

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 5 March 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Beatitude Attitudes (Part 3)

Matthew 5:6-7

In the year 1927, in the city of Chicago, an organisation named The Humanist Fellowship was established. The founders of this society prided themselves on promoting “reason,” “ethics,” and “social and economic justice” (in other words, “communism”). This society soon began to publish a magazine called the *New Humanist*; and in 1933, they wrote *The Humanist Manifesto*, under the leadership of John Dewey—a very influential journalist and educator, who played a huge role in removing God’s Word from America’s public schools. However, it wasn’t merely the atheist crowd who signed the *Humanist Manifesto*. The majority of the people who signed it were so-called “Christian” ministers and theologians who had a form of godliness, but who denied the power thereof. Most of them were Unitarians, who did not believe that Jesus is God, or that the Bible is the Word of God.

In 1935, this group was renamed The Humanist Press Association; and in 1941, it was reorganised as the American Humanist Association. Since then, this organisation has led the way in advocating anything and everything that is anti-God, or anti-Bible. For example, they were the first national organisation to support the “right” of women to murder their babies in the womb.

Now, since about 2009, there is an idea that the AHA has pushed hard. It is the idea that “You can be good without believing in God.” Every year around Christmas time, they roll out advertisements that say things such as, “No God? No problem. Just be good, for goodness’ sake!”

Is this possible? Is it possible to “be good,” without believing in God? No, it isn’t. In fact, it isn’t even possible for people who *do* believe in God to be truly “good”! Why? Because our hearts are evil. Jesus said that from within, from the hearts of men, proceed “*evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride,*” and “*foolishness.*” Now, people can (*with or without* belief in God) do things that *outwardly* appear righteous and good; but these “good deeds” do not originate from the true Source of goodness (God). Instead, these “good deeds” come from their own sinful flesh. Even our best attempts at righteousness are like a pile of filthy rags, because they are always mixed with self-interest and self-promotion. That is why Jesus said, “*There is none good but one, that is, God.*” Romans 3:10-12 says, “*There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*” Even the Apostle Paul, the man who wrote the words that I just quoted, admitted, “*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.*” Paul knew that even though he was a believer, he still had that old nature—that principle of sin—within him; and he knew that the old nature was constantly enticing him to do evil. He knew that he did not have even the *ability* to be truly do good. Not in himself, that is!

You see, that’s the key. Righteousness is not “*in me*”: righteousness is “in Christ.” God the Father will not accept *your* righteousness; but He *will* accept the righteousness of His Son. This means that in order to enter the glorious Kingdom that Christ will establish when He returns to earth one day, you must have a righteousness that is not your own. You must have *Christ’s* righteousness. When a sinner repents of his sin, and places his complete faith in *Jesus Christ*, God puts His Son’s perfect righteousness onto that sinner’s account. God then no longer sees that sinner’s sin, but instead sees Christ’s perfect

righteousness. On this basis, God accepts that sinner; and he becomes a child of the Kingdom. Not only that, but the Holy Spirit of God now gives the sinner the desire—and the *power*—to be *actually* righteous!

This morning, we will learn about two more characteristics of those who will inherit the Kingdom that Christ will soon establish here on earth. These qualities are “*hunger and thirst for righteousness*,” and “*mercy*.” The title of this message is *The Beatitude Attitudes (Part 3)*.

Read Matthew 5:1-7.

I. Beatitude Attitude #4: Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness

(**Read Matthew 5:5 again.**) In this verse, Jesus names yet another spiritual characteristic that you can expect to see in the life of a child of the Kingdom. He says that children of the Kingdom “*hunger and thirst after righteousness*.”

What does it mean to “*hunger and thirst after righteousness*”? First, it means to realise that your own righteousness cannot save you. It means to admit that you are spiritually bankrupt. To “*hunger and thirst after righteousness*” means to admit that you need *Christ’s* perfect righteousness to be put on your account, as though it were yours. That is how *every* believer in history has been saved (both before *and* after the cross). In **Romans chapter 4**, the Apostle Paul tells us how Abraham was saved. Abraham didn’t put any trust in his own righteousness; instead, he simply trusted in God’s promise that one day, the Saviour would come to earth to take his sins away. Because Abraham believed that promise, God took the perfect righteousness of His Son, and put it onto Abraham’s account; and on that basis, God accepted Abraham. (And Abraham lived 2,000 years before Jesus was born!) This is the same way that the Apostle Paul was saved, as well. Paul knew that his righteousness couldn’t save him; instead, he was trusting in *Christ’s* righteousness.

