

“Setting the Stage” Matthew 4:23 - 5:2 Wednesday 5/8/19 – Jeff Lyle

Before we hear the first words from the most famous sermon ever preached on earth, it is helpful to set the stage for the words that Jesus is about to share. The Sermon on the Mount provides a revolutionary prescription for living - both in Jesus' day and in ours. This message was not released without purposeful timing from Jesus. While His fame was spreading and the number of people following Him was increasing, Jesus' released a sermon that cut to the very core of the human heart. This message will prepare us to receive the transformational words which will comprise this series on the Sermon on the Mount. What was happening just before Jesus shared the words concerning culture of His Kingdom? Why did He choose this specific moment to speak on these eternal truths? We will be helped by setting the stage before the curtain rises.

I. Jesus Prepares the People (4:23)

A. By His going - His feet were involved (23a) - “And He went throughout all Galilee...”

Jesus did an incredible amount of ministry in this area which measured about 63 miles long X 33 miles wide. It is estimated that somewhere close to three million people were living in Galilee at this time. Jesus did not set up a tent or a building, requiring the people to come to Him. He knew where they were and made Himself available to encounter them as they went about their daily lives.

B. In His speaking - His voice was involved (23b) - "...teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom..."

1. Teaching in their synagogues - this is where Jesus expounds truth from Scripture - their Hebrew bible. Jesus would often unpack the Scriptures which would have been familiar to most of the Jews living at this time. In our day, there is an unsettling trend of people being bored with the Bible. Jesus would never endorse a movement or ministry that did not include faithfulness to the written word. He quoted Scripture regularly and would often accept opportunities to expound the Word of God in the gatherings which took place in the synagogues. Imagine the revelation that the people would experience as God the Son gave them perfect doctrine as He explained and applied the words of the bible to them! The Holy Spirit now takes on that task with Christians living today. God wants us to know His written word. The Holy Spirit was not only sent to empower us, but to enlighten us as He guides us into all truth.

2. Preaching the gospel of the kingdom - this second means of using His voice is how Jesus called people to a course of action. While teaching the Scriptures is more detailed and methodical, preaching almost always involves a summons for the listeners to commit themselves to what they have heard from the preacher. In proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God, Jesus was signaling them that the time had arrived for them to acknowledge Him as their Messiah. A perpetual King was promised to David 1000 years earlier, and all Israel had a longing for that King to appear. Jesus was and is the final King of Israel. The time had come for Israel to receive the Kingdom by bowing to its King.

C. Through His healing - His hands were involved (23c) - “.....and healing every disease and every affliction...”

Matthew is intentional here to be clear that Jesus prioritized physical healing as part of his ministry. In a culture where there was nearly no medical development, people could (and did) easily die from sicknesses that are cured in modern times with vaccinations or antibiotics. There were very few channels of assistance for those with debilitating disease. Jesus went to these sick and afflicted people and proved His divine mastery over sickness, injury and disease. While different from demonic possessions, Scripture does reveal that demons inflicted pain, sickness and torment on some. Not only was Jesus revealing His power over sickness, He was demonstrating His authority over the forces of hell by freeing people from their physical debilitation. There is no reason why modern-day believers should expect less from Him. Nothing in Scripture tells us that healings from God should not be sought by us today. In fact, there are many passages that compel us to seek God for breakthrough in the areas of sickness, disease and injury. Jesus has not changed. He still heals.

D. Via His connecting - His heart was involved (23d) - “...among the people.”

Though this little phrase is subtle, it is extremely important. God was committed to live among the people. Jesus went to where the every-day man or woman lived. He blessed children. He intentionally deposited Himself in the presence of notorious sinners, the ceremonially defiled, lepers and the marginalized people of His day. If we are truly His followers, we will do the same. Church gatherings are vital, and they give the body of Christ opportunities to worship, learn and pray together. Surely, we serve one another when we come together. Yet, Jesus is clearly committed to reach those who might never feel welcome at a church gathering. He went out and found them. Few kings would make themselves accessible like this. Jesus, the king over every kind did not avoid the people. He placed Himself among them.

