

# Sermon on the Mount: Righteousness Rightly Wrought

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of righteousness that is determined by God, not by man, and involves a deep and genuine expression of the soul.*

**Duration:** 47:10

**Topics:** "Sermon on the Mount"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the importance of loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us. He emphasizes that this is a difficult task, as we naturally tend to be self-centered. The preacher then moves on to discuss the topic of righteousness and warns against doing acts of righteousness to be seen by others. He encourages the congregation to have the spirit, mind, and motives of God embedded in their souls and to act as God would have them act. The sermon concludes with the reminder that God is able to produce in us what He demands, and that we are called to strive for perfection as followers of Christ.

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## Transcript

Coming to our text this morning, may I be permitted just to associate myself with the welcome given by Mr Lowe to you all, and particularly to those who are visiting us this morning. We have friends from far and near, and we're delighted to have you all, not the least being Mrs Seaby at the organ. It's a joy to have you, Mrs Seaby, with us today.

The other thing I would like to underscore relates to our day of prayer on Wednesday. Now it may well be that you can't be with us here in the church, but brothers and sisters in Christ, we cannot exist and we cannot perform our ministry without your intercessions. God has wedded the preaching of the Word with the praying of his people, and I earnestly plead with you today, do not forget this important task of interceding for the work of this coming summer.

You really need to pray, and I really need to pray. If you cannot pray during the hours when we shall be gathering down here, get alone with your family, maybe with someone in the home, or if needs be, alone, and bring the needs of the congregation before God. Without the blessing of God that comes in answer to prayer, we shall miss God's best for this summer.

And that not only for ourselves, but for the many who will gather on the Lord's Day and in our summer fellowship series, and also the boys and girls that we'll be meeting here and in the camp in Muskoka. Let us, let us pray with all our hearts as if everything depended on each one of us. I urge you to join us in this ministry more this year than ever.

Now let us turn to the Word of God as we come to it today, continuing with our studies in the Sermon on the Mount, and I would like to read again verses 1-4 in chapter 6. We've given this the title, Righteousness Rightly Wrought. Our Lord Jesus says, be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret.

Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. May the Holy Spirit help us as we seek to unearth some of the very precious and very practical matters involved in this part of the Sermon on the Mount. Now really we would need to go back to the 20th verse of chapter 5 in order to see the link which binds the whole sermon together and particularly relates what is before us today to the Beatitudes and to that which is preceded in chapter 5. Chapter 5 and verse 20 says, I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, or as the King James puts it, the Pharisees and the scribes, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Righteousness rightly wrought. The righteousness which Jesus demands of the subjects of his kingdom must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, of the teachers of the law and of the Pharisees. It must be a kind of righteousness that is more consistent with the revealed demands of God than with any contemporary notions of what we ought to be.

Whether those notions stem from secular philosophic thought or from ecclesiastical leaders or theologians or what have you. To fulfill our Lord's injunction we need to be sure that that which occasions our mode and manner of living is determined by God, not by man. Not by man at his best, not by man at his highest, not by man in his most excellent way of living, but by God.

The standard we are to follow is carved in the unchanging God himself, and has only been seen in one person in the course of human history in all its glory, and that was in God's co-equal Son, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. The standard by which we are to be molded and transformed and changed then is to be determined by God. That's why at the end of chapter 5 you have that word which is an awesomely challenging word.

Be perfect therefore as the folk around you in your church, the best people are perfect. Oh no, as the pioneers of Christian work are perfect. No, you have to look beyond prophets, law givers, priests, kings and all and sundry.

You, says our Lord Jesus, you are to be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect. Now such righteousness must not only be extensive in nature, co-extensive that is with the will of God, but it must also be deep. That is it must be something that emerges from the depths of our nature.

The righteousness of God does not involve God in simply doing the right things. Before God does that which is righteous, he is righteous. Before God acts mercifully, he is merciful.

