

Well, good morning. You are those who are not traveling to mountains and lakes this weekend. I see. This whole section is right here. If you're looking for a place to sit, this is always a good option.

Right up here. We're glad you're here. Last Sunday after church, I was invited to some folks house for dinner. A delightful dinner. And at the end of it, we got to see some.

Some new little puppies. I think we've got a picture. Look at that little fella right there. Look at him. Oh, yeah, that's the response.

That's the response that is appropriate when you see a little puppy. So Diane was sort of wrestling around. There's six of them. She picks this one up, she goes, she says, this one's as fat as mud. Now, has anyone heard that phrase before?

Fat as mud. You've heard that. You've heard that. Anyone else? Okay, you've heard that.

Michael's heard it. You've heard it. Sandy? Anyone? I had never heard that phrase before in my life.

I thought, where in the world. Now, if you talk to Diane, she's. She's got. She's got a southern accent, so that maybe it's a southern thing, I don't know, but I think you're from Bedford really, aren't you? Yeah, she's got a Bedford accent.

All right. All right. Fat as mud. I thought, what is that? So I was curious.

I Google it, like fat as mud. And here's what I come up with. It actually comes from an old British word called mud, fat, meaning pretty fat. But that word goes back to the Dutch, and it's pronounced matternat matar vat, which means very fat. Now, here's the deal.

I don't want to hear anyone use that word referencing me anytime today. But it's a really good phrase there. Fat as mud. I love that. There are a lot of little local sayings out there whose origin is lost or unclear.

Have you ever heard someone described as the salt of the earth? Have you ever been taught to let your yes be yes and your no be no? Oh, I heard that so much from my dad growing up. Let your yes be yes, and your no be no. Have you ever been asked to go the extra mile?

Yeah. Yep. Have you been told to let tomorrow worry about itself? Yep. Have you been warned not to cast your pearls before swine?

Have you ever been warned to watch out for wolves in sheep's clothing? Have you been told, do unto others as you would have them do unto you?

All of those sayings are found in one key place. It's called the Sermon on the Mount. Today we're going to continue our journey with Jesus around lake shores and up mountainsides, and we're going to join him on the top of a hill on the north side of the Sea of Galilee where he's going to teach us about God's kingdom and the way of life that he's calling his followers to.

And we're going to discover that it involves a lot more than short, pithy little phrases. The life he calls us to is going to radically challenge us to live differently than the world around us. So I'm going to pray and then if you guys want to turn to Matthew chapter five in your Bibles or on your apps, I'm going to encourage you to do that. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you, as Susan said, for the heat of the sun today.

It's causing life to grow. And while it may be uncomfortable, it may be feel very, very uncomfortable at times. It actually serves such a good purpose. And so you're going to call us today into some very uncomfortable spots in the scriptures where you're going to teach us some stuff and you're going to talk about stuff. That man is just going to press us in the wrong way and maybe even feel oppressive to us.

But through that life comes and good life comes. So open your word, instruct us from it. In Jesus name, Amen. So if you've been following with us through this series, we began in Matthew chapter three, and we're going to work our way through the Gospel of Matthew, just talking and getting instructed by looking at the life of Christ. Matthew chapter 3.

If you recall, Jesus begins his earthly ministry with a long season of prayer and fasting out in the desert. The Holy Spirit has led him there, and the Holy Spirit has led him then into an engagement with the enemy, with Satan, with the devil, who offers him a seeming shortcut to the end goal, which is bringing glory to God and the salvation to the world. And so Jesus passes that test, we, we might say, and he moves on to the next stage of his ministry where he, he begins his preaching ministry and he preaches this message called the kingdom. And he says specifically, the kingdom is near. The kingdom is at hand.

The kingdom is within reach. He calls his first disciples and he meets them where they are. If you remember, they were on their boats getting ready to go out to fish or coming in from fishing. He meets them where they are, but he calls them to be where he is. And he says, follow me, stick with me.

And in the process, you're going to become what God intends you to be, what God has created you to be, a fisher of men. And right away, right away, they're thrown into this crazy new life of tagging behind Jesus

as he goes throughout the region. He's teaching his preaching in Matthew, chapter 4, verses 24, 25. Describe it this way. News about him spread all over Syria and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon possessed, those having seizures and the paralyzed, and he healed them.

