

THE CHURCH OF Jesus Christ

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled”

Matthew 5:6

A Message from the Quorum of Twelve Apostles

The Sermon on the Mount written in Matthew, chapters 5 through 7, is the longest recorded sermon delivered by Christ and provides basic instruction for all believers. He told the people they would be blessed and have a great reward in heaven if they would be *humble, penitent, meek, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure, peacemakers, and able to endure persecution for His sake*. Later in his discourse he says “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Since God’s word is timeless, and applies to us now as it did then, it behooves us to understand what righteousness is and why it is so important for us to hunger and thirst after it.

What does righteousness mean?

A dictionary definition of *righteous* includes the following: virtuous; doing what is right; acting in a just, upright manner; acting in accord with divine or moral law; free from guilt or sin. *Righteousness*, then, is the result of *righteous* actions.

What should we know about the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees?

Scribes were trained to study the Law of Moses in great detail. They were called lawyers because of their knowledge and became recognized authorities on keeping the law. They could draft contracts for marriage and divorce, loans, inheritance, etc. They were called upon to give interpretations of the law, which became a tradition of oral law. Many of the scribes were also Pharisees, which was the largest and most influential religious-political party of the day. The Pharisees focused on limited parts of The Law and added their own interpretations which also became oral tradition. The scribes and Pharisees understood the law and could interpret its fine points but they did not follow it. Christ openly chastised them in Matthew 23 where he said of them they were hypocrites who did not practice what they preached, performed to be seen of men, neglected parts of the law, and were lovers of money.

How can we be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees?

The Sermon on the Mount gives clear direction of what is expected of God’s people and provides good instruction on how to be righteous:

- *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21)*
- *“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:1)*
- *“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:19)*
- *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:24)*

How do we measure up against the scribes and Pharisees? Do we “say” and not “do”? Do we calculate our activities for show, to look good, to gain the esteem of our peers? Do our actions teach others that God’s commandments are not important to us? Do we value fame and riches more than being a servant of God?

The scriptures provide the following instructions for those who desire to be righteous:

- Fast in secret, not to be seen of men. Matthew 6:16-18
- Lay up treasures in heaven not on earth. Where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. Matthew 6:20-21
- Reject sin, receive God’s grace, and be obedient unto righteousness. Romans 6:1-23
- Walk as children of light, not children of darkness. Ephesians 5:8
- Be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, to shine as lights in the world. Philippians 2:15
- Do not sleep but watch and be sober, as children of light. 1 Thessalonians 5:4-6
- Depart from iniquity and say the name of Christ, be sanctified and prepared for every good work. 2 Timothy 2:19-21
- Take on the mind of Christ, do not live in lust, but to the will of God. 1 Peter 4:1-2
- Let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, as Christ is righteous. 1 John 3:7
- Awake, put on the armor of righteousness, shake off the chains of sin. 2 Nephi 1:23
- Do not reject the Spirit of the Lord, in open rebellion against God, to endure a never-ending torment. Mosiah 2:36-39
- Learn wisdom, that man can be saved only in and through Christ, the word of truth and righteousness. Alma 38:9

Are we hungering and thirsting after righteousness?

Is there truly hunger and thirst in our souls for righteousness or can we be compared to the scribes and Pharisees condemned by Christ? If we need to do better let us understand that Christ is the fountain of all righteousness. It is only by reading and applying God’s word that we can be more righteous.

Christ told the woman at the well, “...whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John 4:13-14). On another occasion He said, “I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:48-51). If we have tasted of the living waters and eaten of the bread of life we have been given the keys to righteousness! “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16).

Promises to the righteous

The following promises to the righteous should stir up the gift of the Holy Spirit that is within us:

- “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” (Psalm 1:1-3)
- “But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him.” (Psalm 4:3)
- “Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.” (Psalm 15:1-2)
- “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” (Psalm 24:3-5)
- “The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall trust in him; and all the upright in heart shall glory.” (Psalm 64:10)
- “Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness

endureth for ever. Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour.”
(Psalm 112:1-9)

- *“My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.”*
(Proverbs 2:1-9)
- *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)
- *“And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.”* (1 Nephi 14:14)
- *“And the righteous need not fear, for they are those who shall not be confounded...”*
(1 Nephi 22:22)
- *“And because of the righteousness of his people, Satan has no power; wherefore, he cannot be loosed for the space of many years; for he hath no power over the hearts of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth.”*
(1 Nephi 22:26)
- *“Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness.”* (2 Nephi 9:14)
- *“But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever.”* (2 Nephi 9:18)

We urge our beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ to take this message very seriously. It is clear by the many references given that God wants his people to be righteous. We should all examine our lives and resolve to do better. May God help us to understand that through Christ we can obtain righteousness and be free from sin:

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

2 Corinthians 5:21

This is the eighth of a series of messages to *The Church*. For more understanding of what we believe please visit our web site to obtain resource and contact information:

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