

“JESUS ON JUSTICE (RIGHTEOUSNESS)”
by Rom A. Pegram (7/28/19)

In this series, we've been looking at the eight incredible statements Jesus made at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount—the Beatitudes, we call them. And today, we come to the fourth Beatitude (Matt. 5:6, NLT): **“God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice [righteousness], for they will be satisfied.”** Eugene Peterson translates this same verse (MSG) this way: “You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.” So, as we begin today, let me ask you: DO YOU HAVE A HEALTHY THIRST OR HUNGER FOR GOD?

The first week of this series, we made *four commitments* together. Let's review:

- 1) *Give God **the first part of our day**.* Setting time aside to spend with God isn't necessarily what believers do, but it *is* what disciples of Jesus do. And that's the point; we're here to make disciples ... and, hopefully, you're here to be one. ‘Give God the first part of our day.
- 2) *Give God **the first part of our week**.* It's what we're doing today—meeting together as the Body of Christ.
- 3) *Give God **the first part of our finances**.* I've challenged you to push yourself in this area during these 40 days—to give God \$40 more than you normally would during this period of time—a good faith gesture to God...
- 4) *Give God **the first part of our relationships**.* Both inside the church and outside the church. Are we allowing God to lead both of those relationships in our lives?

You have to have a healthy thirst or hunger for God ... if you're to live out these four commitments. But what does God promise? If you do, you'll be blessed ... eternally *satisfied* like never before (Matt. 5:6, NLT)! **“God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice [righteousness], for they will be satisfied.”**

One of my favorite devotional writers is Oswald Chambers. His devotional ‘My Utmost for His Highest’ is probably the best selling devotional ever in print. And he's shared an especially powerful word about the Beatitudes (July 25). Here's a sample:

When we first read the statements of Jesus, they seem wonderfully simple and unstartling.... For instance, the Beatitudes initially seem to be merely soothing and beautiful precepts for overly spiritual and seemingly useless people, but of very little practical use in the rigid, fast-paced workdays of the world in which we live. We soon find, however, that the Beatitudes contain the “dynamite” of the Holy Spirit. And they “explode” when the circumstances of our lives cause them to do so. ... Then we must decide whether or not we will accept the tremendous spiritual upheaval that will be produced in our circumstances if we obey His words. That is the way the Spirit of God works. ... The literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount is as easy as child's play. But the interpretation by the Spirit of God as He applies our Lord's statements to our circumstances is the strict and difficult work of a saint. ... We gradually have to conform our walk and conversation to the precepts of Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit applies them to our circumstances. The Sermon on the Mount is not a set of rules and

regulations—it is a picture of the life we will live when the Holy Spirit is having His unhindered way with us.

I thought Oswald Chamber's commentary might mean more to you after we'd been through a few of the Beatitudes. I hope so. At first, *they seem so simple ... until God begins to apply them to our circumstances in life.* Another good example of this is THE GOLDEN RULE—another part of the Sermon on the Mount. It seems so simple at first, but then God's Spirit begins to make it real to us—in our circumstances. It's found in Matthew 7:12; I believe this part of Jesus' most famous sermon can be used as commentary for our Beatitude for today...

What does the justice or righteousness of Matthew 5:6 really mean? Listen (Matt. 7:12, NLT): "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets." This is really from an ancient (Hammurabi) code—laws of trade set up so justice could be done in the ancient business world. And Jesus took this part of the 'code' and turned the definition on its head, making it so powerful! Instead of being a preventative rule ('do not' in original code), it's now a proactive rule ('do'). And *Jesus, folks, always calls us to a proactive lifestyle.* Just as Jesus came to this earth to be our Savior, he took the initiative ... and desires us to do the same... 'Do to others....' Jesus calls us here to *extreme living!*

So if the Golden Rule helps explain the fourth Beatitude—thirsting for justice/righteousness, how in the world do we do that? How do we live out the Golden Rule? When you study the life of Christ, you'll find that he gives us *four proactive principles* to live by—all here in the Sermon on the Mount. Proactively, we should recognize, unite, look for, and embrace ... in these ways: First (*describing a life that absolutely thirsts for the justice or righteousness of God*)...

RECOGNIZE THE NEEDS OF OTHERS. To live out the Golden Rule—the fourth Beatitude, the first thing you need to do is ... *recognize the needs of others.*

I covered this a bit last week, but let me review. There are only *two ways* you can live your life ... and each of those has consequences. *You can live your life self-centered ... or you can live your life other-centered* (God-centered—with the crown on Jesus' head)...

You can turn inward—thinking only of yourself. You can only care about your world and your motto would be: me, me, me, I, I, I. And over the short term, that may seem alright. But in the long term, there's something very problematic about a self-centered life ... because, well ... 'he who dies alone, dies alone.'

But you can live an other-centered life. You can say 'I'm far more interested in other people. I'm going to find my *satisfaction* (4th Beatitude) not in personal gain, not in fame, not in getting my name in the headlines, but in reaching out to others, helping others, and making a difference in the lives of others. Likewise, there's consequences for that. What you may give up some of the material gain that might come from a self-centered life, but your life will make a difference for *eternity* (invest in the eternal!).

