

PM Matthew 5:6

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Date: 23 August 2020

[0 : 00] My name is David Parker and I was born in Clydebank. I've lived in Glasgow most of my life and I was a free church minister in the Highlands beyond Inverness and Ullapool in a little village called Loch Inver and also in Kilwinning in Ayrshire.

And that was up until 2008 and then I was involved in other ministries until 2018.

So these days I'm kind of semi-retired and taking services here, there and everywhere so I find myself in Dumfries today.

It's been good to be with you this morning and I want to welcome all of you here this evening. I have a couple of notices just to say that on Wednesday at 7pm will be the annual congregational meeting here in this room, not in the lower hall.

And that meeting will be chaired by your interim moderator, the Reverend Kenny MacLeod. The annual accounts for 2019 and the estimates for 2020 are available on the rear table and each set has been inserted into a poly pocket last Tuesday to minimise any chance of infection.

[1 : 35] They've been approved by the deacons' court but the independent examination is still ongoing and we ask you to pick up a set and it will be helpful if you have them with you for reference on Wednesday evening.

Everyone is warmly encouraged to come. And these are all of the intimations. We're going to begin our service this evening by listening to Psalm 109, part 17.

It will be sung to the tune of Hereford. Let's listen to this psalm then. Here we go.

Here we go.

Here we go.

[3 : 49] Little wretch, God set me free, that your commands I may obey.

Come on, your servant, shine your face, teach me the statutes you have made.

My eyes shall see some bitter tears, because your love is not open.

Let's unite our hearts in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for that very encouraging statement in Psalm 130.

That there is forgiveness with you, that you might be feared, that is respected properly and revered.

[5 : 20] Particularly that very hopeful statement, there is forgiveness with you.

Always. A God who is ready to forgive. Ready to pardon.

Ready to wipe away our guilt and sin. And this not because of some very simple and easy autocratic pardon.

But because of Jesus Christ, who bore the burden of our sin and guilt upon his own shoulders and upon his body.

As as we were thinking this morning, that second man from heaven and that last Adam, who came to undo the awful tragedy of our guilt and sin.

[6 : 29] Of our rebellion. Of our shaking of the fist and saying, we'll do it our way. And so Lord, we thank you for the hope of the gospel.

We thank you that the gospel is indeed good news. And it's the good news of the kingdom. As we read in Matthew's gospel.

And so Heavenly Father, we thank you that we have a strong advocate. And indeed, our Father in heaven has said, I have cast all your guilt and sin into the sea of forgetfulness.

And Paul reminds us that he nailed all those things that were against us rightly so.

And he nailed them all to the cross, removing them. And so Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can enter into your presence.

[7 : 37] And that we can call you Father. Father, our Father in heaven, whose name we seek to hallow. Lord, we want to pray for our world tonight.

In pain, Lord. Among other things, of course, many, many things. War and famine and oppression and persecution and so on. We could go on with this list.

But we want to think tonight of this coronavirus. And Lord, we come to you. We know, Lord, that you have created this world and set it up in such a way that you give us freedom.

And because we have freedom, we are accountable and responsible. And not only this, but for those that come to you, you enlist us, as it were, as your partners.

And you use us as your arms and your hands and feet and so on. And this is a great mystery.

[8 : 59] But Lord, we ask you, surely, Lord, you see the devastation that this virus is causing.

Surely, Lord, you see the pain and the suffering, the grief and the loss. The anxiety, the fear.

And Lord, we come before you. And what shall we say? We are simply the clay and you are the potter.

But we shall say this, Lord. We shall say this, Lord. We'll look to you. We shall say this. Have mercy upon us, O God. And see our sighing.

And see our grief. And see our pain. And we believe, Lord, that you are not untouched by any of this.

[10 : 02] Because you came as one of us and shared our pain and carried our grief and carried our sorrow. So, Lord, we pray, remember this situation that we are faced with and has affected so many people.

And, Lord, as we come nearer home, we think of the congregation here. And, Father, we pray that you would bless each person here this evening.

May your voice speak into their hearts. And may their hearts be open to respond to your voice.

Lord, hear our prayers.

And answer above all that we can ask or think or deserve. Because we ask in our advocate and strong saviour's name.

Jesus Christ. Amen. Let's read the scriptures then.

[11 : 15] And firstly, reading from Isaiah chapter 51. Isaiah chapter 51. And then we'll be reading in the New Testament in Philippians chapter 3.

Firstly, in Isaiah 51. And we're going to be reading verses 1 to 8. I can say to you that the theme this evening is righteousness.

