

**Matthew 4: 12 – 5: 3; “For Theirs is the Kingdom”, Sermon # 3 in a series entitled –
“These Sayings of Mine”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
April 7th, 2019, in the Morning Worship Service.**

The Sermon on the Mount was preached to Christ’s disciples, it says in verse 1 of chapter 5. The Lord Jesus went up on a high mountain and when He was seated, He opened His mouth and He taught them. And what a sermon it was; so very different from what any of them had ever heard before. But how very important it was to their eternal spiritual welfare; how very informative and helpful it was, for those whom Jesus came to save. I trust that it will be the same for all of us here today. In attempting to help us to benefit the most that we can from this amazing sermon which the Lord Jesus preached, I want to give you answers to the following 3 questions which will set the stage for our being able to understand all the rest of Christ’s sermon in chapters 5, 6, and 7. 1st of all – What is the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven? 2nd – What did it mean for Jesus and the apostles to preach the gospel of the kingdom? And 3rd – How can being poor in spirit bring the blessing of possessing the kingdom of heaven? May the Lord give each of us wisdom to see how we might enter and become those who possess the kingdom of heaven.

1st of all – What is the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven?

Verse 17 of chapter 4 says – “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” In Mark’s gospel chapter 1, verses 14 and 15, the parallel passage to this one that we are studying, it says this: “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.’” “Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Mark’s gospel refers to “the kingdom of God”, and Matthew’s gospel, “the kingdom of heaven”. Is there any difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven? Well, the simple answer is no; they are referring to the same thing. But we need to understand that the different use of words, “God” and “heaven”, used to describe this kingdom, one in Mark and the other in Matthew, is bringing out two very important aspects of truth. The phrase – “the kingdom of God” focuses our attention upon the fact that this is God’s spiritual kingdom that we are talking about.

Ours is not just another religion. It is not a religion of man’s making. Knowing God is being in His kingdom over which He rules, and a person who enters it is made one of His subjects. They are persons whom He has loved with an everlasting love and who love Him because of the great salvation which He has blessed them with, through Jesus Christ our Lord. The Kingdom of God is the realm of the Triune God’s saving activity and rule. Christ’s Universal Church is all those persons who have savingly been brought into that Kingdom of God; people who by faith have placed themselves under His sovereign and righteous and loving rule. They trust that in believing in Him, that He will teach them everything that they need to know about God and themselves, and how they can live to the glory of God.

But we should understand that God’s kingdom is made up of people who have believed in God according to His word. They have received light from God upon the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures because He has come to them and through a preacher, or through someone who knows the Lord, has opened the eyes of their understanding to perceive Christ’s greatness and glory, and matters of salvation, correctly. All truth is God’s truth and He reveals it to whom He will. In receiving God’s truth by the power of His Spirit, a person then comes to experience God’s grace, leading to their salvation and their entrance into this kingdom when they believed the gospel of the kingdom. In verse 23, of chapter 4, we read – “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Was this a different gospel than the one that the apostles later preached, or a different one than we believed when someone

preached to us and we were saved? I think not. We still preach the same gospel today: Repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

In those days of John the Baptist's preaching, people would enter into God's eternal spiritual kingdom in the same way that we do now; by faith in God's promise of Christ to them. Whether it was in Old Testament times before Christ came and finished His blessed work of righteousness and sufferings, or whether it is in New Testament times; the way of entering the kingdom of God has always been the same. It is by faith in Christ. John the Baptist would point people, not to himself, but to the One who was coming after him, who was greater than he was, because He was God made manifest in the flesh. He was and is, the embodiment of the kingdom. His is the kingdom, the power and the glory. John was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and none greater than John, Jesus said. But he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John. Matthew 11: 11 – "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist, but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." This refers to the ability among prophets, not persons. And so the apostles of our Lord were greater than John; not in personal holiness, but in their ability to preach Christ and His finished work of redemption and in their being given the ability by God to declare and unfold the mysteries of the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom God always refers to God's righteous providential rule over men, as Nebuchadnezzar declared in Daniel 4: 34 – "For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation." But the kingdom of grace in a special and particular sense is related to Christ's kingdom as Daniel says in Daniel 2: 44 – "And in the days of these kings, (the days of the Roman kings of the Roman Empire), the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people." Christ coming into the world to accomplish our salvation has always been the focal point of the setting up of the kingdom so that Jews and Gentiles, all different kinds, nations, and tongues of people would be saved and brought into this kingdom. And it has always been faith in Christ that brings salvation and brings one into His Universal Church, His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.

Faith in Christ has always been preceded by the New Birth; God causing a person to be born again; to be ushered into the Kingdom by God Himself. No one enters God's kingdom unless they are born again. Unless a person is born again, or born from above, they cannot see or enter into the kingdom of God, Jesus says in John 3: 3. But the New Birth always takes place in relation to the Holy Spirit's focusing a person's attention on their responsibility to enter the kingdom. In Luke 16: 16 Jesus says – "The law and the prophets were until John." "Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it." In other words, the kingdom of God being preached related to what Jesus had come to bring; that is, not only healing for the body, but healing for the soul as well; the gift of eternal life.

