

"Kingdom Living"

Scripture Passages: 1) **Matthew 7:24-27**
2) **Revelation 1:4-8**
3) **Colossians 1:9-20**
4) **Matthew 4:12-5:3**

Building Wisdom: Are we builders who have built our house on the “Rock” of Jesus Christ? Do we pursue the ways of God like they are a great treasure hunt or a great adventure? Do we live stoked about our relationship with God and pursuing that relationship?

Dave Wilder stopped by for a few minutes this week. He wanted to share about his recent experiences in Bryce and Zion National Parks. He focused particularly on a hike that he and his hiking partners took. On that particularly hike they entered God’s Creation so deeply that it became a religious experience for him. He felt immersed in God’s presence. He was teary as he shared the awesome presence of God in that moment.

Our God is always present. God does not hide from us. But we must intentionally seek God. Do we seek God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength like we are on a great treasure hunt? Are we building the foundation of our lives on the rock of Christ? Do we live stoked about our relationship with God?

As we begin our study of Matthew’s Gospel those are the questions I want us to always keep before us. Those are the questions posed by the powerful little parable with which Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount. Listen now to what leads us into the Sermon on the Mount.

Read Matthew 4:12-5:3

Two Essential Truths: As Jesus began his ministry he picked up right where John the Baptist left off. He proclaimed, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

There are at least two essential truths to that little statement. First the Kingdom of Heaven has come, is coming and its coming is not dependent on anything we do. We cannot stop the Kingdom of Heaven from coming. Second, repentance is our response to God’s Kingdom coming. God is the initiator of our relationship, we are the responder.

Repent literally means turn around, convert, or get converted. Repentance is a complete change of direction. In repentance we are to turn from our preoccupations, whatever those are, to God.

Dale Bruner writes, “This thematic sentence tells us that we had better change now, get out of the way now – or, more precisely, get in the way new – because in Jesus’ Word God’s mighty new world is on its way toward us and is even now crashing in. ‘Change! Here it comes!’ This is the sense of the expression.”

If we are to build our lives on rock; if we are to build our lives in the coming Kingdom of God then we will choose to begin the Great Adventure of becoming new creatures, of turning our lives around and moving toward God and God’s Kingdom. That defines discipleship. That defines what it is to be a Christian. That defines what it is to be the church of Jesus Christ. The church is a group of people who are bound together in their excitement over the adventure of becoming new and thus entering the very Kingdom of God.

Calling the Disciples: So as Jesus began his ministry he started by calling disciples to join him on the journey. The first people he called happened to be fishermen. He said to them, “Follow

me, and I will make you fish for people.” We read; that immediately they left their nets and followed him. In other words they repented. They left their old life behind and began a new life. Why did they do that, because Jesus and following Jesus was so compelling! Again we see that Jesus came to them, just as God’s Kingdom comes to us. For the disciples the offer was so compelling that they immediately left their old lives behind to begin a new life, a life of fishing for people, a life of eternal importance and impact.

Jesus extends that same invitation to us. Have we joined the great adventure of following Jesus? As the church today are we these disciples? Do we think of our life together in these terms?

Healing: After gathering a group of disciples Jesus began his ministry. We read, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.”

Jesus ministry was a ministry of good news teaching and a ministry of healing. As followers of Jesus we are invited into that same ministry, a ministry of sharing the good news and bringing healing to the world, physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational healing. Healing in and of itself is good news, but the Gospel Jesus proclaimed was even greater and more significant, it was and is good news of eternal significance. We have the great gift of being the bearers of this good news. We are stewards of the good news. Our lives are to be lived in response, in stewardship of the good news. That is our role as followers of Jesus. So let’s dive into some of the details of this good news.

The Sermon Begins: “When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:”

The Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus leaving the crowds behind to instruct his close followers. We see by the end of the sermon that the crowds have followed them up the mountain and taken in the teaching as well. It may seem strange that Jesus leaves a ministry of healing and large crowds, in order to teach a few. But Jesus makes it clear that times of intentional teaching with the core group of leaders is just as important as times of public healing, both are essential to the bringing of the good news.

The Sermon Begins: Jesus then begins his great sermon with the wisdom statements of blessing. The first statement:

NRSV, NIV, KING JAMES, SCOFIELD, THE NEW AMERICAN BIBLE, NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE – *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.*

What in the world does that mean? What is Blessed? What is poor in spirit? How are those ideas wisdom for living? How can that statement become a foundational stone? How is that good news? How do other translations translate that verse?

PHILLIPS – *How happy are the humble-minded, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs!*

THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE – *How blest are those who know their need of God; the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

THE GOOD NEWS VERSION – *Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!*

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION - *God blesses those people who depend only on him.*

They belong to the kingdom of heaven!

