



Pastor Mark Allen Mikels
Sonlife Community Church
Apple Valley, CA 92308

“KINGDOM LIVING”

*- A Study Of The Sermon on the Mount -
(Matthew 5-7)*

Sonlife Community Church

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“KINGDOM LIVING”

(Life In The Kingdom of God)

(Matthew 5-7)

Intro ... Last week’s message (which I characterized as ‘*An Introduction to the Introduction*’), contained the following **Key Concept** ...

*“The Church of Jesus Christ is a Colony of Heaven
living out its existence in a foreign land.”*

Paul urged the believers in Philippi to “*live their lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel*” (1:27) seeing that their “*citizenship was in heaven*” (3:10).

In a sense we could say that all “*born-again believers in Jesus Christ*” are colonists on this earth ...

However, unlike the early American Colonists who were originally seeking to “*live out their old life in a new world*”, we Colonists for Christ are seeking to “*live out a new life in our old world*”.

The American Colonists were completely familiar with the elements of their old life though they were completely unfamiliar with this new world they had entered.

We Christian Colonists, on the other hand, are completely familiar with the old world we live in while we are at times completely unfamiliar with the elements of the new life we are to be living.

The Old World is our home – a familiar and frequently comfortable setting -the New Life is an unfamiliar and frequently challenging calling.

And yet Jesus calls us to this new life ... a new life that embraces every aspect of our being – mental, spiritual, emotional, physical, financial and social.

In a word – He calls us to “***KINGDOM LIVING***” – the title that I have chosen for this series of messages.

There is no place in the Scripture where that “***Kingdom Living***” is spelled out any more extensively or articulated any more clearly than in the Gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7 in the passage that is commonly called ... “***The Sermon on the Mount***”.

Today, by way of introduction, I would draw your attention to what I consider to be the **Key Verse** of the entire three chapter passage ...

Sermon on the Mount Key Verse ...

“But SEEK FIRST His (God’s) KINGDOM and His (God’s) RIGHTEOUSNESS and all these things will be given to you as well.”

(Matthew 6:33)

“Seek first His Kingdom and His Righteousness ...”

Let’s expand that phrase a bit ...

“Seek” (desire – crave – search for – pursue – focus on – make it your ambition or goal to discover and obtain) ... **“First”** (as of prime importance -before anything else – as critical to all else that you would desire) ... **“His Kingdom”** (His ruling authority over your life – His territorial realm in which you might settle down – His Regents of which you might consider yourself to be one) ... **and His Righteousness** (the rules and regulations that He has laid down – the principles for living that honor Him – the inner quality of heart and mind that mirror Him).

What a mouthful ... What a life verse ... What a life task ... Those who experience genuine Kingdom Living will be involved in just such a task.

That’s the life task that is comprehensively addressed in the Sermon on the Mount ... Only a born-again child of God could even dare to think of fulfilling it ... Jesus spelled it out in the Sermon on the Mount so that the unsaved might be overwhelmed by its enormity while the saved might be motivated by its purity.

Week by week we will give ourselves to the process of discovering what it says – what it means in our day to day life - and then to the challenge of living our lives in this fallen, sin-filled world within its framework and under its influence.

***“But Seek First The Kingdom of God and His Righteousness
And all these things will be given to you as well.”***

And by way of encouragement this morning let me share with you several things that Jesus shared regarding the nature of this Kingdom that we seek - this Kingdom within which we want to live – this Kingdom whose values we want to see more and more controlling and defining our lives.

Each of these things I would share – these Characteristics – of the Kingdom, Jesus spelled out in various Parables -

Three caught my attention this week.
Allow them to further motivate your search ...

1. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PRODUCTIVE ... IT GROWS!

(Matthew 13:31-32)

He told them another parable: *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."*

Jesus could have chosen any seed as an example ... seeds are tiny; in comparison, the plants they produce are enormous. Contained in the seed is the stuff of growth.

The Kingdom of God is like that – it is planted (like a seed) in us at spiritual birth (or even before) and then it grows and becomes visible to the watching world (and to us).

It takes a practiced eye to see the difference between one kind of seed and another and to know what kind of seed each is but anyone can tell the difference between a stalk of corn and a pumpkin.

Once put in the ground and provided the conditions of growth, seeds grow and produce what they are intended to produce. So it is with the Kingdom of God ... Once it is planted in the heart – once it is planted in the community of men – it begins to develop into what God would have it be.

And as it grows it gains strength and it is able to handle all the things of life that come its way ... lots of birds can sit on its branches and it is not weighed down.

The Kingdom of God that Jesus urges us to earnestly seek is a Productive Kingdom - a Kingdom that is designed for strong growth and development.

From a little (mostly invisible) beginning, it grows into something noticeable and recognizable.

Here's a second thing ...

2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PERVASIVE ... IT TRANSFORMS!

(Matthew 13:33)

He told them still another parable: *"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."*

The Kingdom of God gradually infiltrates itself into every facet of life. The Kingdom of God brings a transforming presence into our lives. The Spirit of God who accompanies the Kingdom of God into our lives is forever saying to us ... *“What about this?”* or *“What about that?”*

The Word of God which is really the citizen’s manual – the constitution (if you will) of the Kingdom of God - is forever identifying new areas of life upon which our King would place His transforming hand.

The longer you lived as a citizen of this world before you became a citizen of heaven, the greater and the more noticeable the transformation.

More and more of your explanations of your life and behavior begin with these words ... *“Since I became a Christian, I ...”* You recognize that you are in the midst of something transformational – your life is being changed.

Last thing ... Here the parable is so clear that it hardly needs comment ...

3. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS POSSESSIVE ... IT CAPTIVATES!

(Matthew 13:44-46)

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.
When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went
and sold all he had and bought that field.”*

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for
fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away
and sold everything he had and bought it”.*

That’s my hope as we work our way through the Sermon on the Mount – that each of us will find ourselves saying ...

*“I want that kind of life; I want to be that kind of person; I want to handle things that way;
I want to feel the presence of that kind of life within me; I want to truly experience
‘Kingdom Living’ as an enthusiastic and loyal subject of the King!*

FINAL THOT ...

Only those who **SEEK** the **KINGDOM** of God ever **FIND** it!

Resolve to **INVOLVE** yourself in the **SEARCH**.

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson One"

In Sunday's introductory message to our new Series, "**KINGDOM LIVING**, (a study of the Sermon on the Mount), Pastor Mark highlighted this **Key Scripture** ...

"SEEK FIRST His KINGDOM and His RIGHTEOUSNESS ..." (Matthew 6:33)

Here's the way he "*expanded*" or "*amplified* it ...

"SEEK" (desire – crave – search for – pursue – focus on – make it your ambition or goal to discover and obtain) **"FIRST"** (as of prime importance - before anything else – as critical to all else that you would desire) **"HIS KINGDOM"** (His ruling authority over your life – His territorial realm

in which you might settle down – His regents of whom you might consider yourself to be one) **and HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS** (the rules and regulations that He has laid down – the principles for living that honor Him – the inner quality of heart and mind that mirror Him)."

How does that strike you as a "*Life Command*" ... What parts of it strike you as particularly meaningful or challenging? Pick a word or phrase and reflect upon it ...

Choose one option from each of the four amplified words and write out your own amplified version of this Biblical Command ...

Here's one extended statement from Sunday's message. Read and reflect ...

The Kingdom of God gradually infiltrates itself into every facet of life.
The Kingdom of God brings a transforming presence into our lives.
The Spirit of God who accompanies the Kingdom of God into our lives
is forever saying to us ... "*What about this?*" or "*What about that?*"

The Word of God which is really the citizen's manual – the constitution
(if you will) of the Kingdom of God - is forever identifying new areas
of life upon which our King would place his transforming hand.

The longer you lived as a citizen of this world before you became a citizen
of heaven the greater and the more noticeable the transformation.

More and more of your explanations of your life and behavior begin with these words ...
"*Since I became a Christian, I ...*" You recognize that you are in the midst of something
transformational – your life is being changed.

Point to Ponder ...

How tough is it to stay "**KINGDOM ORIENTED**"?

“SO WHO’S REALLY BLESSED?”

-Those Who Are Poor In Spirit -
(Matthew 5:3)

Intro ... Today we begin our study of the Sermon on the Mount – Matthew chapters five through seven.

Repeat after me ...

“More than anything else in the world I want to be blessed.”

Today’s Key Definition ...

BLESSED – experiencing the full **BENEFIT** of
being a born-again **CHILD** of **GOD**.

The word ***“Blessed”*** is a kind of ‘*umbrella word*’ that covers every aspect of genuine Christian life ... purpose, satisfaction, connection with God and man, happiness, enlightenment, fulfillment, divine approval, purity of heart and mind ... a little bit of heaven on earth – all of these are suggested by that single wonderful word.

Look with me at the first 11 verses of Matthew chapter five ... nine times in those 11 verses Jesus used the word ***“Blessed”*** ... And in those 11 verses Jesus identifies those whom he considers to (in fact) be blessed.

And by doing so he identifies the ‘*Heroes of the Kingdom*’ – the ones who are best suited for Kingdom Living ... the ones who will live out the ***“Kingdom Style of Life”*** most successfully.

Now if Jesus had asked me to formulate the list it probably would have gone something like this ...

Blessed are those who have been raised in Christian Homes for they have a solid foundation for their life and they have known of the Lord since birth.

Blessed are those who have been able to attend a solid Christian college for they have had imprinted upon them a comprehensive Christian World View and have had validated the things they were taught in childhood.

Blessed are those who have been fortunate enough to wind up in full time Christian Ministry for they will never worry about whether or not their life has purpose and value.

Now all of those things have indeed been “*blessings*” in my life and I truly thank the Lord for them. Surely each of you could no doubt form a list of unique “blessings” that you have experienced.

But Jesus didn’t include any of mine and probably none of yours in his list.

He didn’t include any “*things*” at all ... His list deals more with qualities of life – qualities of spiritual life – qualities available to every child of God no matter their physical circumstances – qualities that will make them productive in the Kingdom of God – and will make them “*blessed*” – that will enable them to experience the full benefit of being ‘born-again children of God’.

Eight of them in fact He lists ... Today we look at “***Blessed Quality One***”.

Today’s Key Scripture ...

*“Blessed are the **POOR** in **SPIRIT**, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”*
(Matthew 5:3)

Jesus is saying that ‘*success in the kingdom*’ comes to those who are ‘*poor in spirit*’ ... That’s just another way of saying that success in kingdom living comes to those who possess a **HUMBLE HEART** for that’s what poor in spirit really means.

It doesn’t mean to be ‘*poor spirited*’ ... a ‘*down in the dumps*’ kind of person ... It doesn’t mean to be someone who has given up or given in.

Someone with a humble heart sees himself accurately within the larger scheme of things – but someone with a humble heart is not engaged in ‘*exalting himself above others*’ ...

The Apostle Paul who enjoyed incredible Success in Kingdom Living instructed the Roman believers (Romans 12:3) ...

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.”

and he testified to the Corinthian believers (1 Corinthians 4:3) ...

“I do not even judge myself ...”

Someone with a humble heart does his work as unto the Lord and allows the Lord to evaluate the effectiveness of his work. He doesn’t form his own evaluation of how important he is or how significant the work he has done.

And Jesus says that such a person is “*blessed*” and is in line to experience the full benefit of being a born-again child of God and will thus be successful in Kingdom Living.

This morning I would like to take just a few moments and share some of the tangible “*blessings*” that come to one who is “*Humble in Heart*” or as Jesus put it “*Poor in Spirit*” ... someone not all “*puffed up in his own eyes*”.

* Someone Who Is Truly “*Poor In Spirit*” Will Never Experience
ENVY or RESENTMENT Of The Accomplishments Of Others.

Philippians 2:3 ...

“In humility consider others better than yourselves.”

If I honestly consider my competitors to be better than me, then I will naturally consider them to be more deserving of reward or benefit than me.

The humble man actually expects to find commendable qualities in those around him; he actually believes that the better man did get the reward or benefit when he loses out.

His humble heart protects him from feelings of envy or resentment.
How blessed would it be to live with none of that in our lives?

The **second** ‘*tangible blessing*’ that I would mention grows directly out of the first:

* Someone Who Is Truly “*Poor In Spirit*” Will Never Know The
PAIN Of DISAPPOINTMENT When The Expected Thing Doesn’t Happen.

The humble hearted man never expects to be exalted himself; he (like His Heavenly Father) remembers his frame; he knows that he is ‘*just dust*’.

Any accolades or honors that come his way are always unexpected and thus doubly enjoyed.

His motto is simply ... “*Do your best and let God handle the rest.*”

Again we are reminded of Paul’s practice ... “*I do not even judge myself*”.

*‘I neither condemn myself or praise myself.
I do not expect others to notice or praise me –
I present myself as best I can and allow God to handle all outcomes’.*

How blessed we would be if the pain of disappointment was eliminated from our lives!
Humility of Heart does just that.

How about this one ...

* Someone Who Is Truly "*Poor In Spirit*" Will Never
Feel **ATTACKED** even when they are attacked.

He may **be** attacked but he will never "*feel*" attacked;
He is always open to someone else's ideas or opinions;
He is always ready to receive additional insight on a situation;
He doesn't get defensive or angry.

He is not '*puffed up with pride*' ... He has no personal territory to defend.

Doesn't mean that he has no convictions; doesn't mean that he is wishy-washy but it
does mean that he is always open to hear the thoughts and opinions of others and it
does mean that he never takes what others say personally.

He doesn't make things '*all about him*' ...
He doesn't waste energy or time seeking to vindicate himself or his point of view.
He never feels the need to go into '*attack mode*'.
In fact, he doesn't even know how.

Needless to say, his humble heart saves him from a lot of anguish.

Surely there are other '*blessings*' that come to those who are '*poor in spirit*' ... it would
be a good exercise to continue the list around your dinner table today ...

We will probably share a few more in our cell groups this week but let's let these
three suffice for this morning for there is another important aspect of this
discussion to consider.

Today's Key Question ...

How does one truly ***BECOME*** poor in spirit?

Answer ... **COME** to the **CROSS**

* **The Cross Tells Me** ... *"How **UNWORTHY** I Am In The **EYES** Of **GOD**."*

All my (would be) righteous deeds are like *"filthy rags"* in God's sight ... Isa. 64:6

Like a shepherd-less sheep I have *"gone astray"* ... Isaiah 53:6

I *'have sinned'* and fallen far *"short"* of God's glorious standard ... Rom. 3:23

The Cross of Jesus Christ humbles all who approach it.

It points out their spiritual poverty and calls them to repentance and points them in the direction of the blessings that come to the humble-hearted.

* **The Cross Tells Me** ... *"I No Longer **BELONG** To Myself."*

Paul told the Corinthians believers ...

"You are not your own ... You were bought at a price." (1 Cor. 9:19-20)

If I don't belong to myself anymore, then ...

I am no longer responsible to promote myself, to defend myself
or to aggressively watch out for my own interests.

Jesus owns me ... He is responsible for me.

"I am to do my best and trust God for the rest."

One last thing ...

* **The Cross Tells Me** ... *"I Have Been **INFUSED** With Supernatural Power."*

As Paul testified to the Galatians believers ...

*"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live,
but Christ (himself) lives in me ..."*

(Galatians 2:20)

And so living with a Humble Heart becomes a distinct possibility for there was never a man more humble of heart than Jesus Himself (Philippians 2) ...

And as He lives out His Life in me, I begin to experience all the blessings that come to one who is *"Poor in Spirit"* and I begin to ready myself for genuine Kingdom Living.

Final Thot ...

The Poor in Spirit are some of the **RICHEST** people around!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Two"

Pastor Mark started Sunday's message by having the congregation repeat the following ...

*"More than anything else in the world I want to be **BLESSED**."*

Does that statement accurately reflect your desire? What do you think of (have always thought of) when you hear (have heard) the word "**blessed**"?

Reflect upon the following statement from Sunday's message. What strikes you?

*"The word "**Blessed**" is a kind of 'umbrella word' that covers every aspect of genuine Christian life ... purpose, satisfaction, connection with God and man, happiness, enlightenment, fulfillment, divine approval, purity of heart and mind, a little bit of heaven on earth ... all of these are suggested by that single wonderful word."*

In Matthew 5:3, Jesus says that those who are '**POOR** in **SPIRIT**' (humble in heart) are among the '**blessed**' in this world ...

Sunday Pastor Mark shared three '**tangible blessings**' that come to those who are truly "**Poor in Spirit**". Remember and reflect ...

* They will never experience **ENVY** or **RESENTMENT** of the accomplishments of others for they "*consider others to be better than themselves*".
(Philippians 2:3)

* They will never know the **PAIN** of **DISAPPOINTMENT** when the 'expected thing' doesn't happen for they have '*placed all matters in the Lord's Hands*'.

* They will never feel **ATTACKED** (emotionally) even when they **are** attacked for they are always open to new input on how to improve themselves.

Can you think of any other such "**blessings**" linked to having a "**humble heart**"?

What was the single answer given to the question ...

"How can we develop a humble heart?"

"COME to the CROSS!"

Point to Ponder ...

How does "**Coming to the Cross**" keep us **HUMBLE**?

“SO WHO’S REALLY BLESSED?”

- Those Who Mourn -
(Matthew 5:4)

Intro ... Last week we began our look at the Beatitudes – the first section of the Sermon on the Mount – and as we did so we noted first of all that in these ‘Beatitudes’ Jesus was identifying the people who were especially suited for Kingdom Living ... ‘heroes of the kingdom’ we called them. The **‘blessed’** Jesus called them.

There is actually no more noble, no more spiritual condition that a human being can enjoy than that of being ‘blessed’ ... truly *‘blessed’*.

We began last week’s message by declaring right out loud that that is what (more than anything else in the world) we want to be ... **BLESSED!**

We pointed out last week that ...

The word ***“Blessed”*** is a kind of ‘umbrella word’ that covers every aspect of genuine Christian life ... purpose, satisfaction, connection with God and man, happiness, enlightenment, fulfillment, divine approval, purity of heart and mind ... a little bit of heaven on earth!

All of these are suggested by that single wonderful word.

But man’s natural notion of ‘blessing’ is not at all what Jesus was talking about ...

Man’s ‘natural notion’ generally arises from the world of ‘stuff’ that surrounds him and focuses primarily on material things whereas Jesus used the word to refer to a condition of life – a settled position of heart and soul – an outlook on life that suits the Kingdom and is experienced by those who are in step with the King.

Last week we saw Jesus begin his identification of these people by saying,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit (the humble in heart, we called them)
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

It takes a little bit of thought to wrap our minds around that statement until we approach the cross and all the pieces come together.

To possess a humble heart – to be truly poor in spirit, not puffed up in our own eyes, not haughty or arrogant - is to ready ourselves for Kingdom Living – to be a *‘Hero of the Kingdom’*.

Today we add to Christ's identification of those who are Blessed" – those who are truly suited for triumphant Kingdom Living - ***Blessed Quality #2*** ...

Today's Key Scripture ...

"Blessed are those who **MOURN** for they will be **COMFORTED.**"
(Matthew 5:4)

"Blessed are those who mourn ..." What could Jesus possibly have meant?

Certainly we could say that it is a blessing to be comforted in the midst of a time of mourning but wouldn't it be better not to have to mourn at all?

Jesus however seems to be saying that '*mourning*' itself is a good thing – a pre-requisite for successful Kingdom Living even – even as a '*humble heart*' is.

Consider carefully with me ...

Today's Key Definition ...

MOURN ... To experience deep **SADNESS** over a loss.
To sense a **YEARNING** for something that once was.

"To Mourn" then is to experience a deep and perhaps even debilitating sadness precipitated by the loss of someone or something of great value – to maintain a focus on and to sense a yearning for that which has been lost.

In our world today, we almost exclusively today think of mourning in terms of the passing of a loved one but the word is really capable of a much broader application – It's in that broader application that I believe we find the significance of Jesus' Kingdom Observation.

"Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted."

Here's one possible amplification of Jesus' words ...

*"Blessed are those who mourn about the right stuff
and who mourn in the right way."*

The point is ...

*"There is a kind of 'mourning' / a kind of 'sadness of soul'
that prepares us for successful Kingdom Living."*

Let me share with you this morning three types of '**Mourners**' who show themselves ready for Kingdom Life – **Three Types of Mourners** whom (I believe) are truly 'blessed' in the eyes of God.

1. Those Who Mourn For The PARADISE That Was LOST ...

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.” (Genesis 2: 8-9)

And with those words, Moses describes the beginning of the human race – the beginning of life on this earth – life in the Garden of Eden – the nearest thing to heaven on earth that man has ever experienced.

That beginning was ancient history even in Moses' day ... If we take the most conservative of dates for the Scripture and for the formation of the earth, Moses was speaking about events that preceded his own day by some 3,000 years and most likely more.

Moses's people lived under the oppression of the Pharaoh of Egypt – their lives were anything but blessed. Can you not sense the presence of the Mourner's heart as Moses writes of what once was?

There was a time when God walked with man in the cool of the evening; a time when man was sinless and free; a time when man and woman lived in perfect harmony and there was a place (not Camelot but Eden) that was sin-free and stress-free.

Those who truly know the Savior – those who are truly Citizens of the Kingdom – mourn the passing away of such a place and of the way of life it afforded man.

And in their mourning, they mirror the heart of God Himself ...

Can you not sense a deepening of Moses' grief as he writes in Genesis 6:6 (speaking of the world in the days of Noah) ...

“God was grieved that He had made man on the earth and his heart was filled with pain.” (Genesis 6:6)

Who more than the Creator Himself could fully understand all that had been lost and truly mourn for things that once were but were no more!

Surely the Great Flood demonstrated the judgment of God upon sin but it brought no pleasure to God to so display His Power ...

It was a grieving God who “*opened up the windows of heaven*” to destroy the wondrous world of men and animals and perfect climate that he had created.

How about the significance of this brief verse ... John 11:35

“Jesus wept” (at Lazarus’ tomb).

Was not this an example of the Son of God Himself ‘mourning’ the loss of what once was?

Once there was a world where death was unknown; once there was a world where no one doubted the good intentions of God – where no one would accuse God of neglect as Mary and Martha had just accused him. This perfect world free from all sin and sickness existed no longer – and that fact could (and should) easily bring tears.

Today, I would declare ...

“Blessed are those who mourn for the Paradise that was lost.”

They Will Be Comforted – Another ‘Home of Righteousness’ Is ***PLANNED***.

*“We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth,
the home of righteousness.”
(2 Peter 3:13)*

There is coming a day when all that has been lost will be discovered again.
What will it be like to actually live in “*the home of righteousness*”?

To dwell in a land where sin and sickness no longer exist ...

It stretches the meaning of the word to say they will be ‘*comforted*’.
Indeed, mourning will be no more – yearning will be satisfied.
Man and God will be perfectly united and sin forever banished.

Blessed are those who set their minds and hearts on such things.
They are indeed ready to live as Citizens of the Kingdom!

Here's a second type of mourner spoken of in the Scripture ...

2. Those Who Mourn For The SAVIOR Who Has LEFT ...

Did you ever realize that Jesus expected mourning to be part of our lives?
Here's how he answered an inquiry brought by the Disciples of John the Baptist.
They had asked ...

"How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"
(Matthew 9:14)

For them, periodic fasting was part of their religious life, it showed their commitment to God and was a well-established practice.

Here's how he answered ...

*"How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?
The time will come when the bridegroom is taken from them;
then they will fast (mourn)." (Matthew 9:15)*

It's interesting that Jesus interchanged the words "fasting and mourning".

It's almost as though he were seeking to remind (or instruct) them that fasting was not just to be a religious practice put on the calendar and faithfully followed, but that true fasting (self-denial for the purpose of giving oneself to prayer and communion with God) should always grow out of a sense of "*mourning the loss*" of things God (and His Children) hold dear.

Having established that connection and motivation for fasting,
Jesus then says (in effect) ...

*"Everything that God and these men hold dear is right here in their midst ...
How could they and for what would they mourn and fast?"*

*But when things change, when I am gone ... then they will have
reason and motivation to both mourn and fast."*

Can you not imagine the many moments after Jesus had ascended back to heaven,
when the disciples who had fellowshiped so closely with him would be almost
overcome with sorrow at their sense of loss?

Can you imagine them ever again sitting around a fire at night – sharing a meal – and
not feeling the absence of the one who used to always say the blessing – the one who
had so lovingly guided and taught them – the one who had eventually died on
the cross for them?

Is it (should it be) any different for us ... Can we not and should we not mourn for the Savior who has left?

As the Apostle Peter said to the believers in his day, so he would say to us ...

*“Though you have not seen him, you love him;
And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him.”*
(1 Peter 1:8)

He could have easily added ... *“You feel his absence even as I do.”*

Do we? We who have no real idea what we missed – we who don’t even know what the Lord Jesus looked like – we who probably could not pick him out in a crowd.
Do we *‘feel his absence’*?

Is it possible to feel the absence of one we have never personally known ...
Is it possible for us to participate in this kind of spiritual ‘mourning’ that characterized Jesus’ own disciples?

I surely believe it is ... but it takes a drawing apart from the world a bit – it takes time spent in the Word of God – it takes an openness to the Holy Spirit who can make Christ come alive in our midst and who can enable us to see him and love him.

And when that happens, we will mourn him and miss him even as his own disciples did in their day ...

So today, with solid Biblical backing, I can declare ...

“Blessed are those who mourn for the Savior who has left”

They Will Be Comforted – He Will **COME AGAIN**.

No more comforting words than these have ever been spoken ...

*“And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will **come again**
that where I am there you shall be also.”*
(John 14:3)

And to those words are added these written by the Apostle Paul of the Return of Christ to capture away His Church ...

*“And so shall we be with the Lord forever – therefore,
comfort one another with these words.”*
(1 Thessalonians 4:17, 18)

So there are those who “*Mourn the Paradise that has been lost*” and there are those who “*Mourn the Savior who has left*” ... one more type of blessed “mourner” I find in the Scripture ...

3. Those Who Mourn For The CHURCH That Bears Christ’s NAME ...

Here we mourn not so much for the thing that once was but for the thing that has always been the intention ... The Church in Jerusalem (that we studied a little while ago) came pretty close ... but the influence of the world around and the flesh within exert continual pressure upon this wondrous Body of Christ and sin all too frequently finds its way into the fellowship.

And when that happens, the followers of Christ have to decide how to respond.
Should they merely overlook it – should they angrily denounce it ...
Should they immediately forgive it ...
Should they rejoice that their salvation is not based upon their performance and pretty much disregard it as almost “*irrelevant*”?

Let’s allow the Apostle Paul to give us our answer ...

Sin had invaded the church in Corinth ... A man had become sexually involved with “*his father’s wife*” ... even the pagan society considered this to be ‘*abnormal*’ ...

However, the church went along with it ... Paul says that the church was actually “*proud*” ... Proud that they were so liberated? Proud that they were so forgiving? Proud that they were so loving? Who knows the source of their pride but pride was the wrong response. Paul says ...

*“Should you not rather have mourned?”
(1 Corinthians 5:2)*

“*Mourning is the proper response*” – deep sorrow over sin in Christ’s Church.
The proper response is to seek to make things right – to lovingly confront the sinner and seek for confession and repentance.

Paul shared his own unique burden as Church Planting Apostle in his second letter to this Corinthians fellowship ... Speaking of the churches scattered throughout the Mediterranean World, Paul says ...

*“I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.
Who is weak and I do not feel weak? “Who is led into sin and
I do not inwardly burn?” (2 Corinthians 11:29)*

Burn with shame – burn with regret – burn with a deep sense of sorrow over the plight of the church that bears Christ’s Name.

But it's not only the church member, not only the Church leader who '*mourns over sin in Christ's Church*'. The Holy Spirit who indwells the Church does as well ...

Paul instructed the believers in Ephesus ...

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit".
(Ephesians 4:30)

The Holy Spirit, who is placed inside each believer at the moment of spiritual birth; the Holy Spirit who is that "*other comforter*" that Jesus promised to send; the Holy Spirit who gave birth to the Church of Jesus Christ on the Day of Pentecost; the Holy Spirit who indwells the temple created by the Body of Believers ... *This Holy Spirit* – this third member of the Godhead - can be and is grieved (brought to a place of mourning) by the presence of sin in the Church Christ is building in this world.

Through the centuries and surely today there is much cause for '*mourning*' in the Church of Jesus Christ – there is much lax living, there is much neglect of spiritual things, there is much perverted teaching, there is much to bring any spiritually sensitive soul to tears.

Those who mourn for the Church that bears Christ's Name are a very special category of mourners and (again with solid Biblical backing) I declare to you today that ...

They Will Be Comforted – Christ's Church Will Be *PURIFIED*.

*"Then the end will come when He hands over the kingdom to the Father,
after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power."*
(1 Corinthians 15:24)

There is coming a day when the battle with sin will cease; when the demons of hell will be locked up tight; when the building of Christ's Church will reach completion; when Christ Himself will hand over his perfected, purified Church/Kingdom to his Heavenly Father. That promise 'comforts' the hearts of those who 'mourn for Christ's Church.

* * * * *

So is there a place for sorrow and mourning in the Kingdom of God?
Indeed there is, in fact, it is expected. And Jesus says that those who do so are "*BLESSED*" – blessed indeed - for as our *Final Thot* puts it ...

Final Thot ...

Blessed indeed are those who *MOURN* for they have
connected with the *HEART* of their King!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Three"

Sunday we looked at the **Second Beatitude** ...

*"Blessed are those that **MOURN** for they shall be **COMFORTED**."*

Respond to this statement from Sunday's message:

"What could Jesus possibly have meant? Certainly we could say that it is a blessing to be comforted in the midst of a time of mourning but wouldn't it be better not to have to mourn at all? Jesus, however, seems to be saying that 'mourning' itself is a good thing – a pre-requisite for successful Kingdom Living even – even as a 'humble heart' is."

What's your take on the Definition Pastor Mark gave for the word "Mourn"?

MOURN ... To experience deep **SADNESS** over a loss -
To sense a **YEARNING** for something that once was.

Here are three "types" of mourners that Pastor Mark identified as being among the "Blessed of the Kingdom" ... People with a spiritually sensitive heart.

1. Those who mourn for the **PARADISE** that was **LOST**
(Genesis 2:8-9; Genesis 6:6; John 11:35; 2 Peter 3:13)

2. Those who mourn for the **SAVIOR** who has **LEFT**
(Matthew 9:14-15; 1 Peter 1:8; John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18)

3. Those who mourn for the **CHURCH** that bears **CHRIST'S NAME**
(1 Corinthians 5:2; 2 Corinthians 11:29; Ephesians 4:30; 1 Corinthians 15:24)

Do you think these things are commonly mourned for today?

Do you ever find yourself "mourning" them?

Are you more likely to "experience deep sadness" or "sense a yearning" when you 'mourn for' these things?

Point to Ponder ...

How is a spiritually sensitive "mourner" uniquely prepared for **KINGDOM LIVING**?

“COMMUNION – The Mourner’s Comfort”

(Matthew 5:4)

Intro ... Last week as we focused our attention upon the Second Beatitude listed in Matthew chapter five ...

“Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.”

we identified three specific groups of *‘blessed mourners’*; one of those groups was those who *“Mourn for the Savior who Left”*.

Can you imagine how devastating it was to those early disciples when Jesus told them that he was *“going away”*?

These men and women had been with him on a nearly full-time basis for more than three years ... they had given up everything to follow him; they had lived for over three years pretty much totally dependent upon him; they had re-defined their entire lives in terms of him.

They had seen miracles done by him; they had been sent out in ministry for him; the general public (including their families) definitely thought of them in light of him.

To lose him was the worst thing that they could imagine. His leaving left a bunch of true *‘mourners’* behind ... men and women who would have done anything to sense his presence in their midst again.

In times of difficulty ... to sense His Presence;
In times of puzzlement ... to sense His Presence;
In times of doubt even ... to sense His Presence.

To hear him say (as he did on that first Easter Evening) ...

“Peace be with you ... It is I, myself!”

How exciting it must have been when the thought finally dawned on them (perhaps it was John the beloved who first expressed it) ...

*“We can ... We can sense His Presence whenever we want to –
He told us and showed us the way that it can be done.”*

Remember the night that he was betrayed – Remember what he said to us during that Last Supper we shared together?

He picked up a piece of bread and said (Luke 22:19) ...

*"This is my body which is given for you ...
do this in remembrance of me."*

And then remember how he passed around the cup and said ...

*"This cup is the New Covenant in my blood which is
poured out for you. Drink this in remembrance of me."*

When we share communion together those powerful memories are stirred and it's almost like he is standing right there in our midst again. It's like we are living that moment all over again and for a moment it feels like He never left.

Communion can provide a tremendous sense of comfort to us even as we mourn for him.

But there's **something else** that Jesus said ...

Remember the day when he spoke so boldly that most of the crowd turned around and went home? It was that day on the other side of the Lake when the crowd tracked us down and Jesus accused them of just wanted him to work another feeding miracle.

Remember how he said to them (John 6:25-57) ...

*"Your fore-fathers ate manna (the miracle bread) in the wilderness and
they still died ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven.
He who eats my flesh will never die."*

And then he said ...

*"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood,
remains in me and I in him."*

And there's our answer ... We could call it ...

Today's Comforting Thought ...
"In **COMMUNION** Christ re-enters our **MIDST** in a special and powerful way."

Now I'm sure that it probably took those early disciples awhile to work their way to that comforting realization ... that though their Savior had left, **communion** was a way that they could draw near to him and sense his presence in their midst even as they awaited His Actual Return.

You and I are the beneficiaries of their discovery ...

They not only put their discovery into practice, they put it into print and we can read for ourselves today and experience the benefit.

So for us today ...

“Communion is a way to comfort all those who mourn Christ’s absence.”

Key Points ...

“In Communion we **REMEMBER** him just as if we had
EXPERIENCED His earthly life right along with His Disciples.”

(and those ‘*memories*’ can comfort us)

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

Read the gospels ...become as familiar as possible with the details of his life.
Become even more familiar with his heart and voice.

“In Communion we **CONNECT** with him just as if he were
PHYSICALLY present.”

(and that ‘*connection*’ can comfort us)

“This is my body – this is my blood.”

There is something about this meal that draws us into His Presence – or should we say,
draws His Presence into us. These simple elements become ‘*something more*’ when
blessed by prayer.

“In Communion we **RECEIVE** from him **NOURISHMENT** for living.”

(and that ‘*nourishment*’ can comfort us)

“He who eats my flesh will never die.”

There’s a vitality – a passion for living – that comes to one who properly “*communes*”
with Christ. We may not ‘*live forever*’ but we will live life to the full right to the very end.
He invigorates us through his sacrifice.

And so here’s a ***final thot*** (the bottom line) for us as we prepare for this particular time
of communion ...

Final Thot ...

Our **ABSENT** Lord is not nearly so **ABSENT**
for those who faithfully celebrate **COMMUNION**.

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"Lesson Four"

Sunday we continued our look at the **Second Beatitude** in a communion meditation entitled: "**COMMUNION** – The Mourner's **COMFORT**".

Here are a couple of **key statements** from that meditation ...
What thoughts do they stir in you?

- * "His (Christ's) leaving left a bunch of true 'mourners' behind ... men and women who would have done anything to sense his presence in their midst again."
- * "How exciting it must have been when the thought finally dawned on them (perhaps it was John the Beloved who first expressed it) ... 'We can - We can sense His Presence whenever we want to – He told us and showed us the way that it can be done.' "
- * "In communion Christ re-enters our midst in a special and powerful way."

Here are the three "**Key Points**" shared on Sunday regarding communion.
Choose one and reflect upon what it means to you ...

- * "In Communion we **REMEMBER** him just as if we had **EXPERIENCED** His earthly life right along with His Disciples."
"Do this in remembrance of (as you remember) me."
- * "In Communion we **CONNECT** with him just as if he were **PHYSICALLY** present." "This is my body – this is my blood."
- * "In Communion we **RECEIVE** from him **NOURISHMENT** for living."
"He who eats my flesh will never die."

Here are the statements what went along with those '**key points**' ...
See if you can '**Match them up**' ...

- * There is something about this meal that draws us into His Presence – or should we say, draws His Presence into us. These simple elements become '*something more*' when blessed by prayer.
- * There's a vitality – a passion for living – that comes to one who properly "*communes*" with Christ. We may not '*live forever*' but we will live life to the full right to the very end. He invigorates us through his sacrifice.
- * Read the gospels ...become as familiar as possible with the details of his life. Become even more familiar with his heart and voice.

Point To Ponder ... Is there more to "**Get From Communion**" than most get?

“SO WHO’S REALLY BLESSED?”

- Those Who Are Meek -
(Matthew 5:5)

Intro ... Today we continue our initial foray into the Sermon on the Mount – that is, we continue our examination of the Beatitudes with which Jesus began this great body of teaching.

In the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) Jesus was sharing real secrets of the kingdom ... revealing key attitudes and characteristics that pretty much guarantee Kingdom Success.

In the Beatitudes Jesus was identifying the kinds of people who are truly the “*blessed of the earth*” – the kind of people upon whom God’s Smile of Approval rests – the kind of people who will and do experience a deep down satisfaction of heart and soul that both sustains them and enables them to truly “*thrive*” in the Kingdom of God.

Here’s our **challenge** as we launch this study ... Our old adversary, Satan, seeking to use our own language against us, has taken these ‘*words of blessing*’ and so emptied them of meaning that they can seem to us today to be almost the exact opposite of what they actually are.

Check out the **Beatitudes** we have discussed so far ...

<i>“Blessed are the Poor in Spirit”</i>

“Poor in Spirit” – “humble in heart” ... we think “loser” – bottom rung person.
A “*I’m no good; I’ll never amount to anything*” kind of person.

Actually true humility means choosing to consider others to be better, more worthy than yourself - not putting yourself down but raising others up.

The truly humble is freed from the ugliness of envy and resentment; the truly humble is liberated from frustration and disappointment over unfulfilled expectations; the truly humble never feels attacked when criticized by others; the truly humble does not consider everything in life to be a competition where his winning necessitates your losing.

The truly humble winds up being a non-threatening, encouraging, stable presence in the lives of those who know him and as a result he winds up pretty much living a stress-free, blessed and admired life ... the kingdom winds up being his. Not bad.

Second Beatitude ...

"Blessed are Those who Mourn"

Satan would have us turn our attention toward those who have suffered great loss and whose lives have been forever affected by that loss – he would, if he could, drive us to picture those whose grief incapacitates them, who are unable or perhaps even unwilling to move on and get on with life. These are the grief-stricken of earth – they are men and women to be pitied not envied – they are anything but *"blessed"*.

But a quick study of God's broader Word indicated to us that these that Jesus speaks of are another type of mourner altogether.

These *"blessed mourners"* are those whose hearts grieve for the things that God grieves for ... For the Paradise that was lost; for the Savior who has left; for the Presence of Sin in the Church that bears Christ's Name ...

These are people whose hearts are sensitized in a very significant way to the things that bring pain to the heart of God and who as a result find themselves living in a very close connection to the Almighty Himself. Not bad.

Today we come to another quality of blessed people – a quality of heart that will lead to outstanding success in Kingdom Living – and once again the word chosen is one that time and common usage has degraded into something far less than what Jesus originally communicated.

Today's Key Scripture ...

"Blessed are the **MEEK** for they shall inherit the **EARTH.**"
(Matthew 5:5)

If the term *"poor in spirit"* is a tough sell in our current world, how much more is the term *"meek"* ...

The word 'meek' strikes most people as a synonym for 'weakness' ... A meek little man – a pushover – a sad case – a person who would never stand up for himself – a victim – the type of person a bully looks for.

There's hardly anyone who would feel complimented if you were to describe them as 'meek' and yet Jesus says *"Meekness is a condition of Blessedness and is foundational to success in Kingdom Living"*.

In fact Jesus says that the *"meek"* will wind up *'inheriting the earth'* (Ps. 37:11)

As Ricky used to say to Lucy ... Someone has got a lot of “*splaining to do*”.

Well ... let's start ...

First of all ...

***“MEEKNESS DEFINED” ...
“What Does The Word ‘PRAUS’ Mean?”***

That's the Greek word that the Holy Spirit had Matthew select as he recorded the Sermon on the Mount in his Gospel ... **PRAUS**.

To the Greek this word ‘*praus*’ communicated a mild or gentle spirit but it is not inconsistent with a strong and aggressive nature.

‘*Praus*’ was the word used to characterize a horse whose strength has been submitted to harness or saddle. The key concept here is one of “*strength under submission*” ... a gentleness toward the world that is the result of one's choice.

Our Kingdom Living Definition...

MEEKNESS – the ability to submit oneself to a **STANDARD** of belief or behavior even when **NATURAL** urges or impulses would lead you to do **OTHERWISE**.

Meekness is not weakness; in fact those who are
most weak are generally the least meek.

Meekness: strength under control – discipline of self.

The ‘meek’ are those who ‘*submit themselves purposefully to God's standards of belief and behavior*’ and who live gentle and quiet and non-threatening, non-disruptive lives.

And Jesus said that such people will wind up ‘*inheriting the earth*’.

The truth is that such people generally wind up inheriting anything that they are part of.

* The meek husband/wife submits to God's standard of respect for spouse and harmony in the home and does not engage in fighting and quarrelling. His/her wife/husband really cannot find a bad thing to say about him/her. He/She is a delight to live with.

* The meek employee submits to God's standard of work laid out in the Scriptures and does not gripe and complain about how his boss manages him.
His boss is delighted to have him.

Speaking more generally, here's how the well-known Bible Commentator Matthew Henry of days gone by described these "*Blessed Ones*" ...

"The meek are those who quietly submit themselves to God, to his word and to his rod, who follow his directions, and comply with his designs, and are gentle towards all men; The meek are those who can bear provocation without being inflamed by it; are either silent, or return a soft answer; and who can show their displeasure when there is occasion for it, without being transported into any indecencies; who can be cool when others are hot; and in their patience keep possession of their own souls. They are the meek, who are rarely and hardly provoked, but quickly and easily pacified; and who would rather forgive twenty injuries than revenge one, having the rule of their own spirits."

The 'meek' are "*Blessed*" Jesus said ... they are uniquely suited for "*Kingdom Living*".

Long years before Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, Isaiah declared (Isaiah 29:19) that ...

"The meek shall increase their joy in the Lord."

No question about it, Biblically speaking, "*meekness is not weakness*", in fact, it generally takes great strength to truly live as a "*meek person*".

To never give in to natural impulses or urges when those impulses or urges would lead us to violate God's Standards ... to never "*flare up*" and "*spew out*" angry words or cutting remarks. To submit to the Bridle of God's Word and allow all our strength to be directed according to God's Leading. This is no easy thing but it is a most desirable thing.

Blessed indeed are those who have '*mastered meekness*'.

Secondly, as we continue our explanation ... Let's look at some who have mastered this quality of '*meekness*' and consider the fact that all of us are expected to.

Consider with me then ...

<p><i><u>MEEKNESS DEMONSTRATED</u></i> and <i><u>COMMANDED</u></i> ... What Biblical examples and exhortations can we find?</p>

MOSES was meek ... (Numbers 12)

Did not fight back against Aaron and Miriam – Let God judge.

JESUS was meek ... (Matt. 11:29; Matt. 21:5; Matt. 26:53)

"I am meek and lowly of heart"

"Behold your king ... meek and riding on a donkey."

