

True Righteousness – Matthew 5:20

Jesus Defines What it Means to live in His Kingdom!

When I was a child, my mom used to tell me to clean my room.

- I'd push all my clothes under the bed, smooth out the comforter, and make sure anything on the floor was hidden from sight. To anyone walking by, it looked spotless.
- But if you lifted the bed skirt, it was a whole other story!
- We all know what it's like to look clean on the outside but, underneath, things are messy.

The Pharisees – Religious Leader of Jesus' Day were like that

- They were known for being squeaky clean—they kept every rule in the book, at least outwardly.
- But Jesus wasn't impressed by appearances. He was pointing toward a righteousness that goes deeper than what people see.

Matthew 5:20 - ²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' words here must have stunned His listeners.

As we continue our series through the Gospel of Matthew, we will see what it looks like the be Kingdom Citizens

Matthew 5:20 – is Key to this whole passage...

This would have been a shock to those listening...

- How can one exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees – ***Impossible***
 - We ... today ... have the privilege of hindsight – Jesus both called them brood of vipers, hypocrites, whitewashed tombs (outside looked good – inside, full of dead men's bones)
 - To the hearer, they would have thought – No way – they are keepers of the law...there is no way I can exceed them!
- The Religious Leaders of Jesus' day had an artificial, external righteousness based on the oral law...basically body of Jewish legal tradition and interpretations.
- The Pharisees considered the Oral Law to be equal in authority to the written word
- The Pharisees were concerned about the minute detail of ***conduct***, but neglected the major matters of ***Character*** – ***WW said, "Conduct flows from Character."***

Jesus Reveals the True Standard of Righteousness

- This is the Life we are supposed to live!
- Here is what I want you to see...True Righteousness is a gift of God that flows from a heart filled with faith and repentance

True Righteousness Explained

This is what True Righteousness looks like – Jesus starts with Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12):

We will not have time to look at everyone this morning – Two I want to emphasize...

Matthew 5:3-4 - "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

I love what John MacArthur says in his study Bible – Deep humility of recognizing one's utter spiritual bankruptcy apart from God...that leads to mourning over sin!

True Righteousness Begins with recognition that apart from God we are helpless and hopeless

Romans 3:10-11 - As it is written: "There is **none** righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ There is **none** who understands; There is **none** who seeks after God.

Romans 3:23 - for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Paul goes on to say in Romans 5 – That we are without strength...ungodly...sinners...even goes so far as to call those who do not profess faith in Jesus as being enemies with God – Truth is: There is NOTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT THAT...

How then can our righteousness exceed that of the Religious Leaders?

Blank Live - Matthew 5:20 - ²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the* righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

THIS IS IN CONTRAST TO WHAT THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS TAUGHT

- Right Standing with God was a matter of **heritage** ... a matter of **behavior** ... If I do this; don't do that, I'll be right fit for heaven.
- Jesus turned that upside down = Your righteousness has to exceed that!
- Jesus was not setting an unattainable bar, he was redefining the way to righteousness

True Righteousness is a gift of God that flows from a heart filled with faith and repentance

John 3:16-17 - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it* is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Jesus said he came to fulfill the law

- **He lived (Perfectly) the life God's Holy Standard Demanded**

Titus 3:5-6 - not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Mark 1:15 - "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Romans 10:9-13 - that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³ For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

Repent of Sin – Believe in the Gospel – Call upon His name for Salvation

Think of Salvation this way...Not what I do...What He's Done!

- **Tetelestai - is Fully Paid – Sentence is Fully Survey – Battle is fully won**
- For some here today, or watching on line, have you ever **repented** of sin (turned) **believed** in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection – Has there every come a time when you **called** upon his name for salvation – if not, **what's holding you back?**

For those who have repented of sin, believed the Gospel, and called upon Jesus's name for Salvation...we must live like it!

True Righteousness Expressed

Once a person obtains True Righteousness through faith in Jesus should be expressed in the way they live!

