

As we have been learning in Matthew, Jesus came to inaugurate his new Kingdom. Last week Matthew described Jesus' coming as a great light that appeared to people that lived in darkness. Jesus was a light that will shine on those living in the land of the shadow of death.

Then we learned that Jesus called some of his disciples to follow him. He went all through Galilee teaching in the synagogues and telling many about the good news of the kingdom, healed the sick and lame, and cast out demons. And as you might imagine, large crowds began to follow him.

This morning, this light guides us to a mountaintop on the west side of the sea of Galilee. We are about to hear the greatest and most well known sermon ever spoken, studied and written about. In the first few words we find that Jesus is describing a new set of values of a new kingdom that no one in his audience has ever experienced. His words are countercultural. His words are revolutionary. His words describe a contrast between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God. I can picture his audience cocking their heads to the side and asking, "Really? This kingdom you are describing, Jesus, is completely upside down from the kingdoms we know about." The kingdoms they knew about said:

- Blessed are the rich, because they have it all and they have it all now.
- Blessed are the happy because they are content with themselves and don't need others.
- Blessed are the arrogant because people defer to them.
- Blessed are those who fight for the good things in life, because they will eventually get them.

If **we** were able to time travel back to Jesus' day on that mountainside, **our** heads would cock to the side when we heard this teaching and we would say, Really? This kingdom is completely upside down from the kingdom we know about.

Our kingdom says: Blessed are those who invest in successful startups and are able fly to luxury vacation spots on tropical islands, where they lie in chaise lounge chairs, for they shall be satisfied. And if we were to flip on our TV's even today to take in a football game we would see a sample of our modern-kingdom values.

We would say: Blessed are those who drink much beer and watch much football, for they shall be surrounded by carefree, football-watching buddies and highly attractive, socially-gifted women and pizza, for they shall be satisfied.

For others who imagine possibilities in this kingdom of the world might say: Blessed are those who put their trust in technology, for they will have the latest smartphone, for they shall gaze on a screen swirling with color and shall get all the information and answers they need now, and a promise that their needs will be met in the future; for they shall be satisfied.

For those of us who are raising children: Blessed are those who have outstandingly smart and popular kids and who have a golden retriever and who go to the park and shoot a video of your family frolicking in the park as a family and then post it on Facebook and are the envy of real families everywhere; for they shall be satisfied.

Today, we have the opportunity to see that the light of God has bent into our direction and into the dark kingdom around us. And the light of God's kingdom will refract in such a way that it will shed light on God's New Kingdom and we will be able to see it and experience it.

This is a picture of a refracting crystal. Light is bent through the glass and it inverts the image. I want us to look at the Sermon on the Mount as if we are looking through a refracting crystal. I want us to see this upside down kingdom of God. It will look so different from our natural kingdom as we look through the light of God.

This Sermon on the Mount will be hard for many of us because we are used to the old kingdom ways. But in reality the new kingdom can feel like home because it is what we have been re-created for when we were born again. So let's explore this new kingdom because we can. Because the light came into our darkness and he bends it in our favor to reveal to us his upside down kingdom.

**Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. (Matt. 5:1-2)**

We see that Jesus went up on a mountainside and he sat down. Lots of important things happened on mountains for Jesus. He was tempted on one, he healed and fed people on another, he was transfigured on one, and gave the Olivet Discourse on another

mountain. We might even notice the parallel to Moses because he brought down the Law of God from Mt. Sinai to his people.

Jesus has been described as the new Israel ushering in his new Kingdom. And he teaches with authority. Matthew made this point by telling us that Jesus sat down. Kings sit when subjects come into his presence. Rabbis would sit and teach. If the pope had something important to say, he would speak *ex cathedra*, which means out of the chair.

His disciples came and he began to teach them. He doesn't teach what they thought he would teach. He said what seemed like one contradiction after another. Instead of health and wealth and power, he described a disciple as one willing to deny himself and pick up the cross and follow him. And that is what it means to be blessed? Really? Let's look:

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (v. 3)**

Jesus uses the word "Blessed" nine times in the next 12 verses. The Greek word is sometimes rendered "happy." I've heard these taught as the be-happy-tudes, which is clever but it misses the point. The poor, the grief stricken, the persecuted are not usually happy. In English happy means "I'm feeling happy right now because of my good circumstances." But we know our circumstances always change like the weather. Circumstances are uncertain; they are temporary. So anything based on circumstances don't make us feel secure.

But a better translation of blessed is "favored by God;" God's life and goodness bestowed. Happy is too small a word for this. Blessed means to enjoy God's approval and to know one is on a path affirmed by God and one is secure no matter the circumstances.

The first beatitude is first for a reason. What does it mean to be poor in spirit? The poor are the "have not's." We understand poor in not having enough food, or enough money for rent, a poor child in a refugee camp... The wording for poor in spirit used here is bigger than economic poverty. The wording here is the idea of powerless, desperate, spiritually bankrupt. Jesus is saying those who know their spiritual poverty and who admit it are blessed. It's the opposite of self-sufficiency.

