

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

INTRO.:

1. A few weeks back Wendell was talking about the book Radical and about how the author of the book was calling for Christians to rethink their relationship with and walk with God.
 - a. In some of our meetings the elders have talked about making some form of this challenge as our theme for this coming year.
 - b. As I began to think about the theme of Radical Christianity, I also began to reflect on what scripture(s) would go along with this theme, or even be the basis for this theme.
 - c. It did not take very long before one specific passage of scripture jumped out at me and was shouting loud and clear.
 - d. It is a passage where Jesus is speaking and spells out every clearly and simply how radical we must be if we are going to be His disciples.
 - e. The passage that came to mind is the one we commonly referred to as "The Sermon On The Mount" in Matthew 5-7.
 - 1) These 3 chapters have touched more hearts, and in turn has sparked more sermons than any other passage in the Bible.
 - 2) Perhaps the reason for this is that here Jesus gave one of the most complete discourses on God's will for man that can be found in the Bible.
 - 3) Here Jesus spelled out how radical we must be if we want to be called the children of God.
2. The Sermon on the Mount offers a series of challenges to our concept of our relationship with God, others, and even ourselves.
 - a. It challenges our concept of personal character.
 - b. It challenges our concept of man's purpose in life.
 - c. It challenges our concept of what it means to be obedient to God.
 - d. It challenges our concept of righteousness.
 - e. It challenges our concept of communication with God.
 - f. It challenges our concept of piety and dedication.
 - g. It challenges our concept of what is truly valuable in life
 - h. And it challenges our concept of what it means to trust in God.
3. In this sermon, Jesus calls for His followers to live a radically different kind of life.
 - a. It is to be a life radically different from the world's standards, and radically different from even that of the nominal church member and their concept of Christianity.
 - b. It is radically different from those who say they are religious and from those who are irreligious.
4. In our text Christ states that the true Christian's value system is going to be at total odds with that of our non-Christian world.
 - a. Basic things like our ethical standards, religious devotion, attitude toward our possessions, ambition, lifestyle, and relationships will be challenged by Christ.
 - b. And in our text He will show us that life as a citizen in God's kingdom must be lived under a totally different standard, that that of the worlds. – It is a Divine standard.
5. This AM I want to begin a series of lessons where we will go back to the Sermon on the Mount and look in detail at the radical things Jesus taught about what His disciples must be like.
6. Today, we will lay the groundwork by looking at 4 things:
 - a. The context in which the sermon was given.
 - b. The overall theme of the sermon.
 - c. The purpose of the sermon.
 - d. And how we must receive this sermon if we want to benefit from its teachings.

LESSON:

