

# Righteousness and The Kingdom

*Matt 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.*

Matthew talks a lot about righteousness.

*Matt 23: 1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,*

*2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:*

*3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*

Jesus then talks about the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees.

*27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

*28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

*29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,*

*30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.*

*35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.*

- The first murder and the last murder that are recorded in the Old Testament of righteous people. Their “righteousness” was just an exterior cloak in which they hid their true being. We are approaching Passover - a time of inward reflection. Checking what is in our heart. I encourage you to consider whether we are righteous.

We talk about preaching the gospel in all the world. One of the essential elements that is required for us to preach the gospel in all the world is that we be an example of the gospel we preach. This is the underlying reason why Jesus made the comment in Matthew 5 when He said that “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you’re not going to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Prior to this Jesus Christ has told the disciples to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

*Matt 5: 10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Matt 6: 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

The Kingdom of God and Godly righteousness cannot be separated. The two are inseparable. It’s an important point because the religious leaders of that day considered themselves to be the inheritors of the kingdom and they thought they were righteous.

In the first few verses of Matthew 16 Jesus tells the disciples not to be concerned about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They thought He was talking about bread. Jesus Christ was talking about the hypocritical doctrine and teachings.

Matthew has an interesting expression in Matt 5:10 (Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.)

Why did Matthew use the term “kingdom of heaven”? The gospel of Matthew was written to Jews. They already considered themselves to be the recipients of the Kingdom of God and that that they had been the Kingdom of God since Israel appeared before the Eternal at Mount Sinai. They always considered they *were* the Kingdom of God. So Matthew uses the term “kingdom of heaven” to differentiate between what people thought was the Kingdom of God and what truly is the Kingdom of God. He is making a distinction. He is also helping us appreciate the situation the Pharisees considered themselves to be in. They considered themselves to already be the inheritors of the Kingdom. As such they were righteous.

We find the aspect of righteousness being referred to frequently in God’s Word. One of the first references we find to it is in Genesis chapter 6. Noah had been commissioned by God to build an Ark for the saving of humanity. The cataclysm God was bringing upon the earth is described very graphically in the Hebrew - “utter destruction” was being brought upon the earth. A total destruction. A destruction like that described in Zechariah 14 and even more specifically in Malachi 4, where we are told that “unless the hearts of the fathers were turned to the children, and the children to the fathers, the Eternal would come and He would destroy the earth with total destruction”.

*Gen 6: 9 These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God*

The term “a just man” is more accurately translated as “a righteous man”. God had clearly called him into a relationship with Him. Noah had responded to that call and that relationship. The term “righteous” describes a relationship - a relationship between God and man. A relationship that is not defined by man - but by God.

People don’t understand how they can be justified by faith and yet be expected to keep God’s Law. We have to keep God’s Law because that is the righteous life to which we have been called by God, to live. It is defined and established by God, not man.

One of the problems at the time of Jesus, was that the Pharisees and the people saw the law as an end in itself. They didn’t see God’s Law as a means by which they could establish a right and a proper relationship with God. God was not the centre of their lives. The law was the centre. The law had become their God. As a result they were establishing their own righteousness, rather than the righteousness of God, as Paul said to the Romans in Rom 10.

They didn’t see God being revealed in His Law!

Noah was a man to whom God had revealed Himself and who had responded to that, and who God could commission to undertake a Work. God’s evaluation of Noah was that he was “a righteous man”.

In the book of 2 Peter chapter 2, Peter uses three examples of beings and their relationship with God. He starts talking about the angels who sinned as examples of those who will not live a righteous life. In terms of the time in which people lived, the Pharisees fell into exactly the same category as he was talking about here.

*2 Pet 2: 1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction*

Peter is warning us there would be false teachers and false prophets who would seek to lead people astray. From something that God has clearly established for us.

*2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.*

*3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*

*4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;*

*5 (NRSV) and if he did not spare the ancient world, even though he saved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood on a world of the ungodly;*

Peter describes Noah as “a herald of righteousness”. He was a righteous man and as such was able to be used to undertake a righteous act as well. “Herald” comes from a Greek word meaning “a herald or messenger vested with public authority who conveyed the official messages of kings, magistrates, princes or military.” Noah was a herald of righteousness. Or a preacher of righteousness as the KJV expresses it. What was he doing? He was conveying the official message of THE real king to a world that was decadent and about to be destroyed in a great calamity. Noah was a righteous person in God’s sight and he was also involved in doing a righteous work.

*6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly;*

God told Abraham about it. “Will I hide anything from Abraham?”. Abraham went to literally the edge of the plain where Sodom and Gomorrah were built, and literally pleaded with God to spare the city if there were fifty righteous people in the city. That got whittled down to 10 righteous people. How many righteous people were in Sodom and Gomorrah? “Righteous Lot”.