- **Think of some of the other beatitudes that way...**
 - True Righteousness should be expressed in our Meekness: self-control, hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercifulness, being a peacemaker, not a peace-faker
 - Truly righteous people handle persecution well! Why? Because they know their reward is in heaven

True Righteousness Expressed: Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13 - "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

Matthew 5:14-16 - ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

1. God's Design – Salt and Light:

- **Salt:** Preserves, flavors, and purifies; represents influence, godly character, and difference in the world.
- **Light:** Reveals, guides, brings hope; represents visible witness, good works, and the truth of Christ shining through us.

2. Warning – Losing Purpose:

- **Salt losing its flavor** means a believer's distinctive influence is lost—spiritual compromise, diluted convictions, or blending in so much with the world that there's no noticeable difference.
 - **Daily Discipleship Guide** - Chemically, it is impossible for pure salt to lose its salty taste, but it can be "defiled." This is a more literal translation of the statement. As salt becomes diluted and polluted, the result is that it becomes worthless as a preservative. It becomes good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.
- **Light being dimmed** is when a believer hides their faith, ceases to boldly live for Christ, or lets sin or fear overshadow God's work in their life.

3. Causes – How Both Are Lost:

- Neglecting spiritual disciplines (Bible, prayer, fellowship), worldliness, fear, compromise, unconfessed sin.
- When we are "flavorless," we stop preserving or seasoning our environment for Christ. When our "light is dim," we stop revealing God's presence to those around us.

4. Consequences:

- Jesus warns that salt "no longer good for anything except to be thrown out," highlighting loss of effectiveness.
- A hidden or dim light fails its purpose—people can't see Christ's glory through us.

5. Solution – Restoration and Renewal:

- Repentance and renewal restore "saltiness" and allow our light to shine once again.
- Actively pursuing holiness, staying connected through fellowship, and courageously living out the gospel restore both our salt and our light.

True Righteousness Expressed: From the Heart

Rest of Matthew 5, Jesus gives practical examples of how true righteousness is lived out...

In Matthew 5:21–48, Jesus takes familiar Old Testament laws and reveals their deeper, heart-level intent. He contrasts external obedience (what the Pharisees modeled) with the true, inner righteousness God desires. Each section begins, "You have heard that it was said..." and is followed by Jesus' deeper standard: "But I say to you..."

True righteousness is a matter of the heart and motives, not just actions.

- **Anger & Reconciliation (vv. 21–26):**
 - Murder isn't just a physical act, but begins in the heart with anger and contempt.
 - True righteousness seeks reconciliation, not just "not murdering."

- **Lust & Purity (vv. 27–30):**
 - Adultery is not just physical—it starts with lustful intent.
 - Jesus calls for radical commitment to purity of heart, not just outward actions.
- **Marriage & Faithfulness (vv. 31–32):**
 - Easy divorce falls short of God’s faithfulness.
 - True righteousness honors the sacred, lasting intent of marriage.
- **Honesty & Integrity (vv. 33–37):**
 - Oaths aren’t necessary if we always speak truthfully. True righteousness means our “yes” and “no” are completely trustworthy.
- **Forgiveness & Nonretaliation (vv. 38–42):**
 - The old rule “an eye for an eye” is replaced by a call to radical forgiveness and generosity—even to those who wrong us.
- **Love for Enemies (vv. 43–48):**
 - Not just loving friends, but loving enemies is the mark of God’s children. True righteousness goes beyond fairness; it reflects God’s own undeserved love for us.
- **Big Idea:** Jesus explains that true righteousness is not just about what we do outwardly, but about who we are inwardly—it is an authentic, transformed heart that loves, forgives, and lives in integrity, mirroring God’s perfect love.

Exceeding righteousness should be evident in our attitudes. Six different times in Matthew 5:21–48 Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said . . . but I tell you . . .” The Pharisees had created all kinds of ingenious ways of working around the intentions of God’s Word.

- For example, they found ways to harbor bitterness and hatred toward their neighbor while remaining innocent in their own eyes with regard to murder.
- They may have lusted after their neighbor’s wives, but so long as they didn’t commit adultery, they felt themselves to be holy, technically speaking. In general, they felt justified in blurring the edges of the truth.
- They would swear by this or that object and then back out on their promise, but so long as they didn’t swear by the wrong things, then they were somehow people of integrity (see also 23:16–22). But that’s merely an external righteousness, not the kind of righteousness Jesus brings about.

