

Learning From Jesus

Week 11

Kingdom Contentment: How Living in the Kingdom is the Cure for Anger

Key Verse:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."

All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them.
"The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"
Luke 4:18-21 (NLT)

But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.
Mark 10:31 (NLT)

Key Term: The Great Inversion

"God's design that people with little to brag about, who exist in a 'power down' position in the world flourish and are somehow exalted. This reversal brings glory to God, not to the person." (SG, pp. 35-36, cf. DC pp. 88-89, 121, 178) "Possibly the most pervasive theme of the biblical writings" is the 'transformation of status for the lowly, the humanly hopeless, as they experience the hand of God reaching into their situation" (DW in DC, p. 121)

Reflections on "The Heart that Jesus Gives Us"

The engine that pulls the train of Christian Spiritual Formation is the grace infused, Kingdom partnership with Jesus Christ. "We can't do it without Him, and He won't do it without us" is the Kingdom norm, though there are exceptions. We find descriptions of this partnership in many places of Scripture, including Colossians 3, Romans 5, and the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-8).

Over the next weeks we turn our attention to the Sermon on the Mount as our primary text, where we have a remarkable talk about Kingdom life given in intentional and

important sequence. It parallels Col 3.1-17, though Paul is a bit more directive while Jesus is more descriptive. The whole thrust of Jesus is his teaching that...

"A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit." (Luke 6.33,34)

If there is to be Kingdom fruit, the whole tree must be changed, from root to bud. Jesus' call to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5.48) is not just 'preacher talk'. It is the exact intention of the Kingdom, now announced and available in Jesus' life and ministry.

The Beatitudes (Matt 5.1-12) are among the most well known words of Jesus. They are unique phrases, and I think of them as 'sentries', who announce and guard and fulfill the Kingdom. To the broken, they open the doors, declaring God's ready and abundant blessing now available to those who have 'lost out' in life. To the proud, they lock the gates, declaring the insufficiency of human righteousness. To those who enter, they pour out abundant life, and quickly become promises fulfilled!

Jesus (Matt 5.13-20) tells us entering the kingdom will bring change at the deepest levels, at the heart level, enabling us to fulfill the righteous intention of the law that the Law could never produce. Kingdom grace and life will turn us into the good tree that naturally and easily produces good fruit.

Then, in a series of linked paragraphs that draw from common life and upset common wisdom, Jesus teaches that trust in him and living from the resources of his 'Kingdom Among Us' will bring us to be the kind of persons who...

- Live free of contempt and anger (Matt 5.21-26)
- Are free from domination by sexual lust and disgust (vv 27-32)
- Are free of desire to dominate and control verbally (vv 33-37)
- Are free from grudges, 'fairness', paying back (vv 38-42)
- Are able to love enemies and bless those who curse (vv 43-48)
- Do not perform for human credit (vv 6.1-18)
- Do not trust in 'our stuff' (money, etc) (6.19-34)
- Do not manage others by condemnation, criticism, etc (7.1-12)

The 'commands' of Jesus in the Sermon are 'enabling illustrations' of a certain type of person, a person who through faith and discipleship to him has become inwardly transformed so that his/her behaviors flow naturally (supernaturally, of course) from who they have now become - his maturing brothers and sisters happily living under the present rule of God.

Anger is at the top of the list, because it underlies most of the other issues on the list. It is "the will to harm because your will has been crossed, your kingdom has been invaded" (DW, Private Notes). Though there is such a thing as righteous anger, most of our anger is honestly of a different kind. Anger by its nature pushes and judges in an effort to assert 'my kingdom'. This rejection invariably harms everyone. Anger comes from contempt and feeds contempt for people. That is why James warns...

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." James 1:19-20

"Everything you can do with anger, you can learn to do better without it" (DW, Private Notes). Paul tells us to lay aside anger, before the sun goes down, each night. Or you will get into wrath, and you will have sin right and left (Ephesians 4.26,31,32)!

When we give into anger, it can become a part of our character, even to the point of becoming an 'automatic' response to life's trying circumstances. In due time, our nerves, our muscles, our blood pressure, our body chemistry all become unwilling but dutiful servants of the angry heart. We become known as an 'angry man/woman'. People steer clear!

How can the heart be freed from anger? Jesus' words in Matt 5.20-26 reward careful thought. Transforming anger means becoming a different kind of person, from the inside out. The problem is the heart, always! If you just say, "I am not going to explode anymore", you fail. Our inner life, our heart, our mind, our soul must be touched and transformed by the power of the new birth, by the life of the Spirit, by the word of God. This is the "Vision", the good Kingdom soil, from which the contented heart grows. It grows in the person who is living "in the Kingdom", from a new heart, living from a life with God, drawing on Kingdom resources, following Jesus, living the kind of life Jesus would live if he were me.

You make a pickle by soaking a cucumber in the brine, not by dipping it, and it must soak for weeks and weeks! Christians have to be soaked in Kingdom brine. Soaked.

"The Kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."
Romans 14:17 (NLT)

Note in Matthew 5.21ff **Jesus' emphasis on the priority of reconciliation**, of walking in forgiveness and grace. "If my brother has something against me..." I get to go first, forgive first, even to 70 times 7 (Matt 18.21-22)! Forgiveness, freely received and freely given, heals the angry heart.

And note later in the sermon, **Jesus' Kingdom confidence in our Father's care** (Matt 6.25-34). The angry man believes God is NOT good!! We have these suspicions lurking in our hearts... But again and again the scriptures assert that God is good, and that in the day of trouble, you can trust him.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."
Romans 8:28

His goodness is not occasional, deceitful, temperamental or partial: not "He loves me, He loves me not" kind of goodness. But steady, faithful, constant, always pressing in... I remember how in a season of great danger for a friend of mine, the Lord said to her, "Nothing will come into this room unless it comes through me." That is Kingdom living.

We need to train our wills so that anger is not the automatic response when our wills are crossed. How? By seeing your place in the Kingdom. By living in the Kingdom. By

committing yourself to him who judges righteously. We have **Vision** of the Kingdom, **Intention** of getting over anger (for example) and then we use the **Means...**

Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

*"I will take revenge;
I will pay them back,"
says the Lord.*

Instead,

*"If your enemies are hungry, feed them.
If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap
burning coals of shame on their heads."*

Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Romans 12:14-21 (NLT)

Slowly the circles of the soul are transformed. The cucumber is becoming a pickle! Then we come to the place where we routinely and easily do the things that Jesus tells us about.

Reflection Question: Summarize the key ideas in the Reflection in your own words.

Bible Study: The Great Inversion

1. Look up the following verses, and summarize them in the spaces below.

Reference: The Song of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15

Reference: The Prayer of Hannah in 1 Sam 2

Reference: The Story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17

Reference: Jehoshaphat's Prayer and Battle in 2 Chronicles 20

Reference: Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1

Reference: Mark 10.31

2. How would you summarize the "Great Inversion"?

3. Does this Kingdom theme give you different eyes for God's work?

4. Have you seen it happening around you?

Spiritual Tool for the Week

The following exercise is to be done this week. Record your experiences in the spaces below.

Spiritual Tool: Keep A Sabbath

One of the crucial things about the Sabbath is to do nothing for your kingdom. To take your hands off your kingdom. It is an exercise of trust. Not keeping Sabbath is a refusal to yield your kingdom. You should have time each week where you do nothing, trusting that when we are not working, it will be OK. "Once in seven, practice heaven." If you can do it in heaven, it's OK. Sabbath is "eternity training"!

Reflections on your experience

Readings for Feb 25th:

Read The Divine Conspiracy, Ch. 5, Celebration of Discipline, Ch. 4