

This weekend many of us paused to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. We looked at those horrific pictures, remembered those who served so heroically that day and the days that followed, and experienced afresh the raw emotion of it all. As part of it, I watched again the speech George W. Bush made atop the rubble of the World Trade Centers. Regardless of your political affiliation, the nation needed the healing, unifying, and hopeful words of our leader, and he delivered. Many say was his finest moment, and it's now remembered in our nation's history.

History has a way of remembering great speeches, those moments that inspire us, challenge the status quo, and call us to a different way of life and a better future. I got curious and looked online for the greatest speeches of all time. Most went all the way back to Socrates *Apology*, where he defended himself in court over accusations of corrupting youth by encouraging their free thinking. There was, not surprisingly, a bunch from military leaders over the centuries. And more recently, all included Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death" speech, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech.

But one I struggled to find on any list may be the greatest of all. Its ideas and vision are so revolutionary, so counter-cultural, that the one who delivered it was ultimately executed for bringing it to fruition. In it, the speaker talked about a new reality that was drawing near and a glorious future that would last for eternity. It actually wasn't a speech, though. It was a sermon, and the speaker was Jesus.

In Matthew 4:17, Jesus began his public ministry by declaring "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." It was not a new idea. In fact, the nation of Israel had been awaiting the Kingdom, promised through the Prophets, for centuries. Through Jesus, that Kingdom had broken into history, inaugurated by his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and to be fully consummated when he returns.

But what is it? Where is it? Who is the King, who are its citizens, and how are they supposed to live? That's what Jesus answers in his sermon. The Sermon on the Mount is a manifesto of the Kingdom of Heaven. It proclaims the Kingdom's values, the way of life for its citizens, and the culture it creates under the King's rule. We spent the last six weeks talking about engaging that culture out there. We're going to spend the next eleven talking about *Kingdom Culture*...what it is, how it is radically different than the culture Jesus lived in and the one we live in today, and how we live that out, bringing Heaven to earth until the day he returns and finishes the job. To begin, though, we need to be clear on a couple important definitions.

**[SLIDE] Kingdom of Heaven: The rule of God over his people in his creation.** It is a set apart people living a wholly different way of life under the gracious rule of God. It is already/not yet, partial fulfillment through Jesus' first advent, and he will bring it to fulfillment at his second.

**Righteousness.** We may think of "doing the right thing", and that would be right, but it's more. Righteousness is our standing before God. Jesus paid the price for our sins, satisfying the justice of God, and when we believe in him, we are justified, declared righteous, declared not guilty in the eyes of God, and put in right relationship with him. Righteousness also speaks to our behavior: **[SLIDE] Righteousness: Faithfully living in a way that honors the demands of our right relationship with God.** How a person in right relationship with God is to conduct his life.

The sermon is not a way to earn God's favor, it is how we should respond to the favor he has already poured out on us through Jesus. The sermon lays out the right way of life for a Kingdom citizen. **It's not a pathway to salvation. It's a pathway for those already saved.**

So we start in Matthew 5. Jesus begins by laying out the values of the Kingdom. Values express the heart of a person or organization and the character that is developed through them. But the values of the Kingdom of Heaven may not be what you'd expect. One writer suggests Jesus "commends those whom the world in general would dismiss as losers and wimps." We hear "Kingdom" and might look for Jesus to talk about confidence, might, dominance, war, material abundance, but this culture of the Kingdom of Heaven is nothing like the culture of the Kingdom of man. What the world scoffs at, Jesus knows is actually the pathway to happiness and flourishing.

He does this through eight statements called beatitudes. Beatitude means "a state of utmost bliss". These eight beatitudes are Jesus's specification of what every Christian ought to be. They lay out the character qualities of Kingdom citizens and the benefits of living them out.

**[SLIDE: Matthew 5:1-3] Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.**

**<sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:**

**<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Each beatitude begins with the word "blessed". Now, in any other text, you'd pronounce that as a single syllable word. But, in God's Kingdom, his gifts are so good that we pronounce that word bless-ed! It's the Greek word *makarios*, which often gets translated as happy or fortunate, English words that begin to lose the meaning. Ultimately, Jesus is saying "this is where you find the good life." We're going to move fast, but hold your life up to these, and prayerfully consider which Kingdom you're trying to live in.

