

The View from Heaven

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Preacher: Ben Short

[0 : 00] Today's also a special day because of our Bible passage. We're starting the Sermon on the Mount. Wonderful. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' teaching.

Jesus was many things. Jesus was a healer. Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus is a Savior. But today, we come and meet Jesus as the Teacher.

If I am a Christian person, I want to be a disciple who learns from the Teacher. And the Sermon on the Mount is three chapters, Matthew 5, 6, and 7, of wonderful teaching from our great Teacher. And what he does in these three chapters is he explains what the kingdom of heaven is like. And I think maybe his goal is to make us pray the second line of the Lord's Prayer. May your kingdom come. Jesus explains to us what the kingdom is like.

[1 : 05] And he makes us desire the kingdom. And as we listen to him, he wants to fill our hearts with how wonderful the kingdom could be. Now, we're going to begin and have some weeks.

But I'm going to start with verse 20 as my theme verse for today. Verse 20. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

One of the great themes of the sermon is righteousness. Righteousness. And I want to make three points about the subject of righteousness. Okay.

Firstly, I want to talk about what is righteousness like? A description of righteousness. Secondly, what is the result of righteousness? Thirdly, what is the source of righteousness?

So a description, the result, and the source of righteousness. Okay. So firstly, what is the description of righteousness? So Jesus comes, and the first thing he says in the sermon is verse 3, Blessed are the poor in spirit.

[2 : 15] So this is the famous Beatitudes. These are some of Jesus' most famous sayings. And this is kind of like a spiritual anatomy.

He's talking about a person who is in a good position, who is blessed. And I kind of take it that these are the heart postures that make up righteousness.

These are the dispositions of a person who is righteous. Maybe you could divide it into three.

There's different ways to divide it. Basically, some postures are receiving postures.

Some postures are giving postures. And some postures are persecuted, flat postures. And these are the key to the sermon.

Jesus begins with a description of righteousness as multi-layers, deep and wide. Now, I only have time to really talk about one of these.

[3 : 18] I'm sorry if I don't mention your favorite Beatitude. You can put your elbow in the person next to you and say, He missed this one. That's my favorite one. And that's okay. But I'm going to focus on the first, which is the gateway into spirituality.

Verse 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And so we begin, what does this mean? What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

It's actually kind of an interesting thing. It's not obvious. I take it it means something like this. If I'm poor in spirit, I know that my resources are limited.

I am poor. And I acknowledge that I need somebody else. I need someone else to fill me. If I'm poor in spirit, I acknowledge my spiritual poverty.

And I also acknowledge there is somebody who is spiritually rich who can fill me. We cannot be filled with the riches of God unless we first recognize that we are empty.

[4 : 24] Without God, we are empty. And so Jesus says, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Those people who are aware of their poorness, those are the people who get the kingdom.

Now, maybe we could call this a spirituality of helplessness. The person who has helped me a lot with this is a man named Paul Miller.

Paul Miller wrote a book about prayer. It's a wonderful book called *A Praying Life*. And he talks a lot about prayer. I'm going to read a section from his book where he talks about one of his daughters. His daughter's name is Kim. And Kim has autism. This daughter would wake up early in the morning, very early, like 4.30 a.m.

And she would start pacing back and forth in one of the hallways in the house. It was very disruptive. Let me get my book. So I'm just going to read what Paul Miller says about this pacing of his daughter Kim.

[5 : 31] Paul Miller says, In the world of autism, Kim's pacing is called perseverating. It got so bad that we consulted a neurologist who suggested a drug.

We tried the drug, but Kim just gained weight. So we stopped the drug and we went back to yelling. Jill and I have saturated Kim's life in prayer, but it dawned on me recently that we have never prayed for her or with her that she would stop pacing.

Why? Because I knew the solution already. Kim needs to stop. And I will tell her to stop. In other words, I didn't feel helpless. I knew what to do.

I call this the idiot approach to life. In other words, you idiot, if you would just stop. Little children are good at being helpless. It's what they do best.

As adults, we forget how important helplessness is. I, for one, am allergic to helplessness. I don't like it. I want a plan, an idea, or maybe a friend to listen to my problem.

