



# Gospel / Life

## Toward A Spirituality of Freedom

New Creation Teaching Ministry: Tuesday Night Studies 2011, Seacliff Anglican Church

### Study 3: The Freedom of the Father

*Summary of last week:*

*God our Father's great plan for us is that at the end of history we will be a holy and blameless family in His sight, fully conformed to the likeness of His Son. This will be the glorious freedom of God's children. At the moment the fullness of that freedom is not yet ours in experience. But it is certain and will be fulfilled by Christ at the end of history, when he comes again. The Holy Spirit is given to us as a promise and guarantee of the future. By the Spirit's power we anticipate the future by faith, living in holiness and obedience to Christ now.*

*We face two wrong approaches to "spirituality": it either becomes dreadful drudgery (we have to make it to the goal ourselves) or it becomes frightening license (the future holiness does not break in upon us by the Spirit.) We also face a third problem: spirituality becomes divorced from life in this world and seems to be about religious escape from the necessary actions of life. Spirituality is actually about the dynamics of the eternal kingdom breaking into every aspect of our living in the createdness that is God's gift to us.*

### **The Freedom of Life in Communion with the Father through the Son**

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) was spoken at time when Jesus had withdrawn from the crowds (5:1, 8:1), and was addressed to his disciples, those called by him to follow him and to become fishers of men—it was not spoken to the crowds as a kind of general ethical teaching for all people everywhere. It is a passage giving us insight into "the spirituality of the kingdom"—how the truth of God impacts on our everyday life with Him.

In Matthew's Gospel it is placed very early in the narrative of the ministry of Jesus:

- **his baptism (3:13-17):** God from heaven declared Jesus to be his Son, beloved by Him and well pleasing to Him, as the Spirit of God descended upon him. "Son of God" in Matthew is connected very deeply to Jesus being the head of the new people of God, the new Israel (i.e. the new family, the new covenant community created by God through His saving works.)

[The declaration of these things to Jesus were the well-spring of his coming ministry, not the reward for it. Obedience flow out of certain sonship; the certainty of sonship does not out of full obedience (although there is an experiential way in which assurance and obedience are linked in an ever-revolving circle! E.g. "If you obey my

commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." (John 15:10)

Jesus is the gatherer and forger of the new community. Without him and without his working of salvation, the new community cannot exist! "I will build my church!" In gathering this new community, it is all with the intention that we, together with and in Jesus Christ, know that the same word of the Father comes to us—that we are His beloved sons and daughters and that He is well-pleased with us.

To gather the new community, the new family Jesus, the true and obedient and beloved Son will need to rescue the children from slavery under a false father, slavery which has come through willful and wicked rebellion and disobedience. He was to be called Jesus (=the Lord is Saviour, deliverer) "because he will save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21)]

- **the temptations (4:1-11):** Satan sought to undermine and destroy Jesus' Sonship by his well-worn path of tempting to presumption and self-reliance. In fact, his questions about Jesus' being Son of God were a challenge to God's Fatherhood and finally were shown to be an attempt by him to claim fatherhood position himself ("All this I will give you ...") As much as the first couple had faced and fallen at such temptation, so also Israel had done after they had been called out of Egypt as His sons (See Hosea 11:1ff for this tragic story.) Jesus' answers to Satan were from Deuteronomy and Psalms, i.e. the Law and the worship books of the people of God. He did what neither Adam, nor Israel (and not the church either) did, faithfully holding to and living obediently in the word of God, honouring God as the covenant LORD.

[By his sinlessness and full obedience Jesus was then able to offer up to God the sacrifice of atonement that dealt fully with our sins. He not only resisted Satan's tempting, he destroyed his hold on humanity. Hebrews 2:10-18 makes clear that God the Father intended to "bring many sons to glory", and that He worked this by sending Christ to us, fully human. He is of the same family as us, and so he is able to make us holy. By sharing in our humanity, God's Son entered into death, the propitiatory death of the cross, in order to destroy him who holds the power of death, the devil. Death's power is sin and guilt; human beings, fearful of God's disapproval and wrath, are held in fear of death by Satan who pushes them by this fear along his God-hating course. See Eph. 2:1-5; Tit. 3:3-7]