Read Philippians 3:4-9.

To hunger and thirst after righteousness means, first of all, to come to Christ for salvation, and to have *His* perfect righteousness put onto your account, so that God may accept you. This is how you are *saved*. This is how you become a child of the Kingdom. You cannot even begin to *live* righteously until you first receive Christ’s *imputed* righteousness. It’s like putting on a pristine white robe (which represents Christ’s righteousness), so that God can accept you. The prophet Isaiah spoke of this kind of righteousness when he wrote, “*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*”

To hunger and thirst after righteousness means, first and foremost, to come to Christ for salvation, and to receive His imputed righteousness. However, that is not all. It also means to desire to *live* righteously *after* you are saved. Later in this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*” You see, after you are saved, there is a *change* in your life. You now desire to have *actual* righteousness in your life! You now desire to do the things that please *God*, and not the things that please yourself. You now loathe your sin, and mourn over it. The new nature which God has placed within you now hates the deeds of the flesh—such as cursing, using God’s name in vain, lying, sexual immorality, lust, disobedience to authority, bitterness,

revenge, gossip, and covetousness. You now desire to read God’s Word, so that you may know how God expects you to live. As a newborn babe, you desire the *“sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”*

Read 1 Peter 2:1-3.

Those who are children of the Kingdom hunger and thirst after righteousness. And what is the reward for those who *“hunger and thirst after righteousness”*? Their reward is that *“they shall be filled.”* Filled with what? With wealth and material things of this world? With fun, recreation, entertainment, and pleasure? No. They are filled with that which their soul craves; and the thing that their soul craves is **righteousness!** Because righteousness is what their heart desires, and because they *ask* God for it, God gives it to them. God gives them the power to think righteous thoughts, and to do truly righteous things, which please Him.

The desire for Christ, and for His righteousness, is the mark of a true child of the Kingdom. When a believer is yielding himself to God daily, this desire is so intense, that it is like the craving that a fainting, ravenously hungry man has for food, or that a thirsty man has for water. It is the desire that King David had when he wrote, *“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”* Sadly, though, many Christians are *not* yielding themselves to God daily. This means that they are, by default, yielding to their flesh; and their fleshly desires control them much of the time, without their even realising it. Christian, is your appetite for righteousness waning, and being replaced with an appetite for the things of this world, because you are not yielding to God?

You know, there is a “church” to which millions of people in this land belong. People flock to this church not just once per week, but *every day*, throughout the day. During this church’s services, there is a sermon, which is told on a movie screen, in a dark room; and sprinkled throughout the sermon are many parables—little stories, with powerful messages. However, these “parables” are not the kind of parables that Jesus told (you know, those earthly stories, with heavenly meanings). Instead, they are worldly stories, with fleshly, sensual, devilish meanings. The messages that are preached in that dark room are so powerful, that the actress Susan Sarandon once made this observation about them. She said, “Oh, movies are important; and they’re dangerous, because *we* are the keeper of the dreams.” (I assume that “we” refers to herself and her fellow Hollywood actors.) She went on to say, “You go into a little dark room, and become incredibly vulnerable. On one hand, all your perspectives can be challenged. You could feel something you couldn’t feel normally. It can encourage you to be the protagonist in your own life. On the other hand, it can completely misshape you.”