And you might want to just pay particular attention to any references to the theme in our readings. Isaiah 51, verses 1 to 8.

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.

Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you. For he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him.

[12 : 30] For the Lord comforts Zion. He comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden. Her desert like the garden of the Lord.

Joy and gladness will be found in her. Thanksgiving and the voice of song. Give attention to me, my people. Give attention to me, my people. Give attention to me, my people. And give ear to me, my nation.

For a law will go out from me. And I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. My righteousness draws near.

My salvation has gone out. And my arms will judge the peoples. The coastlands hope for me. And for my arm the weight. Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look at the earth beneath. For the heavens vanish like smoke.

[13 : 33] The earth will wear out like a garment. And they who dwell in it will die in like manner. But my salvation will be forever.

And my righteousness will never be dismayed. Perhaps I'll just say to you just now. It's maybe worth saying.

Already on two occasions in this reading. Righteousness and salvation have been associated very closely. Look at that last verse that we read.

But my salvation will be forever. And my righteousness will never be destroyed. Listen to me, you who know righteousness.

The people in whose heart is my law. Fear not the reproach of man. Nor be dismayed at their revelings.

[14:30] For the moth will eat them up like a garment. And the warren will eat them like wool. But my righteousness will be forever. And my salvation to all generations.

And then if I can read in Philippians chapter 3 verses 7 to 14.

Philippians chapter 3 verses 7 to 14. We're breaking into Paul's peroration here.

About his feelings of when he was converted. And he says there in verse 7.

But whatever gain I had. I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss.

[15:32] Because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things.

And count them as rubbish. In order that I may gain Christ. And be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own.

That comes from the law. But that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God. That depends on faith.

Or is based in faith. That I may know him. And the power of his resurrection. And may share his sufferings.

Becoming like him in his death. That by any means possible. I may attain the resurrection of the dead.

[16:30] Not that I have already obtained this. Or I'm already perfect. But I press on to make it my own. Because Christ Jesus made me his own.

Brothers. Brothers. I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind. And straining forward to what lies ahead.

I press on towards the goal. For the prize of the upward call. Of Jesus. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

May the Lord add his own blessing. To the public reading. Of his word. Let's say. Listen to another psalm.

And this psalm is Psalm 63. And the tune is. Chrysalis. O God.

[17:35] You are my God. Alone. I see your face. With the earth ends.

My soul. I'm walking. Thou'er Von Bowen. This psalm is by the table.

my face. Our better is near all the life, and so my best will sing your praise.

Upon my bed I lie outweigh, and in my thoughts remember you.

I meditate through the lights, and keep your constant glory in you.

[19:10] Because you are my help alone, in shadow all your wings I'll sing.

You hold me up with your eyes up, to you, O God, my soul will reign.

If you can turn with me then to Matthew's Gospel. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, 5, and our text this evening is found at verse 6.

Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, verse 6. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. I'm going to explore with you from this verse, three things.

[21:08] I'm going to explore this righteousness that is mentioned here. And secondly, I'm going to explore with you real hunger and thirdly, real satisfaction.

before I do that, I just want to make a couple of fairly preliminary or introductory comments about Matthew's Gospel and also about the Beatitudes.

When you read Matthew's Gospel, you notice that there's a repeated phrase that runs through Matthew's Gospel.

And that phrase is that such and such was happened in fulfilment of an Old Testament prophecy.

And the reason that you get that kind of phrase in Matthew's Gospel, which you don't get in the other Gospels, is that Matthew is writing to mainly a Jewish congregation, a Jewish church.

[22:32] Obviously the first Christians were Jews. And he's seeking to encourage them and strengthen their faith by reassuring them that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

So that's the first thing that you notice about Matthew's Gospel. Another thing you notice about Matthew's Gospel is that it is structured in a way that none of the other Gospels really are structured.

And one example of that is there are five, throughout Matthew's Gospel, there are five significant teaching discourses or blocks of teaching.

And each of those blocks of teaching end with this phrase. And when Jesus finished these sayings, so this is another phrase that you'll find repeatedly in Matthew's Gospel.

When Jesus finished these sayings. Indeed, this Gospel has been described as the teacher's Gospel because of the amount of the sayings of Jesus and the teaching of Jesus that is found in this Gospel because it seems to be quite intentionally organised.

[24 : 16] And there is a theory, if you like, that Matthew's Gospel was used by the church as a training manual.

So, that's just something about Matthew's Gospel. Why am I mentioning this? Because I think that unless you understand the whole of any passage of Scripture, you will not really be in a position to be guided into the particulars unless you know what the whole picture is about.

