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The Gospel According to Matthew

Life in the True Israel of God – How it is Supposed to Be

April 8, 2018

Sermon Text: Matthew 5

Scripture Reading: Exodus 20:1-21

We come now to the fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel which is the beginning of the section (chapters 5-7) commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. As we have seen, Jesus is a kind of second "Moses" come to lead the true Israel out of enslavement to sin and Satan into the Promised Land of the New Heavens and New Earth.

Matthew intends for us to be reminded of Moses going up on Mount Sinai to receive the Law from the Lord which Moses then announced to the people. But there is a radical difference in the

two settings. When God gave Israel the Law in Moses' day, there were frightening thunderings from the mountain and the voice of the Lord was too terrible for the people to hear. They were terrified and stayed at a distance.

But here, the crowds are drawn to the One giving the Law –

Mat 4:24-25 So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. (25) And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

Mat 7:28-29 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, (29) for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

Mat 8:1 When he came down from the

mountain, great crowds followed him.

What we are seeing must be what John meant when he wrote:

Joh 1:16-17 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (17) For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Understand now that Jesus is not giving a new law. He is not abrogating the Law of God, but fulfilling its every jot and tittle. What Jesus is giving us here in the Sermon on the Mount, in other words, *is a description of life in the true Israel of God as it was always intended to be. That is to say, when the Law of God is fulfilled, when the people of God live it out as God intended, this is what it will look like.*

Jesus pronounces blessings (beatitudes) on those in the kingdom of heaven. There are certainly stern admonishments for the hypocrites like the scribes and Pharisees, but there is no litany of curses such as accompanied the Law given through Moses.

This is who true Israelites are, and this is how they will live.

Look for example at phrases like this:

- Theirs is the kingdom of heaven

- They shall inherit the earth
- They shall be satisfied
- They shall see God
- They shall be called sons of God
- You are the salt of the earth
- You are the light of the world
- Your reward is great in heaven
- Our Father in heaven

So Jesus is instructing His disciples. Those who are following Him. And He is showing us *how we are to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven even while we are still in this present world. It is essentially the same motif that we have in the epistles of the New Testament. This is who you are now as a new creation, therefore live out your new life.*

Much of the Sermon is corrective. Jesus corrects and exposes the false applications of the Law taught by the scribes and Pharisees which they claimed were the laws of the kingdom of God. Not so, says Jesus. THIS is what My kingdom looks like.

Do you remember what Paul said about the Law in his letter to the Romans?

Rom 7:6 But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Rom 7:11-14 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. (12) So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (13) Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. (14) For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

When sinful human beings, devoid of and apart from the Spirit of God, read God's Law, interpret God's Law, and teach God's Law, *the inevitable result is false religion that oppresses and enslaves*. The Law of God cannot be comprehended by fleshly, Spirit-less human beings:

1Ti 1:6-7 Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, (7) desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

So here comes Jesus, the King, the true Moses, calling the true Israel out of the world in a new Exodus, and here He shows His people the right use of the Law.

1Ti 1:5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

So this is what Jesus is doing here in the Sermon on the Mount. He is describing true Israelites. He is exposing the false, carnal misapplications of the Law that made up the Temple religion of the day, and positively He is teaching *what the Law of God truly requires and what new creation life in this present world looks like*. Needless to say, it is quite opposite of what the Pharisees had been teaching.

Point of Application – wherever you find a person who is devoid of the Holy Spirit, who is unregenerate in heart, putting themselves off as a teacher of Scripture, a guide to others, *you will always have the blind leading the blind, enslavement, and God's truth turned completely wrong on its head*.

The Beatitudes

Mat 5:1-12 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. (2) And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

(3) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(4) "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

(5) "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

(6) "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

(7) "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

(8) "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

(9) "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

(10) "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12) Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

If you read Deuteronomy 28 where Moses rehearses the blessings and curses of the Law, you will be struck with the observation that blessings and curses are both rehearsed in detail. But here there are no curses for true sons of God, citizens of Christ's kingdom. Christ became the curse for us.

Now, let's consider this word "blessed" in more detail. We generally give it too shallow of a meaning. What it means here is that these kind of people Jesus is describing, these new creation kingdom people, *are recipients of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant*. Listen to it:

Gen 12:1-3 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. (2) And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (3) I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Gen 15:18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

The sons of God then are the children of Abraham. Heirs of the Promise. And if you look closely at these Beatitudes, you will recognize elements of the Promise in them:

- Inherit the earth
- Shall see God
- Called sons of God

Christ's people then are blessed with the blessings promised to Abraham.