[6 : 34] I think that's very wonderful. Paul Miller goes on to say, Maturity as a Christian looks like this. I learn my own helplessness.

And I see it grow deeper. And I learn the ability of God to meet my help. And that grows greater. And as those things grow, I see how wonderful the grace of God to me is.

This is a spirituality of helplessness. Again, he says, The gospel, God's free gift of grace, only works when we realize we don't have it together.

The same is true for prayer. The very thing we are allergic to, helplessness. This is what makes prayer work. Prayer works because we are, in fact, helplessness.

Yes, this is wonderful. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Those who are poor in spirit will pray because they acknowledge that they need God's help.

[7 : 34] Those who are poor in spirit will be humble. They will, no, they don't have all the answers. There is a large concern today about the breakdown in communication. Communication sides that pick one side and another side and dig their heels in and, you know, Facebook arguments or whatever.

You know, wouldn't it be wonderful if we learned to be poor in spirit and say, maybe I don't know everything. I was working for a landscaper last summer and I learned about the Japanese knotweed.

I wonder if you've learned about the Japanese knotweed. I've told my family all about it. It's a plant that grows about 12 feet high. It looks a bit like bamboo.

It's taking over Vancouver. It grows very fast and a lot of it everywhere. And this plant can break concrete and tarmac.

Maybe it's broken some of your tarmac out the back. You should go look. And the reason is it's got a massive root. The root, get this, 10 feet deep.

[8 : 40] You can't get rid of it. You dig down 3, 4, 5, 6 feet. The root's still there. Dug right, right down. And that guy is permanent. We need the truth of our poverty in spirit to be like that root.

To dig deep, deep, deep down into our hearts so we can break the concrete. Now, I would just like to say, perhaps you are new to Jesus' teachings.

And this sounds a bit strange. And if this sounds a bit strange to you, I would say it is. It's a bit strange. We do not live in a world that blesses the poor in spirit.

We live in a world that blesses the successful, the confident, those who have good self-talk. Those kind of things. But this is the spirituality that Jesus acknowledges.

I don't have time to go into all the rest. But this is the beginning. The beginning of the spirituality that Jesus speaks of is poverty in spirit. And I'll just say this. It can't stop there. Because our spirituality and our righteousness must also extend outwards.

[9 : 51] The Beatitudes begin inwards and they take us outwards. Verse 7. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Verse 9.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. I think one of the implications of the Beatitudes is the most precious thing that we have in our life is our relationships.

Our friendships and our family. And righteousness means living in right relationships. So we need the emptiness. And we also need to begin to be merciful.

Okay. So this is the beginning of a description of righteousness. I wish I had more time. I don't. But I'll just say this. This picture of righteousness is very wonderful.

And it's the foundation for Christian spirituality. This is the foundation for what it means to be righteous. And let me just commend a little practice. Why don't you take one of these Beatitudes home and make it a little prayer exercise.

[10 : 56] You could say to yourself, I'll pick. Let me commend verse 6. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. So Jesus begins this sermon with a wonderful description.

What does righteous look like? But in verse 13, he stops describing what it looks like. And he begins to describe what it does. What the results are.

Verse 13. You are the light of the world, but if salt loses its taste, how can it be its saltiness restored? And he uses three pictures. A picture of salt, which gives flavor.

Light, which lights a room. And a city on a hill. And I take it the point of it is this. Where you find people who are righteous, they will be very attractive.

People who are righteous will be like the salt, which gives wonderful flavor. People who are righteous will be like light, that will show the light of the world.

[11 : 59] And Jesus gives a negative warning. He says, it's possible for salt to lose saltiness. It's possible for the light to be put under a basket.

But this is not right. Notice in verse 16 that Jesus talks about works. This is very interesting. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven.

You know, this is a bit confusing, because in chapter 6, verse 1, Jesus says, don't do your works in front of people so they get praise for you. What is Jesus talking about? One of the foundational ideas that has brought forth the modern mind is the separation that we have between public and private.

This is a now old, but still very much living in our minds concept. The difference between the private world and the public world. So the private world is the world of values, and the public world is the world of facts.

