

Life in the Kingdom

The Beatitudes

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I invite you to turn to Matthew 5, 6 and 7 with me. We began the Sermon on the Mount last week, Jesus' words in the first long discourse of teaching that Matthew records from us as he writes his Gospel, and you could ask this question maybe as a way of framing the way that we approach things here this morning and I've asked this question over the years to different kinds of people: what does it mean to be a Christian? What does a Christian look like? How can you recognize a true Christian? And some of the answers that I've gotten over the years are not too good or too accurate. I remember one man in particular who was a fine young man but his initial reaction was, "It's somebody who's at church every Sunday." And others even less informed would say, "Well, a Christian is someone who's not a Jew." And perhaps if you grew up in liturgical backgrounds, people would define a Christian as someone who has been confirmed after their infant baptism at the age of 12 or 13 or 14, whenever they choose to do that, all things that are somehow based on works, based on things that people do or simply as an accident of birth, "I happened not to be born a Jew and therefore I must be a Christian." Well, of course, you all know that none of those things are accurate or even remotely close to the truth but the question is: what does a Christian look like? What is a Christian in terms of what comes out of their lives? How can you recognize somebody who has been born again? And that's what we're going to look at this morning as we consider life in the kingdom of Christ.

Now, we said last time that in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6 and 7 for those of you that weren't with us last time, last time we looked at the Sermon on the Mount kind of from a space shuttle perspective. The space shuttle rides above earth at somewhere around 200 miles above the earth, and so you see things from one perspective; you see a great big perspective and from the space shuttle perspective, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is giving people a call to righteousness and a call to blessing. In Matthew 6:33, he says, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness," and so he commands his hearers to seek out the righteousness of God, and at the same time he promises blessing upon them. He calls them to enter into the kingdom that they might have the blessing of God upon their lives in that same verse. Matthew 6:33, "all these things shall be added unto you." So in a single verse, Jesus calls his disciples, calls his hearers to righteousness and he calls them so that God would bless them. That's the space shuttle view, a twin blessing, a twin call that Jesus makes.

Now, very important to understand that what the Sermon on the Mount is doing, what Jesus is doing in this sermon is he is showing us, he is explaining to us, he is expounding to us the nature of life that flows from true repentance. In other words, stated differently, when a person is converted, this is the life that comes out of them. This is the nature of life in the kingdom of God. Now so essential, so important for you to get this right at the start because if you go wrong on this point, you'll completely misunderstand everything about the Sermon on the Mount. What we're about to see today and what Jesus is giving in the Sermon on the Mount is not, it is not, notice the negative, it is not a to-do list to show you how to become a Christian. That is not the point of this sermon at all. The Bible says that no one is justified by the law, Galatians 3:11. Rather, what this sermon is showing you is the nature of life once you are in the kingdom; once you have been born again, what does that life look like? What is the nature of it?

So what we're going to do today is look at that a little bit more closely. You could think about this as coming down from the space shuttle view down to the passenger jet view at 30,000 feet or 35,000 feet, whatever the cruising altitude might be. You're going to see things a little more closely, more of the contour of the land, and yet we're still looking at this in a broad perspective because it is so essential for you to see these big picture things so that they are in mind as we go through the sermon more verse by verse in the days to come. So primarily in a single sentence, the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus explaining what it means to repent; what a repentant life looks like. And in the sermon, he calls you to righteousness and calls you to blessing.

Now as we dive a little deeper, as we come in a little closer to the lay of the land, we're going to see five aspects of what the repentant life looks like. And listen, I can't tell you how searching this is, how much this applies to every one of your lives, how this is going to penetrate like an x-ray everything about everything about your existence. It's not just everything about who you are, it penetrates every aspect of everything of who you are. And you know, this is what you would expect from the sovereign Lord of our souls, that Jesus as the sovereign Son of God, as God who looks on the heart, not on the outer man, you would expect it to be something that penetrates, that searches you, that you have to think about, that you have to consider. And I might add for those of us who are in Christ, there will be places where we say, "Oh, I see that in my life. Praise God for that." Also, there's going to be those times where it confronts you and says, "Wow, my life is off-track here. This is not...my life does not match up here. I need to repent still more. I need to have Christ manifest his life in me still more."

