

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

Series: "The Kingdom of God"



Message: "The Righteousness of the Kingdom"

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"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus, Matthew 5:17-20

In Matthew 5:20 Jesus links future and present aspects of the Kingdom of Heaven. To enter the future Kingdom one must have a righteousness that exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

The required righteousness for entrance into the future realm of the KOG is the righteousness which results from God's reign in our lives. This is a righteousness that comes from God. Without God imparting this righteousness, we could not attain it. This righteousness is a righteousness which first has been imputed by the grace of God as the Holy Spirit regenerates the heart and one turns in faith and repentance, both granted by God, to believe in Jesus alone, believe Jesus, and believe what Jesus believes. A person convicted of sin, righteousness, and judgment becomes convinced to the point of conversion and sins are imputed or laid to the account of Jesus Christ even as Christ's righteousness is laid to the account of the sinner through faith. By grace are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God and not of works lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8, 9) The righteousness that exceeds even the holiest person is the righteousness of Christ, God come in the flesh, God Incarnate.

The Scribes and Pharisees were profoundly interested in righteousness. The Scribes were professional students of religion. They gave their full time to the study of the Scriptures and their main objective was the definition of righteousness. How does one live right before a holy God? The Pharisees accepted the teachings of the Scribes and put them into practice. They aimed to achieve a life of righteousness, right living.

So how can a person exceed their righteousness? The Scribes and Pharisees had an enormous body of law to define right and wrong. For example, the law says that people should not work on the Sabbath Day. So what constitutes "work"? How do we know when we are obeying the Law and when we are breaking it? It gets complicated. And here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is speaking to personal ethics, not to social justice and social ethics (as of governments, etc.)

So, if a chicken lays an egg on the Sabbath, can I collect it? Should I eat it? Is work involved or not? Well, if I kept chickens for the purpose of producing eggs, the answer would be "yes." But if not, the answer would be "no."

To demonstrate a righteousness that exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus gives some illustrations in the Sermon on the Mount. Mt 5:21. The Law of Anger recognizes different levels. Even in modern law we differentiate between deliberate murder and accidental homicide. We establish differing degrees of guilt. In Matthew 5:22 Jesus takes anger to the root, even to accountability for words spoken and the intent of the heart. Some translations add “without a cause” to Jesus’ words about anger here; but the oldest and best manuscripts don’t have that. Words can evidence anger and contempt and that can put us in danger of judgment and even hell fire. **Jesus goes to the root, to the heart. The scribes emphasized the outward act. Jesus is looking for an inward reality and not outward rule.**

Jesus is looking for a righteousness that deals with what a person is in himself before God. Kingdom righteousness says, “What you are is more important than what you do because what you do reflects who you are.” Kingdom righteousness demands that one have no evil in the heart.

Jesus is saying that to enter the Kingdom tomorrow we must have God reigning in our lives today; and that righteousness can only come as a gift of God.

Jesus goes to the Law of Purity next. Mt. 5:27, 28. Again, Jesus sets a higher standard. The Law of the KOG goes deeper than the act to the intent and bent of the heart. Jesus pierces to the thoughts and imaginations of the heart, to the purposes of the mind. Jesus is going to the core, to the pure heart, to a heart of holy love.

Jesus is radical, to the root. Mt. 5:29 – Jesus is not talking about maiming ourselves. He is talking about a radical breach with sin. We must do anything necessary and everything we can to find the solution to whatever sin problems we have at whatever cost. Do not toy around with sin. See it as the enemy to you that it is. Go radical.

God must give us this righteousness that He demands for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Only those in whom God now exercises His rule will enter the KOH.

Jesus then deals with marriage. Only in the case of adultery is one free to remarry because the OT condemned adultery with the death penalty (Leviticus 20:10) and the NT says that an adulterer is to be considered as one dead so as to leave the spouse free.

Next is the Law of Honesty. Do not bear false witness. Mt 5:33-37 is talking more than about oaths to tell the truth. To the Jewish mind, various objects possessed differing degrees of holiness and an oath was binding only to the degree that the object used in the oath was thought to be holy. People would sit around and figure out just how far they could bind themselves with an oath and still bear false witness without guilt. Jesus is saying that if you must take an oath before your word can be trusted, you are a sinner because someone who knows the righteousness of the KOG does not need an oath at all. His words should be trustworthy if he is trustworthy.

Jesus is looking at our attitude toward the law. Do we look for loopholes? Do we try to get around the letter of the law? Do we seek to take unfair advantage of someone else who doesn’t know the law? Honesty is a matter of the heart and reveals integrity.

Then Jesus moves to the Law of Love. Mt 5: 38-43. Jesus is using radical metaphor to make His point. In John 18:19ff Jesus didn’t turn the other cheek when the High Priest questioned Him and one of the officers struck Jesus with his hand. Jesus rebuked His assailant. What Jesus is talking about is being free from any spirit of personal revenge. How do we react when someone

wrongs us, speaks ill of us, offends us, falsely accuses us, persecutes us for righteousness' sake? Do we want revenge or can we be free from the motivation of personal vindication?

