

This morning, father, we lift up those who are affected by the devastation of the hurricane from the coast, from the Gulf coast clear up into Tennessee. We've seen the pictures, and it is just both awesome in reflecting your power, but also terrifying and saddening to see how many lives have been affected by this. We look around the globe and we see terrifying things, scary things. God, we trust in your providence. We trust in your plan and your will.

But we also know that life gets messy in those places. And so, God, we pray for your protection. We pray for your oversight. We pray for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. This morning.

I pray especially for those who are injured, those who are providing relief for those experiencing the devastation of Hurricane Helena. Pray for the restoration of power, restoration of resources, the ability for families, at least, to find, if possible, a way to get home where they are connected with their communities.

We pray for those who are working to help provide comfort and relief for those who are displaced. So we pray through your servants, men and women who love you and want to do the right thing, that you would comfort the grieving, that you would shelter those who find themselves homeless, that you would feed and clothe and care for those who have lost everything in this disaster. We pray that the wake of destruction that hurricanes and wars leave in their path would be stilled. And we pray that you would lead us back to a place of peace and tranquility.

For those of us who are believers, we pray that you would help us to face disaster of this sort with faith in you and confidence in your ultimate plan.

Pray that you would give us courage to respond in ways that are necessary and helpful. We pray for wisdom so that we know what to do and when to do it. And we pray for a spirit of gracious generosity just to come over. Believers, blanket us with an awareness of the grace that we have received so that we can, in turn, be gracious.

Remind us that though the waters rise, you are our rock, you are our refuge. You are our comfort and our high tower, and that those who run to you will be saved. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

I got a chance to meet a little earlier some folks who are joining us for the very first Sunday. And if that is you, we want to say, welcome. Alan did that as well. But I want to just reiterate that we're glad you are here. We're in a series currently on the Beatitudes.

We're calling it the blessed life, where Jesus describes what life that God says is the good life. Looks like, it doesn't look like most of what our contemporary influencers might say. It looks like said, Jesus points us to a different pathway. And the verse that we're talking about today reminded me of a moment. It's been about five or six years ago now, but I found myself crossways with a member of my team up at the Bloomington campus.

Have you ever been in a sticky relational situation before? I don't think I'm the only one. I had not handled it well. I had said some stuff that I regretted. You know, as it's coming out of my mouth, I was regretting what I was saying.

But you immediately start to justify what you're saying because of what the other person did or what the other person said. And it got to the point where the relation in my ministry had gotten so knotted up and difficult that. That I really didn't know how to extricate myself out of it. Just saying sorry no longer seemed to be sufficient in this instance. And I went to my friend Claudia Mitchell.

Claudia's been here. She shared the platform with me before. Many of you know Claudia. And Claudia has this little thing that she says when she counsels people, and she said this, she said, you cannot control their actions. You cannot control their response.

You cannot control the situation. Now it is out of your control. The only thing you can control is yourself, your words, your actions, your attitudes. And so she posed this question to me, what is the next right thing that you can do?

I never forgot that. And now when I am counseling others in situations that are similar, because we all get there, I will say this. My friend Claudia Mitchell says simply, do the next right thing. Now, again, other people have shared that advice. My parents have shared that advice with me.

Other people, it's out there. But in that moment, it locked into me. And I thought, man, that is great advice from Claudia. And she says, oh, well, it's not my advice. The Bible says the same thing in bible words.

Paul, in his letter to Timothy two, Timothy 2:22, says it this way, pursue righteousness. Today we're going to continue with the beatitudes, and we're going to look at this idea of righteousness and how to go after it. So if you've got your bibles with you, turn to the book of Matthew. Matthew is the first book in many of your bibles that will have red letters. The red letters are the words that Jesus said and that Matthew is the first book in the New Testament.

It's called one of the Gospels, the first gospel. Turn to it. Turn to chapter five. And we're going to begin sort of at the beginning of Matthew, chapter five. I'm going to pray, and then we'll dig in.

Heavenly Father, so we open your word. Continue to teach us what life in you should look like, the attitudes we should have, the approaches, the perspective we should have on life. Help us to do it in such a way that it honors you, because we know that in honoring you, our lives look like you intended them to look. They look and are blessed. So instruct us from your word.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. So Matthew five begins this way. Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, he's teaching and people are following him, and they're attracted to all the things that he's saying and all the things that he's doing. Some miracles, he goes up on a mountainside and he sits down and his disciples gather around him and he begins to teach them.