And God's actions, as God's words, spring from a nature and a character which is unique. Now our righteousness as the people of God must not simply be co-extensive with the demands, with the commands of God and the demands of God, but our righteousness must well from the soul. The actions must have behind them a corresponding condition that makes the actions the very expression of our nature as God's deeds express his.

Now that is one of the main thrusts as I understand it in this passage. The righteousness that the Lord Jesus requires must be a genuine expression of the soul, not a parrot-like mouthing of correct formula, nor a mimic-type representation of the example set for us by our Heavenly Father. We must have the spirit of God, and the mind of God, and the motives of God embedded in our own souls.

And then we must act as God would have us act and do as he would have us do on every level. This is a high calling. And I can understand anyone in this congregation this morning who says already, well that's too high for me.

Of course it is. It is too high for all of us. But we have a God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who is able to make all grace abound towards us, that we always having all things may abound unto every good work.

And the gospel is the good news that what God demands in his people God is able to produce. I can't. Without me, said Jesus, you can do nothing.

You're like branches severed from the vine, lying on the ground. You can't bear fruit like that. But if you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will and it shall be done and you will bear fruit and more fruit and much fruit.

How? Or just because of our union and communion with one who is himself the source of all sufficiency. Now we need to remember that when we come to a passage like this. Otherwise we shall feel utterly, utterly bereft of the least possibility of walking in this way.

This therefore is a very high calling and it is difficult. It is very difficult because we live in a fallen world and it is very difficult because every step we take in this direction means that we must crucify ourselves afresh. You see, moving in this way, you are actually treading upon the natural desires of your old Adamic nature.

Moving in this way, you are stepping on your own neck. You're treading on your own neck. You're slaying yourself.

There's a crucifixion involved here. The cross of Christ has to be central in our Christian experience. Now there is here then, in this part of the Sermon on the Mount, there is an emerging of a fixed principle.

It's involved in what I've tried to say already in coming to the theme. But let me just specify it. If you carefully read chapters 5 and 6, especially in one sitting, you are likely to note the emergence of this major principle in our Lord's teaching.

Not that it is altogether new, of course. You have it in the Old Testament and you have it from the very beginning in the teaching of our Lord. But it's been coming out.

It's being made more and more explicit. Now what is it? Well it is this. The one who is to determine the quality of life of the followers of Christ, of the subjects of his kingdom, the one and only person to determine our quality of life is God.

God. Oh, you say to me, we all know that. We didn't need to come together today in order to hear that.

We all know that. Oh brothers and sisters, I know. But do we really know it? We've heard it.

Do we live by it? If you and I are to be righteous as God requires us to be righteous, then we have to have such dealings with God that, listen, in the language of the Apostle Paul, the image of God in his righteousness and holiness is being more and more embossed upon our souls and upon our lives. Upon what we are and upon what we do. The image of God.

This of course is what Paul had in mind in the background of his mind when he uttered those very familiar words in Romans 12, 1. Don't be conformed to this world. Don't let this world squeeze you into its mold, but rather be conformed and allow God to emboss His image upon your thinking, upon your desiring, upon your motives, upon your spirit, upon your whole soul and being, including the output in words and deeds. And you know that's what sanctification is.

It is the embossing of the divine image upon men and women so that what they do from the depths of their souls, from the deepest desires, is born of God. Looking back over the previous chapter you will see this has been coming forcefully into focus throughout the chapter. I've no time to go back over it this morning, but let me remind you of how it crystallized and became very, very focal at the close of the chapter.

You remember how we were dealing there with the matter of how we ought to deal with our enemies. I tell you, says the Lord Jesus, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Now, that's a very difficult thing to do.

We live in a fallen world. There is a fallen world within each one of us too. By nature we are egocentric.

By nature we love ourselves. By nature we like the whole world to revolve around us, and oh, we like to make it comfortable for ourselves. That's generally true now, isn't it? Over and above that, in our Lord's day there was a tradition, a very noble tradition, a religious tradition, a venerable tradition, which said, love your neighbor but hate your enemy.