In this upside down kingdom, we are commended by God when we admit there is nothing in us—no family ties, no occupation, no personal holiness—that is valuable enough to commend us to God. To put it another way, we are blessed when we see ourselves as beggars coming to the door of the kingdom without anything to give to get in, pounding on the door and appealing to the King. "O Lord, let me in. O Lord, give me what is needed to enter. Lord, give me your grace and mercy." Just like the words to the famous hymn: *Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling, Foul I to the fountain fly; Wash me savior or I die.*

This kingdom thinking doesn't come easy for those influenced by world kingdoms. We are well fed, well educated and upwardly mobile. We live in a kingdom that says, "if you dream it you can do it." Spiritual poverty doesn't likely play well in the corporate world. Needy, dependent, desperate is the last thing in the world we want to be, but until we admit it, Jesus says, the Kingdom of Heaven isn't available to us.

There is no point in going on to the other 7 beatitudes or the other 55 or so traits of the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus gives us in this sermon without this starting point: "apart from God and his grace and mercy we are not part of his kingdom." But when we come into Jesus' kingdom through his grace and mercy we are given the capacity to live as followers of Christ and we can claim the promise of each blessing in the beatitudes.

Many of you are familiar with our Higher Power Recovery Ministry. One of the principles is based on this first beatitude: "To realize that I am not God; that I'm powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing, and that my life is unmanageable." This first beatitude is for those who beat their breasts and say, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" To those he says, "Yours is the kingdom of heaven."

When we see God's offer of grace from our state of spiritual poverty, then the next beatitude makes more sense to us.

**"Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted." (v. 4)**

What kind of sorrow is it that brings Christ's blessing of comfort to those who suffer in that sorrow? Yes, life brings mourning over a lost loved one, pain and suffering, sickness and death, but this is a broader idea. This beatitude is about mourning our sin. In our state of spiritual poverty we acknowledge our sin, and here we grieve over our sin and he says we will find comfort. We mourn the loss of innocence sin brings, we mourn because as kingdom citizens it becomes normal now to hate what God hates and love what God loves. God loves a repentant and contrite spirit person who hates their sin. And we receive the promise that God is the God of all comfort who binds up the brokenhearted. We are comforted because we know our sin is paid for in God's kingdom.

**"Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth." (v. 5)**

To most people today, we think of meekness not as a virtue. As a follower of Christ, I don't go up to people and introduce myself, "Hi, I'm Dan. I'm meek." When we think of meekness, we think of weakness. Weakness isn't what Jesus is commending. A better word for meek is gentle. What does a gentle person look like? They have a humble attitude toward others because they have a good understanding of themselves as being poor in spirit and they have a tenderness toward their own sin.

One wouldn't expect a meek person to inherit the earth. One sees a meek person as getting run over and not tough enough. But a meek person knows that even though others may run rough shod over them, he belongs to Christ and will reign with Christ and he may be blessed to inherit some of this earth. But he knows that one day in the future, that day of the second coming, there will be a new heaven and a new earth for them to inherit.

**"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled." (v. 6)**

Blessed when we hunger to be righteous in our own personal lives. He says, you trust me and seek righteousness and I will fill you with satisfaction. We can understand this better if we look at the contrast. We can't believe the lie that participating in unrighteous things will satisfy. Participating in unrighteousness will never lead to right relationships, or help us feel accepted, or help us to feel significant or heal our relational pain. Sin cannot fill our hearts with satisfaction.

Beyond our personal hunger and thirst for righteousness, kingdom citizens engage and build bridges to bring righteousness into our society. To paraphrase Martin Luther, "At CPC, we are not to crawl into a corner, but to run out of it if that is where you have been and offer our hands and our feet and our whole body and to wager everything we have and can do. What is required is a hunger and thirst for righteousness that can never be curbed and cares for nothing except the accomplishment and maintenance of what is right for society."

**"Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy." (v. 7)**

Jesus loves when his Kingdom citizens have compassion for those in need. A merciful person sees pain, misery and distress, which are the results of sin. And a merciful person wants to extend relief to those who are suffering.

Mercy from God is what we experience when we are saved by Jesus Christ. Like grace, it comes to people who don't deserve it, but mercy adds to grace the quality of ministering relief to others. As Christ showed us mercy we are called to show others mercy. Nothing proves more clearly that we are grateful for God's mercy than when we show others mercy.

**"Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God." (v. 8)**

Jesus gives us a great promise here. The pure—meaning the clean of heart—will see God. Literally, we will see what we are trained to see. As a radiologist is trained to see things on an x-ray, so a kingdom citizen who is pure in heart is trained to see God.

What does the pure heart look like? It's a heart that knows the difference between a sincere desire for the pure things of God and a desire to pretending in front of others that the pure

things of God matter. Jesus here and in so many other places in Matthew is contrasting religious hypocrisy and sincerity. A better way to paraphrase this beatitude for me is this: Blessed are the sincere, for they shall see God.