And not just Syria, but large crowds from Galilee and the five cities, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan follow him. His. His ex. His followers are coming from a wide area. This is no longer a little localized Capernaum crowd.

This is all over the. The countryside. They are coming to follow Jesus. Crowds of people are showing up. And in Matthew, chapter 5, verse 5, Jesus.

It sounds like it can be a little overwhelming, all these crowds. So Jesus sees the crowds and he goes up on the mountainside and he sits down just an aside. Some of you guys, how many of you guys are hikers? How many of you guys love to just look at a hillside and go, I'm going to climb the top of that hill. I'm going up there.

How many of you are like me? And go. You know, that view up there is probably amazing. Could someone take a picture and send it to me? Yeah, yeah.

So Jesus says, I'm going to go to the top of the hill. If you're serious, you can follow me up the hill. And a lot of them, do they follow him up there, his disciples follow him up there. And he begins teaching his disciples there at the top of the hill, those who had left their old life of fishing and they're sitting down at his feet to learn from his life. And here's how he begins this teaching time.

He says this. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. There's a lot there, and this is an overview today.

So we're not going to dig deep into any one of those particulars But I do want you to notice something in when he says, blessed are the poor in spirit, he says theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The very same kingdom that he's been preaching is right at hand. And when he finishes up in verse 10 there, he says, blessed are those who are

persecuted because of righteousness. He says, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Once again, that kingdom that is right there.

Jesus begins and ends with a reference to this mysterious kingdom of heaven. The kingdom that he's been preaching is right at hand. And he now tells us, who's going to experience that? Who's going to be part of that kingdom? Who's going to have citizenship in that kingdom.

It's not maybe who they expected it would be, maybe it's not who you would expect it to be. Frederick Buechner, I love his writing. If you ever get a chance to read some of his stuff. He just writes in such an approachable way. And he unpacks some of.

Some of the elements of walking with Jesus in unexpected ways. It sort of comes at you from the side. And here's how he describes the people that Jesus say are the. Are the hotshots, are the big deals. And in the kingdom of heaven, he says it's not the spiritual giants with impeccable moral credentials.

Okay, that's good to know, isn't it? Because I don't know any of us in this room who have impeccable moral credentials. He says instead, it's the poor in spirit who, who understand, truly understand, that they have nothing to offer in and of themselves. He says it belongs to those who approach life with humility, who get it, who understand they don't know everything. And they approach the people around them with gentleness.

It's not the strong, it's not the forceful. It's not those who hold high elected office who can change the world that change the world. It's the meek. It's the pure in heart. Those people who get exposed to as much dirt, filth as everyone else in the world, but somehow they keep an innocence about them.

It says, this kingdom belongs to people who, wherever they are and whoever they're with, however, they can bring. Bring peace to the world. Bring peace to situations, bring peace. They don't stir it up. They're not drama people, but they're people who, who bring peace.

He says it's people who side with heaven even when any fool can see it's a losing side.

And he looks out at his disciples. Those people have made that trek up and they're sweaty and They've got grime around their neck and they're squinting into the sun because it's just hot up there. And he looks at them, and they're not the kind of people that can naturally make a big difference in the world there. There's not a college degree among them. There's no corner office executives there.

They're just common people for the most part. And they're squinting into the sun and they're trying to make sense of what Jesus is saying,

like, okay, okay. And then he. Then he throws this at him. Verse 11.

It says, Blessed are you when people insult you. Blessed are you when people persecute you. Blessed are you when people lie about you in horrible ways because of me. What's your response? Do you go after them?

Do you sue them? Do you threaten them? No, no. He says, here's what you do. You rejoice and you be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you, you're in good company.

Jesus says, if that happens, you're in an elevated group. You're part of the elite. If that's how people treat you because of me, listen, he says, the world is not going to treat you well. If you follow me, you're going to get mistreated, you're going to get cussed at. You might be thrown in jail for following me, but if that happens, you're blessed.

