

King Jesus Defines Righteousness – Pt. 4

Matt. 5:1-12

Intro. In the past three messages from **Matt. 5:1-12** we've considered six of the eight beatitudes. Jesus pronounced these as the preamble to His Sermon on the Mount. Each Beatitude begins with a declaration of blessing for those who practice the righteousness set forth in these eight divine standards. As we've stressed repeatedly, the beatitudes define righteousness and describe the character of citizens in Christ's kingdom. They were not given to show us **how** to be saved, but to show us **how much** we need to be saved. If we honestly compare these beatitudes with attitudes and behavior that come natural to us, we should realize how far we fall short. Coming to terms with our inability to live this way, should drive us to Christ and the righteousness that comes not by trying but by trusting. We need the goodness that comes by trusting Christ who took our sin so we might be made new. (**II Cor. 5:21**) Once we've experienced God's salvation, we then find the inner resource of God's Spirit who enables us to live as citizens of Christ's kingdom.

The reason Jesus began His Sermon as He did is not hard to understand. The prevailing idea in the minds of His Jewish audience revolved around performance. Judaism had corrupted thoughts about God and His expectations for humanity. The Jews felt the kingdom of heaven was only for those who were good enough...those who scrupulously lived according to God's Law. While professing to be the "*separate ones*" who modeled the life God requires, Israel's religious leaders were great pretenders. They heaped duty and legalistic responsibility on people. But they didn't keep the Law or know God themselves. As we've said previously, the key to understanding the purpose for the beatitudes is **5:20** - **For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

I had a physical exam a month ago complete with blood work and a stress test. Last Monday I saw the doctor to discuss the test results. On page after computer page, he showed me how my numbers compare to numbers considered "normal." Finding nothing outside reasonable margins, he said I might live another week or two. There's a chance. But who should determine what's "normal" and what isn't? Not me! The numbers are determined by those knowledgeable in medical science. So I didn't debate the test results. I didn't pull out a sheet with some numbers of my own. I didn't argue the recommended LDL and HDL cholesterol levels or debate the results of my EKG. By the way, isn't it amazing that physical health can be measured numerically? Maybe math is important after all!

But here's my point...if medical specialists are the only ones qualified to determine fitness and acceptable measurements for the health of our earthly bodies, who should decide what's acceptable for life in heaven? Should any of us down here make that call? How about this?...the only accurate and authoritative standard must come from the God who lives there. And oh by the way, on Mt. Sinai the Lord gave us the perfect ten. The trouble is...most people have ignored God's numbers. We've turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to God's requirements. Many feel they're OK when the fact is...they've refused a check up by the One whose diagnosis matters.

So what did Jesus do? How did His teaching ministry begin? It began with an eight point test drawn up and sent down from heaven. Who are the blessed? Who is spiritually healthy? Who qualify to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? The religious world has a set of ideas. But the Son of God gave Heaven's answer in **vs.1-12**. He started by saying, kingdom people are **poor in spirit**. They recognize the futility of self-salvation. In utter dependence they cry out for God's mercy and grace. They take life seriously and **mourn** because of their sin and the sin that offends God and brings misery to His creation. In humility and **meekness**, they submit to the God who alone can save them and make them righteous. Then having tasted the goodness of the Lord, **they hunger and thirst for righteousness** the way a thirsty traveler searches for food and drink.

Ever conscious of the enormous gift of mercy and forgiveness they received when God saved them, they're **merciful** to others. They maintain a generous attitude toward people whether they deserve it or not. They seek opportunities to make life better for those in misery. Then Jesus said, they are **pure in heart**. In other words, their love for God isn't mixed, diluted or contaminated by love for lesser things...especially sinful things. In **Matt. 22:37** Jesus said the first and greatest command is, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**" This is the essence of what it means to have a **pure heart**. So these are the first six beatitudes. I took four Sundays to unpack them because they're so important. They form the basis for the Similitude's that follow in **vs.13-16**. Kingdom people are to be **salt and light** in this world. We are to be people whose lives have maximum impact. We'll see this next time. But the actual substance of what it means to be salt and light consists of the righteousness attitudes and behavior proscribed in these 8 beatitudes. We come this AM to the final two.

1. Blessed are the peace-makers – v. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

The heathen have many gods and goddesses of violence and war. The Bible says the true God is **the God of peace**. His whole program of redemption is designed to establish peace for those who were formerly enemies and alienated from Him. The ultimate goal of God's plan is to bring peace to the whole world through the work of His Messiah. 600 years before Jesus came, God spoke through His prophet and said, **For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this - Isa. 9:6, 7.** This promise is like music to the ears of a world that knows more about war than peace. The peace of Messiah's kingdom will be uninterrupted and endless.

