

Sermon on Matthew 5:1-12 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Followers of Jesus live under a Kingdom ethic.

We are turning the page to study what is arguable among the most important sermons ever preached. It is a standard and invitation to life in the kingdom of God, under the reign and rule of Jesus. It is what makes believers stand out and it is what makes us smell like Jesus.

And oh do we need it.

This week many of us, who should have known better, watch the first presidential debate. And even if you were spared from watching it you have certainly heard how it went. The nation breathed a collective sigh of discontent. For some, watching the children fight left us numb for the waste of it all; for others, we felt anxiety rising due to uncertainty and a lack of hope; still, others found themselves angry over what we have become.

And that's the challenge, it's us. "The debate we are watching is a mirror, it is us, we are seeing our marriages, our relationships, our churches, our social media engagements reenacted on national television." - Pastor on Twitter

It really is a mirror of our times. And what we see when we look is unsettling. There must be something more, something better. This forces us to ask how we should live? Especially as Christians, not the voting-bloc but the believers and followers of Jesus. Where can we go for a vision for how we can live differently and beautifully in a world filled with so much turmoil, acrimony, and negativity?

I submit that it is to Jesus that we go. To the source of grace and hope - the giver of new life. And we find the clearest description of who followers of Jesus are, how we live, in the Sermon on the Mount.

Today, we begin with blessing.

Matthew 5:1-12

Followers of Jesus live under a Kingdom ethic.

This is Jesus' introduction to his defining message of the kingdom. Matthew 5-7 presents a way of life defined by redemption, counter-intuitive living, satisfaction, and authority.

It has been studied, argued over, embraced, rejected, and left its first audience and many since astonished at the different angle Jesus comes with. Some would argue that it is meant for another time, ultimately experienced when Jesus returns (it will be for sure), others have wrongly seen it as a way of being saved, in the attempt to earn something for our effort.

The sermon is the antidote to the pretense and sham that plagues Christianity.

What is before us is an ethic for life (a set of principles to live by), not an invitation but an announcement to those who have already come. This is a sermon for those who follow Jesus.

“These teachings are a description of what life looks like for followers of Jesus as they try to be faithful to him and to the values of God's kingdom in a world that God has not yet fully transformed.” GTB

Just before our text, Jesus has come away from the temptation in the wilderness, steadfast and true to the Father, and he calls disciples to follow him, to be fishers of men, and they do. Teaching and healing, great crowds followed after him as well but when he sits down on the mountain it is his disciples who came to him. Those committed, followers of Jesus.

We can tend to read things transactionally, but this is not about earning salvation, this is a description of who we are as Christians. What we will read will feel aspirational, like some aspects are life just out of reach, but they are meant for us now. Challenging but practical ethic that Jesus expects his followers to live by in the present age.

Jesus begins with the heart. Eight beatitudes, “blessings,” which are marks of those in the kingdom. Upside down, opposite of cultural norms. Four shape our relationship with God, four shape our relationship with others, and all of them come to those that are blessed because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

1) Heart Toward God

Into a culture where religion was performative - like that of the Pharisees (tithing exact measures, virtue-signaling without real virtue, elevating oneself above others), Jesus says we are different at a heart level. The real kingdom, what has been promised of old, reaches inward, to our emotions, to the deepest part of ourselves as we follow him.

Blessed, happy are these. Harder word for us to translate because we have skewed definitions in how we speak, but this “blessed” is something better than just #blessed.

"Blessed is a positive judgment by God on the individual that means "to be approved" or "to find approval." So when God blesses us, he approves us."
Hughes

As the approved of God, we learn how our hearts relate to him.

a) Poor in spirit

Here we have a lowercase spirit so he means that which is yourself, the animating portion of who you are. The poor in spirit are not depressed or crushed under the weight of the world but instead understand our need for a Savior. We recognize our spiritual poverty. Our need for God’s help

Those poor in spirit never become spiritually self-sufficient.

I think of times in parenting when you are excited for your kid to be able to do things for themselves, always in stages (cut their own food, wipe their own bottom, clean their own dishes, pay their own bills!) That is maturing and it's appropriate.