What a marvelous excuse for people who want to lower the standard. Oh, you love your neighbor. But then there was the problem, of course, we can't go back over this.

Who is my neighbor? Somebody posed that for Jesus one day. But if you're sure he is your neighbor, well, you love him. But as far as your enemy is concerned, hate your enemy.

According to Jesus, his disciples were not to be influenced even by that most venerable tradition existing among the people of the Jews of his day. It doesn't matter what scholar was behind it, or what theologian, or what ecclesiastical authority. It says, Jesus, that is not the way you are going to live your lives.

Your life must be determined not by what men say, men at their best. You are to be righteous as God is righteous. You are to love your enemies because God loves his enemies.

He causes his reign to come down upon the just and the unjust alike. He causes the sun to shine upon the good and the evil. Now he says, it's God who is to determine the way you live.

Don't you take, don't you take any human being as having authority to determine your mode of behavior and the type of character you are to perfect. God alone has that prerogative. God himself, God as he is revealed, must not only be our teacher and our example, but the sole determiner of our character and of our conduct.

Now the perfection we are to emulate then is exclusively God's perfection, so that in the pursuit of it, we must be very careful, diligently careful, not to allow the intrusion of other influences, however little or however great they contradict the influence of God over us. And this raises, you see, the important question, how far does God influence your life and mine? Now Christian people, brothers and sisters, let's try to be honest about this. How far does God influence your life throughout the day? When you set apart an hour or so in the morning before you start your business and you go through what you call your devotions, your reading and your praying, now when you come out from there, is God more in charge of your thinking and your spirit and your motives than he was when you started, when I started? You see, are we just going through the pattern of things, just, just, you know, like somebody counting the beads on the rosary? Or are we in touch with a living God who is molding our way of thinking and who is determining our natures and renewing us in righteousness? This, this is what Jesus is after.

You don't keep God at a distance, you draw near. That's the language of the New Testament. And you know that we are raising a crop of Christian people in North America, as in other places, where really they want to keep God at a distance, as far away as they can, and yet feel safe.

That's not the biblical Christianity that we find in the Sermon on the Mount or elsewhere. God is God, and he's the one who must be allowed to determine our lives. And we are trying to elevate either ourselves or the society we have joined because we think it is better to interpret the will of God for the 20th century than God is himself, by his Spirit to our souls.

And hence there is rebellion at the heart of so many of our churches this morning, and it's a rebellion against God. And brothers and sisters, we've got to repent or suffer dire consequences for us and our children and our grandchildren. For the fact of the matter is this, that there is much Bible reading and there is much praying out of which God has very little real influence upon us.

And this is what frightens me, because I can do it myself. And I have discovered myself reading this great old book, and I believe it, and it's inspiration. And I can read through chapter after chapter, and it's just like a duck passing through water.

And you're not even damp after it. We have to have a concerted effort of soul in order to have dealings with a God, the only God who is, that he in turn may make our lives what he wants it to be. Now the principle then is that, that God should rule, determine, if I may use the word, dominate.

After all, he's the only one who has the right to dominate our lives. You might tend to kick against the pricks, you don't like that word, well don't let's make a fuss about it. But listen, he's the creator, he's the potter, he has rights over the clay, he made you and he keeps you alive, and your next breath is his.

He's the right to tell you how to use it. And this is what Christianity is all about. The world's been turned upside down, it's turning it the right way up again, and it's bringing God and man back together.

And unless this is happening, you see, so much of our Christianity is Christianity only by name. Paper Christianity, it's not the real thing. And as I'm coming to this era in my life, I have a terrible fear that I've not

made it clear to people that it's not enough to be orthodox, and it's not enough to believe right beliefs, unless those same beliefs have brought me into a real, personal, intimate relationship with God, that he determines my life for me.

