Those Who Hunger & Thirst For Righteousness (v 6)

Matthew 6:6 says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” To acknowledge and mourn our spiritual poverty will naturally lead to a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Rather than hungering and thirsting for riches or power or fame, God’s people are the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and as Jesus will later say, will see God’s kingdom and his righteousness. By faith in Jesus, we have become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is ours as a gift. But we should also hunger and thirst for moral righteousness so that the righteousness we have been given as a gift would work its way out into every part of our lives. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness have the promise that they will be given the desire of their heart—they will be filled.

The Merciful (v 7)

Matthew 6:7 says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” In this context, to show mercy is to help alleviate the pain and suffering of our fellow human beings, whatever might have caused it. It’s important to note that grace deals with sin and its forgiveness, but mercy with alleviating suffering. You can probably say it with me now, but for those who acknowledge and mourn their sin, who have a humble spirit and hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercy comes more easily. Pharisees lack mercy because of their self-righteousness. Children of the kingdom recognize the importance of showing mercy to those who are suffering, we show mercy when we are persecuted for the sake of righteousness—those against whom all kinds of evil is spoken. There are times when our commitment to Jesus, and to living out the Gospel, will put us at odds with others who will persecute us. We need look no further than the Old Testament prophets, whose righteousness led them to be mistreated in numerous ways. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such people. Unlike the other beatitudes, Jesus tells us specifically how to respond: we should rejoice and be glad because of the reward we will receive in heaven! So what do we conclude from all of this?

Conclusion

In many ways, the beatitudes embody a different form of the same truths expressed in other parts of Scripture. Two passages that contain much of the same information can be found in 1 Corinthians 13 and Galatians 6. 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that love is patient, kind, humble, and deferential. It keeps no record of wrongs. It protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. Think about how those things relate to the beatitudes. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Those lists, like the beatitudes, are descriptions of life in the kingdom.

Application

The problem, it seems, is that we live and work in the kingdoms of this world and if we’re not careful, we can very easily adopt the values of these kingdoms. Paul told the believers in Rome not to be “conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our mind” (Romans 12:3). After telling the believers in Colossae that their lives were hidden with Christ in God, he states, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed…” (Colossians 3:5).

When we take on the values of the kingdoms of this world, we begin to change, and here’s what we find: rather than mourning our own spiritual poverty, we scorn and deride the spiritual poverty of others. Without mourning our own spiritual poverty, we become arrogant rather than having a humble spirit. We no longer hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness, but try to leverage his commands for the positions we’ve taken. Rather than showing mercy to those who are suffering, we become hardened to it, convinced that their suffering is justified. Our hearts become filled with thoughts and attitudes that are incompatible with the Kingdom of Heaven. If we’re persecuted, it’s not for righteousness sake, but often for self-righteousness sake. And at the end of the day, we fail to offer our burning and broken world a glimpse of another way—the way of the kingdom.
The Kingdom #2
June 7, 2020
Pastor Jared Stoner
Matthew 5:3-12
Introduction
Good morning! I trust you’re all doing well. This the second message in our series called The King- dom. This morning we’re going to work our way through Matthew 5:3-12, which contains what we often call the beatitudes. Before we look at the beatitudes, I’d like to talk for just a moment about the graphic we’re using, which may sound strange, but I actually received a question about it, which may be a first. What’s more, it’s a graphic I deliberately chose after some thought. If you notice, behind the text is a picture of a group of large buildings clearly in the downtown of a very large city. This is intended to illustrate the relationship between the kingdom of God and a very large city, given the fact that cities are well known for a lot of less than kingdomly activities.

So I want to explain why I chose the graphic and what I want us all to be thinking about as we work our way through the Sermon on the Mount. When I say the kingdom of God, my fear is that to some extent, most of our minds picture the dusty roads of first century Palestine. We picture Jesus with long flowing hair, sandals, a robe, and a noticeable lack of almost everything modern—no electricity, phones, cars, corporations, or the like. That’s not wrong because the kingdom of God did actually come and exist in that time period and culture. But, I think, I am often spend a lot less time thinking about what the kingdom of God looks like in our world—in the world of traffic, technology, business, social media, and the like. So we as we go through this series, I want to invite you to think with me about how the kingdom of God God expressed today, in our time, in our culture, in our lives. With that, let’s talk about the beatitudes.

