

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

(Matthew 5-7)

By Randy Wages

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

Turn if you would to Matthew 5 as that will be the starting point for my message this morning. I have decided to begin a verse by verse study of the passage commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. I am not sure how far I will continue on this track in future messages, but I plan to at least cover some of the initial verses found in chapter 5. However, before we begin a verse by verse study, I wanted to take our time this morning to introduce the study by bringing an overview of the entire sermon found in chapters 5-7. So, I've cleverly titled this morning's message, "Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount." I do think an introductory overview will serve us well and provide a proper framework by capturing the central theme of this sermon which Christ delivered to the multitude following him, as he went up into a mountain and preached the words recorded in these 3 chapters. If you recall, a few weeks back, we heard a message, pointing out to us a few key verses from Christ's sermon that help to establish the context. And in a few moments, we will refresh our memories by looking at some of those again.

But initially I'd like for you to consider that the great theme of the Sermon on the Mount is the Gospel of the kingdom and the nature of the kingdom of heaven itself. If you look back at the closing verses of Matthew chapter 4, you will see this is what Jesus preached. In vs. 23 it reads: ***And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom,*** And it goes on to say that great multitudes followed him (and in vs. 25) from ***.. Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.*** And as chapter 5 begins, we see it is to some of this multitude, if not all, that Jesus continues to preach to. And what was he preaching? "The gospel of the kingdom" in this sermon known as the Sermon on the Mount.

If we survey this passage from the lead-in to the this sermon at the end of chapter 4, all the way through to its conclusion at the end of chapter 7, you will discover that the word "kingdom" itself is used no less than 10 times. Now the kingdom of heaven is the same as the kingdom of God. This doesn't speak of a kingdom with geographical borders, but rather a dominion or reign.

Although the kingdom of God can refer to God's sovereign rule, we know that He sovereignly rules over all things and all people "doesn't He?" So we see that simply describing the kingdom as His sovereign rule doesn't completely capture the sense of the

kingdom set forth in the Sermon on the Mount. You see, kingdom described by Christ in this passage is one into which everyone does not enter. In fact, we will observe in a moment that it is one that most do not enter. This is a spiritual kingdom inhabited by spiritual children, not physical. Just as physical, natural born Israel is distinguished in the scripture from the spiritual children of promise ó spiritual Israel, so is it with this kingdom. It is a spiritual kingdom inhabited by spiritually born again children. In Romans 14:17 we see a description of the kingdom of God that corresponds to that which is preached here by Christ in Matthew. Romans 14:17 reads: ***“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; (see it’s not physical) but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”*** (Repeat)

Here in the Sermon on the Mount, the kingdom of heaven does indeed speak of God’s sovereign rule ó but it does so in the specific sense in which His sovereign rule bears directly on His redemptive glory that is seen in the salvation of sinners (the ones who inhabit this kingdom), and His purpose to bless them freely and fully and to provide for them the whole inheritance of eternal life and heaven itself, all based on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

This kingdom spoken of here includes all the things of eternal life and glory that Christ as our Representative, Substitute, and Surety obtained for His people by establishing an everlasting righteousness of infinite value whereby God the Father is manifested as both a just God (who extracts a sufficient payment for the injury against His holy justice) and a Savior (who shows mercy to sinners, who violate or break His law ó and all of this based upon that satisfaction made by Christ ó a righteousness unto salvation. It’s Christ’s establishment and imputation of righteousness that justifies and demands the regeneration and conversion, and the final glory in heaven of all whom Christ represented ó all that the Father gave Him, all for whom He lived, obeyed, suffered, bled, died, and rose again ó a righteousness that demands life!

This sermon is about life ó eternal life. You know we have called our media ministry here, “Reign of Grace” and I know that its theme verse, Romans 5:21, is familiar to many of you. But turn there with me and look at it afresh and consider how it relates to the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Remember we’re not talking about a kingdom with geographical borders but rather a dominion, or a reign. Now with that in mind, consider Romans 5:21: ***“That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** There is a kingdom, a reign, that is unto death and it is established, a product of and entered into by sin. But there is also a reign of grace ó a kingdom that reigns how? ó that is established

how? that is entered into how? ó through righteousness unto eternal life ó grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life. See how it all fits.

