
Title: The Exceeding Righteousness of the New Covenant

Text: Matthew 4:23-8:1

Speaker: Pastor Chad Bresson

Introduction

Matthew 4:23ff... this is what Jesus Christ proclaims to his people through His Word:

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

A conflicted Maria has returned to the Abbey. It wasn't supposed to turn out this way. She had left the Abbey brimming with confidence, off to be the governess of seven children whose mother had passed away and whose father was busy with his own

military and social interests. Yet with music, charm, and a supreme confidence in herself that could not be shaken, a household had been transformed. But she hadn't been counting on that curious thing called love. Life throws Maria a curveball, and so... here she is, back at the Abbey, confidence in tatters, but seemingly wiser for having had the experience. Maria renews her vows at the convent and spends the rest of her life at the convent fulfilling the vows she had made to God and to her order. Right? Of course not! Rogers and Hammerstein know better. When things are darkest, what is it that Maria needs more than a confidence and morale booster? Enter Mother Abbess who proceeds to give Maria a bit of inspiration sent from heaven we are assured: "Climb Every Mountain, Ford ev'ry stream, Follow ev'ry rainbow, 'Till you find your dream." Armed with that bit of honey from heaven, or so we're led to believe, Maria returns to be the governess of the children again... and of course, we know the rest of the story. The plot for the Sound of Music swings on the morsel of worldly wisdom: climb ev'ry mountain; exert some effort; make life happen for you; persevere through the bad times, because the sun will come out tomorrow (to borrow another choice morsel from another story we all know well); face your fears; have confidence in yourself; create your own destiny; just do it... till you find *your* dreams. Thus, the underlying philosophy driving one of the greatest musicals ever penned is the triumph of the human spirit and the self-created destiny. Your dreams, your *heaven* is yours for the taking. It's up to you and no one else... all you need is a little confidence in yourself.

This kind of philosophy isn't all that surprising coming from the moral philosophers of our culture with names such as Rogers and Hammerstein and Walt Disney. But visit your Christian bookstore, go online to any number of evangelical websites, listen to, or watch any number of evangelical personalities, and you'll find wholesale adaptation of Mother Abbess' moral virtue. Oh certainly, many evangelicals would not claim that their ultimate destiny depends on their tenacity and spiritual fortitude. However, they live the so-called "victorious Christian life" as if it were so. While it's seemingly accepted that the rugged American individualism and Christian machismo won't get one into the kingdom, it is quite apparent that one maintains the kingdom by climbing every mountain, fording every stream, following every rainbow until we find the kingdom dream. In the end, it might strike us as uncanny how the kingdom dream isn't all that much different from the American dream. And in fact, some might even conclude that one can have both.

Our passage this morning, though, depicts a kingdom life quite different from that of Rogers and Hammerstein. Life in the New Covenant has a different orientation. It is other-worldly. It is both counter- and contra- culture. It is of another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. Most importantly, life in the New Covenant has its source in a Person. Not the person who climbs the mountain, but the One who has climbed the mountain for those who know they cannot, and now sits on His throne.

The Old Covenant

Surely, how different a picture this One on the mountain was painting for the Israel who had gathered to listen at his feet. This life being offered by the One named Je-

sus was radically different from the one that they knew in the Old Covenant. For the crowd who gathered to listen, their reality was still dictated by the old order that had been given on another mountain to the first and greatest of the prophets, Moses.

This was an Israel under the weight of an oppressive law they could not keep, and shackled to a covenant routinely broken. The etching from the first tablets of God's law wasn't even dry and Israel had broken the covenant and its moral code with a golden calf. At the sight of the calf Moses threw down the tablets; those broken tablets at the base of Mount Sinai not only symbolized broken law and broken covenant, but Israel's inability to keep either law or covenant.

This Israel, gathered at the foot of Jesus on the mountain, is in need of a righteousness beyond her grasp. "Do this and live" were the terms of the covenant, terms broken early and often by a people seemingly bent on disobedience. Not only was this Israel without a righteousness, this was a people who year in and year out, the prophets warned, were confident in their own righteousness. So confident were they of their own righteousness, when they were reminded of their wickedness, more often than not, it was the prophets, not their iniquities, who were laid on the altar for execution.

This Israel, gathered at the foot of the mountain, was not only lacking an awareness of her sin, she also lacked a kingdom. Destroyed by Assyria and banished by Babylon, Israel never regained the kingdom that had been sworn to David and his posterity. Instead, Israel was merely a Roman territory, occupied by invaders who barely tolerated them.

