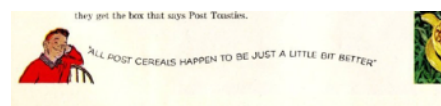


BETTER PEOPLE, MATTHEW 5

Irresistible #3

◆**Intro:** When we first moved to IA to work with a Christian Reformed Church there, we were introduced to the title “Post Toasties.” Someone new would meet me and discover that I was the new pastor at Immanuel CRC and, if they were of a different Christian denomination, or maybe just agnostic or irreligious they might very well say, “Oh, you’re a Toastie.” I had no clue. This made no linguistic sense to me. I felt I had landed on another planet where people had big eyes and skinny green arms! What did this mean?

◆Well it seems back in the day the cereal producer, Post, had a box of corn flakes they called Toasties. And their marketing slogan contained the phrase “just a little bit better.” It also appears that back in



the day, (somewhere and what day it was no one knows for sure) –members of the Christian Reformed churches in that

area at least, (maybe others too), must’ve acted as though they were “just a little bit better” than everyone else. Their kids couldn’t play with Baptist children. They’d walk on the other side of the street if a Pentecostal was approaching. And who knows what they did when shopping next to someone of a whole different religion like a Mormon! And so the CRC folks got the nickname “Toastie.” It’s a shame, really. Not only are we not better, but also people don’t like you much when you act like you

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are better than them. And it isn't like Christ. And God sent his Son in order to make us like him, better. Our text says...

◆v48: Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

◆So how do we make sense of this?

◆**1. Jesus calls me to a higher standard of irresistible goodness.** Christians are not intrinsically BETTER people.

Christians are beggars showing other beggars where to find bread. But we also need to be reminded that God has a better design for all people than what we are without him, and without Christ, we are without God. Some folks read Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount, and think that what's new here is that Jesus of the NT is nicer than God was in the OT, and that he calls us to a whole different thing than God wanted for people who lived before Christ. But this is not true. Jesus' sermon on the mount is far from nicer than the laws of the OT. Nor is it new, as in wholly different. God set out from the beginning to make humans more like him. The Law of Moses was a step on the way helping us to truly see our own inability. As CS Lewis puts it, "No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good."

◆*Galatians 3:24* So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

◆A. And when Jesus quotes that Law, raises the bar. He intensifies all of it. (v20) Yet not as a recipe to make God love us, but as a blueprint of what God will make of us because he loves us. Consider the text.

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◆ Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.

◆ He isn't telling us we don't need to obey the 5th Commandment. He's telling us the 5th Commandment requires far more from us than we ever thought. Not only is God against murder, he wants us to live without anger, which is the root of murder.

◆ Matthew 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

◆ Jesus isn't telling us we don't need to pay attention to the 7th Commandment anymore. He's telling us the 7th Commandment is really far more intense than we ever thought it was! And if we really want the joyful life don't just "not have" an affair. Don't abuse people by the use of porn, don't daydream about the girl next door. These things destroy families. Jesus' new teaching is not nicer and easier, it's harder but better.

◆ Matthew 5:38-41 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

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◆ Jesus is quoting Leviticus law. And maybe you think, “Wow God was awful vengeful in the OT. Jesus is a lot nicer.” But you would be wrong. The other ancient codes of law made the consequence far worse than the crime, as a deterrent. The point of the Levitical law was that the punishment should be fair and no more. It was to *curb* human vengeance, which typically repays more for an offense. So Jesus is teaching, not only are his followers not to require more than is fair...

◆ (in 1994 Stella Liebeck, a 79-year-old woman, suffered third-degree burns in her [pelvic region](#) when she accidentally spilled hot [coffee](#) in her lap after purchasing it from a [McDonald's](#) restaurant. The jury awarded \$2.7 million in punitive damages.)

◆ ... but they should err on the other side, the harder side of generosity, going the “extra mile”! He has raised the bar.

◆ B. When Jesus teaches about the blessed life, he is also describing the harder life. Harder, but blessed, or better. Better for you. Let’s fly over the text briefly. What does Jesus encourage of his people in his sermon?

