

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Part 2 – Seek first the kingdom

Introduction: The Gospel of the Kingdom and the Sermon on the Mount

I. The Gospel of the Kingdom

1. The gospel (or good news) of the kingdom was Jesus' central message.
Matthew 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.
2. It is the message attached to the great commission – the message needed to prepare the world for the coming of the kingdom.
Matthew 24:10 And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. 11 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. 12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.
3. It's as we renew our minds according to the ways and thoughts of the kingdom, that we begin to enjoy the benefits of the kingdom.
Colossians 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.
Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
4. The summary message of the gospel of the kingdom was preached by John and then taken up by Jesus: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” John confronted a generation with the now at hand kingdom of God – whose ways are not our ways and whose thoughts are not our thoughts (**Isaiah 55:8-9**), and with the need to respond – by changing our thoughts and ways to line up with His.
5. The gospel of the kingdom shook up the well-established institutions of religion suddenly forcing hearts to reconsider who their King was – which was the point.

II. The Sermon on the Mount

1. In Jesus' first recorded sermon, He expands upon the message He had been preaching. He begins to describe what the kingdom is like – fleshing out how the ways and thoughts of God differ from the ways of men, and what it looks like to repent – how to change our thoughts and ways to line up with God's.
2. Jesus throughout His ministry deals primarily with two groups of people: the sinners who have given up on pleasing God, and the religious who have devised their own system of pleasing God.
3. The Sermon on the Mount contains so much content we rarely look at it as a whole, but it is a single sermon with a single main point: “seek first the kingdom.” It is a call to reach out and lay hold of what God has made available in Christ, and a guide for how to do so.

4. The Sermon on the Mount lays out “the narrow way” between complacency and religion – a radical pursuit of the righteous kingdom God created us for, lived before the eyes of a loving Father who delights to give it to us.

Outline and main themes of the Sermon on the Mount

I. Introduction: Repent for the Kingdom is at Hand (5:3-16)

From the start it is clear that Jesus is preaching the same message He has been preaching: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (4:17) The kingdom is at hand – it's yours for the taking – just repent – embrace My ways and not your ways.

1. The kingdom is at hand - “theirs is the kingdom” (5:3,10)

This is the one reward given in the present tense. The kingdom is at hand and can be taken hold of by a God-given means.

Matthew 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

2. Repent – My ways are not your ways.

What man calls weakness, God calls blessed.

1 Corinthians 1:27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

3. Happy holiness - “blessed are those...” (5:3-12)

Jesus overturns the religious world with one simple word – “blessed.” He introduces a lifestyle of holiness based not on self-denial, but the pursuit of a higher satisfaction. Throughout the sermon, Jesus emphasizes the rewards of seeking the kingdom.

John 10:10 ...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

4. Summary: those in My kingdom will be very different from those in the world. (5:13-16)

You are the salt of the earth – if you taste like everything else you're not fulfilling your function.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

II. A New Holiness (5:17-48)

1. The Law fulfilled, not abolished. (5:17-18)

Matthew 5:17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

2. Righteousness surpassing that of the most religious. (5:19-20)

We typically think of “religious” as putting an overemphasis on righteousness and self-discipline. In reality, religious living falls far short of the holiness to which we're called.

Matthew 5:19 Whoever therefore breaks [ESV relaxes, NAS annuls] one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

3. “You have heard... but I say to you.” **(5:21-47)**

Jesus systematically begins replacing religious boundaries with a call to true holiness. The Pharisees' religious system actually put shortcuts around true righteousness – allowing people to “obey” without ever dealing with the real issues at the heart of the law or the heart of the One who wrote the law. Jesus confronts them about it over and over again (here, **Mt 12** and **Mt 23** among others).

Matthew 12:5 Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? 6 Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. 7 But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

4. Summary: the bar not only raised, but removed – be perfect as your Father is perfect. **(5:48)**

There were never supposed to be easy answers that allowed man to live a righteous life absent the daily presence of the power of God working within us.

Matthew 19:25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” 26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

III. A Lifestyle of Seeking (6:1-34)

Jesus gives a call to actively seek the kingdom, and lays out a lifestyle to do so – the Dos and Don'ts of seeking the kingdom.

1. The central message: live before the eyes of your Father in heaven. **(6:3-4,6,17-18,19-21)**

Matthew 6:6 ...pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

2. Tools for seeking the kingdom: giving and serving **(6:1-4)**, prayer **(6:5-15)** and fasting **(6:16-18)**. The kingdom is obtained in weakness, not in strength.

3. Hindrances to seeking the kingdom: desire for the riches of this world **(6:19-21)**, the distraction of worldly entertainment/pleasure **(6:22-23)**, the cares of this world **(6:24-34)**.

Luke 8:14 Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

4. The charge: “seek first the kingdom.” Don't let life drag you down to just surviving – there is a higher prize to be obtained.

IV. A Right Heart (7:1-12)

As He's wrapping up, Jesus, knowing the human heart, makes a few last points dealing with common mistakes we make in applying such a sermon.

1. This sermon was for you, not your neighbor. **(7:1-6)**

2. This is not a standard I want to condemn you by, it's a gift I want to give you. **(7:7-11)**
This is the hope in the midst of such a radical call to holiness – those who want it and reach for it will receive it.
Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.
3. Remember: Blessed are the merciful for they shall be shown mercy. **(7:12)**
Matthew 7:12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

V. Conclusion: The Importance of This Message (7:13-27)

1. The way is narrow. **(7:13-14)**
You will not automatically enter into the kingdom lifestyle – it takes hearing and obeying. It's a free gift that we reach for in weakness, but we have to reach.
2. False prophets will come teaching another way. **(7:15-23)**
They will teach a message that sounds good and looks right. They may even be anointed. You will know them by their fruit – do they and do their disciples embrace a sermon on the mount lifestyle?
3. The way of the kingdom is the only way that stands in times of shaking. **(7:24-27)**
Hebrews 12:26 ...but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” 27 Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.

The Message of the Sermon on the Mount in Context

I. This is My Beloved Son

Jesus enters ministry with a declaration from His Father of how much He loves Him. It's His strength through the wilderness time of testing and His joy as He begins pouring Himself out in selfless service to the multitudes.

Matthew 3:16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

II. New wineskins

John's disciples confront Jesus in Matthew 9 because His disciples aren't following His own teachings – they're not fasting. Jesus reveals the heart behind the kingdom lifestyle – longing for the King.

Matthew 9:14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” 15 And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. 17 Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”