And... lacking a kingdom, Israel had no king. More than 580 years had passed since a son of David had occupied the throne in Israel, and Herod Antipas was neither Jew nor king. And finally, this Israel that had gathered at the foot of Jesus on the mountain knew nothing of the dwelling presence of God in their midst. The temple had been rebuilt. Herod the Great, to gain favor with the Jews, gave it a bit of dressing up. But no amount of renovation, no amount of temple expansion could mask the glaring absence of God's visible presence among his people.

This crowd, gathered at the foot of Jesus on a mountain, were sheep without a shepherd, citizens without a kingdom, worshipers without God's presence, sinners without a righteousness.

The Promise of a New Covenant

What a paltry existence this was. What a sorry lot were these people of God. Defiant, disobedient, unable to keep the covenant and completely unaware of their need for a righteousness. But God, in his mercy and grace, gave the promise of a coming day when things would be different for his people. The old order would give way to a new order of things. In Isaiah, Israel is promised a new covenant in the form of a person; Isaiah 42, verse 6; notice all of the "I wills". These "I wills" collectively form the terms of a new covenant:

“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; **I will take you** by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

And again in Isaiah 49:8, God promises to send Israel a new covenant in the form of a Person:

Thus says the LORD: “In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; **I will keep you and give you as a covenant** to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.’ They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture;

In Jeremiah 31, Israel is told about a new covenant... in verse 31... again, notice all of the “I wills”...

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel** and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that **I will make with the house of Israel** after those days, declares the LORD: **I will put my law** within them, and **I will write it on their hearts**. And **I will be their God**, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For **I will forgive their iniquity**, and **I will remember their sin no more.**”

Not only is Israel promised a new kind of law and a new covenant, but a new heart that will keep covenant forever. And this new covenant culminates in the highest expression of covenant that first appeared with Abraham: I will be their God and they will be my people. Jeremiah was not the only prophet pointing to a new covenant; Ezekiel 11:

Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: **I will gather you** from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and **I will give you the land** of Israel.’ And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. And **I will give them one heart**, and **a new spirit I will put within them**. **I will remove** the heart of stone from their flesh and **give them a heart of flesh**, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And **they shall be my people**, and **I will be their God**.

Exekiel 36:23

And **I will vindicate the holiness of my great name**, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them....**I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries** and bring you into your own land. **I will sprinkle** clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols **I will cleanse you**. And **I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you**. And **I will remove** the heart of stone from your flesh and **give you a heart of flesh**. And **I will put my Spirit within you**, and **cause you to walk in my statutes** and **be careful to obey my rules**. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and **you shall be my people**, and **I will be your God**.

And Ezekiel 37:

(verse 5) Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, **I will cause breath** to enter you, and you shall live... (verse 12) Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, **I will open** your graves and raise you from your graves...**And I will put my Spirit within** you, and you shall live, and **I will place** you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD...(verse 21) Behold, **I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land**...**And I will make them one nation in the land**, on the mountains of Israel. And **one king shall be king over them all**...They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But **I will save them from all the backslidings** in which they have sinned, and **will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God**. **“My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes...I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them...My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

These are the terms of a New Covenant. If you want to know just what has been and is being accomplished in the New Covenant, just follow the “I wills” of these passages. Almost from its inception as a nation coming out of Egypt, Israel had been breaking covenant. Unrighteous covenant-breakers was the legacy of Israel. But in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, God says he will take care of Israel's infidelity once and for all by giving them a new heart, a new law, his own Spirit within them that will cause them to obey, a new covenant, a new covenant Incarnate, a righteousness, a king and kingdom, and then, the promise that he will fully and finally dwell with and among His people: “I will be their God, and they will be my people”. Israel is carted off to Babylon, they return to the land... and they wait... for more than 500 years.

The anticipation of a new covenant

We come to the book of Matthew and from the very beginning there is a sense of anticipation about what is to come, chapter 1 verse 1: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David...(verse 17) all of the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to Christ fourteen generations.” From the very beginning of his eyewitness account of the Christ, the Messiah, Matthew is bent on us and those in the early church reading his account understanding that this Messiah is the Promised King who is the final heir to David’s throne.

Israel needs a Savior; in chapter 1:21, Gabriel tells Joseph that the son born to Mary is to be named Jesus “for he will save his people from their sins”.

