

Family Likeness

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[0 : 00] Father, today we remember Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we ask as we hear your words that your Holy Spirit will work in us, grace upon grace.

Amen. Good morning. Nice to see you. It seems I did not too badly last week, so I'm here again. Good morning. I begin with a quote from C.S. Lewis. C.S. Lewis said, When we find in ourselves desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, then we rejoice that you are showing us, reminding us, that the only logical explanation is that we were made for another world.

I like C.S. Lewis. Today we are listening to the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the first of five goes of the Sermon on the Mount.

And Jesus is preaching about the kingdom of heaven. And as he preaches, I feel like that sentiment from Lewis is good. We hear of another world that we were made for, that we long for, that we desire.

[1 : 20] If we take the teachings of Jesus seriously, it's like we're stepping into a new world. This week, I'm taking the same week, same, sorry, verses last week as the theme verse to Matthew chapter 5, verse 20, that was just before our reading.

So why don't you open your Bible to Matthew 5, verse 20. Jesus said, For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Our passage today is six case studies where Jesus explains what righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees looks like.

He gives this theme verse about righteousness and explains it with some examples. Now, I wish I could make six points with six case studies, but I cannot.

We can go hang out for hours afterwards. And I won't talk about some of the bits very much here. I want to make, so if you're very excited to hear the pastor talk about sex, I have to disappoint you, I'm sorry.

[2 : 36] I'm going to make three points today about righteousness. The idealism of righteousness, the realism of righteousness, and the graciousness of righteousness.

Idealism, realism, and graciousness. Okay, let's go. In these verses, Jesus is talking about righteousness, and he gives us these case studies.

And what he's doing is expanding our vision for what the kingdom of heaven could be like. He's painting a wonderful picture.

It is idealistic. It is beyond us. Let's start at the end with verse 48. Jesus finishes this section by saying, You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Wow. That is a command. You must be perfect, like God. In these verses, Jesus calls us to live in an amazing way.

[3 : 43] He says, You've heard said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.

Wow. Wow. What he's doing, basically, is six times he's going into an Old Testament law, and he's kind of reopening them up.

And as he goes through the Old Testament laws, he goes behind them and opens them up from his point of view, and he shows us what God's heart is like.

As we learn about righteousness, we learn about God's hope for the world. So, for example, verse 21, You've heard it said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

So, you shall not murder is the sixth commandment. Just so you know, whoever murders will be liable to judgment. That's the second bit. That's not a direct quote from the Old Testament. It's kind

of summary of a bunch of parts of the Old Testament.

[4 : 49] And really, Jesus is looking at the way people are understanding the Old Testament. But he goes on, and he kind of gets to the heart of what the command is about.

Verse 22, Jesus comes with a new authority.

He speaks to us in a way that is true, the way that points us to reality that we have no other access to. When Jesus speaks, we hear the call of God in a fresh way.

I'm going to talk about Harry Potter. Harry Potter is a children's book, and many of us have read or seen the movies. Harry Potter, the very beginning of the first book of Harry Potter, Harry Potter is a boy.

He is a 10-year-old, ordinary boy, or at least he seems like it. And he longs for an extraordinary life. Harry Potter dreams.

[5 : 56] He dreams of a big man flying on a motorcycle. He dreams of doing magic. And people around him tell him he is ordinary, but he senses that he is extraordinary.

And one day, a giant man on a flying motorcycle crashes into his life and tells him there is another world. There is a world that Harry belongs to.

And he says this great quote, Harry, you're a wizard. One day, Harry was living in a reality, the gray reality of concrete and drill bits.

And the next day, a messenger comes to him and tells him there is another reality that you were made for. And you have always somehow known that you were made for this other reality.

Adam and Eve, it's like this. Adam and Eve were in the garden with God, and they were given a script, a story. And they got a couple of pages along, and they just left.

[7 : 06] They said no to God's story. And ever since that happened, the story got muddled. It got confused. It's been a bit strange. And Jesus is coming to us and giving us the picture of the original story.

We are like Harry Potter. And Jesus comes to us and tells us, yes, what you long for, there is another world, and it's called the kingdom of heaven.