So as we come to this, what I encourage you, what Christ would have from you is to come to God's word this morning with a teachable heart, to come with a receptive spirit, and let your Lord search your life through this sermon. And for some of you, you're going to come to the rapid conclusion, "I couldn't possibly be a Christian in light of this sermon because there is nothing about me that corresponds to the direction that Jesus says the repentant life takes you." So, once again, we see that this sermon is going to search us, it's going to change us and I am just delighted and excited to bring this all to you here this morning.

What happens when you repent? What happens when a man repents and turns to Christ? Well, in a very introductory sense, we would put it like this. This isn't technical but it is certainly very true to the tenor of the teaching of Scripture. What happens when a man repents? Here's what happens: the Lord Christ brings an end to you. He brings an end to you. The old man passes away at conversion. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man is in Christ, behold he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." And so one of the initial things that you need to realize about true conversion is that it puts that old man to death and brings in a new man with a new nature with new desires and he is completely changed. Even though he's still the same on the outside, even though he still has the same measure of certain personality traits and certain skills that he has, those things don't change but who you are in the core of your inner man is suddenly and radically new. Completely different. You see, becoming a Christian does not add Jesus on to the old man and you keep going on with the old and the new side-by-side and fighting like two dogs trying to get out. No. There is a reason that it's called being born again. A new life has been instilled in that person and what we see in the Sermon on the Mount is what that new life looks like; what the change is.

You see, beloved, when you're born again, when a man comes truly to Christ, new life has begun in a new kingdom. Colossians 1:13-14 says that, "Christ rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." You see, you've got to understand this. This is essential for you to grasp, that having previously been dead in sin and under the domain of Satan in darkness and under the wrath of God, what salvation does is it lifts you out of that kingdom, moves you and transfers you instantly into a new kingdom with new life under a new Lord. Did you get that? A new life under a new Lord. You had been dead under the domination of the devil, now you have new life in a new kingdom under a new Lord. Well, beloved, all of that simply to say this: that that changes things. New life comes. Everything is suddenly different in your inner man in seed form at the very moment of your conversion, and then what the Sermon on the Mount describes is the life, is the growth of the spiritual tree that comes out of that new birth. So Jesus said, he said you could know a tree by the fruit that it produces. You can know. How do you know if a man is a Christian or not? You look and you encourage that man to examine the spiritual fruit that is in his heart and see if there is something that corresponds to what Jesus said it would universally be like for those in his kingdom, and that's what we see here in the Sermon on the Mount.

Alright, are you ready? Here we go. Five aspects in the Sermon on the Mount that are laid forth for us. Here's the question that we're going to answer today: what does true conversion do to you? What does true conversion do to you? Stated differently: what is the fruit of true repentance? Stated differently: what is the nature of life in the kingdom of Christ? Stated differently: what does Jesus do in the life of someone that he saves? You get the point. What does true conversion do to you? What are we going to see in this jet tour of the Sermon on the Mount here this morning? First of all, I love every one of these points. Every one of these points should be a separate sermon but we want you to see it all at once.

Point 1. What does true conversion do to you? 1. It changes your inner man. It changes your inner man by which we mean it brings about new affections, new desires and new motivations in your heart. It radically changes the very principle of life that animates everything that you do. It is nothing less than that. It changes your inner man. What repentance does, beloved, is it produces a broken heart that can receive spiritual blessings from God. Let me say it again: true repentance produces a broken heart that can receive spiritual blessings from God.

That's where Jesus starts in the Sermon on the Mount at Matthew 5:3. Look at it with me. Matthew 5, beginning in verse 3. It's okay if you don't get everything about each verse here today because we're going to take a sermon for each single verse as we go through these opening verses in the coming weeks. Look at what Jesus said in Matthew 5:3, remembering this, let me just take you back so that you don't lose track of this. Look across the page, maybe back one page, to Matthew 4:17. "From that time," at the beginning of his public ministry, "Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" That's the summary verse. The Sermon on the Mount is an expansion of all that that means.

