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Tillamook, Oregon

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*The Gospel According to  
Matthew*

*Citizens of the Kingdom of  
Heaven*

*April 15, 2018*

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 5:1-16

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 5:1-16

I am not sure where the term “red neck” came from. One suggestion that seems reasonable is that it was an often derogatory term that used the sun-burned necks of farmers as an image of:

“a working-class white person, especially a politically reactionary one from a rural area.” [Wikipedia]

There are still many jokes and entire comedy sketch series that build on the

redneck – the common “you might be a redneck if...”

The biggest fashion risk you take is which plaid you'll wear to the 4-H Fair. Or, you have flowers planted in a bathroom appliance in your front yard.

For myself, I would rather be with this class of people than hang out with social elitists who fancy themselves above the commoner. Here in the Pacific Northwest we are surrounded by rednecks – loggers, farmers, laborers. They like to hunt and fish, they are second amendment people, and they are very glad that Donald Trump is President.

But consider for a moment with me what we might call “redneck theology,” and be sure that our own view of God, of life, of ourselves, of death and what comes after death, of our relationship with the Lord...is not described by redneck theology. What do I mean?

Well, consider what the average person here in this and surrounding communities believes when it comes to God, the Bible, Christianity, and so on. It goes something like this:

*“You work hard, you provide for your family, you love your kids and sacrifice for them, you help your neighbor, you believe in God, you embrace traditional American family values, you confess that the Bible is the Good Book, and in the end, God will embrace you and reward you and let you into His heaven.”*

What that heaven is like is up for discussion, but generally it involves a big family reunion with all your grandparents and aunts and uncles who have gone before you. But largely, and this is my main point here, *redneck theology focuses on this present life, the things of this present life, in a way that really communicates that its adherents believe that real life, the life that truly counts, is this present life in this present world. Therefore we must enjoy it all that we can, see each day as a gift, and try our best to leave a heritage so that we can live on in the memories of our loved ones.*

And while there is some morsel of truth in this theology – each day is a gift from the Lord, for example – redneck theology goes very, very wrong and we must not embrace it.

Christians do not see their true life in the here and now. Our life is with Christ, soon to come, still to be revealed to us. Our life has only begun when we were given new life through faith in Christ and the Bible tells us that right now, until Christ comes, our life is “hidden” from view –

Col 3:1-4 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. (3) For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

And this is precisely where redneck theology (and even much of what claims to be evangelical Christianity) goes very, very wrong. Redneck theology is what I call “meat and potatoes” theology. It is earthly. It does not specifically emphasize Jesus Christ, the coming resurrection, the great judgment of all men, the new heavens and the new earth. And as a result, its hope is a false hope, its grief is a grief that has no real remedy.

We have seen, as we have begun our study of the Sermon on the Mount, that the theme of Jesus’ preaching is *the gospel of the kingdom*. This good news is not earthly, but NEW earthly! It is

the good news of the new creation coming one day in all of its fullness so that the entire universe is redeemed from every last aspect of sin and the curse. *The gospel of the kingdom, I say again, is the subject of Jesus' preaching. Not only here in the Sermon on the Mount, but in all of His preaching.* The kingdom of God, which is simply another term for the new heavens and new earth inhabited by a new humanity created by God in Jesus Christ, is our real home, it is our real life, it is what we were truly created for in the first place. Redneck theology has no real place for this kingdom. If you doubt that, bring the subject up with them and be specific.

If you are going to enjoy hope and peace and joy and victory over sin and death that Jesus Christ has won for you on the cross, then you must, by faith, increasingly become less and less attached to this present life and world and turn your gaze upward to what is to come. *We do not grieve as those who have no hope, because our hope is certain and it is coming and it is eternal:*

1Th 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

It is a pathetic thing to see people who reject Christ, grieve in the face of

death. They have no hope. Their supposed confidence is in reality hopelessness. Not so for Christ's people.

Now, this kingdom of heaven that Christ proclaims is far more than a mere going to heaven instead of hell message. No, Christ's redemption is *broad*. It is cosmic. It is not just the redemption of His elect from the penalty and power of sin, but it is His redemption of all creation. Here it is:

Rom 8:18-25 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (19) **For the creation waits** with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

(20) **For the creation was subjected to futility**, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope (21) **that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption** and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

(22) **For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.**

(23) And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (24) For in this hope we were saved. Now hope

that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? (25) But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

See it? Christ's salvation, His redemption, His atonement and resurrection, is all-encompassing. It is a powerful setting "right" of all creation. This is the gospel of the kingdom and it is really, really good news. Unlike redneck, here and now theology, the gospel of the kingdom looks up, it looks forward, looking for and yearning for – groaning for – the full renovation of the entire universe.