And it fits who we are and calls us to something greater. It affirms our humanity as it is, but it doesn't let us stay with what we have now.

We must be called to something higher. There is another reality, and that's called the kingdom of heaven. Now, Harry Potter is a picture of this, but there's another picture, a Bible picture, and that's the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ has a human body, and his human body is like ours, somewhat. But when he was raised from the dead, two things happened.

[8 : 19] God said this body, this human body is a good thing, but this body has a future, which is unlike it now.

God, in the resurrection, God says our life today is good. He vindicates our life, but he calls us to perfection, to wonderfulness, to righteousness.

Jesus has won for us a vindication for the whole created order, and he has won for us a future, a future that calls and sings to our hearts. The kingdom of heaven is wonderful, friends, and it speaks to us.

The shape of ethics is like the shape of the resurrection. The kingdom of heaven gets into our lives and calls us forwards. Today is Pentecost, or the day of Pentecost, and we remember the Holy Spirit.

I think Terry was standing here talking about Pentecost and saying something's going to happen in the few front rows. When I heard him say that, I got a bit nervous.

[9 : 24] You know, what's going to happen in St. John's? Word. Yeah. We could say the work of the Holy Spirit is this, restoring us to reality.

Jesus Christ has told us about the kingdom of heaven, and the Holy Spirit calls us into the kingdom of heaven.

He calls us to become like God. Verse 45 is also amazing. Jesus said, verse 44, I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

As we pray, let thy kingdom come, we will become like God, in that we love like God. The Spirit makes us love like God.

So that's my first point. Jesus gives us this picture, this idealistic picture of the kingdom of heaven, which is righteousness. Now, maybe you will say to me, that's some picture.

[10 : 36] That's an unrealistic picture. It's fantasy. It's Harry Potter. It can never be like that. How can people love their enemies? That is not realistic.

And my second point is that Jesus' teaching about righteousness are realistic. They are absolutely grounded in this world. I think Jesus understands this world better than we do.

Everywhere in this section, Jesus assumes that things are bad and broken and not like they are. We need to love our enemies because we have enemies.

Jesus says, turn your cheek because somebody slapped us on the cheek. Jesus says, Jesus warns against divorce because marriages are threatened.

Marriages are hard. Righteousness is like a doctor who wants to heal but first makes an assessment what is happening in this patient and then takes action.

[11 : 45] Righteousness calls us to enter into the world that's as it is, broken, and seeks healing and reconciliation. Let's take the first one about anger to try and see this a little bit more in detail.

I'm just going to read a bit. Verse 21. You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council and whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire. Wow. Jesus is not joking around is he?

He is serious. Here he is talking about the heart of murder and he says we shouldn't be angry. But he's actually not just saying we shouldn't be angry because verse 23 is about the anger of another person to me.

Verse 23. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you leave your gift before the altar and go.

[13 : 00] First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. This example in verse 23-24 is about the anger of somebody else.

I'm a Jew in Jerusalem giving my gift and I remember somebody else is angry because they have something against me. Anything against me.

I think the point is this. Anger is destructive to relationships. Where anger is left to simmer continue it destroys families friends and relationships.

Righteousness means living in right relationships. righteousness means we take seriously the precious relationships that God has given to us and we seek healing and reconciliation.

I think the key for this section is the verse in verse 24. Jesus says first be reconciled. Reconciliation is putting together what was broken.

[14 : 11] Reconciliation is restoring relationships that have been hurt. It's easy to talk about reconciliation over there but it's tough to work out in our lives.

One of the discoveries I have made as I have become an adult is that many people carry anger towards their home families. This is one of the things we learn about as we grow older.

There is anger associated with our families. reconciliation is very difficult. Often we cannot do everything and there's two parties and I can only do my piece.

But righteousness means seeking to live in right relationships and we take the process of being reconciled to our families as a high premium.

Jesus is saying reconciliation is more important than worship in church. It's amazing. First be reconciled.

[15 : 16] He puts a high premium on this. This work of reconciliation is what he calls us to. So this again it's important to say when we seek reconciliation we cannot do everything but we do seek to do our part and where people have sought reconciliation in their families wonderful fruit can come from that.