"Would he (my father) not put more than 12 legions of angels?"

*The archangel **MICHAEL** was meek ... (Jude 9)
Did not make a slanderous accusation against the Devil
but said, "The Lord rebuke you"*

Christian **WIVES** are encouraged to be meek ... (1 Peter 3:4)
"Allow real beauty to grow out of a meek and quiet spirit."

Christian **WITNESS** is to demonstrate meekness ... (1 Peter 3:15)
"Respond to the seeker with meekness (gentleness) and respect."

Church **DISCIPLINE** is to demonstrate meekness ... (Galatians 6:1)
"Appeal to the fallen in a kind and gentle (praus) way."

All Christian **INTERACTIONS** are to demonstrate meekness ... (Ephesians 4:2)
"Be completely humble and gentle (praus)" ...

The meek are those who 'submit themselves purposefully to God's standards of belief and behavior' and who live gentle and quiet and non-threatening, non-disruptive lives.

Jesus says that they are truly among the blessed on the earth.

So as we continue our ***explanation***, we now ask ourselves ...

Today's Key Question ...

*"How does one **BECOME** meek?"*

"How does one gain the ability to submit oneself to a standard of belief or behavior even when such submission is contrary to one's natural urges or impulses?"

How do we learn to "bite our tongues" ... to "soften critical judgments" ... to "keep our cool" ... to "never give in to angry or vindictive speech" ... How indeed do we learn to "keep ourselves under control" and thus avoid all the hassles and difficulties of those who do the exact opposite?

Two Suggestions ...

1. YOKE YOURSELF TO CHRIST ...

(Matthew 11:28-29)

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek (praus) and lowly in heart:
and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (KJV)*

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle (praus)
and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (NIV)*

*Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am
humble and gentle (praus) at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (TLB)*

In other words, he says to us ... *"Learn to be like me"* ... Learn to respond like me ...

*"Learn to see the 'bigger picture' like I do ... Remove from yourself the responsibility to
judge the universe and to put everyone in their place ... See yourselves as gentle people
who bind up wounds rather than make them. Your soul will feel better – you will sense my
smile of approval upon you."*

2. YIELD YOURSELF TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (Galatians 5:22-23)

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness,
goodness, faith, meekness (praus), temperance. (KJV)*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness (praus) and self-control. (NIV)*

If we are to be *'yoked to Jesus'*, it is the Holy Spirit who makes it happen.

He is the ONE who leads us out each morning and puts the harness and the bridle on us ...
He is the ONE who places the thoughts of Christ in our mind and the desires of Christ
in our heart. Yield yourself to him each day.

And as you do so, you will discover this blessed quality of *"meekness"* showing up
more and more frequently in your life.

Final Thot ...

Though **WEAKNESS** and **MEEKNESS** might at times look alike;
the truly **MEEK** are some of the **STRONGEST** people on earth.

May such **'STRENGTH'** be ours each and every day!

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"Lesson Five"

Sunday we looked at the **Third Beatitude** ...

"Blessed are the MEEK for they shall inherit the EARTH."

What do you typically think of when you think of the word "meek"?

Here's the way the ancient Greeks used the word ...

'Paus' (meekness) was the word used to characterize a horse whose strength has been submitted to harness or saddle. The key concept here is one of "*strength under submission*" ... a gentleness toward the world that is the result of one's choice.

Here was the "**Kingdom Living Definition**" given Sunday ...

What does that definition suggest to you?

Our Kingdom Living Definition...

MEEKNESS – the ability to submit oneself to a **STANDARD** of belief or behavior even when **NATURAL** urges or impulses would lead you to do **OTHERWISE**.

Reflect upon this description of the 'meek' given by Matthew Henry ...

"The meek are those who quietly submit themselves to God, to his word and to his rod, who follow his directions, and comply with his designs, and are gentle towards all men; The meek are those who can bear provocation without being inflamed by it; are either silent, or return a soft answer; and who can show their displeasure when there is occasion for it, without being transported into any indecencies; who can be cool when others are hot; and in their patience keep possession of their own souls. They are the meek, who are rarely and hardly provoked, but quickly and easily pacified; and who would rather forgive twenty injuries than revenge one, having the rule of their own spirits."

Why (do you think) Jesus would consider such a person to be "blessed"?

What did Pastor Mark suggest we could do to become meek?

YOKE ourselves to **CHRIST** (Matthew 11:29)

YIELD ourselves to the **HOLY SPIRIT** (Galatians 5:22-23)

Point To Ponder ...

How does **MEEKNESS** differ from **WEAKNESS**?

“SO WHO’S REALLY BLESSED?”

- Those Who Hunger And Thirst After Righteousness -
(Matthew 5:6)

Intro ... Four weeks ago, I asked you to repeat these words after me:

“More than anything else in the world, I want to be blessed.”

In case you were not there that day, here’s a second chance for you to go on record ...

Repeat after me:

“More than anything else in the world, I want to be blessed.”

If Jesus were here in the flesh with us this morning, he would say ...

*“There is nothing I want more for you ... I want you to be blessed –
I want you to enjoy the full benefit of being a born-again Child of God.”*

But *“being blessed”* (as we are learning) is not the same as receiving *“blessings”* ...

“Being blessed” is a condition of soul – a state of being that connects us with the Heart of God and that transports us through life in this fallen world with (what we could call) a kind of *‘divine dignity’*.

A *‘blessed person’* is notable and noticeable – a *‘blessed person’* almost seems to be from another planet – an alien from some distant star system. A *‘blessed person’* feels the smile of God’s approval upon him and basks in its warmth. The *‘blessed person’* navigates this life with a surefooted grace – the *‘blessed person’* responds to the circumstances of life with an unflappable certainty – the *‘blessed person’* generally winds up being a *‘blessing’* to all who know him ... a sought-after ally in the storms of life. There is nothing better than to be one of those whom Jesus calls *“blessed”*.

So who are they? Who really are the *“Blessed”* of the earth?

The answer is given right at the beginning of that famous Biblical Passage known as ***‘The Sermon on the Mount’*** – Matthew chapters 5-7.

Nine identifiers of *“The Blessed”* are given - and the truly blessed is identified by all nine. So far we have heard Jesus say ...

“Blessed are the poor in spirit”

“Blessed are those who mourn”

“Blessed are the meek”

Each of these identifications of the blessed we have examined biblically and discovered insights into their meaning ... those messages are available to you to watch on our website – sonlifecommunitychurch.com

Today's Key Scripture introduces us to **Blessed Identifier #4** – a fourth quality that leads to great success in Kingdom Living.

Today's Key Scripture ...

“Blessed are those who **HUNGER** and **THIRST** after **RIGHTEOUSNESS** for they will be **FILLED**.”
(Matthew 5:6)

Let's start out with a few **Key Definitions** ...

Today's Key Definitions ...

* **HUNGER/THIRST** ... An Intense Craving – A Desperate Need

Hunger: This is the same Greek word that Matthew had used one chapter earlier to describe the condition Jesus was in after His Time of Testing in the wilderness.

After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.
(Matthew 4:2)

Actually ... He was starving – his body was at the point of consuming itself.
That's what the medical people tell us.

Thirst: This word we find in the Apostle John's vocabulary as he describes a portion of Jesus' agony on the cross.

Jesus said, "I am thirsty."
(John 19:28)

The hot Judean sun was beating down – there was the loss of blood which would dehydrate him further – the beating he had endured – the torture of the cross – his body cried out for the smallest amount of comfort – for even a drop of liquid to quell what was actually an insatiable thirst.

Now ... Jesus would say ... that's how the *“blessed of the earth”* crave righteousness. They hunger for it and thirst for it knowing that they would die without it.

And what is Righteousness? Simply speaking ...

* **RIGHTEOUSNESS** ... Godliness – Holiness – Perfection

Righteousness is simply *“being right”* – absolutely perfect in every way –
no mar or imperfection – no need for forgiveness or correction –
no grounds for blame or condemnation.

* **FILLED** ... Completely Satisfied – Needs Fully Met
Could not consume another bite.

So we could say ...

“Those who intensely crave the very perfection that characterizes God Himself will eventually be satisfied.”

And of course we could also say (paraphrasing Jesus a bit) ...

“Those who intensely crave the very perfection that characterizes God Himself are some of the “Blessed of the Earth”.

Here now is what I’m calling ...

<p><i>Today’s Key Point ...</i> The <u>RIGHTEOUSNESS</u> that the ‘Blessed of the Earth’ <u>CRAVE</u> comes as a <u>THREE COURSE MEAL</u>.</p>
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And today as we consider this three course meal, I want us to spend most of our time in the menu – reviewing as it were the descriptions and the specifications of each item. Our menu, of course, is the Word of God.

First Course (is called) ... **“IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS”**

(Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:23; Psalm 24:3-5; Matthew 8:12; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Acts 2:21)

Just listen as I read directly from the menu – see if hunger is created...

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” (Isaiah 64:6)

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

*“Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior.”*
(Psalm 24:3-5)

“But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 8:12)

“But God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew and then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness **from** God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith ...” (Romans 1:16-17)*

“And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2:21)

So a few considerations before the waiter comes and we make our dinner decision ...

Man needs righteousness if he would ever enter into heaven for heaven is an absolutely perfect, sinless place.

Man’s best deeds don’t count because perfection is required and even man’s best deeds fall far short of that pristine standard.

The alternative to heaven is terrible to contemplate and worse to endure.

There has been one (Jesus) who has attained righteousness by his own effort.

God has agreed to take his righteousness (his attainment) and transfer it (impute it) to our account.

Man must agree to this transaction and must communicate his agreement by ‘*calling on the name of the Lord*’ and thus seeking (hungering for) the saving righteousness he provides.

So what do you say ... Are you “*Hungry for this imputed righteousness*”?

When the waiter comes will you be putting in your order? Have you already? Has the offer of Jesus Christ ‘satisfied you’?

The first course in the meal for which the blessed of the earth hunger is **Imputed Righteousness** and until it is consumed no other course is available.

But once it is ordered and consumed then the feast can go on ...

The Second Course (is called) ... **“EXPERIENCED RIGHTEOUSNESS”**

(1 Peter 1:14-16; 1 Peter 2:24-25; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Peter 1:3-7; 2 Peter 3:18; 1 John 3:9)

Again listen as I read from the menu ...

*“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.
But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written:
‘Be holy, because I am holy.’ ” (1 Peter 1:14-16)*

*“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness;
by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have
returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:24-25)*

“To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ — their Lord and ours.” (1 Corinthians 1:2)

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. (2 Peter 1:3-7)

*“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To him be glory both now and forever!” (2 Peter 3:18)*

*“No-one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him;
he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” (1 John 3:9)*

*“If you do these things, you will never fall and you will receive a rich welcome
into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:10-11)*

Again ***some hunger-creating considerations*** before our waiter re-appears ...

God expects his Children to live holy lives – lives that actually demonstrate the righteousness of Christ in this still fallen world.

Those who have ‘*called upon the name of the Lord*’ and been saved have a new power within them that enables them to live a righteous life.

This new life is a process – the new believer ‘*grows in grace*’ and in the understanding of how this new life is to express itself.

The rate of growth depends upon the individual believer and corresponds directly to the amount of effort he/she exerts.

Experienced (actual) Righteousness demonstrates that the new believer does in fact belong to God.

Achieving such 'experience in righteousness' will result in a rich welcome into Christ's eternal kingdom

So what do you say ... How intense is your hunger for this kind of righteousness – the kind that shows that you truly are a Child of God and that brings both the smile of God's approval upon you in this life and His rich welcome and '*well done*' in the life to come?

And speaking of the life to come, let's turn to the final page of the menu and consider the Third Course of this Righteousness Meal ...

Third Course (is called) ... **"COMPLETED RIGHTEOUSNESS"**

(1 John 3:2-3; Romans 8:18-23; 2 Peter 3:13-14; Revelation 21:3-4)

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3)

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8:18-23)

"But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." (2 Peter 3:13-14)

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Revelation 21:3-4)

This part of the menu actually addresses two kinds of hunger-creating realities.

Consider with me ...

There is coming a day when we shall see Jesus 'face to face'.

This is a day the entire creation awaits and for which our re-born spirit yearns (hungers)

In the coming Kingdom, perfection (righteousness) will be experienced
by all for sin and its affects will be completely eliminated.

Our hunger for '*experienced righteousness*' is actually stimulated
by our hunger for "*completed righteousness*'.

The thought of seeing Christ with our own eyes stimulates us to be as
'*pure in his eyes*' now as we can possibly be.

So how is it with you ...

How intense is your hunger for Righteousness?

Jesus said that those who Hunger and Thirst for it are truly among the "*Blessed of the Earth*" for they will be fully and completely satisfied.

Don't settle for anything less.

Don't be satisfied with human religion ...

It can never bring you to the level of God's Requirement –

Receive by faith his Gift of Righteousness.

And once you've received that gift ...

Don't be satisfied with some kind of mediocre, half-hearted, continually distracted
Christian Life.

And think every day – at least once a day – about the Life that is being prepared for you
in heaven ...

Yearn for it and allow that yearning to stimulate you to Godly Living in the midst of this
fallen, sin-filled world.

SO GET HUNGRY AND STAY HUNGRY for as our ***final thot*** puts it ...

Final Thot ...

HUNGER is good when it's **HUNGER** for **GOD!**

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Six"

Sunday we looked at the **Fourth Beatitude** ...

"Blessed are those who HUNGER and THIRST after RIGHTEOUSNESS."
(Matthew 5:6)

What do you think of when you read those words – especially the underlined ones?

In Sunday's message Pastor Mark identified three specific "*kinds*" of righteousness for which one could hunger. Do you remember what they are?

IMPUTED ... EXPERIENCED ... COMPLETED

What is the difference between them?

Imputed Righteousness is Righteousness that God has lovingly **GRANTED** to me.

Experienced Righteousness is Righteousness that is being **PRODUCED** in me.

Completed Righteousness is Righteousness that will be **PREPARED** for me.

For which of these have you and do you consciously hunger?

How does one's hunger for each become satisfied?

In the satisfying of each of these hungers what role do we play?

Respond to this 'combined-consideration' shared Sunday ...

* Our hunger for 'experienced righteousness' is actually stimulated
by our hunger for "*completed righteousness*" (for) the thought of seeing Christ
with our own eyes stimulates us to be as '*pure in his eyes*' now as we can possibly be.

Point To Ponder ... God **EXPECTS** his Children to live holy lives – lives that
actually **DEMONSTRATE** the righteousness of Christ in this still fallen world.

“SO WHO’S REALLY BLESSED?”

- Those Who Are Merciful -

(Matthew 5:7)

Intro ... Let’s start right off this morning by looking at **Today’s Key Scripture** – the scripture that identifies **Beatitude #5 ...**

Today’s Key Scripture ...

“Blessed are the **MERCIFUL** for they will be shown **MERCY**.”

(Matthew 5:7)

Being merciful is an important thing to God.

Way back in the days of Hosea the prophet he had declared ...

“I desire mercy not sacrifice”.

Even more than seeing his people bring sacrifices for their sins, God said that he would like to see them being merciful in their lives.

Jesus was simply carrying on the family message when he included the ***“merciful”*** among the blessed of the earth and identified them as some of those who are well positioned for Successful Kingdom Living.

So let’s check it out ...

Today’s Key Definition ...

MERCIFUL – possessing a **BIAS** toward forgiveness – a willingness to lift the load of **JUDGMENT** and offer a **FRESH START**.

Oh, you won’t find that definition in Webster’s but I like the way it reads.

The merciful person possesses *‘a bias toward forgiveness’* – that means that he is always *‘ready to forgive’* ... The merciful person is always wanting to *‘lift the load of judgment’* if he can ... He is always willing to provide *‘a fresh start’* to those who need it.

Not always is a person in a position to grant mercy – sometimes things are completely out of his control - but the merciful person desires to see mercy work its magic as often as possible.

Consider with me this morning that ...

*** MERCY IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD HIMSELF**

The **Tax Collector** in the Temple knew that ... (Luke 18:13)

"God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

You remember that story? He was a despised man – he was a turn-coat working for the Roman Government against his own people. The Pharisee who stood nearby even included a denunciation of this tax collector in his prideful prayer.

The tax collector knew that he was unworthy – knew he was less than upright – knew that he rightfully received the scorn of his own people. He was probably ashamed of himself. Perhaps that shame had finally driven him into the temple. And there he humbly appealed to the God of Israel whom he knew to be a merciful and forgiving God.

The **Thief** on the Cross knew that ... (Luke 23:42)

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

This story is also a familiar one. Two thieves were crucified with Jesus – one on either side. The one mocked Jesus but this one reminded his colleague that they were dying justly – they deserved their punishment. They would receive no mercy from a rigid Roman Governor but next to them was the innocent Son of God Himself. And turning to Jesus, he asked for what could only be granted to a sinful man by a merciful God – entrance into the Eternal Kingdom – the home of righteousness.

The **Apostle Paul** knew that ... (Ephesians 2:4)

"God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions."

In this critically important and incredibly instructive letter, Paul reminds the Ephesian believers that they were spiritually dead when a merciful God reached down and planted spiritual life in them.

God had done the same thing in Paul's life though Paul had at one time fought furiously against the cause of Christ and had done everything he could to destroy Christ's Church.

The famous English Playwright **Shakespeare** knew that ...

(Here's one of the most memorized passages of all his plays –
Portia's speech from the Merchant of Venice)

Shakespeare was a contemporary of King James and thus the similarity between his language and that of the King James Version of the Bible.

Listen as I read (perhaps it will sound familiar) ...

The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes the throned monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power, the attribute to awe and majesty, wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings.

But mercy is above this sceptered sway; it is enthroned in the hearts of kings:
It is an attribute of God himself; and earthly power doth then show like God's
when mercy seasons justice.

Indeed it has been long known that ***Mercy is a Characteristic of God Himself*** ...

And now we quickly add (even as Shakespeare's character inferred) ...

*** MERCY IS AN EXPECTED CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD'S CHILDREN**

"Be merciful just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36)

And here's the rub ... Shakespeare had it right when he said *"Mercy drops like the gentle rain from heaven"* ... He did not say *"It arises easily or quickly from the heart of man."*

Mercy is not the default position for many human beings. There are things that thwart a merciful expression in even the children of God – even those who have themselves experienced the mercy of God.

These might be things that keep some of us here today from generating and expressing merciful actions. Obviously these are things that frustrate the Will of God for our lives – things that severely hinder our growth in grace and our success in Kingdom Living.

I've labeled them ...

THREE TYPES OF MERCY - THWARTING SPIRITS

1. A PRIDEFUL SPIRIT

"I would never do such a thing!"

Pride, of course, is one of the things that God absolutely hates – that attitude that puffs itself up and exalts itself over others. This morning I would have you see that ***Pride*** is the enemy of ***Mercy***.

Pride has no place for compassion – pride relishes competition. Pride sees the failures of others as a prime opportunity to promote itself.

Pride says basically ... *“If you were more like me, you would not have gotten into this mess.”* Pride doesn’t even consider the possibility of mercy – it’s too busy patting itself on the back to extend a helpful hand to the fallen.

Here’s another type of spirit that will thwart the development or the expression of mercy in our lives ...

2. A CRITICAL SPIRIT

“What kind of person must you be to have done such a thing?”

The critical spirit is also devoid of compassion – the critical spirit specializes in shock and horror. The critical spirit is easily disgusted and finds people who fail easy to discard. The critical spirit clearly sees the failures of those around them and rightly concludes that those who fail are unworthy of help.

Thus the last thing that one with a critical spirit would do is to offer assistance – to offer a second chance – to extend mercy to the messed up.

“These people deserve nothing and they will get nothing from me”

Well, not hard to figure out what comes next for frequently all three of these ‘mercy-thwarting spirits’ are in the same person.

The third ‘mercy-thwarting spirit’ is ...

3. A JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT

“People who do such things should pay dearly!”

The judgmental spirit craves punishment ... people should pay for what they do ... It’s the only way to keep them (or others) from repeating the same offence. Punishment is a deterrent and if you have mercy on one, you will have to extend mercy to all and if you extend mercy to all then everyone gets off and chaos reigns in the land. Thus, people need to pay for what they have done and they need to pay dearly and hopefully publicly!

That’s the view of the ‘judgmental spirit’ ... and let’s be honest – those words ring pretty familiar in our ears, don’t they? We all have a bit of the judge in us. And of course we will all have to admit that the more we give expression to our judgmental tendencies the less we express mercy.

Obviously mercy frequently contradicts normal human behavior ...
Mercy is a Divine Characteristic and arises from those who possess a Divine Connection.

The truly 'merciful' seem to have come from a different place than most. Jesus said that merciful are truly '**Blessed**' in this world – touched and transformed by God Himself. Jesus said that "**Being Merciful**" is a good thing!

So how can we develop a more merciful heart – How can we become more merciful people – How can we come to enjoy the "*blessedness*" of being merciful?

Let me say right off the bat ... It's not by simply "*not caring what people do*" ... It's not by ignoring their bad or misguided behavior ... It's not by adopting a '*live and let live*' philosophy for we saw just last week that the blessed of the world are also people who truly "*hunger and thirst for righteousness*".

Doing the right thing and encouraging others to do the right thing is a passionate pursuit of the blessed of the earth.

But what do the blessed do when failure comes and the wrong thing rather than the right thing has been done by the people who surround them?

Jesus says "**Be Merciful**" ... "*Be merciful even if it seems to undermine your commitment to righteousness because it doesn't*".

Teach righteousness – pursue righteousness but be merciful to those who fall short of it for your merciful intervention might be the very thing that enables them to try again.

Resist those three 'mercy-thwarting spirits' by giving full expression to these three 'mercy-releasing ones' ...

THREE TYPES OF MERCY - RELEASING SPIRITS

1. AN EMPATHETIC SPIRIT

Empathy – the ability to 'feel with' – to 'sense the struggles' of another human being – or any living creature really.

An empathic spirit is one that can "*feel with the fallen*" and thus continue to relate to him as a '*fellow human being*'.

Think of the way our Merciful God models such empathy for us.

Here's how **King David** expressed it in one of his most worshipful psalms – the 103rd Psalm ...

“He knows how we were formed; he remembers that we are dust.”
(Psalm 103:14)

God is not surprised by the failures of human beings – even those of His own Born-Again Children; He anticipates them; He prepares his heart for them.

Yes, he mourns over them but he always responds mercifully to them.

And as we have already seen in this lesson, like Father like son ...

Here's what the writer of Hebrews said (speaking of Jesus Christ) ...

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but ... one who was tempted in every way just as we are ... (So then) let us approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive **mercy** ...”*
(Hebrews 4:15-16)

We (even more than Jesus) should be able to say to ourselves *“I know how it is” ... “I know how easy it is to slip into sin – how easy it is to fall prey to some temptation or other”* when contemplating the failure of one we know.

A merciful response is released by **An Empathetic Spirit** ...

Secondly, a merciful response is released by ...

2. A GRATEFUL SPIRIT

It was out of a heart of gratitude and amazement that Paul shared this testimony ...

*“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown **mercy** ...”* (1Timothy 1:13)

Paul told the believers in Rome that Jesus helped fulfill the Jewish Commission to take the message of God's Merciful Love to the Gentiles ...

*“Christ has become a servant of the Jews ... so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his **mercy** ...”* (Romans 14:8-9)

It's hard to be grateful and judgmental or prideful or critical at the same time ... Being grateful for the mercy that we have received readies us to 'pass it on' whenever possible.

And now thirdly and finally this morning I want us to see that **Mercy** can be both stimulated and released by ...

3. A HOPEFUL SPIRIT

A New Testament example will serve our purpose ...

After Paul's conversion and subsequent ministry in Tarsus and Antioch, the Lord sent him and Barnabas out on a Missionary Journey – taking the Gospel to the larger Mediterranean World. They took a young man John Mark who was a cousin of Barnabas along with them. Their first stop was the Island of Cyprus – they traveled from East to West across the Island and then headed to on to the mainland of Asia Minor. Mark bailed out and headed back home – he didn't finish the Mission Trip with them. The Gospel was preached and Churches established. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and made a full report.

Sometime later a second journey was planned – to revisit the places where they had been, to encourage the churches that had been established and then push on to new territory.

We pick up the story in Acts 15 verse 37 ...

“Barnabas wanted to take John (also called Mark) with them but Paul did not think it wise to take him because he had deserted them (on the first missionary journey) – They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark ... and Paul chose Silas.” (Acts 15:37-40)

Barnabas was being merciful – Paul was being practical. Barnabas had a hopeful heart that God still had plans for Mark and that Mark had just had a bad beginning. I believe that '**hope**' stirred his merciful response.

The Acts account follows Paul and Silas and we might wonder what ever became of Mark. Did Barnabas' merciful intervention accomplish anything?

Two heart-warming comments from Paul later in his life answer the question.

*“Get Mark and bring him with you for he is helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11)
“Mark sends his greetings ... If he comes to you, welcome him” (Colossians 4:10)*

Mark was also used by the Holy Spirit to write the Gospel that bears his name! He became a '*key player*' in the development of Christ's Church.

Empathy – Gratitude – Hope ... three '*mercy-releasing spirits*'.

Allow them to do their work in you!

<i>Final Thot ...</i>	<u>BLESSED</u> indeed are the <u>MERCIFUL</u> for they have been <u>IMMERSED</u> in the <u>MERCY</u> of God!
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"Lesson Seven"

Sunday we looked at the ***Fifth Beatitude*** ...

"Blessed are the MERCIFUL for they will be shown MERCY."
(Matthew 5:7)

Here's how we defined "***Merciful***" on Sunday ...

MERCIFUL – possessing a BIAS toward forgiveness – a willingness
to lift the load of JUDGMENT and offer a FRESH START.

What about that definition strikes you as particularly significant?

How critical is "mercy" to the Christian enterprise?

How central has it been in your experience?

Respond to this statement from Sunday's message ...

"Mercy is not the default position for many human beings. There are things that thwart a merciful expression in even the children of God – even those who have themselves experienced the mercy of God. These might be things that keep some of us here today from generating and expressing merciful actions. Obviously these are things that frustrate the Will of God for our lives – things that can severely hinder our growth in grace and our success in Kingdom Living."

Pastor Mark shared three "***Spirits***" that can 'thwart' the expression of mercy and also three "***Spirits***" that can 'release' mercy ... Do you remember them?

Three Mercy-Thwarting Spirits: Why do they 'thwart' mercy?

A PRIDEFUL Spirit – A CRITICAL Spirit – A JUDGMENTAL Spirit

Three Mercy-Releasing Spirits: How do they 'release' mercy?

An EMPATHETIC Spirit – A GRATEFUL Spirit – A HOPEFUL Spirit

What's your reaction to Shakespeare's last line in Portia's soliloquy ...

"Earthly power doth then show like God's when mercy seasons justice."

“SO WHO’S REALLY BLESSED?”

- Those Who Are Pure In Heart -

(Matthew 5:8)

Intro ... Have you ever felt like someone is being less than perfectly honest with you – like there’s some kind of ‘agenda’ at play that you haven’t been made aware of – like you’re living in the middle of an ‘*election year*’ and there’s lots of ‘*campaign rhetoric*’ in the air?

It can be a bit unnerving ... it can make you suspicious and maybe even paranoid. You begin to wonder if there is anyone who will simply and straightforwardly ‘*tell the truth*’ – anyone whose heart is clean and pure – anyone who you can rely upon and trust in – anyone whose word you can ‘*take to the bank*’ and whose life you can confidently seek to emulate.

Jesus says that you and I – in fact all who attached themselves to him - are to be just such people. He says that those people – those absolutely ‘*authentic*’ people – will enjoy a very special glimpse of God.

Here’s how he put it in ...

Today’s Key Scripture – Beatitude #6

“Blessed are the PURE in HEART for they shall SEE God.”

(Matthew 5:8)

“Blessed” ... there’s that word again. “*Enjoying the full benefits of being born-again*” are those who are ‘*pure in heart*’ for they shall be privileged to gaze upon the face of God – they shall ‘*see Him*’ in unique and life-transforming ways.

To see God in the course of my daily life – to sense His Presence with me at all times – to understand that ‘*in Him I live and move and have my being*’ (Acts 17:28) is one of the true blessings of life.

And Jesus said that such a blessing is enjoyed by those who are (what he called) ‘***Pure in Heart***’. So what does it mean to be “***Pure in Heart***”?

What, in fact, does a “***Pure Heart***” look like?

Three Observations drawn from a variety of Scriptures ...

1. THE PURE HEART IS AN UNSULLIED HEART.

– Without STAIN or Blemish –

(Matthew 27:59/Psalm 24:3-4a/Psalm 51:10/ 1 John 3:3)

Think of the whitest white that you can imagine ... think of the condition to which Tide Detergent claims it will restore your dirtiest clothes. Think of the brightness of Jesus Himself on the Mount of Transfiguration. Mark's Gospel reports that his clothes became dazzling white – whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. That's what a truly 'pure heart' is like – a heart without stain or blemish.

Matthew used the same word to describe the burial cloth that was wrapped around Jesus' body as he used here in this beatitude ...

"Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean (pure) linen cloth." (Matthew 27:59)

Long years before King David had identified the one who would be able to enter into the very Presence of God and gaze upon the Almighty Himself.

"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His Holy Place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart ..." (Psalm 24:3-4a)

Those with impure/unclean hearts will never receive such a privilege and knowing that the natural condition of his adulterous heart was anything but clean and pure, David cried out to the Lord (Psalm 51:10) ...

"Create in me a pure heart, O God ..."

And that's what must be done ... Either God miraculously 'creates' a pure heart in us or we live forever without one and thus live forever without the possibility of ever 'ascending the hill of the Lord' and 'entering into His Holy Place' and (as Jesus said) casting our eyes upon him.

Praise God that the very thing David requested, God is in the business of doing ... Making clean the hearts of those who call upon Him and who put their faith in the One He has send to be the cleansing agent for man's sin-stained heart.

Through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God has provided a way for our hearts to be made as dazzling clean as Jesus Himself appeared that day on the Mountain – cleaner than anyone on earth could bleach them.

Those whose hearts have been 'made clean' by the 'detergent action' of the blood of Jesus Christ now have a chance to 'live clean' even in this fallen, sin-filled world, knowing that one day sin itself will vanish in the Presence of the One that we will finally 'see' face to face.

And so the Apostle John writes (1 John 3:3) ...

*“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself,
just as he is pure.”*

So then, having been ‘*declared pure*’ by the merciful action of God, believers now engage themselves in making their earthly experience match their heavenly reality. They strive to keep themselves as unspotted from the corruption that is in the world as possible.

Or we can put it this way ...

At the very least, those who are ‘*pure in heart*’ **DESIRE** and **STRIVE** to be the very people that God would have them be. And as a result, they get to ‘*see*’ a little more of what God Himself is like.

Here’s a second observation that we can draw from the Scripture ...

2. THE PURE HEART IS AN UNDIVIDED HEART.

– Without Competing LOYALTIES -

(Psalm 24:3-4b/Psalm 86:11/Matthew 10:37/Colossians 3:1-2)

Time and time again throughout the Scriptures God has made it clear that He is a jealous God – that he does not share His Glory or His People or His Proper Worship with anyone or anything else. He requires absolute allegiance.

The **Pure Heart** understands and is most comfortable with such Absolute Allegiance – no double-mindedness, no wishy-washiness ... The Pure Heart is perfectly and completely and ‘*whole-heartedly*’ committed.

The Pure Heart delights in Scriptures such as these ...

*“Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol ...”*
(Psalm 24:3-4b)

The pure-heart doesn’t worship the Lord on Sunday and give itself to something else on Monday – doesn’t find satisfaction in spiritual things on Sunday and then seek satisfaction in worldly things the rest of the week.

David was called a ‘*man after God’s own heart*’ because he knew that man’s own heart was frequently ‘*after things*’ other than God and he consistently sought to rectify that wayward tendency within himself.

Listen to these words of his ...

*“Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.” (Psalm 86:11)*

Listen to these shocking and attention getting words from Jesus himself concerning the impossibility of his people maintaining divided loyalties ...

*“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;
anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”
(Matthew 10:37)*

To the pure, undivided heart, if it's between Jesus and something or someone else, Jesus will win out every time!

The Apostle Paul shared the secret that he had learned for keeping himself from zeroing in on earthly things to the detriment of heavenly things. It's a matter of focus. Here's how he counseled the Colossian Believers (Col. 3:1-2)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

So we could say ...

For the 'pure in heart' <u>LOYALTY</u> to God <u>TRUMPS</u> everything else. They get to 'see' Him as far above and beyond all earthly things.

Now one final observation concerning the pure heart ...

3. THE PURE HEART IS AN UNPRETENTIOUS HEART.

- Without PHONINESS or Falsehood -

(Psalm 24:3-4c/ 2 Corinthians 4:2/ Ephesians 4:25/2 Corinthians 3:5)

This is the characteristic that addresses the situation with which I introduced this message. This is why it's so hard for a truly '*pure-hearted man*' to be a successful politician.

The '*pure-hearted man*' tells the whole story – not just the part that puts him in the most favorable light. The '*pure-hearted man*' refuses to say things that are designed to '*give an impression of something or someone*' that is not completely true. The '*pure-hearted man*' never learns how to '*deceive without actually lying*'. The '*pure-hearted man*' does not pretend to be something that he is not.

Such characterizations are sprinkled throughout the Scriptures ...

*“Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul
to an idol or swear by what is false (swear falsely).” (Psalm 24:3-4)*

In that famous list of seven things that God hates given in Proverbs chapter six, the second one (right after ‘a proud look’) is ‘*a lying tongue*. Nothing sullies the heart of man more than a deliberate lie – especially a lie told believably – a lie that you ‘swear to’- a lie that draws others into error.

There are many who make such deception their stock and trade – even some who are in the service of a good cause.

Showing his resistance to such a temptation, the Apostle Paul wrote in his second Letter to the Corinthians Church (2 Cor. 4:2) ...

*“We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception,
nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth
plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”*

Basically he is saying ... We have laid God’s Truth out plainly before you. We have not ‘sugar-coated it’ or diluted it. We commend it to you. It’s up to you what you do with it.

And then he makes the point to the Ephesian Believers that they too should be characterized by that very same approach (Ephesians 4:25) ...

*“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully
to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”*

And lest anyone try to run out and start an ‘Apostle Paul Fan Club’, he humbly shares in 2 Corinthians 3:5 ...

*“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything
for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”*

And so we are led to say ...

The ‘*pure in heart*’ truly live in the **NO-SPIN ZONE** – they deal with everything **HONESTLY** and **OPENLY** just as it comes. They get to ‘see’ God as the ultimate ‘*authentic one*’.

Final Thot ...

ONLY the pure in heart get to ‘see God’ because everyone else has their **EYES** on something else!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Eight"

Sunday we looked at **Beatitude #6** ...

"Blessed are the PURE in HEART for they shall SEE God."

Pastor Mark shared three observations regarding a "**Pure Heart**" ...

1. A Pure Heart is an UNSULLIED Heart – no stain or blemish!

(Matthew 27:59/Psalm 24:3-4a/Psalm 51:10/ 1 John 3:3)

2. A Pure Heart is an UNDIVIDED Heart – no competing loyalties!

(Psalm 24:3-4b/Psalm 86:11/Matthew 10:37/Colossians 3:1-2)

3. A Pure Heart is an UNPRETENTIOUS Heart – no phoniness or falsehood!

(Psalm 24:3-4c/ 2 Corinthians 4:2/ Ephesians 4:25/2 Corinthians 3:5)

Finish and share your answers to the following three statements:

* It's hard to maintain an unsullied heart because ...

* It's hard to maintain an undivided heart because ...

* It's hard to maintain an unpretentious heart because ...

Which one of these three presents the greatest challenge to you?

The **Key Verses** for the message turned out to be **Psalm 24:3-4** ...

Underline the word or words that relate to these three "**heart conditions**" ...

"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place?

*He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up
his soul to an idol or swear by what is false (swear falsely)."*

Point To Ponder ...

Is pure-heartedness in this day and age a PIPE DREAM?

“SO WHO’S REALLY BLESSED?”

- Those Who Are Peacemakers -
(Matthew 5:9)

Intro ...

Intro ... How fitting in light of all that is going on in the world (and in light of what might be going on in our personal lives) for ***Today’s Key Scripture*** to highlight ***Beatitude #7*** ...

Today’s Key Scripture – Beatitude #7

“Blessed are the PEACEMAKERS for they shall be called SONS of GOD.”
(Matthew 5:9)

“Peacemakers” ... if ever our world needed some it’s now. The Middle East is on fire; the teachers in Chicago are on strike; the Candidates for President are in each other’s face and who knows what is going on in your family or at your place of work.

Jesus says that those who know how to ‘*make peace*’ are some of the truly ‘*blessed people*’ on the face of the earth ... In fact, he says that they will be forever identified with him ...

They (like him) will be called “*Sons (children) of God.*”

If we could expand and amplify Jesus’ words a bit, here’s how they would read ...

“Blessed indeed are those who are able to put an END to CONFLICT and reconcile WARRING parties to one another for they will be functioning JUST LIKE me.”

What parent wouldn’t love to be a ‘*peacemaker*’ as opposed to a fearful executioner of discipline? What divorce court judge wouldn’t rather be a ‘*peacemaker*’ as opposed to a regulator of property division? Peace is a blessed condition and those who ‘*make peace happen*’ are among the blessed of the earth.

But “*Peace Making*” is no small task – It doesn’t happen easily or (sadly) very frequently. Far more conflicts continue than get successfully resolved. It takes thoughtful preparation to be a ‘peace-maker’.

Let me share with you Several Observations Concerning Peace-Making ...

1. If you would be a PEACEMAKER, you must be at PEACE YOURSELF.

(Not still working out your own ISSUES; advancing your own AGENDA.)

Now that is no casually-given prerequisite ...

People with unsettled hearts and minds, people not confidently committed to God's authority over their lives, people with a host of unresolved issues from their past can seldom '*see clearly enough*' to actually perceive what is going on in a given situation and come up with a truly 'fair and balanced' objectively formulated solution.

A heart at peace with **God**, with **Self** and with **Others** is essential if one would have a real 'shot' at being a successful peace-maker.

2. If you would be a PEACEMAKER, you must be NON-PARTISAN.

(Not part of the DEBATE – Not engaged in the COMPETITION)

Think of Roger Goodel ... Commissioner of the National Football League who suspended a number of players for their alleged participation in a "*Bounty Scheme*" – a system of bonus pay for any player who put an opposing quarterback or other key player out of the game. Players appealed those suspensions and said that there was another side to the story. Roger Goodel appointed himself to hear their appeal.

Unsurprisingly, peace has not been made.

3. If you would be a PEACEMAKER, you must have an UNDERSTANDING of both SIDES.

(Able to relate to the key CONCERNS of each party)

Peacemakers cannot and must not divide the world into '*good guys*' and '*bad guys*' ... Peacemakers must see the entire world as filled with '*flawed guys*' – human beings who are seeking (frequently in unproductive ways) to '*fix their flaws*' and actually gain some '*peace of heart*'. Peacemakers can easily be viewed as naïve or simplistic or hopelessly idealistic or even actually dangerous to the '*cause of peace*'.

Just a note in passing ...

Frequently it's the '*Peace-Keepers*' of the world who view them that way for when '*Peace-Making*' fails - *Peace-Keeping* is all that's left and at times like that we thank God for the '*Peace-Keepers*' who protect us, be they our security forces at home or our armed forces abroad!

But peacemakers still push on in the belief that coming to an understanding of the people involved might well yield the key to the resolution of the conflict and whenever they can achieve their aim they make the world/ the home/ the workplace/ the school/the church (even) a better place.

4. If you would be a **PEACEMAKER**, you must be **WILLING** to pay the **PRICE** for **PEACE**.
(Peace always carries a **PRICE TAG**.)

Part of the price we have already mentioned – the price of being misunderstood or even ridiculed. Other prices depend upon the circumstances in which the would-be peacemaker is functioning.

Time, energy, emotional stress, mental fatigue ... these are all costs encountered as one seeks to discover all that needs to be discovered if peace between conflicted parties is to be achieved.

5. If you become a **PEACEMAKER**, you will experience a very special sense of **BLESSEDNESS** in this world and will be well positioned for Successful **KINGDOM** Living.

And not only that but Jesus said that the '**Peacemakers**' in the Kingdom will be uniquely identified with him – this is the ***Beatitude Quality*** that he most clearly identified with himself ... ***Jesus, the "Peace Maker"***.

Note how Jesus perfectly met these qualifications of a Peace-Maker ...

#1. Jesus was the PERSONIFICATION of Peace Itself.

- * Isaiah identified him as the "**Prince of Peace**" (Isaiah 9:6)
The One who would one day bring peace to all Israel.

- * Jesus said ... "**My peace I give you.**" (John 14:27) and thus he insulated them from the fears and anxieties that this fallen world generates.

Paul testified ... "***For He himself is our peace ...***" (Ephesians 2:14)
Those who put their faith in him discover both peace **with** God (a peace treaty has been agreed to) and the peace **of** God (an inner contentment of heart has been created).

Paul then directed ... "***Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ...***" (Colossians 3:15)
Allow the peace-making abilities of Christ to characterize your own lives
as you live for him in this troubled world.

Indeed, Jesus was the very personification of peace and those who have experienced his peace find themselves wanting to share his peace to all they meet ... Wanting people to know both peace with God and then the peace of God which enables them to live peaceably for God.

#2. Jesus FUNCTIONED as a non-partisan ... as not part of the debate.

As a peace-maker, Jesus took on the role of the ultimate ‘*middleman*’ – the mediator – the one who sought to bring warring parties together ... in this case a Holy, Righteous God on one hand and Sinful, Guilty Human Beings on the other.

Immediately following the most famous verse in the Scripture (John 3:16) comes this one ... Speaking of Jesus’ task as he entered into the world, John writes ...

*“(He) came not to condemn the world (nor excuse the world)
but to save the world.” (John 3:17)*

It was the Righteousness and Holiness of God that ‘*condemned the world*’ – the world was condemned long before Jesus entered into it ... Jesus came on behalf of the Heavenly Judge who while condemning the world also loved the world.

Jesus came into the world exclusively identified with neither side of this great conflict ... neither with His Righteous Heavenly Father who would properly and rightly ‘*condemn*’ nor with the fallen race of man who would naturally ‘*make excuse*’ for their deeds and who would ‘*appeal for a lesser standard*’ of acceptance.

He came as a mediator between the two – as one who would provide satisfaction for both. He would save sinful man even as he would satisfy his righteous Heavenly Father.

His words spoken to the woman caught in adultery and brought before him by a virtual mob of self-righteous men reflected that same ability to stand between the two sides and speak the truth that would challenge them both (John 8:11) ...

“Neither do I condemn you ... Having been reminded that they were all sinners, the woman’s accusers had dropped their stones realizing that they were in no position to be her judge and executioner.

Go and sin no more.” ... Being freed from execution did not mean that she was freed from sin – did not mean that those men were wrong in their accusation. He challenged her to change her life and live in ways that were more pleasing to God.

And how about his conversation with the Woman at the Well – the Samaritan women who tried to get him to enter into the debate regarding where the proper place of worship was?

“Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.”