And again, if I'm sitting there on the top of the hill, and if you're sitting there at the top of the hill, we may be looking at each other going, blessed? Is that how he describes it? Is that how we define blessed? Now I'm like, hey, Jesus, I. I mean, I'm not looking to get rich following you, but I'm also not looking to have my life get worse following you.

Am I going to have to suffer? I mean, I'm not out here trying to attract a lot of attention. Can I just follow you secretly? If not secretly, just, you know, just keep it between me and you. You ever met people like that?

I'm religious, but I don't talk about it. I follow Jesus, but don't ask me too many questions. I don't want to cause a stir. Jesus says, I'm sorry, that's not an option. If you're going to follow me, here's what it looks like.

You got to be. You got to be out there. He says, you're going to be salt and you're going to be light. That's what following me looks like now we're so used to thinking about salt as a flavor enhancer, and oftentimes that's what we think about, that as Christians, we're just supposed to make the world a little bit better. But that's not what I think Jesus is saying here, because salt is a flavor enhancer.

That is true. Everyone likes a little salt on their french fries. But salt is so much more than just a flavor enhancer. Salt is necessary for life. Sodium chloride plays a crucial role in maintaining the balances of the fluids inside your system.

Salt can be bad for you, but it's also necessary to regulate your heart health. It's necessary to regulate your blood pressure. It's

necessary to transmit nerve impulses as you move your muscles and move around. Salt plays a part in those muscles functioning the way they should. Jesus says, I don't need you to make the world a better place.

I need you to keep the world going.

And he says, your salt and your light. Light makes things visible. A flashlight for a dark pathway or a night light in an unfamiliar room. That kind of light allows you to see what would be hidden or invisible in the dark. Light can be a warning.

Think about the lighthouses that we've seen. They help sailors and ships avoid danger. Flashing lights on the street at night when it's raining and slick and you see a barricade with flashing lights, well, you know that this is a dangerous road. There's a. There's a barricade put up.

That light lets you see that you don't need to go down that way. But light gives direction and light gives hope. Those little reflectors along the side of the road, you know, keep you on the right path. And then a porch light left on late at night reminds you it's never too late to come home. I love light, and the world needs you to be light.

Jesus says you can't do it secretly. People need to taste and see that the Lord is good, and they're going to do that through you. That means your personal relationships are going to be impacted. As Jesus continues the sermon, this is his next step. This is his next couple of points.

He says, your relationship with your neighbor, if you're being salt and light, if you're being a follower of me, if you're going to be a fisher of men, then your relationship with your neighbor, with your spouse, even with other followers of Jesus, are going to be impacted. And he gets really stern here for a while. He says, listen, in your relationship with your friends, family, neighbors, co workers, if you speak disrespectfully to them. And he uses this term racha, meaning you fool, which sounds pretty innocuous to us. But Jesus says, listen.

He if you treat people disrespectfully, you are in danger of the fire of hell. Look it up. Verse 5, 22. When you speak disrespectfully to people, Jesus says, I'm telling you, you're on the other side of the kingdom. Be careful.

He says this, don't try to make nice with God. If you're at odds with your brother, before you come to church and start singing God's praises and making big offering plates and impressing people with your spiritual life, and you ain't got things right with your brother, your neighbor, you said, no, no, no, stay home, stay home and take care of that before you come to church, man.

Is this a temptation to be unfaithful to your spouse? Temptation so dangerous that it's better to cut off a hand or pluck out an eye than give in to it to indulge it?

He says, you keep your word if you say it, mean it and keep it. Tell the truth. Don't take justice into your own hands. He says, give, give until it hurts. Give until you feel the pain of giving.

And in one of the most famous commands or instructions, he says, listen, you need to treat your worst enemy like your very best friend.

Jesus teaches us this new way, this new kingdom way. And you're like, okay, but what about this person? I can see the brows furrow and then going, ah, ah. They thought about that neighbor, you know, the one you have them too.

They thought about that co worker. They thought about their spouse, they thought about their in laws.

And they're like, I don't know. This is what, this is what we got to do to be part of the kingdom. We got to live this way to be part of the kingdom, to experience the goodness, the blessing and the covering of God.