Folks, I believe, at this point, that you know what I’m talking about. The “church” of which I am speaking is the movie theatre. This church is so powerful, that it draws even genuine Christians into its doors, and desensitises them to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. (By the way, this “church” is so user-friendly, that it also does its services “remotely,” through TV screens, computer screens, and i-phone screens.) Now, before you protest that movies are “just entertainment,” ask yourself this. What if, during church on Sunday morning, your pastor suddenly cursed the name of Jesus? And what if he cursed Jesus’ name several more times before the sermon was finished? Then, what if someone got up in front of the church and drank alcohol, and spewed profanities? What if a husband and

wife got up in front of the church, and, as part of the sermon, yelled and screamed at each other, and used God's name in vain? Also, what if, during the sermon, a man and woman came up to the front, and began to kiss, and to disrobe, and to commit immorality right in front of everyone? Would these things be O.K.? Would we rationalise them away by saying, "Well, Jesus' name was blasphemed only a handful of times. It could've been worse. And there was only one sex scene. All we had to do was close our eyes for a minute"? Of course we wouldn't! We would call it wicked; and we'd demand that the people doing these things get out! Yet, there are many Christians, all over the world, who, on Saturday night, go into a dark room in that worldly "church" down the road (or even tune in to the "livestream" service on their own computer or phone), and watch and listen to these very things (and pay *money* for it)! Why are they not bothered by these things? There are only two possible reasons.

One possibility is that they are saved, but have become very desensitised to sin and worldliness. Little by little, they have let down the guard of their eye and ear gates, because they are not allowing the Spirit of God, and the Word of God, to keep their hearts, minds, and thoughts. They are *trying* to be righteous; but they are doing it in their own strength and will power; and their will power is failing them, because it is really nothing but the flesh, disguised as "righteousness." They are trying to fight the flesh *with their flesh!*

However, there is another possible reason why many professing Christians are so in love with the world. The other possibility is that there are many who have never truly been saved. They have *no* desire for righteousness, because Christ is not really in them. My friend, if this be the case with you, and what I am saying is making you afraid, please don't shut your heart's door to what I am saying. Your heart *needs* to fear! Fear the one who is able to cast both body and soul into hell, and run to *Him* for salvation. Run to *Him* in faith and repentance of heart. Become poor in spirit, mourn over your sin, humble yourself before God, and ask Christ to save you, so that He can give you the gift of righteousness! Don't play games with God! Don't go through life thinking that you're a Christian, only to wake up, on the other side of death, to the horrible realisation that you *weren't* a Christian, and that you will be in hell forever! Examine yourself, whether you be in the faith. Make sure that you have truly repented of your sin, and that you are trusting in Christ, and in His righteousness!

Now, if you are truly saved, but find yourself constantly falling to sin, please realise that all the power you need to live righteously is available at all times. It is all *in Christ*. You must simply yield to *Him*, every day, and every hour.

Read Romans 6:6-23.

In this chapter, Paul makes it clear that our "*old man* (our sinful nature) *is crucified*" with Christ. He says the same thing in **Galatians 2**. In **Galatians 2:20** Paul says, "*I am crucified with Christ.*" What does Paul mean by this? Well, crucifixion, in Roman times, was the very symbol of death. What Paul is saying, then, is that "I am dead to sin." Paul said the same thing in **Galatians 6:14** when he wrote, "*The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*" Paul is saying, "I'm dead to the world." We see this same truth here in **Romans 6**. In **verse 2** Paul says, "*How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*"

Now, many Christians struggle with this thought about being "dead" to sin. In what sense are we "dead" to sin? Was Paul saying that Christians are no longer *capable* of sinning—that we

are now perfect and sinless? Obviously not. Anyone who has been saved more than 24 hours realises that the inclination to sin is still with him! In **1 John 1:8**, John told *believers* that if we say that we have no sin, we lie, and the truth is not in us.

The reality is that even though we were given a *new* nature when we were saved, we still have the old, sinful nature, for as long as we are in this mortal body. Our sin nature will not be annihilated until the resurrection day, when we receive our new, glorified bodies. What, then, *does* Paul mean when he says, **“I am dead to sin”**?

To answer this question, it is important to remember that in Scripture, “death” never means “*annihilation*”: it always means “*separation*,” in one sense or another. For example, “death” can refer to physical death. In physical death, the spirit is separated from the body. There is also spiritual death, in which the spirit is separated from God because of sin. There is also eternal death, in which the sinner is *eternally* separated from God, in the Lake of Fire. No matter how the word “death” is used, it always means “*separation*” in some sense.

