

Building Foundations that Remain (Matt 7.24-27)

I. PURSUING THE KINGDOM

- A. The teachings found in Matthew 5-7 (often referred to as the *Sermon on the Mount*) are some of the most important teachings for the life of those who follow Christ.
- B. In these chapters Jesus teaches on the **value system** of the kingdom of heaven and demonstrates the ways in which we are to pursue a life built on these values.
- C. At the end of the teaching, Jesus gives a picture into what a life oriented around these words will be like. This picture demonstrates the way that Christians are to pursue a life built on a firm foundation.
- D. The Sermon on the Mount provides a picture of a life in partnership with God's grace that is oriented around the things that God defines as valuable ("blessed"). It also portrays the things that stand in the way of that pursuit (Matt 5.21-48) and practices that facilitate and promote growth toward those values in our hearts (Matt 6).
- E. Jesus calls us to purposefully order our lives around these teachings. We are to intentionally seek to cultivate these values, to actively resist these sins/temptations, and to faithfully pursue the practices (the *means*) laid out by Jesus in order to see our lives come into greater conformity with his character and his kingdom.
- F. Yet, Jesus declares that this will be difficult and costly (Matt 7.13-14) and must be something we commit our whole selves to in partnership with the grace of God (Matt 7.9-12).

II. WISDOM: HEARING AND OBEYING

- A. One of the most important aspects of Jesus' teaching related to this sermon is the way he relates hearing and obedience in the closing parable.
- B. Jesus outlines that a life built on a sure foundation consists both of **hearing** his words (i.e., learning them, seeking to understand them) and **obeying** these words (intentionally seeking to order our lives to do these things).
- C. This demonstrates to us that Jesus is not simply giving a "new law". Many interpreters have seen the Sermon on the Mount as an impossible standard given by Jesus in order to again show us that we can never accomplish these things — therefore we need the forgiveness of Jesus.
- D. Although there are *aspects* of truth to this, it is not entirely consistent with what Jesus assumes when he gives this parable. Jesus believes that his hearers (primarily his disciples; cf. Matt 5.1) will be able to pursue obedience to these teachings — not simply that they will serve as a measuring stick they will never be able to live up to.
- E. To rightly respond to the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, we must avoid two temptations to misunderstand or misapply his words.
 - 1. The temptation toward **legalism** — the commands of the Sermon are not how we gain access to God's kingdom.
 - 2. The temptation toward **license** — the grace of God does not remove the response of seeking to obey the commands of Jesus.

- F. The desire to pursue wisdom demonstrates that our lives, our choices, and our responses before God are *significant* in the eyes of the Lord.
- G. The Bible is clear that it matters how we order and orient our lives. We do this empowered by God's abundant grace, because of his mercy that has been given to us in Christ. The truth of the fear of the Lord (understanding that God sees, evaluates, and rewards) invites us to seek out wisdom and orient our lives in such a manner.

¹²does not he who weighs the hearts perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work? (Prov 24.12)

III. ENDURING THE STORMS

- A. We currently live in a moment of time where we are experiencing a type of storm. In these times, the foundations of what our lives are built upon is exposed.
- B. The nature of a Biblical 'test' is intended to highlight or reveal what our lives are truly built upon. In God's economy, tests are not examinations, but rather are instructive seasons that allow us to see more of what is real in his sight, that we might be changed and transformed.
- C. It is the mercy of God to allow different "storms" to affect our lives in order to expose the foundations we have built our lives on. He shakes things in our lives in order that we might more powerfully partake of his holiness. This is done because of his immense love for us.

⁵My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷For what son is there whom his father does not discipline. ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons... ¹⁰For they [our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness... ²⁶At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken — that is, things that have been made — in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12.5-10; 26-29)

¹⁹Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. (Rev 3.19)

- D. I believe that in the coming days we will experience more 'shaking' and 'storms' within our world. What we are walking through in this season is intended (as a gracious gift) to reveal to us the nature and quality of what our lives are built upon, so that we can order our lives toward building upon true and lasting foundations.
- E. Ultimately the "storm" of God's judgment seat (the fire of God's presence) will test the quality and the character of our lives. Through this life we will experience many seasons of "storms" to remind us toward pursuing this kind of lifestyle because of God's grace.

¹²Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (I Cor 3.12-15)

- F. We want to orient our lives around that which is defined as *wise* in the economy of God for eternity, not what appears wise in accordance with the spirit of this age. Jesus declares that wisdom will one day be justified, or vindicated (Matt 11.19). This means that in the eyes of many, what we orient our lives toward will appear to be foolish and wasteful, but in the light of eternity, it will be seen as the only wise course of action.

- G. One of the realities of orienting our lives toward this value system is that much of it is hidden. Jesus declares several times throughout chapter 6 the necessity of pursuing these things in the hidden places when *no one sees*. Our desires for rewards must be oriented toward God and his ways, not toward receiving affirmation, blessing, or reward in the eyes of men.

