

Kingdom Qualities

Matthew 5:1-12

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is great to be with you. If you are a guest or a visitor, welcome. We're glad that you would join us this morning, and we are beginning a new sermon series this morning looking at the Sermon on the Mount. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Matthew chapter 5. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the chairs in front of you. We also project the passage on the screen. You can follow along there. But the Sermon on the Mount is a section of Jesus's teaching that takes place in Matthew chapters 5 through 7. And over the next few months, really, we're going to be in the Sermon on the Mount until Advent. We'll take a few weeks off for Advent, do an Advent series, and then we'll finish up in January.

So we're going to be in this section, Matthew 5 through 7, for a little while now. And it's good for us to spend time in this section of Matthew's gospel, because the Sermon on the Mount is one of the most well known bits of Jesus's teaching. Whether you've grown up in the church or not, whether you've claimed the name of Jesus or not, you are familiar probably with portions of the Sermon on the Mount. That's because in this sermon, Jesus deals with topics like, where is our treasure? He talks about anxiety and prayer, about judgment and judging, and a whole host of other topics. It's his most famous and well-known, one of the most famous and well-known portions of all the New Testament. And the Sermon on the Mount is for us. It's for believers.

You see, the Sermon on the Mount ultimately is about what life is to be like in the kingdom of God. In other words, how are we to live in this world? As those who have been called to follow after Jesus, to embody his kingdom, how are we to live out his kingdom when we are surrounded by other kingdoms as we live in this world? Now, I say it's for us, the church, because that is the primary audience of the Sermon on the Mount. It's his disciples. We actually see it in verse 1 of chapter 5. We're told that seeing the crowds, Jesus went up to the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. So, you see that his primary audience is his disciples, his original followers. Now, this doesn't mean that the crowds didn't hear the sermon, because we're told at the end of Matthew 7 that the crowds were there. They did overhear, and maybe some of them, their hearts were pierced, and they were pricked, and they were drawn into the kingdom. But the primary audience are the people of God. That is the focus. It's on his disciples and how they are to live.

So, as followers of Jesus, what are we to take from the Sermon on the Mount? We know every group of people, every organization, every association of people have qualities that their members are going to embody. We know this. And in thinking about this, I was reminded of a commercial that was very popular when I was in high school in Canada.

Remember, most of you know I grew up Canadian. So, in Canada, during my high school years, there was a popular commercial that was the "I Am Canadian" commercials. Have any of y'all seen these? Oh, they're beautiful. They're wonderful. So, there's this one in particular that is the most famous, and it features one character. His name is Joe, Joe Canadian. He comes onto a stage, and there's a microphone before him, and behind him is a screen with the Canadian flag flapping in the wind. And he approaches the microphone, he clears his voice, and he starts to say, "Hey, I'm not a lumberjack or a fur trader. I don't live in an igloo or eat

blubber.” He then goes on and describes what he does and what he is about. “I have a prime minister, not a president. I speak English and French, not American. I pronounce it about, not aboot. I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack. I believe the beaver is a proud and noble animal. A toque is a hat. A Chesterfield is a couch. Canada is the second largest landmass in the world, the first nation of hockey, and the best part of North America.” And the crowd erupts into cheers, and he concludes, “My name is Joe, and I am Canadian.” It really is beautiful. You guys should go watch it.

There's so much more that Joe says. You can watch it on YouTube, and of course there are things that we would challenge about this, right? Like the best part of North America, I mean, has Joe ever been to Virginia, right? I mean, Amen, thank you. But this commercial took hold of the Canadian imagination. It took hold of the Canadian imagination because it challenged some of the ridiculous stereotypes that people have about Canadians, right? Like eating blubber, living in Inglewood, not that I've ever been asked those things. But it also promoted the qualities that Canadians are proud of, that Canadians seek to embody, especially in contradiction to the rest of the world in general, and America in particular, that this is what it means to be Canadian, distinct from other groups. And that's the point. This is who Canadians are. These are the qualities that they're going to embody. And y'all, that's what the Sermon on the Mount is for believers.