One source calculates there have been 3010 major wars during 3,700 years of recorded history. As reported in a 2011 issue of History Today, incidents of war show no sign of decline. In fact, wars have increased by an average of 2% per year in the period from 1870 to 2001! The history of humanity is a record of strife and conflict with little hope for peace and unity. The fact that war is so prevalent prompted somebody to say "*Peace is that glorious moment in history when everyone stops to reload.*" Today nations like Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Turkey, the Arab States and some African nations, are reloading. They may be reloading for the final showdown the Bible calls Armageddon. Truce has proven to be humanity's best hope for peace.

But aside from international conflict, Dr. John MacArthur writes, "*We do not have economic, religious, racial, social, family, or personal peace. There seems to be no end of marches, sit-ins, rallies, protests, demonstrations, riots, and wars. Disagreement and conflict are the order of the day. No day has had more need of peace than our own!*"

Did you know that God's Word contains more than 400 references to peace? In Greek, the word translated **peace** is *eirene* from which we derive the lady's name, Irene. In Hebrew, the word is *shalom*. This familiar Hebrew greeting means more than the absence of trouble or fighting. It signifies everything which makes for a person's highest good. So in the east, when a man says, *shalom* or *salaam*, he isn't merely wishing away conflict or bad things...he's wishing the other person the best of every good thing. In the same way, the peace God provides isn't just a cessation of hostilities or increased toleration. It isn't just one party letting go of his end of the rope. True peace...the kind the world needs so desperately...involves a change of nature. Because human beings are prone to turmoil and fighters at heart, only God can change us inwardly.

In Rom. 3:10-17 Paul wrote, **As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know."** Writing to Christians, James 4:1 says, **What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?** " You see, *"the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart."* We have a heart defect.

Like every grandparent, I can't help myself...I think my grandkids are exceptional. They're gifted...I'm sure of it. But I have to admit something ...they're not exceptional in this one regard. Like most kids their age, a simple game can escalate to conflict in a heart-beat. Who gets to go first is sometimes settled with fists. A turf war can break out over who gets to sit where. Fairness and equality is demanded or else. Am I right about that? You see the **way of peace we do not know.**

But there is a way of peace! God sent a peace-maker to planet earth...a peace maker who can neutralize hostility and cure the turmoil in our hearts. He happens to be the Christ who **rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. – Mark 4:39** This same Lord of wind and waves wants to calm the trouble and discord in our lives. **Eph. 2:17** says, **He (Jesus) came and preached peace to you who were far away (Gentiles) and peace to those who were near. (Jews)** The Gospel is all about peace...peace with God / peace with ourselves / and peace with others. This peace Christ provides and His Holy Spirit produces is described as a peace the unsaved world can't know. It's a peace that transcends all understanding. Dr. William Miller from New Zealand taught a number of Bible classes at Washington Bible College. When describing a blessing like peace, he would say, "Laddies, it's better felt than told!" Just after His Triumphal Entry **Lk.19:41, 42** says, **As he (Jesus) approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes.** If Israel embraced Jesus their Messiah, they would have experienced the peace God promised. The same is true for each of us here this AM. To experience God's peace, we have to come to God's peace-maker, Jesus. Only Jesus can fix what's broken in us. Only Jesus exchange our sinful, selfish ways for His righteousness. People may be able to stop fighting without righteousness, but we can't live peaceably without righteousness.

So Jesus said, **Blessed are the peacemakers.** But who are these peace-makers and in what way do they make peace? In the purest and primary sense, **peacemakers** are believers. They are sinners who have found peace with God through faith in Christ. The peace of we promote is the peace we possess. Because this peace is so real and too good to keep to ourselves we want others to know about it. In obedience to our Savior and King, we serve as Christ's ambassadors and continue the work Jesus began. **II Cor. 5:17-20** says, **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.** To lead a person to trust Christ as Savior is the greatest peace-making act a human being can perform. Because salvation and peace with God is forever, it's beyond anything a diplomat or statesman could ever hope to accomplish. Sorry John Kerry.

Beyond sharing our faith and helping sinners come to Christ, peacemakers will do what we can to live at peace with others and help people make live at peace with each other. Our lives are given to promoting God's kingdom / quenching hatred / and reconciling those who are divided.

