

# AM Matthew 4:22-5:12 Filled with Righteousness and Mercy

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[ 0 : 00 ] in the Bible to Matthew's Gospel and we'll begin our reading in chapter 4 verse 22 and then we'll continue into chapter 5 to the end of verse 12.

Matthew chapter 4 and verse 20, sorry, verse 23. Is that right? I don't know about you but these numbers are getting ever so small in the Bible these days.

It's on page 976 of the Church Bible if you're following in that version. And he went throughout all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

So his fame spread throughout all Syria and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics and paralytics and he healed them.

And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and from Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[ 1 : 45 ] Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the people of heaven.

Matthew chapter 5. I want us to look this morning, particularly at verses 6 and 7, if we have time.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

[ 3 : 20 ] Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the people of heaven.

Blessed are the people of heaven. Blessed are the people of heaven. Blessed are the people of heaven. This is why the writer of the Hebrews describes the word of God in these words. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

We can entertain great thoughts about ourselves, but when we come under the searching spotlight of the word of God, we see ourselves as we truly are, as God sees us, as we are in his presence.

And when God's word is expounded in the power of the spirit, we are forced under its influence to see ourselves in all our sinfulness.

[ 5 : 07 ] And seeing ourselves as God sees us, we become, in the words of these Beatitudes, poor in spirit.

We mourn for our sins. And we become meek before God. And this is what the Lord Jesus Christ has taught us already in these words of blessing, these Beatitudes.

But we have a further or second spiritual need. Driven in to ourselves, we now need to be driven out of ourselves.

It was the German reformer Martin Luther who said that our basic problem was that we are turned in upon ourselves.

Our basic problem is that we are self-centered. The work of God in giving us true knowledge of ourselves is not intended to make this inward-lookingness even worse.

[ 6 : 21 ] No, God shows us who we are in order to cure who we are. For once we have discovered that we have no resources to save ourselves, we begin to look elsewhere for that help, for those resources.

We begin to look to Jesus Christ as he has offered to us in the gospel the good news that God has provided. He alone meets our needs.

And he alone is able to meet the needs of the world in which we live. And so as we turn our attention to the fourth and fifth Beatitudes, we will see that they tell us that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be satisfied and those who are merciful shall receive mercy.

Now these two Beatitudes have a very important and significant place in the range of the graces which the Lord Jesus describes in this section of the Sermon on the Mount.

because these two graces in these two Beatitudes highlight a most important fact that while we must come to know the true depths of our need on the one hand, God does not want us to be crippled by that discovery.

[ 8 : 13 ] Instead, he wants us to be turned away from ourselves to his righteousness. And finding his righteousness, he wants us then to be turned towards others in their need of mercy.

So this change from a heart dominated and absorbed with itself to a heart that now reaches out towards God and to others marks a turning point in the life of a believer.

From spiritual immaturity to spiritual adulthood. Just as in physical life the difference between childhood and adulthood is the change from self-orientation to a recognition of one's place in the wider world.

So in the spiritual life the mature Christian is one whose life is centred no longer on himself but on God and God's will and who seeks to serve others by God's grace.

blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness who do not find or see that righteousness in themselves but who look for that righteousness outside of themselves in the Lord Jesus Christ for they shall be satisfied.

[ 9 : 51 ] And having been set free from this self-centeredness having received mercy they are now full of mercy for those around them whom they desire to help and serve.

Hunger and thirst as we were speaking to the children are basic physical needs that each and every one of us has known to some degree. and I suppose that was all the more true in Jesus' day in the land of Palestine where water was a precious commodity and where food was sometimes very scarce.

For that reason he uses these words to depict the intense longing of the Christian for the righteousness of God. Now what is meant by righteousness?

righteousness. Well the idea of righteousness appears several times in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact righteousness is one of the major themes in the Lord's Sermon.

Christians may sometimes be persecuted because of righteousness chapter 5 verse 10 says.

Christians must have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees chapter 6 verse 1.

[ 11 : 20 ] And above all they are to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness in the assurance that everything they need will be supplied.