It is telling us how we are to live in this world and what are the qualities that are distinctively Christian as we are living in a distinctively non-Christian world. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the famous Welsh Methodist pastor, said that “the Sermon on the Mount exhorts us to be what we are meant to be and to live as we are meant to live, to be like Christ by being completely contrast to everyone who does not belong to Christ.” In other words, we are to embody these qualities, and as we do embody these qualities, we are going to live counter-culturally to the world, and we will be living out the kingdom of God. And so with that, Jesus' first exhortation comes to us in Matthew 5. In the first 12 verses, we call them the Beatitudes. And this is what we read.

“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Lord, we do thank you for your word and ask that you would simply help us now. Help us to see what it means to be your people and that you would equip us to live that out. And so we ask, Lord, that by your spirit you would open our eyes and soften our hearts and unplug our

ears so that we would see and hear and embrace the truths of your gospel. We pray this in Christ's name, amen.

Our Need

So the first quality that we are to embody as God's kingdom people is a recognition of our need. That we're a needy people. That's what we see in verses 3 through 6. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Now, before talking about how these point to our neediness, it's important for us to stop and talk about that word, blessed. Because there's a couple different ways that we can understand this word. And there's a little bit of discussion, theological debate, about how we're supposed to understand it. You see, there are some who see this word blessed as meaning simply happy. So happy are the poor in spirit. Happy are those who mourn. Happy are the meek. And that's a perfectly acceptable way to translate this word, happy. So that's one way of understanding it.

Another way of understanding it is seeing it through the lens of Old Testament background. Because the Beatitudes in particular are filled with all sorts of Old Testament allusion, quotation, and background. So just think about the fact that Jesus goes up on the mountain to talk to his disciples. It's very reminiscent of Moses, isn't it? Who went up on the mountain, received a word from the Lord, and then gave to the people the words that they were supposed to live by, right? The Ten Commandments. And that's what Jesus is basically doing, right? He goes up on the mountain and he is giving a word from the Lord. He is the Lord. He's giving his word to his people of how they're supposed to live. But not only that, theologians also see in the background here, the blessing and cursing that we see in Deuteronomy.

So you notice our Old Testament reading this morning was from Deuteronomy. It talked a lot about blessing. But if you were to read more of Deuteronomy, you would see that there's a lot of covenant curses as well. And that God's people, many have argued that God's people were actually living under God's covenant curses at this time because God's word had gone silent for a portion of time, remember? The intertestamental period. There is no prophetic authoritative word coming from God during this time. And so many theologians see this as them receiving some of the covenant curses for breaking God's covenant. But now Moses, or not Moses, Jesus, who is the better Moses, the great prophet, goes up on the mountain and now he brings blessing. So that's another way we could see it. That this blessing equals divine favor. And that's how I read it.

That's probably not surprising since I spent most of my time describing that one, right? But here's the beautiful thing about taking it the way that I just described it, is that if you see it as divine favor, then you get happiness thrown in anyway, right? You get the best of both worlds. Because after all, divine favor is going to bring happiness. And that's the point. That this blessing is God's favor. And who is it that received this favor? It's the needy, the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst. And what these qualities are, did you notice that they're not qualities of strength and power, but they're qualities of need. And that's who the people of God are. We are people who recognize our spiritual neediness. We recognize our spiritual poverty. We mourn, not just over death, right? We do mourn over death, but not just over death. We mourn over sin and the brokenness of this world and how the fall is playing out in the midst of this world. We mourn and grieve

that. We're a people who are meek, that is gentle and humble. We hunger and thirst and long for righteousness. We're people in need and we recognize our need.

And as soon as we read these qualities of the Sermon on the Mount, these first three verses, verses 3 through 6, that what we should be struck by is how different these qualities are from the world, who are blessed in the world. It's the strong, the powerful, the autonomous, the self-reliant. And while those qualities might gain us our own personal little kingdoms, it's only the needy that will inhabit God's kingdom. It's only those who recognize their spiritual poverty that God calls to Himself, that enter into this kingdom. Notice verses 3 and 10, how the Sermon on the Mount is bookended by a single phrase, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

You see, the kingdom of heaven is for those who know our need. And we experience aspects of that kingdom even now. Right? Jesus said it is theirs. Not just it will be, but it is. And we experience aspects of this kingdom in the way in which Jesus cares for the needy. Right? "Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, they are comforted." The meek, they inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they are satisfied. Those are tastes of that heavenly kingdom that we will experience one day in full when Jesus returns, but we experience tastes of it even today. See, this is the quality that marks out God's kingdom people. We are a needy people.

