

“Echoes from the Mountain”: The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5-7 [Matthew 4:23-25]
1-15-17



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

Perhaps you would consider watching this brief video on “The Kingdom”, developed by The Bible Project

<https://thebibleproject.com/product/gospel-of-the-kingdom-video>

“When you hear the word, ‘Kingdom’, what immediately becomes present to you? Do you typically associated it with something to happen in the future or something to be experienced now? Or, both? What are some of the challenges associated with such a seemingly antiquated word?”

“As you are exposed to such thoughts concerning the Kingdom from the prophet Isaiah, what do they suggest concerning God’s desires for his world? How do they seem to come together in Jesus?” [Isaiah 52:7-10; Isaiah 61; Luke 4:14-22]

“One of the favorite sayings of Jesus was, ‘If anyone has ears, let him hear’. Jesus most often utilized simile and metaphor and parable to describe the Kingdom?”

“In what ways do you see the values of the Kingdom conflicting with the values of the prevailing culture? Does acceptability equate to reality?”

“What is your current level of pre-occupation and anxiety saying about your operative view of God? If you don’t believe that God is ‘for you’ (Romans 8:31) and committed to a favorable outcome for life, to whom/what will you look to regain control?”

“Would you say that your faith in Jesus is simply making you more compliant (better at following the rules) or helping you to become the kind of person from whom the expectations of the Kingdom more naturally flow?”

“What if the essential question is not, ‘What will I have to give up to follow Jesus?’, but, ‘What will I never experience if I choose not to?’ Would you describe your faith as more of a decisive moment or a series of moments?”

“When you have experienced such moments of faith-crisis, which usually triumphs: the governing passions of your heart or your professed beliefs?”

“Are you convinced that there is nothing more valuable than finding life in Jesus and learning to live under his lovingly-restorative rule? If not, how is it affecting your ability to pursue the Kingdom with the all-or-nothing focus that it demands?”

During the weeks ahead, commit to reading through the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, chapters 5-7) frequently and utilizing various translations.

Teaching Notes...

Jesus is “all grown up”, now. The biographers offer us very little about Jesus’ life from “bar mitzvah” to “baptism”. Luke simply says that Jesus *“grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men”* (2:52).

He was developing in his ability to translate knowledge (everything he was coming to understand about the Story and about himself) into a life that was able to rightly experience God and others, favorably. He was learning to live “grace-fully”.

As you encounter the Story, it becomes increasingly apparent that there were any number of perspectives and perceptions when it came to the identity and message of Jesus [teacher, a healer, a subversive, a prophet, a philanthropist, a heretic].

Sooner or later, if you were paying any attention, you would notice that, although there was some variety to his approach and means of communicating, the theme of his interactions was *“the Kingdom of God and its present availability”* (Matthew 4:23).

Unfortunately, for some, “Kingdom of God” is reduced to some disembodied bliss that we as his followers might hope to experience when we die. For others, it’s the utopia we anticipate once God deals with this failed experiment we call creation.

For Jesus, the Kingdom was both a declaration and an invitation; a present reality to be welcomed and experienced in our eating, sleeping, working, relating, recreating lives--- where all of this is supposed to matter.

Imagery of the Kingdom

Themes of the Kingdom

Responses to the Kingdom

Imagery of the Kingdom

If you lived in antiquity, odds are that you lived under the reign a King. Someone whose will, desires, dreams were the rule of the day and where those living under the rule of the King were expected to function in a way that promoted and implemented his will.

The Kingdom imagery involved:

A sovereign: someone with both the authority (right) and the power to rule as they pleased.

A sphere of influence: a domain in which their desires were carried out.

A people: who would live (voluntarily or reluctantly) under the will of another: submission or subjugation.

An ethic: a way of functioning within the Kingdom which validated our claims of allegiance and which demonstrated the viability of the values of the Kingdom.