A peace-maker builds bridges. We're in salvage, not the wrecking business. Yet from the example of God, the path to peace may demand confrontation and rebuke. Just as a faithful doctor tells his patients the truth, a peacemaker must speak the truth in love. People need the Lord!

Notice the promise that comes with this seventh beatitude...**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.** The Greek word translated **sons** is *huios* which expresses the dignity and honor of the relationship between a child and his parents. Dr. William Barclay says the phrase **son of** was a typical Hebrew expression. Instead of describing a man as a consoling and comforting individual, the Hebrew labeled him a "son of consolation." That's what they called Barnabas. The point here in **v.9** is that peacemakers **will be called sons of God** in the sense that they do the very work God is doing. It's a "*like Father, like son*" thing. The same thought appears in **Matt. 5:44, 45 - But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.** So peacemakers do the work of God...the work of our Father in heaven. By virtue of this good work, our relationship to God is dignified and honored. Our passion for peace-making proves we are His sons and daughters. Let that sink in!

2. Blessed are those who are persecuted – v. 10-12 - Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

There's a verse a little further along in Matthew's Gospel that seems to contradict this seventh beatitude. In **Matt. 10:34** Jesus said, "**Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.**" When we read this verse we tend to wonder how it relates to the peace-making of **Matt. 5:9**. How can Jesus be a peace-maker and a peace-taker? The question is resolved when we understand that Jesus doesn't offer peace at any price. We've seen too much of that! The peace Jesus offers is based on truth and righteousness...qualities the unsaved world fiercely opposes. You see God knows something we're slow to grasp. A truce can be signed and hostilities can cool down without reconciling the parties. Lawsuits are often settled by the exchange of money. But seldom is there forgiveness between parties. Nations sign agreements but the a cold war continues. God knows there can never be true and lasting peace apart from truth and righteousness! That's why Jesus died on the cross. Peace between man and God could never be achieved until our sin was dealt with. God didn't merely turn His head and pretend our sin was no longer an issue...He didn't sweep our shame under the carpet. He transferred the record of our failures to His perfect Son who paid the penalty for our misdeeds. On that basis alone could we be reconciled to God and be legitimately called His friends.

Suppose the physical exam I had last month revealed something life-threatening. If you were in my shoes, would you want a doctor who dispenses only good news and sends his patients away feeling peaceful and happy? Or would you want a doctor who confronts test results honestly and seeks a solution for life-threatening issues? Would you want a doctor who recommends aggressive treatment ...or a doctor who just pats you on the back and sends you home saying, "*relax, everything will be just fine.*" Not me. That sort of peace is an illusion. It's a peace that can't last.

The Great Physician is the God of truth and righteousness. He knows peace can never come to His planet until human hearts are changed. So God reaches out to us as individuals. His Spirit convicts us of how much we need His salvation. Those who trust Christ are saved one by one. Yet most people don't want to hear His divine diagnosis. The Bible is mocked and marginalized. Preaching against sin is unpopular...even in the church!

In the relativism of our times skeptics deny such a thing as truth even exists! The world wants peace while hating the divine standards which lead to peace. So on a hill called Calvary, men killed heaven's messenger...heaven's peace-maker. The Son of God was falsely accused / mocked / cursed / spit on / pierced / and crucified. That's how the world responded to truth and righteousness. Yet Jesus died so we might be reconciled to God and to each other. He died to remove the cancer of sin...a cancer that was killing us all. Then He rose from the dead proving His power over death itself.

Since that time 2,000 years ago, conflict has erupted wherever truth and righteousness are lived out or proclaimed. This is what Jesus meant in **vs.10-12**. Before true peace can come, there will be a period of conflict. In the next verses of **Matt. 10** He went on to say, **"For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."** This is what conversion often results in. It divides families. When one family member becomes a follower of Christ, the others often react with hostility. It was that way in my father's family. When my dad became a Christian his family called him a "holy roller." They threw past failures in his face. They mocked his faith and his church. They reacted to the new creature he had become the way Cain hated Abel / the way Joseph was hated by his brothers / and the way our fallen flesh opposes the Spirit within. There can be no fellowship between light and darkness.