We might not consider Lot as being righteous. Yet Lot’s relationship with God had changed from a carnal self seeking attitude that he had had when he parted from Abraham, and he had chosen the well watered plains of the river Jordan river and the proximity of the bright lights of Sodom and Gomorrah as we might describe them today.

God delivered righteous Lot. Lot was “vexed with the filthy conduct of the wicked.” What was around him had an effect on him in terms of his relationship with God.

*7 And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:*

*8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)*

He desired for it to be changed - so that people could have the relationship with God that he had with God. He was not an unknown in the city. The point is that there is an important relationship involved in proclaiming the righteousness of God to this world and being righteous ourselves. For some people this becomes a “chicken and egg” situation. Which comes first? People refer back to Mr Armstrong’s comment when he said “Your spiritual growth depends on how much your heart is in The Work”. I would agree with that. The question is of course, that Mr Armstrong didn’t ask, but would have asked if someone had tried to apply this line: “Why should your heart be in The Work? Because you desire the righteousness of God for everybody!”

Notice how God perceived John the Baptist’s parents:

*Luke 1: 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*

The same comment is made of Joseph, the husband of Mary. In Matthew 1, Joseph is described as a righteous man. God was very concerned about the parents of these two individuals who were going to have such a profound effect upon the people of that day, and people for all eternity.

*Luke 1: 13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.*

*14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.*

*15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*

*16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.*

*17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

The word “just” should be translated “righteous”. John’s responsibility was to help turn people to righteousness. To help prepare them to have a righteous relationship with God - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

*59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.*

*60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.*

*61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.*

*62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.*

*63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.*

*64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.*

*67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,*

*68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,*

Talking about the way in which God had considered his people:

*74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,*

*75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.*

*76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;*

*77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,*

*78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,*

*79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

*Matt 21:32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.*

John came in the way of righteousness - to bring people into that right relationship with God.

*Luke 3: 18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.*

He proclaimed what we refer to as “The Gospel” to the people. He was a righteous man. He came in the way of righteousness. And he proclaimed that way to the people.

Matt 24: 14 (People dispute as to whether this is a prophecy or a commission:) *And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.*

This gospel will be preached in all the world - or as the verb form of the same word that we referred to in 2 Peter 2 where it is said that Noah was a “preacher” of righteousness. This is exactly the same word. It will be heralded unto all nations, and then the end will come.

What is the starting point of the heralding of that Work?

*Deut 4: 4 But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day.*

*5 Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it.*

*Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.*

They were to keep God’s laws, not just for their own benefit, but so that other nations would see the results! Their very lives could become “heralds” of the good news of the Kingdom of God. They were the physical representation of the Kingdom of God on this earth.

*7 For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?*

Their relationship with God was supposed to have been of such a nature that it could have an impact on the nations that were around them.

*8 And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?*

The righteousness came from appreciating God’s Law in its right context to God. A means whereby we could have a right relationship with God, and not an end in itself.

*9 Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;*

They were given a responsibility. They were to teach and communicate to each successive generation. Each successive generation was supposed to portray that righteousness of God to the nations round about.

That’s why Christ said “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you won’t enter into the Kingdom of God”. Their lives represented no righteousness - or self-righteousness.

It is a lesson we have to learn. We have been called to a righteous way of life. We have been called into a relationship with Almighty God. We’re not called for our own sake. We’re called for the well being of others. We’re not part of God’s Church so we can save ourselves from the calamities that are about to come upon humanity. Yes, God can save us from those evils. And God is faithful in that regard.

God wants us for a great purpose - for what we can do for others. And if we don’t do it, he will use something inanimate - the stones - to accomplish it.

We’re not called for our own sake in any way. We have a responsibility towards others. It’s interesting looking back over the years in God’s Church, and the difficulties we have experienced in the last decade or

more, looking back at the way in which people have responded to the calling they have had. Too often people saw the calling in terms of their own benefit rather than for others.

I look back at the time when Mr Armstrong died. Various people wanted his position. Why did they want it? Was it because of what it would do for them? Sadly I think that was the case. It was not: "What could I do with that position for the benefit of the rest of humanity?"

The aspect of the calling and the righteousness of the calling we have, and the type of people we are to be was lost. As one U.S. pastor said to me after the conference in Louisville "The church has forgotten all about righteousness." That's right. We have. It's so easy to forget that that is what God requires of us. Let me give you an example: Moses had asked to see the Eternal.

*Ex 34: 6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth ...*

Consider those points:

(1) Merciful

(2) Gracious

(3) Longsuffering

(4) Goodness

(5) Truth

That's expanded a little further in verse 7, describing the very character of God.