- I. 1st: To help us better understand the theme of the Sermon on the Mount, we need to first go back and look at the setting in which it was given.
- A. In Matt. 3:1-3, we read about the preaching of John the Baptist: (Read)
1. John came as a messenger preparing the way of the Lord.
 2. He came with a message calling people to “*Repent*” and prepare for “*the kingdom of heaven.*”
- B. In Mt. 4, we read of the beginning of Jesus' ministry.
1. After His baptism & temptation, Jesus begins preaching a message similar to John's: Matt. 4:17: (Read).
 2. While John was preaching in the Jordan near Jericho, Jesus was preaching in Galilee around the Sea of Galilee.
 3. Like John, Jesus message pertained to the “*gospel of the kingdom*”: Matt. 4:23-25: (Read).
 - a. Jesus went throughout Galilee preaching the “*good news*” about the coming kingdom.
 - b. He also was healing all those who were sick.
 - c. As a result, multitudes from the whole area began to flock to Him to be healed and to hear what He had to say.
- C. Seeing the multitudes Matt. 5:1-2 tell us that Jesus went up on the mountain and sat down and allowing the people to gather around so that He could teach them.
1. Without a bit of hesitation Jesus opened His mouth and taught them as one who had authority and knew what he was speaking about (Matt. 7:28-29).
 2. Tradition says that this was probably the “horns of Hattin.”
 3. It was a mountain located on the west side of the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum.
 4. It was about 1000 ft. high and had twin peaks that formed a natural amphitheater.
- II. What was the message Jesus taught? What was the major theme He sought to convey?
- A. To answer this question notice that as Jesus began to teach, He repeatedly used one phrase over and over again:
1. “*For theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” - Matt 5:3.
 2. “*For theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” - Matt 5:10.
 3. “*...Shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven*” - Matt 5:19.
 4. “*...Shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*” - Matt 5:19.
 5. “*...Will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*” - Matt 5:20.
 6. “*Your kingdom come*” - Matt 6:10.
 7. “*But seek first the kingdom of God*” - Matt 6:33.
 8. “*....shall enter the kingdom of heaven*” - Matt 7:21.
- B. Both the setting and the use of a particular phrase should lead us to conclude that the “theme” of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is: “*The Kingdom Of Heaven.*”
1. Here we will find Jesus teaching us about the true nature of His kingdom – both present and future.
 2. And here we will find Jesus revealing to us the type of life we must live if we want to be citizens in this kingdom.
 3. The lifestyle He will be calling for is radically different life that found in the world, or even among “religious” people.
- C. Notice how Jesus develops this theme in the sermon:
1. 1st: Jesus begins by talking about what it means to be a citizen in the kingdom.
 - a. In Matt. 5:3-12, He speaks of the character of those who want to be citizens in the kingdom.
 - 1) He begins by saying that to enter His kingdom there are some prerequisites you must meet.
 - 2) Here He gives us the keys we will need if we want to enter the door to the kingdom.

- 3) In the beatitudes He shows that we need an attitude of humility and gentleness, a hungering and thirsting to be filled with God's way of doing things, a desire to be pure as He is pure, and a willingness to suffer persecution for choosing to live as a citizen in His kingdom.
 - b. In Matt. 5:13-16, He speaks of the citizen's relationship to the world.
 2. 2nd: Jesus deals with what it means to be truly righteous in His kingdom
 - a. He contrasts true righteousness with the "traditional interpretations" of righteousness as given in the Law - Matt 5:17-48.
 - b. He shows how true righteousness deals with a man's relation to God - Matt 6:1-33.
 - c. And He shows how true righteousness deals with a man's relation to his fellow man - Matt 7:1-12.
 3. 3rd: Finally Jesus gives the exhortation to enter the kingdom.
 - a. He tells of the "beginning" of the way, and the choice we must make - Matt 7:13-14.
 - b. He tells of the "progress" along the way - Matt 7:15-20.
 - c. And He tells of the "end" of the way - Matt 7:21-27.
 - 1) Contrasting "sayers" with "doers" (vs. 21-23).
 - 2) And contrasting "hearers" with "doers" (vs. 24-27).
- D. To better understand, appreciate and apply what Jesus was teaching it may be helpful for us to define the expression "Kingdom Of Heaven."
1. 1st: We find that the terms "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God" are used interchangeably in the Bible.
 - a. Some try to make a distinction between the 2 by saying they are 2 separate kingdoms (e.g., Scofield Reference Bible).
 - b. But a quick comparison of the gospels will show that the terms refer to the same thing:
 - 1) Cf. Matt 4:17 with Mark 1:14-15.
 - a) *"From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"*
 - b) *"And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'"*
 - 2) Cf. Matt 5:3 with Luke 6:20.
 - 3) Cf. Matt 13:31 with Mark 4:30-31.
 - c. We find that Matthew used the expression "Kingdom of Heaven" almost exclusively, while the other gospel writers used the phrase "Kingdom of God."
 - d. It may be that since Matthew wrote his gospel to the Jews, he chose to use the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven"...
 - 1) Because of the Jews' reluctance to use the name of God (out of reverence).
 - 2) And because of the Jews' misconception of the coming kingdom.
 - a) Many anticipated a physical kingdom.
 - b) Thus the expression "heaven" (literally, "heavens") would emphasize a spiritual kingdom and not a physical one.
 2. 2nd: The "Kingdom of Heaven/God" involves four inter-related concepts:
 - a. 1st: Rulership: God is the King, Ruler, or Recognized Sovereignty.
 - 1) The term "kingdom" stresses the idea that someone is ruling or has dominion over His subjects.
 - 2) It is not so much concerned with physical boundaries, as it is with who is in control.
 - 3) Jesus used it this way in Luke 17:21: *"Nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."*
 - 4) And He used it this way in Matt 6:10: *"Thy kingdom come; thy will be done . . ."*
 - 5) Thus, the "kingdom of heaven" is wherever the God of heaven is allowed to rule in the hearts of men.
 - 6) NOTE: Since God is king, He makes the rules and we have no right to change them.