The theme of this sermon is the Gospel of the Kingdom, a gospel wherein the righteousness of God is revealed (as Romans 1:17 tells us ó and the reason that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation) and it's a gospel of a kingdom ó a reign of grace ó grace reigning through righteousness. Now this is the context for a proper understanding of the Sermon on the Mount whose theme is the Gospel of the kingdom.

Be turning to Acts chapter 28. You see, the kingdom that Christ speaks of here in this sermon in Matthew is the same subject that was set forth in picture and types in the Old Testament and is so extensively expounded upon in all of the New Testament epistles. No look with me at Acts 28:23. Here Paul had come into Rome and in verse 23 it reads: *“And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him (speaking of Paul) into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, (from the word ó the whole of the old testament scriptures, the new testament having not yet been written) from morning till evening.”* And then picking up again in vs. 30 we read: *“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, ³¹Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.* To preach of things concerning Christ is to tell who He is and what He accomplished. It looks as if Paul preached and discussed these things with all who came to him ó things pertaining to the kingdom of God, things which concerned the Lord Jesus Christ.

See the consistency with the theme of the whole of scripture as we compare this sermon to the same gospel being set forth in the epistles ó Christ's sermon here is dealing with the Gospel of the Kingdom. Now this kingdom includes the past, the present, and the future as it is made of God's people of all ages. Sometimes it is called the kingdom of God, sometimes the kingdom of Christ (or of His dear Son), and sometimes the kingdom of heaven. Christ makes it clear that this kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness.

It's the kingdom spoken of Hebrews 1:8 where we read that *“... a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.”* A scepter is a staff borne by a sovereign as an emblem of authority by which he rules. So we see that righteousness itself is the authority or the basis upon which this kingdom is established, upon which it is entered into, and through which grace itself reigns in this kingdom ó grace reigns through righteousness as we just read in Romans 5:21. So this kingdom, inhabited by God's people of all ages is based upon that which was finished and accomplished at one point in time ó at the point when righteousness itself was established, when God's justice was

satisfied by the obedience and death of Christ some 2000 years ago, and imputed to all whom He represented. Now that's why those who preach God's truth agree with and conduct their ministries consistent with Paul's statement, "***God forbid that I should glory save (or except) in the cross of Christ.***" (Gal. 6:140)

So, if the scepter, the authority or basis of this kingdom is righteousness, then to be ignorant of this righteousness (or not in submission to it as the basis or rule of God's kingdom ó a rebel in God's kingdom) is to be unacquainted with God's grace ó His way of salvation. And as we'll see in our study of this sermon ó the only ones who will enter this kingdom are those who have a righteousness that answers perfectly, without any blemish, flaw or even the least imperfection ó the demands of God's holy law and inflexible justice. And as we'll also see, this required righteousness goes way beyond anything any sinner could ever possibly produce or find within himself. Hebrews 9:14 tells us that it was Christ who offered Himself without spot ó that's what it takes ó a perfect, unblemished satisfaction. And as Romans 3:20 tells us, ***õBy the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified.*** ó The sins of the citizens of this kingdom must be borne away by a God-man who truly fulfilled the law, for no mere man can do so. With that, now let's survey a few key verses found in this sermon that will help us establish the framework of Christ's message in the Sermon on the Mount ó remembering that its central theme is the Gospel of the Kingdom:

- 1) First, we see the truth of the establishment of the kingdom. Look with me in Matthew 5 down at verses 17-18 Christ says: ***õThink not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. ¹⁸For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*** This perfect and complete satisfaction to law and justice by Christ, who was made under the law, speaks of the righteousness whereby this kingdom is established. It is a wrought out righteousness and one that Christ did not fail to produce in its entirety ó He fulfilled the law (every jot and tittle) both in its precept (its demands for perfect obedience) and, as a Substitute for sinners in its penalty, (paying the sin debt for His people that all owe, but none could pay for themselves). That's what is meant when it says He was obedient unto death ó He provided a double cure, saved from wrath and made pure ó in Him.