Chapter 6 verse 33. But what is the righteousness of God? Well the idea behind the biblical word righteousness is probably the idea of conformity to a standard.

conformity to a standard. And given that standard righteousness is the situation in which things are what they ought to be.

Here's the standard. Things are conformed to that standard. That is righteousness. The way things ought to be in God's creation.

And in the Old Testament righteousness you remember is closely associated with God's covenant. He is faithful to his covenant. In relation to his promise God always does what he ought to do.

[ 12 : 35 ] Namely he fulfills his promise. And that is why righteousness can also be expressed not only in salvation terms but also in judgment terms.

God in righteousness saves. God in righteousness judges. Because in doing both he is fulfilling the terms of his covenant which offered blessing but also a curse of judgment.

Often we associate the righteousness of God only with condemnation. But scripture doesn't limit righteousness to this. It tells us that the effect of righteousness will be peace.

Isaiah chapter 32 verse 7. The effect of righteousness will be peace. That suggests that righteousness is not just about condemnation it's about something else as well.

The Bible also explains in Isaiah 45 verse 21 what this really means by telling us that God is a righteous God and a saviour.

[ 13 : 59 ] saviour. He's not a righteous God but a saviour as if saving and righteousness were contrary to each other or in contrast with each but he's a righteous God and a saviour.

In righteousness he saves but in righteousness he also judges. to hunger and thirst for righteousness has therefore many meanings.

It means to long for a right relationship with God and consequently to be righteous before God but it also means to desire to live rightly before him in the world and to desire to see right relationships restored in the lives of others in a fallen world to hunger and thirst will be continual in the Christian life.

You'll always in a sense be hungering and thirsting for righteousness because you always want to be righteous before God and you always want to be acting in righteousness and to see righteous relationships established and prosper in this world.

The righteousness we seek that is our relationship to God being what it ought to be has three aspects to it. First aspect is provided for us by Jesus himself.

[ 15 : 37 ] We have sinned but here's the wonderful gospel. God has made Christ to become sin for us so that in him we might receive righteousness.

This is the center of the gospel. We lack righteousness but God provides it in Jesus Christ. And this was the discovery that changed the life of Martin Luther whom we've already mentioned.

In studying the letter to the Romans he wrestled with Paul's statement that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. Because to Martin Luther that suggested that Jesus Christ stood before him as a hostile judge.

In fact in Luther's Latin version of the Bible the word righteousness was translated with the Latin word for justice hence the confusion. The thought of Christ revealing God's righteousness in the gospel terrified the life out of Martin Luther.

But then Luther began to discover what Paul really meant. He realized that Paul was not describing Christ as a judge but as a saviour. The right relationship with God of which Paul wrote was offered to Luther by Christ as a gift to be received by faith alone.

[ 17 : 14 ] And from that moment Luther called Paul's words the gate to paradise itself. Here was a man who was hungering and thirsting after righteousness and in the gospel he discovered through Jesus Christ that God had provided this righteousness for him that satisfied his hunger and his thirst for it.

But this is only one dimension of the righteousness of God for which we are to long. It has a second aspect. We cannot welcome Christ as our saviour just as Martin Luther did without being willing for him to be precisely just that a saviour who saves and who delivers.

And as such the Lord Jesus Christ saves us from sin's power and sin's influence. He not only brings forgiveness and pardon but he works in us to make our lives look like the righteousness of God.

And that is why in Romans 5 21 Paul says that God's grace reigns in righteousness in our lives. God's grace reigns in our lives through righteousness. So righteousness is not only a gift.

[ 18 : 54 ] We should see it as our reigning king in Jesus Christ. Grace reigns like a sovereign, like a lord, like a king.

And grace reigns through righteousness, never apart from righteousness. Right living then is what we hunger and thirst for as well as for forgiveness.

righteousness. And if we don't thirst and hunger for right living, then we demonstrate that we have a false and wrong understanding of what it means to have a right relationship with God.