And he says this, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. And he says this, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. In other words, blessed are the hungry.

Now, if you've got teenagers, you know how this works. They get home from school, the door opens, they storm in, and they say, what's to eat? I'm starving. Good. I thought it was just me.

And I say things like, well, you know what? There's some carrot sticks in the fridge. I say, how about, you know, there's some crackers in there. You can do some cheese and crackers. Oh, there's a box of Mac and cheese.

You can heat that up, or you can make a ham and cheese sandwich. And they say, no, we don't want that. We're hungry for righteousness. No, they do not say that.

They do not say that. But that's what Jesus says. Jesus says that's what we're to have. Just a rumble in our gut about righteousness. Now, what does that word mean?

Righteousness? Because if you grew up in the church, you've heard that word used a lot. It's a concept that's very important to Jesus. In fact, in Matthew five, just a little bit lower down in the chapter, he says this, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Righteousness is a big deal to Jesus.

But despite that, despite the fact that it matters to Jesus. Despite the fact that this is the blessed life and it's, this is how the blessed life is built into us. We still, I think, have some interesting ideas about what righteousness actually looks like. Oftentimes we use the word in only one way. When we're describing someone who thinks they're just a little bit morally superior to us, we call that person self righteous.

Self righteous. You know, the person they act like. They never sin, they never lose their temper, they never think and impure thought. They're the ones who always parent their teenagers the right way, and they always insist on telling you about it. Now, here's the deal.

One, they're lying. The Bible says very clearly, all have sinned. So don't think that you're any better than anyone else. No one has hit the goal that Jesus marks out for us. None are righteous.

Romans says it. Romans three says it, quoting psalm three. So it goes clear back, way back. None are righteous. Jesus doesn't demand us to be impossibly good.

That's not what he's called us to. And Jesus doesn't save and redeem us just so that we can be arrogant about our good works and good deeds and good life. And he didn't save us to be unlikable. So this idea of righteousness, the way we use it and the way we think about it, may be different to God than what we normally think of. So we were talking about this passage in our teaching team meeting two weeks ago, and Sean described three aspects of righteousness that he finds very helpful.

And I thought it was very helpful as well. So to get a correct understanding of the word, you have to think about three different aspects of this word, righteousness. There's something called positional righteousness. Now, keep that in your mind. Oh, there.

The words are positional righteousness. There's personal righteousness, and then there's practical righteousness. Now we're just going to walk through them one by one so we get an idea of this. So personal righteousness refers to this idea of or positional righteousness. That's where we're starting.

Positional righteousness refers to this place where we stand in relationship to godness. Now, again, there are none righteous. No, not one. So when it comes to where we stand with God, we get a pretty clear picture that we stand far, far from God. In fact, the scriptures are clear that no one, according to God, can be truly self righteous.

Not really. Now, we may have days where we feel really good about our lives. We've done all the stuff we got up early, we prayed. We did our devotions. We didn't yell at the kids.

We managed to get them often into our lives. We had a good day at work. We got home. Everyone ate a nutritious meal instead of takis. And you go to bed at night and you're like, hey, whew, I got this thing.

I'm feeling pretty good about myself. Yeah, we all have those days. But in the back of our recesses, the mind's recesses, we know that we have little critters back there, little dark critters that will smoke their head up and make trouble for us. The scripture says, there is none righteous. We all have those little dark critters, especially the self righteous.

Instead, the scriptures are clear. Any righteousness that we have comes only through the completed work of Jesus. Amen. Romans tells it this way. It says, we have been justified.

We've been made righteous through faith. And because of that, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The standing that we have before God is not because we do it all right, but because Jesus has done what God asked him to do. And through his work, we are now positionally righteous. We were separated from God by our sin.

But when we put our faith in Jesus, when we surrendered our lives to him, and our position before God changed and we were far from God. But we have been brought near to God. Instead of being in a state of wrongness with God, we are now in a state of rightness with God through Jesus. That state of rightness is righteousness. We are declared righteous.

So our new position of righteousness is because of Jesus. That's positional righteousness. But there's also personal righteousness. I was raised pentecostal. We had a lot of rules about what it looked like to be personally righteous.

Now, if you've ever done any serious spring cleaning, you know how personal righteousness can sometimes look. If God's working on your personal righteousness, there's two approaches that God takes, at least with me. One of them is this way. So you have this. This is your heart right here.