Think carefully now about these things. These are the things that earth-bound theology stumbles and chokes over. *Think about this present world in which we live. Consider how death pervades everything:*

- People die – we live in a cemetery
- Animals die
- Plants die
- There are "agents" of death throughout all creation: bacteria, viruses, genetic aberrations
- Things rot and putrify
- Energy dissipates and things wind down

This surely is what Jesus meant when He said:

Mat 6:19-20 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, (20) but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Surely the "moth and rust" He spoke of represent far more than moths and metal rust. The creation in its fallen condition is pervaded by death. The good news of the kingdom of heaven is that Christ has come into this death infested creation to put things right.

I think you see it in John 3:16 as well:

Joh 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Most people today who profess to be Christians, are not heavenly minded. That is to say, they embrace far more of redneck theology than they might imagine. This gospel of the kingdom is quite foreign to them, *and yet it is the very heart of Jesus' preaching!* It is the very reason He came into this world.

William Hendriksen did not miss this. In commenting on the kingdom of heaven, he notes four aspects of the kingdom: [The Gospel of Matthew, Baker House]

1. God's kingship, rule, and recognized sovereignty. This is present now in the hearts of His people. In the fullness of the new creation, His kingship will be universal. No rebels. No sin. No lawlessness. No atheists. No man-made religions. No destructive heresies. Pure and universal truth.
2. Complete salvation. "All the spiritual and material blessings...which result when God is king in our hearts, recognized and obeyed as such."
3. "The church. The community of men in whose hearts God is recognized as king. The kingdom of God and the church when used in this sense are nearly equivalent."
4. "The redeemed universe. The new heaven and earth with all their glory...the final realization of God's saving power."

Hendriksen also shows us how the Sermon on the Mount is arranged according to this main theme, the kingdom of heaven.

1. "First, Jesus speaks about the citizens of the kingdom, 5:2-16, describing their character and blessedness (vss 2-12) and their relation to the world (vss 13-16). They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world.
2. Secondly the Lord sets forth the righteousness of the kingdom, the high standard of life demanded by the King (5:17-7:12). We are shown that this righteousness is in full accord with the moral principles enunciated in the Old Testament (5:17-19), but is not in accord with the current and traditional interpretation and application of God's holy law (verses 20-48).
3. Thirdly Jesus concludes his sermon with an earnest exhortation to enter the kingdom (verses 13-27).

And yet, here is the amazing thing, if you will give serious, honest thought to this subject, you will see that in fact the real, full glory of this message Jesus preached, this ultimate goal for which He came into this world, suffered, died, resurrected and ascended, is most certainly *not* what most Christians set their minds upon. Nor is it what most pulpits preach about. In fact, most sermons today, most conversations among Christians today, are really no better than redneck theology because they are concerned

only with *this present life and world and how to somehow get along in it and find some remnant of happiness*. If you doubt this, just check the titles of the most popular Christian publications, or the subjects of the average Christian conference.

And yet what is Jesus' sermon topic? *The kingdom of heaven!* What is the end point to which all of His redeeming work is moving us? Here it is:

Rev 22:1-5 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (2) through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, **the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month**. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (3) No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. (4) They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. (5) And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

All of creation redeemed, you see. Right now there are seasons. Trees and plants "die" every fall and remain fruitless a good part of the year. But in

the new creation ALL presence of and aspects of death are gone. There is a constant harvest.

Following the beatitudes, Jesus' pronouncement of blessing upon the people of His kingdom, He tells us that right now, in this present fallen world, we are *salt and light*. We will plan next time to consider in detail just what these two images mean, but I would suggest to you now that many, many professing Christians have lost their saltiness and they have hidden their light under a bushel. Why? Well, the kingdom of heaven is only seen by *faith*. And real faith, the kind by which we are justified before God in Christ, is a rare commodity in these days it seems.

Do you believe the promises of God? Do you see the kingdom of heaven? Is your mind increasingly set on your life up there, yet to come, hidden with Christ? Or are you one of the many "yes, but...." Christians who responds with that very phrase to the good news of the kingdom? "Yes, but, that's all well and good, this kingdom to come business and all, but I just don't see how that has anything to do with my life and my problems and my issues right now." A statement like that betrays a person who is still blind to the glory of Christ and the certainty of His promises. In contrast:

Heb 11:37-40 They were stoned, they

were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated-- (38) of whom the world was not worthy--wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (39) And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40) since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.