

Walking With God in a Pandemic

The Heartbeat of a Citizen

Rough Transcript

Brett Clemmer

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Hey guys, welcome back to our series, **Walking With God in a Pandemic**. We've been in this series now for eight or nine weeks, and we've only got a couple of weeks left. And go ahead, if you would, and turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter four, we're going to start at the end of Matthew four. And while you're doing that, let me just share a little bit about what I feel like is going on right now. So I don't know if you noticed, but all around us one of the predominant emotions that I see people feeling is the feeling of anger. When the pandemic came, there are people that were frustrated that we didn't react quickly enough, there are people that are frustrated that we put in measures that were too drastic, people that didn't feel the measures were drastic enough, and people are angry.

And add into that the fact that many people have lost their jobs or have lost hours at their work, many people now are having to juggle responsibilities that they never had to juggle before. Like for instance, I think of all the young families who maybe both parents are trying to work from home and they have kids who now need to be homeschooled. That frustration level, that anger level has risen as people have just desired for this to be done, to be over with. And then you add in the political rancor that has been going on and that just magnifies it all. And then, on top of that, and really concurrent with it but really bubbling up in the last few weeks, we've seen the ugly, ugly issue of racism come to the fore. We've seen three people lose their lives in very unjust ways since February. And that's brought to the surface the issue of racism and the issue of people not having access to the ability to succeed all in the same way and how frustrating that is for people.

The positive part of that is that people are supporting other people who they feel are being treated unjustly, and so they're letting their voices be heard for righteousness and for justice. And for the most part, that's been great. Obviously in some ways, it's not been great as opportunists have used it to commit violence and theft. And that's not helped the issue of racism and justice and fairness in our society. But all around that, again is just this anger at how things are going in our society and in our world today. And so it's a frustrating time and there's a lot of anger around. And in Matthew chapter four, we see Jesus is in a time like this as well.

We know that Jesus lived in first century Palestine in Israel. The nation of Israel was under a foreign rule though. The empire of Rome had dominion over the nation of Israel, over the land that Israel was in. And so Jesus is in this time of Roman occupation, and the people of that time were angry at the Roman occupation. They were not happy to be under somebody else's dominion. There was inherent unfairness in the way that that operated. They paid high, high taxes that left, that went to Rome. They were subject to labor. We all know that if a Roman soldier asked you to carry his equipment for him, you had to do that for a mile. And Jesus famously said, "If they ask you to do it for one mile, you do it for two miles."

And so Jesus lived in a time of oppression, and of sickness as well. They didn't have the medical care that we have. They didn't have the ability to cure disease the way that we have today. And so it was a difficult time then as well, and so I think that the times relate to each other and that Jesus' truth then speaks truth to us today as well. So, let's look at Matthew chapter four, and you've got your handout. If you haven't gotten the handout from the website, I'd really encourage you maybe to pause the video

right now on go get the handout. But if you don't have the ability to do that, maybe you're listening on podcaster, there's going to be three points.

THE WORLD IS NOT ALL RIGHT

And so the first point in the first circle on the handout is this, the world is not all right. The world today is not all right and the world in Jesus' time was not all right. The world is not all right. That's the world that we live in now. So, let's look at how Jesus interacted with the people in the world of his day. Verse 23, "And he went throughout all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom." Remember that phrase, "The gospel of the kingdom." "And healing every disease and every affliction among the people. 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. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. Seeing the crowds..." Chapter five verse one, "Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him."

And so Jesus has... He's been out there, he's been teaching. We know he's been teaching all around, he's been healing people. People are flocking to him because of his power. And so Jesus is healing people, but at the beginning it says, "He's proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom." What is that about? If you look at many of the teachings of Jesus, he has this phrase that he uses in many stories. He says, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like... The Kingdom of Heaven is like." Now what is a kingdom? Well, a kingdom has a king, right? Or it has a sovereign. It has somebody that's in charge. In their day, the Roman Empire was a kingdom and Caesar was the king. And so Jesus has proclaiming a different kingdom. He's proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. And we'll actually see this later on in chapter five.

And so the people of the day, they wanted a change in the kingdom, right? They were looking for Jesus to be the Messiah that delivered them politically, that removed the power of Rome and installed a man of God as their king. And Jesus continually was teaching on, that's not what the kingdom is about. It's a spiritual kingdom, it's a heavenly kingdom. It's not a kingdom of this momentary time, because this world is not okay. In Romans, Paul talks about the creation is groaning waiting for the return of Christ. This world is not okay and we're seeing those groans even today. And so into this time, into this difficulty, Jesus walks and he speaks, he heals people and he proclaims a different kind of dominion. And boy, doesn't that speak to us today.

