

What The World Needs Most: Righteousness And Mercy

Rich Nathan

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Life As It Was Meant To Be Series

Matthew 5:6-7

If someone were to ask you what the world needed most of all, together we could probably assemble a pretty good list of needs. We might say that the world needs peace. Every single day the newspapers are filled with stories about another suicide bomber killing dozens of people in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Israel, wounding scores. Another civil war has broken out in Africa, another coup, another government crackdown – what the world needs is peace. It needs peace internationally, peace in our cities, and peace in our homes.

What else does the world need? The world needs affordable healthcare. Millions of people around the world die every year from preventable diseases, things that we have the power to do something about like malaria, water-borne illnesses from drinking polluted water. The world needs affordable healthcare.

The world needs education. The trend line is very encouraging regarding literacy. From 1970 to today, the rate of global illiteracy has been more than cut in half but it is still unacceptably high. About 20% of adults over the age of 18 cannot read or write. The problem of illiteracy falls disproportionately upon women. It is the women of the world who are most vulnerable to being trapped in poverty and in abusive marriages, and in prostitution as the only means of survival. The world needs education to break the chains of ignorance and poverty especially for women.

What does the world need? The world needs sound environmental policies if we human beings are going to survive. You have almost certainly read about the disappearing of the rain forests. We are only now beginning to appreciate the true value of the rain forests along the Amazon, in Africa and in Asia. Rain forests once covered 14% of the earth's surface. Now they cover less than 6%. Experts are estimating that the last remaining rain forests could be consumed in less than 40 years.

Every year we are losing about 50,000 species of plants, animals, and insects. As the rain forests disappear, so do possible cures for life threatening illnesses. 25% of our pharmaceuticals are derived from rain forest ingredients. The Amazon rain forests have been described as the lungs of the world. More than 20% of the world's oxygen is produced by the Amazon rain forest. What is going to happen when it disappears?

Millions die from environmentally created cancers and lung diseases. There are areas such as around the Aral Sea in Russia that are so polluted from wind-born toxic mixes of pesticides and agricultural chemicals that tens of thousands of square miles have simply become unsafe for human beings to live in. The rates of TB, infant mortality, cancer, and emphysema are off the charts there. The world needs sound environmental policies.

The world needs debt relief. Dozens of nations around the world cannot provide decent education, or affordable healthcare, or sound environmental policies because they are crushed by crippling debt payments owed to wealthy nations.

To this list we could certainly add things like gender equality, the spread of democracy and economic development.

Well, I would suggest today that the world most of all needs the gospel. Not a narrow, over-spiritualized, disembodied gospel – a gospel that simply gives people hope for an afterlife. We need a full bodied, warm blooded gospel, a gospel that impacts our lives just as much before we die as after we die. We need a full bodied gospel that touches all the bases including our relationship with God, with the earth around us, and with each other. We need a gospel, in short, that embraces both righteousness and mercy.

Let me share with you a story that some of you may have heard before. The late Corrie ten Boom wrote a best-selling book some years ago titled *The Hiding Place*, in which she recalled meeting with a guard from the Ravensbruck concentration camp. The same concentration camp where Corrie's sister died and where Corrie herself had been subjected to incredible indignities. She writes:

It was actually at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former SS man who stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly, it was all there – the room full of mocking men, the heap of clothing, my sister Betsy's pain-filled face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein," he said. "To think that, as you say, he has washed my sins away!"

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to people about the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man: was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or

charity. And so I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness. As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

The world needs the gospel. And as I continue in this series from the Sermon on the Mount, I've titled my message: "What the World Needs Most: Righteousness and Mercy." Let's pray.

SLIDE – Matthew 5.6-7

Mt 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Mt 5:7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Jesus says: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." What is righteousness? Righteousness is not just an internal quality like integrity or honesty. Righteousness includes integrity and honesty, but it goes beyond that. Righteousness is not just conformity to God's law. That is the way it is often defined. It includes conformity to the law, but that doesn't quite capture this huge word "righteousness." What is righteousness?

Righteousness, according to one German scholar named von Rad simply means right relatedness. Everything in the world right now is a jumbled mess. The world is out of sync, out of joint with itself. Our relationships are out of sync with each other. We are out of sync with ourselves emotionally and psychologically. We are out of sync with God. The term righteousness in the Bible is a relational term. It communicates the healing of our relationships in a wholistic way.