This is what Paul means when he says that Christians are **“dead to sin.”** Sin still *exists* in us, as long as we are in this mortal body; yet, God says that we are “dead” to it. To illustrate what this means, consider what “death” means to people in Orthodox Judaism. In Orthodox Judaism, many Jews actually perform “funerals” for their family members who have left Judaism. They consider those people to be “dead,” even though they are alive. They choose to *separate* themselves from them. They choose not to have anything to do with them, even though they *could* do so. In a similar way, we who are saved are “dead” to sin. This doesn’t mean that we *can’t* sin, because we certainly can! Our old sinful nature is still very much alive. Yet, we choose, voluntarily, to turn our back on sin. The power of sin has been broken through Christ’s sacrifice for us; and we have not only the will, *but the power*, to die to sin, and to live unto righteousness—as long as we are yielding ourselves to God.

Christian, the moment the Word of God and the Holy Spirit reveal a sin in your life, the desire of your *new* nature is to turn from that sin. Christ has given you a new nature, which means you have the *power* to overcome sin. However, in order to *avail* of that power, you must constantly reckon yourself to be “dead” to sin. This yielding must be daily, and hourly—and especially at the point of impact, when temptation arises. As soon as that sinful thought comes to the threshold of your mind, you must *reckon* yourself dead to that sin, and *yield* to God. When the enemy whispers, “You’ve already thought this wrong thing, so you may as well go all the way,” take the matter immediately to the Lord. Say, “Lord, I don’t have the power, in myself, to do right. I don’t even have the *desire*, in myself, to do right. I can’t hide the truth from you, Lord. The truth is that my flesh wants to do this thing; and the desire is *strong*. That’s why I need your help to cast down this wicked thought, and to *put it to death*. I need *your* righteousness, Lord. I yield myself to your control.” Having known the Lord for 39 years, I can testify that when you truly yield yourself in this way, God *does* give you the power to be righteous!

How strong are your hunger pangs for righteousness, Christian? Have your tastes changed? Could you go a whole week without reading your Bible, without spending any real time with God in prayer, without going to church, and without talking to anyone about the Lord, and not even miss these things—yet, you can’t imagine how you could survive even a few days without any movies, telly, social media, sports, recreation, entertainment, or the hobbies that

you love? If so, it's time to get real with God! Cry out to Him, and ask Him to help you put the flesh to death, and to give you a hunger and thirst for righteousness. In fact, ask Him to give you a hunger and thirst for *Him*. Christ *is* Righteousness; and when you really love *Him*, He will give you a love for the things that He loves!

II. Beatitude Attitude #5: Mercy

(Read Matthew 5:7 again.) When a sinner receives God's gift of salvation, God begins to change that person from the inside out. He begins to impart His holy character to that person; and one of the holy characteristics that He imparts is "**mercy.**" Mercy means "not giving someone what he deserves." It is one of the seven gifts of the Spirit; and those who exercise this spiritual gift are admonished to do so "**with cheerfulness.**" True mercy is exercised "**with cheerfulness,**" because it springs forth from a heart of genuine love and service to others.

Read Romans 12:4-8.

Christian, as God's character trait of *mercy* increases in your life, it will manifest in the form of **compassion** toward those who are weak, erring, and wandering from God. Jesus is the sinless, holy God, who has the right to send *all us* of to hell; yet, He had compassion on the multitudes, because they were "**scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.**" Well, guess what? We, as God's children, are able, by His empowerment, to have this same compassion. By the way, as long as mercy is manifesting in your life, self-righteousness will disappear. Self-righteousness and mercy cannot co-exist in a person's spirit, because a truly merciful person remembers well that *he* was once wandering astray, as a sheep without a Shepherd.

As mercy blossoms in the life of an obedient Christian, **patience and kindness** begin to show up, as well. A merciful person will put away "**all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour** (loud yelling and fighting), **and evil speaking,**" and "**all malice.**" Instead, He will be "**kind**" toward others, "**tender-hearted,**" and "**forgiving.**"

Read Ephesians 4:31-32.