Now in Matthew 5:3, Jesus says,

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Beloved, Jesus starts at the very very core of your existence and says, "This is what the repentant heart looks like." And what he is describing is an inner quality that mourns, that recognizes the reality of sin in his heart and says, "It saddens me that I fall short of the glory of God." To say that a man is poor in spirit is to say that he recognizes that he is spiritually bankrupt; that he has no merit of his own upon which to present himself before a holy God. "God, I come before you as one who is poor in spirit. I have no spiritual merit. I have no good of my own. I agree, I accept, I affirm Scripture's assessment of me that there is none who does good, there is not even one and, God, that condemnation falls on my own head. I'm not good. Father, there is nothing good about me to present myself before you. I'm spiritually bankrupt. I have nothing. I have no spiritual resources of my own to give to you."

And it goes on in verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn." What are they mourning about? It's not the mourning over the loss of a loved one in death. This is all a sermon about righteousness. It's a mourning over a lack of righteousness, as we'll see in days to come, we'll expand on this. But that recognition of spiritual bankruptcy leads to a sadness, a mourning. "Oh, my spiritual condition. I am not the man that I should be. I am not the woman that I ought to be as I look at God's word. I see that I fall short of his glory and it grieves me." You see, something of that is in the heart of a true Christian, to recognize that God is righteous and holy and I am not and that's not okay. That I'm not okay being like that.

And what does that do? Verse 5, it produces somebody who is gentle, somebody who is not self-promoting, self-proclaiming because they're meek. That word for "gentle" has the idea of somebody who is meek. And that yields over into a desire and a thirst for the righteousness that you lack.

Verse 6. Look at it there with me, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." You see, wrapped up in the inner man of somebody who has repented, wrapped up in true conversion is a recognition that I fall short of the glory of God and I desire to be like him. I desire his righteousness to be the mark of my own character. Jesus says, "Blessing on one like that." God's favor rests on someone like that.

In fact, look at verse 3 with me again. He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." I'll show you more about this next time but when he says "theirs is the kingdom of heaven," beloved, you've got to understand something really important: he is making a statement of exclusivity. He is saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven." He says there is no one in the kingdom of heaven who does not have a heart that recognizes his own spiritual bankruptcy. He says if someone thinks they're good enough to go to heaven, they're not going to heaven with a heart like that because they have to recognize their spiritual bankruptcy. Jesus said in Luke 5:31-32, "It's not those who are well that need a physician but those who are sick." You can't claim Christ as your Savior unless you have an acknowledgment at a fundamental level that says, "I am spiritually sick. I'm spiritually dead. I'm not righteous. I need a Savior." And repentance brings you to that recognition. It changes your inner man.

Now, those of you that are true Christians, I know that you recognize this difference about you. I know that some of you can see with clarity things that are true about your prior existence. Before you became a Christian, weren't you a boastful arrogant person that you look back and grieve that your heart was like that? You thought you were somebody special. Your achievements in life made you boastful. You looked down on others. You condemned others for how they fell short while inside congratulating yourself for how good you were. Weren't you like that? Didn't you convey this sense of spiritual arrogance and just the fumes, the smelly fumes of that arrogance and self-righteousness poured out from you as you pointed out the sins of others while refusing to confess the sins of yourself? Wasn't that you? And beloved, when you look back at that, if you're a true Christian, don't you look back at that with a sense of grief that says, "Oh, I can't believe that I was like that. I don't want anything to do with that old man. I can't stand him. I want to belong to Christ and freely acknowledge that I have no righteousness of my own." That's the mark of a true Christian. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit."

You see, beloved, it's a good thing I don't have rockets in my shoes because I'd be shooting them off right now because I want to just step up and say these things so much to you. You see, beloved, here's the reality of conversion: true repentance, true conversion – mark this – it changes your character. It changes who you are. It doesn't

leave you the same. So Jesus opens this sermon in the beatitudes doing a searching examination and explanation of what the true character is of someone who truly belongs to the kingdom of heaven and he says, "A character that is not like this, is not one of mine no matter what they may say with their lips."

So, beloved, as Jesus comes to us in the Sermon on the Mount, here's what he is saying, here's the question that is being asked of your heart: Jesus is asking right from the beginning, "Who are you? What kind of man are you? What kind of woman are you? What kind of boy or girl are you? What is your fundamental character?" By contrast, it asks, "Are you brash and arrogant? Do you boast in your self-righteousness? Do you excuse your sin and say, 'Well, it's not my fault. You see, you've got to understand, I was raised in such-and-such a way and people sinned against me in such-and-such a way and that's why I'm like this.'" No. No, that road is closed because true repentance takes responsibility for sin and says, "I'm the one to blame. I'm the one who falls short of the glory of God and I'm not going to blame anybody else. God, I'm the sinner. Have mercy on me, the sinner," Luke 18. So it asks you: are you brash and arrogant or are you broken before God and gentle before men? "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." So Jesus starts out saying, "I'm going to examine your character here in this sermon and that's the starting point." We'll say more about that in the future.