- b. 2nd: It's nature: Spiritual.
- 1) It is not a physical kingdom, but rather a spiritual one.
 - a) John 18:36: *"Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."*
 - b) Rom. 14:17: *"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*
 - 2) Those who are waiting for Christ to return to this earth to set up a physical kingdom will be sadly disappointed as it will never happen.
3. 3rd: The physical/visible manifestation of the kingdom today is the Lord's church.
- a. The church is the community of those whose hearts recognize God as Sovereign.
 - b. To further see that the church constitutes the kingdom on earth, consider:
 - 1) How the term "church" and "kingdom" were used interchangeably - Matt 16:18: *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*
 - 2) Comments made to those who were in the church.
 - a) Col. 1:13: *"For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son."*
 - b) 1 Thess. 2:12: *"So that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."*
 - 3) What John said as he was writing to the seven churches of Asia
 - a) Rev 1:4: *"John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne."*
--Jesus is now on His throne governing the churches.
 - b) Rev 1:6: *"And He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."*
--We are presently a kingdom.
 - c) Rev 1:9: *"I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."*
--John and his readers are fellow partakers/citizens in the kingdom.
- c. 4th: The kingdom is both a present reality and a future blessing.
- 1) The term "kingdom of heaven" has a future element as well as a present one.
 - 2) Its future aspect is spoken of by:
 - a) Jesus in Mt 25:34: *"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"*
 - b) Paul in 1 Co 15:50: *"Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."*
 - c) 2 Tim. 4:18. *"The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."*
 - d) Peter in 2 Pet. 1:10-11: (Read).
 - e) Peter described the coming of its future state in 2 Pet. 3:10-13: (Read).
 - f) And in 1 Cor. 15:24 Paul tells when this will take place: *"Then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power."*

- 3) So it is proper to think of the "kingdom of heaven" in both a "present" and "future" sense.
 - a) In the present sense:
 - i It is found wherever the sovereignty of God is accepted in the hearts of men.
 - ii It is a spiritual kingdom, for God rules in the hearts of men.
 - iii Its outward manifestation today is the Lord's church.
 - iv This kingdom was "inaugurated" on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.
 - b) In the future sense:
 - i The kingdom will be "culminated" with the coming of the Lord.
 - ii It will be that "*new heavens and the new earth*" described by Peter and John.
 - iii It will be experienced only by those in the church who are submitting to God's will
 - Matt. 7:21-23; 2 Pet. 3:13-15a.