If some of them were tempted to go back to their boats, I don't, I don't know that I would have blamed them, but they don't. Instead, they seem to recognize that Jesus has an authority that no one else has. And he speaks with this authority in such a way that he's taken. He's taken ownership. He's claiming they're not just their actions, but their attitudes for himself and for the kingdom.

He says, no, no, this is, this is how the kingdom works. This is how you express experience by living a completely different sort of way.

And many of them say, yeah, okay, we're in we want to be part of this kingdom where the poor, the mournful, the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the pure hearted, the peaceful, the persecuted. We want to live in this place where that is elevated, where that is the nobility, if you would. These people are the blessed. They're the ones whose lives are aligned with the heart and the character of God. They are the ones who will inherit heaven, experience comfort, inherit the earth, be filled, receive God's mercy, see God and be called God's children.

And this is the point where I say I need to be honest with you guys, because I find this to be pretty difficult. Before I walked up the platform this morning, I managed to insult at least two people. Two people. I mean, I think I hurt their feelings, quite honestly. I don't know that I meant to.

I was just being honest. You know how you are. I'm sorry, I'm just being honest. That's how I see it. I find Jesus message to be very, very challenging.

Maybe you do too, because it's not just me that's the problem. I live in a world where the loudest, the strongest, the wealthiest, the most privileged, they sort of control things, or they seem to. They sometimes prey on the less fortunate. I live in a world where greed and selfishness pay big while meekness and mercy get ignored or even taken advantage of. I live in a world where securing my own stuff, where my own future, where my own security has to come first and my neighbors have to fend for themselves.

Anyone else live in that world? Well, it's on 15th street, so thankfully, if you don't live on 15th street, obviously you're living in a great place. Hey, another 15th Streeter over there. Yeah, 15th Street's a pretty rough place. We gotta.

It's hard. It's hard. No, it's. I'm telling you, oftentimes our reality doesn't match. Sort of this ideal that Jesus shares.

And that's what it's sort of easy to dismiss it as. Sort of this. Sort of this. This ideal world where, yeah, that's what Jesus. That's how it should be.

But that's not really what it is. But Jesus says, no, no, he says it is. It is. Blessed are the meek. They are blessed.

This is what is really.

I don't know Jesus. I don't know how. I don't know that I see it that way. How do I recognize. Reconcile my lived reality with your reality.

And I think there's two aspects of this that help me understand what Jesus is talking about here. Partly it's this understanding that there's a present and there's a future aspect to the kingdom of heaven. And I if you've grown up in church, you. You've been exposed to this. Jesus says, blessed are.

Fill in the blank, for they will be. So there's language used that's both now and not yet. In a sense, it's prophetic. It will be the kingdom that has come. Jesus says it's here.

And the kingdom that is coming, the blessing that is ours now, God's favor and its fulfillment, its perfection, that will come at some later point. So, so there's the now but not yet aspect to what Jesus teaches about the kingdom. But to me, it comes down to a bigger issue of just determining and deciding to trust Jesus completely and fully, even when it doesn't make sense with my eyes and my ears. This sermon implies a deep trust in Jesus in this space between the now and the

not yet. And living in this place between the now and the not yet cannot be done without Jesus.

It can't be experienced apart from Jesus. It has to be lived in him and with him. Back in the Psalms, David wrote this beautiful psalm, and he asked this question, who can ascend the hill of the Lord? Who can climb this mountain and be with God fully?

Is this the one who has a clean heart and clean hands? And the implication is from David, it's not me. I've had people killed. I've committed adultery. I've lied, I've cheated.

I can't climb it.

One else here recognized that they can't climb it either. Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? No one who can live the Sermon on the Mount, Truly, no one except Jesus. Clean hands, pure heart. He can ascend the hill of the Lord, and he can take us with him.

Jesus is central to the life that's lived, that's expected to be lived in this new economy, in this new political situation of the kingdom. And trusting him with our lives is key where we trust him, we say, okay, Jesus, are you telling me the truth about how life really is? Is your definition of reality correct?