So public gets things like science, politics, business, you know, the hard things in life. And the values private world is the nice world of art, and the world of religion, and the world of morality.

[13 : 27] There's a separation between these two things, between the public and the private. And the separation between these two is foundational to a lot of the modern project.

I feel a little bit embarrassed talking about this. Two of my Regent College professors are here, and this is their area of expertise. So if you want to know more about this, you can ask Craig Gay or Jeff Green more about this.

And I'm sure they'll agree with everything that I say, because I did my assignments. This division between public and private, a Christian can never accept this, because God is God of the public, and he's God of the private.

This is all throughout Scripture. So today we read Psalm 47. Let me just read one verse. Psalm 47, page 7 on your thing.

Psalm 47, verse 2. For the Lord Most High is to be feared. He is a great king over all the earth. The Old Testament is filled with this picture.

[14 : 39] God is the public king. And the New Testament is filled with this picture. Jesus brings the kingdom. The kingdom is a political image.

It's an economic image. It's a public image. So what do we do with this? I take it that the meaning of this is that Christians need to have a public presence.

And Christians need to have two public things to our presence. Our proclamation and our deeds. Yes, Christians need to speak about Jesus in the public sphere.

But here, Jesus talks about our works. In the book of Acts, there's a wonderful model of this. Many, many of the sermons in the book of Acts come after someone asks a question.

So Peter and John do a miracle. And the Pharisees bring them in and they ask, By what power and name did you do this? And I think the meaning of this is this.

[15 : 44] It's not the church is here to answer the questions of the world. The world has many questions and we do not have the answer to all of them. The meaning of it is this.

As the Spirit works in the church, the world will begin to ask questions. As Christians follow Jesus and become salt and light, the world will see and ask, What is the meaning of this?

And we have only one answer. Jesus Christ. We proclaim Him crucified. As Christians, we need both to encounter the world with a missionary mind.

We need to live as salt and speak with salt. We need to live as light and proclaim the only light that is Jesus Christ. We need to be Jesus and declare that we have no righteousness except Jesus.

This is the call that Jesus puts before us. And a Christian cannot accept hiding the light under the basket. Okay, so that's the result of righteousness.

[16 : 51] People being attracted. Attracted to us, but attracted to the Jesus who is in us. But my last point is the source. The source of righteousness.

Now, if I just stopped here, I would be putting a great burden upon you. Go and be poor in spirit. Go and be the light to the world. And this sermon would be totally missing grace.

Which is why we need verse 17. Jesus said, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them.

I have come to fulfill them. Yes, Jesus is our source of righteousness. Both the law and the prophets speak about the righteousness of God.

The prophets longed for the day when righteousness would come. They speak about the desert blooming like a crocus flower.

[17 : 51] Very nice. And Jesus Christ has come to fulfill the hopes and the longings of the prophets. I was talking to Jeremy Graham after the service.

And he said, reading the Beatitudes is a little bit like watching videos about yoga. I'll take his word for that. I have not watched too many videos about yoga. You can ask him about that.

But you, he said, begin watching these videos and you say, Oh, that's very nice. I would like to do that. I'd like to do that. I'd really like to be able to do that. And then you start doing yoga.

And then you find you can't do that. And you can't do that. And you really can't do that. Yes. You see, we read these Beatitudes and we feel the draw of them.

We also feel our inadequacy. And the reason is, Jesus is the one who brings the kingdom. Jesus brings the kingdom and all the righteousness that he gives.

[18 : 48] You see, Jesus is the one who is poor in spirit. Yes. Yes, he is. Jesus is the one who mourns. He felt the pain of the world more deeply than you or I could have.

Jesus is the one who hungered and thirsted for righteousness. Jesus is the one who not only teaches us about righteousness, but he lives for it and he dies for it.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Yes. Jesus was persecuted for righteousness, both the teaching and the living.

And we can be righteous. You see, Jesus is our source of righteousness. And we can be poor in spirit when Jesus comes to us and teaches us how to do it.

Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, the spirit lives in us. And it is the spirit in us that calls out, Abba, Father. It is the spirit that calls in us. Come. Come, Lord, come.

[19 : 51] Amen.