Does he? There is the possibility here of a fatal peril. Be careful, says Jesus, not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. For if you do, you'll have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Now what's he talking about? There are many dangers and many problems in living the Christian life in this world. There is the danger of allowing evil men, insidious men, philosophies of men, theologies too, of influencing us, and that as we read books and as we listen to people. But there's something here which is more insidious than that.

It is this, that we ourselves, the people of God, the professing followers of Jesus Christ, the thing we are after in life is for people to look upon us with favor, and to speak well of us, and to pat us on the back and to say, isn't he a great man? Isn't he a wonderful woman? My, that girl's going places. That fellow's going places. I've never met anyone quite like him or like her.

Now wouldn't you like the world to say that about you? Come on, be honest. Don't raise your hand, but it's true, isn't it? But you see what happens. Now look at it, how subtle it is.

When self, you see, dominates life like that, I tend to trim my behavior and the way I do things in order to get you to think well of me. See? And so if I think that this is going to make you cross, well I'm not going to say it. I'm not going to do it, as the case may be.

So that what I really want is I want you to think well of me. See, I'm the important person. You're second-rate.

I'm the important person. And I want you, you must think well of me if you say anything nasty about me. If you step in my path, well, so much the worse for you.

You must think well of me, and I'm going to get it, and I'm going to, I'm going to arrange my standard of living, what I say, what I do, where I go, how I say it, every aspect of my living, in order to elicit from you the praise I want. The praise that this uncrucified nature of mine lives by. The praise of men.

You see what's happening? We're turning the world upside down. The principle enunciated by Jesus is this, the one who is to determine my character and my conduct is God. But in this subtle way, you see, we are going in the opposite direction.

We begin to live in order to earn the favor of one another. And that's what Jesus has got here. Be careful, he says, do not do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them.

Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. Here then is an illustrated habit, and as we go on into chapter six, you will see that this is illustrated in relation to almsgiving, or giving towards the poor, helping the poor.

It is illustrated in the matter of prayer, and it is illustrated in the matter of fasting. The three main areas of the more religious life. In chapter five we've been dealing with great moral issues.

Now our Lord is moving on, not abandoning those, but on the basis of what he's been dealing with already, he's dealing with a more religious side of things, giving to the needy. And it's very interesting that that comes first. Prayer, and fasting.

Now I just want you to look at this, the first of these this morning, very briefly. The sharing of our possessions with the needy is integral to the righteousness that Jesus requires of us. He doesn't say, if you give your goods to help the needy.

Notice that, he doesn't say that. There's no if about it. If you're following in the footmarks of the Lord Jesus Christ, then if you have a brother in need, you do not, in the quaint King James way, hold your vows of compassion from him and shut the door of your sympathy.

Rather you open up your heart and your hand. See, there's no if about that. This is part and parcel of the righteousness, I was going to say, that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees.

It doesn't in a sense exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, because they did that, and they fasted and they prayed. This was involved in Old Testament religion, it was part and parcel of Phariseic religion. Now, much more so in the Christianity which our Lord is here expounding.

Jesus speaks on the supposition that these three practices of helping the needy, praying and fasting, which were central to Jewish religious life, must also be central to the Christian life. But the Christian mode of almsgiving is to be different. The Christian mode of helping his brother in need is to be altogether different.

Jesus would hardly misrepresent the people of his day, but you notice how he represents at least some of the Pharisees and the scribes in their mode of helping the needy. Listen to this, verse 2. When you give to the needy, he says, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they've received their reward.

Now whether this is to be understood literally or metaphorically, I'm not concerned at the moment, I really don't know. It could be either or, I gather. But we do not have any foolproof evidence that it was ever done literally.

Maybe, but not certainly. So don't pursue that thought. Whether it's metaphorical or literal.