(John 4:21)

He certainly could have jumped in and come down hard on the side of those holding the Jerusalem position for it was the current Biblically sound one but he didn't. He spoke of the new position that would soon be the only one ... the new position that would allow both Jews and Samaritans to worship God freely and pleasingly. True worship would no longer be geographically defined ... Re-born men and women of all races would soon be able to worship God in Spirit – no matter where they are.

Peace-Makers find a way to define a middle ground that meets the real needs of both sides of the conflict – a middle ground that brings joy and fulfillment to them both and that makes the peace-maker a delight to them both! John tells us that Jesus and his Disciples (the Jerusalem Jews) and the woman and the people from her town (the Samaritans) enjoyed two full days of the most unexpected fellowship! Peace was enjoyed.

#3. Jesus possessed an excellent UNDERSTANDING of both Sides

** “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God...”*

(John 1:1)

‘Nuff said there ... Jesus was the Son of the Father – Jesus was in every respect equally divine – equally righteous – equally just. He said one time ... *“I and the Father are one”* that is, *‘identical in makeup and essence’*. He definitely understood Heaven's side of things!

But Jesus added something to his divine essence ...

** “And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us ...”*

(John 1:14)

The Son of God added to himself humanity – He became the God/Man. He entered into the human race and experienced all that human beings go through. He lived among men for 33 years and truly came to understand the Human Side of things.

And so the writer of Hebrews could testify of him ...

**We do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses ...”*

(Hebrews 4:15)

As a would-be ‘Peacemaker’ Jesus possessed a thorough understanding of both God and Man – both the demands of Heaven and the limitations of earth!

#4. Jesus was not only WILLING, He SACRIFICED Himself to Pay the Price for Peace.

*"Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."
(Romans 5:1)*

The peace-treaty between man and God has been written – written in blood. Peace has been purchased. The Peace-Maker has sacrificed himself in the making of that purchase. Real Fellowship between God and Man is now a distinct possibility.

Now how about peace between man and man ... specifically between Jew and Gentile? Here too Jesus would be the **peace-maker** and not by saying one side is right and the other wrong but by providing an entirely new side that treats all mankind as one.

*"You who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ ...
His purpose has been to create in himself one new man out of the two thus making peace ...
and to reconcile both of them to God through the cross."
(Ephesians 2:13-16)*

A brand-new humanity is the goal – born-again believers in Jesus living in peace with one another and with God – Jesus gave his life and endured the judgment of a righteous God to provide it.

**#5. Based upon his Peace-Making Sacrifice,
Jesus has been HIGHLY EXALTED in the Kingdom.**

*"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name ...
(Philippians 2:9-11)*

Once again hear these paraphrased words of Jesus with which we began this message ...

*"Blessed indeed are those who are able to put an END to CONFLICT and
reconcile WARRING parties to one another for they will be functioning JUST LIKE me."*

More than any of the other traits Jesus chose **peace-making** as the one that most accurately reflects his heart. **Peacemakers** are what he would have us be ... **Peace Makers** are what we can become as we allow his life to more and more express itself through us bringing people to peace with **God**, peace with **Self**, peace with their **Fellow Man**.

Sonlife ... EXPERIENCING and SHARING the Life of God's Son!

So let's give ourselves to this specific task and as we strive to do so, remember (as our final thought says) ...

Final Thought ...

Peacemakers approach LIFE from the viewpoint of JESUS Himself.
As they look THROUGH His EYES, the world looks different.

Sonlife **Self-Study**

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Nine"

Sunday we looked at **Beatitude #7** ...

*"Blessed are the **PEACEMAKERS** for they shall be called **SONS** of God."*
(Matthew 5:9)

Questions for Reflection:

- * Is it always desirable to "make peace"? (**YES**)
- * Does "making peace" mean "peace at any price"? (**NO – NEVER SACRIFICE TRUTH**)
- * Is 'peace at any price' real peace at all? (**NO – IT'S REALLY JUST A SURRENDER.**)
- * What is the difference between "peace" and a "truce"?
(**PEACE SETTLES THINGS WHEREAS A TRUCE SIMPLY CEASES OPEN CONFLICT**)
- * What is the ultimate "peace" that followers of Christ seek to see "made"?
(**PEACE WITH GOD – PEACE AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE**)
- * What stands in the way of that happening? (**IGNORANCE/REBELLION**)
- * What is the difference between "being a peacemaker" and "living at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18)?
(**PEACE MAKING IS DONE BY AN OUTSIDER WHEREAS
LIVING AT PEACE IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE INSIDER**)
- * ***How do the previous six Beatitudes influence/prepare the peace-maker?***

The **POOR** in **SPIRIT** ... (Takes humility to be willing to look at both sides)

The **MOURNER**... (Is grieved by sin-caused conflict – desires Godly harmony)

The **MEEK** ... (Can maintain composure while seeking to understand/explain)

The **RIGHTEOUSNESS SEEKER** ... (Strongly desires God-Pleasing Harmony)

The **MERCIFUL** ... (Possesses a bias toward the forgiveness that precedes change)

The **PURE** in **HEART** ... (Has no personal agenda – Desires God's Will to prevail.)

Point To Ponder ...

- * Is a Christian (was Jesus) only a '**PEACEMAKER**' or are we (was he) sometimes '**CONFLICT-CREATORS**'? (Check out Matthew 10:34 and Galatians 2:11)

“SO WHO’S REALLY BLESSED?”

- Those Who Are Persecuted For Righteousness Sake -
(Matthew 5:10)

Intro ... Two months ago, we introduced ourselves to the condition Jesus called “**Blessed**”. To be blessed we said was to be “*enjoying the full benefit of being born-again*” – a ‘condition of being’ created by the presence of Godly Attributes in our lives.

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount by identifying just such people:

Those who are poor in spirit (the humble-hearted) are blessed;
Those who sincerely mourn for the things God mourns for are blessed;
Those who are meek (self-possessed) are blessed;
Those who yearn (hunger and thirst) for righteousness are blessed;
Those who are merciful are blessed;
Those who are pure in heart are blessed; and (just last week we saw)
Those who are peacemakers are blessed.

These are really pretty awesome people – these ‘*Blessed Ones*’ ...
They truly function as ‘*Children of God*’ in the midst of this fallen, sin-filled world.

Christ desires His entire Church to live such lives!
Christ, in fact, directs His entire Church to live such lives!
Christ, by His Holy Spirit, enables His entire Church to live such lives!
It’s the **RIGHT** (and only God-Pleasing) WAY to LIVE!

Jesus says that it’s a ‘**blessed way**’ to live!

Surely the people sitting at his feet that day on the mountainside, drinking in his every word, thought to themselves ...
“*That’s exactly the way I want to live!*”

Isn’t that the way we feel after reflecting upon the first seven of these Nine Beatitudes?
Do we not want to experience this “***Blessed Life***”?

Now to this point ... this ‘*state of blessing*’ – this ‘*blessed condition*’ – has been linked to attitudes and actions that are **positive** and **productive**.

However, at this point, Jesus literally turns things upside down and in the final two beatitudes he links blessing to attitudes and actions that are decidedly **negative** and potentially **destructive**.

Here's Beatitude #8 - Note the change in tone and focus ...

Today's Key Scripture – Beatitude #8

*"Blessed are those who are PERSECUTED for RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE
for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5:10 KJV)*

"Persecuted for righteousness sake" ... in other words, 'persecuted because righteousness is part of your life' – persecuted because you are 'doing what is right in your life'.

This **Beatitude** brings into focus ...

ANOTHER SAD TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ...

'DOING what is **RIGHT**' doesn't always cause things to **'TURN** out **RIGHT**'.
Sometimes **EVIL** prevails and **PERSECUTION** comes.

It's definitely a good thing that Jesus waited this long to bring this sad truth to light ...

Only the truly '**Blessed**' ... the humble-hearted, the pure-hearted, the merciful-hearted, the righteous-hearted, the peaceful-hearted, the mournful-hearted, the meek-hearted ... are equipped to understand let alone embrace this state of '**blessedness**'.

The truth is ... Our righteousness will sometimes '*tick people off*' ... Our '*walk in the light*' will sometimes expose those who prefer to '*walk in darkness*' ... Our commitment to doing what is right will sometimes thwart the plans of those who are planning to profit by doing what is wrong.

For many people in this world, '*righteousness*' is neither their goal, their guiding light, nor their comfort. Righteousness annoys them, hinders them and perhaps even diminishes them in the eyes of others.

Righteousness frequently stirs them to retaliate – to undermine, to derail, to frustrate if possible, to destroy if necessary, those who would seek to live righteously.

Thus, Jesus' implied warning ...

"Be prepared for persecution if you plan to live righteously."

Some years later, the Apostle Paul would write to his somewhat '*timid*' son in the Lord, Timothy ...

"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12)

The Apostle Peter, who was there that day on the mountain, echoed Jesus' words in his first letter to the believers scattered throughout the world ...

"If you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed."
(1 Peter 3:14)

It sounds like we should be preparing ourselves for this special type of 'blessing' – the '*Blessing of Persecution*' – the persecution, the opposition, the resistance that comes because we are '*doing what is right*' in this fallen world – living in obedience to the clear teachings of Scripture and up to the expectations of our Savior.

The **Key Question** I would raise this morning is this ...

*"How should we **RESPOND** when it **HAPPENS**?"*

Four Suggested Ways to Respond ...

1. Respond REFLECTIVELY ...

Has this persecution come because of my commitment to the **WILL** and **WAYS** of God or have I in any way **BROUGHT** this on myself?

This is where that "*humble heart*" comes into play – probably the "*meek heart*" also.

Honestly reflect upon the way in which you have '*handled things*' ... Have you in any way been prideful or judgmental? Have you gone '*postal*' in reaction to some sinful behavior – have you promoted yourself as '*having all the answers*' or have you just quietly and consistently lived out the dictates of your faith?

Have you simply and respectfully maintained a position of purity in the midst of the impurity that surrounds you?

If you have, then embrace the **persecution** as confirming your identity as a true worshipper of God and follower of Jesus Christ – ***feel blessed***.

2. Respond UNDERSTANDINGLY ...

Those who oppose me are really opposing the things of God and I should not take it **PERSONALLY** or allow myself to get **OFFENDED** by it.

The '*mournful heart*' and the '*merciful heart*' are most helpful in this response.

As is often said but so much less frequently actually embraced, "these people (these persecutors) are not the enemy but are 'victims' of the enemy" – whether the enemy be understood to be the **world**, the **flesh** or the **Devil** himself.

The **world** molds and shapes the would-be persecutor's mind in almost innumerable ungodly ways while the **flesh** encourages that persecutor towards unbridled anger and even violence and the **Devil** seeks to lead such potential persecutors in direct and open rebellion towards anything that identifies itself with the righteous life that God desires.

These are the **sources** of the persecution that those who seek to live for righteousness experience. The more you can respond to it understandingly, the less you will take it personally and the more you will keep the door open to possible future redemptive ministry.

And as you successfully fight off the temptation to be personally offended and to feel 'victimized,' you will know that you have taken your place among the '*blessed members*' of the Kingdom – **feel blessed**.

3. Respond **RESOURCEFULLY** ...

Is there any way that this circumstance can be used to further the **WORK** that God is doing in my life and in the lives of my **PERSECUTORS**?

This is where those who are 'pure in heart' (they have no 'agenda' but God's – no personal 'issues' that get in the way) and those who are 'peacemakers' can make their biggest impact.

How by this conflict – this tension, this attack – that has arisen can a need for peace be felt and can the Peace of Christ be experienced? **How** can the turmoil that the persecutor himself is creating be used to bring that very persecutor to a place of repentance and faith?

When God's agenda is all that matters it's amazing how insightful we can become and how creative we can be.

Becoming a benefactor to a persecutor is sometimes exactly what God enables us to be ... And sometimes that persecutor's heart is changed in the process.

That's what the Apostle Paul encouraged the believers in Rome to do ...

"Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse."

(Romans 12:14)

And seven verses later ...

"Do not be overcome (overwhelmed) by evil but overcome (overwhelm) evil with good."

(Romans 12:21)

And in the triumph of generosity over hostility, you will show yourself to be '*walking in the footsteps of the Kingdom's King Himself*' – **feel blessed**.

So when persecution comes to you because of **righteousness** – because you are seeking to do the right thing in all circumstances – because you are taking seriously your commitment to live under God’s Sovereignty ...

Respond **Reflectively** and **Understandingly** and **Resourcefully**.

Just one more thing ... It’s perhaps the hardest of the four but it gives by far the greatest evidence that we are indeed living that “***blessed life***”.

When persecution for righteousness sake arises ...

4. Respond **THANKFULLY** ...

Could there be any higher **PRIVILEGE** than to be attacked because of my commitment to **GODLY** virtues and values?

I would suggest that the heart that is ‘*hungry and thirsty for righteousness*’ is most open to this response.

For one who truly yearns to be characterized by the very righteousness that God has so graciously granted to him (and should that not be all of us?), there could be nothing more significant than to be persecuted for the sake of that righteousness.

Such an act of persecution all by itself testifies to the presence in his life of that very thing for which he most fervently yearns. For if some degree of righteousness were not manifestly visible, there would be nothing to stimulate persecution in the first place.

And so such a one sees persecution as a significant confirmation of the very thing for which he ‘*hungers and thirsts*’. And he finds himself responding ‘*thankfully*’ ... and feeling ***blessed***.

So when you find yourself under attack because you are seeking to live righteously, **be thankful** ... for the attack itself demonstrates that you are being successful in your attempt – feel ***blessed***.

Righteousness is contrary to worldliness and self-centeredness and silently calls all the unsaved to the surrender of heart and mind and will that is essential for salvation.

When genuine righteousness enters the picture, some will submit and some will resist and of those who resist some will attack ... ***be ready!***

Final Thot ...

RIGHTEOUSNESS is even more **IMPRESSIVE** when it responds well to **PERSECUTION!**

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Ten"

Sunday we looked at **Beatitude #8** ...

"Blessed are those who are PERSECUTED for RIGHTEOUSNESS sake ..."
(Matthew 5:10)

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have you ever been persecuted/attacked/challenged/ accused/ criticized for 'doing what is right'? What were the circumstances? Did you feel 'blessed'?

2. What are some 'acts of righteousness' for which American Christians might be 'persecuted' today?

(CHURCH ATTENDANCE; TITHING; MORAL PURITY; REFUSAL TO DIVORCE; HONESTY; CONSCIENTIOUS WORK; OPEN-MINDEDNESS IN THE MIDST OF PARTISAN CONTROVERSY; PROTECTION OF THE UNBORN; SUPPORT FOR BIBLICAL STANDARDS OF MARRIAGE; PREACHING CHRIST ONLY)

3. What did you think of the four responses that Pastor Mark suggested we consider when 'persecution/criticism' because of our 'right' actions comes our way? Which of them would be the most difficult for you to make or consider?

- * **Has** this persecution come solely because of my commitment to the will and ways of God or have I in any way brought this on myself?
- * **Those** who oppose me are really opposing the things of God and I should not take it personally or allow myself to get offended by it.
- * **Is there** any way that this circumstance can be used to further the work that God is doing in my life and in the lives of my persecutors?
 - * **Could** there be any higher privilege than to be attacked because of my commitment to Godly virtues and values?

4. How can I respond in these ways rather than letting the persecution/ opposition 'get to me'? Check out Hebrews 12:3 ... (**CONSIDER HIM – LEST YOU 'LOSE HEART'**)

Point To Ponder ...

RIGHTEOUSNESS is even more **IMPRESSIVE** when it responds well to **PERSECUTION!**

“SO WHO’S REALLY BLESSED?”

- Those Who Are Persecuted For Christ’s Name Sake -
(Matthew 5:11-12)

Intro ... Today we come to **Beatitude #9** – a Beatitude that many Biblical Scholars deny even exists. If you ‘Google’ the question, “*How many Beatitudes are there?*” as I did just this morning, you will discover that the answer given most frequently in ‘**Eight**’. That’s the official answer given by the Catholic Church and no doubt by many other Bodies of Believers as well.

You will discover that many Biblical Scholars either lump verses 11 and 12 of Matthew chapter 5 into verse 10 to create a kind of ‘*Two-Part Persecution Beatitude*’ or they consider verses 11-12 to contain a kind of personal commentary (a few ‘add-on’ comments) with which Jesus transitioned from the ‘*Beatitude Teaching*’ into the rest of the Sermon on the Mount - almost a kind of “*Throw –Away Teaching*”.

And yet when we read verses 11-12, we see that they follow precisely the literary pattern of the preceding eight statements. They start with the familiar pronouncement of ‘ **blessing** ’ in the midst of a life circumstance and they continue with the same familiar **promise** of desirable outcome.

Their uniqueness lies in that they provide instruction in how we should respond to the circumstance mentioned and that they link us to other respondents from the past.

I am convinced that these two verses do indeed contain the **Ninth** (and in my humble opinion the most important of all) **Beatitude**.

Here’s how it reads ...

Today’s Key Scripture – Beatitude #9

“**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, for in the same way they persecuted the **PROPHETS** who were before you.”

(Matthew 5:11-12)

Consider with me this morning **Several Key Observations:**

1. This is **SUFFERING** that comes because we are **LINKED** in the eyes of the world with **CHRIST**.

*"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you (that is, slander you) ... **"Because of me."***

This is persecution that comes because of our personal link with Jesus Christ – insult and slander that come our way because we are identified in the world as 'Followers of His' – as **Christians**. This persecution is personal.

The persecution we considered last week (Beatitude #8) we could say was persecution for principle sake ... persecution that comes because (in the eye of the persecutor) we have linked ourselves to **the wrong thing** – to the standards of God's Righteousness.

In this beatitude, Jesus is saying that persecution will come because (in the eye of the persecutor) we have linked ourselves to **the wrong one** – Jesus Christ Himself.

Much later in Jesus' ministry – in fact the very night that he would be betrayed – he would say to his disciples ...

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."
(John 15:18)

The world's hatred of Christ was not satisfied with his death on the cross; it has been refocused on all who bear His Name.

Beatitude #9 identifies a very specific kind of suffering – it's the suffering that comes to us because the world has '*linked us*' to Jesus! For those who never had the privilege of '*walking with Jesus*', it's the next best thing!

2. When we are **OPPOSED** by those who **OPPOSE** Christ, we **STAND** in **GOOD COMPANY**.

Here's how Jesus expressed it ...

"for in the same way they (the persecutors of the world) (also) persecuted the prophets"

Here's how the writer of the Book of Hebrews spoke of the persecution that the prophets of old faced ...

"Some faced jeers and flogging while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword ... they were destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them."
(Hebrews 11:36-38)

Sometimes we might wish that we lived in days gone by – in the days when God was actively intervening in the affairs of men – in the days when the Heroes of Faith were in fact living their heroic lives.

Jesus says that when we experience insult, persecution and slander for his sake, we stand with them and are equally blessed as them!

3. This kind of suffering leads to great HEAVENLY REWARD.

“Great is your reward in heaven.”

Faithfulness in the face of persecution never goes unnoticed – not by those who matter – not by those who ‘*watch from above*’ ...

At this point I picture the reality of which the writer of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1 after he rehearsed the heroics of all those Heroes of Faith mentioned in chapter 11 ...

“Wherefore seeing we are surrounded by such a cloud of witness ...”

We do battle in the same arena in which they were engaged – we live out our lives here in this fallen world, even as they did. We carry on the campaign that they began. We stand in their stead and in their company and some day we will join them in their heavenly reward.

Never does our faithful perseverance escape our Heavenly Father’s eye ... He not only notices and take note ... Jesus says he ‘*richly rewards*’.

“Great is your reward in heaven.”

Forgive me if you think this a bit too extravagant, but I believe that that reward begins even before we arrive in heaven – I picture in my mind all the saints of the past (to say nothing of the innumerable Heavenly Hosts) breaking out in cheers and applause whenever one of us stands faithfully and firmly for Christ.

Listen carefully at such moments – focus your attention not on the persecution you experience but on the faint echo of the heavenly outburst that your faithfulness has generated.

And then, of course, at the end of such a faithfully lived life, as the Apostle Peter expressed it ...

“You will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom”
(2 Peter 1:11)

This is when the Father gets to say “*Well Done*” and the Lord Jesus gets to present the “*Crown of Life*” and the Heavenly Hosts get to sing (as it were) the “*Welcome Song*”. Can’t you just picture it?

Now for the **Fourth** and **Final Observation** drawn from this incredible **9th Beatitude** ...

4. This kind of **EARTHLY** connection and **HEAVENLY** response should generate great **JOY** in our **HEARTS**.

“Rejoice and be glad”

Now that’s the specific instruction Jesus gave ...

You would hardly think that he would have to – you would think that rejoicing would just come naturally in light of all that this Beatitude promises - except it requires such a *‘transformative view of life’* for us to do so.

“Rejoicing and being glad” in the face of insult and persecution and slander is not normal (and will not happen) unless the *‘would-be rejoicer’* is able to wrap his mind around spiritual realities as opposed to just physical, fleshly ones.

And that’s why Jesus spelled out so specifically the things in this Beatitude ...

The personal link with himself – the connection with the great Saints of the Past – the promise of the heavenly reward ... for if we keep focused on these things, we will find ourselves responding just as he encouraged ...

We will rejoice and be glad when we find ourselves
“insulted and persecuted and slandered because of Him.”

So ...

***Can it be done – Has it ever been done?
Has anybody actually ‘Bought into this Beatitude’ and carried it out?***

Let me continue (and then conclude) this message by sharing **Several Key Illustrations:**

1. PETER and JOHN – Acts 5:40-41

Here was the situation ... Peter and John had been hauled before the Jewish Leadership Council for healing a crippled beggar ... The Council, believing that they could intimidate them, commanded them to no longer preach and teach (and especially do no more miracles) in the Name of Jesus. Upon their release, Peter and John went right back to work preaching and teaching and healing and thousands of people were won to Christ. The Jewish leaders had Peter and John arrested and brought before them again ... They were incensed and this time they had Peter and John flogged (beaten severely) before they released them and here’s where today’s Scripture picks up the story ...

*“They (Peter and John) left the Sanhedrin **REJOICING** because they had been counted **WORTHY** OF suffering disgrace for the **NAME**.”*

“Blessed are you when men persecute you because of me ...”

Peter and John actually felt that blessing and they truly experienced the joy that Jesus said should be theirs.

2. The Apostle PAUL – Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:24

The Apostle Paul neither knew Christ nor walked with Christ during his earthly ministry. Paul was one who actually persecuted those who followed Christ so when he himself finally came to Christ he came with a powerful passion to be connected with Christ like the other Apostles had been.

He expressed that passion in his letter to the Philippians (Phil. 3:10) ...

*“I want to know **CHRIST** and the power of His Resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his **SUFFERINGS** ...”*

Paul discovered that he didn’t need to worry too much about receiving an opportunity to ‘*share in the sufferings of Christ*’ ... that kind of suffering, in the First Century, came with the territory. He got his wish and he rejoiced in it.

Here’s what he wrote in his letter to the Colossians (Colossians 1:24) ...

“I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His Body.”

Paul understood the connection between Christ and His Church – to suffer for the one was to stand with the other.

Paul understood that to stand with Christ in this world was to receive from the world the same treatment that Jesus would receive if he were still here. He rejoiced in what he regarded as life’s greatest privilege – to suffer for the Sake of Christ ... He felt blessed and he rejoiced in that blessing!

Well how wide spread was this experience?

Was it something that could be experienced by and responded to only by the few specially chosen Apostles?

Consider these words written to **The Early Church** generally.

3. The Early **CHURCH**

The Apostle Peter instructed those who were suffering because of their faith in Christ with these words ...

*“Rejoice that you participate in the suffering of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are **blessed** ...”*
(1 Peter 4:13-14)

Sounds like Peter paid attention that day on the mountain!

Here’s the **Apostle Paul** broadening out the extent of the blessing in these words directed to the Philippian Believers ...

“It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him ...”
(Philippians 1:29)

And then the **Apostle John** had the privilege of passing along the very words of Jesus Himself to the Church at Smyrna ...

*“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer ...
Be faithful, even to the point of death and
I will give you the crown of life.”*
(Revelation 2:10)

Indeed the blessing of this **Ninth Beatitude** was broadcast throughout the entire Early Church – it was intended to inform and transform all of Christ’s followers.

4. The Church **TODAY**

Millions of believers live under persecution – many are martyred every year because of their connection with Christ. Great will be their reward – Great indeed can be their joy.

Final Thot ...

Jesus took our **PLACE** on the **CROSS** so that we could take His **PLACE** on the **EARTH**.
It should be a **JOY** for us to do so!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Eleven"

Sunday we looked at **Beatitude #9**...

"**BLESSED** are you when people insult you, **PERSECUTE** you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you (slander you) **BECAUSE** of me.
(Matthew 5:11)

Think of ways Christians today might be **INSULTED** ...

- * You Christians are weak of **BODY**, weak of **MIND**, weak of **WILL** and weak of **SPIRIT**.

Think of ways Christians today might be **SLANDERED** ...

- * You Christians are **BIGOTED** – intolerant of anyone who is different; **HATEFUL** – you despise anyone who is different and **DANGEROUS** – you oppose a free and inclusive society.

Think of ways Christians today might be **PERSECUTED** ...

- * You Christians don't deserve equal **PROTECTION** under the law.
- * You Christians don't deserve the opportunity to **THRIVE**.
- * You Christians don't deserve to **LIVE**.

Have you heard of (or experienced) these kinds of things happening?
Google the "**Persecuted Church**" and see what comes up.

REJOICE and be **GLAD**, because great is your **REWARD** in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the **PROPHETS** who were before you."
(Matthew 5:12)

Think of the various 'rewards' that the Scripture speaks of ...

- "**WELL DONE**" – Reward from the **FATHER** (Matthew 25:21)
- "**RICH WELCOME**" – Reward from all the **HEAVENLY HOSTS** (2 Peter 1:10-11)
- "**CROWN of LIFE**" – Reward from the **LORD JESUS** (Revelation 2:10)

Would that make you 'rejoice'?

Point To Ponder ... **JESUS** took our place on the **CROSS** so that we could take His Place on the **EARTH!**

“COMMUNION – The Blessed Life Demonstrated

(Matthew 5:1-12)

Intro ... Last Sunday we concluded our nine week investigation of the Beatitudes – that nine part lesson with which Jesus introduced his ‘*Sermon on the Mount*’ which is recorded most completely in the Gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7.

The ‘*Beatitudes*’ convey the essence of Christian Character – nine qualities of a life that is truly ‘*Blessed*’; nine qualities of the life of Jesus Christ; nine qualities Jesus would have characterize the lives of those who bear his name in this fallen, sin-filled world.

Like most things taught, description only goes so far. Most things that really matter need to be demonstrated if they are to be comprehended and implemented.

So today, as we prepare for our Time of Communion, let me draw your attention to ...

Today’s Key Concept ...

In the **EVENTS** surrounding Christ’s **SACRIFICE** on the Cross, every **QUALITY** of the “*Blessed Life*” was **DEMONSTRATED**.

Jesus experienced every aspect of this **BLESSED** life in the process of providing our **SALVATION**.

Jesus Christ was the ultimate ‘*blessed one*’ ... His life clearly demonstrated and illustrated the points he was making regarding ‘*life that is blessed*’.

Let’s just walk our way through the nine ‘*Beatitudes*’ and see how his life matched up with his words ...

* Blessed are the **POOR** in **SPIRIT** ... the humble-hearted.

Blessed are those who do not possess a haughty or prideful spirit. Blessed are those who understand that their life is being lived in submission to the will of God and who bow themselves before that will. Blessed are those who humbly agree to the role that God would call them to play no matter what that role might be.

Here’s one key example.

In explaining the very process that provided our salvation, the Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Church in Philippi ...

“He humbled himself and became obedient unto death”
(Philippians 2:8)

Though he was the Son of God – though he held all the glory of heaven in his hand, he released his grip and let it go because the salvation of man required it. He demonstrated what it means to be *“Poor in Spirit”*.

* Blessed are those that **MOURN** ... those whose hearts break over the things that break the heart of God.

As Jesus and his disciples and the crowd that attended them on Palm Sunday rounded that last bend in the road and their eyes caught sight of the Holy City for the first time, Jesus was overwhelmed with the compassion that characterizes His Heavenly Father.

God’s heart has not changed from the days of Noah when it was reported that God was ‘grieved deeply’ by the actions of man on the earth. Sin cannot be overlooked – the devastating effect of sin upon the earth and upon the hearts of men cannot be denied. The stubbornness of man to repent and receive the forgiveness of God cannot be ignored. Judgment will come though it breaks the heart of the Judge to release it.

Luke the great and careful Gospel historian reports in Luke 19:41 ...

“As he approached Jerusalem ... he wept over it”
(Luke 19:41)

And as those tears rolled down his cheeks, Jesus demonstrated to his disciples just how God the Father feels about man’s sinful persistent rebellion. He grieves – He mourns - and so do those who belong to His Family.

* Blessed are the **MEEK** ... those who keep a firm grip on themselves, who keep their strength under control, who possess great self-management, who submit themselves to a godly standard of behavior even when natural impulses would lead them to respond differently.

If anyone had the authority and the right to strike back at his accusers, it would be Jesus. He was accused unjustly; he was lied about; he was mocked; he had smelly soldiers get right in his face and yet (as the Apostle Peter who was an eye-witness would later report) ...

“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate”
(1 Peter 2:23)

He had not come to ‘win an argument’; he had not come to ‘put people in their place’. He had come to ‘provide a place’ for all who would believe. And so he ‘meekly endured’ all they threw his way.

* Blessed are those who **HUNGER** and **THIRST** for Righteousness ... these are those who yearn to see God-Honoring, God-Pleasing life restored upon the earth. And this of course was the compelling passion of Jesus' life – his primary purpose for coming to earth.

Again the Apostle Peter becomes our instructor ...

*"He bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might
die to sins and live for righteousness."*

(1 Peter 2:24)

Jesus' death on the cross was a purposeful death – it was intended to produce life – righteous life – once again upon the earth. There is nothing that brings him more joy than to see his followers actually living out that life and honoring him as they do so. To see them do that satisfies the deepest hunger of his heart.

* Blessed are the **MERCIFUL** ... those who truly possess a '*bias toward forgiveness*' – who find pleasure in '*lifting someone's load*' and even providing for them a '*fresh start*'.

Jesus possessed such a '*merciful heart*' that not even the agony of the cross could silence its expression. There on Calvary, he heard the appeal of the justly condemned criminal next to him and responded (no doubt with an inner sense of compassion and delight) ...

"This day you shall be with me in Paradise"

(Luke 23:43)

A last second salvation – Jesus will take it. It counts just like any other. Those who are merciful are not concerned about making someone '*earn something*' ... They are eager to give generously and freely what has been so freely and generously given to them. They are truly '*blessed*' upon the earth.

* Blessed are the **PURE** in **HEART** ... the pure in heart would not recognize an ulterior motive if it hit them in the face. They possess no personal agenda – no self-centered, self-determined plan for success. They have surrendered themselves to the perfect will of God and they contentedly live under His All-Wise Authority.

Nowhere did Jesus demonstrate this '*quality of blessedness*' more dramatically than in the Garden of Gethsemane the night he was betrayed and arrested.

Making very clear that he did not relish the agony that awaited him – the separation from His Father that would nearly overwhelm him – he nevertheless prayed ...

"Not my will but yours be done"

(Luke 22:42)

The pure heart is (above everything else) a surrendered heart – a heart so focused upon the Will and Purposes of God that nothing else actually matters. And as a result it is a heart that is unsullied by personal ambition or rebellious questioning ... It willingly submits because that is its nature.

And as Jesus willingly submitted to the Father's Will that night in the Garden, he demonstrated to all who would follow just what it looks like to have a heart that is purely focused upon the things of God.

* Blessed are **PEACEMAKERS** ... those who can bring '*warring factions*' together in a lasting fellowship.

This was perhaps Christ's most notable '*blessed quality*' ... He possessed the heart and he found the way to make peace between God and His Rebellious Creation. Restoring man to '*fellowship*' has been the underlying theme of the ages – the main item on the agenda.

The Apostle Paul had the privilege of explaining to the Early Believers in the Colossian Congregation that the reason Jesus submitted himself to the agonies of Calvary was because he was ...

"making peace through his blood shed on the cross"
(Colossians 1:20)

Jesus Christ – the peacemaker – was providing a way that unholy human beings could be reconciled (brought back into fellowship) with a most Holy God.

His shed blood would provide payment (atonement) for the sins of all who availed themselves of it. He indeed was the '*peace-provider*' and is truly '*blessed*' when his provision actually '*makes*' the peace he died to provide.

* Blessed are those who are **PERSECUTED** for **RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE**...

These are those who, because of their commitment to live godly lives, suffer opposition from those who are not similarly committed.

Here again, Jesus demonstrated firsthand that of which he spoke on that memorable day on the mountainside. Here are times when those who live rightly will be set upon by those who do not.

The criminal on the cross recognized that fact.

Here's how Luke reports it ...

*"The other criminal rebuked him (saying) ...
We are getting what our deeds deserve but this man has done nothing wrong."
(Luke 23:40-41)*

'Persecuted for righteousness sake' – that's what Jesus was and he had to feel 'blessed' in the midst of it even as his followers can when they are similarly attacked for no other reason than that they are living proper, God-Honoring lives.

* Blessed are those who are **PERSECUTED** for his name's sake ...

These are those who are attacked and set upon in the world simply because they are linked with Jesus Christ.

It's interesting that here too Jesus is our prime example for he himself was persecuted for the name he bore.

Matthew reports the doings of the Roman Soldiers the night Jesus was betrayed, arrested and tried.

"And they mocked him saying ... 'Hail King of the Jews'"
(Matthew 27:29)

It's amazing how much venom the name 'Jesus' – the designation 'Christian' - can generate in certain places of the world.

Try referring to him today as "*King of the Jews*" or "*Lord of the Universe*" or "*Eternal Son of God*" and see how far you get with certain groups of people.

He himself didn't get very far ... The Chief Priests condemned him – the Roman soldiers mocked him and beat him – the crowd demanded that Pilate crucify him.

Indeed he knew what he was like to be persecuted for '*His Own Name's Sake*' and I firmly believe he experienced the '*sense of blessing*' that he said would come from such persecution.

So this morning as we have walked our way through the events that surrounded the Sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, we have discovered the essence and the elements of the "*Blessed Life*" vividly demonstrated for us. Allow this "*walk*" to serve as an inspiring "*Summary*" of that life.

And remember – as our ***final thot*** says ...

Final Thot ...

In the Death of Christ is **DEMONSTRATED** the fullness of the **BLESSED** life.

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"Lesson Twelve"

Sunday we walked our way through all **Nine Beatitudes** discovering that Jesus 'Demonstrated them all' ... particularly in the events surrounding his Great Sacrifice for us on Calvary. Was that a profitable 'walk' for you?

Here's a **key quote** from Sunday's Meditation ...

*"The 'Beatitudes' convey the **essence** of Christian Character – nine qualities of a life that is truly '**Blessed**'; nine qualities of the life of Jesus Christ; nine qualities Jesus would have characterize the lives of those who bear his name in this fallen, sin-filled world."*

Have you previously considered the "**Beatitudes**" to have such significance in the defining of your day-to-day Christian Life?

As we have proceeded through this study, we have suggested along the way that each of the Beatitudes conveys a particular "*heart attitude*" though we have not actually sought to '*identify*' each one.

Here's an attempt to do that in this summary lesson – See if you can '*think along with Pastor Mark*' and wrap your mind around these 'descriptors'.

1. Poor in Spirit (The **HUMBLE** Heart)
2. Those Who Mourn (The **SENSITIZED** Heart – sensitized to the heart of God)
3. The Meek (The **SELF-CONTROLLED** Heart)
4. Those Who Hunger/Thirst For Righteousness (The **YEARNING** Heart)
5. The Merciful (The **FORGIVING** Heart)
6. The Pure In Heart (The **FULLY-YIELDED** Heart)
7. The Peacemakers (The **RECONCILING** Heart)
8. Those Persecuted For Righteousness Sake (The **COMMITTED** Heart)
9. Those Persecuted For Christ's Name Sake (The **CONNECTED** Heart)

Pick one and share how the '*descriptor*' word or phrase applies.

Point to Ponder ...

Why do you think Jesus **BEGAN** the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes?

“TRANSITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS”

(Kingdom Living Series)

(Matthew 5:13-20)

Intro ... Two weeks ago we concluded our nine week investigation of the Beatitudes – that nine part lesson with which Jesus introduced his ‘*Sermon on the Mount*’ which is recorded most completely in the Gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7.

Last week, in preparation for Communion, we took the time to observe how Jesus Himself perfectly demonstrated those Nine Beatitude Qualities in the very actions surrounding his great sacrifice for us on Calvary.

This past week in our Cell Groups we suggested a ‘**Heart Condition**’ appropriate for each of the Nine. Those suggestions are printed on the back of your note sheet this morning. I would encourage to keep that list somewhere close at hand as an ever-ready personal ‘*heart test*’ for you in the days ahead.

This morning we cast our gaze forward into the specifics of the Sermon on the Mount – the specific prescriptions for living that Jesus laid out on that mountainside that sunny afternoon.

These ‘*prescriptions*’ define the kind of life that Jesus expected to be lived by those who would follow him into the Kingdom - those who would carry on what I have called “**Kingdom-Class Living**” after he was gone.

Keep in mind that much of what he said that day cut across the grain of the accepted practices of his day ... one expression that we will hear him use again and again is “*You have heard it said ... but I say to you.*”

New teaching was coming – old concepts were being discarded or at least significantly modified.

But old concepts are not discarded easily – old ways of thinking and responding have a way of hanging on. We will discover that some of those ‘*old ways of thinking*’ have hung on right up until our own day.

We might discover that some of us still ‘*think in those old ways*’ ourselves’. His ‘**Sermon**’ might be as shocking or challenging to us as it was to them!

And if that is the case, then we need to ‘*ready ourselves*’, for I’m sure that every one of us would like to ‘*master*’ this matter of Kingdom Living.

So today ... before we take the jump from preamble to preaching, I want to share with you a few of what I have called “*Transitional Considerations*”.

Things that might help us ‘*transition*’ into the body of this significant teaching with as little difficulty as possible.

Consider with me first of all that ...

**1. YOUR HEART DETERMINES EVERYTHING AND
THE HEART CONDITION LAID OUT IN THE BEATITUDES
IS FOUNDATIONAL FOR SUCCESSFUL KINGDOM LIVING!**

Way back in the Book of Proverbs, we read some months ago ...

*“Above all else, guard your heart for it is the **WELLSPRING** of life.”
(Proverbs 4:23)*

In other words ... as the heart goes, so goes everything else. A good heart produces a good life – a bad heart a bad life. That’s true spiritually as well as physically. The heart (biblically speaking) is the engine of life.

Guard it – protect it – nurture it ... your life outcome depends upon it. God has declared that truth from ancient times.

Jesus, later on in his earthly ministry, would say ...

*“Out of the abundance (the overflow) of the **HEART**,
the **MOUTH** speaks (or we could add ‘actions come’).”
(Matthew 12:34)*

Listen to a man talk and you can generally tell what’s in his heart; sooner or later his words will reveal him. What we call ‘gaffes’ today are generally words spoken in an unguarded moment – words that indicate what is really our core perspective. The more passionate, the more excited our heart the more exuberant the words and the more dramatic the deeds that flow forth.

Again the point we are making is ...

*“Your heart determines everything and the specific heart condition
laid out in the Beatitudes is foundational for successful Kingdom Living.”*

Or we could put it this way ...

*“Kingdom-Class **LIVING** just naturally flows from a Kingdom-Class **HEART**.”*

That's why (I certainly believe) Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes ... the heart condition they depict is essential for genuine Kingdom Living!

Now that's a '*transitional thought*' we need to have down pat as we push ahead into his '*Mountainside Teaching*'.

It's interesting to see that Jesus shared some transitional comments himself before he got into the nitty-gritty particulars of this transformational style of living.

Consider this one ...

**2. IF YOUR HEART IS RIGHT YOU WILL BE TASTY AND BRIGHT –
YOU WILL STAND OUT FROM THE BLANDNESS AND DARKNESS
OF THE WORLD AROUND YOU!**

*"You are the SALT of the earth."
(Matthew 5:13)*

You are the ones who bring flavor and zest to an otherwise fairly bland world; you are the ones who preserve this world from quicker decay than would otherwise be the case; you are the salt of the earth. You are a treasured commodity.

*"You are the LIGHT of the world."
(Matthew 5:14)*

You are the ones who bring enlightenment and understanding concerning the things that really matter. You are the ones who help people 'make sense out of life'. You are the ones who 'shine in the darkness' and help people find their way spiritually and emotionally and sometimes even physically. You 'brighten up' the darkness. You provide a most valuable service.

Notice that Jesus didn't say "You should be the salt' or "You should be the light" ... He said "**YOU ARE**". By virtue of the Heart that has been placed and nurtured within you, you are both salt and light in this bland and darkened world. The Kingdom-Class Heart just naturally expresses itself in these attention-getting, people-serving ways!

Everything that he will subsequently share in this Mountainside Sermon will be simply a manifestation or a demonstration of what it means or how it looks to be '*salt and light in the world*'. Quite a consideration!

Now consider this transitional comment Jesus made ...

**3. I DIDN'T COME TO ABOLISH ANYTHING;
I CAME TO FULFILL EVERYTHING. (Matthew 5:17-20)**

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the (precepts of) the LAW or the (teaching of) the PROPHETS; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them."
(Matthew 5:17)

"I tell you that unless your RIGHTEOUSNESS surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."
(Matthew 5:20)

Usually when you bring in something new, people think that you are eliminating the old. Jesus was planning to fulfill the old **by bringing in** the new. He was planning to take the 'old' where it had always been intended and expected to go.

He was planning to lay out 'a more perfect world' for his people; he was planning to define for them what real goodness and godliness looked like; he was planning to take them far beyond where the most 'righteous of their day' (the Pharisees and the teachers of the law) had ever thought of going.

'Get ready' he was saying ... 'Fasten your seat-belts' ... We are in for a wild and turbulent ride ... We are going to challenge the status quo – We are going to bring the values of heaven to bear on the earth – We are going to conduct ourselves as though the Kingdom was already here and we are going to respond in every situation of life as though we were bona fide, confident Children of God. It's going to be great!

Could anything have been more exciting or unnerving?
And that's right where we are today!

These **Kingdom Prescriptions** are just as shocking to many today as they were when they were first uttered but they will find a warm embrace in those whose hearts are truly 'Kingdom-Class'.

So guard your heart – check your heart – 'beatitude' your heart and thus ready your heart to participate in a full-out Invasion of Kingdom Living in this fallen, sin-filled world for as our **Final Thot** says ...

Final Thot ...

In the **KINGDOM** the heart must **LEAD** the **WAY**.
So make sure your heart is **LEADERSHIP READY**.

'BEATITUDE yourself' every day!

THE WELLSPRING OF SUCCESSFUL KINGDOM LIVING

- A Kingdom-Class Heart –

‘Beatitude Yourself’ Each And Every Day ...

1. A HUMBLE HEART ... *“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”*

“To honor others above myself, to place my own desires and even needs below the desires and needs of those around me.”

2. A SENSITIZED HEART ... *“Blessed are those who mourn.”*

“To allow my heart to break over the things that break the Heart of God – to sense and feel sorrow over the things that grieve God’s Holy Spirit.”