We cannot take on the one hand Christ's gift of forgiveness and pardon for sin and reject or neglect on the other hand Christ's demand for right living, for obedience to his law.

And it's one of the great tragedies of the church today that we have come to believe in what the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called cheap grace.

[ 20 : 23 ] We've come to believe a saviour who leaves us much as we were before we knew him instead of in a saviour who actually delivers us and saves us out of our sins.

Sometimes this distinction has been justified by speaking of carnal Christians and spiritual Christians and people point to what Paul seems to say in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verses 1 to 4 but Paul's point in that passage is that those whose lives do not display practical godliness and righteousness are not just behaving like some kind of inferior Christian they are in fact behaving like people who are not Christians in the first place they are contradicting God's saving righteousness and then the third aspect of the righteousness that we should seek and thirst for involves our seeking to see this righteousness established everywhere in this world yes we are to enjoy a right relationship with God in our own lives therefore we are to live with integrity and in our dealing with others we are to develop right relationships and in the world in which we live we are to encourage moral integrity and right relationships and we do that through the work of evangelism and also by seeking to do what we can where God has placed us to reform society and to bring it into conformity to Christ's teaching and that means that the work of evangelism and mission and the task of social reformation are not to be thought of as alternative choices we can make for ourselves as Christian people but we should see them as belonging together we have got to see each as the outworking of the new birth that longs to see righteousness established in God's world and that is what we mean when we pray your will be done on earth as it is in heaven which is also in the sermon on the mount Matthew chapter 6 verse 10 so more than anything else righteousness involves right relationships a right relationship between ourselves and God between ourselves and others and in the world at large and this is why the quest for righteousness can never be a cold starchy hard hearted quest we've got to remember that the beatitudes hang together we shouldn't read them in isolation but they belong together as an organic unity and as we think about hungering and thirsting after righteousness we've got to keep in mind the previous three beatitudes that we've looked at in former

Sunday morning services the pursuit of righteousness is born out of a sense of our own personal need and it develops and it grows because of our sense of the world's need need and the longing for righteousness then springs from a heart that has been broken by sin and that is why hungering and thirsting for righteousness is coupled with another beatitude that directs us to the caring quality of the Christian giving and receiving mercy mercy in Matthew 5 verse 7 Jesus says that the merciful are blessed because they shall receive mercy I wonder do you read these words and think to yourself there's a problem here there's something here that doesn't seem right to me perhaps some of you are thinking to yourself does Jesus really mean that we will receive mercy only if we ourselves are merciful well let me say quite categorically that is exactly what Jesus means but let me also say clearly that this does not imply that the cause of our receiving mercy will be the fact that we are merciful as though we have somehow earned

God's mercy no being merciful is the natural result of receiving Christ and experiencing the grace of God therefore if we are not merciful we cannot have received the mercy mercy of God in Jesus Christ and therefore we cannot look forward to receiving his mercy in that final judgment there's really no problem here in what the Lord Jesus says about mercy and let me point out that the Lord speaks in a similar way later on in this gospel if you turn to Matthew 6 and verse 14 and 15 he teaches that those who forgive the sins of others will be forgiven it's the same thing isn't it now this doesn't mean that we merit forgiveness by forgiving others but rather that unless we forgive others there is no evidence in our lives that we ourselves have experienced the forgiveness of God's grace and a similar point is made in the parable about the unmerciful servant in Matthew chapter 18 and verses 21 to 35 a merciful person cannot be forgiven a debt of a million pounds and then demand that someone who owes him just a few pounds must repay him at all cost now of course people can act like that for example the servant in the parable but the point is if they do they have not begun to grasp the privilege that has been held out to them in the gospel now we often speak about showing mercy but what is mercy is it kindness perhaps well mercy includes kindness no doubt about that but mercy is more than kindness kindness someone has memorably expressed the difference between kindness and mercy like this kindness is a friend calling when you're well but mercy is a friend calling when you're sick and the parable of the good