II. Jesus Demonstrated Supernatural Power (4:24-25)

A. What went before Him (24a) - “And His fame spread throughout all Syria...”

It makes perfect sense that some intense momentum would be arising as Jesus was moving throughout Galilee. As people were being healed, word would travel fast. The news of what Jesus was preaching and teaching also would have sparked widespread curiosity. Naturally, the crowds would grow. Sick, demonized and afflicted people will always be desperate for healing, deliverance and personal breakthrough. No prophet had ministered miracles like Jesus was doing for many centuries. Word was traveling quickly that Israel's Messiah may have very well appeared. People came to find out for themselves about the man named Jesus.

B. What flowed from Him (24b) - “...and He healed them.”

Jesus' three-year ministry consistently involved the following:

1. Power over disease - “...they brought Him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains...”
2. Power over demons - “...those oppressed by demons...”
3. Power over disabilities - “...those having seizures, and paralytics...”

It is time for the present-day Church to do an assessment of the nature of the ministries that we present. Should we not be alarmed that it is entirely possible to offer a ministry that does none of the things that Jesus did while He was upon earth. Many Christians, churches and ministries have abandoned the teaching of the Scriptures. Jesus prioritized that activity. Fewer and fewer are participating in the public preaching of the Kingdom of God, calling people to decision and action concerning where they currently stand in relation to the eternal Kingdom. More flagrant is the absence of power in the modern Church. Do we heal the sick? Do we cast out demons from those tormented by them? Do we operate in supernatural power that reverses the effects of disabilities which plague people in our own generation? We should be alarmed that we can have "successful" ministries today which seemingly do little or none of the things which Jesus prioritized while He walked on earth. Friends, we need a fresh and widescale repentance that leads to a release of divine power. The reason why His forthcoming Sermon on the Mount would hold such credibility is because Jesus first demonstrated a love and authority that set the captives free.

They would believe more strongly in what He said with His mouth when they witnessed all that He did with His heart and hands.

C. Who came after Him (25) - “And great crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.”

There were many types of people who came to see and hear Jesus. We do well to remember that every large crowd to whom He ministered truth and healing was not comprised of exclusively committed people. Even today, when crowds gather on Sundays for weekly worship, teaching and prayer, many who are present do not actually belong to Jesus as sincere followers. Anything that might look to be attached to religion or God can draw a crowd. Jesus clearly healed innumerable people who never became true Christians. He let the rain of His love, mercy and power find the just and unjust alike. While many committed to Him, the majority did not. In the crowd which gathered before He released the Sermon on the Mount, we would have found the following types of people:

1. Decent people - curious, not overtly sinful, wanting clarified answers about who Jesus truly was
2. Dissatisfied people - living for self, living for the moment, seeking lasting pleasure, yet remaining unfulfilled
3. Desperate people - these had heard His words and power, and were determined to meet Him to find help
4. Doubting people - these were honest skeptics who needed time to make up their minds
5. Devoted people - these knew Him and recognized Him as the One sent to save them

III. Jesus Determined the Precise Moment for the Message (5:1-2)

A. He chose the audience (1a) - “Seeing the crowds...” He knew every heart of every person.

B. He chose the place (1b) - “...He went up on the mountain...”

C. He chose the moment (1c-2) - “...and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying...”

Matthew's words in chapter 5:1-2 hint of an intentional timing from Jesus about releasing the forthcoming Sermon on the Mount at this time. We are told that He saw the crowds, ascended the hill from where He would preach and then He began to teach, in particular, His disciples. We also see that, by the end of the sermon that the larger crowd became listeners to all that Jesus preached. Matthew writes in 7:28, "And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching." So, the intent of Jesus was to release this longest of His recorded sermons at the time when the greatest number of people could have opportunity to hear and believe all that He spoke. While Jesus often spoke profound Kingdom truths in ways that they could not have mass appeal, or even mass understanding, this particular message was crucial to His forthcoming Kingdom. The crowd was comprised of diverse people and they all needed an opportunity to understand the nature of the Kingdom of God, specifically its characteristic as being fully counter-culture for all of human history. This Sermon on the Mount is paradoxical in nature and, in certain places, called people to press beyond what were the standard relational and religious expectations of the day. As the content of His sermon begins to be unpacked, each hearer becomes aware at how different the heart of the Lord is from the unredeemed human heart. Even for those who are born-again, the challenges Jesus releases in this sermon cause us to bow in humility, knowing that only Christ in us can empower this kind of life from us.