Of course, it’s all too easy to pile on the Pharisees, as if we don’t also struggle with this kind of duplicity.

- For example, I can maintain hatred toward my wife, bitterness toward my children, and jealousy toward my neighbor, all while technically never killing them or harming them in any physical way. But self-justification and good appearances are not what Jesus came to do for us and in us; that is not saving people from their sins.

- He came to give us a righteousness that works its way all the way down to the heart and then ushers forth in love, purity, and holiness. These are the new attitudes that Jesus is producing in His people by His Spirit.

The question we need to ask is this: "Do we see those new attitudes in our lives?"

- Is there genuine love, purity, integrity, and holiness? And this is where we desperately need the help of those around us.
- We need other Christians in our life who can say, "I see the grace of God in you," or, conversely, "I'm not sure I see the life of Christ evident in your life." The latter is difficult to hear, but it's far better to hear that today than on the Last Day. (Platt, David. *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, Kindle Location, 1847)

Actions – Next Steps

Relentlessly Pursue God's Design – Mt. 5:48

Matthew 5:48 - Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

- Perfect – completeness, maturity,
- Does not mean **sinless perfection** – We will never be **sinless**, but as we grow and mature we should **sin less**.
- God's standard: holiness, mercy, sincerity.

Humbly Depend on Christ's Righteousness (Mt. 5:3-12)

- True righteousness begins with humility and need for God.
- **Philippians 3:9** - and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;
- **2 Cor. 3:18** - But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.
- We need the Spirit's transforming power, not just willpower.
- We are transformed by the Spirit of God into the image of the Son of God by the Word of God for the glory of God

Faithfully Live as Salt and Light (Matthew 5:13-16)

- Live in such a way that your life points people to Jesus
 - Demonstrate with your life the change the Lord has made so you can
 - Declare with your lips his goodness
- Are you allowing the Snares of the enemy taint your effectiveness to live as salt?
- Are you allowing the Cares of this life hinder you from shining as Light

Let's go back to that opening illustration:

If Jesus came to your house (figurately), and looked under your bed, or in the closet, under the rug, what would he find?

Self-Examination Questions from Matthew 5

The Beatitudes (5:3–12)

- 1. Do I recognize my spiritual need and humility before God (v.3)?**
- 2. Do I grieve over my sin and brokenness in the world (v.4)?**
- 3. Am I gentle and humble in my dealings with others (v.5)?**
- 4. Do I hunger and thirst for righteousness, longing to grow in Christ (v.6)?**
- 5. Am I merciful toward others, quick to forgive and help (v.7)?**
- 6. Is my heart pure, with honest motives and integrity before God (v.8)?**
- 7. Do I actively work for peace in my relationships and community (v.9)?**
- 8. Am I willing to endure difficulties or opposition for standing with Christ (v.10–12)?**

Salt and Light (5:13–16)

- 9. Is my life making a noticeable, positive difference (“salt and light”) in my surroundings?**
- 10. Do others see my good deeds and glorify God because of them?**
- 11. Am I hiding my faith or shining it openly and wisely?**

Christ and the Law (5:17–20)

- 12. Do I value the teachings of Scripture and aim to follow God’s instructions wholeheartedly?**
- 13. Is obedience to Christ just an outward act, or is it coming from inward transformation?**

Deeper Righteousness (5:21–48)

- 14. In my anger, do I seek reconciliation instead of holding grudges (v.21–26)?**
- 15. Am I mindful of my thoughts and attitudes toward purity and relationships (v.27–30)?**
- 16. Do I honor my commitments—marriage, promises, etc.—with integrity (v.31–37)?**
- 17. Am I prone to retaliation, or do I practice forgiveness and generosity (v.38–42)?**
- 18. Do I love not only those who love me, but also those who are difficult, including my enemies (v.43–48)?**
- 19. Is my motivation in spiritual disciplines to please God, not people (see v.48, anticipating ch. 6)?**