

UNIT 23

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THE KINGDOM

OF GOD IS

IN YOUR MIDST

“Let Your Light Shine”

by Jonathan Hayashi

I was born into a broken home. By age fifteen, I became very embittered and depressed. Somewhere deep inside, a part of me longed to know that there was more to life than the hard, angry world that surrounded me.

At age sixteen, I received Christ and began a lifelong process of learning how Jesus is the source of life and the answer to my quest for purpose. The change in my life was so radical, things haven't been the same since. From a point of despair, I was drawn to the rich promise Jesus makes of a life of fulfillment and complete satisfaction in Him.

Even as a teenage convert, I knew the mission. I did not want to waste even a day, hour, minute, or second of my life; instead, I wanted to minister to those who had not heard the good news. Why? Once Christ came into my life, all my desires and dreams changed. Jesus became not only Savior over my life but Lord over every part of my life. That is the very

reason why I am so passionate about the local church, for it is the heartbeat of God.

DISTRACTED CHURCHES DRIFT FROM THE MISSION

However, as I invited people at church to have a gospel conversation with others, it seemed like all I heard were crickets chirping. Soon, I was frustrated with the system that seemed disconnected from the mission of Jesus. I felt like I was rejected by many of my old friends like Jesus had been rejected as a prophet in His own hometown. What I struggled with most was what I saw within the church concerning the kingdom opportunity outside. It seemed like Christians often became customers of religious goods and services distributed in their church rather than co-laborers in the ministry and message of Jesus.

If Jesus is king, then He has a kingdom. His kingdom has citizens. The question is “Are you a faithful citizen of God's kingdom or are you in defiance of your

As Christians, we all are called to the sweet stewardship of His kingdom in whatever God has entrusted unto us.

King?” As Robby Gallaty said, “The gospel has come to us because it is heading to someone else. We are just another link in the chain, and each of us is either fumbling the handoff or passing the baton.”¹

DILIGENT STEWARDS SERVE FAITHFULLY

“Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21). I long to hear those words from the King at His return! Those words consume me and drive me in everything I do here on earth. These words are similar to Jesus’s message to His disciple in Matthew 24:45-51, asking them, “Who then is the faithful and wise servant?”

Note that Jesus reminded the disciples that God’s kingdom is present today and will be established in full when He returns. As Christians, we all are called to the sweet stewardship of His kingdom in whatever God has entrusted unto us. Unfortunately, not every servant proves to be wise and faithful. We can easily become a bunch of lackadaisical servants just “enjoying fellowship” until the Master returns.

Wherever and whatever the Lord has given you, may you be faithful and wise servants as kingdom workers! Whatever age or stage of life, you are on a mission. Jesus asks us today as servant leaders, “Are you faithfully stewarding what I have asked you to do here on earth?”

DEVOTED DISCIPLES EXPAND THE KINGDOM

There are a lot of people who do not know how much God loves them, and a lot of them live right around us. They have no idea whatsoever that God sent His Son. And thus, His Son has sent you to make the gospel known!

Let us spend our lives making His love known amongst those around us. You may be thinking, “That is for the mature, not for me,” but this is a basic element of discipleship for Christians. This is Luke 9:23. You and I don’t have to start a large ministry, a new organization, a new initiative, or an incredible book. You don’t even have to start a blog. You have the authority of the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed in you to share about Jesus with whomever you meet, wherever you are.

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Kingdom people have a clear vision of the future; they point toward eternity, not just toward tomorrow. Kingdom people are single-minded people. Kingdom living is living Christ's way. Are you living the kingdom way today? Do you and I reflect on God as the sovereign, supreme King of the universe?

As kingdom workers, to live in obedience is the key to being a faithful and wise servant. As Jason Allen said: "I believe faithful leadership is remarkably simple. Not easy but simple."² The key to leadership is stewardship of faithfulness. Despite all the hardships, we must endure faithfully to the end.

Let us be careful about placing confidence in past successes or religious monuments rather than in continued faithfulness to the Lord. The world will laugh at the church, yet the kingdom is well worth the investment, even if it costs our lives. By God's gracious guidance, we find the kingdom, and we realize that it is what we have been searching for all along. Because of God's power and the work of His Spirit, each of us serving faithfully can make a significant impact on God's kingdom.

Are you living as faithful and wise servants of Christ? Are you working diligently and faithfully as kingdom workers to expand His kingdom? Are you prepared for Christ's return at this moment? That answer is ultimately only between you and God. But ask that very fundamental question right now: "Am I ready?" We as faithful stewards must always be alert and ready for the return of Christ.