You know, there is a way of letting people know what you're doing, your good deeds, your good works, isn't there? You just drop a hint every now and again, you know, the last check I drew out for a thousand dollars for somebody, you know, there's a way of telling people what you're doing. You don't need to have it in the star or in the Globe and Mail or whatever. Whether we are to understand this literally then or metaphorically makes no substantial difference.

The point is this, their action was not determined by God, his character, his will, his goodness per se. Nor even noticed by the needs of people primarily. Well you say, why were they doing it then? Well our Lord tells us.

Before they did it, they sounded the trumpets, metaphorically or literally, and they got all eyes on themselves, and they let it be known that they were going to do something very wonderful for the poor and for the needy. And of course they got their reward. And the Greek apparently is to be understood as, they got their reward in full as the NIV tells us.

It means that there's nothing else, they get a reward of course, people see them and people will think, my, what a great lot of characters these are. Look at the way they give, look at the way they think of the poor, and they have their reward. But says Jesus, they have nothing from God.

No, he says, contrary wise, when you give to the needy, they say something which is very challenging when we try to apply it, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. You know, when we organize philanthropic work, it's always the second best, never the best, even though the works themselves may be impeccable. But when we organize it, we are doing something which says that the Spirit of God is not doing His work among us.

Ideally, you see, it should be like this, that every man and woman that is really in touch with God, really in touch with God, walking with God, whom God is influencing through His word, by His Spirit, is sensitive and open, with eyes open, ears open, hearts open, and is moved by God. And therefore, you don't even need to tell your best friend, if the one hand doesn't know what the other is doing, well, who's going to get the glory then? Oh, praise the Lord, He gets it all. Now, I'm not arguing against organizing philanthropy.

That has been done throughout the years, and there were deacons in the early church that had to give out of what people brought, benevolent wise, for the aid of the needy. But it's always the second best. If the church was what the church ought to be, living in the light of this teaching, then this is how it ought to be.

We would be sensitive, and we would be on the lookout. And you see, when we bypass that, we're losing something, even though we're gaining something else. Does your right hand know what your left hand is doing? Or rather, does your left hand know what your right hand is doing? And coming to the end, I ought to say a word about this, because someone's sure to raise it.

How does this square up with the 16th verse in chapter 5, where it says, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works? Huh? Here you are to perform your good works in a manner that your left hand doesn't know what your right hand's doing. Well, what did our Lord mean in 5:16 when he says, you do your good works in a manner that men may see them and glorify your Father which is in heaven? Well now you notice there's something quite different there. Our Lord is urging people there in the context of persecution.

That's the context in 5:13. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad.

Probably many people were tempted to withhold their good deeds and to withhold from doing Christian duty because of fear in times of persecution. And our Lord encourages them, no, no, no, you do your good deeds in order not to call attention to yourself, and it's the motive that is important here, in order to glorify your Father which is in heaven. Now that's never wrong at any time.

But here in our context today, you see, the motive has gone sour. The motive is evil. The motive is not let your good deeds be seen in order that God may be glorified, but let everything you do be known by people in order that they may say what a good boy you are, what a good girl you are.

Now the last thing I want to say is that this is a very dangerous habit to live like this. And I want to focus on one thing. It's a very dangerous habit because of the kind of person it makes of you or of me if we walk this way, and allow men's ideas of us or thoughts about us to mold our character and our conduct.

What happens is that if we walk that way, we become hypocrites. Look at verse 2. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, to be honored by men. The word hypocrite, first of all, meant an orator, in classical Greek, and then it came to mean an actor.

Hence it became a synonym in due time for someone who used the world as a stage in order to play an act. Not to be himself, but to play a part which really hid the true self from view. And so it is a theatrical term in that sense.

The hypocrite sets his true identity on one side. He's an actor. He sets his true identity on one side, at least for a while, and he assumes the character and the identity of somebody else.

He's an impersonator. And whereas that may be quite harmless in the context of a theater, in real life it is a very dangerous thing to practice. You see, the terrifying thing about living to please men is that we thereby become hypocrites.