Righteousness communicates a healing of our human relationship with the earth. We are material, physical beings. We human beings are made from the earth. We read in Gen. 2.7,

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Ge 2:7 the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

We are made from the earth and we will return to the earth when we die. Gen. 3.19.

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Ge 3:19 By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;

for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”

In between the time we are conceived and the time we die, our task as human beings is to care for and cultivate the earth. Tragically, the conservative wing of the Christian church has neglected the healing of our relationship with the earth around us for too long. Sometimes it is Christians who most strongly advocate exploiting the earth to the point of destruction. Historically, there have not been many from the evangelical wing of the church forcefully leading out in conservation efforts and environmental protection efforts.

But I see a massive change coming in the next decade. Already some of the greatest agitation for change regarding the destruction of the earth's rain forest is coming from the Christian church. Missionaries and Christian that run charitable organizations, who are working in Brazil, Africa, and Asia, are the most vocal advocates for the protection of the rain forest. One Vineyard church, the Boise Vineyard, in Boise, Idaho, is setting the pace for evangelical leadership on the environment through an organization they started called “Let's Tend The Garden.” You can visit the Boise Vineyard website and learn more about what they are doing. This is an area that Vineyard Columbus has been really underdeveloped in, but I hope to see change through some of your leadership in the next several years.

SLIDE – www.vineyardboise.org – Logo, picture and 10-second film clip

Right relatedness not only with the earth, but with ourselves. We are more than material beings. We are also psychological and emotional beings. Bill Hybels, the very influential pastor of the Willowcreek Church outside of Chicago, once compared our emotional and physical health to warning lights on a car dashboard. He said most Christians pay attention to only one blinking warning light – the spiritual warning light. If you ask many Christians how they are doing, they will immediately look at the spiritual warning light – have I been maintaining my devotions? Am I involved in the practice of sin? But we neglect other warning lights on our dashboard – the emotional warning light, the physical warning light.

About 15 years ago when we were building our first building on this site here at Cooper Road, I found myself for a period of 6-8 months absolutely overwhelmed by work. In addition to pastoring the church, which was growing rapidly at the time, and overseeing all of our small groups, I was also the buck-stopper for our finances, for negotiating loans with banks, for interacting on the architectural plans. In short, I was working about 65 hours a week for a stretch of about 8 months.

On one rare day off, my wife, Marlene, and I were walking around a park when she arrested me with this question. She said, "How are you doing?" Simple question: How are you doing?

I remembered stopping and staring and thinking, "How am I doing?" I hadn't thought about how I was doing for months. I realized that I couldn't remember when I felt good. I was emotionally completely spent, just functioning, but totally disengaged from my feelings. Anyone here identify with just functioning at times, but being disengaged from their feelings? Maybe some of the men here?

The Lord led me into a period of healing. One of the exercises that he had me do (and I would suggest this to any of you who can identify with this story, who feel like a completely rung-out dishrag) was to put a list together of the things that I enjoy doing. The things that bring me emotional life like getting together with friends, who at the end of the evening I didn't have to do a deliverance on them, or taking long walks with Marlene, or reading books that had no particular practical purpose. I looked down my list of 8-10 items and realized I wasn't doing any of them. I felt the Holy Spirit say, "Son, you are out of sync with yourself."

Next weekend, if you say you are out of sync with yourself emotionally or physically, or financially, we are offering a free seminar here at the Vineyard called Embrace Health. It is at 9:00 a.m. here at the Vineyard. We are going to have some of our pastors and professional counselors teaching on topics such as:

- Breaking the Smoking Habit
- Weight Loss
- Underneath the Surface (for 40 year old women and up)
- Help for Anger & Violence in the marriage/family:
- Help for Depression and Anxiety:
- Help for those struggling with Eating Disorders

Right relatedness with the earth, with ourselves, and with others. We are not merely physical beings or emotional beings. We are also social beings. Righteousness means the healing of marriages. Right relationship in business means integrity in business. It means justice in the courts.

This last week America celebrated the birthday of Martin Luther King. Along with a group of other Vineyard staff members, I went down to the convention center where the city of Columbus has one of the largest celebrations of Dr. King's birthday of its kind in America. There are few people in American history who understood righteousness in its wholistic meaning like Dr. King. Listen to King's words:

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A religion true to its nature must also be concerned about man's social conditions. Religion deals with both earth and heaven, both time and eternity.

