



“Embracing Emptiness” - October 6, 2019

OPEN

In Matthew 4:17 Jesus announced that “the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (see also Mark 1:15). The “now” aspect of the Kingdom will be key to our series. This is not to set aside the “not yet” aspect. But too often, we only see God’s Kingdom as a future reality – when it has vital present implications.

Dallas Willard wrote, “The Kingdom Among Us is simply God himself and the spiritual realm of beings over which his will perfectly presides – ‘as it is in the heavens.’” (*The Divine Conspiracy*, Harper One, 1997, 90)

DIG

The message of the Kingdom is change and transformation. Kingdomized people are becoming the people of God as He has called us to be. To explore becoming “kingdomized” we will study eight Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12.

[A] Opening Old Wells - Matthew 5:1-2

A Galilean hillside was the setting for the greatest sermon ever preached. There Jesus delivered the “Sermon on the Mount” found in Matthew 5, 6, 7. This sermon captures our hearts, particularly the eight blessings or “Beatitudes”. We are going to discover places in our lives that need to be re-conditioned and shaped by God’s truth so that we will find greater purpose and meaning as members of God’s Kingdom.

When he taught the Beatitudes at Regent College, Eugene Peterson referred to Genesis 26:18 - “Isaac reopened the wells his father had dug, which the Philistines had filled in after Abraham’s death.” Consider this. When Jesus gave the Beatitudes He was reopening wells, as it were. The Beatitudes are timeless truth. Just like wells that had been filled with trash, fresh water was still present. You see, for us to apprehend the truth of the Beatitudes, there is human and cultural garbage that has to be removed. What is standing in *our* way of grasping the Beatitudes?

[B] Royal Family Code - Luke 6:31-32

If we lived in the time of the Hapsburgs we might better appreciate the fact that the Kingdom changes everything. God’s rule and reign is not a merely hypothetical or even historical. In Luke 6 Jesus presented the Beatitudes with

“blessing/woe” (a continued challenge to Pharisees). This echoes Old Testament “blessing/cursing” as at Mt Ebal and Gerizim – Deuteronomy 27-28. God’s covenant or kingdomized people are distinct. Theologian J. I. Packer referred to the Beatitudes as the “Royal Family Code.” A great title! Consider five observations about the Beatitudes (Darrell Johnson, Regent audio).

1. *The packaging*

The Beatitudes are a precious gem, set in the glorious setting of the Gospel. The setting? The time is fulfilled for the Kingdom of God has come near (Mark 1:15). The Beatitudes are a picture of those who are being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit – a portrait of Kingdom people. The goal is to see a new “Gospelized Humanity”. The whole of the beatitudes are bracketed by the phrase “of them is the kingdom of the heavens”.

2. *The participant*

Note that verses 3b and 10b are bookends – emphasizing that the sense of the Beatitudes is “theirs and only theirs”. This is a radical nature of what Jesus was preaching. Are you a participant in the Kingdom? Are you entering into the Beatitudes. To not yet be walking in the wisdom of the Beatitudes is to not yet have received the Kingdom fully.

3. *The provision*

The Beatitudes are not eight different personality types but eight qualities of kingdomized people. What the Beatitudes *provide* is a full lifestyle change. Each of the Beatitudes can be interpreted by the others - full integration.

4. *The proclamation*

What does “blessed” mean? It is not how we feel about our circumstances, but it is about how *God* feels about us! “Happy” or “lucky” doesn’t do it justice. “Fortunate” or “congratulations” gets closer. Theologian Carl Barth suggested “you lucky bums”! Better might be “right side up” because Jesus fixed the “upside down” by power of the Gospel. “Blessed” means that our lives are in alignment or synced with the Kingdom of God.

5. *The paradox*

The qualities Jesus blesses are not natural human qualities. Jesus didn’t look for pre-Kingdomized people. Rather He called people to Himself, to repent, and then to be transformed into the Beatitude qualities.

[C] Blessing Number One - Matthew 5:3

The first blessing is, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for [of them] is the kingdom of [the heavens].” What is the first thing that is true of a kingdomized individual? Such people are free from pride and performance.

Poverty of spirit is present in the person who embraces their emptiness – recognizing their deep need for God’s filling.

Have you come to terms with the fact that you are spiritually impoverished?

- The Publican did while the Pharisee did not – see Luke 18:9-14
- One thief on the cross did but the other did not – see Luke 23:39-43

Before we can fully apprehend this truth, we must sort through some of the things that have “stopped up the well”. Consider three core issues addressed by the first Beatitude.

- ***Self worth?***

The world offers false sources of worth but only in God do we find our true worth – Isaiah 43:1-7.

- ***Innate goodness?***

Poverty of spirit is not “self-loathing” but honesty about our sinful nature – Romans 5:9-23.

- ***Human potential?***

Self-reliance is simply insufficient for transformation. We need God’s power – see John 15:4-5.

Was *Gideon* poor in spirit? His story begins in Judges 6 where God called Gideon to defeat the Israel-oppressing Midianites. Gideon was...

- fearful – he was harvesting in secret
- cynical – why did you rescue us from Egypt to let us suffer
- timid – I’m from the least clan and the last in my family
- doubtful – used the wool fleece twice

So God powerfully revealed Himself – fire consumed meat, bread, broth on the rock (vv. 19-21). The response? Gideon saw God “face to face” and met God “Jehovah Shalom” (vv. 22-24). God used Gideon powerfully in achieving victory over Midian. Gideon’s heart of fear, cynicism, timidity, and doubt was transformed into poverty of spirit.

REFLECT

What is the take away for you today? Perhaps one of these three conclusions will be important for you.

1. Living in the moment

Let us not view the Kingdom of God as distant – either in time past or time future! Of course, there are components of the Kingdom of God to come. But Jesus said the Kingdom is at hand. When Paul preached to the Athenians, he said that “God is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). Eugene Peterson said, “most of us do not deny God, we just dilute Him.” Are you “diluting” the power of God by not living, in this moment, in the Kingdom of God?

2. Living from the interior

The Beatitudes are not a “to do” list - not just external ethics.. “Separate the beatitudes from the context in which Jesus first preached them and these beatitudes go haywire,” states Darrell Johnson. “They become either frustrating idealism or oppressive legalism.” Are you living from the interior, letting the Holy Spirit kingdomize you?

3. Living with the reality

Author Frederick Dale Bruner refers to the Beatitudes as Jesus’ “state of the universe address” (***Commentary - Matthew 1-12***, Vol 1, xx). He was not giving a list of commands but the condition of Kingdomized people. What is more there is a lot of reality in the Beatitudes. They are true even against the backdrop of a broken and sinful world.