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DISCIPLES ARE BLESSED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus has called His disciples to live in such a way as to reveal God's glory to the world.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Matthew 5

+ **SETTING:**

As people waited for the Messiah, they expected Him to bring the promised blessings of the covenant—wholeness, a restored land, health, and prosperity. When Jesus came and brought healing over sickness and cared for people's needs, many associated His actions with being blessed. What Jesus brings in His blessing, however, is greater than physical wellness and material prosperity. When Jesus blesses His followers, He brings the saving rule and reign of the kingdom of God to them while they wait for the consummation and restoration of all things.

DAY 1

READ:

Matthew 5:3-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:3-9

NOTES

In 2017, the Irish band U2 released their album *Songs of Experience*. Between the songs “Get Out of Your Own Way” and “American Soul,” the band included lyrics that were a play on words of the Beatitudes in the Bible, a type of anti-Beatitudes, calling out the values of arrogance, pride, narcissism, celebrity culture, and the bullying power of wealth in our modern culture.

In the midst of a world where people are made out to be insignificant, the pain produced from greed, the bullying culture, and the awkwardness of truth in a world of lies and spin, you can’t help but be reminded of Jesus’s words: the kingdom of God belongs to those who are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, merciful, peacemakers, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, and more. This is so antithetical to our current culture’s understanding. Yet it speaks truth and life.

The blessed life is not found in the accumulation of wealth or self-importance but in being a child of God who lives with the values and norms of another kingdom—God’s upside-down kingdom. In this kingdom, the first will be last and the last will be first; the proud will be put down and the humble will be lifted up.

God’s kingdom’s values run countercultural to those of this world. By giving up your life, you save it. By sacrificing it all, you gain all. When you lose, you actually win. Because in this kingdom, Christ is our example, and His character is exemplified in these Beatitudes.

What values seen in the Beatitudes do you need to display more of in your life?

DAY 2

READ:

Matthew 5:3-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:10-12

NOTES

Imagine test-driving a new vehicle and the salesperson is explaining all of the benefits of this vehicle that you are looking to purchase, but then he begins to tell you, “After a few hours in the driver’s seat, you will find your back aches, and you’ll need therapy. The repairs on this vehicle could pay for your child’s education. But you’re going to find that this car is a real blessing!”

Who in their right mind would ever purchase this kind of vehicle? It would be ridiculous to consider this type of purchase. For some people, when they read in the Beatitudes that those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed for they will receive the kingdom of heaven, they wonder why anyone would sign up for the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus, however, is not selling us a defective life; rather, He is proclaiming the comforts of the kingdom for repentant sufferers. Just as the prophets faced persecution for proclaiming the message of the kingdom, Jesus declares that His followers will receive the kingdom as the blessing for following in His ways and being suffering servants who proclaim the good news to the world. For those who have yet to experience persecution, Jesus gives assurance that though suffering will come, it will not last forever. Persecution is not a sign of the absence of God’s love; rather, the kingdom is promised for those who are despised and rejected for Christ’s sake.

How does the promise of the kingdom give you comfort in the face of trials?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 5:3-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:13

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #89: EDIFICATION

Edification refers to the progressive growth and maturity of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Corinthians 12:26; Galatians 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of Scripture (Ephesians 4:11-12), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the body of Christ, equipping people to live on mission for the kingdom of God.

Throughout human history, humans have found various methods to preserve food. One critical method that has been common has been the use of salt. When applied to meat, cheese, or produce, salt draws out the water, resulting in a process of dehydration. With the absence of water, harmful bacteria lack the necessary components that are required for them to grow and spread, specifically those bacteria which can cause food poisoning. Whether in meat or butter, salt preserves foods so that they can last much longer periods of time and be consumed at a later date.

In the same way, Jesus calls us to be the salt of the earth. As we live our Christian lives and follow the values of the kingdom described in Matthew 5:3-12, Jesus says that we function as those who preserve this world. As Christians, our words and witness function to keep evil from spreading. Our good deeds, our confession of sin, our mourning over evil, our hunger and thirst for righteousness, our pursuit of peace, our love for purity, our compassion, and our willingness to suffer for what is right display heavenly values. Though some people will oppose the way of the kingdom, Jesus promises believers that our lives will have an impact in this world and point people to the realities of a more blessed way to live.