*7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*

*8 And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.*

*9 And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.*

Moses had revealed to him the very character of God. The true nature of God. What is contained in verse 6, is the centre of the theology of God's Word. If you were to take a concordance, this same expression about the Eternal God is referred to frequently in the Old Testament.

Jonah, a prophet from the nation of Israel, told of the time of the Assyrian threat to Israel to go and proclaim repentance to the city state of Ninevah, one of the capitals of Assyria. What did Jonah do? God says (in the Hebrew) "Get up and go .." and thereafter Jonah went down. He did the exact opposite of what God instructed him to do. Every time Jonah does something he goes down, in contradiction to what God told him to do. Where does he end up? Down in the fish's belly, down at the bottom of the sea. You can't go any lower than Jonah went to get away from what God had instructed him to do! He prayed from the belly of the fish and the fish vomited him out on dry land:

*Jonah 3: 1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,*

*2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.*

*3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.*

*4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*

The king of Ninevah proclaimed a fast for all the people and the livestock:

*9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?*

*10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.*

Ninevah was not destroyed. Jonah went outside the city and sulked. Because he would have preferred to see the Ninevites dead than alive!

*Jonah 4: 1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.*

*2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.*

Jonah is throwing God's Words back in His face. There's something that Jonah had missed. Go back to those 5 words (Ex 34:6 and compare them with Jonah 4:2)

*Ex 34:6 Jonah 4:2*

(1) Merciful Merciful

(2) Gracious Gracious

(3) Longsuffering Slow to anger

(4) Goodness Of great kindness

(5) Truth

Four of the words Jonah used are the same. He left out the last word: Truth. He forgot that God was true. He substituted, as we might say in the vernacular: "You're a soft touch. You can't hold to Your Word. You can't be true."

As Peter said, God is not willing that any perish, but that all should come to repentance and live. The people of Ninevah came to repentance.

*Jonah 3: 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.*

"Turn" is the word that means "repent" in terms of your relationship with God. The king said "Our responsibility as a people is to repent". Meaning to enter into a right relationship with God. Exactly the same meaning that the word "repent" has today. We repent of our sins: We get rid of those things that destroy the right relationship with God, and we enter into that right relationship.

*8 ... let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.*

*9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?*

God will turn towards us and repent. God will establish a right relationship with us. The translation of the Hebrew in the KJV gets a little awkward, because they confuse these terms.

Jonah didn't understand what relationship God was seeking to establish, because Jonah himself did not have a right relationship with God. He fell short on the job he was given - to proclaim the Good News to the people of Ninevah. Instead of being in the city, helping explain God's Way of life to them, he's sulking out on the hillside about what God's done! Where is Godly righteousness in terms of Jonah? It's sad. Here was a servant of God, someone whom God had chosen, and to whom He had given His truth, who completely failed to understand the relationship God desired to have with all people.

As Exodus 34 says, there is a penalty for sin.

*Ex 34: 7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*

Jonah overlooked the righteousness of God. Jonah's situation and the relationship Jonah had, and the attitude he portrayed is perhaps best described in Matthew chapter 25.

*Matt 25: 14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.*

*15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.*

*16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.*

*17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.*

*18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.*

*19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.*

*20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.*

*21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

*22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.*

*23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

*24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:*

*25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.*

*26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:*

*27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.*

*28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.*



*29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.*

*30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Not an unfaithful servant - an unprofitable servant. This servant did not correctly understand what his Master was doing. Just like Jonah. Jonah said God was a soft touch. This man said God was hard. He threw away that which had been given to him. He did not respond as God had revealed Himself to Him.

It's a challenge for us. We live in a world that is corrupt. A world that has lost sight of the righteousness of God. There is no righteousness within this world and we exist within the world. One of the challenges is for us is to understand and respond to the righteousness of God. As Christ said in Matt 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. They will be filled."

That is a direct command that Jesus Christ said we are to focus our lives upon. Yet so often we don't. People say "When are we going to talk more about prophecy?" People want to explain "their idea" of how they know exactly when Christ is going to return. What are such people hungering and thirsting after? Chronology! But what good has that done you - you could walk out and be knocked over by a bus!

On the other hand, if you hunger and thirst after righteousness, you may not know the day of Christ's return, but you can be very much part and parcel of it!

This has always been a challenge for us. To focus upon the right thing. I say this to our own shame, in terms of ministers and lay members alike. We have forgotten what it is that God really God desires of us, so we can be an effective witness to this world. So that God can open doors and we can walk through them.

Over the years I've seen the ability of people to have a problem, and rather than handle the problem righteously, they've handled it unrighteously. And the unrighteous handling becomes a greater problem than the initial difficulty.