◆ to be humble v3

◆ to grieve sin, be bothered by it in self and society v4

◆ to be meek humble toward God v5

◆ to believe in right and wrong, and desperately desire the right thing v6

◆ to not take revenge even if it would be fair. v7

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- ◆to have a clean mind instead of a dirty mind v8
- ◆to break up fights, stop arguments and create harmony v9
- ◆to accept persecution for doing right v10
- ◆to endure evil for Christ v11
- ◆to give the world flavor v13
- ◆to shine the light of good works v16
- ◆to keep living by God's commandments v19
- ◆to strive to surpass mere letter of OT law v20
- ◆to fight the root of murder, -anger itself v21
- ◆to watch your language v22
- ◆to apologize, and seek harmony and reconciliation v23-24
- ◆to deal with conflict immediately and not let it fester and grow v25
- ◆to go further than avoiding an affair, don't even look at porn. v27-28
- ◆to stay married v31
- ◆to not use God as an emphasis in swearing. Always just say what true v37
- ◆to accept suffering without payback v38
- ◆to go the extra mile; ie do what you don't have to do. v41
- ◆to lend freely v42
- ◆to love your enemy, and bad people, and undeserving people, and strangers who are not related v44

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◆ Would you let your kids play with people who lived like this? Did the Christians in the early centuries live like this? They did, and it shocked the world.

◆ In 165 during the reign of Marcus Aurelius an epidemic swept through the Roman Empire lasting 15 years. About a third of the empire's population died including the Emperor. It happened again in 251 with equal devastation.

◆ While the vast majority of wealthy Romans fled their cities in panic to the countryside to escape the plague, (even Rome's most renowned surgeon, Galen) the Christians stayed. While Romans would push infected relatives out onto the street, not even burying corpses of dear ones for fear of infection, Christians nursed the sick which increases their odds of recuperation. Nursing another was a direct risk of life, but Christians did not fear death like the rest.

◆ Emperor Julian complained in a letter to the pagan high priest of Galatia in 362 that they needed to copy the virtues of Christians. He wrote of their "benevolence toward strangers and care for the graves of the dead." He wrote "the impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see our people lack aid from us."

◆ Roman historian Thucydides when Athens was struck by plague in 431 wrote that because of contagious nature of the disease "people were afraid to visit one another... they died with no one to look after them. Christians on the other

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hand, were taught they must love one another as well as the stranger, and even the enemy. Tertullian, Christian apologist from the Second Century, claimed "It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents."

◆ I would like to suggest that part of what was irresistible about the early Christians was that out of love they voluntarily pursued a higher goodness because Christ voluntarily paid for their inability and culpability in being good at all.

◆2. **Jesus calls me to humble goodness.** In your attempt to follow God, do you give off the smell of superiority or of humility? You see, superiority is highly resistible, genuine humility not so much. Jesus is by far superior to any human that ever lived. Being both divine and human, he is holy and sinless in a way none of us could ever be. And yet Jesus was and is the most humble of all. (per Phil.2)

◆*Philippians 2:6-8* *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.*

◆A. Notice how Jesus' beatitudes **balance** each other such that one must take them out of their context to misinterpret them...

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- ◆ What if you're zealous for the right, but loud and bossy, and angry about it? Well, nobody wants to listen to you. v6, 22
- ◆ What if you are merciful, but only so you can say you are merciful? You are resistible. v7
- ◆ What if you apologize, but we can all tell it's just motion and down deep you hate us? It does no good. v25
- ◆ What if you stay married, but no one sees any love between you and your spouse? You don't do anything to improve your own behavior, but hey, you haven't had sex with another woman. v31
- ◆ What if you never say a swear word, but your words slice your kids' emotions worse than a knife? v34
- ◆ What is you go the extra mile but only for your own kind, your peeps? v41, 47
- ◆ **B.** And no Christian assembly that truly acts like Christ has any business making themselves appear as though they themselves are better than anyone else. Note this well because outsiders naturally assume we think this about ourselves. We all carry human guilt and our own guilt makes us imagine that happy people think they are better than us. But no, we worship Jesus because we are not good enough on our own and never will be, but he has granted us forgiveness through his sacrifice. Never let anyone miss that reality!

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◆ **Conclusion:** Perhaps part of what made the first Christians more irresistible than some of us today is that they sought a 1) Higher Goodness, and 2) a Humble Goodness. Let me finish my Toastie story. I grew up in the military with all protestant denominations under one roof. No one thought they were better than the other. I was in youth group with, are you ready?, Methodists! Nazarenes were friends of mine. I know you this might shock you, but I even grew up talking to Episcopalians! Since my parents wanted us educated from a Christian perspective whenever possible, and since we moved around a lot, I attended a Baptist school for 2nd Grade, a Lutheran school in 6th Grade, and a Seventh-Day Adventist school in 7th Grade.

◆ For all the rest of the grades I attended public schools where people were generally content with Kellogg's Corn Flakes and Raisin Bran. ;-)

◆ All these Church backgrounds worshiped the same Jesus. So any Christian earning the title of Toastie is a contradiction! And Toasties are easily resistible. Remember and be careful to show this: Being a Christian does not mean I'm better than you. It just means God makes me better than I used to be. And freely so! Someday he will remove every flaw and welcome me into a perfect life I could never have gotten myself!