

## **The Upside Down Kingdom**

### **Matthew 5:3**

In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard talks about growing up in rural Missouri during the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Back then there was no electricity and life was marked by kerosene lamps, lanterns and ice boxes. And then one day it happened. The new local electric company came by extending their power lines, and in so many ways they said, “Repent of your ice boxes, kerosene lamps and lanterns, for a whole new way of life, a life marked by electricity is available to you!” Oddly enough, Willard notes, that not everyone was on board. See while a whole new way of life had been offered, so many preferred to the old way of doing things.

In essence, this is the message of Jesus. Jesus stepped into a dark world that was marked by the old way of doing things, a way marked by man’s efforts and power. But when Jesus showed up he announced, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is upon you.” The kingdom of heaven does not speak of what happens when we die, but a whole new powerful, dynamic way of experiencing life now! It’s like offering electricity in a world used to ice boxes, kerosene lamps and lanterns! And yet, just like in the natural during Dallas Willard’s day, so many people in our world reject Jesus’ offer preferring the old way of doing things. As we set out together in our study on the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is going to show us what the new powerful way of the kingdom looks like, and how to live it!

#### *Sermon on the Mount Overview*

If there’s one phrase that sums up the basic message of the Sermon on the Mount it is the phrase, *Impossibly Christian*. I call it this because if you read through the sermon the prevailing feeling you should have is one of being overwhelmed. What Jesus says about anger, lust, marriage, how to handle those who wrong you along with a host of other issues should leave you feeling downright overwhelmed with this haunting sense of there’s just no way I can do this! Scholar, D.A. Carson offers this insight: **“Nevertheless, I insist that if the Sermon on the Mount be construed merely as legal requirement to kingdom entrance, no one shall ever enter: can anyone meditate long on [Matthew 5-7](#) and remain unashamed? The Sermon on the Mount provides us with a crushing blow to self-righteousness and follows it up with an invitation to petition God for favor (7:7-11), without which there can be no admittance to the kingdom. At the same time it sketches in the quality of life of those who do enter, those who petition God, ask for forgiveness, and who by God’s grace discover not only forgiveness but a growing personal conformity to kingdom norms. It is not long before their own lives begin to sum up the law and the prophets”- D.A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*.**

Why does Jesus overwhelm us? Not so that we throw our hands in the air and quit, but instead that we throw our hands in the air like a little child and run to our Abba Father saying I need your help! There’s just no way I can pull any of this off. So if you’re feeling overwhelmed by lust, Jesus says don’t run from me. I’m not here to condemn you. Run to me! If you are feeling overwhelmed with how poorly people have treated and wronged you, Jesus says

fly to me! If you're feeling overwhelmed by worry and anxiety, run to Jesus, for he offers us a whole new way to live!

### *The Beatitudes*

Jesus begins his sermon not with a list of laws, but with a list of blessings, extensions of his grace, of what we would call The Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are not a list of things we must do in order to get saved, for that would be works salvation. Nor are the beatitudes a list of things we must do to earn God's favor, then that would be moralism. Instead, the beatitudes are evidences, marks of what kingdom people look like, of what Christians look like.

In fact, the beatitudes are a striking contrast between the **kingdom of this world** and the **kingdom of heaven: Pride vs. Humility. Revelry vs. Mourning. Oppressive Use of Power vs. Meekness. Hunger for Personal Gratification vs. Hunger for Righteousness. Vindictive vs. Merciful. Hidden Agendas vs. Purity of Heart. Divisive vs. Peacemakers. Acceptance vs. Persecution.** The beatitudes show us the upside down nature of the kingdom of heaven which stands in stark contrast to the world!

Not long ago I remember listening to a sermon by Pastor Curtis in which he talked about getting all dressed up because he was headed to a wedding. Now this wedding was way out in the country, and along the way he realized he needed to stop and get gas. So he stopped at one of these country gas stations, a real throwback to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Americana. And when he got out with his suit and tie on the other people began looking at him strange. They were in shorts and jeans and overalls, and they found his apparel weird. He stood out. What he wanted to tell them was that he was not dressed for where he currently was, but for where he was going. Oh friends, that's the beatitudes. They represent the apparel of another world, that Christ-followers wear in this world! Therefore, they make us stand out.