And when people heard this gospel of the kingdom and saw it backed up with the power of the Lord Jesus being exerted in the healing of many people; all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases, His fame went throughout all Syria and great multitudes followed Him – from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. These people were pressing into the kingdom of God. They made coming to know God and entering into His kingdom their highest priority. They earnestly desired it, and they would do everything that could to enter it. They would break through all the difficulties that stood in their way to enter the kingdom of God.

The phrase "the kingdom of heaven", focuses our attention on the heavenly spiritual realm which every believer in Christ is brought into, in their conscious experience, when they believe. It is that realm where they continually know the working of God's Spirit, with and in their spirit; the realm where they spiritually live and move and have their being, in terms of living by faith

upon the truth of Christ's word. Living in this realm of believing in Christ and repenting of all of our sins, leads us to experience heavenly things in our mind and heart. This is life in the kingdom of God. We experience these heavenly things, even while we are here upon the earth, for we are living according to the heavenly doctrine of the Bible, and we are continually being led by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. We are permanently situated in the spiritual realm of God's kingdom, and so we are experiencing the heavenly things of truth and grace, that He brings to us, continually and day by day.

Heaven comes down and glory fills our soul. Jesus said to Nicodemus, one of the elders of Israel, this man who needed to experience the New Birth, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness." "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man who is in heaven." "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." You see, Nicodemus was near to the kingdom, because he was hearing about it from the Lord Jesus, but he was not in the kingdom yet. He had just said – "How can these things be?" But by the end of the conversation he was convinced that he needed to believe in Christ, and believe in the gospel of the kingdom.

2nd – What did it mean for Jesus and the apostles to preach the gospel of the kingdom?

The context of Christ's preaching of the Beatitudes proceeds from chapter 4 and should be understood by us in relation to chapter 5. It is this. It says in Matthew 4: 23 – "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people." At that time, it says in chapter 4, verse 12, Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been put in prison, and so He left Nazareth and He came to the region of Galilee, and He dwelt in the city of Capernaum, which was by the sea. He did this in order to fulfill prophecy, the one spoken by Isaiah the prophet, which says – "The land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."

It was at that time He began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was at that time that He also began to call His disciples; Peter and Andrew his brother, who were fisherman at the time when He found them. They were casting a net into the sea, and He said to them – "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." And they immediately left their nets and followed Jesus. He went on a little farther and He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother. They were in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. And Jesus called them too, and immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus. He called four of His disciples at that time, and then He then He went on a preaching tour throughout Galilee, a country which was inhabited by people who were very poor, people who were for the most part unable to read.

What Jesus was doing when He preached the gospel of the kingdom was to tell the people to repent, and in the process of His preaching that message, and opening up that truth, He would introducing all the people in Galilee to Himself. He went around on this tour of Galilee to tell them the reason for His coming to minister to them. It was to preach to the gospel of His kingdom and their need of His salvation to enter that kingdom. He knew that they would need to receive His gracious word to them, in order that they might be saved. He knew that they must repent of not merely of having an outward religion, but they needed to conceive of a whole new life, in order to come to know God and to have eternal life. And so, when He preached to them, He said – "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". He was saying to them: You need to

understand that My being here means that I am bringing to you a new kingdom, a new and spiritual Israel which is quite different from any earthly kingdom. And My teaching will be much different from the legal teaching which you have heard from your scribes and Pharisees, and rulers. Jesus came to them preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

Well, when Jesus preached, we can be assured that it was not the kingdom that they were expecting Him to bring. They thought that for years that their Messiah would come as a military and political Savior and Conqueror. But what Jesus was focusing on, when He preached, was their hearts and their behavior in relation to whether they were in the kingdom of darkness or light. He was telling them to repent of their false expectation of His coming to reign over them as an earthly king. He would have them to understand that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand; right now, right then, in His coming to them. It was the spiritual kingdom of God which He was going to set up, so that people might be saved from their sins and dwell safely and profitably in His spiritual kingdom being satisfied by His grace. When He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!'" "For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

So what the Lord Jesus was preaching was the gospel of the kingdom; that He was bringing an entirely new and living way, a better way to live life; a way which would glorify God. Indeed, what Jesus was preaching was that His kingdom was the only kingdom that they must be in to be saved, to know God, and to walk with God. It was the only way that they could come to heaven. If they would repent of their sins; change their mind about the profitability of self-righteousness, and believe in His word to them, then they could be assured of entering the kingdom of heaven someday when they died. But the kingdom of heaven is just as significant to our present life and walk before God day by day. Christ's purpose in preaching to the people then, and His purpose in having me preach to you now, is so that your heart and mind might be changed today, and that you might be transformed into being a person of godly character; a person who lives in the Spirit and walks in the Spirit in every situation of your life. Jesus' preaching was a radical call to discipleship. Matthew 6: 31 – "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things (earthly things that are necessary) shall be added to you."