Secondly, what else does true conversion do to you? What does true repentance produce in you? Point 2: it changes you in the world. It changes you in the world. We said it changes your character, now we're going to see in this next section that it changes you in the world. By the way, I should say this: that this first section about how it changes your character, Matthew 5:3-10. We didn't read it all but Matthew 5:3-10, the beatitudes, is a searching of the character.

Now in the next six verses, Matthew 5:11-16, we see how conversion changes you in the world. Look at Matthew 5:11, look at what Jesus says. He says,

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. 13 You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men."

Do you know what happens to a true convert to Christ? Do you know what happened to you when you were born again? Do you know what Jesus does when he saves someone? He puts us in opposition to the world. It sets us apart from the world. There is an aspect of sanctification called positional sanctification which means that positionally Christ has separated us unto himself. That leads into progressive sanctification where we grow in our character over time, but positionally, Christ separates us out, removes us, as it were, from the world so that we belong to him.

Now, what that does when Christ does that in your life, when Christ did that in your life, is that it changes your relationship with the world. Many of you know this by sad personal experience in your closest most intimate human relationships. When you became a Christian, that was met with rejection. It was met with insults. It was met with criticism. What Jesus is saying is, "Yup, that's the nature of belonging to my kingdom."

What's going to happen is, look at verse 11 with me again: people will insult you, people will persecute you, they will falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Why do they do that? It's because you no longer belong to them. It's because you've been separated from them and now rather than being a part and sharing in the darkness of that life whether it's through false external religion or in the dregs of sin, now all of a sudden you stand apart from that and it pivots the perspective of the world against you. And because they hate Christ, they hate those who follow him, Jesus said in John 15.

So many years ago, many, many, many years ago, there was a young woman that said, "You know, if we as Christians could just be friendly with everybody, the world would like us." That's not true. It's not a matter of friendliness, it's about alien, fundamental, spiritual forces being in conflict with each other. It changes, conversion changes your relationship with the world in a way that sets the world in opposition to you – and watch this – it sets you in opposition to it. You see, we can no longer, we no longer share in the values and the perspective and the godless system of the world. It changes all of that, is what true conversion does.

There's a comfort in it when you realize that there is this horizontal hostility with the world. There is a vertical comfort to it. Jesus makes his disciples light in that dark world. Look at verse 13, "You are the salt of the earth." Verse 14, "You are the light of the world." Verse 16, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Jesus says, "No longer do you share in the dark perspective of a satanic world system, now you belong to me," he says, "and now as my disciple, you shine as light even if it seems like a meager little stream for a moment in time, now you shine as my light in the world. The nature of your character testifies against an entire dark world system. You're the light of the world." It's not a command, it's an indicative, it's a statement of what is true. The people of the character of the beatitudes are the light of the world. They testify to spiritual realities that the world is dark, blind and deaf to. Jesus says, "That's what it means to belong to me." That's what true repentance produces. It separates you from the world. It brings hostility from the world and yet you are there as a testifying light on behalf of Christ to that world that you once belonged to and that produces conflict. That explains why people insult you and persecute you, why some in many places have lost their jobs and their lives over this conversion, it's because they don't belong to the world.

And as I think I've mentioned here in times past, you know, it was that separation that was the ultimate route of those dear faithful Christians in the first century that Nero crucified, encased in wax and set on fire to light his gardens. Why did he do that? Why didn't he do that to others? It's because these people didn't belong to his world. They paid an ultimate price. Humiliated and sacrificed in the moment, Nero thought that those

people were lighting up his garden, 2,000 years later, they're still lighting up the world with the testimony of their martyred lives. That's what true Christians do. We don't belong to the world. It separates us out. Conversion changes you so that you don't belong to the system that you once did. That's why Scripture describes us, that's why the testimony deep in the heart of true Christians is, "I'm an alien and a stranger in this place. I'm not at home here. I'm longing for the home that is yet to come when I'm in the presence of righteousness, in the presence of Christ and all of my desires are satisfied. I can't find that here. I'm restless as I walk about in the wilderness of this physical place." You see, true conversion changes you in the world.