Listen, to presume that this kingdom is established or entered into based upon anything other than that which He came to do ó He came to fulfill the law ó is a denial of His very mission ó what He came for, not just to make something possible to be fulfilled or completed later, but He came to accomplish something ó He came to fulfill it completely ó every jot and tittle.

2) Now look with me down a few verses to verse 20. We've seen first now that the kingdom is established with righteousness ó Christ's fulfillment of the law through His obedience unto death. Here we see that it is this very righteousness, this perfect fulfillment, that is required for all the citizens who will enter into the kingdom. Christ proclaims in Matthew 5:20: *“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, (the most devout, outwardly moral, law keeping group perhaps in all of history) **ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.**”* Then in verses 21 through the end of the chapter, Christ proceeds to elaborate on this, with the requirement summarized in the last verse of chapter 5, verse 48, where we see Christ command: *“**Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.**”* Can you do that? Well, that's what is required for all the citizens who will enter into the kingdom of heaven.

So we've seen that the kingdom is established with righteousness and that this same righteousness (Christ's complete fulfillment of what God requires) is required for all the citizens who will enter in ---

3) But, thirdly, we're told something of the way of entrance to this kingdom as we proceed through the sermon. First, look with me at Matthew 6:33. Here Christ commands *“**But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.**”* That is, this is what the citizens of this kingdom (those to whom all these things shall be added) will seek first and foremost ó his righteousness. It is indeed a reign of righteousness and the inclusion in this verse of *“and his righteousness”* excludes any possibility of the *“seeking”* itself having any causal effect or merit in procuring or appropriating these blessings of God. And then regarding the entrance way into this kingdom, in the final chapter of this sermon, Matthew 7, vss 13-14, Christ says: *“**Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:** ¹⁴*Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*”* Can you imagine what this multitude must have thought when they heard this, that only few find this narrow way that leads to eternal life? Here we see that this way of righteousness, is not the popular way that most folks travel (which all naturally and initially travel) in pursuit of their religious interests and endeavors to be accepted by God.

This should wake folks up. We need to be taught of God in such a way that it changes our course. And that doesn't mean a moral reformation, or some new or renewed degree of interest in spiritual things. It means repentance ó a change in what we would naturally think. It means a U-turn on the road that we and most of the religious world are inclined to travel upon, (traveling a broad way), but not the way of entrance into this kingdom.

This kingdom is a way so narrow that only a perfect righteousness will get the job done. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness!!!

And then next week, as we begin our verse by verse study, we'll see something of the nature of this kingdom. In the passage where we'll begin, back at the onset of the sermon in Matt 5:3-12, verses often referred to as the Beatitudes, we'll see a description of the qualities or characteristics (along with a description pertaining to the reward or blessings) of those who are citizens of the kingdom ó who are the blessed of God. And here too we'll see characteristics or qualities that appear to be paradoxes, concepts totally foreign to our natural way of thinking.

So we've seen that the kingdom is established with righteousness and that this same righteousness (His complete fulfillment) is required for all the citizens who will enter in, and that the way of entrance is not popular, not natural, not a way that seems naturally right to us, but rather a way of perfect righteousness --

- 4) And fourthly, near the end of the sermon, we'll examine the blessed assurance for those who are citizens of the kingdom. In Matthew 7:24-26, we read of the one considered wise, who built his house upon a rock, contrasted to the one considered foolish, who built his house upon the sand. One stood ó the other fell. We'll look at that in much more detail when and if we get that far in our verse by verse study, but for this overview, simply understand the consistency of these key verses in the context of the rest of the sermon's overall message ó how Christ is describing the wise man as one whose foundation is solid, not built on sand, but on the solid rock ó as the song writer wrote, a òhope built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousnessö ó a righteousness He established through which grace reigns in His kingdom, the righteousness which satisfies a holy God, none other than the righteousness of God in Christ (that which He came to do in fulfilling the law or in obedience, even unto death). And that perfect, untainted righteousness, is then freely imputed to (or charged to the account of) the sinner He justifies who, on that basis, is adopted, made a citizen of this kingdom. And on that ground ó there's certain assurance.