Religion operates not only on the vertical plane, but also on the horizontal. It seeks not only to integrate men with God, but to integrate men with men and each man with himself. This means, at bottom, that the Christian gospel is a two-way road. On the one hand, it seeks to change the souls of men, and thereby unite them with God; on the other hand, it seeks to change the environmental conditions of man so that the soul will have a chance after it is changed. Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is dry-as-dust religion. Such a religion is the kind the Marxists like to see – an opiate of the people.

It is this kind of vision that is driving Vineyard Columbus to build this community center out front. It is not enough to preach to people and then send them back into homes filled with drugs, violence, and a lack of education and vocational opportunities. As King said, on the one hand we seek to change people's souls and thereby unite them with God. On the other hand, we seek to change folks' environmental conditions so that the soul will have a chance after it is changed.

Righteousness means right relatedness in all realms and certainly it means right relatedness to God. We are physical beings, we are psychological beings, we are social beings and we are spiritual beings. This aspect is neglected by secular society. You cannot get spiritually right related by merely turning within and trying to discover your spiritual center. Spiritual healing requires right relationship with God. That is what the death of Jesus Christ is all about – establishing right relationship with God by consuming the wrath of God that is directed against sin on the cross and winning for anyone who turns to Christ in faith, access to God and relationship with God, connection with God.

Right relationship with God is not simply legal standing. Right relationship with God means that I want my internal desires to line up with the will of God. It is not I want, I desperately crave for such and such, but God doesn't want me to have it, so I am going to turn away from that. Right relatedness means that God is healing my desires so that I want what God wants.

Friend, is that where you are? Internally, do you want what God wants? It is more than having to be dragged away from pornography, drugs, illicit sex, or alcohol. It is, "I don't want those things." I'm being healed. Can you point to any areas where you say, "Yes, my desires have been healed."

This leads back to the first portion of the verse. Pursuing righteousness, Jesus says,

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Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Righteousness, right relatedness comes to those who have healthy spiritual appetites. I discovered this 25 years ago. I was in a small group trying to lead completely unmotivated people – nice people, inoffensive people, pleasant people, well off people, but totally unmotivated people. They were like ballast. They simply served as additional weight in the church.

I discovered 25 years ago that there is one thing that neither I nor any other person can supply to a person and that is a spiritual appetite. Only God can do that. Only God through prayer can get someone to hunger and thirst after righteousness. All the nagging, all the pushing, all the motivational speeches and opportunities a church gives for growth will not cause someone to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

But I also discovered that anyone, who has a healthy spiritual appetite will grow. It doesn't matter, friend, how deep the hole you are in, or what your past is, or how deprived your upbringing was, or what choices you have made. If you have a healthy spiritual appetite. If you are hungry for right relatedness to God, to yourself, and to others, and this earth, you will grow no matter what the obstacle. I've met people from horrible backgrounds who have been given the gift of a healthy spiritual appetite. I've watched them over the course of several years zoom past nice, unmotivated churchgoers who have no passion, no drive, no pursuit of God.

We hear stories of the spiritually hungry and people say, "No way! You were into what? You were an alcoholic? You were a stripper? You were a total liar? You were completely promiscuous? You were a terrible husband? A terrible mother? A thief at your job? You grew up in that kind of abusive home? No way!"

The secret to spiritual growth is contained in Mt. 5.6,

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Mt 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

When we don't see a healthy appetite, it is always a sign of illness. Doctors and counselors, when they are trying to diagnose illness, will often ask questions about a person's appetite. Have you been eating? No, that may be a sign of chronic depression or anxiety, or anorexia, or a bi-polar disorder. Have you been eating? Have you lost your appetite? It may be a sign of a physical illness like hepatitis, flu, or AIDS.

Friend, if you see no hunger or thirst for right relatedness, it is the sign that you are spiritually ill. There is something wrong when you lack passion for righteousness. It may very well be that you have been dulling your spiritual appetite, filling your God-given hunger for righteousness with spiritual junk food.

Are you dulling your appetite with too much noise in your life? Too much TV? Too much media? Too much radio in your car?

It is amazing how much noise we have in America. A triple shot of espresso coffee is apparently not enough at Starbucks to stimulate us. We also need background music. A hockey game, or fights at a game, is not exciting enough. We also need lots of lights rolling around in Nationwide Arena.

Resist the temptation to turn the TV on all the time at home. Resist the temptation to turn the radio on when you are in the car. Resist the temptation to turn to media, or to turn on your computer. Don't dull your appetite. Allow silence to build your spiritual appetite.

