

The Ethics of Jesus Kingdom Part 1: A Greater Life

Someone shared a story with me recently about a friend who had been unjustly accused of child neglect. The police were called when a four-year old boy was seen unattended between a neighbor's house and his own home. The boy had wandered off for a few seconds from the neighbor's, but the police pressed neglect charges on the father. In spite of his explanation and personal account of the story, the father was jailed, forced to post an exorbitant bond, acquire an attorney and forbidden to even see his son for over a month. Governing authorities and laws are meant to protect the rights of the helpless, but sometimes in our hurry for justice we look right past the truth and justice is thwarted. Jesus is the king (Son of David), and the ethics of his kingdom are built on the heart transformation of his subjects. He is less interested in prosecuting offenders and more concerned about the real story. By establishing a kingdom where justice springs from the heart and qualified by righteousness at the core of our being, the kingdom of God is a kingdom where truth works itself out from the inside and where no law can ever count against us. Jesus is crowned king of our hearts!

Journey Together:

- 1). Have you ever been treated unjustly? Describe how it felt?
- 2). Describe what God “desires truth in our inward parts” means to you.
- 3). How has God used you to explain the “real” story when someone was being misrepresented?

Road Map: Matthew 5: 1-20

- 4). How do the beatitudes help define the subjects of Jesus kingdom? What makes the *poor in spirit*, those *who mourn*, the *meek*, those who *hunger and thirst after righteousness*, etc., blessed? What is the blessing reserved for these people and how is it coming to them?

- 5). How do these blessings from Jesus speak to you? How do they give you hope? Which ones encourage you the most and why?

- 6). How is the new government of Jesus a fulfillment rather than a replacement of the old law? What is the law of Jesus kingdom and where is it written? What is the relationship between this new righteousness of Jesus and being the “salt/light” of the world?

Read Matthew 5:21-48. Note: In these verses Jesus addresses the law of murder (do not kill), marriage and divorce (do not commit adultery), oaths (do not lie), revenge (do not bare false witness).

- 7). What is so different about Jesus' requirement in our relationships with one another from the law of Moses?
- 8). What is the relationship between blessing in the first half of the chapter and how we are to treat one another in the last half? Which of these commands do you find most difficult and why?
- 9). If surrender to King Jesus is the first competency in discipleship, what is the second one? What steps will you need to take to move forward with Jesus as your rabbi?

Discipleship challenge: Jesus is challenging us to live from above. Focus on your own poverty of Spirit this week in contrast to Jesus gift. What do you need to follow Jesus from the heart?

- 10). How can this group pray for you right now?

My Journey:

- 1). How has God been using journey in your life this week to do *Great Things* for Him?
- 2). How has God been working in your heart this week?
- 3). How can this group pray for you today?

Backstory:

The Beatitudes are a stark contrast to the blessings and curses that greeted the Israelites as they crossed over the Jordan river into the promised land (Deuteronomy 27, 28). As the slaves of Egypt became the people of God in the Old Testament they were greeted with curses if they broke the covenant and blessings if they kept it. Citizenship in Jesus kingdom begins with a pronouncement from another mountain – the Mount of blessing where Jesus blesses the most surprising of His subjects. Those in power, the wealthy, healthy and prestigious were obviously blessed by God. But Jesus pronounced blessings on those who were poor in spirit, those in mourning, the meek, the merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted and those unjustly treated because of Jesus – in other words, would be followers of Jesus!

Jesus did not count them blessed because of their hardships, but in spite of them. They were blessed because in Jesus they had the kingdom! He knew what His followers were going to face for following Him. Yet, regardless of persecution, insults and many hardships they were blessed by receiving Him. The blessing of God's kingdom rested on them.

What would bring about such hatred and persecutions? Righteousness – but a different kind of righteousness. A righteousness from above. A righteousness greater than the best human example of righteous living known in Jesus day – that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus compared the righteousness of the kingdom to them because they were regarded as the most devoted to the law and the prophets. The Pharisaic order was for the most part a lay led group of very committed men to the Torah. Pharisaism by its most positive intent was a commitment to keep the law following the Babylonian captivity since the captivity had been regarded as God's punishment for disregarding and disobeying His laws and commandments (Deuteronomy 27; II Chronicles 36:15, 16; Nehemiah 1:4-7; Daniel 9:4-14). Most scholars trace the Pharisees back to the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah who launched the restoration of the temple and the

rebuilding of Jerusalem. So, in the first century the Pharisees were the most committed to the law and to righteous living. But Jesus said that the righteousness of the kingdom was to exceed Pharisaic righteousness. Jesus did not come to do away with the law or the prophets. Instead he came to bring it too fullness - to fulfill it. Fulfillment in that the law and the prophets both spoke of Him. The law was literally incomplete until Jesus came. Jesus Himself – His living of the law, His righteous actions, His justice for the poor, His righteous life, death and resurrection completed the law in contrast to the example set by the Pharisees. The law – God's will, was not complete without Jesus! Jesus was not replacing the law, but His life was the only shining example of God's intention of a righteous life. Jesus is the righteousness of the kingdom!

What was the righteousness of Jesus? Heart righteousness. The righteousness from within. The righteousness that seeks the will of God from the inner self. This was a righteousness from above. This was the righteousness that could only come from God as a gift. Man does not have it. Not even the Pharisees could compare with this kind of righteousness. Jesus goes on to talk about the motive and the intent of the heart. "You have heard it said, but I say unto you..."

What kind of king would Jesus be? What is the ethical standard of His kingdom? A government from the very heart of God. Righteousness that does not begin from fallen humanity. Righteousness that comes from God above and is given to us as a perfect gift. The second competency of discipleship under Jesus is submitting to His righteous life reborn in our hearts. A righteousness that we cannot buy or manufacture from within ourselves. Life that is only found in Christ Himself – the inner righteousness that causes us to love with integrity and to seek the good of others no matter what the cost. This is the way of discipleship – the better righteousness, the way of love, the way of Jesus!