To be poor in spirit is to recognize you are spiritually bankrupt on your own. Just like a business declares bankruptcy, telling the courts they have no way to pay their debt, being poor in spirit says we have nothing to offer to pay our spiritual debt and we are in desperate need for God. I love that Jesus starts here because this is where our spiritual journey begins. He makes it clear his Gospel is one of grace, not of works. It's all his doing. And in the Kingdom, those who recognize their desperate need for God gladly accept God's gracious rule and the blessings he provides.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were sure they could keep the Law and be made right with God. It was all in their own power. Today, especially in America, Jesus confronts two attitudes. Our self-sufficiency insists we can do it on our own. But we can't. Or we think Kingdom living is religious activity, so we go through the motions. But Cultural Christianity and Kingdom Culture have nothing in common. Cultural Christianity is all about what we do. Kingdom Culture is about what Jesus has already done.

Where are you trying to do it on your own, thinking if you do just enough you and God will be good? Are you going through the motions? Or do you reject the idea you have nothing spiritually? It is only when we declare our lack that Jesus makes us whole.

**[SLIDE: Matthew 5:4] <sup>4</sup>“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**

The first four beatitudes build on one another. When we acknowledge our spiritual poverty, we recognize the cause is sin. In the Kingdom, God’s people are heartbroken over their own sin and the worldwide brokenness sin has caused. We recognize this is not the way it is supposed to be, and we lament that we are part of the cause of it.

But in the Kingdom, those who mourn will be comforted by God’s sacrificial provision for our sin. In Isaiah 40, after God confronts Israel for their sin, he says “comfort, comfort”, because he is a God who forgives, would one day make a way for forgiveness, and will one day restore all that has been broken.

In a world that celebrates wickedness, Jesus calls us to a different way. In the 1540’s, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer’s communion included: “We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness.” Does that describe you, or do you take you sin lightly or seek to cover it up on your own? If you take it lightly, you take grace lightly, and you take the cross lightly. When the brokenness of the world creates pain in your life, do you run to God for comfort, or do you self-medicate? None of that will work, but it doesn’t have to. In the Kingdom, our King says, “I got you!” He wants to remind you your sin is paid in full and help rid your life of it. He wants to draw near to you when the world is crushing you and comfort you with his love and remind you of the hope we have that and one day he’s going to make it all right. Throw it all at the feet of Jesus and let him meet you there.

**[SLIDE: Matthew 5:5] <sup>5</sup>“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**

If you think about those who advance in this earthly kingdom, how would you describe them? Powerful, forceful, dominant, aggressive. The news is full of people and nations who take ground that way. But not so in the Kingdom of Heaven. It’s the meek who inherit the earth. Meekness is not weakness, though the world thinks of it this way. It is a sober sense of self that leads to a gentle and humble life in relation to others. If you recognize your spiritual bankruptcy and mourn the sin that caused it, you will tread lightly. Jesus himself was described as meek, gentle and lowly, and the Father gave him everything. In the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus rewards the meek. They are the people Jesus wants to rule over the new heavens and earth with him for all eternity.

**[SLIDE: Matthew 5:6] <sup>6</sup>“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

The world would tell you “obedience” is stifling or leads to boredom. But in the Kingdom of Heaven, it leads to a satisfaction only God can provide. If you acknowledge your need for God, mourn your sin, and have a humble sense of yourself, your desires become what God desires of and for you, and you’ll be eager to honor your relationship with God by obeying his will, and being satisfied when you do.

There is the one thing every culture gets wrong, no matter time or place: Fulfillment. **All sin is ultimately us trying to satisfy ourselves in a way God never intended.** And it’s destined to fail. The world says, “you do you”. You doing everything you want is the pathway to fulfillment. It’s a lie. Jesus himself said in John 4 “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me.” Where are

you trying to be satisfied apart from the will of God? How's that working for you? What God has for us is infinitely more satisfying than anything we could come up with on our own. Give it a try.

**[SLIDE: Matthew 5:7] <sup>7</sup> “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.**

There is that great scene in *Les Miserables* where Jean Valjean steals a bunch of silver from the church and bishop who helps him. The next day, a policeman brings Jean back to the church to confirm he's stolen all these things. If it's true, he's going back to prison for a long time. But this bishop is a Kingdom citizen. He says, “This man has not stolen from me. I gave him all the silver...and here...you forgot these in your hurry.” And he gives him two candlesticks. That is the gospel. We deserved punishment and death, but God gave us mercy, grace, and new life through Jesus. In Exodus, as God passes before Moses, he says of himself “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup>keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” That is the God who rules the Kingdom of Heaven, and he asks his citizens to live in the same way.