In what ways has your life made a difference to the people around you?

DAY 4

READ:

Matthew 5:3-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:14

NOTES

Along the coastal regions of the United States and Canada are several prominent lighthouses. Situated in significant locations, these tall, narrow buildings have been erected close to the shore and are elevated with a beacon of light rotating from the top. In the dark nights or in stormy weather, the lights pierce through the dark to give ships guidance and warning—guiding them away from danger, and warning them not to get too close to the rocky shores. In years gone by, lighthouse keepers were tasked with maintaining the light to ensure the safe passage of ships out on the ocean.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to be beacons that shine. When Christians live as repentant sinners, seeking to walk in the new ways of the kingdom of heaven, others notice the light from our lives. Like a light keeper, the responsibility of every believer is to ensure that the light of Christ continues to shine clearly from their lives to the world around them. As Christians live in light of the kingdom, the light of our good deeds warns people of sin's danger and guides people toward the safe passage of the good way in Jesus Christ. While these good deeds are not sufficient to save anyone, they are able to point people in a different direction and give them a vision of something different—a better path that can navigate through the darkness and storms of life to the safe harbor of Christ's presence.

How can you shine for Jesus Christ today?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Only where hands are not too good for deeds of love and mercy in everyday helpfulness can the mouth joyfully and convincingly proclaim the message of God's love and mercy."¹

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906–1945)

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 5:3-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:16

NOTES

In days gone by, Christians were known for their active social work in many areas of life. Prison reform, medical care, the development of trade unions, the control of alcoholic sales, the abolition of slavery, the banishment of child labor, the establishing of orphanages, changes to the criminal code, the development of urban sanitation systems—in all of these areas of life, Christians were the driving force behind societal change. People who believed that the good news of Jesus Christ should have a social impact worked tirelessly to bring about practical social changes. Men like George Whitefield, John Wesley, Lord Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce, and women like Amy Carmichael, Gladys Aylward, and others sought to make a practical difference alongside of their gospel proclamation.

God has given every Christian good works to do (Ephesians 2:10). While not everyone will contribute to a massive societal shift, God has prepared deeds for us to do that add credence to our gospel proclamation. When more Christians have concern for the blessed life of the kingdom of heaven and less concern for personal prestige and fame, they can shape lives and generations with profound good.

While we all would love to do something great for God, He has prepared tasks for us that may seem inconsequential and insignificant in comparison to the great social goods already mentioned. However, a cup of cold water given in Jesus's name (Matthew 10:42) is not insignificant, for God knows how the simple act of obedience of His disciples can open doors to greater works and conversations about the glory of Jesus Christ.

What are some simple ways you can do good to glorify the Lord each day?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Salt of the earth! ye virtuous few, Who season human kind; Light of the world! whose cheering ray illumines the realms of mind."²

—Anna Laetitia Barbauld
(1743–1825)


POINT 1: Jesus's disciples are blessed (Matthew 5:3-12).

The first and last Beatitudes point out the nature of _____ before God and the blessing of _____ for doing right.

 **Why is it difficult to see suffering as a blessing?**


KEY DOCTRINE #89: EDIFICATION

Edification refers to the progressive growth and _____ of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Corinthians 12:26; Galatians 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of _____ (Ephesians 4:11-12), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the _____ of Christ, equipping people to live on _____ for the kingdom of God.

 From Day 1: **What values seen in the Beatitudes do you need to display more of in your life?**

POINT 2: Jesus's disciples are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13).

The salt of believers _____ out over this world, preserving it and offering it as an _____ offering to God.

 **In what ways can we be salt in the world?**

To cease to be salt is to become _____
disciples whose role of displaying the values of the
kingdom is worthless, resulting in _____ .

POINT 3: Jesus's disciples are the light of this world (Matthew 5:14-16).

Being the light of the world, _____ cannot
hide; they must _____ .

? In what ways do people hide the light of Christ?

The main reason we are to shine in good works
is not for our own _____ but for the
_____ of God.

? How do we make sure we are shining our light for
God's glory and not our own?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been blessed by God with salvation
through Jesus, we live as salt and light in the world so
that others might come to trust in Jesus.

- **HEAD:** How does knowing Jesus by faith change your life so that you can live for God's glory?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you can express your joy for the blessings Christ has purchased for you?
- **HANDS:** Whom can you pray for and talk to this week about the joy of Christ's forgiveness?



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The glory of the gospel is that when the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first."³

—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
(1899–1981)