

Seeking

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

I have preached that verse. I have quoted it to people in difficulty and meant it kindly. And the way I heard it, and the way I think most people hear it, is as a matter of order. Get the priorities right. Put God first and the rest follows.

Righteousness, in that hearing, is a standard. Something out ahead of you that you are meant to be closing the distance on. Seek it, and if you seek it hard enough and long enough you might one day have some.

The trouble is the word.

The Greek is *dikaiosynē*, and behind it stands the Hebrew *tzedaqah* – and *tzedaqah* is not a standard. It is rightness within a bond.¹ It describes how you are with someone you are joined to. Take the relationship away and the word has nothing left to describe.

Which means you cannot accumulate it. There is no amount of it to acquire. A man alone cannot be righteous, because there is nobody for him to be right with.

So *seek* cannot mean what I thought it meant. You do not seek righteousness the way you seek a qualification.

Seeking is not to attain to it. It is to step into it.

Once you are watching for the word, it turns up everywhere in the Sermon, and it is not decoration. It is the thing being talked about.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Beware of practising your righteousness before men.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Five times, from the opening of the Beatitudes to the middle of chapter six.

And 6:1 – *beware of practising your righteousness before men* – is followed immediately by giving, praying, fasting.

That is the Hebrew usage exactly. *Tzedakah* became the ordinary word for almsgiving – not because giving is a good deed that earns you righteousness, but because rightness within a bond is a thing you do with your hands.

There is one more thing, and I only saw it this week.

The Beatitudes are spoken about people. Blessed are *those* – the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful. Then at verse eleven it changes. *Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you*. And it does not change back. Everything after that point is spoken to a *you* who has just been described as being persecuted for the name.

That runs to the end of chapter seven. It is still running at 6:33.

So when the anxiety comes, look at what it is about. Not money in general. Food, drink, and clothing – and they are named three times over. Those are the things you lose when your community puts you out.

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It is said to people who have thrown their lot in with Jesus, and are now going without.

Two men sailed from Copenhagen in October 1732 for the island of St Thomas in the Danish West Indies. Johann Leonhard Dober was a potter. David Nitschmann was a carpenter. They went to the enslaved Africans working the plantations there.

The story usually told is that they sold themselves into slavery to reach them. That is not what happened, and the truth is better. They were willing to. They offered. They were told it was not possible – white men could not be sold in those islands – and they went anyway, as free men, and lived among the people they had come for.

Asked how they would keep themselves, Nitschmann said: *I am a carpenter, and will ply my trade*.

Selling yourself into slavery is a magnificent thing. Plying your trade is not. It is just work, and it has to be done again the next day.

SELAH

For years I drove the church bus on a Sunday morning.

I was usually the first to arrive and the last to leave. It added about three and a half hours to the day, and I did it gladly, most of the time. Visiting pastors would sometimes suggest that someone else could do the driving. I had a sermon to preach and a church to lead, and my time was better spent on more important things. They were not being unkind. They were being sensible.

They were wrong. What I did on those mornings was equal to the preaching, and I would argue it was more.

I can still name them all. I could not tell you the number – it changed week to week – but six months after my cardiac arrest, and the last run I did, I can see their faces and put them in the order I collected them.

June first. She had been at that church long before I got there. June is not always easy to understand when she speaks, and when I first came I was not sure how to relate to her. Then one Sunday she prayed. I could not make out every word, and there was no doubting her heart. Polio as a child, a walker ever since. She lived with Colleen until Colleen died, and now she lives with Carol and Les, an older couple who opened their home to her.

Then Anthony. I met Anthony in prison. When he got out he came to church, and he was baptised. He has not been coming much lately, and only once since I stopped driving. I miss Anthony.

Then John and Gerald, from an aged care facility a fair way out. John is probably the most faithful person in that church. He seldom misses a Sunday. A car accident at twenty-four left him with some impairment, and he uses a walker. Gerald moved into the same place recently. He had come to church years before with his wife and his son, and then his son moved out and his wife died, and he lost his footing for a long while. He has been better since.

Then Andrea, who is quiet and gets overlooked. She sits near the front. One Sunday at the end of the run I turned up the driveway and saw her in the mirror, still in the back seat, not saying a word.

I could keep going. Each of them has a story.

A friend of mine who works with homeless people says that just because you are homeless does not mean you are nameless.

In the early days a friend took a service for me when I could not be there, and he was encouraging about the church and what it might become. He said: you'll be able to do so much when you get some normal people.

He was not being rude, and I knew exactly what he meant. He had probably said out loud what I had been thinking. But in someone else's mouth it hit me between the eyes.

I decided then that these were the people Jesus would be with, and that I wanted to be in his company.

I would not swap June, Anthony, John, Gerald and Andrea for the most gifted ministry in the country.

Blessed are you.

¹ I have worked this word through at length elsewhere – see [Tzedakah](#) in the word studies, on what was lost crossing into Greek and why the English has drifted into a score.

This article did not begin with artificial intelligence. It began with years of ministry, reading, prayer, suffering, and conversation.

During the development of this article, AI became a conversation partner. It challenged assumptions, tested arguments, suggested structures, and helped refine expression. Many of the words that follow emerged through that dialogue.

The experiences, convictions, interpretations, and conclusions remain my own.