And if we determine if we decide, if we believe, if we have faith that it is, then we trust Jesus no matter. No matter what our lying eyes show us. And what that looks like is daily insisting on keeping Jesus on the throne of our lives informing every decision, every reaction, every response to the world around us, even as we're being cursed at or shunned or ignored or overlooked or misunderstood. To say, Jesus is king and we will do it the way Jesus tells us to do it. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians talks about this.

Paul talks about. He says, listen, when we're following Jesus, here's what our life is like. We are hard pressed on every side. He goes, we're getting it from all directions from the world around us. Life is, Life is not easy following Jesus.

And if anyone tells you it is, they've not really followed Jesus yet. He says, we're hard pressed, we're being beaten, we're experiencing all kinds of persecution. But he says this in 2nd Corinthians 4:17. But our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs all of that. So what do we do?

We fix our eyes not on what is seen, not on what is right there in front of us, but instead we fix our eyes on what is unseen, what is in advance of us. Because what is seen is the temporary stuff, it's the now. But what is unseen is eternal. It's the not yet portion. And we keep our eyes fixed on that.

We can clearly see around us evidence that following the wisdom of the world may get us what we want in the short term. We may get the satisfaction of just telling them what we really think. We make it the satisfaction of going, oh, yeah, well, yeah, we fudged a little bit. But look, we got, we got this, this and this. It may get us what we want in the short term, but if you drive around even our little community, you can see brokenness and destruction all around.

So Paul tells them, listen, fix your eyes. Concentrate your focus on the eternal, not on the temporal. And Jesus in this Sermon on the Mount, teaches them to pray that way. He says, you, kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Your kingdom come in me, your will be done in me and through me and around me, on earth and as it is in heaven.

And he says, if you, if you want to follow me, those of you sitting at my feet right now, this is what it looks like. You pray this way, you live this way, and you stick with me. Now, as we prepare for a time of communion within a very few short years of Jesus death and his resurrection, in a town in what is now southern Turkey, the followers of Jesus there are so committed to living this way that they attract the attention and, let's be honest, the ridicule of the others there, they get called some pretty insulting stuff. And one of the terms they get called is a dismissive one. They said, oh, they're little Christianas now the followers of Jesus claimed that insult.

They said, okay, you insult us with this, we'll own it before you know it. Followers of Jesus all over are being referred to as Christianaz. Now today we know that term as Christians.

If we are to be called Christians, even in an insulting way, let us live like Christians. Little Christs, let's pray.

Jesus, every day we are brought face to face with the reality that your ways always seem to come in conflict with almost everything about modern life. It runs counter to the basic economics of life where you tell us to give and give and give. When common sense tells us to save and hoard and keep.

It runs counter to the politics where you got to get out there and make stuff happen. You gotta, you gotta hit first before they hit back. And you teach us to live with this meekness and humility of just trusting you.

The whole spirit of the age tends to run counter to the Holy Spirit.

And I got to be honest, Jesus, it is hard and challenging to remain humble, to remain penitent, to remain meek, to remain merciful, and to stay pure and be peacemakers.

All of that, living righteously without somehow getting puffed up about it and becoming self righteous about it.

Even in my goodness, I find myself not following you.

So we need you because.

Because you call us to live a crazy sort of life and we have to be a little bit crazy to say yes to it. So we need you to keep us, to keep us sane in the midst of all the crazy. But if we've said yes to following you, if we've said yes to living in this new way, this different sort of life, then we pray that your kingdom would come around us. We pray that we would be emissaries, ambassadors of it. We pray that in our lives and through our lives, this kingdom begins to take root and grow and become a reality, at least around us.

So we live in it. We live in the blessing of that promise that the kingdom of heaven is ours in the now, even as we look forward to the future. So in this moment, as we take bread and the cup, we, we acknowledge that we can't do it apart from you. We can't live in this crazy kingdom apart from you. So we thank you for your love for us, dying for us so that we can say yes and we can enter into this place.

Thank you for your presence with us. And now as you empower us, help us to live as light in the dark world and as salt in, in a dysfunctional, dying world. Keep us here, keep us salty, keep us sustaining this place. As long as it is in your best interest to do so. And until that time, we trust you.

We ask you to keep us moving in your direction. In Jesus name, Amen.

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