

"Kingdom Eyes: Brace Yourself"

Matthew 5:1-12

Isaiah 9:1-4

First Corinthians 1:10-18

January 27, 2008

Is this the ultimate liberal agenda? The ultimate conservative agenda? Is this guy just nuts? Many people still chafe at everything he said thinking it is all a pipe dream. But millions down through the ages have found it all true by faith in Jesus.

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A blonde decides to try horseback riding, even though she has no prior lessons or experience. She mounts the horse unassisted and the horse immediately springs into motion. It gallops along at a steady and rhythmic pace, but the blonde begins to slip from the saddle. In terror, she grabs for the horse's mane, but cannot seem to get a firm grip. She tries to throw her arms around the horse's neck, but she slides down the side of the horse anyway. The horse gallops along, seemingly oblivious to its slipping rider. Finally, giving up her frail grip, she tries to leap away from the horse and throw herself to safety. Unfortunately, her foot has become entangled in the stirrup and she is now at the mercy of the horse's pounding hooves as her head is struck against the ground again and again. As her head is battered against the ground, she is mere seconds away from unconsciousness when the Wal-Mart manager runs out and unplugs the horse.

Life, just like the Kingdom of God, is sometimes full of surprises!

Many early hearers of the Gospel didn't like it. Paul mentions that directly in his letter to the Corinthian Church. The Jews wanted miraculous proof, and the Greeks wanted "philosophical wisdom." And all of this stuff about god being one of us, loving us, giving his life for us – was just a bunch of foolishness. "Ridiculous!" they would say.

Paul says that the Gospel is foolishness to those who don't understand it. I can't think of a better way to describe the things Jesus had to say as told by Matthew. Talk about a bunch of foolishness. How can you be happy when you're mourning? How can you be happy when you are poor? How can you be happy when people are telling lies about you and saying nasty things to you?

All of this tells us this ride is going to be different. "This is a bunch of nonsense if I ever heard it" – we might be tempted to say. It is exactly the opposite of life as we know it.

WE WANT TO RUN THE KINGDOM.

We want it to take care of us. We want to decide who is in and who is out. We want to determine what is allowed and what is not. We have our minds made up – so we turn to the Bible and find verses that reinforce what we already believe. We use the Bible as our proof, rather than let the Bible (and God's spirit) inform, reform, and transform us.

This is an upside down Kingdom. This doesn't look like it is going to turn out the way we thought it would at all. It takes me a while to get into movies. Especially the crazy ones at home when I have the remote control in my hands. It makes Paula crazy. How do you know what it is? I know instantly. The face I just saw on the screen. The appearance of the setting. I know, pretty much, right away whether I want to see this or not. (sometimes I am wrong.)

So at least we get a clue, right up front what this "new Kingdom" going to be like. I might be tempted to move on fast, if I had the remote control in my hand. It all reads backward and I might give up on it quick. I want to know right away that it is a movie where the good guys win and the bad guys lose. This movie – well it seems immediately that I am going to have to hang in there for a while before I can figure this one out.

If you come to the Christian faith to have your personal convictions and beliefs confirmed, you have a surprise coming. The hungry ones come because they are looking for answers. Brace yourself! You're in for a surprise. A kingdom where the first are to be last? A God who comes searching for us? Grace before behavior? If you come to Jesus to find safety and security, you are in for a big letdown. You had better brace yourself. Jesus comes as good news. Jesus comes to bring change. Jesus comes to call you to a new life in Him. This is not man's kingdom He calls us to, but God's kingdom.

IF YOU WANT A HAPPY LIFE, THIS PASSAGE TELLS YOU WHAT YOU MUST DO.

You must begin to live by a new perspective. You don't want to be poor, you don't want to be attacked and criticized, you don't want God's rule but your own rule in your life, why show mercy to others, we want to do anything we want to do and be able to get away with it. Jesus says, "If you want to be blessed, if you want happiness, you're going to have to go at life another way."

I like what I heard Dr. Laura say one time about the things we do (or need to learn to do) because they are commitments and obligations – no matter what mood we are in at the moment. Maybe there are days you don't feel like going to work, but you do. Don't feel like fixing a meal, but you do. Don't feel like praying, but you do. Don't feel like being happy, but you are. Don't feel like doing God's will, but you do. Don't feel like doing your homework, but you do. Don't feel like being nice around the house, but you are. Don't feel like even coming home, but you do.