I will say, though, that "turning the other cheek" in principle turns the tables on the abuser because it equalizes the power. If you turn a taking moment into a giving moment, you have gained the upper hand. It turns a situation into love giving. The other person sought to abuse, use, and take from you. In that instance, you are a victim. If, however, you give the item to the person, turn the cheek, or whatever, you are no longer a victim. You give; and you rule. Whenever you forgive, you take the higher ground.

Jesus speaks about forgiveness and a righteousness that exceeds human nature. Jesus illustrated the quality of forgiveness demanded by the KOG. He told parables about it. cf Mt 6. God's forgiveness, however, must precede and condition forgiveness on our part of other people and situations. If I have been forgiven, that reality and the extent I honor the forgiveness I have received by God will be reflected in my forgiving others.

Perfect purity, perfect honesty, perfect love, and perfect forgiveness is a standard beyond the human condition. One doesn't enter the KOG without being born again, being born of water and the Spirit. The righteousness of the KOG is a manifestation of the life of the Kingdom. The righteousness of the KOG belongs to The Age to Come. It is being imparted to those who have received the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Imputation – illumination – impartation – imitation – identification – incarnation

Jesus came, God in flesh, a divine Person with a divine nature who took on a human nature in a human body. The believer does not become God, but partakes of the divine nature, in particular those attributes that can be communicated, e.g., mercy, grace, goodness, etc. in measure. How does this take place? Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 16:31; John 20:31.

...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Romans 10:9, 10 NKJV

The KOG makes one fundamental demand: the demand to believe Jesus with a willingness to be made whole. He turns the heart. He is Lord in control of the course of life. He changes the whole direction of action. We turn and embrace in agreement as to the KOG. Agree with the Word of God, both as to who you are and as to who God is. The Word of God defines us. Jesus owns us. The Holy Spirit works in us, permeating our lives. The quality of our present life and future destiny is in Christ. The KOG has come near.

But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, as attested by the Law and the Prophets. And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:21-23.

God will give us the righteousness of His Kingdom. God will give us the life of the Kingdom. Christ fulfills the Law. The Law leads us to Christ. He is the Covenant Lord our Righteousness. Galatians 3:24. Believe the Promise. Titus 3:4-7.

So, one is saved by faith, justified by faith alone. Consider Abraham, Romans 4. With justification, we're talking about a one-time act. Christ died, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God, to the Father.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. 1 Peter 3:18 NKJV

Christ righteousness is imputed to us. Then in the process of sanctification, we are declared sanctified but likewise go through what we call progressive sanctification. It's one of those "already but not yet" things. In sanctification, righteousness is imparted that we might become holy as God is holy.

So, Jesus demanded decision. Before a person is justified in Christ by faith, that person cannot rise to the level of required righteousness. We are dead in trespasses and sin. But justified in Christ, we then have a choice. Of course, the Holy Spirit will use measures to lead us to the right decision because His job description is to make us holy and to ratify the Covenant of Grace.

In Luke 9:57-62, Jesus demands radical decision. Mt. 10:34, Luke 14:26. Luke 13:24.

Radical decisions. Enthusiastic embrace. Costly decisions. Obedience to what we believe.

"Only he who believes is obedient and only he who is obedient believes."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, [The Cost of Discipleship](#).

"Who will follow the Christ?" "Who will follow the Lamb?" Jesus called men to follow Him. Leave the old life. Receive the kingdom. Follow Me, Jesus said. Leave your idols, your false security, your sinner self, your lesser loyalties, your other lovers and loves. Cut that umbilical cord and plug into Jesus. Seek first the KOG and His righteousness. Mt. 6:33, 34. Normal family ties may be ruptured. Matthew 10. The claims of God's kingdom have priority. It is God first.

Take up the cross. A cross is not a burden-bearing situation. A cross is a place of death. To take up the cross is to be ready to die. Denying oneself is not self-deprivation. Denial of self is Christ-centered. It means death, nothing less. Are you ready to die to sin, be crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20), be crucified to the world (Gal.), to put to death passions and lusts of the flesh? Will you die to your dreams, to your ambitions, to your selfish ambitions and self-pronounced destinies? Do you count yourself as dead? Loss, to gain Christ? Have you put yourself on the altar of sacrifice?

Radical decision. Enthusiastic embrace. Costly decision. Eternal decision. The decision for or against the KOG in the present determines someone's future destiny. Luke 12:8, 9; Mark 8:38.

And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. I tell you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will also confess him before the angels of God. But whoever denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. Luke 12:7-9 NKJV

The righteousness of the Kingdom of God comes by grace alone, by faith alone, by Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. Come into agreement with the God-breathed, infallible Word; that is the idea behind the concept of confession. Loyalty. Supreme loyalty. In supreme loyalty and attachment to Jesus Christ, we obey by grace through faith which works by love. Amen.

Mary Craig, D. Min.

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