

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

MATTHEW 5:20 • TV309B

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by
HENRY T. MAHAN

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Matthew 5:20

“For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

There are two kinds of preaching that are utterly worthless. First of all, there is preaching that is entertaining, and we are getting a lot of entertainment from the pulpit today. While it is entertaining, it says nothing, absolutely nothing and is worthless preaching. Men are not taught and instructed in the things of God and the preaching is worthless.

The second kind of preaching which is also worthless is that preaching which is so complicated with high sounding words that the people understand nothing. That is worthless preaching.

I am not here today to entertain you; you don't want to be entertained; you want to be taught. That is why you have chosen to listen to this message today. I'm not interested in impressing you with my understanding of the Bible or the learning of it. I'm not interested in using words and terms that no one understands.

Preaching is communication. If you are not communicating, you are not preaching. If men do not understand what you are saying then you are not preaching and it is ineffective. Paul said

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something about not using, *“Enticing words of man’s wisdom.”* He wanted the faith of the people to be, *“Not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”*

I want to address an all important subject today, a very important subject. I want to pray that the Holy Spirit will enable me to preach in the Spirit, in power and with understanding that you may understand this subject: **“THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.”** Don’t forget that, the **“Righteousness of God.”** Try to write that down in your mind and heart, the **“Righteousness of God;”** you will hear it a lot today.

Paul, in **Romans 10: 1 through 3**, says that the people of Israel were a very religious people. He said, *“They have a zeal for God.”* They have an enthusiasm for God but, *“Not according to knowledge.”* Is that not our day? There is much religious enthusiasm but not much knowledge. Paul says, *“For they are ignorant of the Righteousness of God.”* That is what I am speaking on, **“The Righteousness of God.”**

I will tell you something else, our Lord set forth four ultimatums. You know something about at least three of them. He said something like this; *“Accept a man be born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”*

That is regeneration, life from above. That is being born of God, born of the Word of God which is the seed of life. You are born of the Spirit of God and are receiving spiritual life that we did not have before, having an understanding of the Gospel. That is the new birth. *“Accept a man is born again, becomes in Christ a new creature, created by God, then he will never enter the Kingdom of God.”*

Our Lord also said this; *“Accept you repent.”* Repenting is a change of attitude, a change of mind regarding God, regarding myself, regarding sin and regarding Christ. Repenting is a whole new attitude in regard to this God business and this business of salvation. We are brought down in repentance. Christ said, *“Unless you repent, you will perish. You will all likewise perish.”*

Third: Christ was in a certain house and His disciples were walking toward that house. They were arguing among themselves over who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. When they got to the house, the Master said; *“Children, what were you talking about on the road here?”* It embarrassed them. He knew what they were talking about. He knows all of our thoughts.

They had a little child in their midst, He took a little child and brought that child right up in front of those disciples, (these grown men.) He said, *“Except you be converted and become as a little child, you shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of God.”*

You will have to be brought down and humbled. You see; *“Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before the fall. God resisteth the proud. He giveth grace to the humble.”*

He said in **Proverbs** that there are six things that God hates, and the first one is this: *“God hates a proud look.”* So, you understand a little bit about those ultimatums don’t you? That is three of them and I will give you the other one in a moment. *“Except a man is born again, he cannot enter*

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into the Kingdom of God. Except a man repents, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. Except a man is converted and becomes a little child, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God."

Now, in **Matthew 5:20**; that is my text if you care to look it up. In **Matthew 5:20**, he addresses the people who held their religious leaders and religious laws, ceremonies and organizations in such high esteem, he says this; *"Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Except your righteousness, (your holiness) exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven."*

Who were the Scribes and Pharisees? He mentions the Scribes; they were the scholars, the religious scholars of that day. They were employed in the writing and the expounding of the Scriptures and the Law. These men had the responsibility of translating, transcribing and teaching the Word of God. Christ said to these poor, humble fishermen; *"If your holiness and righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of those scholars, you shall not enter the Kingdom of God."*

He mentions the Pharisees too. Who were the Pharisees? They were the strictest group among the Jews for outward morality, for religion and for personal piety. They were the strictest sect among the Jews for personal morality and piety.