Now, I've said this a time or two, don't mind saying it again: you have so-called professing Christians in America that are so worried about their political rights, "What about my freedom of religion? And what about my First Amendment?" Listen beloved, people like that are not, if they are Christians they are not seeing themselves rightly. Suffering comes with repentance. Jesus says, "Persecution and insults come with belong in my kingdom." And we don't wrap ourselves in the First Amendment in order to excuse ourselves from that. We're thinking all wrong about it. Our thinking about what it means to be a Christian in the world starts with what our Lord said to us and he says, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you because you belong to Me. Rejoice and be glad for yours is the kingdom of heaven."

Now, whatever people want to do to pursue political solutions on their individual time, that's up to them. What I want you to see today is this: is that fundamental to true conversion is we are set against the world and the world is set against us and no First Amendment can insulate you from the consequences of that. It wasn't designed to in the providence of God. So we just have to think rightly about it and if the First Amendment protects us, great. "Lord, thank you for your hand of protection through that providential political act." But if it doesn't and we enter into persecution, into suffering, into insults, marginalization in society because of our faithfulness to Christ and belonging to him, we say, "Oh, hallelujah for this because they're treating me in a small measure like they treated Christ! I am sharing in the suffering of Christ, that means I belong to him. That means the kingdom of heaven is mine. How great can that be! I will not be condemned with the world because the world is showing I don't belong to it by the way it condemns me and rejects me. And not only am I okay with that, I rejoice with it. Why? Because Christ commanded me to. Rejoice and be glad. Why? Because your reward in heaven is great." You see, true repentance changes you in the world.

So, beloved, one of the things that the Sermon on the Mount does is it kind of probes and pokes you in your relationship with unsaved people around you. Christ will bring you into conflict with the world. The question is: do you embrace that? As a Christian, is there something in your heart that says, "Yes, as a matter of fact, I prefer to stand here with Christ rather than over there with the world." That's the fundamental issue. Are you willing to identify with Christ more than you want the applause and approval of men? Let me say that one more time: do you prefer to identify with Christ rather than have the applause and approval of men? That goes to the heart of being a true Christian.

So you young people that I often look to on my right because I love you and I care about you, what's your fundamental perspective, your fundamental aim in life? Do you want the approval and riches that the world has to offer, or do you want the approval and riches of heaven that Christ offers to you? The answer to that question determines the course of your life and that's the way it's meant to be.

Thirdly. How does repentance, conversion change you? Each one just builds upon the other. Thirdly: it changes your view of God's word. It changes your view of God's word. No question about it. This is Matthew 5:17-48. And we're not going to at all do justice to this section. I just want to point out one aspect knowing that the future holds for us, God willing, the fullness of all that we want to see.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does this: he deepens your view of the scope of God's word. Jesus takes you out of a realm that thinks about Christianity only in superficial ways that deal with the external aspect of life. You know how that goes. People say, "I'm good enough to go to heaven. After all, I haven't murdered anybody." Well, Jesus teaches us to look at God's word in a completely different perspective. He teaches us to realize that the word of God asserts itself on your inner man, on your desires, on your motivations, on your attitudes. It's incredible. Jesus as Lord is now coming to you in this sermon and he asserts authority over your inner man and over your thought life. That's how great his authority is.

Let's look at a few passages to help see this. Matthew 5:21. Remember, we're in the broader context of verses 17 to 48. In verse 21 Jesus said,

21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court."

What? You've got to be kidding me! Jesus takes a command not to murder which was being understood in a superficial external sense about simply avoiding literal physical death and he says, "The spirit of that command applies to your inner man. I command you not to carry yourself in an angry spirit. I command you not to have that retaliatory spirit toward those who may be against you." He's saying and understand what he's saying, "It's not enough, it doesn't establish righteousness in your life that you've never murdered anyone, the question is have you ever been angry with anyone? If so, you're guilty before God. You're guilty before the authority of that commandment."

