

Last time we were reminded that the primary purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is about Christ coming to inaugurate or to constitute, to establish His kingdom, and then giving instruction for how His people are to live in the kingdom of God.

We previously presented background Scripture about the Old Covenant saints and their anticipation of the kingdom, we referenced the Scriptures in the New Testament that say Christ came to constitute or establish His kingdom and we learned that the kingdom reality is not yet fully realized or consummated. That will occur with Christ's return.

So, the kingdom has been anticipated, constituted and will be consummated. And again we are examining the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, which are called the Beatitudes and I want to restate what I said last week about this part of the Sermon on the Mount.

There are three things we have examined about this entire passage of the beatitudes, of verses 1-12.

The first is that the Christian mindset is paradoxical to the world's thinking.

Secondly, that the Christian life is a progression--that it starts at one place and moves on toward another, this is progressive sanctification.

And thirdly, that the Christian will live in a constant tension between the present and the future that is yet to come the now - not yet tension.

Today we examine the fourth beatitude:

**Mt.5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

I believe this fourth beatitude is the heart of the beatitudes.

When we remind ourselves of the three that have preceded it and see what follows we realize that it is a pivotal verse of scripture of where we must come and then how we are to proceed as those who are in the kingdom of God, who are the comforted and are those who will eventually inherit the earth.

The first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" taught us that It is obvious that Jesus means we must be *brought* to an understanding that we are

poor in spirit and once we *realize* that, once we *understand* that we are spiritually destitute and bankrupt it then allows us to progress to the next phase of the Christian experience and that is mourning over our sinful condition.

The second beatitude, "blessed are they who mourn" follows and teaches us that once I realize how utterly destitute I am spiritually, I am to weep and grieve at the idea of my sinfulness. I am to be *upset* with my sinfulness in some way and express it.

Coming to repentance and faith is not just some mere intellectual decision. Everyone may not be as emotional as the next person in expressing their sorrow and mourning but somehow and someday there *must* be sorrow and mourning over spiritual poverty.

The third beatitude "blessed are the meek" is so anti world that it startles us and we learned that the essence of meekness results in the inner attitude of submission to authority. This person is pliable, moldable and willing to be shaped according to the will of God, be it expressed from God's providential dealings or from God's Word.

Now we also want to remember that all of these beatitudes are the normal expression of the Christian life and we progress from one to the other and at the same time we still recognize that we are poor in spirit with out the saving and sanctifying grace of God.

We also continue to mourn over our sin as we learn to love God more and hate our sinfulness more because of what Christ did for us as our Redeemer.

And meekness and humility are meant to have a greater place in our lives as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Each of these spiritual truths were known by the Jews throughout their history as we have discussed. So Jesus' audience, the soon to be apostles and the masses, had some identification with these truths because they are all contained in the Law and the Prophets as we have already studied.

And that is why our next beatitude is so pivotal.

First of all, righteousness is a word and a condition that Jesus' hearers understood although it was not practiced in a godly manner by most of them.

Without the first three norms of the New Covenant believer who is/will already be in the kingdom, one cannot and will not hunger and thirst after righteousness the way Jesus means it.

So what is this righteousness?

The Law and the Prophets contain 217 references with various words that translate to the word righteousness in our English Bibles, starting in the book of Genesis. Ge 15:6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as **righteousness**. This is the verse that describes what occurred as a result of Abraham being chosen by God for salvation. And why was this done? Because, Ge 18:19 "For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing **righteousness** and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

In other words, Abraham would prove to be righteous because of what God had done by choosing Him and it would be demanded of Abraham to instruct his children in the ways of God's righteousness because from Abraham there would be four seeds that had a unique bearing on God's redemptive history. He would bear a son Issac, he would father a nation through Jacob, from his line and nation would come the Messiah, Jesus, and all who believed in the Christ( Jew and Gentile) would also be of the spiritual heritage of Abraham.

