

Sermon

- Each of the four Gospels fulfills a unique purpose. They are not simply four versions of the life of Jesus.
- Matthew has a twofold purpose in writing his Gospel. Firstly, to prove Jesus is the Messiah, secondly, to explain the Kingdom of God to his readers.
- Matthew wanted his readers to do what John the Baptist and Jesus called the people of their day to do, namely: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
- This is not the only message of Christianity, but it is the message that Matthew wanted all of his readers to understand.
- John the Baptist and Jesus called the people to trust in and follow Jesus as the Messiah, because the kingdom of God was immediately at hand, it was about to become a reality for all people.
- If the Jews had responded positively to Jesus, He would have established His kingdom immediately. He would have died on the cross, risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, returned to the earth, and established His kingdom.
- But because they rejected Him, the coming kingdom is still in waiting, we have a taste of it, but it's not fully established yet.

As though someone is building a new house, the ground and flattened, the foundation is laid, the plumbing and electricity are installed, but it doesn't progress any further. It's not finished yet.

- Matthew is writing to communicate to his readers that Jesus is the Messiah, he has come to lay the foundation and establish the kingdom and He will come again to completely manifest it when the world is ready to receive Him.
- The commission that Jesus has given us as His disciples is essentially to prepare people for the King's return. To do this we must go into all the world and herald the gospel to everyone. We must call them to trust in and follow Jesus the Messiah who is King.
- Essentially the message of Matthew is: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand, it's about to come upon us.' The proper response to this message is: "Repent."
- Matthew's understanding of repentance is found in two Greek words, one describes a contemplative or mental change, the other involves an active/behavioural change.
- One refers to a change of mind, the other refers to a change of behaviour.
- According to Matthew, the word that Jesus used, when He called people to repentance, was metanoeo. Which could be translated as, "Think again."
- Jesus was calling His hearers to reconsider their understanding of the Kingdom of God, and their understanding of the Messiah, because the Kingdom of God and it's king is here!
- Jesus called for a change of mind and understanding of the kingdom; John the Baptist called for a change of behaviour that arose from a change of mind.

- The Christian church now has the task of calling the world to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Our message is, 'Change your understanding about the kingdom and change your behaviour to come into alignment with the kingdom, that way you will be a part of it when it manifests on earth.'
- Therefore, we must interpret Matthew's Gospel through this lens of changing our mind and our behaviour to come into alignment with the Kingdom of God.
- Our passage today is a clear message that communicates the principles, the practices, and the purpose of the kingdom, which could be summarized in 3 words: Righteousness, justice and peace.
- Righteousness refers to right conduct or behaviour, rather than positional righteousness, which the Apostle Paul writes about.
- Justice refers to restoring the powerless and the outcasts into their rightful place in community.
- Peace refers to peace/harmony/reconciliation with God and with others.
- The beatitudes help us to understand that righteousness, justice and peace are the principles and practices and purpose of the kingdom of God.
- Jesus didn't just teach about this, He spent His entire ministry living the principles, practices and purpose of the Kingdom.
- So, when Jesus says:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

- He is saying, those of you who embody harmony, reconciliation and peace with God are others are living my kingdom principles, practices and purpose.

¹⁰ *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

- If you are persecuted for doing what is right, you are living in your inheritance.
- Jesus is firstly, unveiling something of His own path, and secondly, indicating the path we are called to follow.
- And thus, identifying the disciple of Jesus as one who embodies these qualities, and to be quite blunt, He’s saying that there is no place for us to profess allegiance to Jesus unless we embody right, just and peace filled ways.
- This brings us to the first parable recorded in Matthew, the teaching around salt and light:

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.” (Matthew 5:13)

- The most obvious *general* characteristic of salt is that it is essentially different from the medium into which it is put. Its power lies precisely in this difference. So it is, says Jesus, with His disciples. Their power in the world lies in their being different from the world.
- Salt was important in the ancient Near East because it represented purity, flavoured food, delayed decay in food, and, in small doses,

fertilized land. Jesus implied by this metaphor that His disciples can positively affect the world.

- The Christian functions as salt by exercising his or her personal influence, in contrast to political influence.
- The apostles and early Christians, never sought to affect change by political means, by advocating for legislative changes or by bringing pressure on government leaders.
- They sought to produce change by changing the hearts of people by telling them about the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus' main point, however, seems to be that if His disciples do not fulfill their essential function, they are good for nothing.
- As disciples of Jesus exercise their influence as salt, they will have opportunity to exercise their influence as light. The 2nd parable goes on to say:

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16)

- "Light" is a common symbol in the Bible. It represents purity, truth, knowledge (enlightenment), divine revelation, and God's presence.
- As light-bearers, we re-present Christ – the light of the world to unbelievers, and bring the light of the gospel to them.

- Salt operates *internally*, within the mass with which it comes in contact; whereas, light operates *externally*, informing all that it reaches.
- Salt is about transformation, light is about information – we are called to facilitate both.
- Transforming people to become disciples of Christ, and informing them of kingdom ways.
- Jesus is saying that, even though the light may provoke persecution (vv. 10-12), we must let the indwelling God, who is Light, shine through us.
- This passage invites us into participation.
- It is more than knowledge about the kingdom of God, it is participation in the kingdom principles, practices and purpose of righteousness, justice and peace.
- James says:

“But some of you will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe and shudder. ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith without works is barren?”
(James 2:18-20)

- Believing that Jesus is King and the kingdom of God is righteousness, justice and peace is great, but if we’re not intentionally helping to transform and inform the world of this through our words and our actions then our faith/belief is empty.
1. Through this text Jesus is inviting us to firstly, repent, or have a fresh understanding of the principles, practices and purpose of His kingdom.

2. Secondly, embody the principles, practices and purpose of the kingdom of God which is righteousness, justice and peace.
3. Thirdly, be salt and light by living the principles, practices and purpose of:
 - ✓ Right conduct.
 - ✓ Restoring the powerless and the outcasts to their rightful place in community.
 - ✓ Being ambassadors of peace/harmony/reconciliation with God and with others.
- This passage and theme was chosen 6 weeks ago, and so my sermon is not necessarily in response to the current riots or protests, it is simply God's heart for us in a timely season.
- However, in light of the current awareness and tension around racism, this is the perfect time for the church to consider this text.
- Let me ask you: when and how have you experienced God's kingdom righteousness, justice and peace?
- When have you been on the receiving end of someone else's right and helpful conduct that blessed you, empowered you, enabled you to experience joy and peace?
- When and how have you been restored to community through someone else's kind words or actions?
- When/how have others helped you to be reconciled with God?
- This is God's way of bringing you into His kingdom.
- How are you currently, living the principles, practices and purposes of the Kingdom through: right conduct towards outcast and marginalized people?

- In what ways are you seeking to restore the powerless or outcast people into their rightful place in community?
- How and when have you sort to be an ambassador of peace/harmony/reconciliation with God and with others?
- These are important questions for us to consider, not just today, but ongoing consideration.
- What is God inviting you to through this text? And what do you want God to do for/with you?

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