### **HUMILITY- Matthew 5:3**

Jesus begins the sermon with the beatitudes, and the first beatitude that he lists is those who are poor in spirit. The Greek word for poor was not just used of the person who was a beggar, but it was actually used of their posture. In other words, the word poor doesn't just describe a poor person who was asking for money, but it described their disposition, for the word literally means to be hunched over. It's a picture of them leaning over with pleading eyes, where everything about them says I am completely desperate. The word *spirit* further illumines this idea of disposition because it's not a reference to their finances, but to who they are inwardly. So what does it mean to be poor in spirit? It means to have a disposition of desperation. Or to say it another way, the idea here is one of complete humility and dependence on Jesus!

Some of you have gone through AA and their twelve-step program. You know full well that when a person has come to the end of themselves when it comes to alcohol they say there's just no way I can continue living like this.

So they go to AA where they encounter the first step which says, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable." In other words, those who are in AA have reached a point of desperation. They have a disposition of desperation.

In the same way, Jesus says that true kingdom people, in fact the first step to experiencing the kingdom of heaven, is to possess a disposition of desperation. It is to reach a point in life in which you say I cannot do this life on my own. I don't have what it takes to get to God, to experience God, to have a relationship with God. I am morally bankrupt, completely undone by sin!

What does Jesus say of the person who has this spirit, this disposition of desperation? He calls this person blessed! You know what blessed means? It means to be marked by a state of fullness, and in context this fullness is from God. See the dichotomy here? It's only when you are poor in spirit, when you have a disposition of desperation where you say I am completely incapable of living a life that honors God and others that you will be full. This beatitude shows us the upside down nature of the kingdom of heaven, for Jesus says emptiness is the way to fullness! We can't be full of ourselves and full of God at the same time.

I love the game of baseball. In fact, just before the batter steps into the batters box he will look down the third base line and get a series of signals from the coach. Sometimes those signals mean the batter needs to bunt. Now bunting means to angle the bat in such a way that when the ball hits the bat it dribbles down the line guaranteeing the batter will be thrown out. Now why, you may ask, would a batter be told to do this? Well, it's because one of his teammates is on base, and he's being asked to give up his rights to swing for the fences, and to think beyond himself, and of others, and to advance the runner. In fact, when you bunt it's also called to sacrifice, and to sacrifice requires humility.

College student, when's the last time you bunted for your roommate? Husbands, when's the last time you bunted for your wife? Young person whose single mom is working multiple jobs just to put food on the table, when's the last time you bunted for her. Proud people swing for the fences, humble people are concerned with the well being of others so they bunt. They sacrifice. This is the way to fullness.

## **PRIDE**

And yet, as we all know, the great enemy to the virtue of humility is the vice of pride. Pride is the way of the kingdom of this world. While humility is emptiness, pride is self sufficiency. While humility is to have a disposition of desperation, pride is to be full of oneself. While humility is dependence on God, pride is independence. Pride is what got Satan kicked out of heaven, Adam and Eve evicted from the garden, and lead Judas to betray Jesus. Pride is the cause of death for every marriage, every relationship, and keeps us from coming to God through Christ. A newspaper once invited people to submit answers to the question, "What is the problem with the world?" The great

literary giant GK Chesterton responded with one line, “The problem with the world is me, signed, GK Chesterton”. Yes. We are the problem. It’s our pride!

Years later, another great literary figure, CS Lewis would go onto say in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, that the fountainhead to all vice, the sin beneath all sin, is pride. In other words, what Lewis was rightly pointing to is that sins like gossip, adultery, lying and so on are mere symptoms of a much greater problem, and that problem is pride.

