

Sunday, August 9, 2009

**Matthew 5.1-12
Paradoxes of Kingdom Living
SWCOB 8.09.09**

We Americans don't want to do anything
That doesn't give us instant pleasure;
Instant gratification, if you will.

"I want it all, and I want it now!"
Is our motto for today.

Whatever feels good, just do it,
Whatever gives us pleasure, as long as it's legal,
Let's have at it!

You can have just about anything you want now,
Just sign on the dotted line.

Easy credit, easy payments.
Have it now, pay in six months.

You want that big house?
Buy it!

You want that new car?
It's yours, no interest!

You want that dream vacation?
Put it on your plastic card.

Even in matters of faith we want the gospel of instant gratification.

We want the religion of prosperity,
The religion that if you pray hard enough, you'll get it.

The religion that says,
If you are faithful,
God will reward your faithfulness.

We want to hear about the religion,
That gives us the good life now!

The fact is . . . Job knew it well,
And Jesus knew it better,
Bad things do happen to good people.

And no matter how faithful one is,
Life can be full of misery, trials and tribulations.

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Not only that;

There is also the truth that being faithful to God,
Not only may not give you instant gratification,

It may also get you into trouble!

The reality is that following Christ,
May result in ridicule at the very least,
And loss of life at its extreme.

The Church of the Brethren in Nigeria,
Lost three of its members,
Had a pastor injured,
And three of its churches burned this past week.

I don't see instant gratification here!
I don't see earthly rewards for their faithfulness.

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Today we begin a sermon series on the Sermon on the Mount.

Rev. Bob Bowman, minister, educator, missionary,
Of the Church of the Brethren suggests that we;

“Read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament.
Read the New Testament with the mind of Christ.
And read the Sermon on the Mount
Because that is where the mind of Christ is most fully revealed.”

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The Sermon on the Mount is a critically important teaching.

In fact it appears to be a teaching for disciples only.

The first verse states,
**Now when he saw the crowds,
He went up on the mountainside and sat down.**

**His disciples came to him,
And he began to teach them.**

In his sermon we'll find jewels of wisdom for daily living,
Instructions for praying,
And challenges that will shake the very core,
Of our human understandings.

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Today we read The Beatitudes of Christ.

A beatitude is a blessing.

There are examples of beatitudes throughout the Bible.

Typically these blessings,
Have to do with worldly rewards.

Life turns out well for those who follow God's ways.

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However the beatitudes of Jesus
Do not follow the typical pattern of blessings.

These people who Jesus is blessing,
Do not appear to be blessed.

The poor in spirit?
Those who mourn?
The meek shall inherit the earth?

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These blessings are what you'd call paradoxes.

A paradox is a statement that appears to be a contradiction,
But is nevertheless true.

So as we begin to understand Jesus,
There appears to be a whole bunch of things,
He said that are paradoxical;

The last will be first and the first will be last (Mt. 20.16).

It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 10.35).

**He who believes in me will live,
Even though he dies,**

Whoever lives and believes in me will never die (John 11.25).

These are Paradoxes of Kingdom Living

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Matthew Henry says,

“In the general opinion of humanity,
It is those who are rich,
Great and honorable,

That spend their days in mirth and pleasure;
That eat the fat and drink the sweet,
It is these who are blessed.

Jesus comes along and gives us a different notion,
To blessedness.

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Donald Kraybill,

Historian and theologian of the Mennonite church calls it,

“The Upside Down Kingdom.”

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The beatitudes remind us,

Of the difference between

Instant gratification and delayed gratification.

That though we are poor, despised, and rejected,

Beaten and persecuted,

Weak and mild mannered,

We are not to be discouraged,

Because ultimately God’s kingdom will reign!

And maybe, maybe not here and now,

But someday beyond our wildest dreams and imaginations,

We will receive blessings tenfold.

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A minister dies and is waiting at the Pearly Gates to enter heaven.

Ahead of him is man in sunglasses, jeans and a leather jacket.

