

The King and His Kingdom

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Preacher: David Parker

[0 : 00] How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young, a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God.

Blessed are those who dwell in your house, they are ever praising you, Selah. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.

As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs. The autumn rains also cover it with pools.

They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion. Hear my prayer, O Lord God Almighty, listen to me, O God of Jacob, Selah.

[1 : 10] Look upon our shield, O God, look with favour on your anointed one. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord God is a sun and shield.

The Lord bestows favour and honour. No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

And then if we can read in the New Testament from John's Gospel. And we'll read from chapter 18, verses 28 to 38.

Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness, they did not enter the palace because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

[2 : 29] So Pilate came out to them and asked, what charges are you bringing against this man? If he were not a criminal, they replied, we would not have handed him over to you.

Pilate said, take him yourselves and judge him by your own law. But we have no right to execute anyone, they objected. Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, are you the king of the Jews?

Is that your own idea, Jesus asked, or did others talk to you about me? Am I a Jew, Pilate replied. Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me.

What is it you have done? Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders.

But now my kingdom is from another place. You're a king then, said Pilate. Jesus answered, you say that I am a king.

[3 : 46] In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.

What is truth? Retorted Pilate. With this, he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, I find no basis for a charge against him.

Amen. May the Lord add his own blessing to the reading of his word. Let's unite our hearts then in prayer. Lord, we've been singing about the psalmist's desire to be in the house of God, when no doubt he was prevented from that desire being fulfilled.

And perhaps, Lord, there are many of us that would like to be back in the house of God in the form of our church in St. Vincent Street.

And we feel a making desire for that to happen. But in the meantime, we are able to hear your word and sing your praises and have some sense of togetherness, even although this is through technology.

[5 : 17] And for this, we give you thanks. And as Colin has often reminded us, the church is not a building that we come to, but a family that we belong to.

And we thank you, Lord, that that family is not broken or fractured in any way, simply because we cannot be together physically. But Lord, we are one in you, and you are our great head.

And all these living parts that are in our living head are able to still reach out to one another in the spirit and by prayer and in many other ways as well.

And so, Lord, we thank you for what we have, although we long for this kind of situation to be finished, so that we can have that physical contact and fellowship that is so precious to each one of us.

Lord, we pray that you will remember all of our congregation. We don't know, Lord, what's going on in the lives of them.

[6 : 40] But Lord, we know that you do. And we know, Lord, that you care. And we know that we sometimes forget to cast that care that we have upon you.

And so, Lord, we ask that you would give us that strength and that confidence and that faith to cast our care upon the one that truly cares for us and cares for us all the time.

And Lord, we also want to pray that you would remember this virus and this pandemic. And we ask you, Lord, that your mercy might be known in this situation.

We thank you, Lord, for all that people are seeking to do to try and contain the virus and to find a vaccination.

And Lord, by your spirit, we ask that you would, in your mercy, bless those efforts and grant that wisdom that will find an effective vaccination and stop the deaths and the arresting of our usual way of life across our world.

[8 : 17] Heavenly Father, we pray then that you would be with us as we look at your word and that your spirit might speak to each one of us and that you would pardon all our sins.

And we ask all of these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen. If you have access to a Bible, we're going to use a text from the Beatitudes in chapter 5 and in verse 10.

It was our last attitude. And I just want to read that one again with you. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

Particularly, I'm thinking of those words, because of righteousness. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now, if we're going to read the Bible thoughtfully and intelligently, as well as devotionally and spiritually, we need to be aware of a number of things, such as the historical setting of the book or the passage of Scripture that we're seeking to study.

[9 : 53] And we need to be aware or try to be aware of the author's situation and intention. And we need to be aware of the kind of literature that we are reading, the genre of the passage or the book.

And these are only a few of the things that will help us to gain an understanding of God's truth. And surely it's important to know what kind of literature we're reading.

You know, are we reading Proverbs, which are wisdom sayings? Are we reading a psalm? And there are different psalms, of course.

Are we reading a book like Revelation with a lot of symbolism in it? Are we reading historical books like Kings? What kind of literature are we reading?

So I want to share some ideas with you as we think of bringing the Beatitudes to a conclusion and also mentioning something else about them in the course of this message.

[11 : 15] And I'm going to be looking at four different areas. I want to ask the question, what is a gospel? And I secondly want to ask the question, what is the Sermon on the Mount as a whole about?

And thirdly, I want to look at the centrality of righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Beatitudes.

First, what is a gospel? You know, is a gospel a biographical writing?

Is it principally a historical writing? What kind of writing is it? And we'll be thinking of Matthew's gospel as we're asking this question.

