

A Heavenly Kingdom Here on Earth

Matthew 5:3-12

As I watched the Inauguration of the 45th President of the United States and listened to the record 6 ministers speak of God blessing and leading our Country and this Administration, one Reverend read from what's known as the Beatitudes, Jesus instructions for His Kingdom here on Earth.

These instructions I believe are needed more today than ever in our very divided and hurting country. I also believe we as Christians must set the tone and example of unity in the body of Christ and in our Nation, for it is we who are called to be Salt and Light.

Matthew 5:13-16 (NKJV)

To glorify God, we as Christians must whole heartedly follow Jesus instructions, and we will experience a crucial transformation of...'Our Vocabulary', 'Our Vision' and 'Our Values / Virtues'.

Matthew 5:3-12 (GNT)

In the first four chapters of his Gospel, Matthew shares with us some amazing stories concerning our Lord Jesus Christ.

- In chapters one and two Matthew shares with us Jesus' genealogy and some astounding stories surrounding his birth and early life.
- In chapter three Matthew introduces us to John the Baptist and subsequently the baptism of Jesus.
- In chapter four Matthew shares with us Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, the early days of his ministry and all its successes.

Matthew 4:24-25 (NKJV)

Jesus and his disciples were actively preaching the Good News, healing the sick and delivering people from bondage. Jesus was transforming lives and bringing about the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.

When we begin to read chapters five through seven, we find ourselves immersed in what has been called the greatest sermon of all time.

As you read it, I think you have to agree that what Matthew shares with us here in these three chapters has to be considered a part of his greatest gift to the Church. No other Gospel writer shares with us in such a concise way so many of Jesus' essential truths and teachings.

If you really want to know what the Christian life is all about then I would encourage you to read, meditate and study Matthew chapters 5-7.

However, don't attempt to just read them and think that you have absorbed it all. What Jesus teaches and preaches here is enough material for us to have a lifetime of study.

It has long been known that the sermon that Matthew shares with us here is actually a compilation of a great many of Jesus' sermons put together into one writing. Matthew has collected the main themes of many of Jesus' sermons and compiled them into the sermon that we see here in chapters five through seven.

It doesn't mean that Jesus did not teach all that we have written here, but instead of them happening all at once they are pieces of different sermons that have been put together in one long sermon.

There is a great deal of spiritual revelation, insight and inspiration in these three chapters.

I believe that what Matthew is doing here is letting us know very quickly in his Gospel about Jesus' identity and message. He has taken great effort in sharing with us that Jesus is in fact the Son of God, the long awaited Messiah and the one who has the power to baptize us with God's Holy Spirit.

Matthew wants us to understand that this is the life that we can live through Jesus Christ. This is the life the LORD will enable us to live and this is the life that He desires for us to live.

Some have theorized that Jesus' sermon here is one that must not be taken literally. That there are sections that we must allegorize and others we must look at as just metaphors. That what we have here is a more of an Ideal or lofty goal of the Christian life and not an actual instruction manual for the Christian life.

The only problem with that is the majority of Jews at that time would not understand such abstract teachings and philosophies. For them the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY was real, the world was real and life was real. So to read some platonic ideology into the Sermon on the Mount I believe is to totally misunderstand the original context and even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus' words here are clear and concise.

I think it may be some people's desire to categorize Jesus' words and thoughts as ambiguous so it provides for them an excuse not to attempt to live them.

The more we can make ourselves think that this sermon is full of allegory, metaphors, parables and even platonic thought the more we can divorce ourselves from its fundamental truths.

What we must understand as we read this sermon, is that this is God in Flesh sharing deep truths concerning how to speak, how to see and how to live life here on our world as His followers.

These are the words of the Son of God clothed in human flesh making it clear what it means to live out a life of progressive holiness. These are the words of God in flesh showing us the way that we can live if we accept Him as Savior and LORD and allow the Holy Spirit to infill the totality of our very beings...How to live a heavenly existence here on earth.

This morning, I would like for us to turn our attention to this section that has been given the label - The Beatitudes. (v.3-12)

Many of us who were raised in church may have been taught to memorize them.

Many of us were taught to commit them to our minds but I am not so sure that many of us understood the importance that we were also to commit them into our hearts and souls.

We must allow the words of the Beatitudes to transform us from the inside out.

As we read these beatitudes one of the first things that we may think of is;

"I am so glad that those people are blessed who are going through such tough times but I am even more glad that I am not one of them."

"I want to be holy and a peace maker but I'd rather not be a person who endures persecution or false accusations made against me."

"I want to be meek but if it's all the same I would also like to own some control here on this earth."

"I want to grow in your grace but all that hungering and thirsting sounds a little too painful."