Mercy goes first with others because mercy went first with us. Mercy gives others a break because it recognizes all are poor in spirit, is not quick to take offense, and seeks healing where there is brokenness. In the midst of cancel culture, flame wars, and a punitive and vengeful spirit in society, the Kingdom shows there is another way. When you remember what Christ has done for you, you are eager to do it to others. And as you pour out mercy, God continues to pour out mercy on you.

**[SLIDE: Matthew 5:8] <sup>8</sup> “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**

Righteousness in the Kingdom is not external righteousness found in abiding by a bunch of rules. It's an internal righteousness of the heart made new by the grace of God and work of Christ, and it's a prerequisite to enter into God's presence. Jesus called the Pharisees whitewashed tombs because they were ceremonially clean on the outside but dark and sinful on the inside.

Insincerity, hypocrisy, and deceit all create barriers to intimacy with God and with others. There was a moment in my 20s where I realized I was playing the part of a holy guy but was far from it and, therefore, far from God. I was not living a life that truly wanted to see God, nor did I want God to see me. I needed God to do some heart surgery. The Kingdom is full of those who have been made clean by putting their faith in Christ and confessing when we stray from his ways. As we allow him to purify our hearts, we will see him in this life as in a mirror dimly, and in eternity we shall see him face to face.

**[SLIDE: Matthew 5:9] <sup>9</sup> “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**

The Kingdom of Heaven is ruled by the Prince of Peace. He came to earth to make peace between God and man, and he has given us the ministry of peacemaking, of reconciliation, to make peace between God and man and make peace between one another. We behave like his children when we take on the family mission of seeking peace and pursuing it.

Many in Jesus' day had no interest in peace. They wanted him to crush the Romans. But the Kingdom he was building had a different agenda. Imagine how the Kingdom can stand out today and the impact we can have in a world so divided. But we must decide how we want to engage. We can add to the division by jumping in and fighting like the world fights. We can stand idly by while the world tears itself apart. Peacekeepers and peacemakers are different. Peacekeepers

pursue the absence of conflict. But the peace God has secured and calls us to is not the absence of conflict. It's his setting of all things right, the shalom of Heaven. The third option, and the one Kingdom citizens pursue, is to take the peace of God into the fight, show them the difference Jesus makes, and invite them into that peace. When we do that, we act like God's children. But as we seek peace, it may not come back to us.

**[SLIDE: Matthew 5:9-12] <sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Jesus sums up the mission and way of life of the Kingdom with "righteousness' sake", and the Kingdom belongs to those who pursue those ways at any cost. Persecution comes when irreconcilable worlds collide. The Kingdom is so counter-cultural, so unwelcome in this world, that it may push back hard when it sees us living this way.

I remember a business deal where a guy was encouraging me to act in an unethical way and I said, "I'm not going to do that because I'm a follower of Jesus and it would be wrong." He laughed at me like I was crazy, said that attitude would cost me, I lost business, and it was weird between us from then on. But I was faithful to the King.

The world will not welcome the righteous ways of the Kingdom. But as it reacts, Jesus calls us blessed, not because we are suffering, but because we are part of the Kingdom and God will reward our faithfulness in eternity. We can live with joy and gladness regardless of circumstances because whatever God has for us then far outweighs what we have to go through here. When you are faithful to the King, you stand in a long line of faithful followers willing to pay the price in the name of Jesus. He does not leave us alone in those times but draws near with comfort and the promise of eternal reward. That is the result of us living our lives for righteousness' sake.

I can't tell you how excited I am for this series. Except for a couple verses at the beginning and the end, it's all red letters! All of it the words of Jesus in his earthly ministry, all of it turning the world upside down, and all of it with the potential to change our lives.

**[SLIDE] "We are so used to the sayings of Jesus that they slip past us; they sound sweet and pious and wonderfully simple, but they are in reality like spiritual torpedoes that burst and explode in the subconscious mind." —Oswald Chambers**

My prayer for you is that the words of the Jesus would indeed explode like spiritual torpedoes in your mind, in your heart, and in your soul, that you would be so captivated by his vision and call that you would run hard after being a Kingdom citizen. But as you do, my prayer is that you would not see this as a "do" series, but a "be" series. Doing is about following the rules and trying to stay in good graces to keep your position. That's not what God wants for you. If you're a follower of Christ, you're already a citizen of the Kingdom. That means Jesus is simply calling you to be who he has made you, and saved you, and empowered you to be. Let us take his words to heart, know he has given us everything we need to live this way, and live to make Fellowship Dallas heaven on earth.