Our Posture to the World

But the Beatitudes speak beyond our spiritual need. The Beatitudes tell us what our posture towards the world is supposed to be. It is what we see in verses 7 through 9. Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. You see, the attributes of the Sermon on the Mount aren't simply internal. They manifest themselves in our behavior towards others. Because to be merciful and a peacemaker, you don't do that to yourself. Right? I mean, who are you making peace with if you're just internalizing that? Right? Those are things that are lived out, that we do for the sake of others. Even that language, pure in heart, I imagine most of you, and I did initially, as soon as I read that, my first thought was thinking about moral behavior or being free from moral guilt.

But this phrase, pure of heart, is getting at something much more than that. Sinclair Ferguson, the wonderful theologian, he said this. He said, "to be pure in heart is to be uncompromisingly dedicated to Christ. It means letting nothing stand in the way of our vision of Christ." So you see, to be pure in heart means to have an undivided, singular focus. To be dedicated to Christ and to all of his ways. And that plays out in our lives. That's not just something we do internally, but it plays out, right? That is why we are merciful and peacemakers. Because we are dedicated to the way of Jesus.

And y'all, this is contrary to the world, isn't it? Because in our world, mercy is not prized, but canceling is. In our world, peacemaking is not valued, but provoking is. Right? I mean, the very fact that we, it's the common nomenclature of our time that we live in a cancel culture, right? Someone says something we don't like. Someone makes a mistake. Maybe it's large. Maybe it's small. And what do we do? Cancel them. Be done with them. Be rid of them. But that's not the way of the kingdom. The way of the kingdom is mercy and peace. So why would we behave this way with this singular focus, this pursuit of mercy, this desire for peace, when everything around us is the exact opposite? Well, we know why, don't we? It's because we've been shown mercy. And because God has made peace with us. For we know

our spiritual neediness, right? Our spiritual neediness is that we were once under God's judgment and His wrath. And yet he showed us mercy.

Verse 7, “blessed are the merciful, they shall receive mercy.” He made peace with us. Verse 9, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Y'all, the truth is, is there was a time when we weren't part of God's family. I know that that's a phrase that people like to use, right? Like, we're all God's children. That's very heartwarming and it's very unbiblical. Because what the Bible actually tells us is we are all God's creation. But that actually in our sin and in our rebellion, we were enemies of God. And we were spiritual orphans. And we were at enmity with Him. And yet, by the blood of Christ, not by the work of man, but by the blood of Christ, He makes peace with us. And brings us into His family so that we are now sons and daughters. We are brothers and sisters of the King. That is the peace that God brings. And that is why we express that peace to others. That is how we live in this world, with a dedication to Christ and His ways, by living and promoting mercy, pursuing peace, and a mercy and peace that comes only through Christ. That is our posture towards the world. That is what we take into this world. But our relationship with the world isn't one-directional.

Our Response to the World's Posture to Us

Jesus tells us the world's going to respond to us. But He also tells us how we're supposed to respond when the world responds. And that's the end of our Beatitudes, the end of our section this morning. And we see this in verses 10 through 12. Now, before we jump in, let me just say there is a little bit of a debate as to whether verse 10 is the last Beatitude or verse 11. They both start blessed. There's a little bit of debate about it. Are they two different Beatitudes or simply one? I think that verse 10 is the last of the Beatitudes because of that. One of the reasons is because that book ending, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” But also because I think verses 11 and 12 are actually explanatory to verse 10 and not actually a separate Beatitude. But at the end of the day, I want you to be aware there's a little bit of discussion about this in case you all are reading about it. But at the end of the day, it's not a hill I'm going to die on. You can think that verse 11 is another Beatitude and be wrong. That's okay. I don't mind.