Wouldn't we love for the power of God to come to bear on this virus that's affecting the world? And of course on cancer and heart disease and diabetes and all sicknesses that we're afflicted with. But right now, wouldn't you just love to see the power of God come in and wipe the coronavirus off the face of the earth? We all would. And Jesus has the power to do that. God has the power to do that, but instead he uses these times, these afflictions to draw us closer to him, as their affliction drew them closer to Jesus. Why? So that he could teach them about the gospel. And so we need to use this time of difficulty for us to learn about the gospel as well.

The other thing is that we need to be like the disciples. We need to come to Jesus so that we can learn more about them. And we need to learn what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. So what does that look like? Well, in your second circle, write down this, or the second point is that Jesus reveals the Kingdom of Heaven.

JESUS REVEALS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Jesus reveals the Kingdom of Heaven, and he does this through his parables, but he also does this in Beatitudes. And as we look at the Beatitudes, you've probably heard the Beatitudes before. "Bless is this person, blessed is that person," so let me read through them, and then I want to share a couple of points about the Beatitudes. And then I want to give you a little homework assignment, because there's

no way we could really go through them adequately in one Bible study. But I want to give you an opportunity to really go deeper into the Beatitudes in the week ahead.

So let's read through them together and let me point out a couple of quick things about them. First of all, let's read, verse three, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you and others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account, rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

And so we see this list of what? Of attitudes, right? That's why they're called the Beatitudes. But if you look at this list, there's a couple of interesting things that I want to point out. First of all, the Beatitudes are kind of book-ended by verse three, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." And then verses 10 through 12, which start, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." And those two Beatitudes, they're in the present tense. "Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." They also have the same promise. So the attitudes in between these book-ends, they're not mutually exclusive. In other words, you're not meek or mourning or hungering and thirsting for righteousness. These are the attitudes of a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, and they all go together to describe what the heart attitudes of a Kingdom of Heaven are like.

And so let's run through a really quick. So those who mourn, there's people all around us who are mourning. Mourning the loss of loved ones, mourning the loss of livelihood. There are people who are mourning for injustice, mourning for the impact of racism on their friends or on themselves. People are mourning. But the promises is that God will bring comfort in the Kingdom of Heaven. "Blessed are the meek," there are people around us who are meek, who are listening, who are willing to maybe even take accusation that's not just on themselves, but they're meek, they want to serve the people around them and so they're acting in a meek way. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." There's a lot of people out there right now who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for right action, right behavior.

And so those people, they're going to, in the Kingdom of Heaven, that thirst for righteousness, that hunger for righteousness will be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they receive mercy." Man, how many people do we see that are merciful right now? I think of all the doctors and nurses and first responders that are putting their lives at risk to treat sick people, showing mercy to them. "The pure in heart, for they shall see God." The pure at heart is somebody who's really willing to look at their own brokenness and their own sin, and they're willing to admit that and confess that and repent of that. Those people are pure in heart. That's a journey, but those who go on that journey will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers." There's a lot of people out there trying to be peacemakers right now, people who are trying to comfort those who are angry, comfort those who are hurt, and to be the light of the gospel in those people's lives. And we'll see more about that in a second. And so you see these attributes, these attitudes of mourning and meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking book-ended by being poor in spirit and being persecuted for righteousness. And what does it mean to be poor in spirit, by the way? It's not like walking around going, "I'm terrible, I'm horrible." Being poor in spirit is just being humble. It's just recognizing that in the face of a Holy God, we can't measure up. And so being poor in spirit is just recognizing that it's only Jesus' sacrifice that makes anything possible for us, any righteousness at all possible for us and so we walk in that understanding. And when you walk in that understanding, when you rely on the grace of God, that's when you see the Kingdom of Heaven, yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.

And so the other truth then that we see with the Beatitudes is, "Shall be, shall be, shall be, shall be," is the present and the future, is that the Kingdom of Heaven is here now, but it's not perfect. And it will be perfect when Jesus comes back. But so we're in the kingdom now, we're in God's kingdom now, but that kingdom is going to come to fruition in the future when Jesus comes back. And so when you look at these heart attitudes, you realize that the attitudes of my heart determine, "Am I relying on being a citizen of this kingdom, of the country that I live in, or am I relying on being a citizen of heaven?" And so the Big Idea is that **the attitudes of my heart reveal the citizenship of my soul. The attitudes of my heart reveal the citizenship of my soul.**