Jesus goes further and explains it in verse 27, showing the internal application of the law of God to the soul. In verse 27,

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'

And that was interpreted in terms of the physical external act. Jesus says,

28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Saying, "This law against adultery applies to what you think and what your motives are when you look at someone else." That's how searching and penetrating it is. So it changes your view of the law of God where you're conditioned to think about it of external compliance if you think about it at all and Jesus says, "I command you to be this way in your heart." And all of a sudden your whole view of what it means to be a Christian and the role of God's word in your life is changed and transformed. You realize that your inner man is subject to the law of God, not simply your external actions.

Look over at verse 43.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

What does repentance do to you, beloved? What does conversion do in your heart? It starts to dawn on you in this way, "That my anger violates God's law as much as that other man's murder did. I must reject inner lust as much as I reject and avoid the physical act." The question of what your internet search history says would be pertinent here. Beloved, true conversion does this to you: it makes you desire righteousness in your inner man. It welcomes and embraces the authority of the word of God over your soul and who you are in your innermost being. That doesn't mean that you perfectly comply with it in every lustful thought or angry thought or anything like that. We're not talking about the perfection of who you are inside, that awaits our glorification. What you must see is that true conversion produces this kind of attitude towards God's word, that it is over me, it is over not only my body, it is over my soul and my soul must respond to God's word. I cannot simply go through the motions and claim to be a Christian if I never desire righteousness in my inner man. Because the truth of God's word applies there, the true Christian welcomes it there deep in his heart and the questions is: is that you?

One final way to look at this. We're just looking at these things from a lot of different perspectives. Beloved, if you're a true Christian, you are going to hate with equal fervency the secret sins in your life that men don't see as much as you hate the ones that they do see. There won't be a distinction in your mind, "Well, this is okay because no one sees," and you accept it and approve of it in that sense because men don't see it. No, there is an integrity, there is a consistency that says, "All sin in my life is unacceptable. I declare war against it all whether men see it or whether they don't. In principle, I reject the tyranny of sin. I reject the presence of sin. Why? Because I desire righteousness in my inner man. I recognize the authority of God's word over my soul. I submit to it and whatever lingering sin is there, I declare war against it. It must be purged because I accept the authority of God's word over my heart."

Is that you? Is that what you want in your inner man? You see, God's word really comes to us with a powerful convicting force here this morning, doesn't it? It says repentance affects your inner character; it affects your relationship with the world; and it also affects your relationship with the word and says, "I treasure this inside. This is no mere book to me that sits on a shelf. I've got to get that dust off of it." No, no, you say, "This word is my life." That's what conversion does, it implants that love for God's word in your heart.

Fourthly, we can say this about true conversion: it changes your view of God. It changes your view of God and this is all of Matthew 6 so turn back to Matthew 6 with me, if you would, or turn to it. I closed my Bible to make a point and now I've got to relocate where I was at and that's okay too. Matthew 6. We've alluded to this already but repentance, true repentance creates a new priority in life. As a Christian, you live for the glory of God, not the approval of men.

Look at Matthew 6:1, a verse that should be tattooed on the computer of every true Christian who wants to tweet about his devotional life. Matthew 6:1,

1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

Then he goes on, in verse 4 he says, "Let your giving be in secret," actually verse 3 we could say, "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing," when you give to the poor, "so that your giving will be in secret," outside the purview and observation of men. The same way he speaks about prayer in verse 6, "when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret," outside the view of men. And he talks about fasting in the same way, verse 17, "when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men." Again and again and he's making a bigger point here. He's saying that your view of God is such that you are uniquely and especially devoted to pleasing God in such a way with your practice of righteousness that you're not aiming it so that men will see and praise you for it.

So whether it is giving or praying or fasting, here it is, beloved: Jesus is calling you away from those public displays of virtue that you are secretly hoping someone will notice and say, "Wow, you're a good person. Wow, what a good Christian you are. Wow!" About you. You say, "No. No, that's not what I want at all. I'm seeking God here, not the approval of men." So we don't seek the applause of men with these outward displays of what we do.

Now, repentance changes your view of God in another way, it changes your priorities toward heaven. Look at verse 19 of chapter 6. There is this God-centered focus in the life of someone who has truly been born again. Verse 19,

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and

where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus asks you what are you seeking out of life. Where is the priority of God. Where is the priority of his kingdom. Where is love and affection for him. Where is that in your sequence of priorities. If it's not number 1, man, you have a lot of repenting to do. There should be a page, "First priority: God. His kingdom and his righteousness," and nothing below it. That's how unique and central it is to your focus.