What else is mercy like? Well, because a merciful person is motivated by *agape* love (the pure, selfless kind of love that God has), he "**suffereth long, and is kind.**" He "**vaunteth not himself, is not puffed up.**" (In other words, he isn't prideful.) He does not behave himself unseemly, seeks not his own, and "**is not easily provoked.**" In other words, he isn't touchy, irritable, and easily offended. He also "**thinketh no evil.**" This means that he does not automatically impute evil motives to others, but is willing to go to them humbly and quietly about an offense, and listen to what they have to say. A cynical spirit, just like a self-righteous spirit, cannot co-exist with a merciful spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

As you can see, "mercy" has many close cousins; and one of those "close cousins" is *a heart of service toward others*. (Remember that "ministry" was one of the seven gifts of the Spirit; and "ministry" simply means "serving.") **Because** the obedient Christian is allowing the Lord to rid his spirit of self-righteousness, he thus does not think himself above serving others (even if they be "not worthy" of his service). *None* of us is worthy of Christ's love and mercy; yet,

the Son of man humbled himself, and came into this world *“not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”* We who know Christ should have this same merciful spirit. Our merciful heavenly Father makes the sun to rise upon the evil and the good alike; and He sends the rain upon the just and the unjust. Likewise, God expects us to love even our enemies, and to be *“merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”*

Read Luke 6:27-36.

Brethren, in ourselves, we are not capable of producing mercy; but when we yield ourselves to God, *He* produces this quality within us. By the way, “mercy” has a twin sister named “grace.” “**Mercy**” means “*not* giving someone what he *deserves*”: whereas “**grace**” means “*giving* someone what he does *not* deserve.” I call these qualities “twin sisters,” because you can’t have the one without the other. Christ poured out both His mercy *and* His grace on us when He saved us from our sins. The Bible says, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”* The Bible also says, *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.”* None of us deserve to be saved, or to enter into His glorious Kingdom; yet, Christ, in His mercy, saves us from eternal death in hell; and in His grace, He gives us the gift of eternal life with Him—and the privilege of serving Him with our lives.

In closing, I give you this true story, which took place in the 1500’s, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. This is a beautiful illustration of what God’s grace and mercy are like.

“You may remember the case of the woman who attempted the assassination of Queen Elizabeth. She was dressed as a man page, and had secreted herself in the queen’s boudoir, awaiting the convenient moment to stab her to death, not realizing that the queen’s attendants would be very careful to search the rooms before her majesty was permitted to retire. Hidden there among the gowns, they found this woman, and brought her into the presence of the queen. They took from her the poniard [dagger] which she had hoped to plant in the heart of her sovereign. She realized that her case, humanly speaking, was hopeless; and so she threw herself down on her knees, and pleaded and begged the queen...to have compassion upon her... to show her grace. Queen Elizabeth looked at her quietly, and coolly said, ‘If I show you grace, what promise will you make for the future?’ The woman looked up and said, ‘Grace that hath conditions, grace that is fettered by precautions, is no grace at all.’ Queen Elizabeth...said, ‘You are right; I pardon you of my grace,’ and they led her away a free woman. History tells us that from that moment Queen Elizabeth had no more faithful, devoted servant than that woman who had intended to take her life.”¹

Christian, Christ has forgiven you of all your transgressions. He shed His mercy on you abundantly when He saved you; and He continues to be merciful to you every day, despite your stubbornness and rebellion. Don’t tell God that “I can’t forgive this person who wronged me,” or “I can’t show kindness to this person, or show compassion to him.” Christ saved you so that you *can* be merciful to others, just as He has been merciful to you. In *yourself*, you can’t do it; but in Christ, and in *His* power, you *can*!

Conclusion: Christian, are you allowing the righteousness and mercy of your Saviour to fill your heart? Are you yielding yourself to God throughout the day, so that He can produce these qualities in you? Are you showing the same mercy to others that Christ showed to you when you were saved, and which He continues to show to you every single day? There is nothing more reasonable than to yield yourself wholly to God. This is the way the children of the Kingdom live.

¹ H.A. Ironside, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007), p. 25.

There may be some of you who are not saved; and to you, I would end this message with this plea: “Repent ye, and believe the Gospel!” Christ is coming back to establish His glorious 1,000-year Kingdom; and only the righteous may enter that Kingdom. Because we are all sinners, *none* of us could possibly enter that Kingdom—were it not for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for you, and rose again, to pay for your sins. He already did everything for you! You need only to repent in your heart, and believe that what Jesus did for you is all you need. In simple faith, confess your sin to Him, and ask Him to save you, and give you His righteousness. You will then become a child of the King!