

January 27, 2019 The Kingdom Of Heaven Matthew 5:13-20

I am reading a little book by Dallas Willard called *The Divine Conspiracy*. It is in a single sentence (and it is always misleading to reduce 150 pages of material to a single sentence) but if you asked me what is the book about, my reply would be, the significance of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. I chose the reading this morning because it contains a number of statements about you. I hope I can expand that circle to say, you and I. "You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world....Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven....Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaen."

When I say the phrase, "the sermon on the mount" most of us think of the Beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, Blessed are those who mourn," and so on. What we often lose sight of is the reality that the Sermon on the Mount continues well beyond Matthew 5:3-12. In fact it includes all of the material from the beginning of Matthew chapter 5 to the end of the 7th chapter. It was probably a message delivered in its entirety on the sloping hill above the sea of Galilee which provided a rather natural theater where a large crowd was able not only to see Jesus, but more importantly to hear him. The

church of the Beatitudes is built overlooking the place where Jesus delivered this message. It is clearly about the Kingdom of God, and its subtext is that Jesus is the King.

So for starters, we need to see the balance of that message through the lens of the Beatitudes. The teaching of the sermon on the Mount is not about what we must do in order to be included in God's Kingdom. It is rather a description of those who are included in the Kingdom of God. It turns values upside down. It makes the claim that the flower of humanity is not the wealthy or the proud, or those whom the world recognizes as being people of influence, and importance. Dallas Willard says in his folksy style, that the sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes in particular answer the question, "who are the well off." The world would say without question, people who have lots of money, heads of corporations, people with lots of power, heads of important nations. Here is what Jesus says about the question of who is well off. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The well off are those who know very little about spiritual things and recognize their poverty. You think you don't know enough Bible to be important to God? Jesus would say, "You are in." You are well off. The kingdom of heaven belongs to people like you...you recognize your need, your poverty of spirit, you are teachable.

Jesus said, "You who have lost kin, loved ones and friends, are well off. Your hearts tell you what is really valuable in life. You know what it is to love somebody and lose them.

You know what heartbreak feels like and you value time and love. God will comfort you. You are in. You matter to your Heavenly Father. You matter to the King.

The meek. I was a teen ager when Richard Burton, Julie Andrews, and Robert Goulet took Broadway by storm in the musical Camelot. It is a tragedy about what evil will do to the best of worlds. The song "Fie On Goodness" contains the line, "It's not the earth the meek inherit, It's the dirt." That is the way the world views such things. Jesus turns materialism and humanism inside out and proclaims the meek with their dirty hands will inherit the earth. They are well off because God values them. HE, Jesus values them in both this life and the next. Likewise those who hunger for righteousness. The idealists and dreamers who seek a world that is perfect where everyone's needs are met. Jesus says their hunger will be satisfied all because of their concern. They are well off. They are welcome in Jesus Kingdom.

The merciful, in the world of power mongering and Empire building, are often seen as weak. They are not strong enough to destroy those who seek their destruction. Jesus says, they are well off because they will receive mercy. They are welcome in HIS kingdom. And the pure in heart? The world would describe them as "bleeding hearts". They would foolishly give away their last dollar to some charity that may well be a scam, or at least a very worldly and successful business. Jesus says they define the meaning of being rich, and

they will see God...face to face...up close... they are the beloved of the King of Heaven. They are in.

The peacemakers! Jesus calls them sons of God. The richness of that phrase should not be lost on us. Jesus is saying they are so much like HIMSELF, it is hard to tell the difference. They are people who count, no matter what the world says, and they are welcome in Jesus Kingdom. And those who are persecuted for their faith in God, and their faith in man... precious! Jesus says, they are the kind of people HIS kingdom needs, that they will "own" HIS kingdom and value it as though it were their very own property.

Notice. Jesus has not mentioned the people who run the Roman Empire. He has not mentioned Herod who appears to run Judea, and belongs racially to Jesus own kind of people. He has not mentioned the High Priest, or the Pharisees, Sadducees, and teachers of the Law, who have degrees in doctrine, and who appear to run the business of the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus has not mentioned anyone who is really valued by the world and its systems...including those valued in religious systems. Now, do not get me wrong, we know there were priests to whom Jesus said, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." There was a centurion to whom Jesus said, "I have not seen faith like this in all of Israel." A Gentile! Someone like you and (perhaps) even me. You and I tend to worry we are not good enough for God, for Jesus, for the Holy Spirit. That is a

clear sign you are...well off in the things that really matter to HIM. To the Lord!

Jesus knew for a number of reasons that this crowd that was following HIM near the hill which is the shore of the Sea of Galilee, was made up of people who were poor in spirit, (the Good News Bible translates that phrase as “spiritually poor”). HE knew there were people among them who were in various stages of grief. He knew some of them were meek, (the Good News Bible uses the word “humble”). There were some who really wanted to do what God requires. There were some who would not hurt a fly. And some gifted in making peace between people with serious disagreements. He said to them... “You are the salt of the earth. Do not forget your giftedness. Don’t lose what brought you to this place. This moment. To me(Jesus who is Christ).” You are the light of the world so let your light shine. You will be instruments through whom the darkness of life is cast back. You will cause order to emerge out of chaos. And if people get angry with you or even hate you because you follow Jesus of Nazareth. Laugh. Be happy and sing. Heaven’s doors will swing wide to welcome you. The truth is, you are walking in the footsteps of the greatest prophets that ever were. That is why the world treats you as it treated Isaiah, and Jeremiah and Amos.

Jesus was not saying to those who gathered, you have to become something else. He was rather saying. I love you. In Trinitarian terms my Father loves you. The Spirit of God

is upon you, among you and in you. So here is what you need to do. Don't lose your faith, rather let who you are add flavor and spice to the world where you are. Be God's man, woman and child where you live and where you go. I will be there with you, and you will always be with me. Alive and life eternal.

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus, we thank you for what we understand. Grant us faith when we are tempted to think we are facing challenges that are impossible to overcome, or conditions that threaten to be too hard to bear. Delight us when we do not think delightful things are occurring. Lord take us by the hand, because there are times when we just cannot see. Lead us. Lead us here. Lead us there. Lead us home.
Amen