

I love a new series. And I can't think of a better way to lead out of these vision Sundays we've been in, because all of this we're doing ... the purchase of this building ... the master plan ... Mosaic downtown ... it is all about Jesus. All of it. It is all about positioning ourselves to be a more effective witness to what we have seen and heard about Jesus Christ ... who is Lord and Savior of the world.

Jesus is who everyone in the Old Testament was looking for and pointing toward. He's who the prophets wrote about. The greatest of the Hebrew prophets was a man named Isaiah. He lived in Jerusalem with his wife and children. One day, he was lifted up into the presence of God. His immediate response to that moment was humility. He looked at God and said, "I am a man of unclean lips." God helped Isaiah to feel what its like to be forgiven, and then he recruited him to go tell the people of God that it is through Him they are healed.

So Isaiah became a prophet, and he wrote a lot about justice and charity, but woven into two themes is the story of the coming messiah. Lori and Randall just gave us Isaiah 53 in song ... this beautiful portrait of Jesus, painted eight-hundred years before his birth.

Isaiah 53 is where I began forming this series. I wanted to attach some of the key lines in Isaiah's prophecy and tie them to what we find in the New Testament story of Jesus. And we begin with the first verse. Isaiah says (Isaiah 53:1) - *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?* The message of Isaiah and the message of Jesus was the message of the Kingdom of God. When Jesus taught, his aim was to reveal the meaning of life from an eternal perspective. Matthew tells us that when Jesus taught (Matthew 7-28-29) - ... *the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because (listen to this) he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.* Jesus could teach like that because he

owned this message. It's like the difference between a guy who's read the book and the one who wrote it. Jesus owns this message, and there were people who were ready to listen to a guy like that. So to answer to Isaiah's question: "Who has believed our message?" ... the answer is ... it's the people who are tired of cheap imitations ... and who are sick to death of hearing about get-rich-quick schemes ... people who have heard dead message after dead message that has no power to change anything. Those people who then hear from Jesus himself ... *they* get it. So as we walk through this series and examine the life and teachings of Jesus, I want to pray that you will be one of *those* people. One who is ready to know the truth. (PRAY)

If you've got a Bible, look at Matthew, chapter five. That's where the Sermon on the Mount begins. Its three chapters long ... five, six and seven ... and it's the most famous collection of teachings by Jesus. This is Jesus' take (I love the way Dallas Willard puts this) on "how to actually live in the reality of God's present kingdom available to us (listen to this!) from the very space surrounding our bodies." To own this teaching in Matthew 5-7 is to convert your personal space into Kingdom space.

I want to challenge you to read Matthew 5-7 this week, and look for four themes. The first theme is that **the values of God are not always what we expect**. The Kingdom of God doesn't work like the world works, so a lot of times God works in totally counterintuitive ways. Look at the first few verses of Matthew, chapter five. Jesus says (Matthew 5:3-5) - "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*" God honors those who turn to the Holy Spirit when life gets hard. God honors those who get it that we need others ... that the good of the Body of Christ is more important than my position in it. God honors those who are sensitive to the enormous gulf that separates us from God.

Jesus says (Matthew 5:10-12) - *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad (that's pretty counterintuitive) because great is your reward in heaven* This is how life works in the Kingdom. How often have you said that *this thing* you're going through is hard, but worth it? That you're a better person for it? Stronger? Jesus is pointing at that truth and saying, "See? This is how we're built. So are you going to take the junk life has handed you and sit there and act like a victim ... or are you going to look for the blessing in it?"

Jesus said (Matthew 5:43-48) - *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ... 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

This is where Jesus teaches us what Kingdom perfection is. It isn't in the ability to do everything right. It is in the ability to love *anyone*. God's perfection is found in his capacity to love so perfectly, so selflessly that he can find something worth loving even in his enemies ... and he challenges us to stretch for that kind of love. Jesus says, "Don't fool yourself. You're not winning any "nice" awards by loving people who are easy to get along with. The challenge is to love 'em all. To not be so preoccupied with being right or respected that you can't extend grace in *any* situation.