I should say to you that the way that I've structured this message, one way that I'd like to put it for you is it's cone-shaped or conical-shaped. Actually, think of an ice cream and you think of the widest part of the cone and you're getting into your lovely ice cream.

[12 : 34] I can't give you certainty that the sermon will be as tasty as that. But that's how the shape of it is. So we're starting with the widest part and we're asking the question, what is a gospel?

And it's not an easy question and it hasn't found easy answers. But one way of answering this question is to say that the gospels are the testimony of the church's faith, that Jesus Christ, who had lived among them, was the promised and long-awaited Messiah.

Their core message concerns the life and death and resurrection and exaltation of Jesus the Messiah. But I'm just suggesting to you, you don't need to agree with this.

You don't need to agree with anything of this. You can do your own research and come to your own conclusions. And this is simply one way that I'm suggesting for you. It's not the way, it's a way.

One way of answering the question, what is a gospel? What kind of document and writing is this that I'm reading and engaging with and interacting with?

[13 : 51] It's to say that the gospels are the testimony of the church's faith, that Jesus Christ, who lived among them, was the promised and long-awaited Messiah.

But then, why were the gospels written? And these two questions run into each other. If we have some idea or feel we've got a reasonable grasp of what a gospel is, that may lead to a help and answer to the second question, why were gospels written?

Now, Luke tells us, for instance, at the very beginning of his gospel, which he was writing to a man called Phophilus.

And Luke says this, So that you may know the certainty of things you have been taught. And so, the reason that the gospel is written according to Luke is to encourage the believer's confidence of the thing that they have been taught, perhaps only.

And also, as you know, at the end of Matthew 28 and the end of the longer vision of Mark 16, we have what we've called Great Commission.

[15 : 22] And so, that's another reason that the gospel is written to remind the church that it has to be involved in mission, and that part of its raison d'etre.

Now, though each gospel is the same core message, the message adapted to a particular audience and to the theological emphasis that the author wants to bring.

So, for example, in Matthew's gospel, where we find Zerner and the Mount and the Beatitudes, the gospel is written to a predominantly Jewish Christian community, though not exclusively Jewish.

And therefore, we find Matthew right at the start of his gospel, saying out the divinity and Abrahamic lineage of Messiah Jesus, through opening genealogy, and also throughout the gospel, is continually referring to Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah.

And you also find in Matthew's gospel clear tensions and clashes between the church and the Judaism of Jesus' day.

[16 : 40] What such clash be the role and use of the law. As with most things, there is a paradox here. Jesus accused of being a lawbreaker, and indeed, he's punished and is arrested and punished on that basis.

That he's been a lawbreaker, a blasphemer. And there could be a happy, more emphatic word spoken by Jesus, guarding his relationship and attitude to the law, than we find in Matthew 5, verses 17 to 18.

Let me just read verses of Jesus to you. As I say, absolutely emphatic. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter nor the least stroke of a pin will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.

Now, of course, these words are taken, as you probably know, from the Sermon on the Mount. And this statement that Jesus made there is a key statement and should regulate our understanding of Jesus' relationship to the law in the Gospel of Matthew.

[18 : 26] One more thing before I leave this question of the Gospel and what kind of literature it is and how we need to be aware of the particular slant of the author and the audience that he is seeking to reach in his goal.

People have noticed that Matthew's Gospel is highly structured. And one example of that organizational structure, I'm just going to read to you from the verse 28 of chapter 7 in the Sermon on the Mount.

Read these words. When Jesus finished seeing these things, now, that form of words is found not only here in chapter 7, 28, but chapter 1, verse 1, chapter 13, 53, chapter 19, verse 1, and chapter 26, verse 1.

And some people have wondered if Matthew's Gospel came to be used as a church manual, church training manual, partly because of its highly organizational structure, not just the examples of them, but in many different ways which I don't align to into.

Where am I going with all this? Well, if we don't take account of Gospels' picture and of its unique portrait of Jesus, we may not get the small parts of the picture correct.

[20 : 09] In this brief survey, we've picked that the righteousness of the law is an important key for understanding this Gospel.

So I want to encourage you to read through, if you're reading in the Gospels, the whole Gospel, or a letter, the whole letter, or a book, the whole book, to get the brushstrokes.

Now, this brings me to my second point. The Sermon on the Mount, what is it about? Again, you don't need to agree with me here.

I'm putting it forward as one way of thinking of the Sermon on the Mount as a whole. And I want to suggest it's the new righteousness that Christ brings through the Kingdom of God.