I am not going to examine each one of these beatitudes in detail as is the normal approach to a study of this chapter. I want us to all get a firm hold on the "big picture." What does a true child of Abraham look like? Well, here is the list of qualities:

- Poor in spirit (humble, recognize their need)
- Mournful (grief over sin?)
- Meek
- Hunger and thirst for righteousness
- Merciful
- Pure in heart
- Peacemakers
- Persecuted.

Notice in particular that last quality – persecuted. Jesus spends quite some time on it. Listen again –

Mat 5:10-12 "Blessed are those who are **persecuted** for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) "Blessed are you when others **revile you and persecute you** and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely **on my account**. (12) Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Notice that Jesus specifies that the persecution at its core is due to following Christ – "*on my account*."

And is it not interesting that the world hates such people? Think about it. What logic is there in hating someone who is described by these adjectives and actions? Well, there is plenty of logic in it if you are evil. We see it everyday. Someone stands for righteousness, for holiness. They oppose bullies and wickedness. They portray Christ in other words and that is why they are hated.

Now take careful note of this again:

1. You are *blessed* when reviled and persecuted and falsely slandered. Blessed. Because it is evidence that you are a son of Abraham, and
2. You can rejoice and be glad *because such experience is consistent with being in Christ*. Jesus points to the persecution of all the prophets in the past as proof.

I say take careful note of this because I am not sure that the average professing Christian experiences this. This doctrine is not taught plainly and soundly in the church. When we think of persecuted Christian we think of people in foreign countries, but we do not think of ourselves. And generally

we seem to believe that if we are reviled or persecuted then we have done something wrong. But if you stand for righteousness, if you openly follow Christ, if you speak His truth, then you will be hated. Right now in our own country this battle is obviously raging.

It is also very interesting to give some thought to the irony that *peacemakers disturb the peace!* Just as Jesus did. The gospel disturbs the “peace” of the wicked. The peace that Christ’s people make is not a false peace, but genuine.

Rom 14:17-19 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (18) Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. (19) So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

All of these qualities which characterize the children of Abraham, sons of God, citizens of the kingdom, are *new creation attributes*. The old fallen creation, the kingdom of darkness, has just the opposite qualities:

Gal 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of

anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So They Persecuted the Prophets

As you go through the Bible, what do you commonly see in the experience of the men and women God called to speak for Him? The prophets, as Jesus calls them here. Step back and survey the landscape of the prophets:

Mat 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

Mat 23:29-35 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, (30) saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' (31) Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. (32) Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. (33) You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being

sentenced to hell? (34) Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, (35) so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

Heb 11:37-38 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.

And of course Jesus, THE Prophet, was hated and slandered and crucified.

Jesus pronounces such people blessed, because this hatred by the world is a mark of belonging to Christ.

Let's not permit the enemy, then, to cause us to sink into some deep pit of depression thinking "there must be something wrong with me." If in fact you are standing for Christ, if these beatitudes describe you accurately, then you can rejoice and be glad because it is proof that you are in Christ's kingdom and that our reward in heaven is great. That is to say, we

will most certainly see the New Heavens and Earth and have a share in it. That is why the beatitudes contain so many repetitions of, *the kingdom of heaven*. Two overtly and two in earthly terms. Let me show you as we conclude:

Mat 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is **the kingdom of heaven**.

Mat 5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall **inherit the earth**.

Mat 5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is **the kingdom of heaven**.

Mat 5:12 Rejoice and be glad, for your **reward is great in heaven**, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Right now, heaven and earth are separate fundamentally. Heaven is where Christ is and where departed believers are. When Christ came into this world, the kingdom of heaven began to encroach into the earth. And notice very carefully that Jesus alternately refers to our inheritance as the kingdom of heaven/heaven, and inheriting the earth. What does this mean? Simply this:

Christ's kingdom has come into this world and is coming fully and completely one day. The kingdoms of

this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord. And this means that "heaven" which we inherit ultimately is the renewed, sinless, curse-free creation. Our home that is coming is not "up there," but it will be "down here."

Not some misty, vapory, surreal place of spirits. Nope. A real earth, a real creation, only perfect. Heaven in other words is coming *down here!*

Rev 21:1-5 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (2) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. (4) He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (5) And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."