And there's another thing that repentance does as it changes your view toward God: it changes you from those who view God with suspicion, who think that he is angry toward his people, that he can't be trusted, that he's always looking to squelch the latest bit of joy that you have in order to make you miserable. That misery view of God is unworthy of the greatness of our heavenly Father who gave us the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls. How can you think such low unworthy thoughts of God and his intention to bless you? You see, what true repentance does is it brings you into a place where you recognize that God is good and that you trust him to be a dispenser of blessing to your life.

Look at Matthew 6:31, for example. Jesus says,

31 "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Now, beloved, this may search you more than some of the others do but your fundamental view of God as a repentant person in his kingdom should be so settled on the fact that, "God is good to me, God is loving toward me. He is favorably disposed to me. He will care for me therefore I'll trust him. I won't live life in this constant state of anxiety because I realize that that's not worthy of God. I won't view him with suspicion. I won't worry about what tomorrow holds. Why? Because my heavenly Father holds the future. And what does that mean? He cares for me. It means that he'll most certainly provide for me." And you just work yourself through the simplicity of the logic that Jesus expresses in Matthew 6:25-34.

Look, God cares for birds. He clothes the flowers with beauty. If he does that with beasts and with the greenery of the field, then what more is he going to do for me when I belong to him through faith in Christ? I cannot think such unworthy thoughts to think that somehow God will not take care of me or that when I belong to Christ, he's going to punish me and make my life miserable and not take care of me.

So, beloved, what repentance does, one of the things that repentance does, true repentance does – watch this, watch this and some of you ladies especially, listen in your worried states of mind – true repentance teaches you to trust God for his goodness and

intention to bless you. "I trust him." That's what repentance does. Repentance isn't simply sorrow and feeling bad about your prior sins, going forward it orients you toward a whole new view of God that says, "He is good. He manifested that in Christ. He went to the cross for the salvation of my soul therefore of course I trust him to be good no matter what's happening in life right now. I trust him. I trust him. I trust him. End of sentence. End of paragraph. End of chapter. End of book. I trust him." That's what a repentant heart does. It orients you to a whole new view of God and the repentant heart says, "I've got a long way to go here but at core I see that God is good and I am going to trust him like that going forward." And when you do that, you start to feel the blessing of the dissipation of controlling anxiety, of controlling fear and say, "Those things are needless. These things actually dishonor God because I can trust him and my fear and anxiety that I refuse to let go of says he can't be trusted. I can't go there. Not with my repentant heart. Not with this new life that God has given to me in Christ. Nope. Not me. I trust him completely."

The final point for this morning. We've said that repentance changes your character, it changes your relationship to the world, it changes your relationship to God's word, it changes your view of God, fifthly and finally: it changes your view of final judgment. It changes your view of final judgment and this may not be exactly what you're expecting me to say when I title the point this way. The true Christian, the repentant man, the converted woman, lives life knowing that a day of judgment is coming. Now, we have escaped the ultimate final judgment of the wicked through Christ and he has delivered us from that. He will carry us through that final judgment. But there is still even for Christians, there's a day where we will stand before Christ and give an account, not of our sins but we will stand before him and he will reward us according to the life that we've lived as believers. And we'll look at all of this in great detail when we get to chapter 7 down the road. But Jesus teaches us in Matthew 7 to be mindful of the final accounting that is coming for all the world before the throne of God.

Look at Matthew 7:1-2. Jesus speaking to his disciples says,

1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge [watch this, future tense], you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

And so your whole perspective on life and toward the way that you view others who fall short is informed by – watch this – it's informed by the measure of grace that you would like Christ to show you at your own time before him and you say, "I want that time to go well. I want Christ to deal with me as generously as possible. He says the way that I judge others now will somehow influence that, therefore I'll change my whole approach in dealing with people, in being so hard on them, so coarse and so condemnatory of everything that they do. I don't want Christ to deal with me like that on that final day and so I'm going to be gracious, forgiving, loving, patient as people work their way through because I want that spirit to animate the flavor of the way that Christ views me on the final day."