THE MESSAGE – *You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.*

Interestingly, in Luke's version of this great sermon he records Jesus as saying, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." In Luke's ministry context the physical nature of our relationship with God was his focus. In Matthew's context the focus has a more spiritual focus. So let's try to unpack these two ideas of Blessed and Poor in Spirit.

Blessed: Blessed literally means, "I am with you," or "I am on your side." With this collection of statements Jesus is saying that the Triune God, Father, Son, Spirit is on your side. The blessing is not because of the situation of the person. It is not blessed to be in these situations described here like being poor in spirit. The blessing is that God is with us in our situation. What Jesus is saying here is that we are never cut off from God.

Poor In Spirit: Now at the time of Jesus and in the world where Matthew was doing ministry the religious world was a world of exclusion rather than inclusion, it was a world of the elite, it was a world run by legalism. The legalism had become so extreme that very few people had a sense that God was with them; that God was on their side. People very much felt cut off from God.

Jesus came to turn that idea on its head. The beatitudes as we call them now and the Sermon on the Mount as a whole represent Jesus' upside down wisdom, they turn the wisdom of the culture on its head and make it seem like foolishness.

So Luke says that God is with you, a matter of fact, the very Kingdom of God is yours when you find yourself in poverty. Matthew says that God is with you, a matter of fact, the very Kingdom of God is yours when you are poor in Spirit.

Poor literally means, "those completely dependent on others to make it." "Poor in Spirit means those people who recognize that they are helpless without God's help." Dallas Willard translates poor in spirit as "spiritual zeroes", meaning the kind of people who humans typically think have no place before God. James Bryan Smith translates this beatitude, "Blessed are you who are feeling marginalized from God, who have nothing going for you spiritually—for you too are invited to the kingdom." Anna Wierzbicka notes that Jesus demonstrated great sympathy for those who were marginal to society or outcasts."

When Jesus spoke these words the people who lived life looking down in shame looked up with hope and joy. They said, "Who me? Is he talking about me? I am welcome in the kingdom of heaven? It is here for me, now?"

Jesus began his great sermon with a word of grace like had never been spoken before. Dale Bruner writes, "It is the poor before God to whom God can be rich, and it is those who feel they are peculiarly rich in God who miss the kingdom altogether. . . The moment we begin to look back and down on those who have not come as far or high in consciousness or sensitivity or spirit as we, in that moment we have become rich in spirit and so fall out of the blessing of the first Beatitude."

Conclusion: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule."

No matter where we are in life, no matter what is going on God is on our side. We are blessed. That blessing begins as we recognize our deep need of God. As we recognize our need,

we know God's blessing. Poor in spirit will that be a foundation stone in our lives, in our faith journey? Let us be people who recognize our deep need of God's grace. Let us recognize our poverty for then we will recognize that God is on our side. We truly are greatly blessed. Amen.

Quotes of Note:

Peterson Writes, “Jesus also used language to teach. Unlike the teaching that we are accustomed to in our schools, lectures designed to do our thinking for us, Jesus’ teaching sparkled with scintillating aphorisms. He wasn’t so much handing out information as reshaping our imaginations with metaphors so that we could take in the living multi-dimensional truth that is Jesus.”

Peterson Writes, “When God became human in Jesus, he showed us how to become complete human beings before him. We do it the way Jesus did it, by becoming absolutely needy and dependent on the Father. Only when we stand emptied, stand impoverished before God can we receive what only empty hand can receive. This is the poverty of spirit in which Jesus blesses us. When we listen to and follow Jesus, who lived in continual dependence on his Father, we become convinced of our poverty as men and women. We realize our absolute neediness. We are all beggars. Father, give us bread. Friend, lend us three loaves. Being human means that we are the poorest and most incomplete of all creatures. Our needs are always beyond our capacities.

We do not become less needy, less dependent when we pray; we become more needy, more dependent—which is to say, more human. When we pray we dive ever more deeply into the very human condition from which sin alienates us and Christ saves us.”

Peterson writes, “Glory is what I am after. As it turns out, I am a slow learner. Glory is not just more of what I already have, or the perfection of what I already see. Do I suppose that the Christian life is my biological, intellectual, moral life raised a few degrees above the common stock? Do I think that prayer is a kind of mechanism, like a car jack, that I use to lever myself to a higher plane where I have better access to God?

The language of Jesus tells me something quite different: I become less. Instead of grasping what I value more tightly, I let it go. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” is one way Jesus said it. “Those who want to save their life will lose it: and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” is yet another way.”