But the point is that we see in verse 10 what Jesus says, “blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” So, as the world responds to us, how do we respond to the world? Well, a few observations. Do you see the reason for persecution? Righteousness sake. Verse 11, “they will utter evil against you falsely on my account.” So, what Jesus has in mind here is a mistreatment of his followers because they're his followers. Because they're pursuing righteousness. And y'all, this qualifier and the reasons that Jesus gives are very important. Because there are times when Christians can be mistreated, not because of righteousness, but simply because we're acting like punks. And that's just true. Sometimes we say things we shouldn't say. And we act in ways that we shouldn't act. And we are treated badly. Y'all, that is not persecution. That is getting what we deserved.

That is not what Jesus is talking about here. That's not what he's talking about. What he's talking about is being treated badly and harshly and unfairly for following Christ. For following him. That is persecution. So, why would the world respond to us in this way? I mean, we just said that we're going into this world as ambassadors of mercy, as promoters of peace, as those who seek out the flourishing of others in goodness. So, why would anyone

oppose that? Because those sound like beautiful things. But y'all, think about it. As soon as we start talking about Christ's kingdom, it means that we're also going to talk about the qualities of his kingdom. Like the exclusivity of Jesus. And the beauty of a biblical sexual ethic. And the need for us to cast aside the cloak of autonomy and put on the yoke of Christ. And for us to care and love our neighbor, regardless of nationality or ethnicity or race or class. And though these things that God has called us to embody, those that are given from God out of his love and desire for us to flourish, they run contrary to the kingdoms of this world. And so, when we go out into the world in the name of Jesus, we will experience pushback. Because we are pushing against the kingdoms of the world.

So, how do we respond when we're mistreated? Well, it would be easy for us to respond in kind, right? We'll create our little political blocks to oppose our enemies. We'll treat others as we have been treated. But y'all, that's how the world responds. And Jesus calls us to something better. Something different. When we're persecuted and reviled and lied about, what does he say? Look at verse 12. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Rejoice and be glad. You know, this reminds me of Acts chapter 5. In Acts chapter 5, the apostles have been proclaiming the gospel. They've been talking about how Jesus has died and risen again. And the religious leaders call them in and they question them. They arrest them and they beat them. And they threaten them to stop talking about the name of Jesus. And what do the apostles do when they're released? They go out and they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. They rejoiced when they were persecuted for righteousness sake. Because they knew Matthew 5:12: "Your reward is great in heaven." Your reward is great in heaven.

See, Jesus is putting before us something that is so great, so beautiful, so wonderful, that the difficulties of this world pale in comparison. Right? That's what Paul talked about, didn't he? When he said, I consider the sufferings of this world nothing in comparison to the eternal weight of glory. Jesus is putting before us such a great reward that we can rejoice. It's so great that we can rejoice that we would be made fun of and lied about and spoken poorly of. And Jesus puts this before us because he told us we would face trials. And he says that we will be hated because he was hated. But then in John 16, he said, "take heart, I have overcome the world." I've overcome the world. You see, what's amazing about the Beatitudes is that Jesus is the embodiment of them. He lives them out perfectly. Jesus was rich and yet he became poor. Jesus is the one who mourned over the world. Christ is the one who humbled himself before his creation. He is the one who hungered and thirsted. He was merciful and pure in heart. He was persecuted and killed. And by his blood, he brings peace. And he overcame the world. And he did it for us.

He did it for you and for me. So that there would be a reward that awaits us that is greater than anything that this world could ever offer. A reward that is in heaven. And so he is causing us to fix our eyes on that. That Jesus is greater. This kingdom is better. His reward is everlasting. Jesus calls us into this kingdom and to live out the qualities that he embodies perfectly. Eugene Peterson put it this way, speaking about the Beatitudes. He said, "live into this. This is what it looks like to be a human in the God-made and God-ruled world. This is what it means to live out our humanity. More and more like Christ, our perfect Savior, who was merciful, who was peacemaking, who was humble, who has overcome the world." Friends, this is the kingdom that he has called us into. And this is what it means to live as people of his kingdom. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we have been called out of this world and into your kingdom. And so we pray, Father, that you would equip us now. Equip us by your spirit to embody this sermon, to embody the qualities of your kingdom, and to live as your kingdom people. And so we ask that you would lead us and guide us, that you would make us people of mercy and people of peace, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the one who has overcome this world and has reserved for us a reward in heaven. And we pray it in all this in his name. And God's people said together, Amen.