- his preaching ministry begins (4:12-17)
- his calling the first four disciples (4:18-22)
- his proclaiming by word and deed throughout the region of Galilee (4:23-25)

### **The Sermon on the Mount: The Spirituality of the Family of the Father**

In this sermon Jesus is a new Moses, speaking to a community gathered by him through his gospel of the kingdom. It is primarily about life lived in communion with the Father. God is called "Father" 17 times in these three chapters. At the very heart of these chapters is the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13), in which every aspect of life is brought before the Father for His attention and care. As the head of this new community, Jesus is giving to this family the secret of their life—they are the children of God their Father. All Christian spirituality must have this reality at its heart.

Listen to what is told us in these chapters about life with the Father!

*5:3-10 The Beatitudes*

Although the word “Father” is not used here, the phrase “sons of God” is. Right through the Beatitudes the Father is the silent actor, indicated by the passive voice—“they will be...” We see that life in communion with the Father, though marked now by difficulty and struggle, is actually life in which His children are granted a share in the triumph of the kingdom in history, and are given comfort and mercy.

*5:43-48 Love for Enemies*

The new community is called to deep love for enemies, so that they may be sons and daughters of their Father in heaven. The Father is generous and indiscriminate in His care for the righteous and the unrighteous, those who are for Him and those who are against; and so the sons and daughters of God are to be also. If we discriminate in favour of those we approve, or of those who approve us, we are not like the Father who makes the sun shine on all freely out of His mercy, not on the basis of some deserving on our part. Our perfection is that we love our enemies in like manner.

*6:1-18 Careful Piety*

All we do is done for a reward from those we hope will see what we do—the reward of approval and delight in us. Life in the kingdom means that we have our hearts desiring only the approval and delight of our Father in heaven. He sees in secret, where no one else sees. We know that we are satisfied with His approval and delight alone when we are careful to live out our piety/spirituality before Him, and not seek good repute among those whom we consider piety experts!

When we live out our spirituality before others for their approval, we find that we immediately become hypocrites, play-actors, more often doing or saying what we think will please rather than what we actually think is right or true. When we live our lives before the Father, we know that such sham pretence is of no value for He sees even in the secret places of the heart.

But more importantly we know that we come to the Father through the one true son, Jesus who gathers us to the Father. The approval we have is not granted us on the basis of our correct piety or spirituality: we have a share in the approval and love that is declared to the Son of God at his baptism. Christian spirituality is not at all about working to know God’s favour or blessing; it all proceeds from the granted favour and blessing of the Father in Jesus Christ. *Because* we know His favour and blessing, we go to him in secret and let him see us there.

*6:9-15 Prayerful Spirituality*

Prayerful spirituality is not measured by the quantity or quality of prayer. Prayer is the expression of joyful and trusting dependence on the Father; it is not an attempt to wangle anything from Him! We don’t need long, repetitious, or even theologically pinned-down prayers! Simple trust and faith will do! The first necessity is of course certainty about the Father, and such love for Him because of His grace that we desire His glory and honour before all things. We entrust ourselves to His care. We believe in His ongoing and free forgiveness, and because of this forgiveness we live in forgiveness towards others. (Nothing dries up prayer like the refusal to forgive somebody some wrong done to you!) And we recognise our inability to sustain ourselves pure and holy, and ask God our Father. to protect us through all the assaults of the evil one.

*6:25-34 Careless Trust*

Life in communion with the Father is life marked by assurance of His goodness and favour towards you. What you need for food or drink, what you need for life, what you need to wear—do not worry about all these things....! Your Father knows that you need them. What is to be prime in the spirituality of the children of God is that we seek first the kingdom and righteousness of our Father.

*7-1-12 Trusting the Father for Grace*

Every time Jesus spoke about the need for his disciples to exercise forgiveness and grace towards others, they were overwhelmed by the seeming impossibility of the task. Here in these verses, the matter of grace and the refusal to judge is followed by the exhortation to ask, seek, knock, all on the basis of the readiness of the Father to answer, give and open. He is eager to give good gifts to His children. Our spirituality is not actually ours; it is a receptive spirituality that comes from the Father.