And if I was trying to break up the Sermon on the Mount, which is composed of chapters 5, 6, and 7, I would take it into five points.

[21 : 22] Firstly, the Beatitudes, which present the basic, what I call the basic characteristics of righteousness that ought to be seen in those who belong to the Kingdom, who are disciples of Jesus.

The second point that I think is made is its relationship to the law of Moses and the righteous that Christ brings, its relationship to the law of Moses.

And he begins to comment on that from the verses I read with you from chapter 5, 17, and 18, and comments on that virtually right to the end of chapter 5.

And the third point is the right living or dimension, righteous living in respect to the law of life.

And that's something that he outlines in his sermon, in chapter 6, and in most of that chapter.

[22 : 40] And then there is what I call the relational aspect of this righteousness, which is one of the most important dimensions of this righteousness.

And you see, for instance, where when he's talking about its relationship to law, he says, He heard that it was said to the people, long of you shall not murder.

But then he says, I tell you. And this is a phrase that he used repeatedly. I tell you. I say.

And if we look back at chapter 5, you'll notice that in verse 6, blessed are those who were in first righteousness.

And then in verse 10, blessed are those persecuted because of righteousness. and immediately in verse 11, he says, because me.

[23 : 47] So he's making a very close connection and link between righteousness that he's asking for and himself.

and that I want to call the relational aspect of it. So I'm asking, what is the Sermon Mount as a whole about?

It's about the new righteousness that Christ brings. It's about the kingdom righteousness that he talks about in the Sermon on the Mount.

And one last thing, there's a concluding part to the Sermon. And that concluding part is found in chapter 7.

In chapter 7, Christ talks about at verse 13 entering through Narrow Gate, talks about washing out for false prophets, and he talks about, say, not everyone who says be Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

[24 : 53] Note the phrase, enter the kingdom of heaven. In other words, the entire Sermon on the Mount again is bracketed by the idea of the kingdom of heaven.

And this washing is chilling. I remember the time I ever read as a Christian and I remember thinking, how scary and chilling this.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But only those who do the will of my father.

Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles.

Notice the recognition in your name and notice the impressive form of Christianity, religion that seem to be here, acknowledging Jesus Lord, prophecy or preaching, exercising demons, performing miracles, the chilling part of this morning.

[26 : 04] Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. That is to say, you never had a relationship with me at any point.

So, there is the, what I see the certain amount as a whole about to be. This new righteousness that Christ brings and this new righteousness connected to the kingdom of God.

The next question I want to look at is the Beatitudes then. You know if I'm going from the broad into the narrower, from what is the gospel, what is the Sermon on the Mount, and now what are the Beatitudes as a whole.

You remember I said when I began this series that people have understood them broadly in three ways. One as declarations, declarations who it is in this world that is supremely and truly best.

Duty, the idea that these Beatitudes point to our duty and ethical duty and moral duty, and lovely description, descriptions of the character and the marks of true disciples of Jesus.

[27 : 29] What else can you say about them as a whole? Remember I always said they're a simple portrait. Think of a photographer taking various different angles, different perspectives of the one subject.

That's what these eight Beatitudes are. They're not individual Beatitudes addressed to different groups of people. They're eight shots, as it were, like a photographer from different angles and different perspectives for one subject, which is a disciple of the kingdom.

They're also a blend of inner attributes and outer actions. I wonder if you've noticed that. So, pure in spirit is something that is an inner disposition.

Pure in heart is something that is an inner disposition. but there are other attitudes that go to actions. So, the Beatitudes are showing that there needs to be continuity, the consistency between our inner decision and outer actions.

The other thing I would say is they're universal matters of genuine kingdom disciples. I'll say that again, they're universal matters. I'll take my root, using that word.

[28 : 57] You don't read anywhere in the Beatitudes, bless those that are Israelite for theirs are the kingdom of God. Of course, these universal markers include Israelites, but it's not because anybody is Israelite, or because of their ethnicity, or because they have circumcision, or because they have baptism, because they're born in a Christian society, or anything like that.

These are universal markers of genuine kingdom disciples, and they're also Christological, because Jesus is their author, Jesus is the perfecter, and Jesus is the supreme subject of their portrait.

Although I've been saying that the attitudes are a portrait of kingdom disciples, God, but they're even more a portrait of Jesus Christ himself.

He is their perfecter, he is the one that has supreme embodied in every second of his life. And let's remember that the attitudes are to be learned, not simply admired, or expounded, or understood.

Where no race of the Beatitudes is found for Christianity, it is doubtful that we belong to the kingdom. Orthodoxy, baptism, adherence to the correct career, are not sufficient.