Our Lord says, "In order for us to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, we have to have a holiness and righteousness as good as these men, not only as good as these men, but better than the best man."

He is not talking about an outward morality alone here; he is talking about an inward perfection, righteous and holiness. What the Lord is clearly declaring here my friend, is this; not one person on this earth, even the best human being, the most learned, educated and most pious is holy enough or righteous enough to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The holiness and righteousness that is required to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven is utterly, totally and absolutely impossible with men. It is impossible! The disciples said, *"Well, who then can be saved?"* He said, *"With men it is impossible."*

There is no salvation with men. It is an absolute impossibility. *"Man at his best state (in God's sight) is altogether vanity. There is none good, no not one. There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that understandeth, no not one."* Without true holiness, no man, (the apostle says), can see the Lord.

You see, my friends, if you go through the Bible you will find that the best men who ever lived lamented their sins. God Himself declared that Job was a godly man who hated sin and shunned evil. Yet, Job confessing before God, said; *"I hate myself; I repent of my sins in sackcloth and ashes."*

Isaiah was a man who was permitted to see the Lord as no other man had seen Him; he seen Him high and lifted up in His glory. When Isaiah saw the Lord, what did he declare (I'm talking about

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Isaiah, the prophet of old)? He was quoted so many times by the Master. He said, “*I am undone; I’m cut off; I am a man of unclean lips.*”

David, a man after God’s own heart, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, son of Jesse, a man highly exalted of God, greatly used of God, kept saying; “*My sins are ever before me.*”

Paul, the apostle, who we talked about recently, said; “*O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from this body of death?*” What I am saying and what the Master is saying is this, the holiness and righteousness which God requires, which is necessary in order for you to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, is utterly, absolutely, impossible. “*It is as impossible as a leper changing his spots or an Ethiopian changing his skin.*” That is what Jeremiah said.

What is to be done? Where can we find help? Is there righteousness with which God will be pleased? Is there righteousness in which God will accept? Well, the good news is yes, but it is not in you.

The good news is not in your church, your pastor, your religion, your pope, your cardinals, your beads, in Mary, your evangelism, or in your decision or baptism. This righteousness is in Christ. It is the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. That is the truth!

Let me try to help you understand this righteousness of God with four points from His Word:

First: Righteousness lost.

Second: Righteousness required.

Third: Righteousness provided, imputed.

Fourth: Righteousness imparted.

Let’s look at righteousness lost; it is first and it is important. “*God made man upright.*” There is no question about it. He made man righteous and holy. This man walked and talked with God in perfect fellowship. As the representative of our human race, he fell and he lost that righteousness.

The Scripture says, “*Man was created upright and he sought out many inventions.*” As the representative of the human race fell he lost that righteousness. You may ask me where that is in the Word of God; it is in **Romans 5:12**. Listen to this, “*Wherefore, by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin.*” Watch this, “*So death passed upon all men.*”

Adam was a representative person. Adam was a federal head. God just created one man. Do you understand that? God created one man and every human being, everyone with flesh and blood and bones came from that one man. He only created one man and that man was the head of the human race. “*By one man sin entered the world and death by sin, so death passed upon all men. For as by one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners.*”

“*In Adam we all die.*” So, when Adam fell he lost something. He lost it and we lost it. What did he lose? He lost righteousness and it was a three-fold loss. I want you to listen to this three-fold lost.

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First of all: He lost his righteous nature. Look at man before the fall. He was naked and unashamed. He walked with God without fear. He loved his wife Eve and was in perfect harmony with the place in the garden of which he lived. There was no problem.

Then, he fell. He became ashamed and he became fearful. He ran and hid. He was filled with hate. He said that it was the woman's fault. Then, he blamed God. He said, "*The woman that You created; You were the one who created her. It is really your fault.*"

He became self-righteous. He became ashamed, guilty and hid himself from God. He was fearful, hateful and self-righteous. He lost his righteous nature. He is no longer holy. That is passed down from father to son and daughter. "*We are born in sin and shapen in iniquity. We are brought forth speaking lies, without God, without hope, without help and without life. We are dead in trespasses and sin.*"

Man not only lost his righteous nature but he lost a legal righteous standing before God; God put him out of the garden. God said, "*Get out; you can't abide in God's presence in sin.*" You see, "*Your sins have separated you and your God. In the flesh no man can please God. In the flesh dwelleth no good thing and God dwells in a light unto which no man can approach.*" This is the three-fold lost that I mentioned.