Israel no longer enjoyed God’s dwelling presence among them; in chapter 1:23, this one named Jesus is fulfillment of the promise of God through Isaiah, “Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a *son* and they shall call his name Immanuel”, which means God with us. Months later, a shekinah-glory-like star leads wise men from the east to “came to rest” over the place where the child was. Immanuel has come to dwell among his people.

This crowd at the feet of Jesus on the mountain lacks righteousness; Christ submits to John’s baptism because it is fitting for Jesus to fulfill all righteousness.

Israel lacks a kingdom; Jesus comes out of the wilderness and begins to preach, “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Israel lacks a king, they are sheep without a shepherd; in chapter two there come wise men from the east asking “where is he born king of the Jews?” The answer for the wise men is found in Micah and quoted by Matthew, “from you, Bethlehem, shall come a ruler who will *shepherd* my people Israel”.

Israel needs someone who can accomplish and fulfill all of the terms of the covenant and the law that it failed to do. Matthew chronicles for us that Israel’s champion, Israel’s incarnational representative is miraculously brought up out of Egypt, through the baptismal waters, into the desert where he is tested and tempted for 40 days, and now we come to chapter 5 and this one who has been brought up out of Egypt, through the baptismal waters, in the desert, has now ascended a mountain. And it is on this mountain that one better than Moses beckons Israel to draw near; it is on this mountain that THE Son of David ascends and sits down, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (4:23).

The Sermon on the Mount

While many commentators have suggested that Christ is assuming the posture of a Jewish rabbi who dispenses wisdom with his students, Matthew is doing much more

than that here. This is the “son of David”, the One born “king of the Jews” assuming the posture of One who has authority, and as the Sermon unfolds, One who has ultimate and supreme authority. At the bookend of this sermon Matthew tells us that the “crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority and *not* as their scribes”.

This king comes proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, a kingdom that is not of this world, a kingdom that imposes itself on this world, a kingdom that does not look like the kingdoms of this world. This is the upside down kingdom with kingdom citizens living life upside down with an orientation toward the heavens.

This upside down kingdom’s citizens are marked by those things which are foolish in the eyes of the world. These kingdom citizens are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek. Contra a Jewish culture wrapped up in asserting its own righteousness, the kingdom citizen hungers and thirsts for a righteousness that only the King can satisfy... they seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and in doing so will find that He satisfies the desires of their soul. These kingdom citizens who are merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers find themselves persecuted for the sake of that very same righteousness, a righteousness that had cost the prophets their very lives.

But this righteousness is beyond the grasp of the kingdom citizen. It is not self-generated. This king comes proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, a kingdom that is not of this world, a kingdom marked by a righteousness that can only come from above. Israel lacks righteousness. And this King tells his people that unless their righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees, the kingdom is not for them (chapter 5 verse 20).

One must feel the weight of this. The kingdom citizen hungers and thirsts for a righteousness that cannot and will not be his own. The demands for entrance into the kingdom have not changed... in fact, the ultimate standard of obedience to the law, “be holy as I am holy” is interpreted by Jesus as “be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect” (chapter 5 verse 48). What a severe imposition.

And as we track just what it is that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees through the rest of the Sermon on the Mount we might be driven to the point of depression. By highlighting the heart issues, which we will get to in a minute, the strict code of the law isn’t simply brought to bear, but the intent behind the code as well. This Sermon on the Mount proposes an ideal so high and unattainable, Christianity’s critics have scoffed at the ethic here, suggesting such severe demands are unjust and even unethical. No one can live up to the standard proposed by this king on this mountain. And they are right.

An exceeding righteousness

How is it that one could be more righteous than those who dedicated their entire existence to promoting their own righteousness? These Pharisees are those who have

championed obedience to God's law on their own terms, and in so doing, have come to have confidence in their own righteousness. The righteousness of their kingdom is attainable. These are they who sing "climb every mountain, ford every stream", confident that the kingdom rewards the kind of righteousness applauded by men.

If entrance to the kingdom requires a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees, those paragons of Jewish virtue, how can anyone enter? How is it possible? The answer is found in the very same passage. Matthew 5:17-20 form the thesis statement, if you will, for the entire Sermon on the Mount, landing on verse 20. The entire Sermon swings on this question of the kind of righteousness demanded by the King for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. But it is a righteousness that this King himself provides. This king comes to the mountain having been baptized by John in order to fulfill all righteousness.

That same word "fulfill" is found here in verse 17 of chapter 5. The One fulfilling all righteousness is the One fulfilling the Law and the Prophets. Thus, the righteousness needed by this crowd at the feet of a King on the mountain, the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees, must come from the One who has satisfied not merely the demands of the law, but has fulfilled the entire Old Testament. "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them".