Now, I haven't given you the whole picture by any stretch of the imagination, but I've just given you a couple of little tips as I'm here.

Now, the second thing that I want to look at is what are the Beatitudes? These sayings that are stated by Jesus, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty and all this.

What are these Beatitudes? First thing I'll say to you is every single one of them are found in the Old Testament. The second thing I'll say to you is the genius of Jesus here is bringing them all together and bringing them all together as characteristics disciples of disciples who aspire to follow Jesus.

[26 : 00] Although some authors view the Beatitudes as declarations and so they would say that the main thing that's going on in these Beatitudes is Jesus is declaring who in this world is genuinely and truly blessed.

Others say that what's going on in the Beatitudes is that Jesus is pointing to the duty of disciples. This is how you're to be.

And thirdly, I've mentioned the third one, that the others feel that Jesus is being descriptive here and is describing the characteristics of kingdom disciples.

You'll be pleased to hear that you don't need to choose between the three because the scripture is capable of coping with those three ideas in connection with the Beatitudes.

Another thing that you see in the Beatitudes is that some of them point to what I would call the person's way of being.

[27 : 27] That is to say the type of person that that individual is. Their DNA if you like.

So for instance, the poor in spirit, that's telling you something about the inner disposition of a disciple. The meek, again telling you something about the inner disposition of a disciple.

The pure in heart, again telling you something about the inner disposition of a disciple. In other words, their way of being. But if you look carefully at the Beatitudes, you will notice that not only do they describe a true disciple's way of being, but they describe a true disciple's way of acting. Because righteousness is not only to do with what's inside, but righteousness is to do with what you do on the outside.

it's fascinating, isn't it, that towards the end of the Beatitudes, Jesus says this, everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man.

[28 : 59] Did you notice that? Who hears them and does them. And by the way, the word hear, this Greek word hear, basically means obey as well.

So he's really stressing this. Being and action, this is what Jesus is describing.

True disciples are not just individuals of an inner disposition, they certainly are, but they're also individuals of an outer disposition who conduct themselves in a way that is the true characteristics of the kingdom of God.

And you could look at these Beatitudes are not individually to different groups of people, these Beatitudes are different facets of a portrait of someone who is a disciple of the kingdom, looked at from this way and that way and every which way, this is what they look like Jesus is saying.

So I've tried to give you a couple of wee tips about the gospel as a whole, and I've tried to give you a couple of wee things to think about regarding the Beatitudes of the whole, as a whole.

[30 : 24] Now we're going to look at this Beatitude, although before I do, there's another verse of scripture from this Sermon on the Mount that is through chapters 5, 6 and 7.

There's another passage that I want to read, and I think you'll agree with me when you hear it being read, you could hardly think of a more emphatic statement by Jesus.

Here it is. Chapter 5 verse 17. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them. For truly I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, nor a dot, these are the smallest characters in the Greek alphabet, not an iota, nor a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

[31 : 49] But whoever does them, notice that word does, and teaches them, will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Okay, verse 6, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Now, I want to suggest to you, you don't need to agree with me, of course, you can go away and do your own research and come to your own conclusion. I want to suggest to you, that this idea of righteousness is the centre of the Sermon on the Mount.

It's like the hub of a wheel. All the spokes that reach out from this hub are sourced from this idea of righteousness.

In Matthew's Gospel, the idea of righteousness is mentioned five times. Sorry, I got that wrong.

[33 : 18] I meant to say, I meant to say seven times. This morning, we read this statement and I want to repeat it again and I want you to think about it.

When Jesus came to be baptised by John and John felt that was not right because he needs to be baptised by Jesus.

Jesus said, chapter 3, Matthew chapter 3, verse 15, let it be so now, for thus it is fitting or proper or correct for us, and here's the key phrase, to fulfil all righteousness.

I want you to keep holding your mind that word all, that whole phrase, all righteousness. Not just some of it, all of it.

In verse 6, we have a reference to righteousness. In verse 10, we have a reference to righteousness of chapter 5.

[34 : 30] Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Now that's interesting, isn't it? Jesus is bringing before us, it's for the sake of righteousness.

This is how big this concept is. And indeed, he associates that phrase with himself. Because he goes on to say, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely.

on my account, there's a close association between for the sake of righteousness and because of me. That's three times it's been mentioned.

Verse 20, we've already mentioned that, for I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Chapter 6, verse 1, beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.

[35 : 49] Verse 33, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, now it's associated with the kingdom, salvation.

And did you notice it was associated with salvation as I pointed out to you in a reading of Isaiah. So, first thing is this, what does this righteousness that Jesus is talking about mean?

salvation as I said, in the Old Testament, it's used in four ways.