Maybe you've dulled your appetite through busyness. It is not wrong to be busy, but when this becomes a pattern of life – you stay up too late, you are a person who takes on too much work and you have too many commitments, friends you need space – an hour or two with nothing but your Bible. You need to be able to breathe and allow your appetite for righteousness to build. Pray to become a person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness.

What does the world need? It needs right relatedness. The world also needs mercy. Mercy is something that everyone needs, not just the poor, but the well off. Mother Teresa, in her wonderful little book of stories titled *In the Heart of the World*, which we have copies of in our bookstore, tells this story. She says:

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One day I visited a house where our sisters shelter the aged. This was one of the nicest houses in England, filled with beautiful and precious things, yet there was not one smile on the faces of these people. All of them were looking towards the door. I asked the sister in charge, "Why are they like that? Why can't you see a smile on their faces?" (I am accustomed to seeing smiles on people's faces. I think a smile generates a smile, just as love generates love.)

The sister answered, "The same thing happens every day. They are always waiting for someone to come and visit them. Loneliness eats them up, and day after day they do not stop looking. Nobody comes."

Abandonment is an awful poverty. There are poor people every where, but the deepest poverty is not being loved. The poor we seek may live near us or far away. They can be materially or spiritually poor. They may be hungry for bread or hungry for friendship. They may need clothing, or they may need the sense of wealth that God's love for them represents. They may need the shelter of a house made of bricks and cement, or the shelter of having a place in our hearts.

Everyone needs mercy. What is mercy? Mercy means negatively not giving someone what he or she deserves. This is the gospel. We don't give people

what they deserve. That is what God does in the gospel. He shows mercy. He doesn't consume us in his wrath but instead, he consumes his wrath on himself. Christ becomes our substitute. Positively, mercy means giving someone what they don't deserve.

Mercy means not giving people what they do deserve and giving people what they don't deserve. This is not a natural quality. That is why I keep saying through this series that these qualities that we find in the Beatitudes are the result of the kingdom breaking into our lives.

The world is an unmerciful place. We give people what they deserve. You've made your bed, now lie in it. This is a consequence of your behavior. Mercy demonstrates the gospel. Over and over again in the gospel of Matthew we hear Jesus saying, "Learn what this means." Then he quotes Hosea 6.6, which says,

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Hos 6:6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,

The kingdom of God is all about mercy. Again, from Mother Teresa's book, she said:

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At a seminary in Bangalore a nun once said to me, "Mother Teresa, you are spoiling the poor people by giving them things free. They are losing their human dignity." When everyone was quiet, I said calmly, "No one spoils as much as God himself. See the wonderful gifts he has given us freely. All of you here have no glasses, yet you can see. If God were to take money for your sight, what would happen? Continually we are breathing and living on oxygen that we do not pay for. What would happen if God were to say, "If you work four hours, you will get sunshine for two hours?" How many of us would survive then?"

Then I also told them, "There are many congregations that spoil the rich; it is good to have one congregation in the name of the poor, to spoil the poor." There was a profound silence. Nobody said a word after that.

Mercy demonstrates the heart of God. Mercy is the mark of someone who has been impacted by God's kingdom. Mercy is a sign that the kingdom of God has broken into a person's life.

Many of you are familiar with the story in the New Testament that most communicates God heart of mercy. It is the story of the Good Samaritan. You know the story. Luke 10.25-29,

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Lk 10:25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Lk 10:26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

Lk 10:27 He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "

Lk 10:28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

Lk 10:29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

We read about a lawyer and as a former lawyer I understand how lawyers get involved in these hair-splitting technical discussions that narrow the scope of our obligation to other people. "Who is my neighbor," the lawyer asked. Hair-splitting, self-justifying questions. This weekend, America is celebrating the 33rd anniversary of Roe v. Wade, that infamous US Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion across our nation and has resulted in the termination of lives of tens of millions of the unborn.

Who's my neighbor? And so over the last 30 years, lawyers, politicians, and courts have engaged in the same hair-splitting, limiting, self-justifying question: "Is the fetus a person?" Let's go through this convoluted analysis and talk about fetal development, constitutional history, and philosophical questions about when life begins. Let's make sure that our moral obligations are as limited as possible and that the unborn belong to a category outside the scope of our moral concerns.