And it's full of stuff. And it's. I'm not going to tell you whose garage this is, but I believe it starts with an s and it ends with Wango. So this is a s Wango garage. And before you get judgey, how many of you guys thought, oh, my word, has Tim been in my garage?

Because that looks a lot like mine. So here's what God does. Very often through the Holy Spirit, he will drag all of this nonsense out onto the driveway so we can see it. And he'll say, look at this mess, Tim. This is why we have to do something.

And you look at it and you're like, oh my word. How did it get this bad? I had no idea. God says, here it is. Are you ready to start working?

Sometimes he does this. Now, thankfully, that's not how he mostly works in my life. Mostly he works like this. And this is a different picture. Do you know what this is?

This is a junk drawer. We all have junk drawers somewhere in our house. We have junk drawers in our hearts. And here's how God often works. He says, listen, listen, I'm gonna pull this out and I'm gonna hold it up.

I'm gonna ask you a question. Does this thing from your old life work in your new life? This is how we get rid of stuff, isn't it? This is, this little thing mattered to you last year. Does it still matter to you this year?

And so you go, no, I don't need that anymore. And you throw it away or you donate it. Jesus does the same thing through the Holy Spirit. He'll bring it up and say, the situation, the circumstances, the episodes in our lives, and we are brought face to face with some aspect

of our lives that isn't aligned with this new life that Jesus is calling us into. One, Peter, two, one says this, you need to get rid of the stuff that doesn't look like Jesus.

And here's what it looks like. It looks like malice. That's not like Jesus. It looks like deceit. Well, that's not like Jesus.

It looks like hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind. That's not like Jesus. And get rid of that. And like babies, crave pure spiritual milk, hunger and thirst for the right things so that you may grow up in your salvation, so that you may become the person that God has intended you to be. Romans twelve says it this way.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. When those, when the Holy Spirit puts those stuff in front of you. No, I am choosing to let go of this and walk in a new way that God is pointing out to me. So allowing the Holy Spirit to sort of transform our minds enables us now to live in a way that is aligned with the good and pleasing and perfect will of God. Now what is that will?

What does that look like? Because again, we're going to get practical here in just a little bit. Well, well, Matthew says that it looks like honoring God and putting him first. It looks like resisting temptation, overcoming sin. It looks like loving one's neighbor as oneself.

It looks like being humble and serving others. It looks like sharing the gospel, making disciples. It looks like practicing generosity and caring for the poor. All of these scriptures point to this way that righteousness will get up close and personal in our lives. It will affect not just our standing with God, but our standing within ourselves.

Here's who we want to become. And some of those point us to this third aspect of righteousness. We have the positional, we have the personal, and then we have the practical, the practical part of righteousness. Now, it's not that the others aren't practical. It's just that when we say practical righteousness, it is a righteousness that we practice.

We do it. We do the right thing.

Jesus wants us practicing righteousness. He wants us out in the world, doing and working and serving in ways that point people to him. So one John three seven says this, whoever practices righteousness, righteous as he is righteous. Micah in the Old Testament, Prophet said it this way. He's shown you, o man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

For some period of my life, I thought that to be truly righteous, I needed to sort of go off the grid. Have you ever thought that if I could just, if I could just get rid of all social media, if we could go back to 1940 when the world didn't come into my life so insistently as it does now in every aspect, if I could just go to my little cabin out in the woods with a little creek there, raise my vegetables, sit on my rocking chair, watch this changing seasons, got my bible

there, my cup of coffee, that would be the easiest way just to be righteous. Am I the only one who periodically thinks, yeah, that would be easier to be righteous? In that context, I don't think so. But the truth is that Jesus never called us to retreat into a holy cocoon.

He never called us to be a hermit on a mountain cave. Instead, we're called to be salt, and we're called to be light, and we're called to be that city that set on a hill. You see, he redeemed us so that we could show up and be him in the world around us. When things are not right in the world according to God's word and God's will, Christians, those who want to be like Jesus, step in and do right to make it right. That's doing the next right thing.

It means loving our neighbors, ourselves. Now, who is our neighbor? Well, whoever God puts in front of us. So some of the practical ways that we do that here in our community is we serve the poor and the homeless through the food bank and the men's shelter. Those are great ways that we practice righteousness.