**"Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God." (v. 9)**

This step from a sincere heart to peacemaker makes sense. Sincerity and openness are critical to resolving conflict and bringing true reconciliation. Every Christian is called to be peacemakers in the church and in our surrounding community. In our world of division, misunderstanding, hatred, prejudice and brokenness reign. Jesus compels his children to move into the conflict and become agents of reconciliation and peace.

Children of God serve their king by bringing reconciliation between people in all settings... in families, in churches, in businesses, in government. And it's most important to be agents of reconciliation between God and man through the gospel of peace. The word "peacemaker" that Jesus uses here is the same word the Apostle Paul uses to explain that we now have peace with God because of Christ's shed blood on the cross.

**"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (v. 10)**

It seems strange that Jesus moves from peacemaking to persecution. We may try hard to be peacemakers but there are people who don't want to live in peace. If we are living for righteousness and others don't want our righteousness, one response to that is to persecute the righteous ones.

Then Jesus speaks about specific persecution to those who follow Christ.

**"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."  
(verses 11-12)**

Maybe you can see it. With every beatitude the gulf between followers of Christ and the people of the kingdoms of the world widens. So it's important to remember that we are not solo citizens of the kingdom. The beatitudes describe life for disciples together with Jesus at the center.

And the flow of this beautiful sermon continues: If we embody these beatitudes and model the Sermon on the Mount, the world takes notice and action. It will either hate us for being Christ-like or it will taste and see that God is good. He ends this section with two metaphors that were familiar to his audience: Salt and Light.

**"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no**

**longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.” (v. 13)**

Why out of all the things Jesus could use to describe us he uses salt? When Jesus speaks of salt he speaks of tasting it. If it doesn't taste salty than what value is there to the salt? Salt in large quantities may not be good for blood pressure, but salt makes things taste good. When Christians are salty the world notices a distinct flavor to our lives. But if we stop acting salty, if we lose our distinctness, we become worthless. Salt can only flavor because it's different. Salt can only preserve because it's a different chemical compound from what it's preserving.

Salt seems so ordinary and cheap and easy to get. But I read a lot about the history of salt this week. I read that until 100 years ago, salt was a valuable commodity. Salt represented wealth. Soldiers in some places were paid their wages in salt. And if any of you have ever been in a hot climate and become salt deprived, you learned fast that you cannot live without salt.

Salt is fully alive when it behaves like salt and is different. If we just blend into the world around us, we are salt not being salt, and we will be irrelevant, ignored, and the most important message we have of Christ's love will be shrugged off. The goal of the Christian life is not to be different for the sake of being different. The goal is to live life with Jesus, and let our life of following Jesus make us different.

The language Jesus uses is emphatic. You—yes you—are the salt of the earth. The second metaphor Jesus uses is light.

When I was in Israel, I remember standing in the place where scholars thought Jesus was when he taught the Sermon on the Mount. It was on the northwest side of the lake. And about seven miles away on the other side—the southeast side of the lake—was a Greek city called Hippus Sussita or Hippo. The ruins of Hippo are amazing.

We walked up a long path from the shore of Galilee up the hill, up to an elevation of 1500 feet to this city on a hill. It was a city that was bustling at the time Jesus gave his sermon on the other side of the lake. The city was known for its lights. Historians record that candles were placed all along the path leading to the city and the city was lit up in the night sky. It was a beautiful site that anyone around the lake could see. It was a marker for fishing boats to get their bearings at night. And the lighted path welcomed guests to this city. It was with that in mind that Jesus said these words:

**“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (verses 14–16)**

We his followers are the light. Followers of Jesus are to be visible. It's not what we think when we read the beatitudes. We could read these beatitudes and think, In order to live like this I had better head for the hills and find some rural place to hunker down and live, thinking, I should isolate myself so I won't get corrupted by the world. No. Unless we hear differently from God, we are called to be lamps that are to light up the room, the neighborhood, the workplace, the school.

How do we make our light shine? In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is telling us we light up the world through our good works. “A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow Him.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

My community group met this week and we were talking about the sermon from last week. Someone shared that their job takes them on a train every day to San Francisco and this person has a 20-minute walk to get to work, and that is the time every day that this person prays.

One day this person was talking to a colleague and she asked her colleague, “What do you do to overcome the stress of our job?” Her colleague said, “I do yoga and meditate.” And the person from my group said, “I pray. I pray each day when I walk to work from the train station.” Well, some time passed, and one day her colleague asked her, “Did you pray today on your way to work?” She responded, “Actually I didn't because I ended up walking with another co-worker.” And her coworker said, “I noticed. You just didn't have that glow, that shine that you usually have.”

She said that afternoon when she was getting ready to leave, she got an email from her co-worker. “Don't forget to pray tomorrow. I want to see your shine.”

And there in our group on Friday, she shared what God had taught her through that experience. She told us, “Grace is hard to hide.” Yes, grace is hard to hide and it's supposed to be hard to hide for followers of Christ.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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Catalog No. 1434–8FC