**Genuine Righteousness**

Based on [Matthew 6:1-21](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt6.1-21)

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Ash Wednesday

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The beginning of Lent is a good time to remember that the world is an evil place, full of temptations and trials. It is unimaginable what heaven will be like because it is impossible to imagine a life without drama, or the type of drama we’re used to here. We are used to experiencing shades of four primary emotions--joy, fear, sadness, and anger. In heaven, there will be only joy. What could that possibly be like?

On account of this drama, we are bombarded with a cacophony of conflicting stories in this life. We understand explain our lives in narratives. These are the stories we tell ourselves. We play the victim in some stories. We play the hero in others. But no one wants to be the bad guy. So, we might be the bad guy in other people’s stories and the way they tell them, but rarely do we explain ourselves as the bad guy.

Ash Wednesday is a good time to step back and to remember that, we are by nature evil. We are the bad guy. People tell a lot of stories, a lot of versions of what’s really going on. But there’s only one story really. God’s story. History, right? His-story is the only story that’s real. And in it, we are not the good guys. By nature, each and every human being is the enemy of God...not in the sense that God hates us, but that in our natural hearts, we rebel against Him and His rule.

But the coming of Jesus Christ in mercy changed all that. Because of his obedience to God, we are counted obedient. Because of his loyalty to God, our treason is acquitted. Because he died, so did the authority of our flesh. Because He did the time, Satan can no longer accuse us of the crime... These things constitute our ***Justification*** before God. Once we were lost, evil, miserable sinners and nothing more. Once we were a stench in the holy nostrils of God. Once, every intention in the heart of man was evil. Now, because Jesus Christ made right our wrongs; and undid the curse of Adam...we can stand before God justified, *we are still sinners by nature, but justified sinners by grace.* Through faith, we can strive to please him; seek to live a virtuous life, and we can be genuinely righteous.

Jesus teaches such genuine righteousness. He teaches it first by contrast with the Pharisees. He says that the pharisees aren’t genuine, they don’t really consider that God is watching them, only ***people***. They want to be ***seen*** as righteous *by people*. They want to be ***considered*** holy and perfect *by people*. They want *people* to admire them and aspire to them. They want *people* to know that they pray, and that they deny themselves, and that they give to charity. In a way they care very much about other people, because they care that other people praise them, and they bend their lives towards being esteemed in the world.

John the Evangelist sums up such error and sin in one simple phrase, “**They loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.**”

Jesus’ whole life was dedicated to pleasing his Father, rather than pleasing people. Every single moment, he was genuine and devoted to the will of God alone. He always knew his Father was guarding his life, guiding his ways, and preparing his path. He was utterly committed to fulfilling the will of his heavenly Father in everything. ***Jesus Christ loved the glory that comes from God, more than the glory that comes from man.***  That is why the authorities had him murdered. That is why his Father had him lifted up and glorified, that all who believed in him would have eternal life. He did not regard peoples opinions; he always regarded the truth.

In the world, there is no regard for truth. Jesus said “I came to bear witness to the truth, and Pilate said, “What is Truth?” In the world, the truth is whatever story makes *me* out to be the good guy...that’s the truth. And the truth was, if Pilate released Jesus, the Jews were going to spin the story that he was no friend of Caesars. That wasn’t true, but Pilate only knew one truth, ***whichever story prevails in the minds of men.*** The idea that there is a story that is true, even if nobody believes it, is totally beyond his understanding. So he says “What is truth?”

This disillusionment with the truth is so seductive, that it can even sway a genuine heart. A good biblical example is King David. After impregnating another man’s wife, David had the husband secretly killed and he married her. So he could tell control the story. So he could cover up his evil by covering up the truth. It was only through the confrontation of the prophet, who exposed his sin before his eyes, that David’s arrogant pride was crushed by God’s law and he repented and fasted and wept.

By faith, you have been given the righteousness of Christ. Be genuine in that righteousness. ***Live in the truth; which means living in the sight of God.*** You do not need to pray so that others will see your christianity, pray so God will hear you. You do not need to fast so that others will admire you, fast so that you may rejoice in the true heavenly food. You do not need to give to charity so others will praise your generosity, give to the poor because you love your Father in heaven who favors them.

Adam and Eve sinned, and they became aware of it and tried to hide. Don’t hide from God; let him see you. You have an ashen cross on your forehead, which means that you are aware of your sin. So is God. You need not hide it to approach him. He knows who you are and He forgives and He loves.

“***Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need***.” (Hebrews 4:16)