3. A SELF-CONTROLLED HEART ... *“Blessed are the meek.”*

“To so control myself that earthly passions and urges do not cause me to act rashly, insensitively or defensively during times of duress.”

4. A YEARNING HEART ... *“Blessed are those who hunger/thirst after righteousness.”*

“To yearn for the fullness of the righteous life that God desires – to feel God’s smile of approval upon me - to crave holiness in thought and deed.”

5. A FORGIVING HEART ... *“Blessed are the merciful.”*

“To possess that ‘bias towards forgiveness – to desire to lift the burdens of those around me – to grant ‘fresh starts’ to as many as I can.”

6. A FULLY-YIELDED HEART ... *“Blessed are the pure in heart.”*

“To be completely free from any personal agenda or baggage from the past as I enter into this day – May doing the Father’s Will be my only objective.”

7. A RECONCILING HEART ... *“Blessed are the peace-makers.”*

“To bring ‘conflicted parties’ together by finding the common ground around which they can wrap their arms and even join their hearts.”

8. A COMMITTED HEART ... *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness”*

“To respond reflectively, sensitively, thoughtfully and even thankfully when I am attacked in one way or another simply because I have chosen to do the ‘right thing’.”

9. A CONNECTED HEART ... *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of me”*

“To feel privileged and blessed when I experience opposition or even persecution because someone who opposes Jesus connects me with him.”

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Thirteen"

Sunday's message "*Transitional Considerations*" was designed to 'transition us' from our study of the Beatitudes into the '*directive content*' of the Sermon On The Mount. Here were the three '**Considerations**' that we considered – one based on our '*Beatitude Study*' and two based on Jesus' own '*transitional teaching*' in Matthew chapter 5:13-20.

1. Your **HEART** Determines Everything and the Heart Condition Laid Out In The **BEATITUDES** Is Foundational To Successful Kingdom Living.

What does this '*Consideration*' suggest to you?

Why do you think Pastor Mark would take the time to have us '*consider it*'?

2. If Your Heart is **RIGHT** You Will Be **TASTY** and **BRIGHT** – You Will Stand Out From The **BLANDNESS** and **DARKNESS** Of The **WORLD** Around You! (Matthew 5:13-14)

What does it mean for a Christian to be '*tasty and bright*'?

Would you say that the world is really characterized by '*blandness*' and '*darkness*'?

3. **JESUS** Didn't Come To **ABOLISH** Anything; He Came To **FULFILL** Everything. (Matthew 5:17-20)

Do you think that that statement from Jesus surprised his hearers?

Why or why not?

What's your ***response*** to this statement from Sunday's message? ***Reflect*** in light of Matthew 5:20 ...

*"Usually when you bring in something new, people think that you are eliminating the old. Jesus was planning to fulfill the old **by** bringing in the new. He was planning to take the 'old' where it had always been intended and expected to go."*

What kept the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law from getting all the way to where they needed to be? (Check out Matthew 15:7-9)

Point to Ponder ...

In the Kingdom, the **HEART** must lead the way so be sure your heart is **LEADERSHIP** ready. **BEATITUDE** yourself every day!

“NO MURDER ALLOWED”

(Kingdom Clarification #1)

(Matthew 5:21-26)

Intro ... Today we make the jump – ***from*** the ***Beatitudes*** which lay the Foundation for Kingdom Living and from the ***Transitional Considerations*** that Ready Us For Kingdom Teaching ***into*** the very specific Prescriptions for Kingdom Living that form by far the bulk of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

Verse 21 of Matthew chapter five begins with these soon to be familiar words ...
“You have heard it said” ... six times Jesus will use them ...

Call these **Six Key Clarifications Of Ancient Teaching**.

Are you ready? We’re about to begin that wild and exhilarating ride we talked about last week for every time Jesus introduces a new subject with these words, he is getting ready to announce a level of living that goes beyond anything that anyone had imagined before ...

He’s getting ready to raise the discussion to what we could call **“Kingdom Level”**.

Here’s the first one ...

Today’s Key Scripture ...

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago”
(in the Ten Commandments specifically) ... ***“Do not MURDER”*** – (that is,
do not engage in the willful destruction of innocent human life) - ***“and***
(you have heard it said as well) ***anyone who MURDERS will be subject to judgment,***
BUT I SAY TO YOU ...

Certainly all the people on the hillside that sunny afternoon had not only heard but had lived by that commandment their whole lives.

“Thou shalt not kill” ... There is nothing more fundamental than that.

God, the creator and sustainer of life, has made it clear from the very beginning that life is sacred and that the taking of human life, particularly the taking of innocent human life, is a great offense against him.

Buried deep in our DNA is the conviction that taking life is a grievous thing and that taking an innocent life is the most grievous of all.

How many unbelievers, when it's pointed out to them that they are sinners and that they need a Savior if they are to gain Eternal Life, will defend themselves with these words ...

*"I not saying that I'm perfect or anything
but at least I've never killed anyone."*

"Killing someone" – specifically committing murder - is that universally agreed upon 'worst possible sin'.

So where is Jesus going with this ... What is he about to say ... How is he going to modify or clarify this Ancient Prohibition?

Several possibilities could have popped into his listener's minds.

Perhaps he about to announce his support for a long-desired Rebellion against the oppressive Romans and say ...

*"But I say to you ... This prohibition, of course, does not apply to our
Roman Oppressors –go ahead and kill as many of them as you can!"*

There were no doubt many there that day ... the **zealots** particularly – who would have loved to hear those words.

Or perhaps he was about to announce that 'sometimes killing people' is the only way to actually bring about the kind of Kingdom God desires ...

*But I say to you ...this prohibition does not apply to people who are openly violating God's standards of
morality or who are living perverted lives in one fashion or another – people like that deserve to die'.*

Many of the Pharisees would have loved to hear him say that ... They would have agreed that Blasphemers – Moral Degenerates – Adulterers – Roman Sympathizers – should all be erased from society.

So it was a much more provocative statement Jesus made that day than we might just naturally and casually think ...

*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago,
'Do not murder' and 'anyone who murders will be subject to judgment',
But I say to you ...*

I have no doubt he paused a bit right at that point.

What kind of **Clarification** was he about to bring to the Old Commandment?

I doubt that anyone would have guessed the direction that he was going to take ...

For rather than letting any “*man-killers off the hook*” by explaining that under certain circumstances the ‘taking of human life’ is permissible or even necessary, he says something that nails even more of us to the wall.

Here’s what he said ...

Today’s Key Scripture Completed ...

*“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder’ and
‘anyone who murders will be subject to judgment’,*

But I say to you ...

*“Anyone who is **ANGRY** with his **BROTHER** will be subject to judgment.”*

That is not what anyone was expecting ...

In effect, Jesus was saying that this old world has more ‘murderers’ in it than we would have ever imagined. That old fall-back defense “*At least I never killed anyone*” might not be as air-tight as once thought.

Basically Jesus is saying that “*Anger towards a fellow human is just another form of murder*” – it’s actually ‘murder waiting to happen’. Those who possess anger in their hearts toward a fellow human being possess the ‘heart of a murderer’.

In God’s eyes they already are murderers.

Now that’s a lot to chew ... there’s plenty there to debate ... to resist – to argue with – to wonder and worry about.

Because actually anger is a valid human emotion, isn’t it? Doesn’t anger at times even show that we have been made in the image of a righteous and at times wrathful God? Isn’t there much in this world that we ought to ‘*get angry about*’? Doesn’t God get angry about stuff? Didn’t Jesus?

Isn’t it true that the awareness of sin can and should lead us to anger as in ...

“How dare they?” – “That should never be!”

Note the word that Matthew selected here to convey Jesus’ teaching. It’s the Greek word “Orge” ...It’s frequently translated by the English word ‘*wrath*’ - a flaring up, passion-driven hostility ... anger that is well on its way toward full blown hatred.

This is the kind of anger towards another person that could cause someone to say ...

“I wish you (he) were dead – The world would certainly be better off without you (him).”

And there it is ... anger revealing itself as the forerunner, the accessory to murder. Jesus says that such anger has no place in the Kingdom – such anger, in fact, undermines the values of the Kingdom.

Years later, Jesus’ half-brother James would summarize Jesus’ teaching with this simple statement (James 1:20) ...

*“Man’s anger **DOES NOT** bring about the **RIGHTEOUS** life that God desires.*

Basically Jesus and James are telling us that there is no place in the Kingdom for Man’s flesh-based anger ... and seldom do we actually experience any other kind.

So What DOES Man’s Anger Bring About?

OUT AND OUT DISGUST WITH PEOPLE!

*Again, (You have heard it said) anyone who says to his brother, **RACA**,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But (I say to you) ... (vs. 22)*

Out and out Disgust with people ... “Raca” – a guttural turn of derision – the First Century version of Hate Speech.

Such speech was totally unacceptable; it would bring rebuke and discipline by the Jewish Court – the Sanhedrin. Such language communicated a complete repudiation of a person – a dismissal of him or her as unworthy of any consideration or respect – let alone protection.

It was speech that was considered absolutely detrimental to the smooth functioning of society; it was speech that would effectively ‘kill’ any possibility of meaningful connection or cooperation between the parties. It was a kind of ‘social murder’. It was serious stuff and it was taken most seriously.

Now this prohibition against such demeaning speech was obviously a well understood and accepted social protection. Jesus mentioned it as though it were as familiar as the prohibition against murder. You just can’t speak about a fellow Jew in that way ... It’s anti-social, disrespectful and illegal.

Jesus, however, once again takes a well-understood standard of the day and raises it to yet another level ...

*Again, (You have heard it said) anyone who says to his brother,
‘RACA,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But (I say to you) ...
anyone who says, ‘You FOOL!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

*“I say to you” ... he who says
“You fool” is in danger of hell fire (judgment).*

Here Jesus lowers the level of guilt from full-blown disgust with someone (particularly a Jewish brother) to mere frustration with someone – with anyone.

You ‘numbskull’ – you ‘idiot’ – you ‘moron’ ... these words can pop out of our mouths in a moment of frustration and exasperation.

But they too can bring a kind of death with them. They can ‘murder’ a person’s self-esteem; they can completely destroy a person’s sense of ‘trust in others’; they can permanently damage a person’s reputation in the community.

There’s no place in the Kingdom for this kind of ‘murder’ either.

Man’s anger (and the frustration that leads to that anger) indeed does not bring about the righteous life (the Kingdom-Class life) that God desires and that God recognizes and honors.

And so we come to ...

Today’s Key Observation ...

Man’s Anger almost always makes things WORSE not better.
Man’s Anger DESTROYS rather than builds up or improves.

Frequently the pattern is ...
DISCOVERY which leads to ANGER which leads to
CONFRONTATION which results in DESTRUCTION.

Even the mildest form of frustration with the actions of others can put our feet on that murderous path.

So how can we keep ourselves from ever getting on that path – how can we move in a more productive direction? What resources can we draw on when confronted with situations that might normally move us toward anger and the eventual destruction it can bring?

How about the **RESOURCE** of a **KINGDOM-CLASS HEART?**

Today's Key Question ...

What Beatitude **QUALITIES** might come into play in keeping us from heading down the path toward **ANGER** and (even) **MURDER?**

* How about **SORROW** over the **CIRCUMSTANCE** - the sin and the sinner?

"GRIEVE and mourn rather than **FUSS** and fume."

(This is the **SENSITIZED** Heart at Work)

As we saw some weeks ago, this is Jesus grieving over Jerusalem – the city that would reject him - the people who would cry out to Pilate to '*crucify him*'.

In many ways, they were people to be pitied – they were lost and didn't even recognize it – their Savior was standing in their midst and they didn't even recognize him.

They were a sad lot; they were about to do a desperately wrong thing but his heart was grieved not angered. He felt the sorrow of God Himself over their plight.

And so do the true "*Citizens of the Kingdom*" respond when confronted with the foolishness and sinfulness of fallen men. True Citizens of the Kingdom do not set themselves up for disappointment by expecting something '*better*' of people.

They recognize men for what they are – "*fallen and flawed*" ... they are not surprised though they are definitely saddened when those "*flaws*" manifest themselves in some twisted and even tragic ways.

There's no room or opportunity for wrathful anger to arise in such a ***sensitized*** heart.

* How about seeking to **ASSIST** the sinner toward **WHOLENESS?**

"Put His **NEED** of salvation ahead of your **DESIRE** for justice."

(This is the **YEARNING** and **HUMBLE** Heart at Work)

The “*Fall of the Unenlightened*” is not viewed as an opportunity for the “*Enlightened*” to take comfort in his “*Unshakable Stand*” – it is not viewed as an opportunity for the fallen to finally “*get what’s coming to him*”.

This might well be the critical moment when the fallen one recognizes that he/she is indeed a helpless sinner in need of salvation and that very failure might serve the awesome purpose of bringing him/her to Christ.

To see that happen – to seek to bring about that spiritual transformation - is the focus of those with ***Yearning*** and ***Humble*** Hearts.

In such hearts there is no stirring toward wrathful action.

* How about **PICTURING** what might yet be **ACCOMPLISHED?**
“Look for ways to **FORGIVE** and grant a **FRESH START**”
(This is the **FORGIVING** Heart at Work)

This is the perspective of one who believes that failure is never final.

Other than suicide, no man’s sinful action needs to be his last.

There is always the chance of “*Repentance and Restoration*” ...

This is Jesus praying as the soldiers pounded the nails through his flesh:

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Those with “*Forgiving Hearts*” see with a broader perspective – they continually look forward with ***hope*** not ***hostility*** in their heart.

The bottom line is this:

Those who “*Beatitude Themselves Daily*” will be well-guarded against any ugly outbreak of anger in their lives and that’s good because as our ***final thot*** says ...

Final Thot ...

In the Kingdom, **ANGER** is like **DYNAMITE** ...
Best keep it **DEFUSED!**

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Fourteen"

Sunday we focused our attention upon the **first** of what Pastor Mark called

THE SIX KEY CLARIFICATIONS

with which Jesus introduced the "*Prescriptions for Kingdom Living*"
that make up the bulk of his "*Sermon on the Mount*".

Here's how Jesus put it ...

*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, (Exodus 20) 'Do not **MURDER**' and 'anyone who **MURDERS** will be subject to judgment', but I tell you ... "Anyone who is **ANGRY** with his **BROTHER** will be subject to judgment."* (Matthew 5:21-22)

What would you say Jesus was attempted to "*clarify*" in this passage?

(That spiritually there's no difference between "*strong anger*" and "*murder*".)

Do you think '*it*' needed to be clarified? Does what he said '*clarify anything*' for you?

What are some questions on the subject of "*anger*" that remain in your mind?

Jot several down ...

What was your take on Jesus' statement on "*angry words*"? (Matthew 5:22)

*Again, (You have heard it said) anyone who says to his brother, '**RACA**,' (a guttural term of disgust) is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But (I say to you) ... anyone who says, 'You **FOOL!**' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

We might draw a distinction between words '*spoken in hatred*' and those '*spoken out of frustration*' ... Do you think such a distinction is valid?

What do they share in common? (See James 3:9-10)

(They both show disrespect for God's image-bearer and thus for God Himself.)

Point to Ponder ...

The bottom line is this: Those who '*Beatitude Themselves Daily*' will be well-guarded against any ugly outbreaks of anger in their lives and that's good because in the Kingdom, **ANGER** is like **DYNAMITE** ... Best keep it **DEFUSED!**

Exercise: Reflect upon which "*Beatitude Qualities*" best guard us against anger.

“NO ‘ADULTERY’ IN THE KINGDOM”

(Kingdom Clarification #2)

(Matthew 5:27-30)

Intro ... Last week we jumped with both feet right into the main content of the Sermon on the Mount. We examined the first of the ***Six Clarifications of Ancient Teaching*** with which Jesus began that incredible afternoon exposition.

‘Anger and murder’ ... Jesus said that at the heart level they are one and the same. We must cleanse our hearts of anger if we would keep our record free of murder. It was a momentous beginning to his afternoon dissertation. He followed up that First Clarification with this one ...

Today’s Key Scripture ...

“You have heard it was said (written in stone actually)
*‘Do not **COMMIT ADULTERY**’* but I say to you ...

To the people on the hillside that day, this was a no-brainer. Adultery was really pretty unthinkable – it carried an incredible social stigma.

Marriage (as we still might hear in today’s wedding ceremony) was considered to be the *“foundation of home-life and social order”* – it was the primary human relationship – it was thoughtfully arranged, carefully prepared for and expected to last a lifetime.

There wasn’t anyone in that crowd that day who would have had a radical thought in their mind regarding the institution of marriage – adultery was as distasteful to the mind as the word *“Raca”* was to the tongue.

But what if Jesus were here today and it was a crowd of 21st Century curiosity seekers who formed the congregation on the mountainside that afternoon?

Here among our contemporary population, Jesus might have set more than one mind whirring with the opening part of this statement ...

You have heard it said, *“Do not commit adultery”* but I say to you ...

What might he say ... How might he be about to modify that ancient prescription written on those by now *‘moss-covered’* stones?

You have heard it was said, “Do not commit adultery” **but I say to you ...**

“If you’re unhappy in your marriage, God would certainly grant you the freedom to take back the vow you made.”

You have heard it was said, “Do not commit adultery” **but I say to you ...**

“Love is one of the more fickle of human emotions; it’s not surprising that your love has found a new focus; it’s just the way life frequently is.”

You have heard it was said, “Do not commit adultery” **but I say to you ...**

“This is a much more enlightened age – this is a much more sexually aware age – there are so many more possibilities to consider than just a single commitment made in the excitement of youth.

The sad thing is there are many today who claim to bear Christ’s name who (if they could) would finish his words in all of those ways.

So that pause of Jesus in his pronouncement would bring about a much different response in our day than it probably did in his.

But both in his day and in ours, the words with which he followed up that initial prohibition were (and are) shocking for rather than ‘soften it’ or ‘loosen it up’ or somehow ‘modernize it’, He actually strengthened that ancient prohibition and made it even more demanding than it originally was.

Here’s what he said ...

You have heard it was said, “Do not commit adultery” **But I say to you ...**

<p><i>‘Anyone who <u>LOOKS</u> at a woman <u>LUSTFULLY</u> has <u>ALREADY</u> committed adultery in his <u>HEART</u>.’</i></p> <p>(Matthew 5:27-28)</p>

It’s as though he said, ‘Indeed adultery is unthinkable in the Kingdom of God but let me tell you, there are far more adulterers in our midst than you would have ever imagined’. More of you are actually ‘*living in adultery*’ and in need of healing and restoration than would have ever recognized it or admitted to it.

Let’s consider some **key definitions** as we seek to understand the full impact of Jesus’ clarification of that Ancient Command ...

Key Definitions ...

"ADULTERY": a sexual relationship **OUTSIDE** the bonds of **MARRIAGE**

Now I know that the standard understanding here is that only '*married people*' can commit adultery but I would seek to make the case this morning that nearly all sexual relationships outside of marriage are adulterous ... even those relationships entered into by the seemingly '*unmarried*'.

Follow me on this ...

If you ever will be married, does God know the name of your future marriage partner? Of course, he does.

Before I was even born, God knew the day would come when I would ask 'Linda Spencer' to be my wife and that she would say, 'yes'.

My parents raised me to understand that before I knew her name, she was the 'One' and that she and I were already linked by the Will of God and that one of the first and greatest adventures of my adult life would be finding her. All I could ever give a woman belonged to her and should be kept securely for her – even casual kisses.

So then – getting back into the flow of thought here ... if you enter into a sexual relationship with someone other than that one whom you will someday marry, is that not (in the eyes of God) adultery? Are you not '*cheating on*' that future spouse?

And that person you are having that sexual relationship with, might she or he someday be married? And if so, is that future marriage partner known to God? And are you not then causing him/her to 'cheat on' their future spouse? So technically it's adultery even if both of you are unmarried at the time of your relationship.

How about if you are having a sexual relationship with the person that you eventually **do** marry – That can't be '*adultery*', can it – if anything, it's just 'pre-marital sex'. It's just a matter of 'failing to wait', isn't it? Even if it's a kind of 'sin', it's certainly not adultery – How could it be?

Well, here's one thing that you are missing ... No sexual relationship can be for sure called 'pre-marital' for there is no 100% guarantee that any couple who '**plans** to get married' will in fact actually **get** married!

And if they wind up **not** getting married then their sexual relationship was not actually 'pre-marital' was it? It was the same as that between any other unmarried individuals – an adulterous one.

And even if such a couple **does** wind up getting married, you are failing to acknowledge the fact that marriage fundamentally changes people – a woman ‘*about to be married*’ or who ‘*believes her lover plans to marry her*’ is not the same person she will be once she ‘*is married*’.

It is God’s plan that the gift of oneself to one’s marriage partner becomes the actual consummation – the completion (if you will) of the marriage ceremony itself. To give that moment to someone who is still in the ‘unmarried state’ is to cheat on and to steal from the person he/she will be after the wedding ceremony has been completed.

You are actually ‘*cheating on*’ and ‘*stealing something precious from*’ the very one that will someday be your husband or wife.

This too is a form of adultery and it violates the standards of God.

Do not commit adultery – God’s Word is very specific and though it probably would not have required this much discussion in Jesus’ Day, it definitely does in ours.

So if the **Ancient Prohibition** itself is a challenge to our society ...
How much more the extra dimension Jesus gave it!

“I say to you *anyone who looks at a woman lustfully*
has already committed adultery in his heart.”

So what is he saying? What is this thing called “*Adultery of the Heart*”?

Here’s how I would define Jesus’ words ...

“LOOKS LUSTFULLY”:

A fantasizing **STARE** activating sexual **APPETITE**.

This is more than just ‘*noticing*’ ... This is more than even ‘*appreciating*’.

This is a ‘*relishing*’ ... this is ‘*imagining*’ ... this is looking in such a way
that one’s passions are stirred and desires are aroused.

And those desires Jesus labels ‘*adulterous*’ and thus ***sinful***.

Looking has never been easier ... The men and women of Jesus’ day knew nothing of the kind of ‘*looking*’ that is available in our modern world.

Everywhere you go there are opportunities for such '*looking*' – the human body is exposed and displayed nearly everywhere you go. The television has brought such '*looking*' right into the living room.

The internet abounds with opportunities for men and women, people young and old to '*look*' and then '*look some more*' ... to fantasize in the privacy of their own homes.

Dating sites provide opportunities for married men and women to connect with all sorts of potential life partners.

And how many Christians defend their '*looking*' by saying but I haven't ever actually '*cheated*' on my spouse. I only '*look*' – I only '*imagine*' ...
What wrong with a little fantasy?

Well, Jesus says that it's ***sinful*** – that it's absolutely ***contrary*** to life in the Kingdom – that such '*adulterous behavior*' is damaging and detrimental to that life God desires his Children display.

So how can it be done ... How can a born-again Child of God maintain moral purity in the midst of this fallen, sin-filled world? How can we as Christians maintain the kinds of male-female relationships that truly honor God and show us to be Citizens of His Kingdom?

In answer to that most important question, I would ask you to consider what I'm calling this morning the ...

THREE STAGES OF CHRISTIAN MALE-FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

These are three stages of development in the process of developing a Kingdom-Level Understanding of your fellow citizens in Christ's Kingdom.

These are 'stages of growth' that take us from the elementary to the most advanced ... Few of us actually make it all the way. And relapses are common.
A Kingdom-Level Heart is definitely required.

STAGE ONE: PROTECT Yourself ... GUARD your HEART!

This is where almost all of us begin ... susceptible to the lustful look and to the passions and fantasies those '*looks*' create. This is the realm of temptation; the realm where desire threatens to overwhelm reason or instruction.

Paul wrote to his young protégé Timothy ...

2 Timothy 2:22 ... **FLEE** youthful lusts” ... (Joseph/David)

Paul could have referred Timothy to the example of Joseph – the Hebrew boy sold into slavery who was propositioned by the wife of his master, Potiphar. Joseph literally ‘fled’ leaving her holding the robe that she had ripped from his body.

But it’s not always and only the ‘young’ who encounter such battles. Paul could have said, *‘Do not be like the great King David’* ... who in his middle years gazed lustfully upon another man’s wife and committed adultery with her.

Jesus basically said (in this matter of protecting yourself and guarding your heart) ...

Do **WHATEVER** it takes ... (Matthew 5:29-30)

*“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.
It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.
And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.
It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”*

Strong, forceful, extravagant speech ... Do whatever you need to do to protect yourself. Know your points of weakness – take steps to address them. Don’t put yourself in compromising situations. Recognize God’s call upon you to live a morally pure life. Avoid committing adultery in all forms.

That’s ***Stage One*** – Level One – in Christian Male-Female Relationships – Avoid Sinful Sexual Relationships – Protect and Guard Your Heart. Cultivate the *‘Heart that Hungers and Thirsts for Righteousness’* – for the moral lifestyle that truly honors and pleases God.

Now since ***Stage One*** is primarily protective, it can almost cause you to view members of the opposite sex as the enemy ... as someone to be always *‘on guard against’* – to watch out for.

More than one concerned Christian father has communicated just such a message to his maturing daughter as in *“All boys want is just one thing. Watch out for them.”*

It’s a start but it’s not the whole story by any means.

Time for ***Stage Two***.

Without forgetting about the need to *“Protect oneself”* and to *“Guard oneself from all forms of adulterous behavior”*, ***Stage Two*** is where we learn to ...

RESPECT the Opposite Sex

* See all women/men as fellow **HUMAN BEINGS**

In our fallen, sin-twisted world, men and women are frequently reduced to mere objects of sexual desire – they are not seen as valued human beings at all.

Men and women (in one way or another) sacrifice their bodies and their reputation and their sense of moral purity and integrity to gain some all-too-fleeting sense of satisfaction.

If all human beings have indeed been fashioned in the Image of God, then all human beings are worthy of respect and should never be viewed or treated as less than what they are.

* See all Christian women/men as **BROTHERS/SISTERS** in Christ
(1 Timothy 5:2)

Here's some additional instruction that the Apostle Paul gave to that young minister Timothy ...

Certainly '*flee youthful passions*' i.e. deal with them aggressively whenever you need to – don't accommodate them – don't allow them to lead you astray but more than that as you deal with all kinds of people here's how you should view them and viewing them in this way will actually help you "*Protect yourself from sin behavior and guard your heart from sinful desire*" ...

*"Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father.
Treat younger men as **brothers**, older women as mothers, and younger women
as **sisters**, with absolute purity."* (1 Timothy 5:2)

In other words, turn everyone in the church into a family member!
See them as your Father or your Mother – Your Sister or Your Brother.
Allow that '*family identity*' to determine your personal relationships.

So **outside** the church ...

Treat members of the opposite sex with the **RESPECT** they deserve as your fellow human beings – they are not to be seen as objects of conquest – they are not people to lust after – they are not **just** physical beings – they are your fellow members of the glorious human family and as a result they bear the image of the incredible God you serve. Value them and never violate them.

And **inside** the church ...

Treat members of the opposite sex with the **RESPECT** they deserve as fellow members of the Family of God. You and they have been born into this family of faith and you recognize them as Children of your Heavenly Father and you value them as such.

Stage Two can create marvelously healthy and wholesome relationships – relationships that are above reproach and that honor the desires of God for our lives.

Stage Two relationships just naturally possess some ‘*built in protections*’ against adulterous actions and lustful longings.

But **Stage Two** is not the ultimate in Christian Male-Female Relationships.

Ultimately the Holy Spirit would desire us all to arrive at ...

STAGE THREE: LIVE above GENDER Distinctions Altogether!

Just time for a brief comment – there’s an entire sermon series awaiting birth in this concept ... It’s been gestating for some time.

Today suffice it to say that **State Three** is entered when we ...

* Embrace a **KINGDOM IDENTITY** (Galatians 3:28)

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

Here is the ultimate understanding of the transformational work the Spirit of God is doing in our midst ... This is what is coming in heaven itself.

God is seeking to create in each of us a new and more complete humanity – a humanity that rises above earthly gender distinctions. And as this transformational work of the Spirit is advanced in us, we see one another more and more as **Fellow Citizens of the Kingdom** – much more alike than different – as members of a new, perfected humanity.

That thought should cause us to fall on our knees in worship of the God who would conceive such a glorious thing and to gaze with wonder and amazement upon all those who are being so transformed!

Final Thot ...

A Heart filled with **WONDER** and **AMAZEMENT** has no room for **LUSTFUL DESIRES**.

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Fifteen"

As part of Sunday's message on '**Adultery**' (Matthew 5:27-30), Pastor Mark chose to share with us what he called ...

"Three **STAGES** of Male-Female **RELATIONSHIPS**"

STAGE ONE: PROTECT yourself – Guard your **HEART**

* "**FLEE** youthful lusts" – 2 Timothy 2:22

* Do **WHATEVER** it takes to maintain a pure heart and life.
RESOLVE to win every battle with temptation!

* * * * *

STAGE TWO: RESPECT the Opposite Sex

* See all women/men as fellow **HUMAN BEINGS** – James 3:9

"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father and with it we curse (demean through lustful words) human beings who have been made in the image of God. This should not be."

* See all Christian women/men as **BROTHERS/SISTERS** in Christ – 1 Timothy 5:2
*"Treat younger men as **brothers**, older women as **mothers**, and younger women as **sisters**"*

* * * * *

STAGE THREE: LIVE above **GENDER** Distinctions Altogether!

* Embrace a **KINGDOM IDENTITY** - Galatians 3:28

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female for you are all one in Christ."

Points To Ponder ...

1. What do you think of this '*three stage understanding*' of male/female relationships?

Have you ever been exposed to this kind of '*progression*' – this particular illustration of '*growing in grace*' - before?

2. How 'old' would you say someone would need to be to 'arrive' at 'stage three'?
Can 'Stage Three' be reached this side of heaven? Why or why not?

3. Can a believer move in '*either direction*' through these stages?
Which would you say is '*easier*' to do – move up or down?

“NO ‘CASUAL’ DIVORCE”

(Kingdom Clarification #3)

(Matthew 5:31-32)

Intro ...

Today we take yet another giant step into our understanding of ‘Life in the Kingdom’ ... Today I would draw your attention to the **THIRD** of the **SIX KEY CLARIFICATIONS** with which Jesus began this most comprehensive set of teachings which we call “*The Sermon on the Mount*” (Matthew 5-7).

Each of these six follow the pattern ... “*You have heard it said*” or in today’s case simply ‘*It has been said*’ (the long-accepted teaching) followed by the words “*But I say to you*” (his clarification of the teaching).

In each case the ‘*teaching*’ has gotten more demanding as a result of Jesus ‘*clarifying*’ it. So far he has touched on the matter of Murder and the Anger in the heart that mirrors murder and the matter of Adultery and the Lustful Look that Jesus said was equally adulterous.

Today we come to **His Clarification** of the Subject of **Divorce** ...

Here’s Today’s Statement of Ancient Teaching ...

TODAY’S STATEMENT OF ANCIENT TEACHING ...

"It has been said, 'Anyone who **DIVORCES** his wife must give her a **CERTIFICATE** of divorce.'

(Matthew 5:31)

In other words ...

“Any man who would divorce his wife must do it legally.”

Can’t just say ... “*I’m done with you – get out.*”

Can’t just say ... “*I’m done*” and walk out.

Divorce must be handled with care – there are human beings and the structures of human society involved. So divorce had been legalized and regulated by Jewish Society since the days of the Great Law-Giver Moses himself.

And such regulation was necessary because divorce was not at all uncommon. There was, in fact, one school of rabbinical teaching that came right out and said that a man could divorce his wife for any reason whatsoever.

The famous First Century Historian, Josephus, (a major celebrity of his day) had recorded in his memoirs that he had *‘divorced his wife who had borne him three children because she had ‘displeased’ him’*.

And so there was then and is now **A Legal Process** that must be followed.

Several observations in passing that are as true in the 21st Century as they were in the **FIRST** – these are observations pertaining to the nature of that **Legal Process**.

* **A Legal Process Takes Time** ... time for emotions to cool and rashly spoken words to be reconsidered and would-be life-altering actions to be re-evaluated. The quickest a divorce can be made legal in the State of California is six months. Not all divorces that are ‘filed’ are ‘finalized’. Sometimes the length of the process itself helps *‘save the marriage’*.

* **A Legal Process Zeroes in on Essential Matters** ... What will the circumstances of each of the former marriage partners be after the divorce is final? How will possessions be divided up – How will responsibility for the children be apportioned – How will future interactions between the parties be handled? The Court seeks to protect the interests of all parties involved as best it can. The Legal Process is not intended to produce a winner and a loser.

Sometimes the very hassle of the matter and the *‘sorting through all the things that once bound two people together’* cause those two people to re-discover their essential oneness and to determine that they would be better off remaining together than living their lives apart.

So really the very directive that Moses gave and that Courts of Law have upheld through all these years contains an element of grace and sometimes even helps bring about redemption and restoration.

It was not a bad thing when Moses said to the men of his day ...

“Any man who would divorce his wife must do it legally.”

The people of Jesus’ day understood that just as well as they understood that both Murder and Adultery were acts to be avoided.

So again there was lots of head-nodding when Jesus transitioned into this third sermonic topic by saying ...

“It has been said” (in fact, it was still being said) ...

“Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a Certificate of Divorce.”

But by now (I'm sure) the crowd was waiting for that increasingly familiar (and ominous) follow-up phrase ***"But I say to you ..."***

What was he going to say – What could he say – How much hot water was he prepared to get into?

He was probably surrounded by many men who had done their legal duty as they put away their wives for whatever reason they found. There were no doubt women there who had been put through that painful process. There were also (I'm sure) many, many unmarried young men and women who were in the process of formulating their thoughts on the subject.

Here it came ... **TODAY'S KEY CLARIFICATION** - Jesus did not disappoint ...

*"It has been said ... "Anyone who divorces his wife
must give her a Certificate of Divorce."*

TODAY'S KEY CLARIFICATION ...

But I say to you ...

*" ... anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness,
causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who
marries the divorced woman commits adultery.*

(Matthew 5:32)

(Just a note before we proceed with today's message – In this passage Jesus gives the one biblical grounds for divorce: *"marital unfaithfulness"* – that's a full sermon topic in its own right – suffice it to say this morning that *"marital unfaithfulness"* has the potential to kill a marriage just as completely as the death of one's spouse does).

However, that condition was not the shocking thing – that condition was not the point of clarification ... everyone hearing Jesus' words that day were well aware that *'marital unfaithfulness'* created legitimate 'grounds for divorce'.

According to the Law of Moses, *'marital unfaithfulness'* actually provided grounds for death. So, of course, one way or the other, by death or divorce, it was well-understood that *'marital unfaithfulness'* ended a marriage. By exempting *'marital unfaithfulness'* from his clarification, Jesus was simply stating something else that had also *'always been said'*.

The shocking thing was what he said about all divorces that were **not** the result of such ‘*marital unfaithfulness*’ – the divorces that probably characterized the bulk of the divorced people in his audience that sunny afternoon.

“... anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

Nobody was expecting that ... Not many today would be expecting to hear that ... Only here in this passage do we read that.

In the other New Testament Passages that record Jesus’ teaching on this topic, he focuses his attention on the damage the Divorcing Party **does to himself** by his actions.

For instance in Matthew 19:9 (a much more extended passage) we read this response from Jesus ...

“Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard (there’s that heart thing again) but I say to you ... “Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

That’s also the way the way it reads in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 10:4) ...

In other words, adultery is not only committed by sleeping with someone who is not your spouse and by you lustfully looking at someone not your spouse, it is also committed by you marrying someone after you have unbiblically divorced your spouse.

In other words, even though such a re-marriage might be legal – it’s not right – it doesn’t meet the standard of “*The Kingdom*” – it doesn’t have the approval or blessing of the King.

Now though that teaching takes the standard to an additional level, it’s not an entirely unexpected one – those who divorce their spouse unbiblically are **not** free to re-marry – the Church of Jesus Christ has maintained that position pretty much all through the years.

But here in Matthew’s Account of the Sermon on the Mount we have this subject taken to yet another level (a fourth level – if you’re keeping track) ... Jesus is saying that even the ‘*innocent party*’ in an unbiblical and perhaps lust-caused divorce is put in a compromised position.

Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount say that the actions of the **Divorcer** bring about serious, spiritual and moral effects in the life of the **One He Has Divorced**.

Jesus says that the actions of the **Divorcer** pretty much ‘force’ (‘cause’ he actually said) the newly discarded spouse to seek a new partnership – a partnership that she neither desired nor even imagined ever entering into.

Functionally, she (who would be still committed to her original marriage vows if not for the fact that her husband had divorced her) is forced by his actions into a circumstance that could in one sense be called “*adultery*”.

That is ... She (a woman for whom spousal death has not freed her from her vow to live faithfully ‘til ‘death do us part’) is put in the position (through no desire or action of her own) of doing the very thing that she would do if she were an adulteress – i.e. sleeping with a man who is **not** the still-living man to whom she first pledged herself.

And (Jesus points out) the man who marries her is ‘caused’ to enter into that very situation with her. That is, he is ‘*sleeping with*’ a woman who has pledged herself in marriage to another and whose marriage vow has never been biblically broken.

He **also** is doing the very thing that he would be doing if he were, in fact, an **adulterer**.

Both of them (if they are spiritually sensitive souls) would probably be troubled by such thoughts their entire re-married lives.

But the reality was (particularly in the First Century) that there were very few other options for an unmarried, divorced woman. Re-marriage (if offered) would be almost always accepted.

Jesus (in this passage) seemed to assume that such re-marriage would (in fact) happen. He doesn’t blame or condemn them; he simply identifies their less than ideal circumstance.

So what is Jesus’ point here ...

“What is the Clarification that he is seeking to make?”

I believe that it is simply this - Call it ...

TODAY’S KEY DECLARATION ...

**“DIVORCE – particularly CASUAL DIVORCE is
DESTRUCTIVE to Life in the Kingdom”**

THREE OBSERVATIONS ARISE FROM THAT DECLARATION ...

Note: In these observations we follow the pattern that Jesus laid down of looking at divorce from the perspective of a divorcing husband ... a man who has chosen to divorce his wife ‘*casually*’ - for reasons other than ‘*marital unfaithfulness*’. These observations are framed in a Christian context and intended primarily for Christian men.

1. CASUAL DIVORCE IS AN UTTERLY SELFISH ACT – IT DISREGARDS THOSE IT IS RESPONSIBLE BEFORE GOD TO CHERISH.

* It disregards one’s SPOUSE -

“Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.”
(Ephesians 5:25)

‘Casual’ ... ‘I’m tired of her’ type divorce tramples on the primary instruction that God has given to husbands - ‘Love your wives’ – invest your life in her life. Put selfish thoughts aside and focus on meeting her needs. Rather than cherish her, this type of divorce totally disregards her.

* It disregards one’s CHILDREN

“Children are an heritage from the Lord ... Happy is the man whose quiver is full of them.”
(Psalm 127:5)

“Fathers do not exasperate your children ... instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4)

There are no children anywhere whose lives have been enhanced by their father (for selfish, immature, unbiblical reasons) walking out on their mother. Quite the contrary, children in a fatherless home walk an incredibly more difficult road than those whose fathers are a daily presence in their lives.

It just doesn’t fly to say ... ‘Kids, I love you but I can’t stand your mother so I’m leaving.’

It doesn’t take a very old child to see that Dad is simply doing a **selfish** thing and that his words of love for them aren’t worth the breath it took to say them.

* It disregards one’s COMMUNITY

In most marriage ceremonies (Traditional ones at least – certainly in any that I would conduct) there is a statement something like this ...

“Marriage is the foundation of home life and social order and so must it remain until the end of time.”

“Marriage” ... the life-long union between a man and a woman ... is the bedrock of a secure society ... chip away at that bedrock and the society built upon it will increasingly totter and eventually fall.

The writer of the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 13:4) wrote both to the church of his day and (I believe) to society as a whole ...

“Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure.”

The casual divorcer is a threat to his entire community – he casually walks away from and undermines the very foundation upon which that community has been built.

He selfishly disregards the consequences of his actions ... to his wife – to his children –to his community.

2. CASUAL DIVORCE IS A SELF-DESTRUCTIVE ACT – IT EATS AWAY AT THE VERY CORE OF MEANINGFUL LIFE.

*“LOVE the Lord your God with all your Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength” (and)
“Love your NEIGHBOR as yourself.” (Mark 12:29-31)*

Ultimately, the casual divorcer is putting himself and his own sense of entitlement above everyone else – God included – and that action eats away at the very essence of true life which can be defined as a ‘*whole-hearted love for the Living God and a whole-hearted commitment to the things of God and to the People of God – wife included*’.

One final observation I would draw ...

3. CASUAL DIVORCE IS A TESTIMONY-DEFEATING ACT – IT UNDERMINES THE CREDIBILITY OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST.

Consider these verses (with my additions) in light of this divorce discussion ...

“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him (as the world expects us to be).

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother (or casually divorces his wife), he is a liar (a scam artist and hypocrite).

*For anyone who does not love his brother (does not seek to live lovingly and respectfully and faithfully with his wife), whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother (the woman to whom he is married).”
(1 John 4:16-21)*

Time for just a single comment ...

When Christians divorce for the same ‘unbiblical reasons’ as non-Christians, how legitimate is our testimony – our profession that ‘*Jesus brings new and different and better life*’ – that our ‘*new life in Christ*’ is, in fact, transformational?

Think about it.

And so we come to the ‘***Final Thot***’ of this discourse ...

Final Thot ...

MARRIAGE – the lifelong **UNION** of a man and a woman – is one great **STAGE** upon which the **CHARACTERS** of the **KINGDOM** play their parts.

If you are in the play – **PLAY** your **PART** well. There’s an **AUDIENCE** watching!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Sixteen"

Sunday's message was entitled ... **"No Casual Divorce"** and was based upon the **Third Clarification** Jesus drew in the opening section of his **"Sermon on the Mount"** (Matthew 5:31-32) ...

*"It has been said ... 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a Certificate of Divorce.'
But I say to you 'Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery'."*

Check out the parallel passage (Matthew 19:3-10) ...
What are the differences in the two ...

What is the focus in the Matthew 19 statement? - **THE DIVORCING HUSBAND**

What is the focus in the Sermon on the Mount? - **THE DIVORCED WIFE**

Here's the point ... **DIVORCE AFFECTS THEM BOTH!**

That recognition led to Sunday's **Key Declaration** ...

**"DIVORCE – particularly CASUAL DIVORCE is
DESTRUCTIVE to Life in the Kingdom"**

In Pastor Mark's message Sunday, he illustrated three of the 'Destructive Effects' of such Casual/Unbiblical Divorce ...

The Casual Divorcer **DISREGARDS** those he is responsible to **CHERISH**
Casual Divorce **EATS AWAY** at the very core of meaningful **LIFE**
Casual Divorce **UNDERMINES** the credibility of the **GOSPEL**.

Can you see how each of these applies?

Question: Is there anything in our society today that is more destructive to healthy functioning than such 'casual' divorce?

Is just 'not getting married' an answer for single people today?

Point to Ponder ... What are some specific steps that Christians can take to
"DIVORCE-PROOF" their marriage?

“NO DEMONSTRATIVE SPEECH”

(Kingdom Clarification #4)

(Matthew 5:33-37)

Intro ... Today we come to the **Fourth** of those **Six Key Clarifications of Ancient Teaching** with which Jesus began the main body of teaching in what we call ***“The Sermon on the Mount”*** ...