St Peter comes to the gate and asks the man in the jacket his name.

“I am Joe Cohen, taxi driver from New York City.”

St Peter looks over his list,

Finds his name and says,

“Take this silk robe and golden staff,

And enter the kingdom of heaven.”

St Peter looks to the minister,

And asks for his name,

The minister booms out his name in his pulpit voice.

St Peter looks at the list,

Finds the name and says,

“Here take this cotton robe, and wooden staff,

And enter the kingdom of heaven.”

“Hey! Wait a minute!

How is that!” the minister asks?

“You give a taxi driver a silk robe and golden staff,
And you give me, a minister,
An old cotton robe and spindly wooden stick,
What’s up with that?”

St Peter looks at him and replies,

“Here we reward those people,
With the greatest results.

When you preached, everyone slept.
But when he drove,
Everyone prayed!”

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Those who are rich and prosperous,
Have received their blessings.

But those who suffer and mourn,
Who seek justice at all costs,
Who are peacemakers,
Who are persecuted for their faith,

Jesus says take heart, there is a blessing for you too.

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A pediatrician tells this story.

One Sunday his wife was teaching Sunday school.

The lesson was on serving God.
Even children can serve God she said.

A little girl named Sarah wanted to know how to serve God.
Now Sarah was the kid all the other kids made fun of.

“Teacher, what can I do to serve God?”

The kids snickered and laughed.

It caught the teacher off guard,
And so quickly looking around,
She noticed an empty vase in the class room.

“Sarah, you can bring in a flower to put in the vase.”

“That’s not important,” Sarah said.

But it is important because a flower can brighten up our day,”
The teacher said.

And so the next Sunday,
Sarah brought in a dandelion and placed it in the vase,
All the kids teased her.

But despite the kids,
Every week she would bring in a flower to put in the vase.

The pediatrician's wife told the pastor,
Of Sarah's devotion to her task.

And the following week, the pastor,
Brought the vase up next to the pulpit,
And preached a sermon on serving God.

After that Sarah would bring her flower,
And place it in the vase next to the pulpit.

Sometime later,
The parents brought Sarah into see the pediatrician.

She didn't have energy or appetite.
After running her through the usual tests and examination,
The pediatrician sat in his office
With Sarah's paperwork on his lap.

Sarah had leukemia.

He stopped by Sarah's house on his way home,
And sat with the parents at the kitchen table.

Sarah had a rare form of leukemia,
And he told them there was really nothing that they could do.

She placed a flower in the vase,
At the church,
As often as she could.

But over time she got weaker and weaker.

She stopped going to church.
And then became confined to her bed.

She was nothing what she had been.

She was a small bundle that barely moved.

The pediatrician knew it would be just a matter of time.

On that Sunday he sat in church,
And saw the empty vase beside the pulpit.

He couldn't seem to get his mind around the service.

The songs, the prayers, the sermon,
Had no meaning for him.
All he could think about was poor little Sarah.

And just then, to his amazement,
The door to the sanctuary opened,
And Sarah and her parents came in.

They carried Sarah and sat down in the last pew.

And with as much strength as she could muster,
Sarah got up from the pew,
And walked down the aisle toward the pulpit.

In her hands she carried a dandelion and a small piece of paper.

She placed the flower in the vase,
And the slip of paper beside it,
And returned to her pew.

Four days later Sarah died.

After the funeral,
The pediatrician and the pastor spoke,

"I've got something you ought to see,"
Said the pastor.

And the pastor showed the pediatrician,
The small slip of paper that Sarah had placed next to the vase,
The Sunday before.

In it Sarah had written,

"Dear God,
This vase has been the biggest honor of my life.
Sarah" (taken from an article in Today's Christian).

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**Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are those who mourn,
For they will be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek,
For they will inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they will be filled.**

**Blessed are the merciful,
For they will be shown mercy.**

**Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they will see God**

**Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they will be called children of God.**

**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are you when people insult you,
Persecute you,
And falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.**

**Rejoice and be glad,
Because great is your reward in heaven,**

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