He lost his righteous nature; he lost his standing before God and he lost an understanding of God's righteousness. He doesn't even understand. He calls sweet "bitter" and bitter "sweet." He calls good "evil" and evil "good." He is deceived into thinking that he has righteousness.

That is what Paul said in **Romans 10**; "*They are going about to establish their own righteousness.*" Preachers and people today are making all sorts of rules and regulations for us to establish righteousness. They are telling us all kinds of things to do and not to do in order to please God. They do not understand that the true Holiness of God is not in doing but is in believing the gospel of Christ.

What I am I will do. That is what Christ said to the Pharisees, the religious leaders of that day in which He walked this earth. He said, "*You clean the outside of the cup but you are full of dead men's bones on the inside.*" You are a hypocrite! "*Cleanse first, that which is in.*" You have to have a new nature, a new righteousness and then the outside will be clean. You do what you are.

So, man had a three-fold loss in the Garden. He had a nature of righteousness but is no longer righteous. He lost his standing before God and he lost his understanding. He has no conception of what it is to be holy and what holiness is.

That brings me to the next point: The next point is righteousness required. What does the Lord require of thee? You say that you are going to please God; what does it take to please God? You say that you are going to make yourself acceptable before God, what will it take to do that?

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Well, let's find out, in **Deuteronomy 10:12**, "*What doth the Lord thy God require of thee O Israel?*" The first thing is "*Fear the Lord Thy God.*" That is reverence and that is worship and fear. It is to walk in all His ways. "*Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the Book of the Law to do them.*" You are to walk, not think about it or approve of it; you are to walk in all His ways.

Third: You are to love Him. How did Christ say to love God? He said, "*Love God with all your heart, your mind, your soul and strength.*"

Fourth: "*Serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul. Him only shalt thou serve.*" My, my, that one verse is enough to put every one of us into deep distress and conviction, crying "I have not fulfilled a single one of those." That is still what God requires.

You see; a man's definition of holiness depends a great extent on his understanding of God's holiness, Who He is. This is the problem with my generation; they have never seen God in His holiness. Only God can please God. The Scripture says, "*To be accepted it must be perfect.*"

What righteousness does God require? He requires perfection, inwardly and outwardly, forever. Therefore, in **Galatians 3:10**, Paul says; "*Cursed, (under God's wrath) is everyone, (Jew and Gentile) that continueth not, (without interruption), in all things written in the Law to them.*" That is the righteousness that is required, perfection.

Well, that leaves us out doesn't it? We have lost our righteousness. We have lost our righteous nature, we have lost our contact with God and we have lost our understanding of God. We are frustrated and confused. God presents what is required of a man to do, which is the whole Law.

Is there righteousness provided? Yes sir! Turn to **Romans 3: 19 through 24**. Everybody ought to have this marked in their Bible. It will give you a clear understanding of where a pure, perfect holiness for sinners is found. Listen to this; I will read it, "*Now we know, whatsoever things the Law saith, it saith to them, all them who are under the Law that every mouth may be stopped and all the world become guilty before God.*"

Therefore, because we are guilty, all of us; me, you and every human being, by the deeds of the Law, "*By the works of the flesh there shall be no flesh justified in God's sight: For by the Law is the knowledge of sin.*"

It doesn't consist of what a man wears. It doesn't matter if it is black, blue, red or yellow. It doesn't matter how long his sleeves are or whether he wears jewelry or not. It doesn't matter if he watches television or doesn't. It doesn't matter if he reads the paper or not. It is not holiness and a righteousness that some man can put on and take off. This holiness and righteousness is not geographical that he can have one place and then when he is away from home, forget it.

It doesn't matter if he is at the church or if he has a different standard somewhere. This is God's holiness, God's perfect heart, perfect love, perfect faith, perfect truth, perfect life and perfect obedience. This is God's holiness. This is the righteousness of God and the holiness of God. This

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is that righteousness required. It is perfect inside and out, top to bottom, sideways and in every way. It is perfect and it is the righteousness of God.