Mercy shatters categories. Mercy sees another human being not as Jew or Gentile, black or white, Republican or Democrat, Christian or non-Christian, Asian or American, born or unborn. Mercy sees another human being. Mercy shatters categories. It is the heart of the gospel to constantly bend towards mercy, to bend towards the elimination of classifications and to expand the circle of our concern.

Mercy involves risk. If you are going to show mercy, you are putting something at risk. You are potentially going to lose money, time, your health, or your reputation. If you are going to show mercy, something is going to be at risk. In other words, mercy and showing mercy – giving people what they don't deserve, is always going to be in tension with conventional wisdom and the wisdom of this world. Mercy does not fit in with what most investment planners will tell you. You are not generally going to hear an investment planner say, "Well, of course, you will want to risk half of all your assets because that is what is going to be available to show mercy to others." Investment planners are not going to say: "Set the equity in our home or your pension aside for acts of mercy."

Mercy doesn't fit in with what your family might tell you. You are in your 50's and you are going to bring into your home a foster child because you feel she needs you? Are you crazy? You are going to adopt a child from where?

The parable of the Good Samaritan, this parable about showing mercy, is all about risk. There is no mercy without risk taking. Luke 10:30-37,

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Lk 10:30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

Lk 10:31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

Lk 10:32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

Lk 10:33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

Lk 10:34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.

Lk 10:35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

Lk 10:36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

Lk 10:37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

The Samaritan comes up to the man lying in the road and he is taking a risk even by drawing near to him. What if it is a set-up? What if this guy is lying in the road and he has some friends hiding in the bushes or behind some rocks? I stop to help this guy and then I get robbed. There is a physical risk here.

There is a risk to the Samaritan's reputation and to his freedom. He could have said, "I am a Samaritan. If I taken this beaten Jew to a Jewish town, they may think that I did this. I may be arrested. I may be held responsible." The Samaritan's situation was similar to that of an African American stopping on the road to help a victimized white person in the pre-Civil Rights South.

You can't show mercy without taking a risk. He takes a risk with his own safety. He takes a risk with his own reputation. He takes a risk with his own finances.

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Lk 10:35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

Lk 10:36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

This Samaritan is serving as a guarantor for a debt whose amount is utterly unknown. What if this beaten victim had a relapse?

Mercy makes you vulnerable, but it is this risk-taking quality of mercy, the vulnerability to being taken advantage of that changes the world. Friend, is there anything, any sacrificial act of mercy that God is presently calling you to that you are struggling with because it will make you vulnerable? In contrast to the hair-splitting legalistic culture that we live in that is constantly asking questions like: “Is the fetus a person?” and “When exactly in human development should we offer protection to the unborn?”

It is mercy that changes the world. Let me share a story with you from William Willimon. Will Willimon teaches at Duke University. He says that he was in a group of ministers who were debating the morality of abortion. A lot of these mainline Protestant ministers were saying that abortion is justified in some cases because young teenage girls cannot possibly be expected to raise children by themselves.

A black minister, who pastored a large African American congregation, took the other side to the question. He said, “You know, we have young girls in our congregation that this happens to all the time. I have a 14-year old in my congregation who had a baby last month. We are going to baptize the baby next Sunday.”

One of the pastors asked, “Do you really think she is capable of raising a little baby?”

The African American pastor said, “Of course, not. No 14-year old girl is capable of raising a baby. For that matter, not many 30-year olds are qualified. A baby is too difficult for any one person to raise.”

“Well, what are you going to do with the baby?” the pastors asked.

“Well, we baptize them and then we all raise them together. In the case of that 14-year old, we have given her baby to a retired couple who has enough time and wisdom to raise children. They can then raise the mama along with her baby. That’s the way we do it.”

If you want to change the world on any issue of justice, then the church must demonstrate costly mercy to the world.

Some United Methodist pastors got together and signed a declaration called Durham Declaration, which was not directed to legislators, but to the church. It concluded with a series of pledges, which included the following:

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We pledge, with God's help, to become a church that hospitably provides safe refuge for the so-called "unwanted child" and mother. We will joyfully welcome and generously support with prayer, friendship, and material resources – both mother and child. The support will also include strong encouragement for the biological father to be a father, indeed, to his child.

It is by showing mercy, giving people what they don't deserve, not giving people what they do deserve, that the church transforms the culture that we live in. We have been trying to take steps towards that here at Vineyard for years. We have a program called Mother Heart, in which we provide diapers, newborn baby clothing, and blankets to moms. We try to pair up Mother Heart mentors, older women, with women who are in crisis pregnancies and support those moms with one on one personal relationships. We try to financially help moms who are in crisis pregnancies with crisis intervention and help with utilities. If you are interested in getting involved with Vineyard's pro-life ministry, you may want to check out those tables in the lobby that I mentioned before.

