



There's no one like Him

Jesus is not a myth or legend. Jesus is not an ethereal religious figure. Jesus walked the earth at a specific time and place. There's never been another like Him. As we follow the life of Jesus of Nazareth through the Gospel of Matthew, we find our faith in Jesus rooted in the life of Jesus. Meet Jesus. Knowing this man will change your life.

You are part of a kingdom. Lots of kingdoms actually. You are part of a consumer kingdom. In this kingdom, you are valuable as long as you produce and purchase. You are part of a political kingdom. In this kingdom, you are valuable as long as you pay taxes and vote. You are part of a click kingdom. A kingdom of clicks. Your value here is determined by likes and hearts and shares and follows. You are part of many different kingdoms, small and large. Some you chose, some chose you.

Of course, the primary meaning of the word kingdom is a land or a region where there is a king. In the ancient world, most of the landscape was wild, so you would pass through the wilderness until you came upon a kingdom. Maybe marked by some stone pillars or signs, marking the limits of the authority of the king who claimed that soil. If you passed by those markers, you entered that kingdom. Kind of like passing through border security or the passport control desks at the airport. It's important to know where your foot is, because when you take a few steps, you might enter another kingdom. As we take a look at the life of Jesus, giving ourselves an outside view of this historical life, one thing everyone says about Jesus of Nazareth is that He taught people about the Kingdom of God. Early in His ministry, Jesus sat on a hillside and delivered news about another kingdom, not of this world.

It was a profound thing when Jesus opened His mouth to teach. Some think it was over a period of two or three days, and we have a summary. Others take it as one message delivered as a whole. Matthew 5-7, one of the greatest addresses ever given on the face of the earth, the Sermon on the Mount. It inspired . . . well, so many things. The teachings of Jesus became in one way or another the basis for Western Civilization. It inspired kings. It inspired presidents. It inspired Gandhi to stand up for the rights of the poor. It inspired Martin Luther King, Jr., to stand for equality. There are few pieces of oratory that have had such a profound effect on the world in which we live. At the end of it, the people who heard it were struck by its authority. "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of

the law" (Matthew 7:28-29). Jesus spoke with a kind of divine, self-authenticating power and authority. When His mouth opened, it reset everything.

You see it in how the sermon begins: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Jesus defines blessedness. I'll tell you what blessedness is. And He doesn't defend His right to do it or construct any kind of platform, physical or otherwise, to stand on to establish His voice and influence. He just opens His mouth and begins to teach. There is another dimension to life, another strata, another quantum shell, another level of existence, and it breaks in right here where Jesus speaks. It's not the soil He stands on that matters, but it's Jesus Himself—that's where this other way of life breaks in. The Kingdom of God. The rules are different there, as Jesus explains. But first I just want you to fully grasp Jesus simply saying it is there, it exists. The world you live in and the rules you are living under are not the limit of human existence. There exists another way of life, another country to join in citizenship, another kingdom where you can belong, and it breaks in where Jesus speaks. Do you know what a terrarium is? Like an aquarium, but instead of water and fish, it's sand and stone and heat lights. Pastor John Ortberg explains the Kingdom of God as when the top comes off the terrarium. You thought life was limited by these four walls of glass and the light overhead. It's not. There's a whole different dimension. Jesus of Nazareth said He came to tell us about it.

Jesus outlined a different kingdom. The world says blessed are the wealthy, for they will have all options available. Jesus says blessed are the poor who have another kingdom in sight. We say blessed are those who are protected from harm, sanitized and insulated from pain. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). They will know what it feels like to be embraced by God when life hurts deeply. We say blessed are the winners for they will dominate in strength; Jesus says blessed are the meek. We say happy are those who are free from moral strictures—how fun it is to be someone who does anything they want, anytime they want, with no guilt

or shame or aching conscience. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Those who long to walk God’s ways, who hunger for things to be right in the biggest and best sense of the word. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8). We say blessed are the conquerors; Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7) and “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

You start to get the sense, don’t you, as you read along that it isn’t just another way of life Jesus is talking about. It’s more than a philosophy of life or an ethical model. Jesus keeps saying things like, you will see God. You will know God’s comfort. You will inherit something from God. You will be called children of God. I mean, that’s family. That’s more than citizenship. That’s family. Jesus didn’t only teach another choice in how to run your life. Jesus presented a relationship with God. A seeing, knowing, loving and being loved by, God, and being adopted into God’s family. People listening had a hard time wrapping their minds around that. You see, “kingdom” means soil. “Kingdom” means boundaries and lands and nations. What is this place Jesus talks about when he says the Kingdom of God?

Teaching delivers information. Information gives insight. Insight opens up possibility. Jesus spoke authoritatively about a life, a relationship with God. People started to respond. To them it sounded like a life they always wanted, a world they longed to be a part of, a relationship they needed deep in their soul. The Kingdom of God, to many, started to sound like home. The home they somewhere lost. The family they knew they were always meant to be. You are this, said Jesus. He didn’t say, “Hey, try to be this.” He said, “You are.” This is who you are. The way that Jesus invited people, and the way He invites us still, is not to try to be something we aren’t, but to live into who we actually are. Stop pretending to be something else, and actually become who you are—a child of God. So, Jesus explained, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ... You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:13-14). Salt preserves and draws out flavor.