Jesus goes on in calling both sinners and Christians to this recognition in verse 13. He says,

13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Here's the point, beloved, all that I want you to see here today from that is that Jesus calls us to think about there is this coming future event, that this life is not all that there is, that there is more to come, and that there will be destruction or blessing in an eternal sense that lays ahead for every man and Jesus says many people go the way that leads to destruction. What the Christian does, says, "I'm aware of that. I believe that. I take that seriously and therefore it affects my priorities and choices here in life. It affects the disposition of my heart. I live with a certain sober fear of God that says he is the Judge of all the world. He has said that judgment is coming and that's going to inform the way that I live. I will not give myself over to sin and pleasure and whatever my heart desires for me to do. I can't do that when I know that there is a day of accountability that's coming."

Look at verse 21 and in a passage that wasn't written exclusively for today's church but certainly applies to it with great force and clarity. This is a passage that ought to be preached from every pulpit in every church, especially in America. But they won't. Do you know why? Because they don't want people to think this way because it punctures the whole view of an entertainment driven model of ministry. It punctures the view that you can pray a prayer and just forget about Christ ever after and still end up in heaven. And some of you have walked away from churches over this very point and God bless you for it. Matthew 7:21,

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them [notice the future tense again,] 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice wickedness.'

Final judgment informing the way that people respond to the sermon.

So what does this do to your heart? What do the words of Jesus mean to you in light of all of these things that we've said? Back up. Let's back up for a moment. The truth of the matter is we're all in this room together for a short time. The ultimate truth of the matter is that every one of you is marching toward an appointment with Christ where you will see him in some manner or another, give account to him at the end of your life. That's the reality for you. It's the reality for every man. And Jesus calls you to think about that and to be warned about it and to cast aside the superficial way that you have approached your spiritual life; to cast aside the indifference and the mediocrity. And what true repentance

does for you is that it motivates you to live this way. It motivates you to care about these things. To let this be the defining nature of why you live and exist. And, beloved, if you don't embrace that, final judgment is not going to go well for you. It is not going to be pleasant. And the reason that we plead with you again and again and again week after week after week, the reason that we will be pleading with you and teaching you through the Sermon on the Mount, one simple desire beyond that to glorify Christ, it's that the final time where you appear before Christ would go well for you because it's not going to go well for everybody. And what true repentance does is it motivates you to live and not simply give lip service to these things.

Look at verse 24 of chapter 7. Matthew 7:24. Listen and pay attention. Jesus is teaching for keeps. He says,

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell - and great was its fall."

I've said it before, I'll say it again: this compacted into these three chapters, Matthew 5, 6 and 7, are words that have eternal consequences for you. The way that you hear, the way that you receive, the way that you respond to Jesus' teaching has enormous eternal consequences for you. Those who respond in fidelity to what Christ has said will find that he blesses them beyond measure at final judgment. Wouldn't you like that to be your experience? Wouldn't you like to be ushered into heaven with that kind of affirmation and abundant blessing from your Lord? It comes from responding to what he says; to embracing it and taking it to heart. Jesus himself said, "If you stick your fingers in your ears and say, 'No, not me. I'm not going there. Don't talk to me about it. I'm not listening. I'm here but I'm not paying attention. I refuse. I reject.'" Jesus says, "It's all going to collapse on you." In the moment that most matters, your hard-hearted refusal to receive the words of Christ are going to collapse on you and the destruction will be great.

Why would you do that? Why would you live life in a way that positions you for ultimate destruction? I ask you: why would you do that when Jesus invites you to righteousness and he calls you to his blessing and says, "I'll keep you in this life and I'll bless you immeasurably in the life to come." Why would you not respond to that loving invitation while you have time?

Christian, in one way or another as you've heard these things, I know that your heart has said, "That is what I want. That is what I desire." And for you, you should praise God and thank him that you have been born again because those desires are not natural to the world. When you desire these things, you're showing forth the fruit of true repentance.

Those of you that see the barrenness and emptiness of your soul no matter how much you have proclaimed Christ in the past, take this as an act of mercy that God is calling you to true repentance now, today, as you bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, your word says that unless one is born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of God, Father, that new birth must come from you. We ask you to show us mercy and help us as we respond to your word. Lead us all, each one. Father, I ask you again, I beg you again, O God, the eternal consequences of that which we have heard today are too great for you to turn away our prayer. God, for each one that is here, lead them safely into your kingdom. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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