This place is not our home. This place is a temporary place until we can live fully in the Kingdom of Heaven, live fully in God's presence and with Jesus. And so that's the message of the Beatitudes to us, that the attitudes of our heart reveal the citizenship of our soul. So then, so now what then? What are we supposed to do as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven? Well, it's the next few verses. So look at verse 13 to 16. "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

SALT AND LIGHT

And so Jesus uses these two great metaphors, that metaphor of salt and light. So why does he call us to be salt? Well, what does salt do? Salt brings flavor, right? So let me ask you, when you think about the interactions that you have with people, the way that you take care of your family, the way you interact with people, maybe at work or your community, in your church, are you bringing the salt of the gospel into those conversations, into those interactions? Are you bringing the flavor of Jesus, of God's grace and mercy and love and kindness? Are you bringing that flavor into the conversations and into the interactions that you have?

Because the metaphor is this, that if you lose that flavor, if you have a relationship where you're not bringing the salt of the gospel, where in fact, you're bringing the anger of the world, you're bringing the self-righteousness or whatever sin into that conversation, into that relationship, once you've lost the flavor of the gospel, it's incredibly difficult to get it back. And so, as you enter into relationships and enter into conversations, bring the flavor of the gospel with you, not of your own righteousness, but only of your righteousness in Christ. And that will help to bring a flavor to those conversations that brings glory to God, and frankly, that is more helpful to the people that you're interacting with.

And light is the other metaphor that he uses. "You are the light of the world." Well, what does a light do? Well, a light dispels darkness. The metaphor of light is often used to show purity, to show goodness. And so you don't hide goodness, you don't hide purity, you don't hide the light of the truth under a basket. No. You want to shine that light. You want to proclaim that light. You want to be on a stand, not even just like a little flickering candle on a side table. You want to be on a stand providing light to the room that you're in, to the relationships that you're in, to the interactions that you have.

Even if you are in conversations at work, or if you're out on the street and you're walking in a demonstration, are you bringing the light of the gospel or are you bringing the anger of a temporary kingdom that is not all right. The world is not all right, but the world is not our home. We are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. And the attitudes of our hearts shows the citizenship of our souls. And the way that we interact, if we are salt, if we are light, those are the ways that we can proclaim the gospel of the kingdom just as Jesus did, in the first century.

So that's my prayer for us today, that we would be salt and light, that the attitudes of our heart would be revealed to people around us and that it would show them that we are citizens. Our souls are the

citizens of heaven and not the citizens of this place. So how do you write those attitudes into your heart? Right. How does heart change happen, if you're not feeling particularly peaceful or meek or righteous or poor in spirit? If you're angry at being persecuted, if you're not feeling very merciful right now, how do you get there?

Well, let me give you one idea, one suggestion, a sort of homework for you. So we've been teaching a class at Man in the Mirror called Abiding. We've done it once and we're going to do it some more in the days ahead. And it really... The idea of Abiding is really the idea of taking time to sit in the presence of the Father quietly, to not try to read a whole bunch. You can do that at another time, read a whole bunch of scripture or do a lot of Bible study. Those are great things to do, and you should do that, but take some time, and I would recommend in the mornings, take some time to just abide in Christ, to abide with the Father. And how do you do that? Well, take one verse.

And so what I would suggest that you do is just take one Beatitude every day for the next week. There's the book-end Beatitudes at the beginning and the end, and then there's six other Beatitudes in between. That gives you seven days of just meditating on the word of God. Just take a verse and read that verse, maybe write it down. And then pray to the Father, "Lord, will you reveal this to me? Will you show me how to do this in my life? Will you change my heart to mourn well, to be meek, to hunger and thirst for righteousness? Father, will you change my heart? Will you show me what that looks like in my life? Will you show me the times that I'm not like that so that I can repent of those things and turn back towards your way, towards the way of the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Make God your king. Live in his kingdom, not the kingdom of this world, and certainly not the kingdom of darkness and falsehood, but live in the kingdom of light, and the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Kingdom of God. That's my prayer for us. And I pray that you'll spend time in these verses this week. Let me pray for us.

Well, Father, we love you, but we are surrounded by difficulty. We are living right now in a tumultuous moment. And Lord, we often don't know what to do, we don't know what to think or how to act. We don't know what to say. Father, would you give us the perspective of a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven and help our hearts to be turned towards you first so that we can be salt and light to all of those around us. Lord, bind us together as brothers, help us to lift each other up, to encourage each other, to bear each other's burdens and to exhort each other to be citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, and to live like we are sons and daughters of God. Lord, we love you. Help us to remember that you love us and that you are our Father and you are our king. In Jesus name we pray, amen. Thanks guys, and have a great week.