But maturity in the kingdom works differently. We remain dependent all the way through, for all of eternity. If we approach Jesus as if he tosses us the keys to the car of life he purchased with his blood on the cross, and expects us to drive ourselves we miss it. “Jesus take the wheel” is not a plea for when things get dicey, we instead stay with the refrain “Savior Pilot Me” through everything.

Kingdom life is not about just buffing out the rough edges, it is relying on Jesus for all of life.

"To be poor in spirit is not to lack courage but to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy. It confesses one's unworthiness before God and utter dependence on him" Carson

Salvation is by faith alone, (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 11:6);⁸ but poverty of spirit is the posture of faith. God pours out his grace to the spiritually bankrupt, because we are the only ones open to believe and receive his grace and salvation.

"For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Bookend of the beatitudes. The poor in spirit that follow Jesus are in. Secure. Kept by him.

b) Mourn

I think of "Sadness" in the Pixar movie Inside Out, we need to feel blue to be whole. But this mourning isn't just being acquainted with grief. This mourning follows our need and mourns over sin and the brokenness of the world.

In the best sense this is what most of us felt watching the recent debate. Mourning, as the godly remnant weeps because of the humiliation of Israel.

This is a Holy Discontent, that has the blessed longing for the peace and provision of Christ. In relationship to God we mourn over the disregard for him we held and that those around us flaunt.

Paul in writing to the Corinthians church mentions their mourning, that provided him comfort in affliction because, **2 Corinthians 7:10** "godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." (ESV)

They shall be comforted. His promise anchors our perseverance. The God of all comfort meets us in our mourning.

c) Meek

Among the most memorized lines of Scripture that we rarely know what it means! Those approved by God take on the heart of Christ. Humble before God, the absence of pretense, gentleness. A true view toward ourselves.

It is not cowardice or a lack of strength, but the refusal to assert ourselves over God or others to further our agenda with our ability. A gentle knowing our place before God.

"The man who is truly meek is the man who is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do." Lloyd-Jones

This is counter-cultural. The follower of Jesus is not necessarily the loud one, but the gentle and deferential.

They shall inherit the earth. They shall reign with Jesus. Submitting to his authority and gentleness toward us.

d) Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

From our poverty, from our mourning, from our meekness we long for what is good, what is right. This is not the imputed righteousness of Christ (that which he gives to those that believe in him) but the realized righteousness of lives transformed by grace.

Both personal righteousness and justice in the broadest sense. Unrighteousness makes us grieve and homesick for the new heaven and earth. So the approved of God are consumed by the desire for the fruit of the Spirit and the living water we are promised in Jesus

Galatians 5:19–24 “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (ESV)

They will be satisfied. The fullness of Christ in all of life will meet our longing, whet our whistle and keep us going for more of him. Staying thirsty because we want more of a life pleasing to God.

Obedience brings satisfaction and to Christ we run and cling.

How we view God, how we relate to him as those approved by him, recognizing our need, mourning over sin, gentle before him and others, and hungry for righteousness.

These characteristics keep progressing and shape how we live with others.

2) Heart Toward Others

This second set of four flows from the first. This is where being kingdom citizens becomes noticeable. When our heart is shaped by the cross, we relate to our neighbors in different ways, all that image Christ, how he has treated us.

a) Merciful

Karate Kid - Cobra Kai motto "Strike first. Strike hard. No mercy." Seems to be more appealing and how many of us live face-to-face and online. But those blessed by God are more the turn the other cheek and show mercy types.

Because we have experienced the ultimate in mercy as God's children, not receiving what we deserve, we then extend it to others. Becomes an unrelenting cycle of spreading mercy.

"The merciful person remembers his own sin and God's mercy to him, he understands the weaknesses of others, and he forgives." Hughes

The merciful embrace both forgiveness for guilt and compassion for the suffering and needy but they also do something to alleviate distress where they find it. It's common sense, but hard for us because we forget who we are.

Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (ESV)

They will receive mercy... it keeps going.

b) Pure in Heart

This is what develops when we hunger after righteousness.