It has always been meant that God's righteousness, not a human righteousness, would be evident in God's chosen people whether under the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, once Israel was established as a nation, or the New Covenant.

All true believers from every age must demonstrate the righteousness of God in their lives. And Israel as a nation, had to conform to an external righteousness, that had nothing to do with true salvation, to be blessed in the promised land

according to the Mosaic Covenant which is Law and does not merit salvation by the keeping of it.

Dt.9:4 "Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my **righteousness** the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD is dispossessing them before you. De 9:5 "It is not for your **righteousness** or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. De 9:6 "Know, then, *it is* not because of your **righteousness** *that* the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people. Dt. 9:4-6

Righteousness from God's perspective is His doing right, that is all that He can do. He makes no mistakes, He makes no errors in judgement or in judgements. He does whatsoever He pleases for his own purposes and for His own glory.

He is vindicated in all that He does. He is just in all that He does because He is holy. His standards are the highest and He always does them as He purposes for His will and for His pleasure to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Ps 11:7 For the LORD is righteous, He loves **righteousness**; The upright will behold His face." Again all righteousness is rooted in God and those He considers spiritually upright are righteous because of Him.

Now, what does righteousness mean for us.

Well, some people have a concept of God as a final judge. And they are correct. They believe that in the end God judges their good works against their bad works and they hope that the scales will tilt to the good and they will have a right standing with God. Of course, this is not biblical.

For extremist Muslims a right standing with Allah is guaranteed if you engage in Jihad against the infidels or against those who blaspheme the prophet Mohammed. In certain Eastern Mystic religions one wants to achieve good karma, a personal redemption so that in reincarnation they will have a better life than the previous one.

And there are some Christians who believe they maintain their righteousness by good works or they will lose their salvation, which is unbiblical.

Jesus pointed out that the righteousness of the Pharisees and the Scribes is not good enough for them to enter the kingdom of heaven

**Mt 5:20\*** "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is not saying that kingdom people need more righteousness than the Scribes and the Pharisees. What He is saying is we need a different quality, a different kind, in other words not the righteousness of men but the righteousness of God.

So how is this possible? How do we obtain the righteousness of God?

If we have recognized our spiritual bankruptcy, and mourned over our sinful condition, which has proven to us that God has granted us the gifts of faith and repentance, then we have become inheritors of God's righteousness. If we are showing the quality of meekness and desiring to be molded according to the will of God then we are acknowledging that God has changed us and this is proof that we are inheritors of the righteousness of God.

But how was this done?

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.18 Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.20\* Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

God's righteousness is imputed to us or put on account for us just as it was for Abraham because Jesus reconciled us to God through the blood of the cross and part of being new creatures is the ability to live according to the standards of God's

righteousness because Jesus died for His people and we are in Him and His righteousness is alive in us because of Him.

As we said earlier for all true believers throughout history our righteousness is rooted in God's righteousness. Our own righteousness is nothing but filthy rags and will only condemn us to perdition.

For God's kingdom people it means living according to the standards He has placed before us. To live according to His standards does not mean to obey some rules or laws but to have conformity to *all* of God's will, not just the parts that you like but all of God's will.

So, this people of the kingdom righteousness means a pattern of life in conformity to God's will that occurs because we are being transformed inwardly by His Spirit. But how does this pattern, this habitual undertaking, this cycle of growth in conforming to the will of God take place.

Jesus says we are to hunger and to thirst after it and we shall be filled with His righteousness. We are to desire it more than anything else. He says it a little differently later in the sermon" Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

We already have it but knowing that we do and what it means to have it we are to hunger and thirst for more as if we could never have enough because we desire to be filled with it.

So if we are hungering and thirsting for righteousness which is conforming to the will of God then we must be hungry and thirsty for the Word of God because it is there that we find the will of God. This is a desire that God will fulfill for it is His will. This is a norm of the Christian life but it appears that many Christians today are abnormal: they hunger for spiritual experiences, for recognition, for power, for money, for fame - but where is the hunger for conformity to God's will.