³When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matt 6.3-4)

IV. THE VALUE SYSTEM OF GOD'S KINGDOM

- A. The Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus' statement about the value-system of the kingdom of heaven. Every culture, society, and kingdom throughout history has a set of values that undergird its concepts of success and worth. These are embodied and embedded within the cultural practices, and often times are given symbols or artifacts as status symbols within the culture (i.e., money, power, influence, etc.).
- B. These symbols and values can be excavated by looking into the prevailing ways that people understand success and worth — what people give their lives away to pursuing.
- C. The kingdom of heaven is no different. Jesus declares that there are symbols and qualities that are the “metrics of success” in the kingdom of heaven. These are marked by the statements at the beginning of this teaching as embodying a state of “blessedness” before God.
- D. The eight “beatitudes” operate like invitations into holding and embodying the things that are truly great in God's economy and kingdom. These are like fruits that we seek to cultivate by the grace of God in partnership with the Spirit's activity in our lives. They are supernatural gifts that are given and grown.

³Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5.3-10)

- E. These eight marks of blessedness are the “litmus test” for our growth in grace and godliness, and the measure of our real and true impact in the kingdom of God (not the size of our ministry, the number of disciples we convert/make/etc.). These traits define a life of love and spiritual maturity that is at the heart of a life oriented around God's kingdom.
- F. Jesus demonstrates that the presence of these eight virtues are the essence of Christian discipleship. To not have these realities developing and growing in our lives would be akin to salt losing its flavor, or light being hidden under a bushel (Matt 5.13-15). In other words, salt that is not salty is not salt; and light that is hidden under a basket is not light. Similarly, a disciple of Jesus who does not possess these realities (in part; growing; pursuing; etc.) is not a disciple of Jesus.
- G. Each of these eight markers runs counter to the ways that the world defines success, growth, maturity, and greatness. Because of this, we must *intentionally* and *consistently* reorient our lives by God's grace to see these realities as truly blessed. We do this in this life by faith.
- H. If our minds and hearts are captivated by the cares of this life, or by the patterns of this world (what our culture/age defines as valuable), than we will not see these realities as markers of a blessed life before God.
- I. This is an active pursuit that requires the setting of our heart, the filling of our mind, and the use of our will.

V. CULTIVATING A LIFE IN LINE WITH GOD'S KINGDOM

- A. The Spirit's desire is to speak to his people about the things that are valuable in the kingdom of God. Our posture should be to position ourselves to hear from him, and to pursue the means that he has revealed in aligning our hearts with his values.
- B. Our values are shaped by the practices we consistently give ourselves to. They are often shaped in imaginative and tacit ways by the things we see as fulfilling and satisfying. Our hearts and minds must be retrained to see these things as ultimately valuable, and to see them as marks of true blessedness in the kingdom of God.
- C. The spirit of this age lays forth a counterfeit set of blessings that have often conscripted our affections and our imaginations. Jesus would invite us to build our lives on a different value system, one that cannot be shaken no matter the storms of this life.
- D. Jesus outlines that the ways of the kingdom as he defines them (outlined in this teaching) are the way to true greatness in his kingdom (cf. Matt 5.17-20). He did not come to loosen the demands of the law, but to fulfill them and promote a way for his disciples (by his grace) to walk in obedience to his commandments. To do (and teach) these things is the true mark of greatness — not the size or the scope of our assignment in this age.
- E. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teachings about six particular strongholds in the human heart that stand in the way of these values being cultivated and manifest (Matt 5.21-48). These are **anger** (the spirit of murder), **lust** (spirit of immorality), **disregard for the marriage covenant** (divorce), **false commitment** (spirit of manipulation and self-promotion), **retaliation** (spirit of revenge), and **inactivity** (refusing active love).
- F. Jesus also taught several practices to be done *before his eyes* that partner with his grace in cultivating these eight virtues in our hearts (Matt 6.1-34). They are **giving, prayer, forgiveness, fasting**, and actively pursuing to **live in restful confidence of his sovereignty**.
- G. Our aim should be to experience and attain true greatness — greatness in God's eyes. We long to have impact and legacy inasmuch as it aligns with things that cannot be shaken, and that will last for all eternity. Jesus himself declares that a pursuit of these things will mark greatness in his kingdom.

¹⁷Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.
¹⁸For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5.17-19)
- H. What would it look like for you to begin to ask God to reorient your life according to these values? We long to be people who are set on a firm foundation, whose lives are built on that which cannot be shaken, and who partner with God's grace for all that he has for us. Jesus declares that those who are wise are those who *hear* his words and *obey* them. Familiarize yourself with these realities, and in whatever small way you are able, set your heart to be oriented toward them.
- I. We respond by setting our hearts to obey in partnership with the grace of God. Faith in Christ *looks like* orienting our lives around what he calls valuable, empowered by the Spirit. This will be weak in this life — but is significant and real in the eyes of God.
- J. To do this we must commit to believe that his ways are good, that his word is true, and that the only way to experience true wholeness (flourishing, joy, satisfaction) is in accordance with his truth and his ways.