

The Kingdom of God – Part 1

ILLUS – Shortly after arriving in Australia, our family was invited to lunch with some new Australian friends. “Bring a plate,” they said. We thought: “What a strange custom! Maybe they don’t have enough plates.” We turned up dutifully with a plate, only to find that they were expecting us to bring something on it.

This is the sort of thing that happens when you go from one country to another.

ILLUS – We discovered that there was no point in asking for an ice lolly, for some pop, or for a pair of daps or plimsoles.

So much was different: the accent, the customs, the way of thinking, the terms that were used – it was all different.

But there are lots of similarities.

Australians drive on the same side of the road as the Brits, they try their best to speak English, and there’s even hot and cold running water.

But when you transfer from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of God, **everything** is different.

2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, **all things** have become new.

The new birth brings each one of us into a new citizenship.

We are now citizens of God’s Kingdom.

If you go from one country to another a lot is different.

But the ways of God’s Kingdom are totally different from the ways of the world.

There are no similarities between God’s Kingdom and Satan’s kingdom.

Therefore, it is God’s intention to give us a complete overhaul.

In the two messages in this mini-series, we’re going to explore some of the basics of what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

Matt 5:1-12

1. Poor in spirit

In our country, we really don’t understand what it means to be poor.

ILLUS – My wife and I lived for a decade below the so-called poverty level. We were fine. We lived in a poor area, surrounded by poor people. They could still afford alcohol, take-away foods, cigarettes, and gambling. Their shopping trolleys were filled with potato chips, chocolate, biscuits, and many other luxuries.

We don’t know what poor means.

ILLUS – We’ve been to Bougainville Island where the people can carry everything they own in a bilum bag strapped to their head.

They’ve got almost nothing – they understand poor.

Our Compassion children in Rwanda and the Philippines understand poor.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit...”

But what does that mean?

ILLUS – “The emperor Julian the Apostate (332-63) is reputed to have said ... that he wanted to confiscate Christians’ property so that they might all become poor and enter the kingdom of heaven”.¹

He didn’t understand that Jesus wasn’t talking about material wealth.

So what did Jesus mean: “poor in spirit”?

Poor in spirit means to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy.

Outside of God, I’ve got absolutely nothing.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

“It is the conscious confession of unworth before God. As such, it is the deepest form of repentance.”²

Being poor in spirit is the opposite attitude of the church in Laodicea.

Rev 3:17 Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked;

But poor in spirit means utter dependence on God.

It means putting our confidence in Him only – not in money, natural abilities, not in our education, our gender, our race.

What really counts is our trust in God.

And Jesus said that if we are poor in spirit, He will bless us with the kingdom of heaven.

Rom 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

2. Those who mourn

Note that it says “mourn” not “moan” – it has nothing to do with whinging and complaining.

Mourning is the natural outcome of being poor in spirit.

It “is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning for the dead, for the passionate lament for one who was loved”.³

We’re not just talking about being miserable here.

ILLUS – Not like the little girl who said to her father, “Daddy, that horse must be a Christian; it has such a long face.”

It’s talking about godly sorrow.

This is the kind of sorrow that makes your heart ache, brings tears to your eyes.

2 Cor 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

For those in the Kingdom, repentance isn’t a one-time event – it’s a lifestyle.

Because the Holy Spirit continually works in our lives.

When Isaiah came into contact with the holy presence of God, he cried out, “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” (Is 6:5)

It’s really easy for our hearts to become hard.

There are documentaries of outback Australia showing how the land is totally parched, hard and dry.

What if our hearts become like that? What will soften them?

The rain of the Holy Spirit certainly, but it begins with the trickle of our own tears.

It's our tears that water the soil of our hearts.

Do we need to be weeping all the time?

No, but if we never weep, that's a problem.

I know that men aren't supposed to cry, but I have bawled my eyes out on many occasions because of sin in my life.

I encourage you to do the same, for the Christian who never cries over their sin has a hard heart.

There's an old Arab proverb: All sunshine makes a desert.

You don't get much fruit in a desert.

Mourning also means sorrowing over others who don't walk in God's ways.

"Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep Your law", said the psalmist in Ps 119:136

The state of the world around us should impact us.

Sinners going to hell should impact us.

Those who mourn will be blessed with comfort – not the comfort of material luxuries.

2 Cor 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, (4) who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

3. The meek

Meekness is not weakness, spinelessness, or being wishy-washy, or timid, or unconfident.

The Greek word was used for a domesticated animal "which has been trained to obey the word of command, which has learned to answer to the reins. It is the word for an animal which has learned to accept control."⁴

For us, it means accepting the control of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Himself was meek.

Mat 11:28-29 Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle (meek – same Gk word as Matt) and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Meekness is totally the opposite of the attitude of the world – pride.