On the surface, it's not as ground-breaking or controversial as the first three ... certainly not as puzzling or even angst creating as the one on Divorce that we considered last week, but once we delve into it, it will issue its own challenge to our hearts.

Here then is ...

TODAY'S STATEMENT OF ANCIENT TEACHING ...

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago ... 'Do not **BREAK** your **OATH**, but **KEEP** the **OATHS** you have made to the **LORD**.'"

(Matthew 5:33)

Once again, Jesus identifies an *“Ancient Teaching”* that garners universal acceptance ...

Basically that ancient teaching says, *“Keep your word – don't go back on things that you have said”* – especially things that you have sworn to with an Oath – as in, *“I promise”* ... *“God help me, I will do it”* ... *“I swear on my Mother's Grave”* ... *“I swear on a stack of Bibles”* ... *“Come hell or high water, I will be there”* ... *“May God strike me dead, if I don't carry through on this”* ... *“Scout's Honor”* ... *“I really, really, really mean it”* ... *“Here's something that you can take to the bank”*.

We would have been nodding our heads today right along with the people of Jesus' Day (if we had been there that afternoon) for if we can't count on what people say – if people can't count on what we say – if we don't hold ourselves to the promises that we make – if we can't convince people to believe us when we say something, how jumbled up would our society become?

So it's important that our words – our commitments – be believable and we should use whatever language necessary to create that belief.

And let's face it, sometimes it takes some pretty strong language – basically an oath (a sworn statement) to get people (who are just naturally suspicious) to truly believe what we say.

So the ancient teaching says (if I could amplify and paraphrase a bit) ...

“Knowing that people are just naturally both suspicious and devious, and knowing that the smooth functioning of society requires an underpinning of honesty in any important social or business transaction, state your intentions in language that people will find impressive and credible even relying upon things held sacred to strengthen your truthfulness in their eyes. Just be sure that you carry through on what you have said for the entire structure of society depends upon such ‘oaths’ being upheld.”

Sounds like something a lawyer would write, doesn't it? But actually, in reality, these “ancient ones” had been doing a lawyer's work - essentially laying down the verbal ‘laws’ by which society should and (even) must function.

Makes perfect sense ... Guard yourself from deception by requiring that all promises made to you be couched in high-sounding, no-wiggle room phrases.

And on the other hand ... Guard yourself from suspicion by being sure that you do ‘couch’ all your public or private statements in those very same kind of ‘high-sounding, no wiggle-room phrases’.

Of course, over time, ‘high sounding phrases’ do lose their ‘punch’. Ever more impressive things are necessary to bring about the intended result ... believability and reliability.

By Jesus' Day ... the established phraseology had gotten pretty convoluted – statements of commitment or denial needed impressive packaging but most of the packages had already been used.

The Jews had an additional problem in that their “Big Law” – the Ten Commandments prohibited them from directly “Using the name of God in any vain or inappropriate way” (Exodus 20:7).

Their solution to that prohibition was that they refused to ever utter the “Name of God” at all – so even in the most extreme case where believability was most desired (where perhaps even death was on the line) they could not buttress their words with such a divine utterance.

They could not say (as we say in our Courts of Law today) “*So Help me God*”.

So they would say ... “*I swear by heaven*” ... “*I swear by the earth and as long as it endures*” ... “*I swear by Jerusalem itself*” or even “*I swear by my own head*”.

It’s a bit like someone saying today ... “*I swear on my mother’s grave*”.
Who would not believe such a demonstration of sincerity?

It seemed to be working ... Just as it seems to work for us.
People were promising to keep their word and most people were,
in fact, believing them.

And then comes Jesus with another one of his “**Clarifications**” ...

JESUS’ KEY CLARIFICATION ...

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people
long ago ... ‘Do not **BREAK** your **OATH**, but **KEEP** the
OATHS you have made to the **LORD**.’

“But I say to you ...

‘Do not **SWEAR** at all ...

(Either by heaven, for it is God’s Throne; or by the earth, for it is His Footstool,
or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head,
for you cannot make even one hair white or black.)

Simply let your **YES** be **YES** and your **NO** (be) **NO**.
Anything beyond this comes from the **EVIL ONE**’.”
(Matthew 5:34-37)

With those words, Jesus was directly addressing what we have been describing
already this morning as ...

THE LIFE SITUATION ...

The **NEED** to make my **PUBLIC** affirmations or denials more **CREDIBLE** or
plausible and thus more **BELIEVABLE** - the **TEMPTATION** to engage
in **DEMONSTRATIVE** Speech.

Who of us doesn't want to be believed? Who of us doesn't want others to be struck with our sincerity or passion (especially if that 'other' might be our boss or spouse)? What's wrong with a bit of 'Demonstrative Speech'?

What about those times when a simple "Yes" or "No" just seems so inadequate for the affirmation or the denial that I am making. What's wrong with making my declaration a bit more impressive – especially when critical issues are on the line?

Well ... look at that final observation Jesus made in his clarifying statement ...

*"Simply let your YES be YES and your NO (be) NO.
Anything beyond this comes from the EVIL ONE."*

Jesus says that all such "Impressive Speech" – all such "Demonstrative Speech" – all such Speech designed to 'create believability' is birthed in the heart of the Devil Himself and thus comes from him as a **Key Temptation** to us as Followers of Christ. It's a temptation that we must resist.

Now, of course, it would be enough for us just to know that Jesus said to 'keep our speech simple' – keep our declarations straightforward and unadorned but I believe it might be profitable for us if we gave just a bit of thought this morning to **why** such speech is prohibited.

That is, wherein lies the harm of us adding to our simple "yes" or "no" some other words or oaths even to strengthen them in the eyes of others?

Since Jesus said that these 'buttressing' words come from the Evil One himself consider with me for a few moments ...

The "Evil Nature" of Such Demonstrative Speech ...

Feel free to disagree but do give each of these observations your attention and consideration. Just have time for three ...

**** Some Demonstrative Speech Grows Out Of A Desire To IMPRESS***
(Reveals the Presence of **PRIDE**)

Now that's exactly what these words – these emotionally chosen phrases – are designed to do. They are designed to impress people with our integrity and intention - To convince them that we are trustworthy and reliable.

They are designed to cause others to elevate us to as high a place as we feel we actually deserve – to cause them to think things like “*Look how passionate he is*” – “*Look how committed to truthfulness he is*” – basically “*Look how great a guy he is*”. Pride lies behind much demonstrative speech and we all know how God feels about the proud.

Think of the **PHARISEE** – Luke 18:11-14

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

No doubt God was not the only One who ever heard that Pharisee go on and on about his incredible righteousness – I can just imagine him saying to someone to whom he was trying to make a point ...

“Look I’m telling you the truth – would I lie to you? I’m not like other men – I’m not a robber or evil doer or an adulterer – I fast and tithe – I’m one of the good guys. You can believe me – I’m more believable than anyone else I know!”

That kind of ‘talk’ is designed to impress and it grows out of a heart filled with Pride. It comes right from the Devil’s lair.

Here’s a second thing to consider ...

**** Some Demonstrative Speech Seeks To Counter ACCUSATION***
(Reveals the Presence of **FEAR**)

Sometimes potent words are used to defend ourselves from accusation or attack ... Out of fear of consequence we dredge them up. They are designed to strike back and to guard ourselves.

Think of **PETER** – Mark 14:66-71 ... Philippians 4:6-7

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

Peter was in full panic mode ... If he were identified as one of Jesus’ disciples he would probably be arrested and treated just like Jesus was being treated. “*Protect yourself at all costs*” was all he could think. He used every word in the book to demonstrate the ‘truthfulness’ of his deceiving words. The fear that leads to such panicky speech plays right into the Devil’s Hands.

In contrast the Apostle Paul counseled the early believers in Philippi this way ...

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:6-7)

The use of such strong, demonstrative speech to counter accusation shows our absence of trust in the One who actually holds our lives in His Hands. Trust comes from the Spirit of God – Fear is a tool of the Devil.

One last thing to consider ...

*** *Some Demonstrative Speech Attempts To MISLEAD***
(Reveals the Presence of DECEPTION)

This (I would say) is the worst of the three ...

Peter, of course, was trying to deceive but at least he was in full panic mode – almost immediately he repented.

Others, however, use demonstrative speech in a carefully constructed way to lead people into an '*illusion of truthfulness*'.

This kind of speech is used by one who is consciously using impressive language to convey the exact opposite of what he really believes or knows to be true.

Think of the DEVIL himself – John 8:44
"He is a liar and the Father of lies"

Demonstrative speech that is designed to mislead finds its source in the Devil's Loins.

He gave birth to the first lie ever told; its family is immense.

Final Thot ...

If your **LIFE** requires something more than straightforward AFFIRMATIONS and DENIALS then something is drastically WRONG!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Seventeen"

Sunday we examined the **Fourth** of the Six 'Clarifications of Ancient Teaching' that Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount ...

"**NO DEMONSTRATIVE SPEECH**"

"Let your 'yes' **BE** 'yes' and your 'no' **BE** 'no'."

(Matthew 5:37)

In discussing this 'clarification' and the need for it, Pastor Mark identified for us a very common ...

LIFE SITUATION ...

The **NEED** to make our **PUBLIC** affirmations or denials more **CREDIBLE** or plausible and thus more **BELIEVABLE** - the **TEMPTATION** to engage in **DEMONSTRATIVE** Speech.

Why do we 'feel the need' to buttress our affirmations or denials with strong, impressive sounding declarations? Is our credibility suspect? Do we feel like people won't take us seriously unless we use some kind of strong, convincing language? What do you think leads us to go beyond what Jesus called a 'simple yes or no'?

Now Jesus said that anything more demonstrative than that 'simple yes or no' actually arises from the "Evil One himself" so to Jesus it's a big deal.

Pastor Mark shared three "Examples" of such speech and their sinful 'Motivations' ...

- * Some Demonstrative Speech Grows Out Of A Desire To **IMPRESS**
(Reveals the Presence of **PRIDE** – think the **PHARISEE** in the Temple)
- * Some Demonstrative Speech Seeks To Counter **ACCUSATION**
(Reveals the Presence of **FEAR** – think **PETER** in the Courtyard)
- * Some Demonstrative Speech Attempts To **MISLEAD**
(Reveals the Presence of **DECEPTION** – think of **POLITICIANS** in a Campaign)

Has any (or all) of these three ever 'brought forth' impressive words from your mouth? Did they achieve their purpose? Did they help you 'handle' the situation?

Point to Ponder ... If your **LIFE** situation requires something more than straightforward **AFFIRMATIONS** and **DENIALS** then something is drastically **WRONG!**

“DEALING WITH EVIL PEOPLE”

(Kingdom Clarification #5)

(Matthew 5:38-42)

Intro ... *“Dealing with evil people”* – that’s the title of today’s message and that’s the next subject for clarification that Jesus chose on that increasingly controversial afternoon spent on a Galilean hillside delivering what has become known as the *“Sermon on the Mount”* (Matthew 5-7).

Let **me** clarify as we begin that these words from Jesus are directed toward us as individuals ... these are not words intended to dictate government policy or even family policy or church policy necessarily.

These are not words intended to guide you if you bear some responsibility for the oversight of others – some office of public trust. These are not words intended to allow you to tell others how they should act toward you. These are not words intended to cause you to ignore someone’s illegal activity.

These words of Jesus are directed at each of us personally. They are intended to inform us how you and I as citizens of the Kingdom are to respond when we are mistreated by what Jesus called an *“evil person”*.

Every time we experience such a thing we will have to make a *‘judgment call’* regarding the degree to which these words apply. So with that brief introductory disclaimer established, let’s look at ...

TODAY’S STATEMENT OF ANCIENT TEACHING ...

“You have heard that it was said ...

‘EYE for EYE and TOOTH for TOOTH’.

(Matthew 5:38)

Now it’s interesting that though many times people today use those words to justify strong retaliation when harmfully treated, they were originally given to establish the proper framework for any retaliation.

Basically these words (recorded by Moses in Exodus 21:24 and in Leviticus 24:20 and in Deuteronomy 19:21) were intended to limit the extent of any retaliation made against an offender. Retaliation for evil done should be fair, impartial, immediate and (if possible) in kind.

Our American System of Justice is based upon that same understanding of just punishment as in *‘the punishment must fit the crime’* and *‘cruel or unusual punishment’* is to be prohibited.

The Justice System employed in our homes by parents or in schools by teachers and principals should show that same kind of restraint ...

Moses could have easily have expressed his directive this way ...

“No more than an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth.”

In other words ...

“There shall be no ‘over-reacting’ in the administration of punishment for wrong-doing”.

That’s what Moses had taught – that’s the way the Law had been handed down – that’s the way the people of Jesus’ day had been brought up and so there, of course, was again lots of head-nodding when Jesus pointed out this additional item of ‘ancient teaching’ ...

You have heard that it was said ...

“Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.”

Here now comes the clarification ... Here now came those increasingly familiar yet unsettling words ... ***“But I say to you ...”***

What was he going to say ... How was Jesus going to *‘clarify’* or *‘modify’* or *‘amplify’* this particular ancient teaching?

I know what a lot of people would be thinking and hoping that he would say ... especially those whose faces were still smarting from the smack of some evil-doers hand.

They would be hoping that he would say ...

*“But I say to you ... those guidelines from Moses are far too restrictive ...
Your retaliation to evil should not only be swift and purposeful but expressed as
powerfully as possible – it should be designed to destroy both the ability and the desire
of the offender to ever offend again.*

*Retaliation should be overwhelming, demoralizing, even incapacitating; it should shock,
stun, immobilize and paralyze. Your retaliation should teach them a lesson they will never
forget. It should put the fear of God into them.”*

Now if that had been Jesus’ response, he would have gotten quite a few ‘Amens’ from the crowd – even from those good Jewish, law-abiding people.

The idea being that the more punitively you deal with evil the quicker such evil will vanish from the earth. Powerful punishment of present evil becomes a powerful deterrent to future evil. Even evil doers are smart enough to '*get the message*' and re-think their behavior.

Such words could (of course) get a few "*Amens*" in our own day.

How shocking it must have been when the crowd stopped imagining what Jesus ***might*** say and heard what he actually ***did*** say – How he chose to '*clarify this additional bit of ancient teaching*' ...

Jesus gave what I'm calling this morning a "*Double-Barreled Clarification*". And allow me to paraphrase and amplify Jesus' words just a bit ...

*"You have heard that it was said,
'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth' but I say to you...*

1. DO NOT RETALIATE WHEN YOU ARE MISTREATED

"Do not resist an evil person" – verse 38

"Do not fight fire with fire ... do not retaliate in kind."

Getting even is not your prerogative;
Getting offended should not be your immediate reaction;
Getting angry never leads to a healthy solution.

Basically Jesus was pointing out to them something else that Moses had said and that the Apostle Paul would put in print in his letter to the Romans (Deut. 32:35 and Rom. 12:19) ...

*"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath,
for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine' says the Lord, 'I will repay'."*

So when we are personally mistreated by an evil person – a person who comes against us and would cause us grief or difficulty – we are to do nothing? We are to just take it – just endure it and wait for God to somehow intervene?

Are you serious, Jesus?

To that unrecorded question certainly raised in the minds of his congregation that day (and perhaps in ours as well), Jesus (in effect) said ...

"Of course I'm not saying that you should 'do nothing' ... in every one of these situations there is something that you can (and should) do. For instance, let me give you four examples from everyday life – four examples of personal mistreatment at the hands of some evil-doer – and let me share with you an appropriate response in each situation."

You see ... in addition to not retaliating when you are mistreated, I would challenge you to ...

2. RESPOND INSTEAD IN RADICAL KINGDOM WAYS

* “Turn the other **CHEEK**” ... verse 39

“If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

This is by far the most dramatic and the most immediately painful of the four examples that Jesus will share. Obviously there is anger behind this mistreatment – perhaps some degree of frustration or exasperation as well. This might be the slap of someone’s hand or the sting of someone’s angry words ... This might be the angry “*I hate you words*” heard coming from the lips of one’s child or spouse even.

“Turn the other cheek” ... give his conscience time to ‘kick in’ ... allow your gentleness to cause his ugliness to be recognized and even magnified.

Jesus practiced what he preached on the night he was betrayed as the soldiers physically and emotionally abused him.

‘Turning the other cheek’ might provide the opportunity to say ...

“Do you feel better now that that’s out of your system?”

“Are you ready to talk – Do you want to tell me what’s wrong?”

* “Give up your **CLOAK** as well” ... verse 40

And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

Technically speaking, in those days a man could put up his tunic – his shirt as it were – as security for a loan or promise of some sort but it was prohibited for a man’s cloak (his outer garment) to be taken as security in such a situation.

The heavy outer garment might be the man’s only protection against the chill of the evening. It was considered essential for survival.

It was a most **radical suggestion** indeed to say ... “*Let him have your clock as well*”. Nobody in his right mind would do that and no one with any degree of human compassion would accept it.

Jesus’ **third real-life example** grows out of the context of the day.

The land of Palestine was under Roman rule and Roman soldiers were everywhere. It was a well-understood that a Roman Soldier could commandeer any Jewish citizen for the purpose of assisting him with his duties. Remember how they ‘*laid hands on Simon of Cyrene and compelled him to carry Jesus’ cross*’?

It's in light of that practice that Jesus says regarding such abuse/such mistreatment by one of those 'evil men' ...

"If someone forces you to go one mile ...
* "Go with him **TWO** miles" ... verse 41

Okay, let's go nuts here ... imagine the Jewish citizen cheerfully picking up the soldier's baggage and taking the opportunity as they walk along to express appreciation for the peace and protection from marauders that Rome provides.

Imagine the soldier's surprise when, reaching the one mile mark, the Jewish citizen says '*I'll gladly go another mile if you want me to*'.

Imagine now that Roman Soldier talking to his fellow soldiers that night about the most remarkable Jew he had encountered that day!

The ***final example*** Jesus gives involves responding to those who come to you requesting assistance ...

Now the only way that I can place this example with the other three is if this requester of funds is a '*dead-beat*' of some sort ... someone that you suspect will probably never pay you back but has once again brought a request.

Perhaps it is just that you know the person is pretty much a hopeless case and that you will most likely never see again any funds that you provide. Perhaps the person himself knows that he has little chance of getting from you what he requests.

Jesus simply says ...

* "**GIVE** to the one who **ASKS** you" and do not turn away
from the one who wants to borrow from you." (verse 42)

Give to the one who is probably just '*taking advantage of you*' – even if everyone else thinks that you are stupid for doing so. Demonstrate that meeting human need is more important to you than holding on to what you have. This too is a pretty ***radical*** response.

In all these cases – these real life situations – where someone with improper motives and actions does you harm Jesus says that we should respond in a distinctive – radical even - Kingdom Way.

In a nutshell ... Jesus is saying that we should ... **BLOW HIS MIND!**

Cause him to think that he has stepped through a ‘*worm-hole*’ as it were into an entirely different universe ...

Because he has ... We are the ‘*worm-hole*’ that connects this world to the Kingdom of God and Life in the Kingdom of God is (and should be seen as) radically different from life on planet Earth.

Kingdom Behavior is by definition ‘Radical Behavior’ – it will always ‘*Blow the Minds*’ of any mere Citizens of Earth who get to observe it.

Kingdom Behavior establishes a starting point for discussion – it establishes a framework for witness and it communicates that there is a reality (and a hope) beyond the borders of this fallen, broken sin-filled world.

And so hearing Jesus lay out these ***four examples of radical living*** for the people of his day and thinking about all the opportunities for radical responses in our own day, we come to ...

TODAY’S KEY QUESTION ...

What does it take to ***RESPOND*** in such a ***RADICAL***, other-worldly kind of way?

Answer: A KINGDOM-CLASS HEART!

Again, as we pointed out before ... This is why Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with the “*Beatitudes*” – the identification of the qualities of heart that are essential for genuine Kingdom Living – for without what we could call a “*Kingdom-Class Heart*” there is no way that we can pull off a “*Kingdom-Class Life*” – no way we can carry out (or even want to carry out) the directives for living that flowed from the mouth of Jesus that controversial afternoon there on the Mountain.

Here’s how I would see ***four*** of those nine “*Heart Qualities*” coming into play in this matter of responding to mistreatment brought into our lives by the actions of others.

**** A HUMBLE HEART*** – It’s not all about me.

So he’s insulted me; so he’s offended me; so he’s treated me badly in some way, he’s obviously got a serious problem. My focus must be upon him and how that problem might be addressed in helpful ways.

* **A MOURNING HEART** – Grieves over the brokenness displayed – over the twisted and perverted condition of sinful men. Grieves over the ultimate destiny of such a sin-enslaved person. Grieves over the mockery made of the glorious plan of God by the deception of Satan himself.

* **A MERCIFUL HEART** – Questions can something be salvaged? Is there any way that this person can be appealed to? Is there any way that I can communicate the Love of God to him? Is there any chance that the Spirit of God might open his eyes to the Glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ?

* **A MEEK HEART** – focuses all its strength on the task at hand. It will most likely require all the spiritual resources that I possess if I am to control the natural impulses of my nature and manage to view this person not as my enemy who needs to be defeated but as a victim of my enemy who needs to be delivered.

I'm sure the other five "*Heart Qualities*" could impact these types of situations as well ...

Perhaps you might find time this week to ponder just what '*impact*' each of them would have.

Suffice it to say for today that the prescribed "*Kingdom Response*" to those who personally 'mistreat us' is truly **radical**.

It goes way beyond the law or the dictates of our human traditions.

It seeks to bring critical elements of the Kingdom into this fallen world.

For as our ***final thot*** says ...

Final Thot ...

For the **CITIZEN** of the **KINGDOM**, retaliation is not even an **OPTION** let alone the **PRESCRIBED SOLUTION!**

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Eighteen"

Sunday's message was entitled: "***Dealing With EVIL People***" ... that is, dealing with those people who come against you and bring some kind of pain/difficulty to you.

What is the normal standard of response to the harm one person might bring to another? "An EYE for an EYE and a TOOTH for a TOOTH"

What does that phrase mean to you – How have you always understood it? Did Sunday's message change your perspective at all? Why did Moses put it down in black and white (3 times actually)?

What shockingly different directive did Jesus give – What was his "*Clarification*" of this ancient teaching?

"DO NOT RETALIATE WHEN YOU ARE MISTREATED"
"Do not RESIST an EVIL person." (vs. 38)

Here were ***Four Radical Responses*** to "Evil" that Jesus mentioned (Matt. 5:38-42).

TURN THE OTHER CHEEK ... LET HIM HAVE YOUR CLOAK AS WELL

GO WITH HIM TWO MILES ... ***GIVE*** TO THE ONE WHO ASKS YOU FOR HELP

If you had been a Jew in Jesus' day, which of these would have been the hardest for you to do? If you had been sitting there that day on the hillside, what would you have thought about this new rabbi from Galilee? Consider yourself to have just returned from that '*teaching-filled afternoon*' ... What do you think of these '*teachings*' of Jesus?

What do you think of the following '*disclaimer*' with which Pastor Mark began Sunday's message ... Does it '*dilute*' Jesus' message or just further '*delineate*' it"?

Let ***me*** clarify as we begin that these words from Jesus are directed toward us as individuals. These are not words intended to dictate government policy or even family policy or church policy. These are not words intended to guide you if you bear some responsibility for the oversight of others – some office of public trust. These are certainly not words intended to authorize you to tell others how they should act toward you. These are not words intended to cause you to ignore someone's illegal activity. But these words of Jesus are intended to inform us how 'Citizens of the Kingdom' are to respond when they are personally mistreated by what Jesus called an "*evil person*".

Point to Ponder ... Can the WORLD really be influenced by such behavior?

“HOW TO TREAT AN ENEMY”

(Kingdom Clarification #6)

(Matthew 5:43-48)

Intro ... Today we return to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and we take up the 6th and final ***“Key Clarification of Ancient Teaching”*** with which Jesus began the main body of this comprehensive message – this *‘Exposition on Kingdom Living’*.

Do you remember the first five?

*1. You have heard it said, ‘Thou shalt not murder’ but I tell you
‘Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment’.*

*2. You have heard it said, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery’ but I tell you
‘Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart’.*

*3. It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a Certificate of Divorce’ but I tell you
‘Anyone who divorces his wife (except for marital unfaithfulness) causes her to commit adultery’.*

*4. You have heard it said, ‘Do not break your oaths but keep the oaths that you have made to the Lord’
but I say to you ‘Do not swear oaths at all ... but simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No’.*

*5. You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye’ and ‘Tooth for tooth’ but I say to you
‘Do not resist an evil person’.*

Certainly those five *‘clarifications’* serve to point out the fact that *‘Kingdom Living’* is indeed Extreme Living – that *‘Life in the Kingdom’* is lived on a completely different plane. We’ve certainly had some interesting and maybe even at times controversial moments as we have discussed them together.

Today, on this first Sunday of the New Year – on this Sunday that we first turn our attention toward our Annual Commitment Sunday, we come to Jesus’
Sixth and Final *‘Key Clarification of Ancient Teaching’*.

This ***Sixth Clarification*** is the most ‘radical’ of them all – it certainly leads to the most radical directive of them all.

Here’s how it begins ...

TODAY’S ANCIENT TEACHING ...

*“You have heard it said, ‘Love your **NEIGHBOR** and hate your **ENEMY**’ ...”
(Matthew 5:43)*

Once again these are tried and true words ... these are words that describe the kind of perspective that makes loyalty and continuity possible. We love and stick by our friends and colleagues and we definitely resist and perhaps even despise those who come against us.

Our politicians in Washington have these words of ancient wisdom down pat. Extreme partisanship is based upon just such a perspective.

These are words that become codified – that become part of the moral code of a society – because they are so seemingly obvious.

Everyone on the hillside that day was surely *‘nodding his/her head in agreement’*. This is an ancient teaching that will never go out of style.

However, by now we (as well as the people on the hillside that afternoon) know that Jesus has only brought up that *‘Ancient Teaching’* because he plans to *‘challenge it’* – to *‘dispute its well-accepted directive’* – to bring a point of *‘clarification’* to the whole discussion.

But what could he possibly say ... How could he mess with this underlying, seemingly practical and necessary practice of human society –

‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy’?

Well ... here’s what he said ... Here is his ***‘Astounding Clarification’*** ...

JESUS ASTOUNDING CLARIFICATION ...

(You have heard it said, *‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy’*)

*“But I tell you ... **‘LOVE’** your enemies and **PRAY** for those who **PERSECUTE** you ...*
(Matthew 5:44)

In other words ... *‘Love your enemies’* just like you love and care for your neighbors – pray for those who persecute you. And don’t pray that God will *‘get them’* – pray that God will bless them!

That is a tall order – that goes well beyond the normal (or the seemingly reasonable).

It’s one thing to tell me not to aggressively *‘resist’* an *‘evil’* person but it’s taking it to an entirely other level to tell me to *‘love him’* and to *‘pray God’s Blessings upon him’*.

I'm sure the people on the hillside that day (and maybe some of us here in this room this day) would want to ask Jesus ...

TODAY'S OBVIOUS QUESTION ...
WHY in the world would I **WANT** to do that?

A just world is based upon '*evil being treated badly*' and '*good being treated well*'. Isn't that one of the realities of life that might deter someone from doing evil and encourage someone else to do good?

So again, Jesus ... Why in the world would you **say** what you have just said and why in the world would I want to **do** what you have just said?

Well ... Just like on each of his previous five '*clarifications*' Jesus is more than ready with an answer and here it is ...

JESUS TWO-FOLD ANSWER ...

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" ...

1. Because By Doing So You **SHOW** That You Are A **LEGITIMATE** Child of God.

*"... that you may be (show yourselves to be) **SONS** of your **FATHER** in Heaven'."*
(vs. 45a)

You see ... by acting in such a way you demonstrate your family likeness for that's exactly the way your Heavenly Father treats people. Consider the fact that ...

"He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."
(vs. 45b)

God does not every day decide who '*deserves*' a little sunshine or who by the actions of their lives '*deserve*' a little life-giving rain. God's natural blessings are doled out indiscriminately. When the sun shines both the evil and the good benefit. It is the same when the rain falls.

Jesus is telling us that we (as Children of God and Citizens of the Kingdom of God) are to operate within those same parameters.

If we have something that will be of benefit to those around us, make it available to everyone. Treat all men as though they **were** your neighbors.

If you can '*bring a little sunshine*' or '*provide a bit of refreshment*' to a dark or dreary place, then do so and allow all who are there the chance to benefit from it. That's what the Heavenly Father does every single day!

So ... (Because you are a Child of the Heavenly Father and have His spiritual DNA coursing through your veins) ... **love** your enemies – (those who seem '*out to get you*' or who '*make life difficult for you*') and **pray** for them ...

'Pray that God will give them the wisdom to take advantage of the things you are offering'.

By doing so, you will show that you truly are a Child of God – a literal ‘*Chip off the Old Block*’. Now that is certainly reason enough ...

Responding in this way shows that we truly are the Children of our Gracious, All-Loving Heavenly Father but Jesus adds to his answer by changing the focus 180 degrees and saying ...

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” ...

2. Because If You Don’t Do So (that is, **RISE** to the Godly Standard), You Are No **BETTER** than The **UNBELIEVERS** Around You.

*“Are not even the **TAX COLLECTORS** ... Do not (even) the **PAGANS** do that?”
(Matthew 5:46-47)*

And if you live no differently than the unbelievers around you, then there is no distinctive “*Kingdom Life*” emanating from you.

No ‘*Light of the World*’ – No ‘*Salt of the Earth*’ –
No ‘*Kingdom Heart at Work*’.

And so it is with all Six of these “*Kingdom Clarifications*” Jesus made.

They ‘**clarify**’ what true Kingdom Living looks like in real life situations. And true ‘*Kingdom Living*’ is what Children of the Kingdom are to display in their daily lives. ‘*Kingdom Living*’ is what identifies them in the world.

Therefore, Jesus says (and here comes that Most Radical Directive that could lead us to make the Most Outrageous New Year’s Resolution Of All Time) ...

THE MOST RADICAL DIRECTIVE OF THEM ALL ...

*“Be **PERFECT**, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is **PERFECT**.”
(Matt. 5:48)*

Greek Word “**Telios**” ... the end result – not sinless perfection but completion, maturity, wholeness – the literal embodiment of any particular concept.

Live in such a way that it shows you ‘*have your act together*’ just like God does.
Live like a true ‘*Citizen of the Kingdom*’ and “*Child of the King*’.

Final Thot ...

The most outrageous New Year’s Resolution ever uttered:

*“This Year I resolve to be **PERFECT** just like my Heavenly Father”.*
I will allow the Spirit of God to ‘**PERFECT ME**’ in Kingdom Living!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Nineteen"

This past Sunday we examined the Sixth and Final Key Clarification of Ancient Teaching that Jesus included in the "*Sermon on the Mount*".

"You have heard it said, 'LOVE your neighbor and HATE your enemy ...
but I say to you 'LOVE your enemies and PRAY for those who persecute you'.
(Matthew 5:44)

How does that '*clarification*' strike you? How does it stack up with the previous five?
List them in order of difficulty (one being least difficult)

- _____ Do not commit '*murder in your heart*'.
- _____ Do not even look at a person lustfully.
- _____ Do not move beyond "yes" and "no".
- _____ Do not divorce without '*Biblical Cause*'.
- _____ Do not '*resist*' an evil/difficult person.
- _____ Do not '*hate*' your enemy but rather loving '*pray*' for him.

Which did you list as easiest – Which as hardest?

What did Jesus say is to be our ultimate objective ...

"Be PERFECT as your Heavenly Father is PERFECT" (vs. 48)

How does that '*strike your ear*'? What does it make you think?

Remember the Greek word used here is the word 'Telios' which does not mean '*sinless perfection*' but means '*the full embodiment of the concept in question*'.

Which of these following words/phrases best carry the concept of the word "*Telios*" to you? Choose one or suggest another.

- 'Be complete' – 'Be a full-blown version of' – 'Be one who has your act together'
- 'Be a finished product' – 'Be one who has finally arrived'
- 'Be an example of the believer' – 'Be fully mature and ready to teach'

Point To Ponder ...

How outrageous is it to say, "*I want to be PERFECTED in KINGDOM LIVING*"?
Can it be done? Does Jesus actually expect it to happen?

“PERFECTION’S PERSPECTIVE’ ”

(Kingdom Living Series)

(Matthew 6:1)

Intro ... The final verse of Matthew chapter five (the verse we focused on last week as the basis for an outrageous New Year’s Resolution) is both a conclusion to all that has preceded it and a transition into what comes next.

It comes across as ...

AN INCREDIBLY MOTIVATING (and breathtaking) **DIRECTIVE** ...

“Be PERFECT therefore as your Heavenly Father is PERFECT”

(Matthew 5:48)

“Be Perfect” (*Telios*) ... Mature/Complete/A Finished Product/The Living Embodiment of the Idea/ An Example that others can safely follow.

That’s what the ‘*Sermon on the Mount*’ is all about ... It spells out the kind of life that is just naturally lived by one who is indeed a Citizen of the Kingdom and a Child of the King.

For instance, the True (full-blown) Citizen of the Kingdom – the Genuine (born-again) Child of God – possesses (or is increasingly taking possession of) the Nine Characteristics of Heart laid out in the Beatitudes.

The True (full-blown) Citizen of the Kingdom – the Genuine (born-again) Child of God understands (or is progressively coming to understand) that he/she is both the Light of the World and the Salt of the Earth.

The True (full-blown) Citizen of the Kingdom – the Genuine (born-again) Child of God wraps his/her mind around (or is working on wrapping her/her mind around) the Six Key Clarifications of Ancient Teaching Jesus so carefully delineated.

The True (full-blown) Citizen of the Kingdom – the Genuine (born-again) Child of God shares the Father’s spiritual DNA and thus (increasingly) the Father’s Commitment to Perfection both in thought and deed.

So then Jesus would say (paraphrasing and amplifying his words a bit) ...

“Give EXPRESSION to that FAMILY trait ...

Be **PERFECT** – rise above the normal and achieve something truly extraordinary and **SHOW** yourselves to be exactly what you are:

'CHILDREN of God and **CITIZENS** of His Kingdom'."

Then in the first eighteen verses of chapter six, Jesus identifies three areas of spiritual life (of Kingdom Living) where this kind of extraordinary Kingdom Life should manifest itself ... **Giving** and **Praying** and **Fasting**.

I'm calling this little section "**Perfection in Action**".

But before Jesus discusses any of these three **specifically**,
He addresses them all **generally** by sharing what I would call ...

"PERFECTION'S PERSPECTIVE"

*"Be **CAREFUL** not to do your 'acts of righteousness' (manifest your perfections) before **MEN**, to be **SEEN** by them. If you do, you will have no **REWARD** from your **FATHER** in heaven.*

(Matthew 6:1)

Several Comments regarding this '**Perspective**' Jesus would have us adopt:

1. There's a real **WARNING** in this '**perspective**' ... "**Be CAREFUL**"

Jesus says "**Be careful**" as you do your "**acts of righteousness**" –
"**Be careful**" as you seek to put your '**perfection**' into action.
Don't do these things to be '**seen by men**' or you will lose your reward.

That is, don't do these things primarily to be seen by men – for the purpose of impressing men – to build up your reputation with men.

If possible, don't even let the people around you know that you are doing them. Do them to bring pleasure and glory to your Father in Heaven. He is the only One whose notice you should be focused on.

Now earthly notice may come ... honor may come even. Other believers may recognize and praise you ...

Most likely such notice eventually **will** come since genuine '**acts of righteousness**' are fairly uncommon things and those who are benefited by them frequently make them known.

Also some of them (these ‘acts of righteousness’) are actually hard to pull off without **someone** noticing because our lives generally are so interwoven with the lives of others.

So notice and commendation might well be part of the picture but they can never be the reason we do what we do.

In fact, Jesus says that we need to be ‘*on guard*’, we need to ‘*be careful*’ as we approach the doing of these ‘acts of righteousness’ – careful that our motivation for doing them doesn’t become a desire to be seen and applauded by men because (second comment)...

2. That’s something that we can all be **TEMPTED** to do ...

*“The flesh would rather **IMPRESS** people than **PLEASE** God.”*

Think about that for a moment ...

“The flesh would rather impress people than please God” ...

The ‘*flesh*’ – that fallen, sinful part of man - actually has no desire to please God at all.

The flesh seeks to make every man his own God and seek from other men the worship and honor that belongs to God and the flesh never quits – even in one who is ‘*knee-deep in Kingdom Living*’.

The flesh doesn’t care if we invest ourselves in ‘*doing seemingly spiritual things*’ just so we get the credit and the notoriety for it.

The flesh craves recognition and headlines ...

The flesh loves the ‘*pat on the back*’ and that ‘*pat on the back*’ can actually become the thing that continues to drive us onward in the ‘*doing of those good things*’.

Flesh-Driven Ministry is frequently ‘*Photo-Op*’ Ministry – it forces its way into the spotlight.

And because the Scripture tells us that the flesh will be with us until the day we die (read Romans chapter 7), Jesus issues this warning.

“Be careful”, he says, ‘lest it happen to you’.

Here’s the ***third comment*** that grows out of this little passage ...

3. Flesh-Driven **MINISTRY** was a real **PROBLEM** in Jesus' Day ...

Consider the ways some were carrying on ...

vs. 2 ... **GIVING** announced by a **TRUMPET**

*"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets,
as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men.*

Today Jesus would say ...

*"So when you give to the needy, don't bring the TV cameras along –
Don't take out a full-page ad in the paper – Don't call a press conference –
Don't brag about it to everyone that you meet."*

Or as my mother used to say ... *'Don't go around tooting your own horn'.*

'Give' (Jesus would say) because people have real needs not because you need a boost in your approval ratings.

Here's a second flesh-driven *'act of righteousness'* that was being practiced in Jesus' day ...

vs. 5 ... **PRAYER** offered on a **STREET CORNER**

*"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray
standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.*

Can you imagine using prayer as a way to impress people? Can you imagine someone turning a street corner into prayer closet? Can you imagine someone throwing down their *'prayer mat'* (as it were) anywhere at all and dropping to their knees or falling on their faces in prayer?

Can you imagine someone doing that for the purpose of impressing you by their devotion to their faith? Can you imagine someone *'bragging about'* how much time they spend in prayer? Can you imagine someone merely repeating prayers by rote but doing it in the context of great fanfare?

All of that was going on in Jesus' day and is still going on today.

Prayer can certainly be useful in gaining the admiration of men and once that admiration is felt we can easily get ourselves *'hooked'*.

There was one more ‘*act of righteousness*’ that Jesus identified as being flesh-driven in his day ...

vs. 16 ... **FASTING** with **DISFIGURED FACES**

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting”.

Now fasting is an approved spiritual discipline – we will discuss it three weeks from today ... Might want to put that on your calendar!

But fasting is not for the purpose of impressing men with our spirituality and yet the flesh would say ...

‘What’s the sense of denying yourself – what the sense of withholding from yourself something essential to life if you’re not going to get some credit for it?’

Fasting is a great way to enhance your reputation as a godly person but if people don’t know you are fasting or if people don’t know just how much you are suffering for the sake of your godly calling, what is the point?

So adopt a sober, somber attitude – put a pained expression on your face ... look like you are really enduring some great stressful thing and then when people ask you what’s wrong, work up your most spiritual tone and explain that you are in the midst of a time of ‘fasting’. Amaze them with your dedication. Their admiration might even give you ‘*strength to carry on*’!

So ... Giving and Praying and Fasting (all legitimate and necessary ‘*acts of Kingdom righteousness*’) can each be practiced in ‘*flesh-driven*’ ways and they can all be used as means to impress men and build a reputation of godliness in men’s eyes.

Not surprisingly Jesus points out that ...

4. Those who do such things are **HYPOCRITES** ... (vss. 2, 5, 16)

They appear to want to **SERVE GOD** but in reality what they really want to do is **IMPRESS MEN**.

On this day, so near the beginning of His Public Ministry, Jesus didn’t name names ...

He didn’t say that that’s what the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law do. But that’s exactly who were doing these things and his words certainly must have hit them like a bucket of ice water.

That's certainly not how they viewed themselves. They probably thought Jesus was totally misrepresenting them. They certainly recognized that Jesus' words would undermine their reputation with the people.

It's no wonder that in Mark's Gospel it is recorded that at a very early stage in Jesus' Ministry the Pharisee's began to plot how to kill him.

The truth was ... they needed to listen – they needed a serious heart check. They desperately needed to gain a “*Kingdom Perspective*” – they needed to rethink what it meant to attain ‘Perfection’ (Maturity) in the Kingdom. They needed to recognize that they were more “*flesh-driven*” than ‘*Spirit-led*’.

But there is no evidence that they did ...

They were proud of the way they went about ‘*Serving God*’ and here's the final thing ...

Though they might be fooling themselves ...

5. The **FATHER** in Heaven is not **FOOLED** for a minute ...

“They have received their reward in full.”

(vs. 2b, vs. 5b, vs. 16b)

Nothing beyond this life was coming to them – No commendation from the Father was being reserved for them – They were living to impress men and that would be all the satisfaction they would receive if they even received that.

No wonder Jesus says “**Be careful**” ... these are tricky waters.

The Spirit within us and the Word of God itself urges us to “**Be Perfect**” – to do ‘*acts of righteousness*’ regularly as part of our family heritage and yet the flesh within us would seek to capture our hearts and minds even as we ‘*do them*’.

The solution (of course) is not to forsake the doing of these things but to do them in God-Honoring, Flesh-Defeating ways.

Over the next three weeks, we shall see what specific instructions Jesus gives with regard to these God-Honoring ‘acts of righteousness’ but for today suffice it to say as our **Final Thot** puts it ...

Final Thot ...

PERSPECTIVE is absolutely **CRUCIAL** in the Kingdom.
PLEASEING God is way more important than **IMPRESSING** men!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Twenty"

As we transition into Matthew Chapter Six, Pastor Mark pointed out that the very first verse contains what he called:

"PERFECTION'S PERSPECTIVE"

"Be CAREFUL not to do your 'acts of righteousness' (manifest your perfections) before MEN, to be SEEN by them. If you do, you will have no REWARD from your FATHER in heaven. (Matthew 6:1)

What do you believe Jesus was getting at in the giving of this 'perspective' ... What is he saying that we should be 'careful of'? What is the consequence of such "carelessness"? (LOSS of REWARD)

Is he talking primarily about 'METHOD' (How we go about doing these 'acts of righteousness') or 'MOTIVE' (Why we go about doing them)? What do you think? What's the difference? Why does it matter as long as the good deed is done?

Jesus gave some pretty outrageous examples of the wrong way to do an 'Act of Righteousness'. Do you remember what they were?

"Blowing a TRUMPET to announce your GIVING to the NEEDY" (vs. 2)

"PRAYING on the STREET CORNER" (vs. 5)

"FASTING with disfigured FACES" (vs. 16)

Why did Jesus say these people did these things in this way?

"They were HYPOCRITES"

"More than SERVING and PLEASING God they wanted to IMPRESS men!"

How big of a danger is this?

How much of a temptation is it to 'do things' to 'impress people'?

Is it always 'fleshly' to want people to 'sit up and take notice'?

Point to Ponder ...

How should we HANDLE it when our 'acts of righteousness' do IMPRESS people and they let us KNOW i.e. compliment us? What do you think?