It's used relationally. That is to say, it's used to point to that the person that is considered righteous has a relationship with God.

Israel is in relationship, a covenant relationship with God. And that is a really important dimension of this.

[37 : 04] That's the right thing about this aspect of it, right relationship. relationship. People, there's many dating sites today, isn't there?

And I was reading or hearing somewhere anyway that they've been a lot busier during lockdown.

And, people are hoping, rightly so, that they can get into a relationship.

My question tonight is, are you hoping, if you're not already in a relationship with God, that you'll get into a relationship with Him, a right relationship.

So, it's relational. But the second thing is, it points to right conduct.

You know, if you read the Psalms carefully, there's a, I always smile when I read it. Some of the Psalms go like this, Lord, look upon me because of my righteousness.

[38 : 14] Hold on a wee minute, we don't have any. I'll tell you, that's a problem if we don't have any. Because, if there is a relationship, that relationship will manifest in right conduct and right living.

we must not make unbiblical separations between all righteousness, the whole of it. As a third use in the Old Testament, not only relational, not only right conduct, but right standing. that's the kind of aspect of it that Paul emphasizes in his letter to the Romans and in his letter to the Galatians.

It's not the whole of it. And when Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness, the whole of it wasn't in paying the penalty for our guilt and sin and standing in our place.

the whole of it was every moment and every breath of his life in a lived righteousness.

righteousness. Yes, but there is this right standing.

[39 : 49] And we've seen how this righteousness is so closely related to Christ. This righteousness is not talking about a human endeavour. All of these dimensions of righteousness, the source of all of them is God.

righteousness. And then there's what I suggested that you pick up and see when I was reading. That righteousness is linked very closely in the Old Testament to salvation. And it's all of those dimensions in my view that Jesus is talking about when he says blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

And did you notice something in that Pauline reading that you might have thought is that not a bit odd? God. I thought he had the righteousness but he's saying he's striving with every fibre of his being that he might be found having that righteousness of Christ.

Christ. Yeah but if we're only thinking in one dimension we might have a problem with that statement.

[41 : 21] And we've got to be careful in the reform tradition because sometimes that's the only dimension that we want to think on. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in one of his early books called The Cost of Discipleship opens up that book with this statement cheap grace is the deadly enemy of the church of God.

We must be careful making too sharp a cleavage between one dimension of righteousness against the others because let me just throw this out to you we must remember this the minute a person is truly born again they are united to Christ and you cannot be united to Christ and not be showing something of that right conduct of that relationship as well as that right standing.

This is what he means I believe by righteousness blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. But secondly notice how he puts it and we're on to this second point now of real hunger blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness and he said that hunger and thirst thirst.

We were thinking of Jesus this morning hungering and thirsting in the wilderness. By the way the language here that is used in Matthew's gospel about blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness is continuous language.

It means we're repeatedly and continuously hungering and thirsting after righteousness. the whole of it, all of it but notice the terms he uses for this hunger it's not just that we have a kind of casual kind of thought about it or we have the odd discussion now and again about it it seems that the characteristic this characteristic that's being depicted it's something that the true disciple of Jesus, the true member of the kingdom it's something that is all consuming it's like the centre of gravity of their lives it's intense hunger and thirst and they certainly knew all about that in that society of Jesus so hot so arid and you can imagine they depended on rain twice a year and sometimes it didn't come can you imagine how dry and parched and that affected the crops if it didn't come and when Jesus said hunger and thirst that resonated with these people they knew what he was talking about oh yeah it's when I feel that pang and that pain and that acute thirst and that hunger this is how you want me to be this is the people you're saying is blessed it's intense it's total

[45 : 42] I think when he mentions hunger and thirst it's not just a sort of literary thing I think Jesus is communicating total and when you think of the terms that he's using here there's something of necessity about it Paul has a great statement and you've probably heard of it and he says something like this woe is me if I preach not the gospel what Paul is really saying is there's something of absolute necessity for me that I preach the gospel and this is what Jesus is saying not

only is this I want you to be in earnest not only is this something that is ongoing and continuous but this is something that is of absolute necessity in a sense the petition that Jesus teaches us to articulate as the prayer manual of the people of God thy kingdom come it's a bit that's echoing it as well isn't it remember how he said in the gospel there seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness associating these things and Peter tells us doesn't he that where is all this heading it's heading to a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness and so there is real hunger for real righteousness and for the whole of righteousness thirdly and finally