It is without the Law. It is without my conformity to the Law because I am not conformed to the Law. I would like to be but I am not. You are not either. It is being witnessed by the Word of God and it is the righteousness of God which is by the faith of Jesus Christ.

It is the holiness of God which is through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. It is the righteousness and holiness of God that is imputed to a sinner through the obedience of Jesus Christ, through the holiness of another. How holy was Jesus Christ? He is as holy as God. *“He thought it not robbery to be equal with God, who was Himself in the form of God.”*

You see; here are two Adam’s. In the first Adam we were represented in the flesh and we died. We lost our righteousness. God sent a second Adam. He is called the second Adam, *“The Lord from Heaven.”* This is in **1 Corinthians 15**. That second Adam represented a new race, a new people, God’s elect.

He came to this earth and the same way that we fell in Adam, we were restored in Christ because Christ kept God’s Law perfectly. He was a perfect man, *“In whom there was no guile.”* By believing on Him, by a living union with Him, by faith in Him, by God accepting me in Christ and loving me in Christ and regarding me in Christ, I have a perfect holiness.

This holiness is not one that I worked out without the Law. It was not one in which the Old Testament prophets believed. *“Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him for righteousness”* (the holiness that God demands).

Christ said to those men, *“Except your righteousness exceed the Scribes.”* They were working out their own righteousness and it wasn’t good enough. The Pharisees; they were working out their own but it wasn’t good enough. *“But, except your righteousness exceed theirs”* and we have one that does exceed theirs and it is the righteousness of Christ the Lord Himself of whom the Father said, *“This is My Son in whom I am well pleased.”*

You might say, “Preacher, who is this for?” It is the righteousness of God which is by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, *“Unto all and upon all that believe for there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*

I’m talking about male, female, old or young, bond or free, Jew or Gentile. Listen to these verses of Scripture. Turn to **2 Corinthians 5:21**; the Scripture says, *“Christ who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God,”* (the holiness of God in Him).

Romans 10:4 says; *“Christ is the end of the Law, (the consummation of the Law), for righteousness to every one that believeth.”* **Galatians 3:13** says, *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us.”* **Romans 5:19** says, *“By the obedience of one shall many be justified.”*

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Paul said, *“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth: To the Jew first and also to the Greek for therein is the righteousness of God revealed.”* There is the righteousness provided, perfected, purchased and imputed to all who believe.

Do you see what the Lord is saying? Did I make that clear? Our righteousness was lost in the Garden. We don't have righteousness and we can't produce righteousness. God's Righteousness which He requires has never changed. His righteousness is perfect and holy.

We fall short but there is a righteousness provided and purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ as our Representative, as our Redeemer and as our Saviour. Have you heard that? If you can believe on Him and receive Him, *“You will be made the righteousness of God in Him.”*

Let me close with this comment; I want you to listen; there is also a righteousness imparted or given. God Almighty in many places calls His people a, *“Righteous people.”* In **Peter** He calls them a righteous people and then also, He says; *“If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”*

In **Job 17:9**, He said; *“The righteous shall hold his way.”* Then, He said of one of His Old Testament prophets; *“He is a righteous man.”*

God's people are called in the Word of God, *“Righteous.”* They are called righteous first of all because they are righteous in Christ. He is our righteousness; He is our holiness.

The people of God hold no claim to personal holiness. You would embarrass one of them by walking up to them and saying, “You are holy aren't you?” That would be embarrassing to a truly redeemed person because he knows that there is too much in him that is unholy. There is too much about him that is unholy.

He wants to be holy. He is holy in Christ. He doesn't brag about his works or his holiness because he knows his best works without Christ are, *“Filthy rags in God's sight. But, if any man be in Christ, (you get this); he is a new creature.”*

The Bible does not teach that a person is saved and will reach heaven even if he leaves the way of faith and the way of life and the way of God. The true believer will continue in the faith; he will continue in love; he will continue in godliness and he will continue in hope.

He will not only continue, he will grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ Jesus. I'm saying that God's people are not without sin but they do hate sin. They long to be like Christ. They walk in the Spirit of God and they mind the things of God. They love God and they love others. They are honest people, faithful people, generous people and kind people.