[ 28 : 57 ] Samaritan beautifully illustrates the nature of the mercy that the Lord speaks about here remember how at the end of the parable Jesus speaks and he asks the three passers by which of them the priest the Levite the Samaritan proved to be a neighbour to the man who was attacked by the robbers and an expert in the law replies to Jesus and says the one who showed him mercy Luke chapter 10 verse 37 in other words the Samaritan illustrated the meaning of mercy and we should therefore take careful note of two things about the Samaritan as an example of mercy it

teaches us so much mercy first thing to note relieves the consequences of sin in the lives of others see how the Samaritan in the parable took responsibility for the injured man you remember how he attended to his battered and bruised body and did everything he could to provide for restoration and healing he didn't deal with the cause of the man's need by chasing the robbers it wasn't retribution that he sought he didn't complain about the failure of society to meet the man's need such protest was not the appropriate remedy for the man's immediate condition rather the Samaritan sought to address the immediate need that was set before him and to bring relief of course there's a place for seeking justice and of course there's a place for prophetic protest when society fails to do its duty but neither of these things is the exercise of mercy mercy is getting down on your hands and knees and doing what you can to restore dignity to someone whose life has been broken by sin whether that's his own sin or the sin of someone else and it should come as no surprise to us that the early church used to think about Jesus himself as the good

Samaritan when he encountered broken reeds he didn't break the broken reed but he healed them when he met men whose lives were like dimly burning wicks he didn't quench them he fanned them into a flame Jesus restored the weak and the bruised he never passed them by or worse trampled upon them so let me ask you are you like the Lord Jesus Christ in this respect have you ever stopped for the sake of the bruised and broken or have you always found a reason to pass by on the other side the second thing to note about the Samaritan is an illustration of mercy mercy does not hide behind unbiblical scruples in order to protect itself from costly service the priest and the Levite in the parable who passed by the wounded man doubtless had their reasons for doing so they had their own lives to attend to they might turn the man over to discover that he was dead and that would render them unclean for temple service how could they get on with their ordinary routine if that was the case the gospel shows us that even though touching a dead body involved ritual defilement the Lord Jesus would have ignored that ritual defilement think of how he touched the funeral bear of the widow of Nain's dead son in Luke chapter 7 touching touching that would have made Jesus ritually unclean but he didn't care about that he wanted to show mercy or you remember how he went into the deathbed room of

Jairus' little daughter and reached out and touched the dead girl's hand that would have made him ritually unclean but he didn't care about that he wanted to show mercy better to run the risk of becoming ritually unclean than to feel to show mercy to the needy because it is not a sin to be ritually unclean but it is always a sin not to show mercy what explains the merciless actions of the Levite and the priest well one reason was their refusal to pay the cost of being inconvenienced and another was their refusal to die to their own plans and to fit in with the providence of God in their lives these things the Samaritan was prepared to do and in this respect he was like the Lord Jesus Christ I wonder do we put too little value on the importance of mercy in the Christian life do we resemble the Levite and the priest or do we resemble the good Samaritan let's examine ourselves carefully here do we treat the duty of showing mercy as if it was some kind of optional extra in the Christian life the Bible treats showing mercy as a divine necessity and if we ignore it we ignore it to our spiritual endangerment and this is something that can be clearly seen in both the [36:00] Old Testament and the New Testament God desires mercy not sacrifice he says in Hosea chapter 6 verse 6 what about Micah 6 verse 8 he has told you oh man what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God lack of mercy to the poor and needy is really a touchstone and hallmark it shows us whether we belong to the world or whether we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ without mercy we don't belong to Jesus Christ and he shall say to us on the last day no matter what else we may have achieved I never knew you depart from me you workers of lawlessness my dear friends how can we claim to be

Christians if we are not showing mercy to others I think we need to go back to the basics back to the first three Beatitudes see ourselves as God sees us experience afresh the wonderful pardon and forgiveness that he holds out to us in the gospel having seen the extent of our own sin and how the Lord has so wonderfully pardoned and forgiven us will surely change our mindset our attitude our instincts to those in need around us blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy may God bless his word to us this morning help thanks for vision for nothing