Hearts get broken when you don't do these things whether you feel like it or not. Homes get torn apart. Life gets twisted when you don't do the things you don't feel like doing.

We do those things because we have learned that you do what you ought, and do what you have obligated yourself to do. Even when you don't feel like it.

This is a different approach to the Beatitudes. We have always taken them as gifts that are just somehow given to us by God. Maybe we could take them more as encouragements to live the way we need to.

Several years ago, after I had preached on “Happy are those who mourn for they shall be comforted,” a woman came to me after the service and said, “I want you to know my husband died 2 years ago, and I’ll never be happy again.” I wanted her to know that that was her decision, not the will of God for her life.

Last week we talked about a great struggle (overcoming the temptation to live by our own standards), a great announcement (when Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is near), and a great call (when He invited us to be active participants in the Kingdom of God). What is the Kingdom of God? A very simple answer might be that it is wherever God’s will reigns, or wherever God and His people are working to bring about His will.

Jesus begins to paint images of that Kingdom. And we are surprised. What did you expect? I keep asking people about the joke above - ok, so how did you think that story would end? You drew some conclusions, or expectations as you heard it. Sometimes I’ll get puzzled at a long joke someone is telling, and think, “I have no idea where this is going.” So it is with the Kingdom of God. I begin to draw some conclusions, I have some expectations – but in reality I have no idea where it is headed. Some people are intrigued by that and want to know more. Others reject what they hear, still others may catch on slowly. Jesus understood that and compared it to the different kinds of soil a farmer has to deal with.

Peter says he wants to be part of this kingdom. Jesus says - “but I’m going to die.”

Peter says – whoa, no way.

Peter says he wants to be part of this kingdom. Jesus says – “Then let me wash your feet.”

Peter says – whoa, no way.

Peters cut off a soldier’s ear to defend Jesus, and Jesus said, “That’s not it.”

James and John thought it was about prestige – sitting at Jesus’ right hand and left hand in His new kingdom. Now Jesus says – “Whoa, no way.”

Judas Iscariot thought it was a political kingdom and tried to force Jesus’ hand in the Garden. The Pharisees thought it was all about following rules – and couldn’t understand endless forgiveness, couldn’t understand why Jesus would allow His disciples to break those rules by “working” on the Sabbath.

We would agree with all those people. Our expectations of what He was up to would have been entirely different than what He was really doing. We bring our own images, our own desires, our own ambitions and motives along when we come to the Kingdom of God and want it to look like what we expected.

The story is told about a guy who took up painting while he was in prison. He actually became quite good and the other prisoners began anticipating seeing each new project. One time he had spent a long time on a particular project, steadfastly refusing to let anyone see it until it was finished. It was, according to the artist, to be a picture of the Christ. When it was finally finished and unveiled for everyone to see, the picture of Christ he had painted was the spittin’ image of himself.

We come to the Kingdom pressing our own issues. We want the Kingdom to be there to serve us, to improve our lives by changing our circumstances, by removing all obstacles, taking away all unpleasantness. It is hard to ask these things of the one who wept over his

dying friends, who wept over nameless people because of their lostness, who suffered alone the night of His betrayal, who gave His life for the sins of the world.

What He does do is change us in our situations. He doesn't sidestep doing battle with the devil in the wilderness. He doesn't call down food to save Him, armies of angels to remove Him from either the wilderness or the cross. **Rather, He conquers through the abiding peace and power of the endless Kingdom.** Thus, He changes us in the middle of it all. He brings us new life. Life that never ends. Life that always conquers. Life that isn't limited to the weather of today, or the emotions of the moment.

He shows us the way to a great life. But brace yourself. It may not be what you expected. He will take you the way of humility, the way of weeping at the things that truly should be wept over. He will take you the way of seeking God's will before your own. He will take you the way of mercy toward others. He will take you down the road of peace and of purity. He will take you in a way that likely won't bring popularity or recognition. Likely you will be ignored and mocked and disregarded and laughed at. But then how can you walk in the way of the Master without walking the walk of the Master?