Finally, mercy doesn't simply transform society at some global or political level. Mercy brings healing to us on a personal level because we are kingdom people, because we have experienced God's mercy, because we know what it feels like to owe a debt we cannot pay and to have Christ pay a debt for us he did not owe. So we kingdom people find ourselves extending mercy to those who have abused us, to those who have offended us, to those who have ripped us off, or betrayed us.

I began by telling you Corrie ten Boom's story. Let me close by sharing with you my own story. Some of you have heard me tell about being hired by a law firm when I first got out of law school. One of the early cases that they had me working on was a case representing Larry Flint, who is the publisher of Hustler Magazine.

I shared my reservations with another attorney in the office, who was mentoring me. I told him that I was a Christian and that this was really a moral conflict for me, particularly in the way that they were handling Flint's defense. He seemed very sympathetic but this other attorney betrayed my confidence. That very evening he went to the partners and they held a partnership meeting. I don't know what he said, but the next day the managing partner of the law firm called me in and dismissed me. He said, "We can't have someone with your kind of moral reservations working here at this firm."

The firm also put out a word around town apparently that I was some sort of pariah because even though I had done well in law school, I found that I was unable to find employment for nearly five months. I had a number of firms say, "Well, your academic record is good, but we heard from this firm that you are a difficult employee. I'm sorry."

Marlene and I had just bought a house. Marlene was about six months pregnant with our first child. We spent down our savings. We had no income. Month after month my mailbox was filled with rejection letters. I wondered what was going on. Did I mess up somehow? Did I violate God's will?

Well, I got another job and was eventually hired at OSU to teach MBA classes and undergraduate classes. Several years passed. I had pretty forgotten about the incident. Then one day I was walking in a shopping center when who should approach me but the attorney who had betrayed me. The attorney who had caused me so much pain. The attorney who cost me thousands and thousands of dollars. The attorney who had caused me lots of heartache. Here is that attorney walking towards me with his hand outstretched saying, "Hi, Rich. How are you?" Just like Corrie ten Boom.

In that moment, I had a choice – a choice to close my fist and punch him in the head, or instead to extend my hand in mercy and shake his hand. In that moment, I felt the grace of God and God empowered me to extend my hand in mercy and say, "It's good to see you." We chatted for a little while and I felt the healing of the Holy Spirit in my heart. The demonstration of mercy heals wounds.

What does the world need? The world needs righteousness and mercy. Let's pray.

For Ministry Time: I want to do a call for many of you who have unhealed wounds of abuse, heartache, pain at the hands of others. I want to invite you to come forward, to kneel down at the altar. I would like to engage you in a little gospel exercise. The exercise is simply this: I want you to close your eyes and imagine that you are in Jerusalem. You go to the hill where they crucified Jesus. There you are kneeling before the cross. Will you tell Jesus where you need mercy. I want you to imagine that you see the person who has hurt you. They are afraid to come any closer because you are there. Can you, as an act of your will, motion that person to join you in kneeling before the cross? Tell Jesus with that person standing or kneeling beside you what that person did to hurt you. And then say, "Jesus, have mercy on him. Have mercy on her, just as you've had mercy on me." If you can pray, "Jesus have mercy on him. Have mercy on her, just as you've had mercy on me," Jesus says to you, "Blessed are you...Blessed are you. You've shown yourself to truly be a member of my kingdom."

What The World Needs Most: Righteousness And Mercy

Rich Nathan

January 21-22, 2006

Life As It Was Meant To Be Series

Matthew 5.6-7

I. The Need For Righteousness (Mt. 5.6)

A. The Meaning Of Righteousness

1. Relationship To The Earth
2. Relationship To Ourselves
3. Relationship To Others
4. Relationship To God

B. The Pursuit Of Righteousness

1. The Necessity Of A Healthy Appetite
2. The Loss Of A Healthy Appetite
3. The Building Of A Healthy Appetite

II. The Need For Mercy (Mt. 5.7)

A. Mercy Demonstrates The Gospel

B. Mercy Shatters Categories (Lk. 10.29)

C. Mercy Involves Risk (Lk. 10.30-37)

D. Mercy Changes The World

E. Mercy Heals Wounds