This king proclaiming the good news of the kingdom fulfills, or fills up to the very last measure, everything foreshadowed in the Old Testament. From the law to the prophets, comprehensively from Moses to Malachi, what was contained in law and in prophecy, Christ came to fulfill all that anticipated Him.

This word "fulfilled" isn't simply about making all of the predictions in the Old Testament come true. This is the typical way "fulfill" is often preached or taught in our evangelicalism. No, the word used here, *pleroo*, has the idea of "filling up completely" or "filling up to the last measure"... so... this King doesn't merely make the predictions about the coming Son of David come true; Christ here is saying that he is the final subject and object of that which had been foreshadowed and promised throughout all of the Old Testament. Christ is the sum and substance of all Old Testament revelation, the sum and substance of its history.

And this fulfillment includes all of the law (Matthew 5:18). In filling up the full measure of all that was foreshadowed in the law, in obeying the law to its fullest extent, Christ embodies the Law and becomes the standard by which all holiness is measured. In becoming the sum and substance of law by filling up the law to its fullest measure, in fulfilling all that had been foreshadowed in the law, this king sitting on the mount is the full and final Torah, he is The Law of the New Covenant invested with all of its authority and glory.

It was Christ all along to whom the Old Testament had been pointing. And it is this Christ, this king fulfilling all righteousness, who becomes righteousness for His

people. This Christ, who sits on the mountain, dispenses to His kingdom citizens a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees. This king who is proclaiming another kingdom proclaims that the righteousness necessary for entrance into the kingdom is a righteousness that comes from above, a righteousness given by another.

How does Christ's fulfillment of the law become righteousness for us? Because this King, is the Blessed man of the beatitudes. In fulfilling the law and the prophets, this king has, on behalf of his people, has been poor in Spirit. This King is one who mourned. This King is one who in purity of heart was persecuted for righteousness sake. This Son of David, this new Israel delivered out of Egypt, affirmed in the waters of baptism, and tested in the wilderness, in meekness hungered and thirsted after that righteousness necessary to provide salvation for His people. On this mountain, this King, this Lawgiver, proclaims a kingdom that will be won by filling up the very last measure of a law that enslaved those who broke it. In obeying all of the demands of the Old Testament, this King, this Lawkeeper, gives life to those who seek first his kingdom and that righteousness only He can provide.

The New Covenant

This Israel, at the feet of Jesus on the mountain, lacks a covenant that is not and cannot be broken. And this king who comes proclaiming the advent of the kingdom of heaven comes bringing a New Covenant for his people. If we were to trace the storyline of Matthew's unfolding of the kingdom of heaven that is imposing itself onto the stage of this world in the Person of Jesus Christ, we would eventually come to an upper room, where this One who is fulfilling all righteousness holds up the cup to His disciples and declares that this new kingdom, ushered in through His death and resurrection, inaugurates a new covenant, a new covenant ratified by His blood and personified in Christ himself. Fulfilling Isaiah 42 and 49, this King becomes The Covenant himself, his own promise and guarantee to His people, bestowing all the rights and privileges of kingdom citizenship.

In this New Covenant, a great exchange has taken place: Israel's unrighteousness for Christ's righteousness. The heart of stone is replaced with a heart of flesh. God's people, those of us who knew nothing but disobedience, have been given new heart that not only desires to obey, but we have been given a Spirit that causes us to obey. In fulfilling the tablets of stone, the kingdom citizen no longer lives under the specter of an external law that condemns, but lives the life of the Spirit, an internal law that produces obedience in the kingdom citizen.

Thus, in this New Covenant, the principle of inversion, a principle that has been prophesied in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, becomes the order of the day. And at the outset of the kingdom, this principle of inversion is being proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount by the king who sits on the mount. That which the world thinks is mighty really is weak. That which seems wise is foolish. What seems right to the average person is wrong. What seems to give life brings death. And being meek, waiting on the Lord, is now that status quo. Mercy rules the day. The foolishness of

this world is wise. Peacemaking, not winning, not war, is the mark of the kingdom citizen. Self-reliance is out; utter dependence on someone else for favor with God and overcoming life's difficulties is the mark of the kingdom citizen.

