

## TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS

**Speaker:** Prof. Joseph John

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**Scripture:** Matthew 5, 6, 7 and 23

Last few weeks, Pastor has been concentrating on the topic of discipleship. And Pastor used one phrase “authentic discipleship”. So I thought we would see more on that word “authentic” and how we can be authentic in our discipleship. So, for our meditation I have taken the Sermon on the Mount – chapters 5, 6 and 7. Now unfortunately, each of us, me included, when we read these 3 chapters, we often think that it is not for us; we are not very comfortable. We read it and just keep it away. But we’ll read it together and see that Jesus spoke this to His disciples. So if we are disciples, we also need to listen to what Jesus said. The problem is that sometimes we think that it is all about us, and we need to do all that. but we forget that we cannot do it on our own strength. So let’s remember that it’s not about us; it’s all about God. The worship team very wonderfully sang that: “We stand in awe of You.” And the Lord knows everything that goes through our heart. We are standing in the presence of an awesome God who knows everything; hence we can be authentic.

One very strong theme of this Sermon on the Mount, which I believe is the most important thing to remember, is that it’s all about our being more than our doing. Very often we are more concerned about our doing and less about our being. What I mean is that we are not so worried about our character, but we are worried about our conduct. The Sermon on the Mount is all about the inside and less about the outside. The emphasis is first to take care of the inside so that the outside will become better, not the other way.

### Matthew 5: 1-4, 13-16

*<sup>5</sup> Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, <sup>2</sup> and He began to teach them.*

*Saying:*

*<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.”*

*<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*

*<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

I’m sure you noticed that when the disciples came to Him, Jesus began to teach them. But look at the very first thing Jesus said. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” In Jesus’ day, and even today, what Jesus said is very much against the grain of the day, or what we think. Jesus is saying ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’, meaning that when you feel that you are not up to the mark, you are not an authentic disciple, you are not following the Lord – that’s the right spirit, much more than being overconfident and being self-righteous. He said: that’s the right spirit. Then you are blessed.

And look at the second one. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Are you really feeling sorry, or really, really mourn about your sinfulness, your nature, and you are struggling? You are blessed because you realize that you are not righteous. And that is very much against the grain of that day. And even today it is very much against the grain of the day. The emphasis is more and more about what we are truly inside than about what we are outside. Therefore, we can be sure that God is interested in our life and God wants to change us from inside out. Always remember – we are blessed.

And again, what I read from vv. 13-16. You are the salt of the earth. He did not say you will be the salt of the earth; you are the salt of the earth. Even in this brokenness, even when we mourn our sins, you are the salt of the earth. That's all about God. God has made us salt. But the warning is in the next verse: If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? remember that God has made us salt so that we would bring taste. But what we need to watch out for is not to lose that saltiness which God has put in us – we should not lose it. That's what we should be careful about.

Then He says: You are the light of the world. Even in the midst of our brokenness, in the midst of us knowing that we are not up to the mark, Jesus says "you are the light of the world, and your light is because of Me. Let others see your light so that the glory goes to God." That is the important thing.

Now, having said when we consider ourselves blessed, let us also read what Jesus said in 5:20  
*<sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

That's one of the first things that Jesus warned them right in the beginning, that our righteousness should surpass or excel that of the Pharisees.

So let's look at a few areas where we might identify with the Pharisees. What are some of the mistakes they were making and what made Jesus say that our righteousness should exceed theirs. If we look at the context, in v.17, Jesus says: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets. I come not to abolish them but to fulfil them." Then He says in v.19: "If anyone takes away a little bit from the Law and the prophets and teaches others accordingly, that person will be the least in the kingdom of heaven." And then v.20.

Why did Jesus say that? The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law in Jesus' day added many more things to the Law, many small things. We know that Jesus had a lot of confrontation with them about the Sabbath. They added many things, but they also conveniently removed many things. They did this for their own convenience.

So let's look at 3 or 4 kind of problems of the Pharisees that we should be careful about.

**1.** The first thing when we think of the Pharisees is the word **hypocrisy**. That is the 'inside' versus the 'outside'. Matthew 23 is all about Jesus confronting or exposing the Pharisees. So we'll read a few verses from here as well as from there.

What is hypocrisy? Hypocrisy is an overemphasis of how we appear outside over who we really are. I'm sure that all of us, to some extent, are guilty of this. We are very concerned about how we appear outside, or how others perceive us. That's why we should be careful. Always watch out. We should be more concerned about our character than how we conduct ourselves. Who we are inside is far more important than our conduct. But for the Pharisees, that was not important.

Matthew 23:25 <sup>25</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup> Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”

Jesus is bringing it out very strongly – don’t be too much concerned about the outside. Yes, outside is important, but far more important is the inside.

2. Another aspect of the Pharisees, especially when we talk about hypocrisy, is saying something and doing something else. The Pharisees were guilty of this.

Matthew 23:2-3 <sup>2</sup> “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup> So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

We also need to watch out. As I said, the word ‘authentic’ is very important when we talk about discipleship. Fortunately these things are listed and written for us, therefore we can watch out. So next time we are tempted to say something but do something else, watch out. Jesus already warned us.

3. The Pharisees liked to show off.

Matthew 23:5 “Everything they do is done for men to see.” Or we can also say – see and appreciate.

We see this happening again and again. Jesus warned us.

Matthew 6:1 “Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

Now this was one of the biggest problems of the Pharisees. They did whatever they wanted others to see. Jesus talked about 3 specific areas in which the Pharisees liked to show off.