Let me give you an example that most can appreciate: Marriage problems. Maybe there is a problem over how the money is spent. There is never enough money. That's a human condition. I doubt there is a family in this room that has enough money to do everything they would like to do, or hope to do. So decisions have to be made about how money is to be spent. Priorities have to be established. I'm sure in each case, somebody slips up. Somebody's wants or needs gets in the way of the agreed priority. What happens? The reaction because of the problem ends up being an unrighteous one. The end result is a greater problem than that at the beginning. We get on a downward spiral. An unrighteous tit-for-tat situation in terms of their reaction. In reality we ought to be seeking to outdo one other in terms of our righteous response towards one another. And challenging our spouse to be more righteous than we, in the right way.

*Luke 18: 1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*

*2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:*

*3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.*

*4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;*

*5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*

*6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.*

*7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?*

*8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

*9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:*

The starting point of Godly righteousness is reflected in the way we react to one another? Do we despise another person? Do we seek to put another person down? Maybe because of what they have done to us? Or do we have a different attitude towards them that Luke talks about later in the chapter?

*Luke 18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.*

*11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

*12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

He was elevating himself above all those around him.

*13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*

*14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified (made right with God) rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

Why should we be involved in proclaiming the Gospel to this world as a witness? Because it's what mankind desperately needs. Is there a corner of this globe that doesn't need the Kingdom of God?

What will be the hallmark of the Kingdom of God?

*Isa 11: 1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:*

*2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;*

*3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears:*

*4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.*

*5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.*

- That's the hallmark of the Kingdom of God. That is what will bring about the change. What does it require of us now? That we also be righteous. That we be the heralds of the Kingdom. As we show that righteousness, then God can provide the means whereby we do this with very much greater strength.

One of the things that has struck me over the past five years (because I have been on a learning curve as well) is how much we have been affected by this world. As Mr Armstrong so frequently said "It is much more difficult to unlearn false education than it is to learn new." People talk about doctrine. What are God's doctrines? No more than the life we are to live. We get caught up in terms. We use the term "law" in terms of the first five books of the Bible. The Hebrew word "Torah" really means "instruction, teaching." The misnomer of law being a sort of statute book type approach, a legalistic type approach, is something that has come through the Greek language and the use of the word "nomos" as a word that was used to translate "law".

What do we think of in terms of doctrine? We think of words that are difficult to explain like sanctification, justification and all of these wonderful words that theologians use to describe doctrine. That's not what "doctrine" means. Doctrine means "teaching". The Western world has allowed itself to come to where it believes in belief itself. It's lost sight of what it's supposed to be doing. "Here's a nice idea, let's put it in a box on the wall." That's not Christian at all. Christians are doers of the Word of God. Christians are those who are righteous in God's sight.

*Matt 25: 31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:*

*32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:*

*33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.*

*34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*

*35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:*

*36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*

These are the people who have been promised the Kingdom. The righteous. Christ is saying "You have spent your life using my law to inculcate within you the attributes of Godly character. To change the way you think about other people. To represent yourselves to other people as I have represented Myself to you. "Insofar as you've done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you've done it to me." He said "You're righteous, because you've had a right relationship with Me. So, come inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth."

Except our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees we won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. God requires a righteous response from us. He wants to see that righteous response portrayed to the rest of humanity.

People say "The Work's over". No it's not. It's not over until Jesus Christ prevents anybody setting an example of righteousness to any other human being. Isaiah talks about "His Kingdom (which is going to be filled with righteousness) will have no end. The Work of God will always be being done. Members of the God family encouraging one another to be even more Godly in their approach and the way in which they handle the responsibilities that are being given to them.

In May 1996 the Council of Elders crafted a statement about the underlying problem in the church. That we've not always handled our relationships and responsibilities in a Godly manner. It's very easy to say that, to memorise it. It's a lot more difficult to undertake it and to respond to.

I see people responding to situations that challenge them. They respond in the unrighteous way that they have learned from others in the past. There's only one way to learn righteousness and that is by burying ourselves in God's Word, learning the way of righteousness God has revealed to us. We have a job to do. A job just like Lot saw before him, where he vexed his unrighteous soul because of the ungodly conduct.

Ezekiel had a vision of the temple of God. There is no physical temple standing at this time. You and I are part of the temple of God.

*Ezek 9: 1 He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand.*

*2 And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brasen altar.*

*3 And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side;*

*4 And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.*

*5 And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity:*

*6 Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.*

“Begin right here at the altar.” God is looking for righteous people. For those who ache for the day when that righteousness can fill the earth and all humanity can participate in the relationship we already have with God now, only even more so, because it will be a much more open and complete relationship. Unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, we won’t enter into the Kingdom of God.

We are entering the Days of Unleavened Bread in a few weeks time. Do our lives really represent the righteousness of God? Ask yourself “Does my life reflect that relationship?”

... Peter Nathan

28-Mar-98

Birmingham

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