This was a far different kingdom than the people of Galilee had grown up in. The Israel that they knew was a kingdom of religious men forcing them to do and keep God's commandments from legalistic motives. They tied heavy burdens on people which were hard for them to bear, and they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers. Jesus was telling them that if they would repent of believing in this false teaching of a works-righteousness; if they would see that the kingdom of the Pharisees and Sadducees and rulers of Israel was not the kingdom of God. If they could see that if they believed in Him, they would enter an eternal, spiritual kingdom at that present moment in time. They would be declared righteous by God through faith, and by His grace they would remain in favor with God all their life through, and enter into heaven upon their death. In repenting of thinking that salvation was by their works, either moral or ceremonial, and believing in Jesus alone for salvation, they would receive a new power to do His will and keep His commandments. This spiritual power would be with them while they walked by the way, when they lay down at night, and when they rose up, and then at the end of their days, they would go to heaven, where God dwells.

The people whom Jesus preached to, did not understand the principles of grace which undergird all of this truth that I have related to you. But they did know that Jesus was preaching to them something far different from what the leaders of Israel had been teaching them all through their lives. The preaching of the law is not the preaching of the gospel, even though all who know God love His law. Jesus preaching the gospel of the kingdom was something very far different from what their leaders taught. The Lord Jesus was preaching and presenting the true

spiritual Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven to them. His saying to them – Repent, was His way of introducing them to the idea that they could not hold on to legalistic self-righteousness as the way of salvation from sin, and knowing God. They must come to Him and hear His words and believe them. When Jesus began teaching them these things they little understood that in believing in Him, they were actually entering His kingdom. They did not know what sufferings that the Lord Jesus would have to endure on behalf of sinners like them so that they could enter His kingdom. Christ had not yet risen from the dead and so the apostles could not preach yet, as they would on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit had not yet been given in the sense of His coming to anoint their preaching, so that the building of Christ's Church could take place, but the apostles took notice of all that Jesus was doing and all that He preached. The training of the 12 was not in vain. People were entering Christ's kingdom; the spiritual realm in which His Church would be later be built.

“The Church's one Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord, she is His New Creation by water and the word.” “From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy Bride; with His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.”

Christ would lay the foundation for His Church by His life's work; by His sufferings and His death. But His kingdom's ongoing work would be done by His apostles preaching His word in the power of the Spirit. And this leads us now to our final question needing an answer:

3rd – How can being poor in spirit bring the blessing of possessing the kingdom of heaven?

In chapter 5, verse 3, Jesus said – “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” Jesus said, “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Very simply, it is when you are poor in spirit, when you look at yourself and you see that you do not have the resources to do all of what God expects you to do; what He has commanded you to do in His word. It is at that time, you realize that you need Jesus to save You and to give you the spiritual wherewithal to do what pleases God. This is a word which all of us need to take to heart. It is not just a word to the unsaved, but it applies to all Christians during their whole earthly pilgrimage through this life. How was it that we became a Christian in the first place? Was it not that we saw that we were sinful in many ways, and did not think that we had the strength or the wisdom or the ability to change ourselves and the course of our life, so that we would be pleasing to God. We looked to Jesus for the grace to be saved. We trusted in Him and in His finished work, and He saved us entirely apart from our works; anything that we thought that we could do for God to make our life acceptable to Him. We realized that all of our righteousnesses were like filthy rags in God's sight.

“For when we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.” “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 4: 6-8) You see, it is when we do not see the strength in ourselves, that then we are in the perfect position for God to come and save us. We become poor beggars in our own sight and apply to God for grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Is this what you have come to know in your experience my dear listeners? But you say to me – I have been crushed by a sense and sight of the greatness of my sins for some time. What can I do to be saved? What can I do to have God hear my prayers to be able to be saved and live the Christian life?

Well, think about what is said in Isaiah 66, verse 1 – “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool.’ “Where is the house that you will build Me?” “And where is the place of My rest?” “All those things My hand has made, and all those things exist, says the

Lord.” “But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.” And what about those who have fears about being able to persevere to the end of their earthly course? Think about Luke 12: 32 where Jesus says to His disciples – “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Jesus as the Good Shepherd, knows how to bring you all the way through your earthly journey which is so full of trials and temptations. We become fearful at times when we see all that we are up against, and all that is against us as His Church. But we should not be, for the Father has gladly chosen, it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom. That is the kingdom of glory that is awaiting us at the end of our earthly course.

What is the value of our being poor in spirit? We come to see the greatness of grace which is in Christ, when we in our poverty seek Him. 2nd Corinthians 3: 1 – “Do we begin again to commend ourselves?” “Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?” “You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men: clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.” “And we have such trust through Christ toward God.” “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Brethren, can you say this of yourself; that you do not see anything being from yourself, but your sufficiency is from God? Is God enough? Is Christ enough to bring you through this life and give you the grace to do what is right and to bear fruit to Him and to His glory? You know that He is! Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.