Folks, this is radical teaching. It is upside down to our nature. Jesus is teaching us that our weaknesses are our strength. And he's teaching us to love even when no one is looking. And to love not just people who occasionally have a bad day ... but our enemies. And he even asks us to pray *for* our enemies ... because he knows that when we pray for people we're the ones who change. So pull out that list you just started a few minutes ago ... the one we're making of people we plan to pray for over the next two weeks. Have you written the names of any enemies on that card? Your boss? Co-worker? Your ex? Jesus teaches us to pray for our enemies, so write one of those names on that card. Ask God to heal their wounds. Ask God to show mercy. Why? Not to change them, but because this is how God builds character in *us*.

A second theme I see in Matthew 5-7. **Jesus teaches that authentic faith leaves a trail.** He says (Matthew 5:13-16) - "*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.* (read these next verses with me) *14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

This is how the Kingdom of God happens on earth. It happens when we take what Jesus teaches and put it into practice. Authentic faith leaves a trail. Jesus says (Matthew 7:24) - *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.* How are you doing that?

Here's another theme that runs through the teachings of Jesus: **God wants your heart.** Jesus said (Matthew 5:8) - *Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.* That's powerful statement. Just stop and think about that for a minute. Jesus gives us a formula for

experiencing God. It happens as we work at the core level to clean out the build-up of emotional junk that clogs our hearts.

How do you even begin to do that? Jesus teaches (Matthew 5:21-22 - "*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'* 22 *But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' (that means fool or empty-headed ... which is really about writing other people off) is answerable to the Sanhedrin. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matthew 5:27-28) - You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'* 28 *But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:31-32 says - It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'* 32 *But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.*

This is tough teaching. And here's what he's really saying through all this ... not that someone who has thought unkindly is at the same level as a murderer ... ***but that none of us lives above the sin line.*** Jesus is teaching us here about humility in the face of our fallenness. This is where we have to start if we're going to purify our hearts. We begin by saying, with Isaiah, "I am a man of unclean lips." Jesus is challenging us to look at the condition of our hearts.

Jesus is teaching us that the real battle for our hearts is in our minds. T. W. Hunt says, "God's goal for me is that I be like Christ. The one aspect of my personality that he will constantly measure for Christlikeness is my mind. He helps my growth by revealing *through His Word* the expectations He has of my mind." This is how we purify our hearts. We take every thought captive.

Say you've got a corral of horses. And they are all good, well-trained animals. One day, a wild horse gets into your corral. Maybe you left the gate open, or maybe that horse just jumped the fence. For whatever reason, it's there. So now you have three options. You can immediately shoo the horse out and reinforce your fence. Or you might decide that because this horse is now in your fence, he belongs there. Just like he is. Even if he tramples the other horses, eats all the food and wreaks havoc on your corral ... because he is there, you reason, he must belong there. OR ... you might decide that if you shoo this horse out, he'll just come back ... again and again ... so rather than getting into that dead-end cycle, you decide you're going to break him. He stays in the corral but you get some training and learn to break him. Now he's under your control now and not the other way around.

This is how we purify our hearts. We do whatever it takes to tame the wild horses ... and we pray for, work for, shoot for the mind of Christ. What are you doing about the wild horses? Are you going to leave them there to wreak havoc, or are you going to break them?

Go back again to Isaiah standing in the presence of God, painfully aware of that gulf between God's holiness and his sinfulness. The ability to see that gulf ... that's humility. And that's the secret. **The secret to following Jesus is humility.** He says (Matthew 6:1) - "*Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have **no** reward from your Father in heaven.* That was the problem Jesus had with the Pharisees of his day, those religious leaders who prided themselves on the fact that they followed every single law listed by Moses. Somewhere inside they had this idea that if they could follow the law perfectly, *they could be like God.* And maybe they didn't say it that way, but it came off that

way. In the way they acted toward anyone who wasn't there yet, it came off as pride. They came off as people who had arrived, when in fact, they were clueless about who Jesus was.

And that's the thing. If the teachings are all there is to it, then who needs a redeemer? We can just worship the Book. But ultimately, it's not the teachings that save us. The teachings alone won't span that gap between us and God. Only Jesus can do that. It isn't rules we follow. It's Jesus.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, says, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

Jesus owned the message of the Kingdom of God because Jesus wrote it. He is the author and perfecter of life ... The Living Word. That's why we follow him. Not because he was a great teacher, but because He wrote the Book. And He is Master over all of it.