We care for at risk families. With hope Resource center and Bloomington, the community and culture look a little bit different there. Who has God put in front of them? Well, God's put in front of them a lot of immigrants, both legal and illegal. Now, that may matter to you at the ballot box, but it doesn't matter when it comes to the gospel.

Amen. You serve those who God puts in front of you. Today, our campus in Bloomington, our spanish speaking campus, is celebrating ten years, their ten year anniversary. And I just want to say that ministry has done so much to bring the gospel to people who are hungry and thirsty for God. I'm proud of them.

For that dozen in there. Around the world, when issues come to our attention, we don't ignore them. In a moment, we're going to get the chance to help out with relief for the victims of the hurricane. But a little further from home, we serve in the slums of Africa and in India, teaching and encouraging and providing medical and other care for people who do not have access to it.

In East Asia, we rescue and redeem women and children caught up in sex trafficking. Those are just a few examples of that. But in loving and serving our neighbors, the ones that God has put in front of us are the one God has brought to our attention. We get to be the heart and the hands and the mouthpiece of God. And this is what God's plan and intention is for us.

Second, corinthians says something very interesting. It says, for our sake, he made him to be sin. Who knew no sin. Now, why did he do this? So that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Now, we think about that in terms of our position. We think about that in terms of our personhood in Christ. But think about that in terms of the practical nature of practicing righteousness. We become the righteousness of God when we become his mouthpiece,

when we become his hands, we become his feet. When we become his heart, we become God in those situations.

That's not heresy. That's what Jesus says. We represent him in these places. It's a good thing. So how do we hunger and how do we thirst after righteousness?

Well, first of all, we commit to doing the next right thing in front of us. So today it may be saying yes to Jesus and it's free offer of salvation. It could be saying yes and cooperating with the Holy Spirit as he pulls stuff out of our garage and out of our junk drawers saying, hey, hey, do you still want this in your life?

And it could be saying yes to the work that he's placed right in front of us. Are you hungry and thirsting after righteousness? Well, how do you know if you are? Does your gut grumble? Does your gut grumble to be filled with more of Jesus?

Does your gut grumble to have the junk replaced with righteousness? Does your gut rumble with a desire to make the world look more like the kingdom of heaven that Jesus described? If it is, if your gut grumbles for those things and Jesus says, you are blessed, you are blessed and you're going to be filled. Filled with what? Isaiah, the old prophet from the Old Testament, says it this way, the work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness will be quietness and assurance forever.

Peace, quietness, assurance. I want those things in my life. Do you? Do you want those things? That's the effect of righteousness.

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness isn't complicated. It's pretty simple. It's just asking yourself all the time, what's the next right thing? What is your next right thing this morning? If you've never trusted in Jesus, if you've never surrendered your life to him, the next right thing is saying, I want to know Jesus.

I want to follow him. I want to trust him with my life. I want to be baptized and be part of his family now and his work in ministry. I want to do that. That's who I want to become.

That's your first step. That's your next right thing. But if you're already a believer, the next right thing is coming up right now. It's communion. It's a simple thing again.

Doing the next right thing is rarely complicated. It may not always be easy, but it's rarely complicated. And in this moment, we get to sit back and remind ourselves, simply remind ourselves of this thing that Jesus satisfies. Jesus fills where nothing else does. John 6:35 says it this way, Jesus talking.

He says, I'm the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Nothing else but Jesus satisfies. We can pursue all sorts of stuff, the pursuits and the clamor of the world around us just, oh, drain us.

It can distract us. It tried to get our attention. Sometimes that chatter can be absolutely deafening. But in the end, it is junk food. It is stuff that will not fill us up.

We'll nibble and nibble and nibble on it and never really be satisfied. We try a little sweet, we try a little salty. We try a little sweet and salty, and then we're going, nah, that's not it. I'm gonna go back to the kitchen, see if I can find something else. And Jesus says, listen, stop that.

Come to me, you who are hungry and thirsty, and in me you will be filled. He calls us to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, this morning as we prepare for a time of communion, we want to rest. We want to sit and rest in this awareness that only you can satisfy.

Bread of heaven, fill us till we are no longer hungry. Living water, quench our thirst.

Thank you for the work of the cross and how it has brought us into this position of rightness with God. Thank you for the Holy Spirit who brings our lives in conformity with the life of Christ in us. And thank you for your prompting, which moves us from the ease of life into the work of the gospel, the work of righteousness. May we be obedient in Jesus name. Amen.

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