"In the beginning", is a Hebrew idiom meaning, "from top to bottom". It means that God thought of everything and, at times, seems to offer it in mind-numbing detail (see Leviticus).

We have God speaking, acting and interacting in ways that define reality. Because he is the Creator, he alone gets to determine what is "good" and how his world should function, as an expression of his good intentions.

He locates us within a "garden", which, not so coincidentally, was, in ancient times, the space surrounding the Temple--- where God lived and from where he would rule.

He identifies us Adam--- 'humanity', those meant to image (represent) the King in his world and called to rule with and for him. *"Subdue"*, he says. *"Kabosh it!"* (Hebrew): tame something wild; bring order out of chaos. Cultivate. Harness the raw potential and resources available in order that it would flourish/become. We are called to broaden the "Eden experience".

What the S.O.M. is not:

... "The Commandments 2.0".

It's not a new moral mandate, meant to somehow challenge the level of our commitment by raising the stakes (Jesus' way of saying, *"You thought those first 10 were tough..."*) The S.O.M. does speak to our behavior, but it just doesn't start there. It would be futile because while laws, in and of themselves, may show us what's expected of us, they may even arouse our tendencies toward disobedience (*"Wet Paint. Do not touch"*: we all know how that ends!) They can, in no way, inspire or empower us to live into this vision of life according to God (Colossians 2:20-23).

... available to the "casual-observer".

"One day as he saw the crowds (people who have flocked together to the same place) *gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down with his disciples* (those who are learning by use and practice) *and he began to teach them"* (5:1-2).

So, there are always people following Jesus with varying motives, with varying levels of interest and varying degrees of intentionality.

... a "Chicken-Soup-for-the-Soul", approach to life.

These are not pithy little, desk-top-calendar, thought-for-the-day inspirations. These are about "blessing" (practical acts of goodness) people who are tarnishing your reputation by lying about you and mocking your very way of life. These are about intentionally seeking the good of people who are actively plotting your ruin.

The Sermon on the Mount portrays what it means to be human and what that life looks like when it is defined by and empowered by the lovingly- restorative rule of God; it's what life would look like if God were King and his desires were the rule of the day. In a word--- the "Kingdom".

Themes of the Kingdom:

The Kingdom-reality challenges what “is” and disturbs the status quo.

The Kingdom creates a renewed sense of identity, value, and mission.

We need no longer look for affirmation and validation and acceptance through our status and achievements, because we are already secured in the benevolence of a God who feeds birds and fertilizes lily-fields. They don't hold a candle to you!

The Kingdom portrays a transformation possible as we are to enter and participate in the rule of the Kingdom.

Responses of the Kingdom...

If you hear the words of the S.O.M. without being, in some fashion, encouraged and compelled toward a different vision for your life, you haven't heard it properly.

If you haven't been a bit “*offended*” by it (as you confronted with your own self-indulgent and self-protective tendencies), you haven't heart it properly.

Any decision that involves a choice between (2) or more options has an opportunity cost [Matthew 13: selling all for the pearl]. The benefits you could have received if you had chosen an alternative course of action.

Jesus says that the Kingdom has “*entry-points*” [Matthew 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 18:8-9; 19:17; 19:23-24; 23:13]. It means that our Kingdom participation culminates in a determination to voluntarily live under the rule of another. Submission.

I realized, as I typed that line concerning a ‘decision’, that I have been somewhat cankered (tarnished) by the notion of “*making a decision for Christ*”. We filled out cards; we put our names in the front of Bibles, but what we did was anything but ‘decisive’ [resolute or causing something to end in a particular way].

The process will require massive doses of grace, but it will also demand something of us: a committed determination.

You can't legitimately say, “Your Kingdom come” while you are ferociously clinging to your own!

We cannot simultaneously continue to live with (2) contrasting sets of values and ethics. Inevitably, they will collide and conflict and one will ultimately govern your choice.

The message of the Kingdom is meant to get your attention, stimulate your imagination, capture your heart, re-direct your affections, and transform your lifestyle.