Though that foundation of sand ascribed to the foolish man will not stand, it is one which we all attempt to build upon, but for His abounding grace that reigns in His kingdom through righteousness. See, even our faith and repentance that would cause us to throw away the plans to build on sand, to forsake the broad way for His way ó this is nothing more than the fruit and effect of that which was accomplished ó which He purchased for us in establishing the righteousness at the cross of Calvary through which grace reigns.

5) And then finally as was pointed out to us in a recent message, it will help us as we study these verses, to remember the reaction of this religious multitude who was following our Lord and Savior ó their reaction to what they heard in this great sermon ó evidencing how vastly different it was from that promoted by the religious majority of their day (and as has been the case throughout all of history, just as it is today), As the last verses of chapter 7 read: ***“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: ²⁹For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”*** He spoke with authority ó it was the word of God. And it was unlike the teaching of the scribes ó the well respected, religious mainstream, the highly esteemed biblical scholars of their day.

Just as Prov. 16:25 tells us, ***“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”*** Christ speaks in this sermon of the way of life. He blew these folks and their religious underpinnings away ó they were astonished at his doctrine. And notice, He apparently preached doctrine for you see, that’s how He is known. He, Christ Himself, preached doctrine concerning Himself. See, we know Christ by the doctrine of Christ. They were astonished at his doctrine ó who He is and what He would accomplish.

Now given this natural reaction to Christ’s teaching ó this astonishment by this religiously interested multitude that had followed him, shouldn’t it prompt us all to look to His Word to be taught something contrary to our natural, sinful disposition ó to be taught something our natural wisdom would never perceive? At some point, we all need to be not only astonished, but brought to change courses ó we have to get off the broad way that leads to death, if we’re to inhabit this kingdom.

Shouldn’t this encourage us to seek to understand God’s wisdom as we begin our study of this great sermon, desiring that God will use the instrument of His Word, through the power of His Spirit, to make it effectual unto all who hear it? For we know when that word of the gospel ó described in the scriptures as sharper than a two edged sword ó is applied by the master swordsman, i.e. - in the irresistible hands of God the Holy Spirit, (and only then) that it will cut the heart asunder as the Bible says ó and bring men in their astonished minds and hearts to forsake that way which seemeth right unto men but leads to death and, instead, be made willing (in the day of His power) to choose the way of life, the strait gate, the narrow way ó to rest in the very blood and righteousness of Christ in which all of the citizens of this kingdom find their joy and assurance of eternal life. Yes, that’s what the scriptures say the kingdom of God is. It’s ***“...righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”*** This is the way God saves sinners ó the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Turn to Colossians chapter 1. While you're turning there, I encourage everyone to consider the seriousness of this subject ó of what is being taught concerning this kingdom. Because to fail to enter the kingdom of heaven is to perish eternally. That's quite a long time. Oh, but to enter the kingdom of heaven is to be saved ó to enter into eternal life and all the blessings that go with it by the adoption of grace, a grace which reigns through the righteousness of God in Christ. And that is a blessing for which words seem inadequate in order to express the gratitude that a citizen of this kingdom experiences when he finds himself in need of God's mercy, in need of His righteousness and thereby finds he is an object of God's mercy and grace.

Look with me in Colossians 1:12-14 where Paul expresses his gratitude for this, writing: ***"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet (i.e. ó sufficiently complete) to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into (what?) the kingdom of his dear Son:¹⁴ In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:"***

Oh yea, as the psalmist David wrote, ***"blessed is the man to whom the Lord inputeth not iniquity."*** ó whose sins are forgiven ó whose sins are not charged to His account. That's true of each and everyone who will inhabit this kingdom for their sins are imputed, or charged to Christ and His righteousness, the very one required for admittance into this kingdom, the righteousness through which grace reigns unto eternal life ó it is imputed or charged to them. By imputation, they have all they need in Christ to be reconciled before God.