Ps 42:1 **As the deer** pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. This is a thirst that needs to be quenched and is satisfied when it drinks but yet wants more because it is so glorious to be conforming to the will of God. We do not

want it to stop so that Christ will be exalted and glorified in our lives and in His church.

Jesus said, Blessed are they who do so, the favor of God rests upon those who do so. Satisfied in Christ and Christ alone are those who do so.

Possibly some of you here this morning are more like this. Your soul is hungry and your heart is thirsty. You feel an insatiable longing for something. You are restless. Almost everywhere you turn the grass is greener than where you stand. And the great tragedy for some of you is that even though this is the Spirit of God beckoning you to himself, you turn away again and again to short-run, temporary, backfiring pleasures.

And everything turns to ashes in your hands. The thrill of lust leaves the sediment of guilt and loneliness. The emptiness of a gossip ridden life shows you have no real friends, the drugs and alcohol can't keep you from waking up in the real world again and again with your messed-up relationships. The tan and the hairdo looks so artificial and fades so quickly. And the new toy is so boring in just a few weeks. We drink at broken cisterns and we eat bread which does not satisfy. And the words of C.S. Lewis ring more and more true. He said,

“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

And if we are true believers we are in the end made for another world.

Hebrews 11:13-16\* All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.14\* For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.15\* And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return 16\* But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

The hunger and the thirst of your life that cannot be satisfied by anything in this world is the constant beckoning of God to remember that you were made for another world, you were made for God.

But let us be very careful at this point. For just here we could make a very

dangerous mistake. We could withdraw from the world. We could become monks or nuns or forest rangers. But just here is where the words of Jesus become all-important—to keep us from making that mistake.

Jesus says that the people who will be satisfied in the end are not people who have gone off into the woods to find solitary communion with God. Rather they are the people whose hunger and thirst has been for righteousness, people who have craved for the grace to be merciful, people who have yearned for radical purity of thoughts and feelings, people who have passionately desired to make peace. And if someone should ask why the promise of satisfaction is made to those who hunger for righteousness and not to those who simply hunger for God, there are two reasons.

One is that when we hunger and thirst for righteousness we don't look to the broken cisterns of our own resources. We look to God. So it is not either-or: we hunger for righteousness in God.

But there is a deeper reason why Jesus promises satisfaction to those who hunger for God's righteousness instead of promising satisfaction to those who simply hunger for God.

The Sermon on the Mount ends in 7:22-23 with these words of Jesus:

On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers."

They called him Lord. They seemed to have the charismatic gift of prophesy. They were engaged in exorcisms of demons and miracles in Jesus' name. And he turned them away at the last day saying he never knew them, because they were doers of evil and not righteousness.

They thought they knew Him. They thought He knew them. But they were strangers: "I never knew you." Why? Because they had not hungered and thirsted for His righteousness. They had been religious! They had gone to church. They had gotten involved in many religious activities. But the passion, the hunger, the thirst



of their lives was not righteousness. And therefore they will not be satisfied, neither in this age nor in the age to come.

I said when we began that I believe this beatitude is pivotal for all the rest.

Here is why.

You cannot hunger and thirst for righteousness if the first three beatitudes are not a part of your life.

And the rest of the beatitudes all grow out of this one.

Being merciful, being a peacemaker and suffering persecution for God's glory grow out of hungering and thirsting for God's righteousness.

Deep and lasting satisfaction for our souls comes not from the delights of the world or from a merely religious or vertical relationship with God. Satisfaction comes from God to those whose passion in life is to know him in the struggle to be like him in the world (5:48).

Could it be that one of the reasons the grass is greener everywhere you look is that your life is not devoted to the central pursuit of righteousness, but to the pursuit of other things? Let us consider with what regularity and perseverance and strong urges we pursue food and drink day after day. And let us make it our prayer that we will hunger and thirst in that same way to establish righteousness—from our own souls to all our relationships and in our land and in the world.