Let’s stop for a moment, and take a shot of Vitamin A- application. Let’s take a little test. Because one of the deceptions of pride is the ability to see it in everyone else but ourselves. If you answer yes to any of these questions, you struggle greatly with pride. **Are you easily offended?** I once heard it said that it’s almost impossible to offend a humble person. Why? Because they don’t lead with their rights, they’re too consumed with other people. **Are you a people pleaser**, making it very difficult for you to turn down others? Why is that? Maybe it’s more than being nice that’s in play. It could very well be you want them to think well of, well, YOU. **Are you a timid person** who just won’t confront people? Timidity is actually a face of pride. Why? Well, the timid person won’t confront because they’re too worried about the other person not really liking, well, YOU. See the pride? **Do you rarely if ever apologize?** Humble people apologize frequently, prideful people don’t. Why would they? They don’t see themselves being in the wrong. **Do you always find a way**, no matter what the subject is being discussed, **to bring the matter back to, well, ME**, and to one up someone else’s story? **Do you struggle with prayerlessness?** E.M. Bounds, the great 19th century prayer warrior and writer once said that prayer is the expression of the souls dependence on God. Prayer essentially says, “I need you,” which means prayer is a mark of humility; prayerless is a mark of pride. Finally, **have you never struggled with anything on this list?** If you say you haven’t, you have pride issues! Pride is universal. We are all prideful.

## **CULTIVATING POVERTY OF SPIRIT**

The gravitational pull of all of our hearts is away from humility and down into pride. Humility is unnatural to humanity. So how do we cultivate a disposition of desperation, a poverty of spirit? Believe it or not, everything we need to cultivate a heart of humility is found in the gospel. And as we love to say around here at the Summit- the gospel is not just the diving board, it’s the swimming pool.

### **Abide in Christ**

At the center of the gospel is Jesus, and no one lived a more humble yet full life than Him. Writing to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul describes it this way: **“Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself”- Philippians 2:5-8a.** You know, it really is a truism to life- we drift towards what we meditate on. Driving down the road, if your eyes are fixed right, the car will drift right, because we drift

towards what we meditate on. If we want to live a truly humble life, we have to fix our eyes on Jesus, to have a mind consumed with him. We have to abide in Christ.

### **Be Gracious**

Christ and grace are the essence of the gospel. Take either of these two away and you have no gospel. It's impossible for prideful people to receive grace, because grace says you did wrong, and you need help, two things prideful people will never admit to. We'd much rather give ourselves to works, because that's where the boasting is. But the mark of the truly humble is that they readily receive the grace daily extended to them through the gospel, and they extend that grace to others.

When our kids were little, I'd take them to breakfast on Saturday's. And this one Saturday we walked into a diner in Memphis, and I could tell right away the server was a piece of work. She seemed like she was in a bad mood. She screwed our order up several times, and when I let her know about it she was just flat out rude. No problem, I thought, I'll fix her. So when the bill came, I left the line that said "gratuity," blank, yanked my son out of there, got in the car and left. Not too far down the road, the Holy Spirit began speaking to me. He reminded me that the word "gratuity," comes from the same family of words we get the word "grace," from. And grace means to give someone something they did not deserve. By leaving the line blank I had withheld grace from her. So the HS, being the nuisance that he can be, impressed upon me to drive to a nearby ATM. I pulled out a good bit of money, and made my way back to the diner, and asked to speak to our server. I apologized to her, and gave her the money. Immediately she broke down and began to cry. Ultimately she would tell me about how she's going through a divorce, and is in a nasty custody battle for her children. I was able to share the gospel with her, and it was grace that lead the way.

Now, please don't look to me as some paragon of humility...I am not. My wife is saying amen right now. Instead, everything we need to live a full life is found in a gracious Jesus, who in an insane act of humility gave his life on a cross for you and I. He died that we might live, I mean really live. The gospel inspires us to put down our "kerosene lamps and ice boxes," repent and live into the fullness of the kingdom. And we access that by humility.