So Jesus is idealistic and he is realistic. He paints this wonderful reality of the kingdom of heaven and he comes into our life and he sits there and he kind of speaks to us.

It's like there are these two realities the one that we live in and the one that Jesus is calling us to and Jesus knows our reality better than us and yet he calls us to the kingdom of heaven with simplicity and clarity which is why we need the third point which is the grace and the graciousness of righteousness.

The only way we will be able to seek the kingdom of heaven and pray thy kingdom come is if we understand grace because grace hopes and grace loves what is.

I'll take the last two examples to illustrate this. Verse 38 This section is one of the famous sections of Jesus' teachings.

[16:52] It's called the non-retaliation teaching. Verse 38 You've heard that it was said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you do not resist the one who is evil.

This is amazing. When wrong is done to us we want to resist. Jesus says do not resist. Do not resist.

Eye for an eye tooth for tooth has been called the lex talionis that's Latin for the law of retaliation and lex talionis is good.

It is a good law for the legal system. What it does is it lowers retaliation. So when a punishment is being given out it limits the punishment to what the crime was.

But people were applying the lex talionis in their own lives as a personal ethic. Jesus says it's fine for law but it does not work as a personal ethic because we need to be people of grace.

[18:02] Do not resist the one who is evil. And he gives a bunch of examples which are very simple. If anyone slaps you in the right cheek turn to him the other also.

It's important to say Jesus does not call us to be doormats. Jesus does not call us to be passive. In fact he calls us to actively give good to the one who is evil.

Verse 42 for example give to the one who begs and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. I think the meaning is grace means and righteousness means as evil comes to us we face it back with good and grace.

The person who has embodied this recently is Martin Luther King Jr. Martin Luther King Jr. sought a policy of non-violent resistance and he may have had some flaws but he did wonderful things seeking to obey Jesus.

Another example of grace is verse 43 the last one you've heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy but I say to you love your enemies pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons and daughters of your father who is in heaven.

[19:19] yes love is a power a powerful good the Pharisees obeyed the command to love but they restricted who they love to a few people and Jesus says let's widen the gates love your neighbor love your enemy pray for those who persecute you verse seven Jesus says we must do more and if you greet only your brothers what more are you doing than others you know the Gentiles do this and the question is how can we do this how can we love like God that is amazing how can we love our enemies and the answer is we can only give grace if we have received grace we can only love like this if we know that we have been loved like this one of the great stories is the book

Les Mis it has been a movie and also a musical one the main character in Les Mis is called Jean Valjean and he begins his life as a prisoner or begins the story as a prisoner spends 19 years in jail and he is released from prison and after being released he reverts to stealing to stay alive and the great scene in this story is he goes to a church and steals some silver and he is caught by police and the police take him to the bishop and he says to the man is my friend and I gave him this silver as a gift and I actually forgot something and he goes back and he grabs the candlesticks which are the most valuable piece of silver and he gives them to

Jean Valjean and in this act he gives him grace he gives him forgiveness and he gives him capital to start a business and it utterly transforms him I quote from the musical Jean Valjean says my life was a war that could never be won yet why did I allow that man to touch my soul and teach me love he treated me like any other he gave me his trust he called me brother my life he claims for God above can such things be as grace comes to Jean Valjean as he really understands what it is it transforms him and teaches him to live with grace Jesus wants us to be agents of grace in the world but we first need to know that grace upon grace has come to us Jesus calls us to reconcile to be agents of reconciliation but we can only do that if we know that we have been reconciled to God through the blood of the cross

Jesus wants us to love our enemies but we need to know that while we were enemies of God God loved us and paid for us by the blood of Jesus Christ as we understand the call of Jesus Christ we will begin to repent we will begin to see how amazing the grace of Christ is for us and it will melt our hearts and transform us the gospel says to us we are worse than we could ever dare imagine we are less loving less good at reconciliation but the gospel also says we are more loved than we could ever dare hope friends Jesus Christ has come and brought us this kingdom and one response to

Jesus preaching is repentance we should repent as we hear this call and see our feelings we should ask for forgiveness but friends we also need to seek the kingdom too and pray like Jesus commands your kingdom come he has given us grace so we can be agents of grace in the world amen