Their pursuit of purity and uprightness affects every area of life. The one who is single-minded in commitment to the kingdom and its righteousness will also be inwardly pure. Against hypocrisy. Genuine.

We are slaying the sin that clings so tightly and pursuing instead integrity, authenticity with God and others. This is a heart that does not bring mixed motives and divided loyalties. Not two-faced.

We feel like we can't do it "We must cast ourselves on the grace of God and thus receive his radical renewal. We must ask him to implant and nourish the character of the kingdom in our lives. If we do this, these qualities will take root and grow within us, though we will never attain absolute perfection in this life."
Hughes

They shall see God. To be admitted into his presence. Awestruck by his glory. And comforted by his grace.

c) Peacemakers

The list is extensive already and here we come to one with a great amount of work. Not merely pacifists but actively bringing peace, even willing to "fight" for it.

The approved of God are shalom bringers, agents of reconciliation, spreading the gospel of peace near and far. "Describes one who actively pursues peace in its fullness. He pursues more than the absence of conflict; he pursues wholeness and well-being." for themselves but more importantly for others.

Honest about where true peace resides and willing to risk pain to breakthrough. Taking on good trouble to make peace.

Like Jesus, Peacemakers are willing to lower themselves, to even lose their dignity in order to bring shalom to life. This is the way peacemakers always have been. *Philippians 2:3-9*

They shall be called the sons of God - noticeable as those that reflect the character of their Father who makes peace with us.

d) Persecuted for Righteousness Sake

Persecuted is a word that gets an increasing amount of play these days. Here though, the approved of God are wrongly treated for their evident faith. And this is quite a normal expectation for those that follow Jesus. Opposition is a normal part of being a disciple of Jesus.

We have to be careful that it is for righteousness sake we are persecuted, not our own personalities or disregard for people.

But Jesus builds on this one and speaks directly to his disciples, “Blessed are you when others revile you... on my account.” Because we have made him ultimate in our lives not the approval of others or even the acceptance of others. We called Lord a man that walked out of the grave - that is strange to a lot of people.

But those faithful to God are always persecuted, they persecuted the prophets before us!

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

3) The Kingdom

Now, not later. This is our ethic for life in Christ. This is what disciples look like.

“Theirs is the kingdom of heaven” refers to the people who acknowledge God as their king and who may, therefore, confidently look forward to the fulfillment of his purpose in their lives.

The kingdom is ours because Jesus lived all of this for us. He recognized the need of intervention that only God could act on our behalf. He mourned the unrighteousness of the world, our rejection of him and all that is right and true.

He is gentle and lowly in heart toward us. Patient, calm, with loving kindness leading us to repentance. He longs for his people to live righteous and stands as our satisfaction, giving us all we need in him.

He shows us mercy when we were still sinners by dying for us. He is pure in heart, wholly devoted to his mission and the glory of God. He is unleashing peace by his blood and working restoration through his kingdom. And he was persecuted to death on a cross that changes everything.

He is the servant that brings peace... **Isaiah 61:1–7** “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; [2] to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; [3] to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. [4] They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

[5] Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; [6] but you shall be called the priests of the LORD; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. [7] Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.”
(ESV)

This is what we need, and always. And it is ours in Jesus.

Now we, those following him, clinging to him, live under this ethic. As the priority in our lives, as our identity.

Living with hope, undeterred by what Caesar might do... not shaken by what the markets will maintain... still singing when we are put into death camps... serving the least even when the plague takes our last breath... standing for peace where violence is all we see... Extending to others what we’ve been given in Christ.

We live differently - under a kingdom ethic - because this is who we are.

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Over the next weeks much of what we hear will sound hard but we have been given the promise of acceptance and freedom to live this way. It is who we are, and it is where we find joy and peace.

Start and stay with need - Be poor in spirit - confess that you need Jesus to intervene, to give grace, to call you his own, and forgive you. Stay reliant on him for all of life.

Be Satisfied in Him - This is how we carry on, this is how we face the day and beat the temptation to fight as the world does. And he promises it. We will be satisfied. Ask for it.

We can see something better in the mirror... in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is holding it and saying this is who you are, approved and blessed by God. Let's live.