“GIVING TO THE NEEDY”

(Perfection In Action)

(Matthew 6:2-4)

Intro ... This morning we begin our look at (what I have called) “*Perfection in Action*” ... three ‘*acts of righteousness*’ (to use Jesus’ words) that demonstrate True Citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let me remind us as we begin that according to Jesus Himself ...

“*Perfection is our Direction*”!

In the final verse of Matthew chapter five Jesus established that life direction when he said ... “*Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect*”. Those words present an awesome challenge to any who would seek to live so as to feel the Father’s Smile upon them.

It only mitigates the force of that directive a smidgen to point out that the Greek word ‘*Telios*’ used in Matthew 5:48 means not ‘*sinless perfection*’ – not ‘*perfect flawlessness in living*’ but rather ‘*only*’ means ‘*be mature*’ or ‘*complete*’ – a finished product – an example that others can safely follow - for that is no small or easily accomplished task either.

In other words ... Don’t worry about being sinlessly perfect just worry about being a ‘*prime example*’ of everything that God the Father desires His Children to be!

I’d say that’s still a steep hill to climb, wouldn’t you?

And then, in the process of seeking to be that ‘*prime example*’ (Jesus would say), always keep ‘*Perfection’s Perspective*’ in mind ... remember that ‘*Pleasing God is way more important than impressing men*’ as we saw in last week’s lesson based on Matthew 6:1.

So ‘*be careful*’ (he says) as you ‘*do your acts of righteousness*’ that you are not motivated by a desire to be seen and honored by men ... As you live out this ‘*Kingdom Life*’ be sure that you are focused on honoring the King rather than just impressing the rest of the Citizens.

So how do we do that? How does the kind of perfection that characterizes the Father work itself out in real life situations? What do ‘*perfect acts of righteousness*’ actually look like?

Well, in this rather extended sermon delivered on the mountainside that sunny afternoon, Jesus gave three specific examples ...

He zeroed in on **giving**, **praying** and **fasting**.

I'm going to characterize it this way ...

Perfection in Action means:

*'Living with a Sensitivity to those **AROUND** you'- "When you give"- (vs. 2)*

*'Living with a Sensitivity to HIM who is **ABOVE** you'- "When you pray"- (vs. 5)*

*'Living with a Sensitivity to that which is **WITHIN** you'- "When you fast"- (vs. 16).*

Here then is how he began ...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURAL FOCUS ...

"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."
(Matthew 6:2-4)

So ... 'Giving to the needy' is the first 'act of righteousness' – the first example of "Kingdom Perfection in Action" that Jesus identifies.

From this passage today I would draw ...

FOUR KEY OBSERVATIONS REGARDING 'GIVING TO THE NEEDY' ...

1. GIVING TO THE NEEDY IS AN EXPECTED SERVICE

"WHEN you give ..."

Jesus assumed that all of his hearers that day already involved themselves in acts of charity to the less fortunate members of their society.

Such service was a long standing practice ... It was part of the fabric of Jewish culture ... Went back to the establishment of the nation.

Here's how Moses instructed them as they literally stood on the banks of the Jordan and anticipated entering into the land that had been promised to their fore-father Abraham and establishing a nation of their own among the peoples of the earth.

"If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother ... Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart ... There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land."

(Deuteronomy 15:7-11)

God frequently evaluated the quality of life in the Kingdom according to the manner in which His People treated the poor, the alien, the fatherless and the widow. His people have always been expected to *'Live with a sensitivity to the needs of those around them'*.

In our Country, deeply rooted in Biblical Values as we have been, this *'Sensitivity to the needs of others'* has taken on Governmental Status ...

Our welfare system is second to none ... Every one of us who pays taxes is involved in *'Giving to the Needy'* ... As believers we should pay our taxes intelligently, hopefully, faithfully, honestly and perhaps even joyfully when we consider the incredible amount of good they can do.

In addition to our governmental giving, we as believers can be involved in such *'acts of righteousness'* institutionally. Non-profit agencies dedicated to the alleviating human suffering abound ... many of them (like Samaritan's Purse) do so in the name of Jesus.

Some minister internationally, some are focused locally. God's smile of approval surely is upon their efforts. They all rely upon gifts from individuals.

And of course, there is always the *'face to face'* expression of this *'sensitivity to the needs of those around us'*.

When you (directly and personally) give (lend) to those in need, you place yourself in the best of company and God would have you feel his smile of approval as you carry out one of the *'expected'* actions of a Citizen of His Glorious Kingdom.

Now here's a ***second observation*** that grows out of Jesus' words ...

2. GIVING TO THE NEEDY IS A NECESSARY SERVICE

*"When you give to the **NEEDY** ..."*

That term says it all ... these are people '*in need*' that Jesus is talking about.

If someone doesn't come to their aid, their need will not be met.

Food, clothing, shelter will be gone without.

Some will die of hunger or of exposure ... some (more figuratively) of embarrassment.

It doesn't take much '*sensitivity*' to enlarge the list beyond the basic necessities of life. Beyond food and clothing and shelter there are many who ...

'need treatment of some kind'

'need education'

'need hope'

'need friendship'-

'need help with the tasks of life'

'need salvation'

We as a church family seek to meet the needs of our own fellowship – the needy (as it were) in our own land.

Over the years thousands of benevolence dollars have been spent in the alleviating of financial hardship among our members – an equal number of hours have been spent alleviating suffering of other kinds ... caring and comforting the sick and the dying, providing assistance to the disabled and discouraged.

If you would want to be included in such a capacity, please indicate your desire on your registration card today or speak to Chris Nalian who directs our Care Ministry.

To be one who '*alleviates human need*' is to show yourself to be a true Child of God and Citizen of His Kingdom.

Now here's the **third observation** that arises from today's passage ...

3. GIVING TO THE NEEDY IS (Ideally) A SECRET SERVICE

"When you give to the needy, do not ANNOUNCE it."

'Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.'

Well, the first thing that we can deduce from that statement is that Jesus was right-handed! It's assumed that the right hand is doing the work and therefore the left hand could be/should be *'left in the dark'*.

One commentator I read said that the "*poor box*" in the synagogue would normally be recessed in the wall on the right side of the door as one entered in. Therefore one's gifts would most likely be placed into the box with one's right hand.

Perhaps Jesus was saying *'Let it be so routine for you' – 'Let it be so natural for you'* that as your right hand drops your contribution into the box, your left hand (let alone any person watching you) isn't even aware that you are putting anything in at all!

Of course, all our gifts (especially the ones we give directly in response to some need that is brought to our attention) cannot be done in absolute secrecy – not all gifts can be anonymous.

But in all of our giving we can stop well short of *'blowing a trumpet to announce them'*.

The bottom line is ... *"The fewer the people who know – the better"* and if all the recipient knows is that *"God has somehow provided"* then that is the best of all.

Our goal always is that *'the needy'* praise God as their ultimate benefactor when His People involve themselves in meeting needs.

So ... Giving to the needy is an expected service and a necessary service
and (ideally) a secret service ...

There's one more thing ... one **final observation** that can be drawn from this teaching of Jesus regarding *'Giving to the needy'* ...

4. GIVING TO THE NEEDY IS A SACRED SERVICE

"Your FATHER ... will reward you."

This matter of *"Giving to the Needy"* is pretty high on the Father's Agenda. He not only *'notices'* when it is carried out by one of His Own but He feels personally invested in the effort.

Listen to this incredible observation on life found in Proverbs 19:17 ...

*"He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,
and He will reward him for what he has done."
(Proverbs 19:17)*

That's exactly what Jesus said ...

"Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

Consider this expanded/ amplified version of the statement ...

*"When you give personally and privately to alleviate the needs of those
less fortunate than yourself, your Father who sees what is done personally and
privately will reward you by alleviating your deepest need –
your need to feel His Smile of Approval upon your life."*

Now how good is that?

How's that for a 'return on your investment'?

The Father exercises active oversight concerning life in His Kingdom – nothing escapes His Eye and no act of kindness to the needy will go uncompensated.

God considers your donations to the needy to be 'loans made personally to Him' – loans that He delights in repaying.

He says, in effect ...

*"You remain sensitive to them – meet their needs appropriately and generously –
and I will remain sensitive to you and will shower you with my favor".*

Our **Final Thot** expresses the fullest expansion of the concept ...

Final Thot ...

EVERYONE we meet is **NEEDY** in one way or another;
Seek to **LIVE** with a **SENSITIVITY** to all those God sends your way.

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Twenty-One"

In Sunday's message we took a look at the First of Three 'Acts of Righteousness' that Jesus identified in Matthew chapter six ...

"GIVING to the NEEDY"

Jesus didn't actually define the term 'needy', did he? How would you define it? Who do you think Jesus had in mind here? Try to come up with a 'Definition'.

"A Genuinely Needy Person is someone who _____

_____.

In Sunday message Pastor Mark drew four observations from Jesus' words in Matthew 6:2-4:

"Giving to the Needy is an **EXPECTED** Service" (*When you give*)
(Deuteronomy 15:7-11)

"Giving to the Needy is a **NECESSARY** Service" (*To the 'needy'*)

"Giving to the Needy is (ideally) a **SECRET** Service" (*Do not 'announce' it*)

"Giving to the Needy is a **SACRED** Service" (*Your 'Father'... will reward you.*)
(Proverbs 19:17)

Which of these presents a new or challenging thought to you?

Respond to this statement from Sunday's message ...

"God frequently evaluated the Quality of Life in the Kingdom according to the manner in which His People treated the poor, the alien, the fatherless and the widow. His people have always been expected to '*Live with a sensitivity to the needs of those around them*'."

Do you think He still does and that His People still are?

Point to Ponder ...

"EVERYONE we meet is NEEDY in one way or another!"

“PRAYING TO THE FATHER”

(Perfection In Action)

(Matthew 6:5-13)

Intro ... This morning we continue our look at (what I have called) “*Perfection in Action*” ... three ‘*acts of righteousness*’ (to use Jesus’ words) that demonstrate True Citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven:

Giving, Praying and Fasting.

Or as I put it last week ...

*“Living with a Sensitivity to those **AROUND** You” – ‘When you give’
“Living with a Sensitivity to Him who is **ABOVE** You.” - ‘When you pray’
“Living with a Sensitivity to that which is **WITHIN** You.” – ‘When you fast’*

Indeed, all possible ‘acts of righteousness’ that a Child of God might perform will fall under one of those three headings.

So basically Jesus was saying “*Be Careful*” – be on guard - whenever you do something of a spiritual nature lest you fall into bed with the “Hypocrites” of the world. “*Be Careful*” as you progress toward greater and greater ‘*perfection*’ (completion) that you might indeed become ‘*like your Father in Heaven*’.

We will do these things because the very nature of Life in the Kingdom demands it but we must be sure that we do them in a “*Kingdom Way*”.

Last week we took a look at the first of these three ‘acts of righteousness’:

“Giving to the Needy” ... ‘Living with a sensitivity to those around you.’

Today I would draw our attention to the second of the three:

LIVING WITH A SENSITIVITY TO HIM WHO IS ABOVE YOU ...

“When you pray”

Be particularly sensitive to what He wants to hear when you pray!

Here’s what Jesus actually said ...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURAL FOCUS ...

*"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.
I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full.*

But when you pray, go into your room, (closet) close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

"This, then, is how you should pray:

*'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'* "
(Matthew 6:5-13)

So what **DOES** God want to hear from us when we pray?

* God Wants To Hear A **PRIVATE** Communication
"Enter your closet/room"

"Enter your closet/ your room" ... a place set apart from the on-going activities of life and from the eyes of the world ... a private place. For us each Sunday, this 'sanctuary' can be such a place.

Here's the point ... prayer is intended to be a personal and even intimate communion between the Heavenly Father and those who are His Own. It is not intended for purposes of public display any more than intimate communication between a husband and wife is.

Once again ... prayer as an '*act of righteousness*' is intended to please and serve God not intended to impress men. So Jesus says, "**Keep it private**".

No one else even needs to know that you are doing it – Your prayer life is not intended to enhance your reputation among men. God wants to know that our prayers are intended for His Ears only – a '*Private Conversation*' between us and Him.

* He Wants To Hear A **PITHY** Communication

“Do not keep on babbling”

“Pithy” ... how’s that for a word? Now I needed a word here that started with “P” and I also wanted a word that might stick in your mind. “Pithy” means ‘*brief, concise, succinct*’ ... to the point, thought-provoking even.

Jesus says that our conversation – our communion – with our Heavenly Father is to be like that.

Of course, you can sit quietly in His Presence for hours, but when you officially ‘Approach the Throne of Grace to obtain mercy to help you in time of need’ ...

Pray in a simple, straightforward way – don’t go on and on just because you have the ability to ‘*put words together*’ or because you think that God will be more impressed with your sincerity if you pray for hours and hours and don’t merely ‘*babble on*’ in some nonsensical way.

So ... when God listens to our prayers, He wants to hear a private communication and a pithy communication and thirdly Jesus would say ...

* He Wants To Hear A **PROPER** Communication

“This is how you should pray”

You see ... there is a proper way to pray – Jesus not only gave his disciples the way to pray, he actually gave them a set of actual words to say and as he explained the manner of prayer to them, he dropped ‘*something*’ on them that (I dare say) has gone largely unnoticed in our day today.

It’s the ‘*something*’ that has turned into **Today’s Key Concept**. It’s a ‘something’ that has hit me right between the eyes and hopefully will hit you in the same place!

TODAY’S KEY CONCEPT ...

All **PRAYER** is to be offered in the **CONTEXT** of **COMMUNITY**.

We should never come **MERELY** as **INDIVIDUALS**.

Have you ever taken note of the continual use of the words **“OUR”** and **“US”** in the Lord’s Prayer? What about **“ME”** and **“MY”**?

“All prayer is to be offered in the context of community.”

We should never come merely as individuals."

That could be a life-altering statement ... That means that I say "We" and "Us" and "Our" when my natural impulse is to say "Me" and "Mine".

That statement says that even though I usually approach God's Throne of Mercy individually I should never approach the Father's Throne 'merely' as an individual.

I should always be aware of and sensitive to the fact that I come as a member of a larger community – a member of a wide-spread, highly diverse community – a community that should influence every word that I say in His Wonderful Presence.

In the "Lord's Prayer" - the Prayer Jesus specifically told his disciples to pray - Jesus reveals ...

SIX INSIGHTS CONCERNING THIS PRAYER-INFLUENCING COMMUNITY

1. IT'S A FAMILY-BASED COMMUNITY ... "Our FATHER in Heaven"

When we say these words, we acknowledge the unique relationship that has been formed between ourselves and the Almighty God – the Creator of Heaven and Earth. We have been 'born' into His Family as a wondrous result of His Merciful Love and none of us is an 'only child' and there is no 'sibling rivalry' among us. When any one of us appears in His Presence, we represent the whole bunch. Even though we are the only one there, we find ourselves saying "Our Father" ... "*Our Father in Heaven*" even.

The fact that we belong to a community that is "*Family-Based*" should influence every word that we breathe out in prayer.

Now in addition to this community that influences every word that I breathe out in prayer being a '*family-based community*' ...

2. IT'S A WORSHIP-CENTERED COMMUNITY ... "HALLOWED be your name"

The one I approach in prayer is not only the 'Father' of a world-wide family of faith (me included) but He is an "*Awesome Father*". He is one of a kind – He is to be placed above all others. He is the Almighty God; He is the Great "I AM" ... He is JEHOVAH – the God of all the Universe.

There's a part of me that is staggered to be in His Presence. I find myself '*Bowed in His Presence*' – not in fear but in wonder and delight.

"Hallowed" ... Most Holy and Wondrous is your name!

The fact that we belong to a community that is '*Worship-Centered*' should greatly influence the manner in which we pray. Our God is not one we can 'command'.

Now in addition to this community that influences every word that I breathe out in prayer being a *'family-based community'* and a *'worship-centered community'*...

3. IT'S A KINGDOM-DRIVEN COMMUNITY ... "Your KINGDOM come"

There is nothing more important in the Community to which we belong as *'Born-again Children of God'* than that the *'Kingdom of God Advance'* and the *'Will of God Be Done'* on this earth we inhabit.

Such an advance and such an accomplishment display the awesome power of our Heavenly Father to overcome the effects of sin and to re-create something new right in the midst of that which is fallen and broken.

God's Kingdom is being experienced right now in the hearts of God's Children and someday the Son of God will make visible and extensive what is now invisible and limited.

To see that day come and to assist in its advance is the passion of every member of this *"Kingdom-Driven Community"* and their prayers reflect that passion.

So now (as we continue to follow Jesus' thought through this model prayer) in addition to this community that influences every word that I breathe out in prayer being a *'family-based community'* and a *'worship-centered community'* and a *'kingdom-driven community'* ...

4. IT'S A RESOURCE-RELIANT COMMUNITY ... "Give us today our DAILY BREAD"

It's no small task to live as *"Citizens of the Kingdom"* in this fallen, sin-filled world – it takes great spiritual resources to keep our minds clear and our hearts pure and our passions in check.

It's an even harder task to seek to *"Advance the Kingdom"* ... to seek to share the truths of the Kingdom with those who are *'died in the wool'* Citizens of Earth.

The Apostle Paul acknowledged that the weapons of our warfare are not the *'weapons of the world'* (2 Corinthians 10:4) but rather they are *'divinely manufactured'*. Our appeal for armament must be taken to Heaven's Armory itself.

"Give us this day our daily bread" ...

'Outfit us this day with all that we need to carry out our part in Your Over-All Plan to Advance Your Kingdom and Accomplish Your Will.'

In fact, as the Apostle Peter would point out (2 Peter 1:3) ...

"His Divine Power has given us (will appropriate to us) everything we need for life and godliness."

And so we ask our Father for the very things he has already laid aside in store for us.

Resources for the tasks of the day!

Well now as we draw to a close, in addition to this community that influences every word that I breathe out in prayer being a *'family-based community'* and a *'worship-centered community'* and a *'kingdom-driven community'* and a *'resource-reliant community'* ...

5. IT'S A **FORGIVENESS-FUELED COMMUNITY** ...

*"As we also have **FORGIVEN** our debtors"*

You could almost get the idea that Jesus is saying that we can have a greater impact upon the world by demonstrating forgiveness than by anything else that we might do. Forgiveness truly received results in forgiveness easily granted. Those who do not (or even cannot) forgive very likely have not yet actually experienced forgiveness themselves.

In a word ... how can people believe that God (who is unseen) will forgive when the people that they can see don't?

The community that we belong to is fueled by forgiveness like an automobile is fueled by gasoline. My prayers are to be influenced by that fact.

Now finally, in addition to this community that influences every word that I breathe out in prayer being a *'family-based community'* and a *'worship-centered community'* and a *'kingdom-driven community'* and a *'resource-reliant community'* and a *'forgiveness-fueled community'* ...

6. IT'S A **SPIRITUALLY-VULNERABLE COMMUNITY** ...

*"Lead us not into **TEMPTATION** but deliver us from the **EVIL** one"*

Never can we start to assume that the battles have all been won and that the Kingdom has finally been fully established – either in our hearts or in our church or in the world.

Our enemies still abound – the flesh within with its passions and desires, the world outside with its godless notions and perspectives, the Devil himself with his hatred of all things touched by our Heavenly Father's Hand.

We understand our vulnerability – we are vehicles made of dust containing within ourselves the very Spirit and Life of God. It's like a broken down old pickup carrying a cargo of diamonds. Breakdowns are more than possible, they are almost inevitable and yet successful delivery of the cargo is imperative.

So we pray for protection – for smooth paths and good direction. We stay close to the ONE who understands 'our frame' – who remembers that we are but 'dust' creatively arranged by his masterful hand. He will hear!

Final Thot ...

PRAYER provides us a tremendous opportunity to *'sensitive ourselves'* to 'Our **FATHER** in **HEAVEN**' and to the **COMMUNITY** of which we are a part!
Take full advantage!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Twenty-Two"

In Sunday's message we took a look at the Second 'Act of Righteousness' that Jesus identified in Matthew chapter six verse 5-13 ...

"PRAYING" to the **FATHER** "

Based upon the information given in that passage, Pastor Mark pointed out that our communication with our Heavenly Father should be ...

PRIVATE – '*for His ears only*'

PITHY – '*brief and to the point*' (and)

PROPER – '*in the form prescribed*'.

Questions for discussion:

1. How '*private*' is '*private*'?
2. What does it mean to '*enter a room/closet*' for prayer?
3. What would qualify as '*babbling*'?
4. Why is such '*babbling*' not necessary? (vs. 8)
5. Did Jesus simply give his disciples a '*pattern*' for prayer or did he actually give them a '*prayer to pray*'?

How did Sunday's "**Key Concept**" strike your ear?

*'All prayer is to be offered in the context of community.
We should never come merely as individuals.'*

Is that 'Concept' something that you have ever thought about before? Does it influence or alter your view of prayer? What seems (to you) to be the key word or idea? What about '*The Lord's Prayer*' seems to support this 'concept'? (**PLURAL PRONOUNS**)

Respond to this statement from Sunday's message:

'Even though I usually approach God's Throne of Mercy individually, I should never approach the Father's Throne 'merely' as an individual – I should always be aware of and sensitive to the fact that I come as a member of a larger community – a member of a wide-spread, highly diverse community – a community that should influence every word that I say in His Wonderful Presence.'

Point to Ponder ...

Prayer not offered in the context of community runs the **RISK** of becoming mere **HUMAN** agitating and even an attempt at manipulation.

“FASTING TO TAKE CHARGE OF OURSELVES”

(Perfection In Action)

(Matthew 6:16-18)

Intro ... This morning we continue our look at (what I have called) “*Perfection in Action*” ... three ‘*acts of righteousness*’ (to use Jesus’ words) that demonstrate True Citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven:

Giving, Praying and Fasting.

Or as we paraphrased and amplified those three ‘Acts of Righteousness’ ...

*“Living with a Sensitivity to those **AROUND** You” – ‘When you give’*

*“Living with a Sensitivity to Him who is **ABOVE** You.” - ‘When you pray’*

*“Living with a Sensitivity to that which is **WITHIN** You.” – ‘When you fast’*

Indeed, all possible ‘acts of righteousness’ that a Child of God might perform will fall under one of those three headings.

Jesus began this passage by saying “*Be careful*” ... ‘*Be on Guard*’ (as it were) whenever you engage in these types of actions lest you fall into bed with the “*Hypocrites*” of the world. “*Be Careful*” as you progress toward greater and greater ‘*perfection*’ (completion) so that you might indeed become ‘*like your Father in Heaven*’.

Three weeks ago now we took a look at the **first** of these three ‘acts of righteousness’:

“Giving to the Needy”- ‘Living with a sensitivity to those around you.’

Two weeks ago we examined the **second** of the three:

“Praying to the Father”- ‘Living with a sensitivity to Him who is above you.’

Today I would draw our attention to the **final one** of the three:

LIVING WITH A SENSITIVITY TO THAT WHICH IS WITHIN YOU ...

“When you fast ...”

We need to be particularly sensitive to those things that can ‘**GET IN THE WAY**’ of those other two ‘*sensitivities*’ – things that can cause us to become ‘*in-sensitive*’ to either those who are around us or to Him who is above us.

Here’s what Jesus actually said ...

Today's Key Scripture ...

*"When you **FAST**, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their **REWARD** in full.*

*But when you **FAST**, put oil on your head and **WASH** your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your **FATHER**, who is unseen; and your **FATHER**, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

(Matthew 6:16-18)

"When you fast ..."

Once again Jesus is identifying an 'expected' spiritual practice. He assumes that '*fasting*' of some sort will be part of his followers' lives.

And once again he points out that it needs to be a 'private' spiritual practice – the world around is not to know – not to be impressed with you as you engage in it.

So it's expected and it's private but what exactly is it and what should be our focus as we do it?

Today's Key Definition ...

"FASTING"

Abstaining from **FOOD** (especially) for **RELIGIOUS** reasons.

Now we all 'fast' ... every night we fast ... then in the morning most of us 'break-fast' by eating something. Fasting (Biblically speaking) is abstaining from eating for the sake of some perceived spiritual purpose.

MOSES fasted (40 days) while meeting with God on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 34:28)

JESUS fasted (40 days) preparing for his earthly ministry (Matthew 4:2)

Queen **ESTHER** fasted (3 days) preparing to appeal to the King (Esther 4:16)

The Early **CHURCH** fasted while seeking God's Leading (Acts 13:1)

Fasting is a kind of "**PURPOSEFUL DEPRIVATION**" ...

We could define it more broadly as:

Purposely denying myself something **PHYSICAL**
for the sake of something **SPIRITUAL**.

This morning I would like to share with you **Four Possible Purposes for Fasting** –

Four Reasons one might engage in a time of *'Fasting and Prayer'*.

This coming Wednesday (all throughout the formalized Christian World) will be recognized as *'Ash Wednesday'* – the official beginning of Lent which is the 40 day period leading up to Easter Sunday – the celebration of Christ's Victory over Sin and Death.

Millions of Christians (mostly members of the Catholic Church) will *'give up something for Lent'* as a way of identifying in some small manner with the Sufferings of Christ.

So the first ***'Purpose for Fasting'*** that I would mention this morning is:

1. Fasting to IDENTIFY ... To 'Sense the PRESENCE of Christ'

The hearts of those who fast with this purpose in mind would connect with the heart of the Apostle Paul himself who wrote in his letter to the Philippians ...

"I want to know Him and the power of His Resurrection and the Fellowship of Sharing in His Sufferings ..."
(Philippians 3:10)

In the Scripture we read that after Jesus had fasted for 40 days in the wilderness, *'He was hungry'* and on the cross he cried *"I thirst"* ...

To share both hunger and thirst for the purpose of drawing close to him in his sufferings and to perhaps more tangibly appreciate the physical aspects of his suffering is a prime motive for a time of fasting – be it for a single meal, or for a day or for a period of days.

Men and women of faith have practiced fasting for this purpose throughout the history of the Church. The sad thing is that many engage in it in the very way that Jesus warned against ...

What purpose do the 'ashes on the forehead' serve if not to announce to the watching world the intention of the one bearing them to so *'identify'* with Christ'?

Done privately, however, such a fast can be most beneficial. It can assist us in 'Drawing near to Christ and appreciating more personally His Suffering'.

Fasting to Identify ... It has its place.

The second ***'Purpose for Fasting'*** that I would identify this morning is:

2. Fasting to AMPLIFY ... To 'Increase the IMPACT of spiritual exertions'

Sometimes we encounter things in our lives as Christians that just seem particularly resistant to change – we do what we normally do and nothing happens. We pray in our normal way and the circumstance remains unaffected. It might be the result of us becoming somewhat complacent or even spoiled ... It might be that we have allowed our faith to become somewhat routine ... It might be that we have begun to simply *'take things for granted'* and then we encounter this *'thing'* – this *'circumstance'* that stands like an unmovable mountain in our path.

The nine disciples that Jesus had left at the foot of the mountain upon which he was transfigured in the presence of Peter, James and John encountered just such a circumstance.

A man had brought his demon-possessed son to them for healing but they had been unable to 'cast the demon out' though they had previously cast demons out of others.

When Jesus (and Peter, James and John) arrived the father cried out in desperation to Jesus (and I paraphrase) ...

*"Can you do what your own disciples could not do
or are you as impotent as they?"*

After a brief conversation with the father regarding the son's condition and a challenge to the father to believe, Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the boy and the boy was released of his suffering.

Later when they were alone with Jesus, the disciples asked *'Why couldn't we cast it out'* to which Jesus replied ...

*"This kind cannot come out except by prayer and fasting."
(Mark 9:29)*

In other words ... this circumstance was not 'ordinary' – this circumstance required a kind of spiritual preparation that went beyond the normal – that went beyond what they had been engaging in. To experience success in this kind of situation they would have to be 'more like their master' than they presently were.

Remember what Paul had said ...

*'I want to know him and the power of his resurrection' as well as the
'Fellowship of sharing in his sufferings'.*

As we fast to *'identify with Christ'* we also *'amplify the impact of our service for Christ'*. **So** ... fasting to *'identify'* and fasting to *'amplify'* – good reasons both ...

Here's a **third reason** that we might *'purposefully deprive ourselves of something physical for the sake of something spiritual'* ...

3. Fasting to ***PURIFY*** ... To 'Engage in a spiritual ***DETOX***'

Here's one that on a physical level the world has really grabbed ahold of.

Walk down the aisles of any book store or health food store and you will find an array of books and products dedicated to the idea that our bodies are overflowing with toxins of all varieties and that those toxins are literally choking the life right out of us.

The food we eat and the water we drink and the air we breathe all act as conduits for toxic material to enter our bodies. The image created is that you and I are nothing more than walking '*landfills*' where the garbage of our industrial age eventually winds up.

And as a result, we experience fatigue and headaches and fuzzy thinking and joint pain to say nothing of a general sense of malaise and even depression.

The solution ... '*Purify yourself*' ... Purge yourself of these things – Remove from yourself as many of those 'toxins' as you can.

The suggested purification process almost always involves a period of 'fasting' – a depriving of yourself of one kind of 'physical thing (unhealthy stuff) for another kind of physical thing' (healthy beneficial stuff).

Here's the point ... we are more than just physical beings – more than just our bodies can become toxic. Thoughts and feelings, motives and passions can become toxic as well and as a result our souls can weaken and become vulnerable to the enemy's attack.

Long years ago the Apostle Paul spoke to this issue when he wrote these words in his second letter to the Believers in Corinth ...

'Purify yourselves from everything that contaminates soul and body'
(2 Corinthians 7:1)

In other words, take conscious steps to be both physically and spiritually sound ... Periodically set aside time to '*Fast yourself toward greater purity*'.

Purposefully remove from yourself those things that '*toxify*' either your body or your soul for the work of the Kingdom requires both physical and spiritual vigor.

Fast to restore both '*Joy in your heart*' and a "*Spring in your step*'.

Fasting to '*Identify*' ... Fasting to '*Amplify*' ... Fasting to '*Purify*' ...

Just one to go ...

One more reason why followers of Jesus Christ might spend some time in '*fasting and prayer*'. It grows right out of the other three ...

I call it ...

4. Fasting to **RECTIFY** ...To 'Plot out *mid-course* **CORRECTIONS** when necessary'

Frequently '*fasting to rectify*' that is, fasting to '*make things right*' – to bring our lives into a more proper order is a direct outgrowth of the first three.

For as we identify more and more **with** Christ and as we seek to amplify our impact **for** Christ and as we become sensitive to the need to purify ourselves so that we might be useful **to** Christ, we zero in on the very things that distract us from Christ. They are usually earthly, worldly things.

Here's how Paul put it in his letters to the Colossian and Roman Churches:

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things"
(Colossians 3:2)

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing (the refocusing) of your mind."
(Romans 12:2)

Earthly concerns – worldly perspectives have a way of capturing our minds (to say nothing of our hearts) ...

It's easy to forget that we are Citizens of a Heavenly Kingdom and that we are but '*strangers and aliens*' in this fallen world. Those earthly concerns frequently take priority in our lives; those worldly perspectives can easily frame our world view.

And those '*earthly things*' and '*worldly patterns of thought*' can be some of the very things that contaminate our souls and weaken us.

Paul would say ... If you find yourself overly concerned with the issues of life and looking at life pretty much the way that everyone around you does, then 'Step back and refocus yourself'.

Engage in a period of fasting from those earthly concerns and worldly perspectives and set your minds on things above – on the liberating truths of the Gospel itself – on the glorious Son of God Himself – and you will nourish yourself as you do so for as our **Final Thot** puts it ...

Final Thot ...

When we **FAST** we actually wind up **FEEDING** ourselves!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Twenty-Three"

In Sunday's message we took a look at the Third and Final 'Act of Righteousness' Jesus identified in Matthew Chapter Six ...

"FASTING" or '**LIVING** with a **SENSITIVITY** to that which is **WITHIN** you' – particularly to the things within that might make us insensitive to 'those who are around us' and to 'Him who is above us'. (vs. 16-18)

How big of a concern is that? Can we become '*insensitive*' to the things within us? Can '*less than desirable things*' become so familiar to us that we don't pay them any attention at all?

Are there times when we need to "*step back*" or "*step away*" from things as normal and ask God to give us a better '*vision*' of the things that lie within our hearts and minds? What do you think? Can a time of '*fasting*' help us do that?

Pastor Mark said that we could most broadly define '*fasting*' as ...

*"Purposely **DENYING** myself something **PHYSICAL** for the **SAKE** of something **SPIRITUAL**."*

In the message Sunday we considered '*Four Possible Purposes For Fasting – Four Reasons Believers might commit themselves to a time of 'Fasting and Prayer':*

1. Fasting to **IDENTIFY** – To '*Sense the Presence/Person of Christ*'
(To know Him and the fellowship of sharing in His '*Sufferings*')
2. Fasting to **AMPLIFY** – To '*Increase the Impact of spiritual exertions*'
(To know Him and the '*power*' of His Resurrection)
3. Fasting to **PURIFY** – To '*Engage in a kind of Spiritual Detox*'
(To cleanse oneself from anything that '*contaminates*' either body or soul)
4. Fasting to **RECTIFY** – To '*Plot out any necessary Mid-Course Corrections*'
(To re-establish a focus on '*things above*')

Which of these four was most '*surprising*' – most '*challenging*' – most '*exciting*' – or most '*intriguing*' to you?

Point to Ponder ...

How **OFTEN** should a believer **FAST**?

“DO NOT STOCKPILE EARTHLY TREASURE”

(Kingdom Corrective #1)

(Matthew 6:19-24)

Intro ... Every time we enter a new section of the Sermon on the Mount, it's important that we ask ourselves how we got here for in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was handing out to the people of his day a kind of Syllabus of all that his earthly ministry would cover – an overview of the course he could have called ***“Kingdom Living 101”***.

He began the Sermon on the Mount by sharing ...

“Nine Key Heart Attitudes Necessary for Kingdom Living”

(The Beatitudes)

Then He shared with them the ...

“Two Key Identities of the Citizens of the Kingdom”

(‘Salt of the Earth’ and ‘Light of the World’)

Then He pointed out to them the...

“One Key Objective of the Kingdom”

(The complete ‘Fulfillment of the Law’)

Then came ...

“Six Key Clarifications of Ancient Teaching”

(You have heard it said, But ‘I say to you’.)

And then he shared with them ...

“Three Key Expressions of Kingdom Righteousness”

(Living with a Sensitivity to ‘Those Who Are Around Us’)

(Living with a Sensitivity to “Him Who Is Above Us”) and

(Living with a Sensitivity to ‘That Which Is Within Us’)

The Course is nearly over ...

Today we come to the Section of the Syllabus entitled:

“Four Key Kingdom Correctives”

(‘Do not’ – ‘Do not’ – ‘Do not’ – ‘Do not’)

These are ‘*Four Teachings*’ that directly address ‘*Four Behaviors*’ that definitely need ‘*correction*’ if they are present in our lives.

But before we consider them, let me say this.

The reason these ‘*correctives*’ are necessary is because we Christians are deceivable and thus vulnerable and as a result frequently susceptible to perspectives and practices that undermine the very things that the Spirit of God is seeking to do in our lives.

It’s because of His Love for us that our Savior would seek to warn us against and correct us from any of these misguided and potentially damaging behaviors.

Note carefully the behaviors that he has chosen to address and listen carefully to the counsel he has given.

Consider ...

TODAYS ‘KINGDOM CORRECTIVE’ ...

“DO NOT STOCKPILE EARTHLY TREASURE!”

Here’s how Jesus put it in ...

TODAY’S KEY PASSAGE ...

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

(Matthew 6:19-24)

Some might say that that’s far more than just a ‘corrective’ **for** our lives – some might say that that’s a direct ‘challenge’ **to** our lives – some might go even further and say that’s an actual ‘condemnation’ **of** our lives.

Whichever way they took it, I’m sure that many of the people of Jesus’ day were blown away by it just as many of the people of our day might be.

“DO NOT STOCKPILE EARTHLY TREASURE!”

‘Do not stockpile – that is, accumulate great amounts of – earthly treasure.’

Here are some other ways of saying it ...

“Do not make earthly abundance the goal of your life.”

“Do not allow earthly things to become your greatest delight.”

“Do not consider earthly abundance to be proof of God’s Blessing.”

Any one of those statements could well serve as a ‘corrective’ for a good number of us American Christians. Based upon this passage, consider ...

TODAY’S KEY CONCEPT...

There is no direct correlation between American **PROSPERITY** and Biblical **CHRISTIANITY**; in fact there could be a very serious **CONFLICT** between them!

What possible ‘conflict’ could there be? What could possibly be wrong or harmful in seeking to accumulate as much as possible of this world’s goods? Isn’t that what being a ‘good steward’ is all about? Didn’t Jesus have quite a few wealthy people (men and women) as part of his earthly entourage? Wasn’t it a wealthy man who laid Jesus’ body to rest in his brand new tomb?

Don’t we as a church practice some pretty conservative financial management – Don’t we have money laid aside against the unexpected event? Isn’t that in fact what we are supposed to do?

And what’s wrong with getting a ‘warm and secure feeling’ inside when we see that our net worth is mounting and that our financial goals are being met?

What if I said that there’s actually nothing wrong with any of that?

However, at the same time there are **DANGERS** in all of that!

In this passage, Jesus very definitely points out just what some of those ‘dangers’ are.

In fact, in this passage, I can find four.

Call them ...

FOUR DANGERS OF STOCKPILING EARTHLY TREASURE

When we put in the effort to ‘*Stockpile Earthly Treasure*’ we place our feet on dangerous ground ...

First Danger ... Such An Effort Can Cause SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.” (vs.19)

Here the words ‘*on earth*’ are what must catch our eye. The greater the effort to amass (stockpile) treasure ‘*on earth*’ the greater the tendency to fall prey (once again) to the notion that this life is all that really matters and that comfort and measurable success ‘*on earth*’ are the evidence of a life well-lived.

In the midst of such a pursuit, it’s also easy to forget just how vulnerable such riches are ... literally, they can vanish in a moment. Nothing ‘*on earth*’ is permanent; nothing ‘*on earth*’ is secure; nothing ‘*on earth*’ is ultimately satisfying or significant.

The pursuit of riches can cause us to become incredibly short-sighted (near-sighted, if you will) and we tend to live as though this world is all there is (or at least the most important part of what there is).

There are professing believers today out there in the world working like crazy to amass the most ‘*earthly treasure possible*’ or out there ‘*playing with some of the earthly treasures*’ they have already amassed rather than gathering for worship with other believers on the ‘*Lord’s Day*’.

Though eternal life might be within them – ‘*earthly life*’ has blinded them. Their pursuit of ‘*earthly treasure*’ has reduced their vision to only that which is right in front of their eyes. They have become dangerously ‘*short-sighted*’.

Now that would be bad enough but here’s a second danger the effort to ‘stockpile earthly treasure’ presents ...

Second Danger ... Such An Effort Can CAPTURE Your HEART

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”(vs. 21)

Human hearts always wrap themselves around treasure. God’s heart does too. We are made in his image. Our hearts yearn for something to ‘treasure’ as does His. People are His Treasure – He set His Love upon us from the moment of our creation.

In fact the Bible says that he ‘*so loved*’ us that he gave His Only Begotten Son to save us from our sins.

The truth is, there is no such thing as treasure unless someone's heart *'treasures it'* – that's what makes treasure *'treasure'*.

Now here's the thing – the thing that Jesus was concerned about.

Our hearts tend to get involved in the efforts we make. We say to our children *"Put your heart into it"* when we seek to encourage them in some endeavor or another. Looking at someone else's achievement we frequently say, *'He really put his heart into it'*.

And Jesus says ... *"I know that" ... "I know how that mechanism works"*.

The more effort you put into *'stockpiling earthly treasure'* the more likely it will be that your heart will be captured in the process and that (as a result) nothing will be more important to you than the *'treasure that you have in fact stockpiled'*.

You will rejoice in it – you will feel vindicated because of it – you will concern yourself with how to protect it – you will continually seek to enlarge it – and you will find little energy or interest in anything but it.

And as a result, your love for God will become a secondary and almost irrelevant thing because for all practical purposes, it will be your *'possessions'* – your *'earthly treasures'* that you actually love with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

That would indeed be a sad state for any Christian to find himself in.

Much like the Ephesians of old, the Lord would be saying to him ...

"I have this against you – You have forsaken your first love."
(Revelation 2:4)

So the effort to *'stockpile earthly treasure'* can actually *'capture our hearts'* as well as lead to and reveal a kind of spiritual *'short-sightedness'*. Dangerous things both. But there's more ...

By stating this third danger, Jesus is simply drawing a most obvious conclusion ... He uses somewhat obscure imagery as he does so ... Words intended to make his listeners think.

You see, the third danger is that ...

Third Danger ... Such An Effort Can Lead You BACK Into DARKNESS

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (vs. 22-23)

'Short-sightedness' has now degenerated into 'total blindness' ... those whose eyes can see nothing more than what is right in front of their face (earthly things and earthly treasure and earthly comfort) now can see nothing at all.

As a result of their 'earthly focus' they have once again become blinded to the bigger picture – the 'light' that was placed within them at spiritual birth – the light of understanding – the light that illuminated the darkness and allowed them to 'see' the purposes of God – has gone dark.

Their fascination with earthly pursuits has thrown a blanket (as it were) over the light and they wander as aimlessly as the lost around them.

Their darkness is even deeper because they are walking into it after having been in the light. Such aimless wandering is not the way the Heavenly Father wants His Born-Again children walking through life.

One last danger and I need to do little more than just state it for it should be by now one you can easily draw yourself ...

Fourth Danger ...Such An Effort Can DRAW You Away From GOD

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. (vs. 24)

As long as we live in this world, the Checkbook and the Good Book will vie for our attention. Both are necessary to our earthly functioning.

Settle the issue early and often. Make sure the Good Book wins!

Final Thot ...

It's not so much the ACCUMULATION as the LOVE of the ACCUMULATION that is the PROBLEM. However, it's hard to have the ONE without the OTHER so be CAREFUL as you accumulate the things you NEED to successfully navigate this life.

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Twenty-Four"

Sunday we looked at the first of four 'KINGDOM CORRECTIVES' contained in the 'Sermon on the Mount' ...

*"Do not STOCKPILE earthly treasures"
(Matthew 6:19-24)*

Respond to this set of questions Pastor Mark suggested might spring to the minds of astute Christians when they read this 'Corrective' ... Do they have a '*familiar*' ring? How would you respond to someone who raised them?

"What could possibly be wrong or harmful in seeking to accumulate as much as possible of this world's goods? Isn't that what being a 'good steward' is all about? Didn't Jesus have quite a few wealthy people (men and women) as part of his earthly entourage? Wasn't it a wealthy man who laid Jesus' body to rest in his brand new tomb? Don't we as a church practice some pretty conservative financial management – Don't we have money laid aside against the unexpected event? Isn't that in fact what we are supposed to do? And what's wrong with getting a 'warm and secure feeling' inside when we see that our net worth is mounting and that our financial goals are being met?"

How did Pastor Mark respond?

*"What if I said that there's actually nothing wrong with ANY of that?
However, at the same time there are DANGERS IN ALL OF THAT!"*

What ARE the 'Dangers' of seeking to accumulate earthly treasure?

1. Can Result In SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS (vs. 19-20)
2. Can Cause Your HEART To Be CAPTURED (vs. 21)
3. Can Lead You Back Into DARKNESS (vs. 22-23)
4. Can DRAW You Away From GOD (vs. 24)

How '*real*' are these '*dangers*' ... Need we be concerned?

