

Character In The Kingdom

Matthew 5:7-9

Introduction

The Lord Jesus has begun His sermon describing Kingdom attributes (vv.1-12). The attributes serve as an introduction to future Kingdom actions (vv.13-16). Citizens in God's Kingdom will serve as salt in the earth (v.13); light in the world (vv.14-16) and that light will be visible to all.

Jesus has already said; "Blessed are the poor in spirit"; those who recognize their utter dependence upon God; the men and women who recognize their spiritually impoverished condition; those who have admitted their need to depend on God in every area of life (v.3). Jesus continued with the shocking declaration of the need for citizens to mourn over their sin and the sins of others (v.4). Jesus tells us; "Blessed are the meek"—those who in transparency and humility are willing to live under the authority of God's righteous rule (v.5). "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (v.6); not self righteousness—but the kind of righteousness that has God as both source and a kind of rightness that only God can impart. What happens when a person recognizes their dependence upon God (v.3); grieve over sin (v.4); are willing to live under God's authority (v.5); accept the fact that only God can give rightness (righteousness—rightness with Him, with each other)? The Citizen in Christ's Kingdom can exercise mercy (v.7); cultivate personal purity (v.8) work for peace (v.9).

What happens when a person recognizes their absolute and fundamental need for God? The Kingdom is given (v.3). What happens when a person recognizes their utter lack of spiritual resources in and of themselves; they are given comfort (v.4). What is the reward for the citizen who lives a life of transparency, and humility? Possession of the promises of God (inherit the earth; v.5). What happens to the person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness? They receive satisfaction; righteousness in full (v.6). What about the person who practices mercy? They are shown mercy. What about those who practice personal purity? They will see God. What about the person who works for peace? They will be called the children of God (v.9) Wiersbe writes; "We experience God's mercy when we trust Christ (Eph.2:4-7), and He gives us a clean heart (Acts 15:9) and peace within (Rom.5:1). But having received His mercy, we then *share* His mercy with others. We seek to keep our hearts pure that we might see God in our lives today. We become peacemakers in a troubled world (instead of trouble makers) and channels for God's mercy, purity and peace" (p.21).

Think about the process Jesus describes just for a moment. God is in the process of emptying our lives of pride and pretense in order to fill our lives with kindness and compassion.

Mercy In The Kingdom (v.7)

Matthew 5:7 (NKJV) 7Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

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This is not Hindu Karma or Christian Legalism or exclusively the law of sowing and reaping. The Bible does teach if we show mercy and sow mercy we obtain mercy. Why? Because Christ has been merciful to us. Mercy is a quality of God.

We cannot earn mercy but God prepares the hearts of citizens to receive mercy. What does it mean to be merciful? We get undeserved relief from God in the form of care, kindness, compassion! Care, kindness and compassion are the recipe for mercy.

In Genesis 20:6; “Yes, I know that you are innocent,” God replied. “That is why I kept you from sinning against me; I did not let you touch her”.

Abimelech had unknowingly taken Abraham’s wife Sarah into his palace. He did not know she was married. He did not know he was in danger of committing adultery. Somehow God prevented the King from touching Sarah. What mercy! We do not always see how God acts in mercy in our lives. We experience God’s mercy in times of disobedience. God’s mercy is not based on our worthiness. The proud cannot experience God’s mercy. Self-righteousness is very dangerous. Pride causes us to despise others. What happens when the Christian experiences the love of God in Christ? Mercy grips our souls. We want to extend that mercy to others.

Does it surprise you that God is merciful? In Jesus’ day there were those who believed that God was not merciful! When the woman was caught in adultery in John 8 a group of men came to Jesus; trying to trap Jesus. They were not interested in this woman. They asked Jesus (v.5); “Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” We all know the story. He bent down to the ground and began writing in the dust. They kept pestering Jesus and Jesus said, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (v.7). The accusers left. But before the chapter ends the religious leaders will attempt to stone Jesus (v.59).

Proud and arrogant people view mercy as weakness. People listening to Jesus might have thought that mercy was the least of all the virtues.

Once when Frederick II; an 18th century king of Prussia, went on an inspection tour of a Berlin prison, he was greeted with the cries of the prisoners, who fell on their knees and protested their unjust imprisonment. While listening to these pleas of innocence; Frederick’s eye was drawn to a solitary figure in the corner, a prisoner seemingly unconcerned by all the commotion. “Why are you here?” Frederick asked him. “Armed robbery, Your Majesty.” “Were you guilty?” the king asked. “Oh yes, indeed, Your Majesty. I entirely deserve my punishment.” At that Frederick summoned the jailer. “Release this guilty man at once.” He said. “I will not have him kept in this prison where he will corrupt all the fine innocent people who occupy it” (see Lloyd H. Steffen; *The Christian Century*; 4-29-87).