[30 : 34] The Bible is nothing of a fruitless Christianity. Think here of the foundational parable, the sower and the seed.

When the seed drops into ground, Jesus said, they expound that parable. When someone accepts the truth, they bear fruit.

Maybe not the same amount of fruit, twenty-fold, forty-fold, sixty-fold, or whatever, but they bear fruit. And so the Bible knows nothing of a fruitless Christianity.

You see, the moment a person comes a follower of Jesus, they're united to Christ. They are immediately in union with him and immediately become part of a spiritual vine.

Biblical Christianity, you see, is dynamical, spiritual, and its inner life evidences itself in other characteristics, which mean that the Beatitudes themselves presuppose spiritual life.

[31 : 49] Can I ask, are some of those attitudes then characteristic of our Christianity, of our walk, of our relationship with God?

God, finally, centrality of righteousness in the sermon and in Beatitudes.

Let me remind you of some of the ways that righteousness is used in the Old Testament. It's used relationally, it's used in terms of righteous living.

Indeed, many of the Psalms say, Lord, look upon me because of my righteous living. It's used in terms of right standing and it's used redemptively.

so the question really is how is Jesus using the term in the Sermon on the Mount? Now, I will suggest the main aspect of righteousness that Jesus is dealing with here, though not exclusively, in the Sermon on the Mount is the righteous living of kingdom disciples.

[33 : 11] Now, before we look more closely at his use, the Sermon on the Mount, I want you to note chapter 3 of Matthew verse 15.

Let me read it for you. John can't believe that Jesus come for baptism. And John is saying, understandably, I need to be baptized by you and you come to me.

What's going on here? him. And Jesus said this, let it be so now, it is proper, fitting, or correct for us to do this, to fulfill all righteous.

I want you to focus on the word all. Right at the beginning of his induction to ministry.

Jesus declares that what he is about is to fulfill all righteousness, the length and breadth and depth and height of righteousness.

[34 : 22] Not only justification by faith, yes, that's included, but not only. So I want you to remember that Jesus said that what he's about, he wants to fulfill the whole of righteousness.

Paul once said that I have shunned to clear unto you the whole counsel of God. Preachers must take to heart, must not pluck one string or one cord, of the whole of righteousness.

In chapter five, the word righteousness is used three times. It's used in the attitude blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness.

It's a massive concept. and it's used in verse 10, blessed are they that are persecuted because of righteousness.

This righteousness can be stated as the very cause of persecution. and then in verse 20, Jesus says, for I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, we will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

[35 : 58] the righteousness that Christ announcing connected to the kingdom is not less than righteousness these Pharisees and scribes sought to live by, but more.

Now, I also want to notice that when Jesus said, blessed are they that are persecuted because of righteousness, he added in the next verse because of me.

And that shows you the close connection and link between this righteousness and Jesus Christ himself. Because it is righteousness and it's his Christ likeness at the end of the day.

If we look at chapter 6, notice what Jesus says in the first verse of chapter 6, be careful not to do acts of righteousness, say that again, acts of righteousness in front of others.

And he then summarises the three basic areas in this right to living that was common Judaism, fasting, prayer, and and alms giving or charity.

[37 : 26] And he's just telling them the right way to do that and the wrong way. in verse 33 of chapter 6, verse 33, we read this, seek first kingdom and his righteousness, his righteousness.

This is God's righteousness. This is Christ's righteousness. This is the righteousness that of God is expressed in the ten commandments.

So, this righteousness is linked very closely to God's righteousness, to God's kingdom, and to Christ himself. Jesus came, as I said, to fulfill all righteousness.

it's closely connected to himself and to his kingdom. God has never and will never rescind the ten commandments because they are an expression of his righteousness.

the problem, as Paul reminds us, isn't the law per se. We're the problem.

[38 : 53] That's what Paul is having in Romans when we think we can be justified through keeping law in some kind of mechanical and ritualistic way.

We need to be careful here. Not only is Jesus not about dismantling or destroying the law but rather upholding it.

Neither is all. Listen to what Paul says. The law is holy and the command holy righteous and good. Again, we know that the law is spiritual and again, do we then nullify the law by faith?

Not at all. Rather, we uphold the law. So the law is still alive and kicking and is the form, if you think, of our lived righteousness in the spirit from our living relationship with Christ.

[40 : 06] Are we those that seek to fulfill in our lives, in our thinking, and in our living, in our inner self and our outer actions, all righteous, just as Christ came to fulfill all righteousness.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to each one of us for his glory and for our eternal good.