How can we '*keep things in balance*'?

Point To Ponder ...

It's not so much the ACCUMULATION as the LOVE of the ACCUMULATION that is the PROBLEM. However, it's hard to have the ONE without the OTHER so be CAREFUL as you accumulate the things you NEED to successfully navigate this life.

“DO NOT WORRY ABOUT THE STUFF OF LIFE”

(Kingdom Corrective #2)

(Matthew 6:25-34)

Intro ... Have you ever noticed that the deeper you go into the ‘*Religions of Men*’ the more philosophical and theoretical and even secretive or obscure things become? The more men think about things the more complicated their understanding of those things tends to become.

By the time men get done building some ‘*system of thought*’ a PHD in the subject is required for you to even feel like you have scratched the surface. Those who ‘*master the system*’ are viewed as truly masterful.

In complete contrast to that, have you been noticing (as we have proceeded through the Sermon on the Mount) that the deeper you go into “True Faith” - the more practical and understandable things become?

Have you noticed that the emphasis is not so much on ‘*understanding God*’ as it is on ‘*obeying God*’?

Last week we entered into the next to last major section in the Sermon on the Mount – a four topic section that I’ve entitled: “***KINGDOM CORRECTIVES***”.

In this section of teaching, Jesus identified four common behaviors that he says must be corrected if we are practicing them. His teaching is not hard to understand; it’s simply hard to carry out.

Last week we looked at ***Kingdom Directive #1*** ...

“DO NOT STOCKPILE EARTHLY TREASURE!”

Jesus shared four very real and likely dangers that come to those who fail to heed his warning and who thus fail to take such ‘corrective action’ in their lives.

The final of those four dangers he mentioned is that ‘stockpiling earthly treasure can draw our hearts away from our Heavenly Father’ for it is impossible (as he said) to “*Serve Both God and Money*”.

Today’s message and corrective grows right out of that one. In fact today’s passage begins with the word “*therefore*” – a transitional word if there ever was one.

It's as though Jesus were saying ...

"Therefore, since you cannot serve both God and Money and since you have made the decision to serve God rather than money, and since you are not going to invest yourself and all your energies in the effort of amassing great amount of earthly treasure, now take this next corrective step which actually follows quite logically ..."

TODAY'S KINGDOM CORRECTIVE ...

"DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE!"

(Matthew 6:25)

WORRY ... Excessive and Possibly Debilitating CONCERN

Here's Jesus' full teaching on the subject ...

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ...

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

(Matthew 6:25-34)

Six times Jesus uses some form of the word "Worry" in those few verses.

'Worry, worry, worry, worry, worry, worry' ...

It's hard to miss the fact that he really doesn't want us to do it.

Now some in this room are just by nature what my mother used to call “Worry-Warts” – people who just naturally take things very seriously and who cannot in any way just ‘go with the flow’ and who even as Christians tend to invest a lot of time in ‘being deeply concerned’ about things.

It so easily to become almost consumed by the “What ifs” of life. Besides someone has to ‘worry about stuff’ or life would really run amuck, wouldn’t it?

And so we come to **Today’s First Key Question**, a question raised by hundreds of mother’s out there if by no one else ...

TODAY’S FIRST KEY QUESTION ...

What’s wrong with **WORRY?**

In the passage that we have just read (Matthew 6:25-34), Jesus identifies

FOUR MAJOR PROBLEMS WITH WORRY ...

Let’s look at them one by one:

1. Worrying About The Stuff Of Life Can Become DISTRACTING

*“Is not **LIFE** more important than food ...?” (vs. 25)*

*“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.
Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?”*

The point is there is more to life than what you are eating and what you are wearing. Worrying about those things can distract us from the main thing – our life as Citizens of the Kingdom of God!

*“Are you not much more **VALUABLE** than they?” (vs. 26)*

*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.
Are you not much more valuable than they?”*

Here again Jesus is saying that ‘worrying’ about these ‘lesser things’ can cause us to lose sight of another ‘main thing’ – our relationship with our Heavenly Father who considers us to be more important than anything else in His Marvelous (and much cared-for) Creation.

If worry about the stuff of life like food and clothes can distract us from the ‘*more important things*’ of life like God and His Kingdom, then ‘*worry*’ is indeed a problem. Reason enough to end it.

Now here’s a second problem that worrying about life can produce ...

2. Worrying About The Stuff Of Life Can Become FRUSTRATING

“Who of you by worrying can add a single HOUR to his life?” (vs. 27)

Who indeed? Maybe by exercising you can ... Maybe by eating wisely you can ... Maybe by getting proper rest you can ... Maybe by dropping excess weight you can ... and possibly not only hours but years to your life.

But worrying won’t do it. Worrying, in fact, (due to the stress it creates) will take hours and perhaps years from your life!

If worry could have accomplished anything, I would have emerged from high school as a 5’10” 175 pound well-built physical specimen ready to play college football – but worry not only did not add an hour to my life, it did not add an inch to my height or a pound of muscle to my body.

And so worry becomes a ‘frustrating’ exercise – We can ‘*worry ourselves*’ well past frustration to discouragement and even depression. Good reason to eliminate it from our lives, Jesus would say.

But here’s a **third** problem that worrying about life can produce ...

3. Worrying About The Stuff Of Life Can Become INSULTING

And by that I mean “*Insulting to Our Heavenly Father Himself!*”

Listen to the way Jesus put it ...

“Will He not much more CLOTHE you, O you of little faith?” (vs. 30)

*If that is how God clothes the grass of the field,
which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into
the fire, will he not much more clothe you,
O you of little faith?*

“Your heavenly Father KNOWS that you need them” (vs. 32)

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

In these verses, Jesus is pointing out that the Presence of Worry in our lives reflects the Absence of Faith. We worry because we are failing to trust God.

Our worry indicates that either we doubt God's Knowledge *of* us or we doubt God's Commitment *to* us. He could consider both to be '*Insults to His Nature*'.

Now that's a serious problem and an incredibly good reason to eliminate worry from our lives.

Adding to the conclusion he drew last week, Jesus would say ...

If it's true that we cannot serve both God and Money, then
It's also true that we cannot both Trust God and Worry!

And now the fourth and final problem that worry about life can produce

4. Worrying About The Stuff Of Life Can Become FAITH-DENYING

"The PAGANS run after all these things" (vs. 32)

*So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or
'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'
For the pagans run after all these things, and your
Heavenly Father knows that you need them.*

This was no casual observation that Jesus was making here – this was actually a rather strong denunciation. He was pointing out to them that 'worry undermines credibility'.

If we have no more confidence in life than the pagans (the unbelievers do), then what's the point of saying we have a Heavenly Father and calling ourselves Children of God.

When push comes to shove, we are just as frantic as they are!

They can rightly consider us to be phonies!

Our actions deny what our mouths declare. Our testimony is ruined.

Our invitation to faith is easily discarded.

Now that's another most serious problem that worry produces.

So has the point been made?

Do you view 'worry over the things of life' to be a most serious problem?
How many of you right now are 'worrying' about your problem with 'worry'?

Many of you, I'm sure, have already phrased in your mind ...

TODAY'S SECOND KEY QUESTION ...

How can a CITIZEN of the Kingdom OVERCOME worry?
How can I stop my MIND from spinning and my HEART from churning?

Indeed, how can we do it?
How can we get off the Merry-Go-Round of worry and settle down
into a much less dizzying life of faith and trust?

ANSWER: INVEST and even EXHAUST yourself in the PURSUIT of
Genuine KINGDOM Living. (Matthew 6:33)

Here's how Jesus put it ...

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will
be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow ..."*

That's the verse that I chose as the "*Theme Verse*" of this entire study.
That's the verse we focused on in the introductory message to this series.

Here's how we '*broke it down*' in that message ...

"Seek" (desire – crave – search for – pursue – focus on – make it your ambition or goal to discover and obtain) ... "First" (as of prime importance-before anything else- as critical to all else that you would desire) ... "His Kingdom" (His ruling authority over your life – His territorial realm in which you might settle down – His Regents of which you might consider yourself to be one) ... and His Righteousness (the rules and regulations that He has laid down – the principles for living that honor Him – the inner quality of heart and mind that mirror Him).

Do that and there will be no time or energy or desire or need to 'worry' – to exercise excessive concern over the things of this life.

As we close our discussion of this incredibly important second '*Kingdom Corrective*', I'm reminded of a simple little chorus that we used to sing long years ago.

*Why Worry When You Can Pray? Why Be Doubtful? Just Trust Him And Obey!
Why feel lonely? He's With You All The Way. Why Do You Worry When You Can Pray?*

And so we come to our '*final thot*' which conveys a simple observation Jesus would surely endorse ...

Final Thot ... The more tightly we EMBRACE the Kingdom the less we WORRY.

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Twenty-Five"

Sunday we looked at the second of four '**KINGDOM CORRECTIVES**' contained in the '*Sermon on the Mount*' ...

"Do not **WORRY** about your **LIFE**" - Matthew 6:25-34

"**WORRY** – excessive and possibly debilitating **CONCERN**"

In this passage Sunday, we identified four definite '**PROBLEMS**' associated with "worrying about the 'stuff' (the necessities) of life" ...

1. Such Worrying Can Become **DISTRACTING** ...

It takes our attention away from the **MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES** of Life.

Name three '**Issues Of Life**' that are more important than Food and Clothes.

*

*

*

2. Such Worrying Can Become **FRUSTRATING** ...

It can lead us into **DISCOURAGEMENT** and even **DISPAIR**.

Have you ever '*worried yourself*' into such a state? Did you escape it?

3. Such Worrying Can Become **INSULTING** to God ...

It demonstrates **DOUBT** concerning His **NATURE** – either His **KNOWLEDGE** of us or His **COMMITMENT** to us.

Have you ever viewed 'worry' in this way?

Does "*The Presence of Worry reflect the Absence of Faith*"?

4. Such Worrying Can Become **FAITH-DENYING** ...

It mirrors the **BEHAVIOUR** of the **PAGANS** around us.

Is it a fair accusation to say that our '*faith is not real*' if we show ourselves as anxious about the needs of life as the unbelievers around us?

Point To Ponder ...

"**EMBRACING** the Kingdom eliminates **WORRY**."

“DO NOT ‘KRINO’ ONE ANOTHER!”

(Kingdom Corrective #3)

(Matthew 7:1-5)

Intro ... Today we take up the **third** of four “*Kingdom Correctives*” that Jesus addressed near the end of the Sermon on the Mount and as we do so we transition into Matthew Chapter Seven.

“Do not” – “Do not” – “Do not” – “Do not!”

‘Do not’ (Jesus would say) continue to engage in any of these four behaviors that are so common to man for each of them undermines and thus compromises true “*Kingdom Living*”.

“Do not stockpile treasures upon earth!” – Such behavior diverts your attention from your true treasure. That was the **First** Kingdom Corrective.

“Do not worry about your life!” ... Such behavior demonstrates the absence of true faith in your Heavenly Father’s Care. That was the **Second** Kingdom Corrective.

Today I would have us consider the **Third** ...

TODAY’S KINGDOM CORRECTIVE ...

“DO NOT ‘KRINO’ (Judge/Condemn/Belittle/Put Down/ Humiliate/ Write Off/ Wash Your Hands Of) ***ONE ANOTHER.”***
(Matthew 7:1)

I kept the Greek Word ‘**Krino**’ here because no single English Word really covers all the possibilities.

In the New Testament, this word is translated variously as ‘*judge*’ ... ‘*condemn*’ ... ‘*determine*’ ... ‘*call into question*’ ... ‘*damn*’ ... even ‘*sue*’ or ‘*take to court*’.

In a nutshell, it means to come against those who have ‘*fallen short*’ with a desire to ‘*put them in their place*’ ... to ‘*reveal their short-comings*’.

Why would Jesus feel that he needed to include this rather ugly, generally destructive behavior in a list of Kingdom Correctives?

I believe he included it because he knew how prone we all are to do it and I would share with you that we are prone to do it because of what I am calling ...

TODAY'S SAD REALITY ...

PEOPLE are not **PERFECT** and **IMPERFECTION** in those **AROUND** us is not difficult to **SPOT**. It's incredibly **EASY** to become **JUDGMENTAL**.

Have you noticed that?

Have you noticed that people are not perfect and that imperfection in those around you is easy to spot?

Have you found it easy to become '*judgmental*' – to see them as inferior?

Have you found yourself (at certain times and under certain circumstances) wanting to '*reveal the shortcomings*' of those around you and even '*put them in their place*'?

Jesus says that if we have done (or are still doing) any of these things, we need to stop.

This is behavior of which he does not approve though it can come so naturally that we feel it must be right and even necessary.

So let's just address it head on.

Here then is ...

TODAY'S KEY CONCEPT ...

A Judgmental Environment is a **TOXIC** Place ...
Both for the **JUDGE** and the **JUDGED**.

A Judgmental Environment chokes out just about every one of those "*Heart- Qualities*" with which Jesus began this marvelous message.

It's impossible to be '*Judgmental*' and '*Humble*' – impossible to be '*Judgmental*' and '*Merciful*' – impossible to be '*Judgmental*' and a '*Peace-Maker*' – impossible to be '*Judgmental*' and '*Pure in Heart*'.

Simply put ... '*A Judgmental Environment is not a Heart-Healthy Place!*'

Obviously when this attitude invades the Kingdom of God, it creates problems ... It makes toxic something that is intended to be a source of blessing and delight.

It's a toxic environment both for those who judge and for those who are judged.

Is there any worse feeling than the feeling that people are '*judging you all the time*'? You feel like you are continually under their microscope and that no matter what you do, you just cannot measure up. It's a terrible environment in which to live.

On the other hand, is there anything that will more quickly destroy relationships than a '*judgmental spirit*'?

Such a spirit makes no allowances for honest mistakes – cuts people no slack ... never lets people '*off the hook*'. Such a spirit is so involved in '*putting people in their place*' that there is no place for people in their lives!

Need I say that a '*Judging Spirit*' does great harm to the Kingdom of God and to the Body of Christ?

Now the problem ... as I mentioned before ... is that the imperfections of the people around us are so easy to spot and thus becoming judgmental is an incredibly easy thing to do.

The second problem is that most '*judgmental people*' – most judgmental Citizens of the Kingdom - think that they are actually doing God a service by '*identifying*' and '*dealing with*' such '*problem people*'.

They would never call themselves '*judgmental*' ... they would say that they possess gifts of '*discernment*' and the courage to '*discipline*'.

Jesus would say ... They fail to '*see themselves*' or their circumstances correctly.

Notice the way that Jesus addressed the issue.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?"

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

(Matthew 7:1-5)

Several Observations arise from that passage ...

1. In the matter of '*Judging*', Jesus says that ...

"TURN ABOUT is FAIR PLAY".

"For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (vs. 2)

This I believe is both a ***practical*** and a ***theological*** observation.

*'Do you want people to 'cut you some slack' when you mess up?
Then be willing to 'cut them some' when they mess up.'*

*'Do you want God to 'grant you mercy' when you sin?
Then grant mercy yourself when those around you sin.'*

Jesus could have said ... '*King David surely understood this.*'

*If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared (revered).
(Psalm 130:3-4)*

Jesus is simply pointing out that Citizens of the Kingdom '*dig their own graves*' when they give into the temptation to '*judge*' their brothers.

He could have also said that they contribute to their own resurrection when they exercise forbearance and forgiveness.

Now here's another thing ...

2. In the matter of '*Judging*', Jesus says that ...

"JUDGING can turn us into HYPOCRITES"

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite ... (vs. 3-5)

You see, even when we do not '*see*' (or admit) our own imperfections, everyone around us does. Our '*sins*' are just as apparent to others as the sins of others are apparent to us.

Thus the rise of such phrases as *“Those in glass houses should not throw stones”* or *‘That’s the pot calling the kettle ‘black’*.

Jesus, no doubt, got a bit of a laugh by the word picture he drew in this comment ... Can you imagine someone with a 2x4 sticking out of his eye saying to someone else *“You seem to have a problem with your eye - let me help you with it”*?

Jesus says that the word for such a person is **‘Hypocrite’** ...

At least that is the way that he appears to those around him.

So if you don’t want to appear hypocritical, put **first things first** for ...

3. In the matter of *‘Judging’*, Jesus says that we ...

*“Frequently get the **CART** before the **HORSE**”*.

‘First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.’ (vs. 5)

Major surgery for you ... **Minor** surgery for your brother.

*‘Let me get and keep my own house in order –
let me stay in touch with my own vulnerabilities ...*

*Let me remember how much in need of God’s Gracious Forgiveness I am
before I seek to counsel or reprove or correct someone else.*

*And when I do seek to assist someone else let me do it in the
most unobtrusive way possible.*

May they always feel loved not judged!’

Final Thot ...

A judgmental attitude turns **COMPANIONS** into **COMPETITORS**.

Don’t **ALLOW** it to **HAPPEN!**

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Twenty-Six"

Sunday's Message focused upon KINGDOM CORRECTIVE #3 ...

"DO NOT 'KRINO' (Greek word) ONE ANOTHER!" - Matthew 7:1-5

Here was the expanded/paraphrased version:

*"Do not ... Judge/Condemn/Belittle/Put Down/Humiliate/Sue
Write Off/ Wash Your Hands Of ... One Another."*

What was the '*word-association*' that Pastor Mark suggested might help us remember what the Greek word '*krino*' means? Do not RHINO one another!

What does that '*word-association*' suggest to you?

What did you think of the '*Sad Reality*' that Pastor Mark said makes '*krinoing*' such an easy thing to do? Is this an issue for Christians as well as non-Christians?

People are not PERFECT and IMPERFECTION in those around us is not difficult to SPOT. It's incredibly easy to become JUDGMENTAL.

Respond to these Self-Evaluation Questions shared Sunday:

"Have you noticed that people are not perfect and that imperfection in those around you is easy to spot? **Have you** found it easy to become '*judgmental*' – to see them as inferior? **Have you** found yourself (at certain times and under certain circumstances) wanting to '*reveal the shortcomings*' of those around you and even '*put them in their place*'?"

Why did Jesus say that such '*krinoing*' is not to be done?

"It creates a TOXIC environment." (vs.2)

"It makes us appear HYPOCRITICAL." (vs. 3-5a)

"It gets things completely BACKWARD." (vs. 5)

What did you think of this suggested '*Perspective*' shared Sunday?

'Let me get and keep my own house in order – let me stay in touch with my own vulnerabilities – Let me remember how much in need of God's Gracious Forgiveness I am before I seek to counsel or reprove or correct someone else and when I do seek to assist someone else let me do it in the most unobtrusive way possible. May they always feel loved not judged!'

Point To Ponder ...

How do we CORRECT without JUDGING?

“DO NOT WASTE GRACE!”

(Kingdom Corrective #4)

(Matthew 7:6)

Intro ... Today we come to the fourth and final ‘*Kingdom Corrective*’ found in the Sermon on the Mount. It’s only a single sentence long; it’s by far the most cryptic of the four.

It’s a statement that has found its way into our literary and political and social culture; and it’s a statement that forever destroys the notion that Jesus was saying ‘*Do not make judgments about people*’ when he said (in the Kingdom Corrective we looked at just last week) ‘*Do not judge lest you be judged*’ ...

Here’s how it reads ...

TODAY’S KEY SCRIPTURE ...

“Do not give **DOGS** what is **SACRED**; do not throw your **PEARLS** to **PIGS** (for) they may **TRAMPLE** them under and **TEAR** you up!”

(Matthew 7:6)

That’s not only cryptic, that’s graphic ... ‘Dogs’ – ‘Pigs’ (swine) ... Sounds pretty harsh statement. Jesus would say that it’s merely a ‘*Realistic*’ one and an ‘*Attention-Getting*’ one.

Like the ‘*Beam in the Eye*’ image Jesus now pictures a priest taking the meat from the altar of God and throwing it to the half-wild dogs of the street rather than saving it for the temple workers (its proper recipients).

‘*Don’t give dogs what is sacred*’ – such a thing would be unthinkable – it would be an insult to the God to whom that sacrifice had been offered!

Then he pictures a person walking into a pig pen and tossing a couple of handfuls of precious pearls on the ground before them just as their owner might scatter a couple of handfuls of grain.

“*Don’t throw your pearls to pigs*” – such a thing would be incredibly wasteful – to say nothing of being incredibly foolish and dangerous!

Who would do such a thing?

Who would be so unthinking and so callous; who would be so foolish and foolhardy?

Jesus implies (as he has in his three previous 'Kingdom Correctives') that any one of us might be guilty of doing just such a thing ... that is, that we might be engaging in behaviors that these graphic statements are intended to highlight.

Well, what might those behavior be since none of us (I'm sure) have ever '*taken meat from the altar of God and thrown it to the dogs of the street*' and I'm also sure that none of us has ever walked into a muddy pig pen of ravenous pigs and scattered a few handfuls of pearls on the ground in front of them.

What lies behind these 'graphic word pictures'?
What is Jesus actually saying to us?

Here's the way that I would express it ...

TODAY'S KINGDOM CORRECTIVE ...

"Do not **WASTE** Grace ...
Don't put yourself in **HARM'S WAY!**"

Have you ever stopped to think what a precious thing the Grace of God (the Truth of God) really is?

The Grace of God is all that stands between a sinful man and an eternity in Hell ...
The Scripture says (Lamentations 3:22) '*It is of the Lord's mercies (His Gracious actions) that we are not consumed*'.

The Grace of God (Paul wrote in Titus 2:11) is that which '*brings salvation to all men*' ... that is, to all men who will receive it.

But what about men who will not '*receive it*' ... What about men who 'mock it' and who resist those who declare it ... What about men who find pleasure in seeking to undermine it and lead others from it?

Jesus anticipated just such a situation ...

Consider the instructions he gave his disciples in our

'Parallel Passage of the morning' ...

Matthew 10:14-17

"If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues."

Jesus understood well the kind of world into which and the kind of people among whom he was sending his disciples with his wonderful, liberating message and actions of grace.

It's interesting that he did not say that '*If they refuse to hear you, consider how you can say it differently so that they might be more receptive*'.

He didn't say '*keep trying until they get it*' ...

He didn't say '*try using language that they find more appealing*' ...

He didn't say '*tone it down and once you find out the parts of the message that they object to, just leave those parts out*'.

He basically said ...

"Declare the Word – Deliver the message of God's Gracious Provision for Man's Sin and Guilt – And if they refuse to receive what you have to say, then move on ... Shake the dust off your feet as a testimony that you are done talking and leave them to their own devices.'

Now lest we think that this counsel was only intended for the disciples of Jesus' day during that particular excursion through the towns and villages of Galilee, note secondly this morning ...

An Apostolic Example ... Acts 13:49-51

"The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium."

This situation occurred during the very first Missionary Journey of the Apostle Paul ... He and Barnabus had been chosen by the Holy Spirit and sent out by the Church in Antioch on this incredible task ... The task of taking the Gospel – the Good News of the incredible Gracious Actions of God expressed in the Birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

They had had considerable success ... The Word of the Lord had 'spread through the whole region' – the local synagogue was packed with people – the message was received by many but then the backlash came ...

But the Jews (that is, those Jews who refused to believe the message for many Jews did receive it) incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

And so Paul and Barnabus did the very thing that Jesus had told his disciples to do many years earlier ...

"They shook the dust off their feet in protest against them"

and moved on ...

Now that might strike some people as 'odd' ... It might seem to some that Paul and Barnabus basically just 'turned tail and ran' ... Doesn't seem very courageous – Doesn't seem very committed.

Shouldn't they have stayed and confronted those who were opposing them? Shouldn't they have gone 'toe to toe' with them and kept after them until they yielded their hearts to Christ?

Doesn't it seem to undermine the very concept of evangelism to just '*give up*' on those who choose to '*resist the gospel*'?

Maybe you know some people like that ... Maybe you have someone like that in your own family or circle of acquaintances ...

Does there ever come a time when you should just quit talking to them about Christ – when you should just '*let them be*'?

And if so, why?

Why would Jesus ever counsel us to take such a position toward those who are openly and perhaps aggressively '*resistant to the Gospel message*'?

There's no way that you can read these passages in the Scripture without having such a question come to mind.

Ask we search for an answer, here are several ***Things To Consider*** ...

* Focusing On The Resistant Can ***DIVERT*** Us From The ***RECEPTIVE***
(We cannot allow them to ***MISS OUT.***)

There is no truth any more clear in the Scripture than that all men are not going to be saved – men are lost in sin, men have a fallen nature and a self-focused heart.

It takes the intervention of God's Spirit in conjunction with God's Truth if a human being is to 'embrace God's Truth' and be spiritually 'converted'. Man's natural nature resists that very process.

Some resist it openly and aggressively – Some simply resist it quietly and yet stubbornly.

Men tend to '*lock themselves into the positions that they adopt*' – particularly the position they adopt relative to Jesus Christ.

Jesus would say that we can come to the place where we are just '*wasting our breath*' when we continue to seek to '*convince them of their need of salvation*'.

And more than simply '*wasting our breath*', we are '*diverting our breath*' from those around us in whom the Spirit of God *is* working who have not yet '*locked themselves into some position of resistance to the things of God*' – from those who are, in fact, **RECEPTIVE**. We cannot allow them to **MISS OUT**.

Here's another thing to consider ...

* Focusing On The Resistant Can **DISCOURAGE** The **FAITHFUL**
(We cannot allow them to **LOSE HEART**.)

Is there anything more discouraging than to see someone persistently and successfully '*Resist the Gospel*'?

Watching someone counter every attempt to '*convert them*' – every careful presentation that is made to them can cause even a faithful believer to lose heart – to maybe even wonder if the 'Gospel still works' - to wonder if the 'truths' we proclaim are still 'true'.

"Banging our heads against the wall" of someone's firm and unyielding resistance to Christ can do more than just give us a headache – it can cause others to become discouraged in the effort.

We cannot allow them to lose heart – It's important that they realize that we can't 'play God and just 'make people believe'.

People's resistance doesn't show any '*failure*' on our part; it simply shows the condition of the resister's heart and once that 'heart condition' is known, we need to cease and desist. We have done all that we can do and all that our Savior calls us to do.

Here's (to me) the most important of these three '***Things to Consider***':

* Focusing On The Resistant Can **DIMINISH** The **GOSPEL**
(We cannot allow it to be **OPENLY SCORNE**.)

Once we know that a person is a '*confirmed resister*' of the things of Christ, our continued focus upon them – our continued attempt to witness to them – can actually provide them with a platform to '*attack the Gospel*' ... to say things that diminish Christ or that unfairly and unbiblically represent those who confess Christ.

In so doing we allow them to '*scorn the Gospel*' and the Savior of whom it speaks.

This is like allowing '*pigs to trample those precious pearls underfoot*' ...

Frequently in this kind of encounter we actually set ourselves up for painful and maybe permanently damaging personal attacks.

Far more than just '*wasting our breath*' we are exposing ourselves and our Savior and God's Life-Giving Gospel to perhaps public ridicule.

If the '*resister*' is smarter than us – or more skillful with words than us – or simply more '*practiced in debate or attack*' than us, the Gospel can be diminished in the eyes of others because of our attempt to '*win the resister over*'.

In all these scenarios, Jesus would have us '*make intelligent assessments of the people with whom you are dealing*' – Recognize the truly resistant and avoid them – the world is full of them.

They have made their bed – let them lie in it; they have established their position ... let them maintain it.

And do so because you understand and heed the admonition expressed in today's ***final thot*** ...

Final Thot ...

Guard **GRACE** and **TRUTH** like the ***TREASURES*** they are!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Twenty-Seven"

Sunday's Message focused upon KINGDOM CORRECTIVE #4 ...

"DO NOT WASTE GRACE ... Don't Put Yourself In HARM'S WAY!"

It grew out of Sunday's **Key Scripture** ... Matthew 7:6

"Do not give DOGS what is SACRED; do not throw your PEARLS to PIGS (for) they may TRAMPLE them under and TEAR you up!"

What do those graphic 'word pictures' communicate to you?

The **Parallel Scriptures** were Matthew 10:14-17 and Acts 13:49-51 (Read) ...

In each of these Scriptures, the gospel was preached until RESISTANCE appeared. Once official RESISTANCE appeared the disciples 'SHOOK the dust off their FEET' and disappeared just as Jesus TOLD them to do.

Would you be comfortable receiving that counsel? Could you see yourself just '*packing up and leaving*' (closing your mouth and not saying another word) once the people you are talking to make it clear that they have no interest in surrendering their lives to Christ?

Pastor Mark pointed out that though Jesus didn't give any '*reasons*' for the directions he gave there were some '*things to consider*' in this matter ...

- * Focusing on the Resistant can DIVERT us from the Receptive
- * Focusing on the Resistant can DISCOURAGE the Faithful
- * Focusing on the Resistant can DIMINISH the Gospel

Which one of these '*considerations*' gives you the most to '*think about*'?

Here's another '*parallel passage*' (1 Corinthians 7:15-16) Do you see the similarity? What's the significance of Paul saying "*God has called us to live in peace*"?

Did you '*catch the bottom line*' (vs.16)? There's no guarantee that an unsaved person is going to respond to our efforts to save them, is there? Our job is to make sure they know the truths to which we have committed ourselves. What they '*do*' with that knowledge is their responsibility ...

Point To Ponder ...

Sometimes '**STANDING** Down' is the best way to 'STAY in the Game'.

“RELY UPON YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER”

(Key To Triumphant Kingdom Living #1)

(Matthew 7:7-11)

Intro ... This week we return to our examination of the *“Sermon on the Mount”* – a series of messages we’ve entitled simply ***“Kingdom Living”*** – a daily manual for those who by the Gracious Work of God have been born into His Kingdom and who live out their days on this earth as *“Citizens of That Glorious Kingdom”*.

It’s been a profound study – we have sat at the feet of Jesus and heard him discourse freely and I would say delightfully upon many different aspects of *“Life in the Kingdom”* – the very life that he was planning to live in the presence of his listeners over the next three plus years.

We said that if Jesus had been a college professor, then the Sermon on the Mount could have served as his syllabus – his summary of the course we could call *“Kingdom Living 101”*.

Today we come to the final section of that syllabus – the section I’ve entitled ***‘Keys To Triumphant Kingdom Living’*** ... there are four of them.

Those four ***‘Keys’*** will be followed by Jesus’ tremendously graphic *‘Concluding Lecture’* on the subject ... You won’t want to take any ‘cuts’ during these final five weeks!

Keep in mind that these ***‘Keys’*** must be considered in context ... they come at the conclusion of all that has preceded them and they assume our awareness of all that has preceded them.

They are not *‘stand-alone’* statements ... they are linked to and arise from all that has been previously addressed.

But they are nevertheless ***‘KEY’*** ... they are the things Jesus saved for last.

They are the ***‘KEYS’*** that unlock the life that God would have each of his children live – they are essential and therefore crucial to hear and heed.

The first of them is tucked away in ...

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ...

*"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.*

*For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds;
and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a
stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?*

*If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good
gifts to your children, how much more will your Father
in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*

(Matthew 7:7-11)

Did you find it? Here's how I would express it ...

TODAY'S 'KEY' TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING ...

If you would enjoy Triumphant Kingdom Living, then ...

'RELY Upon Your Heavenly Father For EVERYTHING'.

SEE Him as your SOURCE!

Anyone who was still awake in that crowd on that warm, sunny afternoon on the hillside, certainly would have been looking for this '**KEY**' ... the syllabus has been daunting – the topics have been challenging – the expectation that genuine '*Kingdom Living*' will emerge from these '*would-be*' Citizens of the Kingdom is certainly a bit unnerving.

But the conclusion cannot fail to be drawn – Jesus has just outlined the life that he expects his followers to live – He will '*model*' it but he then definitely expects them to reproduce it in their corner of the Kingdom.

The Apostle Peter would later write ...

*"Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example,
that you should follow in his steps".*

(1 Peter 2:21)

Jesus himself anticipated that his followers would be more than just '*hearers*' of his words – they would be '*doers*' as well.

In John 15:16 we hear him say:

"I chose you that you should go and bear fruit – fruit that will last."

"Fruit" ... "Spiritual Growth" ... "Maturity in Christ" ... "Growth in Grace" ...

Whatever terms we use, it's clear that Jesus expects that '**Triumphant Kingdom Living**' will characterize all those who belong to Him – all who see themselves as '*Citizens of the Kingdom*' – thus the extended '**Sermon**'.

And the truth is ... All true '*Citizens of the Kingdom*' share that same expectation. They want to function in this world as the "**Salt**" and the "**Light**" that they know they are. They want to get through their earthly sojourn not just '*somehow*' but '*triumphantly*'.

So by the time the afternoon sun was setting and this vision of a totally different kind of life had taken possession of their mind, they were more than ready to hear these final words from Jesus – they were more than ready to ask "*How can this happen – How can this radically different kind of life (this Triumphant Kingdom Living) be pulled off?*"

Time for **Key To Triumphant Kingdom Living #1** ...

'RELY Upon Your Heavenly Father For **EVERYTHING**.
SEE Him as your **SOURCE!**

Obviously, this kind of life doesn't just happen – this kind of life isn't the '*norm*' ... this kind of life doesn't just naturally arise from the fallen human heart ... And even '*spiritual birth*' doesn't guarantee its arrival.

Assistance is needed – Spiritual Resources will be required – Desire and Determination will need to be factored in and Jesus says that '**Key**' to all of that happening is our **Reliance** upon the Almighty God Himself!

See Your Heavenly Father as your Source – He outperforms the best of earthly fathers in His Desire to fully provide for His Children. His Ear is more attentive; His Heart is more committed; His Arms are more open; His Hands more filled with good things than any earthly father's ever could be.

So **Ask** – **Seek** – **Knock** ... Jesus says.
Actively involve Your Heavenly Father in the process.

So are "**Asking**" and "**Seeking**" and "**Knocking**" just three different ways of saying "*see Him as your source*" or can we draw some distinctions in light of the message Jesus has just shared?

Well, try this interpretation on for size ...

First of all, See Him as your Source for ...

Things you need to **HAVE** for Triumphant Kingdom Living ...

*'The Kingdom **HEART**' - "Ask Him and you shall receive.'*

Remember how Jesus began this lengthy '*Sermon on the Mount*'?

He began by identifying the kind of '**Heart**' that would be required to '*triumphantly live*' this Kingdom Life. Those heart descriptions have become known as '**The Beatitudes**'.

You cannot even come close to '*Living the Kingdom Life*' without them.

We ended our nine-week examination of those "*Heart Attitudes*" by saying that we need to "***Beatitude Ourselves***" every single day. One or more of those 'attitudes' will be critical for successful functioning each and every day of our lives!

So ... Ask the Father to grant you a "***Kingdom Heart***" ...

He is the Heart Specialist in the Family. Long years ago – long before our medical profession had conceived of and perfected '*heart transplant*' procedures – our Heavenly Father's office was open for business.

He understood that fallen mankind suffered from a '*heart problem*' of major proportions.

Man's heart has been diagnosed variously in the Scripture as being '*hardened*' or '*corrupted*' or '*sinful*' or '*willful*' or '*turned away*' – Man suffers from spiritual '*Heart Failure*' and the condition is terminal.

No corrective is possible – only the most extreme measure – complete replacement – will suffice. And so God shared His Intentions (long years ago) with his Prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 11:19-20) ...

*"I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.
Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
They will be my people, and I will be their God."*

That '*Heart Transplant*' takes place at Spiritual Birth – If you have been '*Born-Again*' through faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ on Calvary, then you possess such a heart.

This is the '*heart*' – the '*Kingdom Heart*' – the '*Energized, Focused and Committed Heart*' that Jesus was describing in the Beatitudes ...

"Blessed are those who possess such a heart"
we could paraphrase.

Blessed indeed are they!

Such a heart pumps the very '**Life-Blood of the Kingdom**' through their veins!

Keep his description of that Kingdom Heart ever before you and **ask** God regularly (once you have received it) to keep it strong and to keep it providing you with all the spiritual vitality you need to *‘Triumphantly Live this Kingdom Life’*.

Now you might think that that would be all that might be needed – that all our needs would be included in just getting and keeping our heart right. Just **Ask God** – Just see your Heavenly Father as your source for **‘Heart Health’**.

But there’s more in this incredibly insightful and thought-provoking **“KEY”** that Jesus gave.

See Him (your Heavenly Father) **as your Source for ...**

Things you need to **UNDERSTAND** for Triumphant Kingdom Living ...
*‘The Kingdom **MIND**’ - “Seek for it and you shall find it”*

One of the sad facts of life – one that we learn soon after we begin our formal education – one that frustrates many teachers – is that understanding requires effort.

Understanding, insight, the ability to *‘put things together in a way that they make sense and provide true direction’* does not just drop from the sky and transform our minds.

‘Meditate’ – ‘Ponder’ – ‘Reckon’ – ‘Consider’ ... these are words the Bible uses to notify us of our role in coming to an *‘Understanding of Spiritual Truth’*. The new heart yearns for the righteous life that God desires – the new heart is sensitized to the heart of God but the mind is where those yearnings take on substance and where that sensitivity finds its focus.

Seek – engage yourself in the quest for such understanding – **and you will find it**. That’s what Jesus promised.

And know this ... such understanding of life in the Kingdom is absolutely crucial if we are ever going to *‘Live triumphantly in the Kingdom’*.

So break out your **‘Kingdom Syllabus’** regularly ...

Review and **reflect** upon all that Jesus covered on the hillside that afternoon and as a result you will:

Understand your Identity as Salt and Light;

Understand Jesus’ Intention to Fulfill not Abolish God’s Law;

Understand Jesus' careful Clarifications of those Six Ancient Teachings;
(Regarding murder, adultery, divorce, oath-taking, revenge and treatment of enemies)

Understand the meaning and parameters of true "*Righteous Living*";
(Living with a sensitivity to Those who are around me and to Him
Who is above me and to That which is within me)

Understand the Four Kingdom Correctives that Jesus gave;
(Don't treasure earthly stuff; don't worry about your earthly life; don't condemn those
around you who fall short; and don't waste the grace and truth God has given you.)

Understanding these things is not only highly desirable – it's absolutely possible ...
Jesus says that those who **Seek** for such understanding will **Find** it for it's
God's Will that they do.

So ... **Ask** for a strong and vigorous Kingdom Heart ... **Seek** for an informed and engaged
Kingdom Mind ... now just one thing remains ...

As a Citizen of the Kingdom with a **Kingdom Heart** beating in your chest and a
Kingdom Mind directing your thoughts, turn your attention once more
toward your Heavenly Father and ...

See Him as your Source for ...

Things you need to **EXPERIENCE** for Triumphant Kingdom Living ...
'The Kingdom **DYNAMIC**' - "*Knock on the door and it shall be opened*"

Knock boldly on the door and request entrance into the experience of '*Full-Blown
Triumphant Kingdom Living*'. Your Heavenly Father desires for you to '*enjoy it*';
He sent His Son to earth the '*Identify it*' and '*Model it*'.

All that you need now is the '*Energy*' (the inner dynamic) to pull it off and that energy
also come from God – specifically God the Holy Spirit who inhabits every '*born-again*'
Child of God.

Knock on the door – request the Spirit's energizing power in your life each and every day
and you will feel the **Pulse** of your Kingdom Heart quicken and the **Clarity** of your Kingdom
mind sharpen and your **Experience** of true Kingdom Living deepen.

Final Thot ...

Triumphant Kingdom Living is a **GIFT** from the **FATHER'S HAND**.
ASK – SEEK – KNOCK and it shall be **YOUR'S!**

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

-

"Lesson Twenty-Eight"

Sunday's Message focused upon KEY TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING #1...

"RELY upon your Heavenly Father for EVERYTHING - See Him as your SOURCE!"

What goes through your mind when you read that statement?

Choose one of the key words and share what it communicates to you ...

Pastor Mark drew that '**Key**' from this passage (Matthew 7:7-11) ...

Read it and seek to formulate one good solid '*observation*' based upon it ...

"ASK and it will be given to you; SEEK and you will find; KNOCK and the door will be opened to you. For EVERYONE who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you, if his SON asks for bread, will give him a stone?
Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

If you, then, though you are EVIL, know how to give GOOD gifts to your children, how much MORE will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ASK him!"

Pastor Mark pointed out Sunday that this passage (like every passage in the Scripture) needs to be '*taken in context*'. What does that mean?

What is the relevant '*context*' of this passage?

Why can't we just '*pull it out*' and '*stick it on our refrigerator*' and '*run with it*'?

What did you think of the way Pastor Mark '*interpreted*' this '*directive of Jesus*' in light of the '*context*' of the entire Sermon on the Mount?

ASK the Father for that absolutely necessary KINGDOM HEART;
SEEK to gain possession of a transformational KINGDOM MIND;
KNOCK to gain ENTRANCE into the KINGDOM DYNAMIC.

Point To Ponder ...

If we could '*boil our prayer requests down*' to just ONE THING, what do you think God would WANT that one REQUEST to be? (Check out Luke 11:13)

“RELATE TO ALL PEOPLE APPROPRIATELY”

(Key To Triumphant Kingdom Living #2)

(Matthew 7:12)

Intro ... ‘*Triumphant Kingdom Living*’ – that’s what our focus is upon as we come to the end of our examination of the Sermon on the Mount.

The ‘*Abundant Life*’ Jesus called it in John 10:10; the ‘*Transformed Life*’ Paul designated it in Romans 12:2; the ‘*Spirit-Filled Life*’ would be its designation in Ephesians 5:18 ...

The bottom line is that whatever it’s called it is the life that God desires all His Born-Again Sons and Daughters to live. It’s the very life that Jesus Himself would live out during his earthly sojourn and it’s the life that is described in greater detail in the Sermon on the Mount than anywhere else in Scripture.

The \$64,000 Question is simply this ... How can it be accomplished?

How can we ‘*earth-born*’, ‘*earth-bound*’, ‘*earth-battered*’ Followers of Christ pull off such a radically different, spiritually defined life? How can the Expectations of Christ clearly laid out in the Sermon on the Mount be fulfilled in our daily lives?

Well ... as we saw last week, Jesus concluded his long afternoon discourse by sharing what I have called: ‘**Four Keys To Triumphant Kingdom Living**’ ... four critically important actions that will guarantee our Success.

Last week we looked at the first ...

Key To Triumphant Kingdom Living #1 ...

*“Rely Upon Your Heavenly Father for Everything.
See Him As Your Source!”*

We covered a lot of territory in that message:

Ask your Heavenly Father for that critically necessary Kingdom Heart;
Seek from your Heavenly Father the transformational Kingdom Mind; and
Knock (as it were) on your Heavenly Father’s front door and request entrance into (what we called) the Kingdom Dynamic.

“Rely upon your Heavenly Father for everything – See Him as your Source!”
That is the first and most important ‘**Key**’ to Triumphant Kingdom Living.

The **Second** of these four Critically Important '**Keys**' is found in ...

TODAY'S KEY SCRIPTURE ...

*"So in **EVERYTHING**, do to **OTHERS**
WHAT you would **HAVE** them do to **YOU**."
(Matthew 7:12)*

When you think about it, this is simply another way of expressing the truth of what Jesus called 'The Second Commandment' ... *"Love your neighbor as yourself"*.

But whereas the Second Commandment gives us (in some ways) a Concept to Consider ... this 'Key' gives us a more specific 'Behavior to Follow' – a behavior that is absolutely '**KEY**' to 'Kingdom Success'.