And in time, they are made partakers of the inheritance in light ó brought from spiritual darkness to light ó to seek and behold the kingdom of God and his righteousness, to trust in that which Christ accomplished at the cross where He delivered us from the power of darkness. I believe this speaks of Christ's victory over Satan as II Cor. 4:3-4 tells us: ***"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:⁴ In whom the god of this world (Satan) hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."*** But as Paul writes in Colossians, the citizens of this kingdom are delivered from this ***"power of darkness."*** The light of gospel does shine upon them.

And I believe that this ***"translation"*** spoken of in Colossians 1:13 (although I'm not sure, I realize it may refer back to the cross) ó I'm inclined to believe that it is speaking of that which takes place in each successive generation as all those whom Christ justified and redeemed are born again or translated (since that word "translation" simply means move from one place to another and doesn't seem to carry the connotation of a change in standing or state) ó translated into the kingdom of his dear Son, but on what basis? ó

Verse 14: In whom they already have (past tense) redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin. That's my understanding of this passage and it seems consistent with how the citizens of this kingdom are predominantly referred to in the Sermon on the Mount by evidences that are only found in those who have been given light, who have actually partaken of their inheritance.

Remember, the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. That is: (1) righteousness, (established and imputed at the cross as Col 1:14 says, redemption through his blood / the forgiveness of sins), (2) peace (Christ having made peace (reconciliation) between God and His people at the cross and, in time, in their minds as it's made known to them in each generation) and (3) joy in the Holy Spirit (unspeakable joy as we learn of our blessed inheritance, untold eternal riches in Christ.)

Wow as those who enter the kingdom of heaven receive the whole inheritance of grace as all of salvation, for as long as they can hold onto it? No as it's eternal. They didn't gain it and the One who did can't lose it. It's forever and ever. They inherit it, they don't deserve it, they don't earn it as they inherit it. It's free. Put down your money. This isn't the Magic Kingdom at Disney World. You can't afford the cost of admission into this kingdom.

Well, my prayer is that God will use our study of this great sermon, delivered on the mount by the Lord Jesus Christ, to your eternal good as the word of God delivered in this passage by the Incarnate Word of God Himself as the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that God will accompany His word with the life giving power of the Holy Spirit, knowing that all who are delivered from the power of darkness will be translated into the kingdom of His dear Son as all through God's ordained means and I pray, even through this message today, the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ as the good news of His righteousness imputed.

Today, I hope you've seen the serious, eternal significance of the Gospel issues set forth in God's word, in these key verses that we've examined. In them, I believe we see the frame of reference for a proper understanding of the entire Sermon on the Mount. As a result, I hope that you too come to see:

1. How the kingdom of heaven itself is established by Christ's fulfillment of God's law as righteousness.
2. How that this very same righteousness is required for all who would enter into this kingdom as that nothing less than "be ye perfect" will meet the standard.

3. How that the entrance way into the kingdom is the way of righteousness ó not the vainly traveled broad way that most (and all initially) travel upon but which leads to destruction.
4. How that the only real, rock-solid, sure and certain foundation upon which a sinner rests is based upon this same righteousness imputed to the sinner, and that alone. As the songwriter put it, “All other ground is sinking sand.”
5. Lastly, I pray that you too will be astonished by the doctrine of Christ, but that it will be an astonishment that leads to finding your rest in Him, based upon the satisfaction He made, this same righteousness and that alone ó made yours, the sinner’s, by imputation. God will make His people like the wise man who built upon the solid foundation that we read of in Matthew 7 ó they will be made wise unto salvation. May God give eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts and minds to love and understand His way of salvation ó the way of eternal life ó the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself ó the Bible.

Randy Wages