Jesus says in this beatitude those who fit the description will be satisfied now there's only I count people people's arithmetic with the beatitudes is sometimes slightly different some count nine some count eight I'm one of the eight counters and another interesting thing to notice about these beatitudes is only the first and if my count is right and the last is framed in the present tense let me just illustrate that for you and he opened his mouth and taught them saying blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven beatitude number eight which is to do with the persecution blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven now those that are literary experts tell us that that's called an inclusio it's like brackets and that's one way that the writer is showing us that this is all to be considered as a single portrait but the point

I'm making at the moment is the first and the last are in the present tense and the rest of them are in the future tense blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall or they will be and it's in the future tense satisfied in other words that full satisfaction that total satisfaction awaits a future time when we will see all his enemies put under his feet and that new righteousness that Peter mentioned that is not to say that there will not be any satisfaction in the present why because God's future is already present because of the coming of Jesus

Christ satisfaction satisfaction I kind of touched on this this morning I believe but would you not agree with me there's so much pseudo satisfaction on offer out there if only you could get the latest phone the latest Mac the slickest looking car that better house that rise in salary that sought after job that relationship so much of the satisfaction that's dangled before every one of us is what I call pseudo satisfaction and not only is it pseudo fleeting and momentary and not only is it fleeting and momentary it's illusory it's an illusion it's candy floss and the reason for that is this it doesn't even to be it doesn't even begin to come anywhere near our real needs as human beings

I'm closing now by saying this here's one or two of our real needs love what better experience for any human being to have than to feel that they are loved that they matter that they are wanted think of that hymn loved with everlasting love led by grace that love to know spirit breathing from above thou thou has taught me it is so if you're a

[53 : 56] Christian this evening you've been loved with an everlasting love that's for sure and the bible actually tells us that I have loved thee with an everlasting love there's another hymn writer puts it this way as well and it's also from the bible oh love that will not let me go I rest my weary head in thee acceptance we all want people to accept us and to accept us for who we are not to accept a version that they might like but simply to accept us I remember

I've been a Christian for about 43 years and I remember the first time I came across this statement in the bible accepted in the beloved it's that wonderful accepted in the beloved and of course I remember being at a conference and quite a high up speaker from America was at this conference this was not a Christian conference it was a conference in connection with my work in Airdrie Health Centre and this person was talking about the fact that we human beings are meaning making entities individuals we need to feel that there's some meaning to our life there's a point to it hence the reason you get people don't you and I have every sympathy for them believe me who have a dreadful illness and they apply to the courts to be willing to take their life why because they cannot see that there's any point or that there's any meaning our best man at our wedding and I won't tell you how long ago that was died of motor neurons in his 40s and I used to go and see him up until he died he started falling and he went to what was then called the southern general in Glasgow and the clinician that he saw was very straightforward and blunt you have motor neurons disease you've got five and a half years to live and that's exactly how long he lived and I remember Arthur saying this to me I know he has a purpose but for the life of me I cannot fathom what it might be or if he has this purpose how he couldn't have used something else to achieve it this person at this conference said that we're meaning making individuals we need to have a sense of meaning and purpose all the tinsel that's out there never gives anybody that it's just little shots and then they

wear off and then finally what I was saying this morning worship

I don't know if you know but one third of the population of the planet worships some religion that is two billion people and the rest of them are worshipping something although it's not religion and there is this within us we need to transcend ourselves we need to reach out from ourselves to something that is better and bigger something that we can adulate and adore so you see all this adulation don't you through celebrities and stars and sports people but don't forget the words of Saint Augustine thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee you see we are God shaped we are made in the image of God there is a remarkable verse in the scripture that says he hath put eternity into our hearts blessed blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled may the Lord bless these words for his glory and for our eternal good we are going to close our service then by listening to a hymn

[60 : 36] I've quoted loved with everlasting love love with everlasting love led by grace that love turned whole gracious spirit from above thou hast taught me it is so oh this full and perfect peace oh this transport all divine in a love which cannot cease I am his and he is mine in a love which cannot cease

I am his and he is mine things that once were wild alarms cannot now disturb my rest closed in everlasting arms pillowed on his loving breast oh to thee forever here doubt and care and self resign while he whispers in mine ear I am his and he is mine while he whispers in mine ear I am his and he is mine is forever only his who the Lord and me shall part how with what a rest of bliss Christ can fill the loving heart heaven and earth may fade and flee firstborn light in gloom decline but will guide and I shall be I am his and he is mine but when God and I shall be I am his and he is mine Lord how we thank you that love overcomes hate and goodness evil and righteousness unrighteousness and may that love of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be with everyone here this evening both now and forever more
Amen in