Yet, if we allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to us the meaning of Jesus' instructions here I believe we will find inspiration and encouragement for our lives. I believe that what we will discover is that beginning here in these beatitudes and continuing throughout the rest of this sermon is how Jesus wants us to experience a transformation in...Our Vocabulary, Our Vision and Our Virtue and Values.

1. JESUS WANTS TO TRANSFORM OUR VOCABULARY

Jesus shares some key words that He used throughout the rest of his ministry.

(poor in spirit, meekness, humbleness, righteousness, mercy, purity, peace and blessings)

They are words which are quite the opposite of the secular world at large.

(boasting, pride, arrogance, sensuality, popularity, power, position and greed)

The words and ideas that Jesus wants us to focus on are far different than the words and ideas that the world wants to embrace.

Just watch the news, read an article online, listen to the words people use on Facebook and Twitter or look at the pictures people put out on Instagram. The majority of what we find has nothing to do with meekness, mercy, hungering and thirsting for righteousness or being a peacemaker.

JESUS wants to transform our Vocabulary to be like His.

We find the foundation for this instruction all way back in Genesis where we read these words - **"AND GOD SAID"**. Time and time again as we read through the creation story we hear the words - **"AND GOD SAID"**.

I believe Words matter. Words are important. Our Vocabulary is important.

Words were the means in which the LORD brought about all creation, connection and conversion.

God could have been silent and simply thought the world into existence but He used words. God more than anyone else knows the power of words. The words we say, the words we hear and the words that make up our vocabulary are vital because with them we bring life and with them we can bring death.

Proverbs 18:20-21 (NKJV)

If you listen to how a person speaks and what they say you will soon begin to know the person. If their language is full of political ideals, sports metaphors or business advice then you will know what the person does, what they dwell on and what is important to them. Our words come from the depths of minds, our hearts and our souls.

The more we saturate ourselves into an arena the more we use their words, absorb their thoughts and flesh out their philosophies and principals.

This is especially true for us as followers of Jesus.

If our vocabulary is sprinkled with words of righteousness and integrity, words including humility, meekness, peace, kindness, joy, love etc...

It is a testimony of us allowing the Holy Spirit to work in and through our lives.

It is a testimony of the heavenly life we are living in Christ.

It is a testimony of how we are reading and studying His word and the depth of our prayer lives.

If, however, what comes out of our mouths are words of anger and bitterness and division then we have blocked the Holy Spirit's transformative work and are allowing the vocabulary of the world to come in and take hold.

We need to understand that there is a spiritual battle going on for our vocabulary.

James 3:5-10 (NKJV)

Today, as we read the Beatitudes, look at the words, understand their meanings and allow the Holy Spirit to transform your vocabulary. Surrender your heart, your mind, your soul and your tongue to the Holy Spirit. Allow Him to place words like meekness, humbleness, righteousness, peacemaking, mercy and purity of heart into your everyday speech and thoughts.

Allow the Holy Spirit to recreate your everyday vocabulary.

2. WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND THAT JESUS WANTS TO TRANSFORM OUR VISION

Just as important as our words is also our Vision.

Proverbs 29:18 (NKJV)

1 John 2:16 (NKJV)

These verses speak of the power of vision; whether it is physical, emotional or spiritual vision.

(v.8) Matthew reminds us that the pure in heart are not only blessed but they can also see God.

Seeing God and being able to see things as God sees them is the LORD JESUS' desire for each of us this morning.

Jesus gets our attention here by illuminating to us the people He calls blessed.

We all want to be blessed by God.

Jesus begins by having us focus on the people that He says are able to receive God's blessings. It is not the high and mighty. It is not the proud, the boastful or the arrogant. Instead, it is those who the world would see as unimportant or unassuming.

To use a phrase that has been thrown around lately - the world would look at those mentioned in the beatitudes and may call them "a basket of deplorables". The world may label them as uninformed, woeful and even offensive.

Yet, these are the people that Jesus was reaching out to and was sharing with them the message that the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY considers them to be accepted recipients of His blessings.

It must have been shocking for those who first heard Jesus words. At the same time, it must have brought great comfort to many who were hearing those words. They knew all too well what it meant to feel spiritually bankrupt, to experience great sorrow and to be persecuted for their faith.

Many of them knew what it meant to be run over or stepped over because of their meek and mild nature.

Many of the "people groups" Jesus mentions here are the very ones that we too often either do not see them or even look for them.

How many times has our attention been drawn to those who seek peace and not war?
How many peacekeeper movies over the years have become blockbusters?

How many from the "meek and mild" crowd find themselves on the podium of center stage rather than in the far corner of the room?

How many people reach out to those who are being persecuted and lend a protective hand, instead of finding some shelter for themselves?

It takes great Vision, Jesus vision, to truly see the people around us.

The Woman at the Well - she is spiritually bankrupt.

Jesus sees her, talks to her and redeems her.

Mary and Martha at the tomb of Lazarus overcome with sorrow.