Everything Israel understood to be reality has been flipped on its head. The emphasis of the Old Covenant had been an external code written on breakable stone tablets. The emphasis has shift from a law demanding perfect conformity to an external code, or that which seemed wise to the law abiding Israelite, to a new order in which being poor in spirit, meek, merciful, pure in heart, hungry and thirsty after righteousness is the mark of the kingdom citizen.

If we were to read a little further in the Sermon on the Mount we would find that the emphasis of the New Covenant is on internal righteousness that flows out of the heart. In a series of 6 statements in chapter 5, Christ juxtaposes the law over against the intent of the law, which is aimed at the heart. Sitting in the backdrop of the external code of the Old Covenant are issues of the heart. "You have heard that it was said in the law, thou shalt not murder... but I say to you, those who hate are guilty of murder. You have heard it say, don't commit adultery. But, I say to you, if you lust after a woman who isn't your wife, you're guilty of adultery." This New Covenant inverts the emphasis on the fruits of obedience to the tree that gives rise to the fruit (Matthew 7:16-17).

Heart issues were certainly part of the Old Covenant. God's people are condemned for having hearts that are far from him. Heart issues are implicit in the first and last commandments... having no idols before God and not coveting. Heart issues are certainly inherent to the greatest commandment which summarizes the law: loving the Lord your God with all heart, soul, and strength. But the identity of the Old Covenant was wrapped up in external code and law keeping. The external code dominated the Old Covenant landscape. Do's and don'ts dominated the Israelite's worship. "Do this and live" was at the forefront of everything that happened in the Old Covenant.

But in Christ's fulfillment of the law and prophets, in Christ's fulfillment of "do this and live", the New Covenant he makes with his people is characterized by the internal, the new heart of flesh and its corresponding Spirit, that does not break Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31ff). In the Sermon on the Mount, the king who is proclaiming the kingdom of heaven, places the heart front and center because it is the heart out of true worship, true love, and true obedience flows.

This is why the kingdom citizen lays up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). His affections are oriented toward a righteousness that the world cannot give, and toward a kingdom that cannot be seen. The fleshly heart of the kingdom people in the New Covenant is oriented toward this King sitting on the mountain as the only thing that can satisfy. This is why the kingdom citizen need not be anxious about life (Matthew 6:25). Those with eyes of faith are not anxious over the provisions in this world; in-

deed, these kingdom citizens recognize that the King sitting on the mountain dispenses bread that gives life (Matthew 4:4).

Conclusion

The King has come to the mountain proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. The crowds who gather at the foot of Jesus on the mountain are offered life in a righteousness only the One who fulfills the law and the prophets can provide. They are offered the kingdom of heaven in the Person who is born king of the Jews, the One who has an authority that is not of this world.

This sermon ends where we must end this morning. Chapter 7 verse 28: “When Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.” If we are to find ourselves among those kingdom citizens to whom Christ feeds himself and gives life, we must find ourselves following Christ’s footsteps.

Kingdom citizens, this morning we meet at the foot of Mount Zion. We feast at the feet of the One who has been enthroned. We eat of the bread that He offers freely in his word. We find our satisfaction in One who has fulfilled all righteousness on our behalf. All that we lack, He provides.

These crowds who followed Jesus off of the mountain, most of them, if not all of them, were unaware that if they continued to trace the steps and path of *this* king, it would lead them to another hill where this king would inaugurate the New Covenant with his blood, beneath a sign that read, “This is Jesus, King of the Jews” (Matthew 27:37). The one who is born “king of the Jews” in Matthew 2 dies as the king of the Jews in Matthew 27. This king came proclaiming a kingdom in humility and meekness; this king came into Jerusalem not riding a white horse, but a donkey; and this king died inaugurating the kingdom with his own blood. If we are to follow this king, we must trace his footsteps in meekness and humility and mercy and being poor in Spirit to our own possible crucifixion.

As citizens of a new kingdom living under a new covenant with new hearts of flesh and the Spirit living within us, we live by the inversion principle. We eschew and forgo the climbing every mountain self-reliance and self-righteousness. The king proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom on the mount is determined to drive every bit of self-reliance out of us. We are fools to the world, living with our eyes focused on a kingdom that is not of this world, to the point of being persecuted for righteousness sake.

As we feast on Christ, as we find our satisfaction in the One who sits enthroned, as we pursue the expansion of a kingdom that is not of this world, we trace the footsteps of the king in mercy, in meekness, in purity of heart, to the point where we too are persecuted for righteousness sake. At the risk of being falsely accused because of His name, we orient our hearts toward our reward in heaven, a Reward who has exceeded the righteousness of the Pharisees.