We act in a manner other than what is true to our deeper natures. We give people the impression that we are generous, when really we are not wanting to give at all. We are wanting to, we are wanting people to give us something.

We are buying something. Buying something? What are we buying? A good name. We're on the market.

We are investing. We're not giving to the poor, but we're investing. We're willing to do anything if you think well of me, or of us.

God is not the one we want to glorify. The people in need are not the people we want to alleviate. But we want to buy something, and we're willing to pay this high price in order to get it.

The righteousness which is greater than that of the scribes and the Pharisees is determined by the place which God occupies in our lives. If He really occupies the position of our God and our Father, then He will not only constrain us to say what is right and to do what is right, but you see, God makes us the kind of being He wants us to be. And that's why, you see, you've got to read a passage like this in the light of the Beatitudes.

We've got very bad memories. And you can only understand the passage like this by considering it in terms of the fact that God has started with character. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

That's what you are, not what you do. There is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn.

That's a spirit. That's an attitude. When you mourn because of sin, you're penitent.

You're humble. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. You see what I'm saying? In order to do the right thing, we've got to become the right kind of people. Jesus said, if you want good fruit on the tree, you must make the tree good.

That's what Jesus is exemplifying here. I want good fruit on the tree. In chapter 5, He's been telling us how to make the tree good first.

And brothers and sisters, the two of them are requirements of our Savior. His was no cheap discipleship. And the thing I am stressing this morning is this, that we should not think of ourselves as called to be parrots just to say the right things because they're the right things to say.

But we should learn to speak the gospel and express the truths of the Word of God out of a heart, out of a soul that is being transformed and sanctified in touch with God from day to day, so that what we are speaks in and through what we say. That is, of course, the glory of the gospel. It changes human nature in order to transform human conduct.

Regeneration and sanctification are centralities in our Christian faith. It's not just telling people what to do. It's not just an ethical standard.

It's a redemptive gospel hours. God makes men new. This is solemn.

Is your religious life dominated by what men think or by who God is and what He has said? When you say you go apart to be with God from day to day, does He influence your life? Could it be that there is someone here this morning that's never started living like this? You've never really got within a mile of the true God who determines the way you think and the way you live. Brother, sister, this is the day of salvation. Don't keep Him standing outside the door.

Let Him come in that He may live His life in you. Let Him come in this morning. Ask Him in.

Maybe some visitors here and perhaps your pastor doesn't make an appeal like this. Well, forgive me this morning. No, don't forgive me.

I can't ask your forgiveness. I can't apologize for it. But I ask you this morning on your visit to Knox Church, listen.

This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Open your heart's door. Bid the Savior come in.

Ask Him in to give you the life that is capable of producing actions and behavior and a character of righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees and the scribes of old. Do it now right where you are. And there may be others of us who've begun that process.

And we knew what it was when we prayed, when we sought the face of God. Really, we dealt with God and God dealt with us. It wasn't something trivial.

It was something very, very real. But some things happened and we're out of gear. Turn back, my friend.

Repent. Turn. Start again.

Get on your knees. Before you leave your pew this morning, suddenly before you go through this day, ask the Lord to take hold of you afresh and to be the sovereign Lord of your life, that He may save you to the uttermost and bring glory to His great name out of your little life and mine. Will you pray that? And to His name be the glory forever and ever.

Let us pray. O Lord God Almighty, thank you for this new day, this Lord's day. We so often forget its significance, that the Christ who died for us on the cross to take our sins away is alive to save to the uttermost those that come to God by Him.

We bow before you now. We need you, Heavenly Father. I need you.

These dear people of Knox need you. And probably every visitor here today needs you in this sense to become what we must become if we are fit for your presence and to become what we must become if we are to serve you acceptably on the way into your immediate presence. Put your hand upon us.

Let your spirit speak to us by name and draw us into the way. O Lord, we ask it through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

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