The Beatitudes

There is so much that could be said about the beatitudes, but for the sake of time, let me just summarize three points that will help us understand them clearly and correctly. The Gospels frequently pronounce blessings or woes to different groups of people. You likely remember Jesus pronounc- ing woes on the teachers of the law and Pharisees in Matthew 23. Likewise, he pronounces blessings on people in the Gospels. In fact, there are three of these beatitudes in the Gospels. A beatitude is simply a pronouncement that a certain group of people is blessed, or maybe even better, happy or joyous. So, we could say happy are those who mourn.

That very example leads to the second point I want to make, without which none of this really make sense. The beatitudes are not saying that these people are happy in themselves because of their spiritual poverty or sorrow or persecution, but because through the coming of Jesus and thus, the powerful expansion of the kingdom of God, their fortunes would be changed. Happiness belongs to these people not through any accomplishment of their own, but because Jesus had come and inaugu- rated the kingdom of God and thus a whole new reality that looks very different than the reality of the kingdoms of the world.

Third, last week I told you that the Sermon on the Mount is a description of what life in the kingdom of God is like. In Matthew 4:17, it says that Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Or as Mark records it, Jesus said, “Repent, for the time has come… the kingdom of God is near.” Through repentance and faith, we are born again and we enter life in the kingdom. The Spirit comes to live in us and helps us to live outwardly what God has done inwardly. The beatitudes, and everything that follows, are descriptions of that new life we enter in the kingdom by the power of the Holy Spirit. With that, let’s look at Matthew 5:3-12.

Matthew 5:3-12

1Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 2Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 3Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 4Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 5Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 6Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. 7Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 8Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 9Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Poor In Spirit (v 3)

Let’s talk about each of these nine beatitudes in order. First, Jesus says, “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The Old Testament is particularly helpful for under- standing the beatitudes, including this first one. In the Old Testament, the poor originally referred to those in Israel who did not have land or money. However, over time it came to describe those who were suffering or af- flicted and had to humbly depend on the Lord for help and salvation. Psalm 34:6, ascribed to none less than David, says, “This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.” God heard the poor, for they had to be understood as those in spiritual poverty. You might remember that Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1 when he says, “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.” To be poor in spirit is to recognize and humbly acknowledge our spiritual poverty and to look to God as the only source of our salvation. Those who do recognize and humbly acknowledge their spiritual poverty will receive the kingdom because Jesus came to save them. It reminds us of the Pharisee and tax collector who both went to pray. The Pharisee was confident in his own righteousness and went so far as to thank God he was not like the tax collector. The tax collector stood at a distance, and tearing his clothes, and on his face, turned toward heaven, and prayed, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner (Luke 18:13).” Jesus concluded by saying that the tax collector went home in a right rela- tionship with God, while the Pharisee did not.

Those Who Mourn (v 4)

Matthew 5:4 says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” This second beatitude then naturally flows from the first. Jesus isn’t say- ing that those who are sad will be happy, but that those who are sad, or who mourn, their spiritual poverty will rejoice because he came to give them his spiritual riches. In other words, those who have been given the gift of godly sorrow will be comforted because it will lead to repentance and new life. As 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, “God’s good sor- row brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

Here’s what’s interesting and what we’ll talk a little more about in a few minutes. We are blessed when we mourn our own spiritual poverty, not when we revile it in others. Here’s the problem: take any political or cultural issue in our world, which is often divided into two oversimplified sim- plistic sides, and you’ll find that if one side is going to mourn spiritual poverty at all, it’s usually the spiritual poverty they’re sure exists in those they disagree with, and not their own. There is no blessing in that. As God’s people, we can truly mourn spiritual poverty in those around us as God’s people. But it also means we must always mourn our own spiritual poverty before I even think about mourning it in someone else. I must always first humbly rely on God for his provision for my spiritual poverty. Otherwise, we become the Phar- isee. The Pharisees placed value on the money of the tax-collector and went home at odds with God.

The Meek (v 5)

Matthew 5:5 says, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” The word meek can also be translated as gentle, humble, or considerate. It does not mean that someone is weak or insecure, but that they have a humble spirit. So how do we understand that? I think it’s best to understand it in relationship to what Jesus has already said about acknowledging and mourning our spiritual poverty. It’s a spiritual poverty that will lead to a humble spirit, and Jesus said, to inherit the earth, however impossible that might be.