Jesus sees them, joins in their sorrow and later in their joy

The humble and meek woman in the temple drops a couple of coins thinking no one notices her extreme sacrifice but there is Jesus praising and adoring her.

The woman who anoints Jesus feet does so in a spirit of complete surrender and humility only to face ridicule and persecution from self-righteous Judas.

Jesus sees her and steps in and protects her and promotes her heart felt actions.

As much as we need to change our Vocabulary as Christ followers we also need to refocus our Vision.

By our human nature we are all drawn to the super stars, the extroverts, the charismatic people and the ones who exude success. We gravitate towards those who hold power and position over those who are meek and unassuming.

We tend to allow the people Jesus calls blessed here to live in the outskirts of our lives and our churches.

However, it is those individuals that Jesus wants us to understand that the Father loves, promotes and pours out His everlasting blessings upon. They are the ones we should be looking out for rather than looking down upon. They are the ones who we should go to and learn something about meekness, how to have mercy and how to promote peace.

It is the other crowd promoting arrogance, greed and self-idolatry that we need to develop a deafness and indifference to.

3. Jesus wants us to transform our Values/Our Virtues

Notice with me this morning the Values and Virtues that Jesus tells us that are blessed.

Values like hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

Values like being a peace maker.

Values like standing strong when others revile you and say all manner of evil about you.

Realize that NONE of those values are passive in nature.

Think with me for a moment what it means and what it takes to truly hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Two of the most forgotten spiritual disciplines today are Fasting and Simplicity.

Both of them require a great measure of being hungry and thirsting for righteousness so much that we will put down the wants and the desires of our physical bodies and minds for the sake of the LORD and our spiritual formation.

If anyone has ever fasted for an extended period of time then you know what I am talking about. When we fast for the LORD we are asking the LORD to help discipline our physical bodies and put in balance our physical wants and desires versus our Spiritual growth. You see, our stomachs and fleshly desires cry most of the time not for needs but instead demanding that its wants are meet over and over again.

The same is true when we practice the discipline of Simplicity.

It's the discipline of purposely going without for the sake of the Kingdom of God or removing all the stuff from our lives that just sits around and does nothing but take up space.

I really shouldn't say it does nothing because all too often that stuff can cause us worry and anxiety because we are afraid that someone will steal it or it will simply rust and rot or run out. So, we put it in storage containers or safety deposit boxes or safes. We don't use those items but we believe that we must have them. We don't need those items but they are ours and no one else's.

But do we really own them or do they begin to own us?

That is where the discipline of Simplicity helps us get a God value on things. The disciplines of Fasting and Simplicity allow us to see the true value of things. They allow us to see that in God's kingdom, the really valuable and the really virtuous are;

Being a person of mercy

Being a person who is more hungry for righteousness than they are for the riches

Being a person who can stand up under persecution and accusations for Christ

Being a person who wants to promote a life of peace

(Shalom - peace, harmony, wholeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquility)

Being a person who values purity of heart over sensuality or entertainment

Those are the values that the LORD wants us to possess in our lives.

Those are the values that the Holy Spirit will help us to work on, emulate and possess as we grow deeper in our walk with the LORD.

The Beatitudes reveal to us this morning that we have a great deal of transformation that needs to occur in our lives, in the Body of Christ and in our world.

The Vocabulary of the Beatitudes is scarce these days.

The Vision of the Beatitudes is lacking these days.

The Values of the Beatitudes is minimal these days.

They are not gone, not vanished but at least in the United States they are anemic and in need of a much needed transfusion of Jesus' blood of redemption and Holy Spirit power today.

As a child I was taught to memorize the Beatitudes. As an adult in Christ I am being called to live them out in my everyday life. To speak like Christ, see like Christ and have love like Christ.

In order for that to happen I must lay down my life and allow the Holy Spirit to teach me a new language. I must allow the Holy Spirit to give me a new vision and I must allow the Holy Spirit to teach me a new values system.

None of this will happen automatically or overnight.

That is why Matthew wrote this very sermon. He knew that we would need to revisit it over and over again. He knew that we would need to read it, meditate on it and allow the Holy Spirit to illuminate its truths and work on our lives bit by bit by bit.

Matthew tells us that Jesus went up on a mountain away from distractions and the routine of life to teach these truths to His disciples. We must understand that these mountain top truths can only be ours by our devotion to read, reflect, receive and be renewed by them.

Matthew knew that we need some time to allow the LORD to speak to us and for us to then allow Him to transform us from the inside out.

As we close this morning let's commit to the LORD that we are going to study, we are going to meditate and we are going to allow Him to bring the truths and principles we find here in the Beatitudes into our hearts, minds and souls. That we are going to allow the Holy Spirit to teach us His vocabulary, His Vision and to obtain His Values and Virtues and to live them every day.

We pray for the transformation of our Nation but it must begin with us.

Let us pray.