- Giving alms. They wanted everyone to see publicly that they were giving alms so that others would appreciate them.
- When they prayed. Here is where they failed miserably too.  
6:5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.”  
Even in the area of prayer, the emphasis was not on praying to God but it was more that others would see, and associate that with some kind of spiritual status. Let us be warned. We also can be guilty of this. Sometimes we also have a slight superiority complex when it comes to our spiritual life. Be careful! Jesus said, “When you pray, it’s not for anyone to see that you are praying, but God.”
- Fasting. When the Pharisees fasted, they wanted everyone to know that they were fasting. They probably thought that they would earn some brownie points. Watch out! Jesus said that when you fast it is not for others to see. We should be careful not to have our spiritual life as a show-off religion. What is the danger? When you have a show-off religion, or whenever we do things so that others would see, we are seeking appreciation and praise from others. Nothing wrong with that, but if that is what controls you or affects you, then watch out. Then you do everything to get popularity or appreciation. Most dangerous!

That was the problem with the Pharisees. They wanted others to appreciate them, to praise them. Therefore, they did everything to get that praise or popularity. That’s what we should be very careful about. But in contrast, look to what Jesus is saying.

Matthew 5:13 “You are the salt of the earth.” Remember, we did not deserve it. The saltiness which is there is us, which can add taste to wherever we are, your places of work, in our homes, wherever God has placed us. Apart from bringing in taste, we can also prevent that place from decay. We don’t need to have a lot of salt in order to be effective. So don’t be

discouraged that you are alone in some place. You are salt and God has placed you there for a purpose. Always remember that.

Matthew 5:14 Jesus said “You are the light of the world.” Why? So that you can shine in dark places. Maybe God has placed you in a dark place so that your little light would shine there. but, v. 16 says “In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” That’s the key. Are others able to see the light in us and give praise to God?

Remember we are being watched. The very fact that we are different means that we are being watched, even though we may be criticized. Sooner or later, those who watch us will know the source of our light. The source of our saltiness. What Jesus is saying is let them praise their Father in heaven. I think that is the key! When something good is there in us, we should honestly give that glory to God, so that others will know that it is from God and that praise goes to God. That’s something that we should watch and be careful about.

**4.** The Pharisees had a legalistic approach, especially when dealing with others. Sometimes we can also be guilty of this. For example, the letter of the Law was far more important to them than the spirit of the Law, and that was their problem. Religiosity vs spirituality. How they did everything was far more important than the spirit of it.

Matthew 23:4 *“They tie up heavy loads and put them on other men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”*

The Pharisees made so many rules. Someone said, by Jesus’ time, they had added another 600 or so extra things to be done. They put very heavy loads on men’s shoulders, but they themselves were not willing to lift a finger to move them. That’s something that we should watch out for. They also made so many extra laws about the Sabbath, and Jesus confronted them.

23:23 *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees. You hypocrites!. You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former.”*

They gave far more importance to the point of tithing, to the extent of tithing their spices, mint, dill and cumin. But Jesus is saying that they neglected the far more important things of the law like justice, mercy and faithfulness. You’ve seen the many times they lacked mercy, and they lacked justice and faithfulness. But they were emphasizing on the very small things. That’s the legalistic approach. We also sometimes can be guilty of that, especially when it comes to others.

**5.** Judging others. We are all good at that. We have one rule for ourselves, and another rule for others.

Matthew 7:1-2 *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup> For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the same measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

I believe it is very often said that if there is something which we as Christians or Evangelical Christians can be guilty of, it is in this area of judging. We have special standards for others, but when it comes to us, we are very soft. That’s exactly what Jesus said: In the same way you judge others, you will be judged and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. We need to watch out for this.

In summary, we saw how the Pharisees behaved when it came to the 3-4 areas that we saw. They had a hypocritical way of doing things. They wanted to show off. They were legalistic – they picked on the small things and forgot the big ones. They were also judging.

**What should be our response, especially in the context of becoming authentic disciples?**

- **Be Intentional.**

We need to really desire to be authentic disciples. We need to be intentional. Without that, nothing else can happen. But at the same time, we should also remember that it is not about us. That is very important. If you ever thought that you can live by the Sermon on the Mount, you are mistaken. You'll soon be guilty. In fact, many of our friends from other faiths, they read these chapters and are put off. We should ask for God's help and I'm sure God's Spirit would show us specific areas of our life which needs change – which are the areas where we are hypocritical like the Pharisees. And then ask God for help to get rid of it. God's Spirit will help us. That's why as a child of God, we are privileged. We have God's Spirit as a permanent resident. All that we need to do is give Him control. Slowly and surely, then we will see our life being changed. That's the important thing, asking for God to change us from inside and not just outside. very often, many of our behaviors are only symptoms of something which is much deeper within, and God's Spirit can show us that.

- **Invest heavily on God's Word.**

One of the biggest dangers today is social media. Only yesterday I was reading the newspaper that doctors are concerned that children are spending about 3 hours a day on social media. Social media is good but it should be used with care. Compare that with what you are investing in God's Word daily. That should be a comparison. What we have been talking about will not be got from social media. God's word has to go in, and that is not automatic. We need to be intentional in terms of reading God's word, studying God's word, memorizing God's word, meditating on it. God's Spirit can use only what has gone in. so invest heavily. The answer is not to stop social media but to have that balance.

I like this chorus very much. I'm sure you all know it, so let it be our prayer.

Change my heart, O God,  
Make it ever true;  
Change my heart, O God,  
May I be like You.

You are the Potter,  
I am the clay;  
Mould me and make me,  
This is what I pray.

Amen.