In **John 15:18-21** Jesus said, **"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.**

Have you noticed how hostility toward truth, righteousness and Christians is escalating in the United States? Just a few months ago we witnessed the firestorm when Phil Robertson of Duck Dynasty dared to speak the truth about homosexuality. Just two weeks ago, when Matthew McConaughey received the Oscar award for best actor...the audience booed him because he thanked God. And why was Tim Tebow such target? He was ridiculed and persecuted because he was outspoken about His faith in Christ. In the cross hairs of this culture war is Christ, His truth and all who follow Him. We've all heard reports or seen characters on television or in movies that portray believers as backward, stupid, gullible, naive, prudish, judgmental, insensitive and cruel. We should congratulate ourselves when these insults are untrue and leveled because of our association with Jesus. Having experienced this form of persecution confirms our citizenship in Christ's kingdom.

Listen to **I Peter 4:14-16** - **If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.** Peter isn't naive. He knows Christians sometimes behave badly and deserve the flack they receive. There's no blessing or reward when we call ourselves "Christian" and behave like a knucklehead! These words from Peter echo the eighth beatitude! Remember what we said in the first message? The entire theology of the NT is contained in these eight beatitudes! Salvation / sanctification / submission / service / suffering / and more, are here in the beatitudes.

Can you now sense how this eighth and final beatitude relates to the seventh? Believers can't take their stand with the prince of peace, without stirring up hostility and opposition. When God's righteousness shows up in our speech, attitudes and conduct, unbelievers will be aroused. Expect it. In **Jn. 15:22** Jesus said, **If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin.**

Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. Peacemakers in the Bible sense are truth speakers and truth speakers are seen as agitators by a godless world. Truth speakers are ridiculed and silenced. Jesus was completely honest and forthright about this.

vs. 11, 12 expand on **v.10**. Notice the differences: For one thing, the pronoun “**those**” in **v.10** is made more personal in **v.11**. Here Jesus said, **Blessed are you...** In **vs. 11, 12** Jesus used the pronouns **you** and **your** 5 x’s! Remember, Jesus was speaking to His disciples in the audience of a crowd that gathered around them. So this beatitude was for His followers...for those who dropped what they were doing to follow Him. He was speaking to each of His disciples and to us.

Beyond the change of pronouns, the point of conflict in **v.10** is **righteousness**...right living...living according to God’s standards. People who don’t “play by the rules” tend to hate those who do. Hostility may show up in the home / at school / in the workplace / and the neighborhood. What happens if you refuse to listen to dirty jokes or participate in filthy conversation? Negative reactions are sure to be triggered when we refuse to “play the game” the way others want us to.

For a year or so, my dad was employed as a salesman for Burry Biscuit Company. I wouldn’t mention the company name except this Jersey based company went out of business. They were famous for Scooter Pies / Gaucho peanut butter sandwich cookies / Fudge Town chocolate / and Mr. Chips chocolate chip cookies. The company car that came with dad’s position was the first new automobile my family ever had. So those days we had a nice ride and a pantry full of Skooter Pies. We were livin’ the dream! But suddenly and unexpectedly, my dad resigned and was unemployed. He explained that those over him insisted he overstock the grocery stores he serviced. They pressured him to stock the stores with more product than he knew they could sell. For conscience sake, my dad refused. He might have reasoned he was just following orders. But he didn’t see it that way. He felt complicit in their wrong-doing. So he resigned. He refused to “play the game, though it cost him the job, the car, and the Scooter Pies. For my father and believers like him, the question boiled down to this... *“the perks of this world are no trade off for eternity in Christ’s kingdom.”* In fact, listen what is said of Moses...**Heb. 11:24, 25 - By faith Moses... chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.**

So Jesus, said, **Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.** Notice, great award awaits those who suffer for the sake of Christ. Those who are persecuted because of Jesus find themselves in good company because this is what the prophets endured.

So let’s land this message. As we said previously, Jesus turned conventional wisdom on its head. He pronounces blessing on those the world considers most unlikely to succeed. The world views the **poor in spirit** as pathetic. Those who **mourn** because of sin are diagnosed as emotionally weak and peculiar. Those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness** are misguided. The **merciful** are taken advantage of. The **meek** are run over. The **pure in heart** are labeled fanatics and extremists. **Peacemakers** who urge others to find peace in Christ are too simplistic. And those who allow themselves to be **persecuted** because of Jesus merely get what they deserve.

But I ask you this AM. Whose diagnosis do you trust? How do you define righteousness and spiritual health? Who do you think gets to enter the kingdom of heaven? Do you believe the God of heaven, religion, or the consensus on earth? Do you approach life with your own score sheet, or are you listening to God’s Word? In **Matt. 5:1-12** Jesus defined righteousness and pronounced blessing on those who pursue it. Christ’s salvation is a free gift, but there’s nothing cheap about following Him.