Jon Courson wrote that the more mercy and grace that has been heaped on you, the more you are willing to extend it to others. Not judgment, or criticism or analysis. “I believe the more

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righteous a man is, the more merciful he will be; the more sinful a man is, the more harsh and critical he will be” (see Courson’s Commentary p. 90).

What do you believe about God? Do you believe He is merciful? Do you believe He desires to pardon your sins? Do you believe He is willing to forgive you? The whole New Testament is devoted to the fact that King Jesus came to die for your sins!

What does it mean to be merciful? It means meeting people’s needs. It means providing undeserved relief. Does the Lord expect mercy from His people? “He has shown you O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

You mean I have to be nice to people? What if they are not nice to me? “The fifth beatitude does not teach that mercy to men brings mercy from men, but that mercy to men brings mercy from God. If we are merciful to others, God will be merciful to us, whether men are or not” (John MacArthur p. 189).

What happened when Jesus showed mercy? He showed just how merciless the religious system and political system was towards the people. Jesus was the most merciful person who ever lived. Jesus reached out to the poor, to the desperate, to the sick, to the dying, Jesus reached out to some beyond the grave, bringing them back to life. Jesus reached out to tax collectors and prostitutes; Jesus reached out to the proud and the humble; the sincere and insincere (Judas). The more Jesus committed to exercising mercy; the more the religious leaders committed to His execution. When the religious leaders saw Jesus eating and drinking with sinners and tax-gatherers; they asked His disciples why their Master hung out with such unworthy people (Mark 2:16).

Who do you find difficult to show mercy? Democrats? Republicans? Relatives? Your church family?

Purity In The Kingdom (v.8)

8Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

To the pure all things are pure. This purity is not simply sinlessness—for we cannot say we have no sin (1 John 1:8). This has more to do with the presence of truth in our hearts. The pure in heart have a single heart instead of a divided heart. The pure in heart are not divided between the truth and the lies of this world; or torn between God and the promises of this broken world.

What does it mean to be pure in heart? Singular on the inside. The word pure means without mixture or alloy. In that sense—uncomplicated—no mixed motives.

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The word heart (cardia) was used to describe the inward person. This is the place of our thoughts, attitudes, motives, emotions, feelings and will. In Proverbs we are told “as a man thinks in his heart so is he” (23:7). Jesus spoke to a group of Scribes and asked the question; “Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?” (Matt.9:4). Out of the heart flow the issues of life; Jesus said (Matt. 15:19); “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things that defile the man.”

We are given a new heart, a clean heart and pure heart in Christ. If you are born again, born from on High, born of the Spirit; you are brand new.

Do you know the difference between clean and pure?

But a pure heart is one not distracted by this trinket, or that trip, this hobby or that idea. Think of it this way: “All soap is clean. Dial, Coast, Palmolive are all clean. But only one soap is 99.99% pure soap—Ivory soap. Ivory soap doesn’t have deodorants, perfumes, additives or colorings. Ivory is just soap, nothing but soap. Other soaps are clean but not pure. Pure hearts seek only one thing: the will of God. When we examine our hearts we sometimes find something impure. Someone has written that in ministry there are three temptations; (1) The temptation to Shine; (2) The temptation to Recline; (3) and the temptation to Whine.

The pure in heart see God. Why? Because they can’t see anything else. The impure in heart do not see God. You may be in a place in your life—where you are not able to see God. Could it be that you are no longer pure in heart? You might be thinking, “What are you saying Pastor? Are you accusing me of something? Are you saying there is something missing or wrong or not quite right?” You tell me. Has your vision of God been filtered, obscured, polluted, by a bunch of additives, chemicals, preservatives, perfumes—are you still clean—but no longer pure? God cares about what is going on in your heart. God reveals Himself on His terms; not yours. We develop disciplines of devotion, purity, worship. “It is God’s will that you should be holy” (1 Thess. 4:3).

Jesus rejected the hypocritical appearances of purity and holiness from the religious leaders when all the while they were filled with impurity and corruption.

The Lord promises; “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God. And such we are. And does not yet appear what we shall be—but we know this that when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (I John 3:1-3). The pure in heart will see God. This purity is not found in personal effort—but absence of sin—only Christ can cleanse us. Purity of heart is not something we work for—but something we desire—and God grants!