So, which life are you going to live? 'Other-centered ... or self-centered? It is our choice. From Jesus life (Matt. 20:28) we read: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served

but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Isn’t that an amazing statement? It’d be one thing if I’d say that ... or you’d say that, but *this is Jesus talking—the Son of God!* This is the one who worked miracles, turned water into wine, fed the 5,000, promised us and then did rise from the dead! I mean, *if anyone deserves to be served, it’s Jesus*. But he chose not to be served (self-centered), but to serve (other-centered). Jesus expands our horizons, doesn’t he? He calls us out of our comfort zones to recognize the needs of others—not just those in our inner circle either. Jesus says in Matthew 5:47 (I’m sure with a bit of humor), “If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.” If we’re to experience the fourth Beatitude, live out the Golden Rule, Jesus is saying we’ve got to begin to recognize the needs of others—all others. Why? Justice (see Proverbs 31:8-9). And once we do, here’s what we need to do:

UNITE WITH OTHERS. Once you begin to recognize the needs of those around you, unite with others in doing good!

God’s plan all along has been for us to accomplish his will together. We are to work together. That’s why the Church exists. So, we’re to unite with others in doing all God wants us to accomplish, including meeting the needs of others—both inside and outside our circle...

Jesus, even though they were a small group to start, sent his disciples out to do just that—to meet the needs of others. But, how did he do that? How did he organize this motley crew of disciples? Some would think ‘divide and conquer,’ right? If we all divide up and go out on our own, we can cover more territory. But is that how Jesus did it? Here’s what it says in Mark 6:7 (MSG): “Jesus called the Twelve to him, and *sent them out in pairs* [italics mine]. He gave them authority and power to deal with the evil opposition.” Jesus sent ‘em out two by two, and when he did, they had the authority and power to do what he called them to do!

They united with others, didn’t they? *This is why whenever someone wants to start a new ministry through the local church, I insist they find someone to partner with!* It’s biblical; it’s the way Jesus did it. The writer of Ecclesiastes (4:9, NLT) has said: “Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.” And they get something else when they unite with others (Matt. 18:20, NLT): “For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.” When they proactively unite together to accomplish what Jesus wants ‘em to, they get his presence too. Always better with Jesus along, folks... Here’s another principle:

LOOK FOR SMALL WAYS TO HELP OTHERS DAILY. 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NLT) tells us: “So we are Christ’s ambassadors....” and as Christ’s ambassadors—representing him, we are to *look for small ways to help others daily!* That’s what *ambassadors* who live out the Golden Rule do!

So, Jesus is busy telling parables about the end times—the final judgment and here’s what he says (Matt. 25:34-36, NLT): “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from

the creation of the world [*and here it comes...*].³⁵ For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.³⁶ I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.” Go back to the first part of this scripture for just a moment, would you? I’m looking at the first line that says ‘you who are blessed by my Father.’ Do you want to be blessed? Jesus gives us eight ways in the Beatitudes, but then he drives it home here in the one we’re looking at today! Do you want to be blessed? Share a meal ... offer a drink ... welcome a stranger ... give away some clothes ... tend to the sick ... and visit those whose address isn’t ‘home’ right now...

Here’s Jesus talking about small ways we can make a difference. Small acts with eternal rewards. How do you live out the Golden Rule? *Inch by inch*; that’s how! And Jesus tells us, over and over again, that it’s people who matter the most! Recognize their need, get with others, and look for small ways you can make an eternal difference in their lives! These small steps may be costly steps, at times, but they’ll reap eternal rewards! People matter more than comfort; people matter more than schedules; people matter more than money...

Folks, I have a dream (idea) I want to tell you about today. This is a dream that God has planted on my heart as I’ve been studying for these messages this summer. Do you want to hear what it is? I believe we here at Trinity UMC can change the world; we can change our world ... even in one week’s time! I know, I know, every time Rom has a dream, it costs someone ... but listen to me. I’m talking today about \$5. What if each and every one of us made today’s message a tangible act for God? What if each one of us in the next week took \$5 out of our pocket, set it down where we do our praying, and then prayed about what God wants us to do with that \$5 (it could be a part of your \$40 in 40 days challenge). Then what if we began to recognize the needs of others around us—those God places in our path during the next week, we got together with someone to talk about it (or do it over the phone), then thought of a small way you could make a difference in someone’s life this coming week? What if we all did that ... with \$5. I’m not saying give the \$5 to the church. I’m not saying give the \$5 to me. I’m saying give the \$5 ... away! If all of us did this this coming week, do you think we could change our world ... even in small ways? You bet we could!

So ... will you join me in this challenge? To look for small ways to help others daily ... especially in this next week? Here’s Jesus’ final principle for us today:

EMBRACE THE RISK! There is risk involved in what I’m asking you to do today—what Jesus is really asking all of us to do... You’re being challenged, first of all, to be proactive; that’s a risk. Embrace the risk; Christianity’s an adventure; live life to its fullest! That’s what Jesus was talking about in John 12:25 (MSG) when he said: “...anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you’ll have it forever, real and eternal.”

So, folks, let's learn to let go of this life ... and be reckless in the way we love others. Let's go out this week and look for circumstances around us where God can use us to make a difference!

I'm praying God will take our small actions this coming week, and work miracle after miracle after miracle in our communities. And I believe he will if we're all committed to living out the Golden Rule. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 (NLT) says: "We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too." That's how much we need to let go ... and allow God to use us in the week ahead, in our communities! Just imagine the impact! I can't wait to hear the stories of how God has used Trinity filtering back to me... It doesn't get any more exciting than this—anticipating what God can and *will* do through *you*...