The world says, "Dog eat dog. Fight your way to the top. You are No. 1. Grab it while you can."

But that's not the way of Christ, it's not the way of the Kingdom.

The way of the Kingdom is meekness, and meekness is humility.

ILLUS – Waking from his sleep, the donkey still basked in the joy of the best day of his life. He had never felt so happy and proud. Wandering into the village, he found some people by a well. "They'll be overjoyed to see me," he thought. But no one noticed him. They continued about their business and paid no attention. "What's wrong with you" he demanded angrily. "Don't you realise who I am?" The people just stared at him, and someone slapped him on the backside, ordering him to get out of the way. "Unbelievable!" snorted the donkey to himself. "The people at the markets will remember who I am." But when he got there, it was no different. He strutted down the street, but again no one paid any attention. "What happened to the palm branches? You threw palm branches before me yesterday!" Upset and angry, the little donkey galloped home

to his mother and told her what had happened. She shook her head sadly. “You silly child,” she chided, “Don’t you understand that without Jesus, you are just an ordinary donkey?”

Meekness means not looking for the recognition of this world, not looking for the credit.

It needs more skill than I can tell to play the second fiddle well. Spurgeon

A swollen head is nature’s frantic efforts to fill a vacuum.

ILLUS – On one occasion Brother Maseo, looking earnestly at St. Francis of Assisi, began to say: “Why you? Why you?” “What are you saying?” cried Francis at last. “I am saying that everybody follows you, everyone desires to see you, hear you, obey you, and yet for all that, you are neither beautiful, nor learned, nor of noble family. Whence comes it that it should be you whom the world desires to follow?” When Francis heard these words, he was filled with joy, raised his eyes to heaven and, after remaining a long time absorbed in contemplation, knelt praising and blessing God with extraordinary fervour. Then he turned to Brother Maseo. “You wish to know? It is because the eyes of the Most High have willed it so, He continually watches the good and the wicked, and as His most holy eyes have not found among sinners any smaller man, nor any more insufficient and sinful, therefore He has chosen me to accomplish the marvellous work which God has undertaken; He chose me because He could find none more worthless, and He wished to confound the nobility and grandeur, the strength, the beauty and the learning of this world.”

That’s meekness, humility.

There is no limit to the good a person can do if they don’t care who gets the credit. Anonymous

1 Cor 4:7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

Everything we have is from God.

We need to humble ourselves, before God needs to step in or use others to do the job.

ILLUS – A young girl went to her pastor and confessed that she feared she had incurred the sin of vanity. “What makes you think that?” asked the minister. “Because every morning when I look into the mirror I think how beautiful I am.” “Never fear, my girl,” was the reassuring reply. “That isn’t a sin, it’s only a mistake.”

It’s the meek who are blessed by inheriting the earth.

4. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

ILLUS – A little girl got saved and applied for membership to a church. “Were you a sinner?” she was asked. “Yes,” she replied. “Are you still a sinner?” “Yes.” “Then what real changes have taken place in your life?” “The best way I can explain it is that I used to be a sinner running after sin, but now I’m a sinner running away from sin.”

1 Tim 6:11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

What will cause us to pursue righteousness, godliness ... like that?

Spiritual hunger.

ILLUS – Fasting is not my favourite pastime. On our prayer and fasting days, everyone looks forward to one particular prayer: “Thank you Lord for this food...”

Because we seem to be starving; we’re so hungry that even lettuce would taste good.

Are we hungry for righteousness like that?

Someone said to me not so long ago: “There is such a lack of spiritual hunger in the church today.”

I thought about it, and he was right.

How can Christians find hours to talk on the phone and not get enough time for prayer?

How can they get to their jobs or to an airport on time to catch a plane, but can't get to church on time?

How can they spend hundreds of dollars on clothing, cosmetics and entertainment, but would rarely – if ever – spend money on a book that will help them grow spiritually and in understanding?

How can they spend hours watching TV, but the power-packed, life-changing, Holy Spirit-inspired Word of God sits on the shelf gathering dust?

Lack of hunger and thirst for righteousness, for God, for spiritual things.

Those who hunger and thirst will be blessed, because God will give them that which they hunger and thirst for.

Ask yourself today: Am I poor in spirit? Does my heart ache within me for God's ways? Am I meek – under the control of the Holy Spirit? Do I hunger and thirst, long for, righteousness?

In all the bustle of life, not to let other things crowd out our love for Jesus Christ.

¹ Carson, D.A. *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew 1-12* p132

² Carson, D.A. *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount* p18

³ Barclay, William *Daily Study Bible: Vol 1 – Matt 1-10* p 93

⁴ Barclay, William *Daily Study Bible: Vol 1 – Matt 1-10* p 97