Our culture values—purity—clean air, clean food—but why do they despise a clean heart? Who wants to eat in a smoke filled restaurant? Why are we so open to a polluted heart? What would

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happen if you prayed a prayer like David; “Create in me a clean (pure) heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10).

Peacemaking In The Kingdom (v.9)

9Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

Who are the peacemakers? These are the people who are working hard to reconcile warring factions. In Titus 3:2 we are “to speak evil of no one to be peaceable” and in verse 3 “for we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another”.

The verse describes a world at war! Humanity for the most part is at war with God! And at war with each other! In order to have peace we must experience it in our hearts by the gospel and then share that gospel with others to bring peace. We want to reconcile people to God and to one another!

We possess the gospel of peace.

The absence of peace is one of the most obvious facts of our existence. There is no peace for two reasons; the opposition of Satan and the disobedience of man. Someone has said that peace is that glorious moment when everyone stops to reload! One source reported that there have been 14,553 known wars from 36 B.C. until 1968. Since 1958 over 100 nations have been involved in some form of armed conflict.

“This is not peace at any price, for holiness is more important than a peace based on sin (see James 3:17; Heb.12:14). Compromise is not peace, but Christians should not be contentious as they contend for the faith” (Wiersbe; *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*; p.29).

God is the God of peace. The Bible contains 400 references to peace. The Cross of Jesus makes peace with God possible.

The peace that Jesus speaks of has nothing to do with the peace of nations or governments, kings or diplomats. It is the inner peace of the soul that only He can give and that only the true children of God can represent. This peace is more than just the absence of conflict or antagonism, it is the presence of genuine righteousness and relationship (they shall be called the children of God!). Only righteousness can produce the kind of relationship that puts warring parties together. “Men can stop fighting without righteousness, but they cannot live peaceably without righteousness. Righteousness not only puts an end to harm, but it administers the healing of love” (MacArthur p. 211).

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The great enemy of peace is sin. Believers cannot afford the luxury of pretending that truth does not exist. It does. God is a God of peace because He is righteous. Because He is righteous he does not avoid the truth; God must confront lies. Jesus never ducked from wrong behavior or avoided the issues of sin. Later in Matthew's Gospel we will see Jesus deal with some pretty heavy arguments. Jesus will not avoid the issue of the woman at the well who is living with her boyfriend (John 4) or the woman taken in adultery (John 8). He corrected her with her immoral living and corrected her false ideas about worship and then told her the truth about himself.

We are left with some profound paradoxes; the first are last. The least are greatest, the trouble-maker can be a peace-maker. "To come to terms on anything less than God's truth and righteousness is to settle for a truce—which confirms sinners in their sin and may leave them even further from the kingdom" (MacArthur p. 213).

Think about what Jesus does—he unites the concept of peace making and sonship! The central characteristic of God's Kingdom is peace. The wolf lives with the lamb; the leopard with the goat, the calf and the lion, and the yearling together, and little child leads them (Isa. 11:6).

Has Jesus given you peace?

Conclusion

Do you want to be merciful? Do you want God to create in you a clean heart? Do you want to be a peacemaker instead of a peace-faker or peace-breaker or trouble-maker?

Then listen to Paul's exhortation from the book of Romans (12:18); "If it is possible, as far as depends on you, live at peace with everyone". In order to do that you must make peace with God. Peacemakers lead others to make peace with God. Christians are not an elite corp of special forces warriors who have it all together—we are sinners who have been shown mercy—cleansed by Jesus invited to carry and commission others to hear—understand—and receive Christ.

The Lord is merciful.

The Lord is holy.

The Lord is righteous.

In his book *Peace Child* (Glendale Ca: Regal, 1979); Don Richardson tells of his long struggle to bring the gospel to the cannibalistic, headhunting Sawi tribe of Irian Jaya, Indonesia. Try as he would, he could not find a way to make the people understand the gospel message, especially the significance of Christ's atoning death on the cross. Sawi villages were constantly fighting among themselves, and because treachery, revenge, and murder were highly honored there seemed no hope for peace. The tribe, however, had a legendary custom that if one village gave a baby boy to another village, peace would prevail between the two villages as long as the child lived. The baby came to be known as "the peace Child". The missionary seized on the story as

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an analogy of the reconciling work of Christ. Christ, he said, is God's divine Peace Child that He has offered to man, and because Christ lives eternally His peace will never end. The analogy was the key that unlocked the gospel for the Sawis. In a miraculous working of the Holy Spirit many of them believed in Christ, and a strong evangelistic church soon developed—and peace came to the Sawis.