Here's how I would express ...

TODAY'S 'KEY' TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING ...

If you would enjoy triumphant Kingdom Living, then
'RELATE to all **PEOPLE** as you would have them **RELATE** to you."

Jesus went on to say that this behavior '*sums up all the law and the prophets*' ...

He would say (later in his ministry) the same thing about the Second Commandment when it is added to the First which is *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."*

So ... in a nutshell – all the thousands of words in the Scripture about human Relationships - all the laws and regulations about how God's People should treat one another – all the expectations for interpersonal relationship even laid out in the Sermon on the Mount itself can be boiled down to this single simple key understanding ...

"Relate to all People as you would have them relate to you".

So how would you have people relate to you? What would cause you to say about a person ... *'He or she treated me really well and I hope that I will do the same if I am ever put in a similar situation'*?

Naturally this can become a somewhat '*subjective*' discussion ...

But here are four guidelines for what I have called 'Spiritually Beneficial Reciprocal Relationships' that I found scattered through the Scripture.

Four Guidelines for how I myself would wish to be treated by others and then, of course, they become guidelines for how I, myself, must treat others if I am to (in fact) experience any degree of Success in Kingdom Living.

Guidelines for Spiritually Beneficial Reciprocal Relationships ...

(Guidelines I would want people to follow as they relate to me.)

*** RELATE SINCERELY ... 'No PRETENSE or MANIPULATION'**

(In an absolutely trustworthy manner – no hidden agenda)

What an essential starting point for a beneficial reciprocal relationship.

Relate sincerely ... honestly ... with no '*falsehood*' or desire to '*take advantage*' or to simply '*use a person*' for your own personal benefit.

The Apostle Paul felt it necessary to point out to the church in Corinth that ...

'We have exploited no one.' - 2 Corinthians 7:2

It's a terrible thing to feel '*exploited*' or '*used*' or '*manipulated*' or '*handled*' ...
As followers of Christ we must never relate to people in any of those ways.

Be open and honest. If you have a concern about something, lay it out clearly and allow the person you are talking to the opportunity to think about and respond to what you have said.

It's never permissible to bully or badger – mislead or manipulate.

Though a person might come to me with something I don't want to hear, I would certainly desire that they come to me sincerely – in an absolutely trustworthy manner – with me and my good as their agenda.

And, of course, if they approach me (and if I then approach others) in that way then this ***second guideline*** will almost automatically be followed.

*** RELATE SENSITIVELY ... 'With Genuine EMPATHY and COMPASSION'**

(*"Speaking the truth in love"* – Ephesians 4:15)

In writing to the Church in Ephesus, Paul identified "*Speaking the truth in love*" as fundamental to the process of the church '*growing up into Him (Christ) who is the Head*'.

Paul, as a former aggressive, ruthless, arrogant Pharisee surely knew that truth spoken harshly can be more harmful to the kingdom (and to a personal relationship) than even truth ignored.

Nothing can close the mind, blind the eyes and deafen the ears quicker than words harshly and insensitively spoken.

But it's not easy to bring '*bad news*' in a '*loving way*' ...

However, if you ever have to do it to me, give it your best shot and I will seek to give it my best shot if the tables are ever turned for the manner in which we say a thing is frequently more important than the thing that we are actually saying.

Now a couple more things that seem very important to me in this matter of '*relating to others as we would want others to relate to us*' ...

*** RELATE SCRIPTURALLY ... 'CONSISTENT with clear BIBLICAL Teaching'**
(*'How do you read it?' – Luke 10:26*) ... '*What does the Bible say?*'

This little verse fragment comes from this more extended passage ...

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.
"Teacher," he asked, "*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*"

"*What is written in the Law?*" he (Jesus) replied. "*How do you read it?*"

He answered: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*"; and, *'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*"

"*You have answered correctly,*" Jesus replied. "*Do this and you will live.*"

If someone is coming to '*correct me*' or '*inform me*' or in any way to '*improve me*', I would hope that in addition to coming 'sincerely' and 'sensitively', that they come 'scripturally.'

That there is a Biblical basis for what they are saying ... that what they are saying is '*consistent with Biblical Teaching*' and not just some notion of their own.

Obviously, the more challenging the situation the more '*Biblically Supported*' their words need to be.

That, of course, is the approach that God would have me take when I relate to those around me ...

What I say and how I say it should be consistent with sound doctrine – with clear Biblical Teaching.

Now just one final guideline ...

* **RELATE SUFFICIENTLY** ... ‘Until the **TASK** is **ACCOMPLISHED**’
(‘Barnabas took Mark’ ... ‘Bring Mark, he is useful’)
(Acts 15:39; 2 Timothy 4:11)

Paul and Barnabus took John Mark along with them on their first missionary journey (Acts 13) and he quit on them in the middle of the mission and went home.

When it came time for a second journey, Barnabas wanted to involve Mark once again – Paul refused because of Mark’s behavior on the first journey.

Barnabas, however, took Mark under his wing and kept relating to him until Mark grew into a mature, productive disciple.

Barnabas not only related to Mark ‘*sincerely*’ and ‘*sensitively*’ and ‘*scripturally*’ but ‘*sufficiently*’ as well ...

He stuck with him ‘*until the task was accomplished*’ and Mark was a finished product.

Near the end of his life, Paul himself would write to Timothy ...

‘When you come to see me, Bring Mark –
He is (has become) *useful*.’

Relationships ... They are a critical component of Kingdom Living, aren’t they?

One ‘**Key to Triumphant Kingdom Living**’ is ‘*Relating to all People the way
That we would have them Relate to us*’ and if we do so, people will ‘*see us*’
Living the ‘***Kingdom Life***’ right in front of their eyes!

Nothing could be more strategic for as our ‘***Final Thot***’ puts it ...

Final Thot ...

DEMONSTRATING the Kingdom is the First Step
Toward **EXPANDING** the Kingdom!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Twenty-Nine"

Sunday's Message focused upon KEY TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING #2...

"RELATE to other PEOPLE as you would want them to RELATE to you."

Finish this statement with your top three choices:

"I want people to relate to me _____ and _____
and _____."

Why these three? What makes them desirable to you?

Do people very often 'relate to you' in these ways?

Do these describe the way that you seek (desire) to relate to the people you encounter?

How challenging is it to relate in these ways?

What do you think of the Four that Pastor Mark presented in Sunday's message?

Relate SINCERELY – No Pretense or Manipulation

Relate SENSITIVELY – With Genuine Empathy and Compassion

Relate SCRIPTURALLY – Consistent with clear Biblical Teaching

Relate SUFFICIENTLY – Until the Task is Accomplished

Which one is toughest for you to remember to do?

Which one do you most appreciate having others do in relating to you?

Point To Ponder ...

Does this apply to our relationship with JESUS ... that we should 'RELATE to Him'
in the very way that we would want Him to "RELATE to Us"?

What do you think?

“RESTRICT YOURSELF!”

(Key To Triumphant Kingdom Living #3)
(Matthew 7:13-14)

Intro ... This morning we come to the third of the four “**Keys To Triumphant Kingdom Living**” with which Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount ... Four ‘**Keys**’ that literally ‘*unlock the door*’ to the Kingdom Life itself ... Four ‘**Keys**’ that will enable us to make the ‘*Sermon on the Mount*’ more than just an impressive ‘*pipe dream*’.

Two weeks ago we examined the **FIRST** ...

If you would enjoy Triumphant Kingdom Living, then
‘**RELY** Upon Your Heavenly Father For Everything;
See Him As Your **SOURCE!**’

Last week we examined the **SECOND** ...

If you would enjoy Triumphant Kingdom Living, then
‘**RELATE** to all people the way that you would have them **RELATE** to you’.

Today we come to the **THIRD** ...

KEY TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING #3 ...

If you would enjoy Triumphant Kingdom Living, then
“**RESTRICT** yourself to the Kingdom **PATH!**”

Here’s how Jesus put it ...

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life and only a few find it.”

(Matthew 7:13-14)

Put another way ... ‘The Kingdom Life is a most restrictive life’.

There is only **ONE** that we can rely upon – our Heavenly Father; there is only **ONE** way of relating to people – the way we want others to relate to us. And there is only **ONE** path that leads to our destination – the narrow, uncommon, not easily found and never to be altered **Kingdom Path**.

And Jesus is saying here that no one will ever experience Triumphant Kingdom Living unless he/she is willing to ‘**Restrict**’ himself/herself to that most narrow Path.

Now that realization leads me to share with you yet ...

ANOTHER SAD FACT OF LIFE ...
'RESTRICTING ourselves is one of the HARDEST
things we are ever CALLED upon to do'.

Our **FLESH REBELS** against such restriction ...
(*"If it feels good, seems good, then just do it – Don't deprive yourself!"*)

The **WORLD CHALLENGES** any such restriction ...
(*"Grab for all the gusto that you can – never simply 'settle'"*)

The **DEVIL** directly **ATTACKS** restriction wherever it is found!
(*"I will be like the Most High – You shall be like Gods."*)

And so we come to what I would call ...

TODAY'S BOTTOM LINE TRUTH ...
The **CALL** to a **RESTRICTED LIFE** is not easily **HEEDED**.
Jesus said in fact, that only a **FEW** actually do.

CURRENT EXAMPLE ...
(*Hilarious and Horrifying at the same time*)

Last October (thanks to my younger pastor brother, Wade) my wife Linda and I became aware of something called "**The Five Bite Diet**". It's a diet that can cause quick and significant weight loss ... 5-7 pounds the first week and as much as 20-30 pounds in the first month. It's a diet that does not plateau but will steadily continue to '*work its magic*' until the person reaches their desired weight.

All a person has to do is '*submit him/herself to it*'. Just '*restrict yourself*' in the way that the plan directs.

This '**Five-Bite Diet**' provides a person with what could be called a "**Virtual Stomach By-Pass**" for it '*reprograms a person's hunger stat*' to be satisfied with the same amount of food that a person would eat who had actually ***had*** a '*By-Pass or Lap- Band Procedure*' – about five bites at a time.

Now it only takes three days to do that. Three days with a bit of hunger and then day after day of satisfying eating and weight-losing. Sounds great, doesn't it?

All the benefits of Lap-Band Surgery without the \$40,000 price tag or the potentially harmful side-effects of the procedure itself.

This Diet-Concept was developed and demonstrated by Dr. Alwin Lewis and has been used with varying degrees of success in his Medical Practice down in Burbank where my brother pastors.

Some patients have lost well over 100 pounds and successfully kept it off. Others have struggled to lose anything.

And why have they struggled?

They have struggled **because it is an extremely restrictive eating plan.**

Until you reach your goal weight, you must eat nothing more than a cup of black coffee for breakfast and then five bites of food twice a day. For fun and actually for ease of management, Dr. Lewis says that your two '*five-bite meals*' can even be TWO SNICKERS BARS! (Now you know, nothing '*satisfies*' like a Snickers!)

After you reach your goal weight, you simply increase the number of '*Five-Bite Meals*' you include in your day but you never increase the size of those meals.

You remain forever '*restricted*' to that '*portion size*'. It's actually the strategy that the American Medical Association has recommended for diabetics for years ... numerous '*small meals*' throughout the day.

Linda and I have been following this eating plan for the past 6 months.

Now here's my point in telling you all this ...

Linda has been following (and occasionally commenting) on a Facebook site dedicated to those who would identify themselves as '*Five-Bite Dieters*' ...

These are people who would say that they have '*bought into the concept*' and are seeking to '*experience the benefit*' – significant and permanent weight loss.

Let me read to you a series of comments that these '*adherents*' have posted and you tell me if it sounds like '*restriction to a set of standards*' comes very easy to us fallen human beings ...

*Just ate dinner, had a small garden salad and cup of potato soup, 5 peanut M and Ms.
I'm not going to (actually) count bites but will still eat just twice a day.*

*I had some cream in my coffee for breakfast.
Lunch was 8 bites lasagna. Just now had coffee with cream again.*

*Just had dinner....6 bites of a toasted ham and mozzarella cheese sandwich...
I feel stuffed.*

I had 4 bites of grits for breakfast, 7 bites of cereal and a couple cups of coffee.

*I skipped breakfast this morning and had a snickers for lunch. But I messed up and ate
with the rest of my family even though I wasn't hungry. And it wasn't five bites.*

I am starting Monday but I will be doing 10 bites for each meal instead of five.

If I feel I need to go to 10 bites I will too.

*I started off with my 5 bites for breakfast. Then I met the hubby for lunch.
I ate half an appetizer plate, 3/4 of a big burger, & 2 cookies.*

*Breakfast: 5 bites of grits ... Lunch: 5 bites of a subway (hubby ate the rest)... then I made the
hubby some homemade Mexican salsa and pico that I had to taste test. 4 bites of taste testing...
then the Hubby brought me some veggie sushi rolls.. 2 bites there.*

*I had 5 bites of egg salad sandwich for lunch. I had 20 bites of dinner last night.
I had boneless pork chops and strawberries. The extra bites I had were
from the pork. I cheated at night with a little bit of Coca Cola.*

*I just cheated...I feel sooo guilty!
That pop tart was screaming my name!*

Can you believe it? How can people call themselves 'Five-Bite Dieters' and then so openly and deliberately fail to 'restrict themselves' to the 'Five Bites' that actually define the program?

But think about this ... (And this is our point this morning) ... How can people call themselves 'Citizens of the Kingdom' and then fail to 'restrict themselves' to the 'narrow gate' and to the 'Kingdom Path'?

Actually it's pretty easy, isn't it?

The World, the Flesh and the Devil conspire to convince us that 'restriction' is somehow almost demeaning ... that to 'restrict ourselves' to something that someone else figured out, is to deny our own insights and is to fail to put our own unique stamp on things.

Though this might indeed be '*Our Father's World*,' we do intend to arrange and structure our place in it according to our own best judgment. After all, why did God give us a mind and a will in the first place?

Ever since the Garden of Eden, men and women have followed that counsel ... We will obey God when His Directives make sense and seem beneficial but we will make modifications to (if not absolute renovations of) those directives when they don't.

So **Eve**, once she was told that the forbidden fruit was actually a very desirable fruit, took some and ate it. Why restrict yourself from something good just because God said that you should?

So the tribe of **Benjamin** stopped short of driving the Jebusites out of Jerusalem and those Jebusites remained a problem to the Israelites for years. But why go to the trouble of driving them out when you could negotiate with them and convince them to become your servants?

So **Elimilech**, the husband of Naomi, during a difficult time, went to live in Moab (a Godless land) for a little while and never made it back. Why stay and trust God for provision in the Land he gave you? Why limit or restrict yourself when there are some other seemingly good options out there?

So **King Saul** decided that rather than destroy the people and property that God had told him to destroy, he would keep the best for himself. Why restrict yourself to what you already have when so much more is right there for the taking?

So even **King David**, that most godly of men, decided that lust and adultery and deception and murder were permissible for one who had served the Lord as faithfully as he had. No need for the King to 'restrict himself' to what could be done lawfully, is there?

Personal 'restriction' has never come easy for mankind ... not even for those who confidently say ... 'I belong to God'!

So how about us today ...

How far have we come from the '*non-restrictive lifestyle*'
of all those Biblical Characters?

Are Christians today still susceptible to the temptation to '*Re-create the Kingdom*' according to their own needs and notions?

Or are we much more familiar and comfortable with the idea of '*restriction*' than those '*believers*' of by-gone days?

Let's check it out ...

Have you ever heard (or thought) something like this ...

Certainly I'm a Christian (a citizen of the Kingdom) but I'm sure God would not want me to stay in an unhappy marriage.

I know that God sets the tithe at 10% (after all that's what the word tithe or tenth means) but I've decided to just 'give whatever I can whenever I can'.

I know the Bible would say that 'living together is wrong' but we can't afford to get married right now and why waste money living separately; after all, we love each other and plan to get married; it's not like we are just 'shacking up'.

I know that God says that we should forgive those who sin against us but in this case I'm sure God understands the anger and resentment I feel and the desire I have to 'punish' them somehow for what they have done.

I know that the Bible says that I should not allow 'filthy conversation' to come out of my mouth; but in my line of work it's just the way I need to talk if I want to get my point across or to be taken seriously."

* * * * *

Sad to say ... Just as in days gone by ... Restricting ourselves to the Kingdom Path is not easily done (and too seldomly even attempted) but Jesus says that it is absolutely '**Key**' to experiencing the Joy and the Freedom and the Satisfaction of '*Living the Kingdom Life*' ...

'RESTRICT YOURSELF TO THE KINGDOM PATH!'
Even though it is neither natural nor easy to do so!

So then we come to ...

Today's Key Question ...

What exactly does it take to successfully
LIVE this '**RESTRICTIVE**' lifestyle?

Let me suggest a **Three-Part Answer** to that Question ...

First of all, to successfully live this '*Restrictive Life-Style*', it takes ...

A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE BENEFITS OF DOING SO.

'Doing so' leads to **LIFE** – An All Too **RARE** Form Of Life!

"Small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life."
(That's how Jesus put it as he wrapped up his extended afternoon teaching.)

Jesus would say (later in his ministry) ...

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."
(John 10:10)

There's a kind of life a Christian can enjoy that goes way beyond the merely physical ...

* **It's A Fruit-Filled Life** – Galatians 5:22-23

(A life filled with the '*Fruit of the Spirit*' – things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control)

* **It's A Grace-Fueled Life** – 2 Corinthians 12:9

(A life powered by the all-sufficient grace of God – a power that carries us through times when our own strength would fail)

* **It's A Sure-Footed Life** – Ephesians 6:10-14

(A life that stands firm in the face of all attacks of the Enemy)

Now what believer would not want such a life? Who would not want to experience such '*abundance*' in the midst of this '*fallen, sin-filled world*'?

It would seem that such a clear understanding of the '*Benefits*' of Turning in at the Narrow Gate would be all the motivation we would need. But that is only half of the picture that Jesus painted for his listeners that afternoon.

Second of all, to successfully live this '*Restrictive Life-Style*', it takes ...

AN EQUALLY CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT DOING SO.

Not Doing So Leads To **DEATH** – An All Too **COMMON** Form Of Death!

"For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it."

(That's also something that Jesus wanted them to know before he sent them home.)

There's a kind of '*death*' (destruction) that can come to a Christian (A Citizen of the Kingdom) that is even worse than physical death ...

Professing Christians who turn in at the Wide Gate and who put their feet on the Broad Path can experience:

The Death of **Doctrinal Truth**;

The Death of Behavioral Standards;

The Death of Consistency;

The Death of Stability;

The Death of Vision and Purpose; and worst of all

The Death of Fellowship (both with God and with His Children)

It's a kind of 'Living Death' ... It's a horror and a torment to one who would desire to experience the 'Life of the Kingdom' – It's the kind of unfulfilling, frustrating, defeated experience that caused the Apostle Paul to cry out in Romans 7:24 ...

*"O wretched man that I am!
Who will rescue me from this Body of Death?"*

Now that's what awaits the would-be follower of Christ who turns in at the Wide Gate and who steps out upon the Broad (Unrestricted) Way. Who would want to live such a life – Who would not want to avoid that Broad Path at all costs?

But ... clearly understanding both the Benefits of 'Restricting ourselves to the Kingdom Path' and the Consequences of 'Not Restricting ourselves to the Kingdom Path' does not yet put us upon that Kingdom Path.

Third of all, to successfully live this 'Restrictive (yet most rewarding) Kingdom Life-Style', it takes (and with this we close) ...

*** A DECISION TO SUBMIT OURSELVES TO THE KINGDOM PATH**

A DECISION – a Purposeful, Passionate, Persistent Decision – to SUBMIT ourselves to the Kingdom Path must be made.

"ENTER through the narrow gate" ... Jesus told them that day.

Later Jesus would say ... "Take my YOKE upon you" ... Matthew 11:29
'Limit yourself to WHAT I say and to WHERE I lead and to HOW I behave.'

Final Thot ...

In the Kingdom of God, RESTRICTION opens the door to true ABUNDANCE ... Do 'restrict yourself' to the KINGDOM PATH!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Thirty"

Sunday's Message focused upon KEY TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING #3...

"RESTRICT YOURSELF TO THE KINGDOM PATH." (Matthew 7:13-14)

Does the phrase 'Restrict Yourself' sound '*negative*' or '*positive*' to you?

During the message, Pastor Mark shared some 'BENEFITS' that come to those believers who '*Restrict themselves to the Kingdom Path*' and also some 'CONSEQUENCES' that come to those who don't.

Which kind of person are you ... One who more motivated to 'RECEIVE BENEFIT' or one who is more motivated to 'AVOID CONSEQUENCE'?

Jesus said that the '*narrow path*' leads to LIFE and Pastor Mark characterized that '*life*' as being ...

A FRUIT-FILLED LIFE (Galatians 5:22-23)

'The fruit of the Spirit'

A GRACED-FUELED LIFE (2 Corinthians 12:9)

'My grace is sufficient'

A SURE-FOOTED LIFE (Ephesians 6:10-14)

'Stand your ground'

Jesus said that the '*broad path*' leads to DESTRUCTION and Pastor Mark characterized that '*destruction*' as involving ...

The Death of DOCTRINAL TRUTH; The Death of BEHAVIORAL STANDARDS;

The Death of CONSISTENCY; The Death of STABILITY;

The Death of VISION and PURPOSE; and (worst of all)

The Death of FELLOWSHIP (both with God and with His Children)

Have you experienced any of these since you have been saved?

How did you get out of that '*death experience*'?

Point To Ponder ... Does every DAY begin with us STANDING at the GATE?

“RECOGNIZE AND REJECT FALSE TEACHING”

(Key To Triumphant Kingdom Living #4)
(Matthew 7:15-23)

Intro ... This morning we return to our examination of the four “**Keys To Triumphant Kingdom Living**” with which Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount ... Four ‘**Keys**’ that literally ‘*unlock the door*’ to the Kingdom Life itself ... Four ‘**Keys**’ that will enable us to make the ‘*Sermon on the Mount*’ more than just an impressive ‘*pipe dream*’.

So far we have examined **three** of the **four** ...

FIRST KEY TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING ...

If you would enjoy Triumphant Kingdom Living, then ‘**RELY** Upon Your Heavenly Father For Everything; See Him As Your **SOURCE!**’

SECOND KEY TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING ...

If you would enjoy Triumphant Kingdom Living, then **RELATE** to all people the way that you would have them **RELATE** to you’.

THIRD KEY TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING ...

If you would enjoy Triumphant Kingdom Living, then
“**RESTRICT** yourself to the Kingdom **PATH!**”

Today we come to the **fourth** and **final** one ...

KEY TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING #4 ...

If you would enjoy Triumphant Kingdom Living, then
“**RECOGNIZE** and **REJECT** False **TEACHING!**”

Here’s how Jesus actually put it ...

Watch out for **FALSE** prophets.
They come to you in **SHEEP’S** clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious **WOLVES**.
(Matthew 7:15)

Here’s yet ...

ANOTHER SAD FACT OF LIFE ...

Not all who **USE** the **NAME** of **JESUS** actually **BELONG** to Him –
Some are **FAKING** it. They can **DESTROY** your **LIFE**.

They can confuse you; they can de-rail you; they can deceptively escort you right back onto the Broad Path filled with worldly notions and perspectives. They can take the most popular ideas of men and twist Scripture to fit every one of them. They can identify the deepest desires of your fallen human flesh and find Scriptural ways to validate them. They can call you to embrace the very lies of Satan and give you fine sounding reasons to wrap your arms around each of them.

This is serious stuff ... Your heavenly reward and your earthly delight are both on the line here. Is it any wonder Jesus says, "Watch out for them" – these false prophets – these agents of Satan himself – these enemies of the Kingdom itself? They are of all men most dangerous!

Don't be misled by a pleasant demeanor or an inviting smile – don't be taken in by entertainingly told stories or unwarranted assurances. Remember, though they are wolves, they look like sheep.

Just because they hold up a Bible doesn't mean they are about to proclaim its message ... Just because they use the name of Jesus doesn't mean that they actually have any relationship with him.

Rejecting False Teaching and False Teachers is vital to Triumphant Kingdom Living but even well-meaning Followers of Christ will fail to **reject** false teaching if they fail to **recognize** that the teaching is false.

And they might well fail to ever recognize that the teaching is false, if it were not for this ...

MOST ENCOURAGING REALITY ...

There's a **FOOL-PROOF** way to spot the **FAKERS**.

Their **FRUIT** gives them **AWAY**.

(Matthew 7:16)

"By their fruit you will know them."

I remember an old saint saying long years ago ...

*"God has commanded us not to judge
but he has commissioned us to function as His 'fruit-inspectors'.*

Here's a list of things such a 'Kingdom Fruit Inspector' might ask of those who proclaim truth in Jesus' name – things that grow right out of Jesus' great discourse on

Kingdom Living ...

Do they possess or seek the '**Kingdom Heart**'?

Do they identify themselves as '**Salt**' and '**Light**' in the world?

Do they recognize the one '**Key Objective**' of all Kingdom Living?

Do they understand and teach those six '**Kingdom Clarifications**'?

Do they practice those three '**Expressions of Kingdom Righteousness**'?

Do they modify themselves according to those four '**Kingdom Correctives**'?

Do they implement these four '**Keys to Kingdom Living**' in their lives?

Is the Fruit of Genuine Kingdom Living seen in them or is it
some other kind of fruit they are displaying?

Does their '*preaching*' match up with '*Sermon on the Mount Teaching*'?

Certainly those are '*inspections*' that are most easily made when the person in question is right in front of you and their life is somewhat open to your evaluation.

In Jesus' day all such teachers would be. They would appear in your town, perhaps having even grown up in your midst.

Today they pop into our homes via the television or the internet. Their teachings are found on the shelves of our popular bookstores – attractively packaged and titled. It's much more difficult today to answer these questions about them.

But it is possible to match up their teachings to the teachings of Christ. It is possible sometimes to see the breakdown of their personal lives.

Sometimes they actually implode under the weight of the double life they are living. Sometimes they actually discover the error of the things they are teaching.

But usually they don't.

Usually they continue to proclaim their errors – they sometimes build great followings – create world-wide cults even. And they lead many astray in the process. Watching out for them is critical.

Now here's yet ...

ANOTHER SAD FACT OF LIFE ...

Some of the **FAKERS** actually **FOOL** themselves.
They think they have **IMPRESSED** the Lord with their wonderful **DEEDS**.
(Matthew 7:22)

Just imagine a group of people saying (as Jesus says some will) ...

*“Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy (make great pronouncements)
in your name. Did we not in your name drive out demons
and perform many miracles?”*

In other words ...

‘Does not our ‘performance’ demonstrate our allegiance?’

No doubt their ‘*performance*’ – their preaching/teaching, their miraculous ministry – was convincing to many on this earth. Most likely they had built great followings.
On earth this argument is pretty unassailable.

Probably this argument had been useful in raising large sums of money to underwrite the very ministries that these false prophets had developed.

Impressive performance is definitely impressive to us limited human beings who primarily judge by ‘*outward appearance*’.

Frequently impressive performance is blindingly impressive to the person who is ‘*pulling it off*’. Thus the challenge to Jesus on that ‘*Day of Reckoning*’.

So I can indeed imagine such a group saying to Jesus not necessarily desperately but even somewhat defiantly ...

*“Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy (make great pronouncements)
in your name. Did we not in your name drive out demons
and perform many miracles?”*

And I could imagine them adding ...

*“If anyone should be granted admission to heaven, if anyone should
hear you say, “Well done, good and faithful servants”, it should be us!”*

Now can you imagine Jesus saying back to them ...

*“Your performance in my name doesn’t (in and of itself) demonstrate
or prove anything – my name has power even if the Devil uses it.
Your words and works simply testify to the ‘power of my name’
not to the ‘validity or credibility of yours’.”*

So here then is ...

TODAY'S BOTTOM LINE ...

OBEDIENCE not **PERFORMANCE** is what demonstrates genuine
God-Pleasing, Christ-Acknowledging **KINGDOM LIVING**.
(Matthew 7:21)

“Not everyone who **says** to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven,
but only he who ‘**does the will of my Father**’ who is in heaven.”

True obedience flows out of a Kingdom Heart.

Performance can be motivated by many lesser things – pride, ambition, competitive drive, fear of failure, even the desire to please or satisfy others.

Later in his ministry (Matthew 15:8) Jesus would condemn the Pharisees by saying ...

*‘Isaiah was right about you people when he said’
“This people honors me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.”*

We had a minister like that in our little liberal church when I was a boy.

He shared one time with several of the church leaders that when he was growing up he had a desire to go into social work but his mother had her heart set on her son being a minister so to please her he became one.

Billy Graham had a close friend like that in the early days of his ministry.

Chuck Templeton was his name. In the early days, they traveled as evangelists with the Youth for Christ organization. Chuck Templeton developed a large, impressive ministry in Toronto, Canada. He and Billy Graham eventually broke fellowship over Chuck’s denial of the Inspiration of Scripture.

Later when Chuck Templeton left the ministry (having identified himself as a complete agnostic) he confessed that his only motive in building a large church ministry was to prove to his minister father that he, the son, could out-do him, the Father.

People were no doubt saved under Chuck Templeton's ministry because the Word of God is true no matter who declares it but Chuck himself was motivated by a far lesser motive than simple, single-hearted obedience to the Kingdom Call.

His performance earned him no standing with God or commendation from God. His fruit was not that of an obedient Child of God but rather that of a driven, disturbed, doubt-damaged man.

So there's a **dual challenge** contained in this message today ...

1. DON'T BE **TAKEN** IN BY FALSE PROPHETS (and)

2. DON'T **BECOME** ONE YOURSELF!

Don't allow notions of performance to get in the way of genuine obedience.
Don't allow church work to replace true kingdom living.

Ask yourself every day ...

"When the people who know me best examine my life, what do they see? Do they see the presence of a Kingdom Heart and the faithful pursuit of Kingdom Values or do they see something else?"

And surely ask yourself every time you hear some 'prophet' speak out for God ...

*"Do these words ring with the Truth of Christ?
Are these words consistent with the teachings of Christ?"*

For as our **final thot** says ...

Final Thot ...

Triumphant **KINGDOM** Living requires constant **VIGILANCE**.

WATCH out – Be on **GUARD** – Falsehood is **EVERYWHERE!**

And you can be more easily **DE-RAILED** than you might think.

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Thirty-One"

Sunday's Message focused upon KEY TO TRIUMPHANT KINGDOM LIVING #4...

"RECOGNIZE and REJECT False TEACHING"

(Matthew 7:15-23)

How important a '**key**' would you say this is in our world today? Are the '*Doctrines of Christ*' being assailed today? Are Biblically inaccurate things being taught?

Check back through the Sermon on the Mount – pick out at least one teaching that you feel is being ignored, misrepresented or even deleted in much of today's church?

How about these?

*"Blessed are those who **MOURN** ."*

(What place does '*mourning*' have in today's '*happy church*'?)

*"I have not come to **ABOLISH** (the Law and the Prophets) but to **FULFILL** them."*

(Where do God's righteous standards fit in today's '*open-minded church*'?)

*"This then is **HOW** you should **PRAY**."*

(How do the principles of the Lord's Prayer fit into today's '*person-centered church*'?)

*"**SMALL** is the gate and **NARROW** the road that leads to **LIFE**."*

(How does such a '*restrictive perspective*' fit in today's '*increasingly-inclusive church*'?)

Here's how Pastor Mark expressed the '*skill*' of those who are '*false prophets*' in our world today. Reflect upon this descriptive statement ...

Have you ever been '*victimized*' in any of these ways?

"They can confuse you; they can de-rail you; they can deceptively escort you right back onto the Broad Path filled with worldly notions and perspectives. They can take the most popular ideas of men and twist Scripture to fit every one of them. They can identify the deepest desires of your fallen human flesh and find Scriptural ways to validate them. They can call you to embrace the very lies of Satan and give you fine sounding reasons to wrap your arms around each of them."

Point To Ponder ...

Triumphant **KINGDOM** Living requires constant **VIGILANCE**.

WATCH out – Be on **GUARD** – Falsehood is **EVERYWHERE!**

And you can be more easily **DE-RAILED** than you might think.

“HOW TO HAVE AN INDESTRUCTABLE LIFE”

(Kingdom Living Series Conclusion)

(Matthew 7:24-27)

Intro ... “AN INDESTRUCTABLE LIFE” ... who wouldn’t want one? Who wouldn’t want to possess the kind of life that simply could not be ‘destroyed’ by any calamity that comes along the way?

Well that’s the very kind of life that Jesus identifies in the very last paragraph in his incredible “*Sermon on the Mount*” - the study of which we wrap up this morning. Here’s what he said ...

TODAY’S KEY SCRIPTURE ...

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

(Matthew 7:24-27)

Out of that vivid concluding statement arises **Today’s Key Concept** – a concept that will stand us all in good stead if we remember it ...

TODAY’S KEY CONCEPT ...

A ‘Sermon-On-The-Mount’ **LIFESTYLE**
PREPARES All ‘Citizens Of The Kingdom’ To Handle **CALAMITY**.

“BE PREPARED” ... for generations that has been the Boy Scout Motto.

What a shame that they as an organization have not followed their own counsel as they have ‘*failed to anticipate*’ and have ‘*failed to properly respond*’ to the current challenges brought upon them. Their ‘*failure*’ will most likely bring about the demise of the very thing their recent hastily-made, politically-desperate decisions have been designed to protect.

We who are ‘*Citizens of the Kingdom*’ through spiritual birth must not be caught so off guard. We need to truly “**BE PREPARED**” to handle the various kinds of calamity that come our way.

Jesus makes very clear that the way to ‘**BE PREPARED**’ for whatever the challenges or calamities that come our way is to “*Put His Words of Instruction Into Practice*” - to adopt what I would call this morning a “*Sermon on the Mount Lifestyle*” for (as ***Today’s Key Concept*** puts it) such a ‘*Sermon on the Mount*’ Lifestyle **prepares** all ‘*Citizens of the Kingdom*’ to handle all such calamities.

Basically Jesus here is making an incredible **PROMISE** – a promise of stability and sufficiency in the midst of life’s most challenging moments - and he makes this promise to all who will ‘*live their lives in accordance with His Teachings*’.

Now that promise would not have to be given and such life preparation would not have to be made if it were not for ...

YET ANOTHER SAD FACT OF LIFE ...

Sooner or later some kind of **CALAMITY COMES** to us all.

Our **HEALTH** might fail – Our **FAMILY** might implode –
Our **JOB** might be lost – A key **RELATIONSHIP** might end –
Something truly **EVIL** might impact our lives.

Eventually, calamity comes to us all. There is no possibility of avoiding it.
It will find us ... Life in this fallen world is like that.

TODAY’S KEY QUESTION ...

HOW will we **HANDLE** such **CALAMITY** when it **COMES**?

How will we respond to it? How will we cope with it?
How likely will we be to not only survive it but even thrive in the midst of it?

That ***Key Question*** must be followed by this ...

CRITICAL COROLLARY QUESTION ...

Why **HAS** it **COME**?

Now I know we are told that generally (when bad things happen) that we should not ask “***Why***” – But when these things come upon you personally it ***is*** a valid and productive question to raise. Why has this happen **to me**?

ONLY TWO POSSIBLE ANSWERS:

1. I BROUGHT IT ON MYSELF.

Now I know that there are some morbid people who always go there and we generally tell them *“Don’t go there ... It wasn’t your fault; sometimes things like this just happen”*.

But Jesus would say that *“Sometimes we need to go there; perhaps every time we need to ‘start there’ for there are truly many calamities in life that we do, in fact, ‘Bring On Ourselves’*.

Sometimes we *‘Bring these things on ourselves’* due to sins of **OMISSION**:

Our self-examination causes us to honestly say ...

* I failed to **EMBRACE** the **PRINCIPLES** of **KINGDOM LIVING**.

“Everyone who hears my words ...”

In the Teachings of Christ are found *‘Secrets of Protection’* that can guard us from many of the *‘Calamities of Life’* if we will just embrace them.

‘Blessed are the Poor in Spirit’ – those who are truly humble in heart are wonderfully protected from the destruction that can come from the expression of human pride and arrogance.

‘Blessed are the Pure in Heart’ – those who truly have hearts that are pure in purpose and intention are similarly protected from the misery generated by the presence of a critical and judgmental spirit.

To fail to embrace any one of these *‘Principles of Christian Living’* – these *‘Secrets of Protection’* can leave us vulnerable to our own worst tendencies. And as a result we can indeed (by that failure) *‘Bring Calamities of various kinds upon ourselves’*.

Sometimes we *‘Bring these things on ourselves’* due to sins of **COMMISSION**:

Here our self-examination causes us to honestly say ...

* I **VIOLATED** some fundamental **‘TEACHING** of **CHRIST**’.

“And does not put them into practice ...”

In these *‘Teachings of Christ’* are many *‘Directives for Behavior’* that will help us walk successfully through the *‘Behavioral Minefields of Life’*.

Those 'Citizens of the Kingdom' who actually do learn to 'Turn the other cheek' will never be 'nailed for retaliation' while the initial perpetrator gets off scott-free.

Those who refuse to 'harbor hatred in their hearts' and who actually do learn to 'love their enemies' will never be found acting in hateful and mean-spirited and possibly even unlawful ways.

Those who refuse to look upon another human being 'lustfully' will never find their spouse divorcing them for unfaithfulness.

However, to violate these fundamental '*Teachings of Christ*' by engaging in these kinds of behaviors can in fact and almost always will '*Bring Calamity Upon Us*'.

And at such a time, as these '*Citizens of the Kingdom*' look around at the broken pieces of their lives and accurately say ... '*I brought this on myself*', there is only one thing for them to do ...

"Make the trek back to the narrow gate and start over, taking the 'Teachings of Christ' as their absolute guide for life and thus building their lives at last upon that rock-solid foundation."

Perhaps that's where some of us are right now ...

Perhaps that where some of us here today have recently been. We've committed sins of Omission or Commission ...

We have neither built into our lives the protection Christ's Teachings would give nor have we truly put into practice the behaviors He has prescribed and as a result we have '*paid the price*'.

Don't waste one more minute '*beating yourself up*' ... the consequences of your actions or inactions have no doubt already done that.

Here's what you must do ...

'Return to the Narrow Gate' ... Resolve to 'Restrict yourself to the Kingdom Path' ... 'Rely upon your Heavenly Father' for everything necessary to make your journey successful.

Jesus is the Gate Keeper – He opens it wide for all who would enter in.
Discover the stability of life built on the ROCK!

So what about the other answer to the question,

'Why has this calamity come into my life?'

What if I have **not** *'Brought it on myself'*?

Well, if I have not *'Brought it on myself'* then ...

2. SOMETHING (SOMEONE) ELSE HAS BROUGHT IT TO ME.

And it's actually this kind of Calamity that Jesus is most talking about in this concluding section of this awesome Sermon ... For Calamities eventually come to all ... even to those who are faithfully living out the principles of the Kingdom ... even to those who have been protected from the Calamities that arise from sins of Omission and Commission.

* Sometimes this **CALAMITY** has arisen from the **BROKENNESS** of **LIFE**.
(*Blessed are those who mourn – Who hunger and thirst for righteousness - Matt. 5:4, 6*)

Life in this world is lived on the surface of a 'cursed planet' – God himself has decreed that *'life will be hard'* and even *'unpredictable'*. Sometimes those unpredictable hardships make havoc of our best efforts to make our way through this life.

Sickness and Disability enter the picture; Tornadoes and Hurricanes sweep away from us our most precious possessions; Bridges collapse and airplanes fail; Wildfires destroy and Floods overwhelm.

In the midst of such a world – a world beset by the consequences of God's own curse upon it – Jesus would call upon us to respond with a *'Mourner's Heart'* ... *'Mourn over and for the very things that God Himself mourns over and for'* ... Mourn over the loss of perfection; mourn for the Savior who will one day return in power and glory ... Sensitize yourself to the Heart of God (even in the midst of calamity) and Jesus says you will experience blessing.

Jesus would call upon us to respond with a *"Yearner's Heart"* ... to *'hunger and thirst after the very things that this world most desperately needs'* – an experience of the full-blown righteousness of God.

Jesus would call us to live with a desire to *'please God in everything'*; to live with a passion to embrace the 'Rightness of His Will and Ways'; to yearn for the day when a new earth will once again be the 'home of righteousness' and God's curse will never again be needed.

But know that sometimes calamities come upon us simply because of the Brokenness of Life itself on this Cursed Planet and thank God that those calamities do not define your life or frustrate your hope.

* Sometimes this **CALAMITY** has arisen from the **SINFULNESS** of **MAN**.
(*"Persecuted because of Righteousness or because of me"* – Matt. 5:10-11)

Jesus said that those who 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' and who pursue such righteousness will sometimes be persecuted because of it.

Sinful men generally are put off by and sometimes even enraged by Godly Living. Jesus also said that persecution will come to us because of him – Hatred toward Him will be transferred to us who identify ourselves with him. We might indeed encounter those who are 'out to get us' simply because of our faith in Christ.

Jesus said 'Rejoice in such persecution' because 'Great will be your reward in heaven' – that's how you handle it.

And, of course, sometimes calamity enters our lives because of man's sinful behaviors ... drunk drivers have killed wonderful Christian people. Burglars have done the same. At such times we both mourn and trust and even deepen our yearning for that world to come.

And lastly we must mention that sometimes the answer is that ...

* This **CALAMITY** has arisen from the **DEVILISHNESS** of **SATAN**
(*"Deliver us from the Evil One"* – Matthew 6:13)

It's not unthinkable that Job was not the only one of His Children that he has ever allowed to be '*tested by Satan*'. Such a testing is not revealed to us any more than it was to Job. It's a possible explanation whenever things happen that are not of our own doing ...

The response of the true Citizen of the Kingdom is ...

*'Father, deliver me (if I am in fact under the attack of) from the Evil One.
Grant to me sufficient grace to stand up to this test and bring me forth as gold from the furnace'.*

Final Thot ...

A 'Sermon-on-the-Mount' **LIFESTYLE** functions both as a **PREVENTATIVE** (It guards us **FROM** certain calamities) and as a **PRESERVATIVE** (It maintains our integrity and stability **THROUGH** the calamities that do come). **RESOLVE** to make it your own!

Sonlife Self-Study

"KINGDOM LIVING SERIES ...

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"Lesson Thirty-Two"

The title of Sunday's concluding message from the 'Sermon on the Mount' was

"HOW TO HAVE AN INDESTRUCTABLE LIFE".

What does that title suggest to you?

Do you think that it's possible to live such a life?

Here's the passage that '*inspired*' that title ...

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

(Matthew 7:24-27)

Pick out (circle) a word or phrase in that Scripture that seems to you to be particularly crucial. Reflect upon its significance ...

Here was Sunday's **Key Concept** ...

"A 'Sermon on the Mount' LIFESTYLE prepares all CITIZENS of the Kingdom to HANDLE Calamity."

What does that concept 'say' to you?

What would you say that a "Sermon on the Mount Lifestyle" is?

Look back over the entire sermon (Matthew chapters 5-7) and pick out one '*teaching of Jesus*' and share how it could help us '*deal with some of the calamities of life*'.

Point To Ponder ...

A 'Sermon-on-the-Mount' LIFESTYLE functions both as a PREVENTATIVE (guards us FROM certain calamities) and as a PRESERVATIVE (maintains our integrity and stability THROUGH the calamities that do come).