III. What was the purpose of this sermon?

- A. The Sermon on the Mount gives direction to the Christian life
 1. Here Jesus tells us how Christians ought to live.
 2. In this sermon we are told "live like this because we are saved," not "live like this to be saved."
 3. If we look to this sermon for direction and follow those directions it will help to insure the blessings of God upon our lives as His disciples (Matt. 7:24-25).
- B. The Sermon on the Mount will reveal deficiencies in our Christian life.
 1. God's intends for every child of His to be "perfect" or complete maturity (Matt. 5:48).
 2. As we study Christ's teachings in this sermon, we will see how far short we are from His intended purpose.
- C. The Sermon on the Mount adds depth to the Christian life.
 1. It was after Christ saw the multitudes and their need that He pulled them aside and taught them these dynamic Biblical principles.
 2. The world today is looking for, and desperately needs, real genuine Christians.
 - a. So much of what the lost see today in terms of Christianity is not real.
 - b. They see that there is no difference in the lives of those who claim to be born again believers and those who make no claims at all in regards to religion.
 - c. And sadly, at times, they see no difference between our lives and those of any other person on the street.
 3. The simple fact is that the lost that we come in contact with on a regular basis need to see that Christ has made a dynamic difference in our life.
 4. And what better way to demonstrate that difference than to begin living the Sermon on the Mount.
 5. But to do it will require some radical changes in our lives.
- D. In view of its "Content," we can see why some have called this sermon "The Magna Carta Of His Kingdom;" or "The Manifesto Of The King."
 1. Simply, from the very beginning of His ministry Jesus was making it totally clear what it would take to be a citizen in His kingdom.
 2. Jesus let His followers know immediately what it would cost to be a citizen in the kingdom of Heaven.
 3. And He calls for His disciples to adopt a radically different lifestyle which would cause them to stand out from the world and even be persecuted by the world as different.

IV. Since the words of Jesus in this text will be radical and challenging to our way of thinking, how do we prepare to listen to it and get the most out of it?

--In James 1:19-25 we find the answer: (Read).

--Notice the three things that James said here:

- A. 1st: We must have an eagerness to hear the Word of God – *“Let every man be swift to hear...”*
1. To receive what Christ has for us in this text, we must be willing to sit and listen to Him.
 2. We cannot afford to be preoccupied with less significant things than what is being taught from these words of Jesus.
 - a. It is not only important that we hear the right words, but that we also hear the right way.
 - b. Jesus said, *“Take heed what you hear”* (Mark 4:24) and *“Take heed therefore how you hear”* (Luke 8:18).
- B. 2nd: A readiness to receive the Word of God – *“And receive with meekness the engrafted word.”*
1. James gives us some insight into what it means to be ready to receive the Word of God.
 - a. We must cast aside all hindrances.
 - 1) A heart that is preoccupied with the presence and practice of sin, will not be open to accepting the truth of the Word.
 - 2) In the Parable of the Sower in Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23, the seed that fell among thorns and was choked out represents the crowded heart that allows sin to crowd out the Word of God.
 - b. We must come with an attitude of humility.
 - 1) Arrogance and pride have no place in the heart of one who is eager to hear and ready to receive the Scriptural truth found in the Bible.
 - 2) Like Paul, we must be willing to acknowledge that we have not yet "arrived" in terms of spiritual truth (Phil. 3:13), and that we still have a lot of learning to do.
 2. Any serious student of the Word will readily admit that the more they learn of Jesus Christ, the more there is to learn.
 - a. Therefore, in order to press on and understand the things of God better, we must maintain a teachable spirit.
 - b. We must have a heart that is receptive to God’s word.
- C. 3rd: A willingness to obey the Word of God – *“But by ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”*
1. Ideally, a child of God will hear the Word, receive the Word, and then obey the Word.
 2. However, in reality, the average Christian is more likely to hear and receive the Word than they are to obey it.
 3. Because we fail to obey the Word, there is a disparity between what we profess and what we possess; what we say we believe and what we actually believe; what we say we are and what we really are.
 4. For those who are willing to not only be *“hearers”* of the Word but are also willing to be *“doers”* of the word, James says that they will be blessed in their doing.
- D. May we be willing to take the truth of the Lord’s sermon into our hearts and let it transform our lives by putting its teachings to practice in our lives on a daily basis.

CONC.:

1. In the Sermon on the Mount we will find Jesus telling us exactly what He expects of us if we want to be citizens in His kingdom.
 - a. Do not make the mistake of thinking that this sermon is just some nice sayings.
 - b. In it we find the teachings of Christ and they are hard and demanding, or radical in our way of thinking.
 - c. This sermon is deep and challenging.
 - d. And as we look at it closer we will see the radical changes God is calling for us to make in our lives.
2. Simply, Jesus wants us to understand the nature of His kingdom and our need for it before we even become His followers.
3. Have you responded to the exhortation to enter the kingdom?
4. Remember the words of our Lord to Nicodemus in John 3:3-5.