Jesus saw this kingdom, and those who are part of it, as a preserving force to counteract the rot and decay in the world and draw out the flavors of God. Jesus saw this Kingdom and its citizens as light—light to draw out the God colors of the world. It wouldn’t happen immediately, but it would start to happen, and it would eventually fully come. That’s the Kingdom Jesus taught. And, He said, this is what the Bible was talking about all along. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).

Jesus taught the Kingdom of God. But people didn’t get it. Romans didn’t get it because they only thought of kingdoms as places, ground marked out by roads and borders, where the strong ruled over the weak. The Jewish people, Jesus’ own people, didn’t really get it either. The kingdom they were expecting was one where God would send a King who kicked the Roman oppressors out, and restored them to the soil they were promised. Jesus spoke of another kind of Kingdom of which he would be another kind of King. Bigger than soil. Bigger than boundaries. Bigger than nations. Bigger than a philosophy or a way of life. A Kingdom where you get to be in relationship with God, right now and forever, through Jesus. They didn’t get it. But it was controversial enough that eventually the Jewish leaders turned Him in and the Roman leaders put Him to death.

When Pontius Pilate had time with Jesus on the morning Jesus was going to die, he asked Him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” What is this Kingdom business? What do you actually mean? Jesus digs into Pilate a little bit. This is all in John 18. “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” (John 18:34). See, there was something even in the heart of Pontius Pilate that was drawn toward this Kingdom. Jesus knows it’s there. “Why are you asking, Pontius? Is there something you’re looking for? You who win at the kingdom game in this world.” Remember, blessed are the winners, blessed are the wealthy, blessed the untouchable and protected. Pilate had all that. What are you still looking for? Then: “Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’” (John 18:36). Pilate killed Him on a cross, and when he did, he had them

write over His head on a sign, “King of the Jews.”

Tell me about the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught about it. He told about it. It's not of this world. But it is available. You are already part of a kingdom, already part of some kind of kingdom. These are not neutral kingdoms either. They are rebellions against the rule of God. God is the maker and creator of all things. His rule is the only real rule there is. These other so-called kingdoms are not kingdoms at all, but robberies, rebellions, against God's reign. They are shadow kingdoms. That's all. And the longer you live there, the more the colors fade, the flavors dissipate, the more you waste away. Here's the very best news about the Kingdom of God: you can enter it right now. Jesus has the power to transfer you, right now, out of the false, corrosive, lifeless shadow kingdoms and into His Kingdom. “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14). Is that true of you? It can be. You don't have to travel to Jerusalem to get there. It's not about soil. It's about your heart open to the power of Jesus to save.

Who can enter the Kingdom of God? Well, like any kingdom the King sets the rules. The King determines the terms of entry, and that King is Jesus. Jesus says come to me, believe in me, today you enter my Kingdom. Receive His saving love and grace. You might be a titan of industry, at the top of your game, you can enter the Kingdom of God. You might be suffering homelessness, sleeping out in the cold with little hope and unsure future—you can enter the Kingdom of God. You are never far from it. You might be lying on a cot in prison, bottomed out drunk, watching the ceiling spin, wondering what the impact of the DUI is going to be. The Kingdom of God is a word away. When you are sick from the choices you've made, the Kingdom of God is a word away. When you are pitched into anxiety and angst wondering what your life is ever going to be about, the Kingdom of God is one word away. And that word, that opening, that gateway—it's Jesus. Jesus. Call on Jesus. Enter the Kingdom of God.

STUDY GUIDE

JESUS • “Teaching the Kingdom”

Matthew 5:1–17

UP: UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Begin your study in prayer. Read and reflect on Matthew 5:1–17.

- 1) How many times do you see the word “blessed” in our passage this week? How does this word correspond to the imperative found in verse 12 to “rejoice and be glad?” How ought we understand ourselves as the people of God?!
- 2) Which beatitude seems most counter-cultural, most upside-down to you? Why?
- 3) Which beatitude is your heart most drawn to as you read Matthew 5:3–10 this week? Why?
- 4) Why does Jesus use images of salt and light to describe citizens of the Kingdom of God?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us
(Join God in His Mission)

- 5) How can you further embrace and celebrate the conditions of being “poor in spirit, sorrowful, meek, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure, peaceful, and persecuted?” Encourage one another that as we experience these things in Christ, we are truly blessed in the Kingdom of God, having great reason to “rejoice and be glad.”
- 6) How can you be “salt” to someone you will likely interact with this week who has yet to say yes to being a citizen of the Kingdom of God?
- 7) How can you be “light” to someone you will likely interact with this week who has yet to say yes to being a citizen of the Kingdom of God?

IN: Connect with Each Other

Pastor Tim encourages us with this word: “Jesus keeps saying things like, ‘you will see God. You will know God's comfort. You will inherit something from God. You will be called children of God.’ That's more than citizenship. That's family.”

How are you doing in living into your identity as a citizen not primarily of this world, but of the Kingdom of God—where you are not just a citizen, but a child of the King?