, Jesus will confront the religious leaders face to face over this matter. He will point out to them that sometimes their traditions, what he called the traditions of the elders, contradicted the scripture. And when that happened the tradition had more authority to them than the scripture did.

Jesus rebuked them for this. So the righteousness of the Pharisees and the scribes was traditional and Jesus taught that real righteousness should be scriptural. Jesus taught that the righteousness of his followers should be exceptional.

Except, he said, your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. You are not really entering this kingdom that I'm talking about. Jesus said that your righteousness should be very relational.

That is why the Beatitudes are the teaching here on the mountaintop and all the rest is application. When he starts making the application, he begins by pointing out how this righteousness works on a relational level. The real contrast between the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees and the righteousness that Jesus taught was this.

Jesus said that their righteousness is hypocritical. The word hypocrite in the Greek means false face. In the early days in the theater, actors used to wear a mask or a false face depicting the character that they were portraying.

To be a hypocrite meant to be pretending, to be wearing a false face, to be one thing on the outside and something else on the inside. A hypocrite is not someone who is not doing as well spiritually as they would like to do. A hypocrite is someone who is not really trying to be spiritual.

They are pretending to be. Maybe they don't even believe the gospel or maybe they don't even believe what the people in the faith believe. For expediency, for any kind of reason imaginable, they are pretending to believe and Jesus said you are hypocrites.

The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was hypocritical. It was hypocrisy. Jesus taught that the righteousness of his followers should be real, that they should be real.

You will find many references to this concept of righteousness in the teaching of Jesus, especially here in the Sermon on the Mount. The beatitude that we should hunger and thirst after righteousness and the beatitude that we are blessed if we are persecuted for righteousness sake, this teaching that your righteousness should exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, all of this is in Matthew chapter 5. And then still part of the Sermon on the Mount, at the beginning of chapter 6, Jesus says be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men to be seen of men. If you do, you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

So he is talking about righteousness when he talks to us about this up focus in chapter 6. Make sure everything you do in terms of worship and stewardship, praying and fasting is before God and not before men, as unto God and not as unto men. In the second half of Matthew chapter 6, he talks about values.

Look upward and get God's values, God's priorities.

The heart of that teaching is verse 33 where he says, but seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well. In terms of priorities, I believe all of us should have a priority target with a bullseye and maybe about 10 circles, like a target you would shoot at. In thinking in terms of your priorities, what should the bullseye of your priority target be? According to Jesus in Matthew chapter 6 verse 33, it should be two things.

It first should be the kingdom of God. That means God being your king. Second, it should be God or his righteousness.

I believe you could interpret that to mean what he shows you to be right. That should be the bullseye of your priority target. Now all of that helps us to understand at least in terms of the teaching of Jesus, the importance of the concept of righteousness.

I think you will find that throughout the rest of the scripture, righteousness is a very important concept with God. Psalms chapter 4 verse 5 reads, offer the sacrifices of righteousness and put your trust in the Lord. Here the writer cannot sleep because he is bothered by a decision he must make.

Should he do the right thing or the expedient thing? We've all been at that fork in the road, haven't we? The expedient thing, although it may bring a few problems, has less conflict and is an easy solution. But to do the right thing would be costly and it could cause more problems than it's worth. And so even though the psalmist has integrity, he's struggling between the right or the expedient.

He is tempted like all of us to take the easy way out, to do the expedient thing rather than the right thing. So here in the middle of the night, he cannot sleep because he's got to resolve this issue. Then he says, because he's made a decision, offer the sacrifices of righteousness and put your trust in the Lord.

That means he's going to pay whatever it costs him to do what is right. Whatever sacrifices he has to make to do the right thing, he's going to make them and then put his trust in the Lord. And then he lies down in peace and sleeps.

That's a beautiful verse about righteousness. The reason why those people at the bottom of the hill have all those problems is that they do not have the right attitudes. They are trying to do the expedient thing.

They are all trying to do the expedient thing and nobody is trying to do what is right. And when you do not do the right thing, but do the expedient thing, in the end, it gets more complicated. Everything gets out of focus.

That is part of what those people down there at the bottom of the hill need to see. They need to see somebody who is willing to do the right thing. In Psalm 4, the reason why the psalmist says all of us should offer the sacrifices of righteousness and put our trust in the Lord is that there are many watching us who are asking themselves the question, who will show us something good? All day long, every day, we are surrounded by people who are looking for someone who is real, who would be greatly impressed if they saw somebody do the right thing, even if it cost them a high price to do the right thing.

That has an impact on people. That is one of the reasons why Jesus said, if you want to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, if you want to be a city built on a hill that cannot be hid, a candle on a candlestick giving light to others, if you want to be my solution and my answer to the problems

represented in those people at the bottom of the mountain, you must have a hunger and a thirst for what is right until God fills you full of it, until you do the right thing versus the expedient thing, until you have a righteousness that far exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, remembering their righteousness is ultimately hypocritical, external, traditional, legal, not really coming from the scripture and not really coming from God at all, a righteousness that is horizontal, that is for the praise of men. They are not his disciples.

If you are his disciples, you're going to have a righteousness that far exceeds that kind of thing. You're going to have to be a kind of person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness until you are completely filled full. You see why Jesus said there is a broad way and a narrow way.

The broad way seems to have solutions and answers, but never the solutions and answers that God alone can give and the broad way leads to destruction. If you're going to be his disciple, you're going to realize that it starts with a very narrow gate and that it is followed by a very narrow, difficult, disciplined way. There's no easy way to be part of the solution of Jesus or part of his answer.

There's no easy way to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We should understand that by examining the fourth beatitude, blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled. This should not surprise us because the scriptures are filled with references to righteousness.

If you had a concordance and trace the word righteousness or righteous through the Bible, you will see the importance of the concept all the way through the scripture. One verse I'll mention Isaiah chapter 61 verse three, which says that the people of God are supposed to be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified. How do we glorify God? How do we become part of the answer and the solution of Jesus? Well, it has to do with meekness.

That's when we say to God, it's not what I want. God, it's, it's what you want. We surrender to his will and then we become hungry and thirsty to do what is right and to be what is right.

And then we can claim as promised that when we were hungry and thirsty for righteousness, that he indeed will fill us full of his righteousness. God bless you until next time. We at the mini Bible college are so glad you have chosen to do this study with us and we pray that God has met you today and filled you with his righteousness because you were hungry and thirsty for his righteousness.

Now until we meet again, it is our prayer that you are filled with his peace and joy and feel encouraged to be the disciple Jesus is calling you to be, that you will be more committed and available to be used by God as you grow closer to him.

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