

Throughout my years of education, there have been a few teachers that have stood out. The first is Glen MacLeod. In grade 9, Mr. MacLeod was a quirky science teacher who taught us German, who was humorous, and yet got the ideas of science across. In my undergrad, the theology prof, Larry Dixon, was also a quirky and humorous man who was passionate that we love God through theology. He would be unpredictable at times, and would always begin class with either a reading of a story or a pop quiz. And in my grad studies, Mark Siefred was an excitable NT prof who was my favourite Greek professor who would, upon hearing a good comment from a student, say, “Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!”

Each one of these teachers left an impression upon me. They had a way of teaching that showed their passion for the subject. They had a joy about them that was infectious. They seemed to attract students around them.

Jesus, likewise, came and showed his passion and love for people through his teaching. He came as one who taught not as the scribes and Pharisees taught, but as one who had great authority (Matt. 7:28-29). He begins teaching just a few on the mountain, and by the time he is done there are crowds there. So this morning, I want us to see three things about Jesus’ teaching that cause us to worship him as the glorious Christ.

Seek the Kingdom of God

Jesus comes teaching something new and yet something old. He begins his teaching by proclaiming a blessing. While the OT law was filled for blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, Jesus begins with the blessing for those who belong to the kingdom. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). And he ends this section with a blessing: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:10). He begins and he ends with a present blessing – the kingdom that God had promised to David has already come, and you are blessed if you grieve over your sin and you suffer like the OT prophets did. Why? Because this is who the kingdom has always belonged to!

In other words, Jesus is claiming that the kingdom of God is already here. The kingdom is among us when we mourn over sin and we suffer for doing what is right. There is a blessing for obedience, just like the OT law promised. And Jesus says that the blessing is the kingdom that was promised to David, Solomon, and his descendants! You can be a part of that kingdom!

But as much as the kingdom is already among you, Jesus teaches us that we should also expect that it is not yet fully here. Throughout the rest of the beatitudes, he shifts the tense of the blessing from the present to the future. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they WILL BE comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they WILL inherit the earth.” All of the middle blessings are future tense. In other words, the way to enjoy all of the blessings of the future coming kingdom are by continued obedience to the instruction, the Torah of God.

But who is the obedience for? In 5:1, we hear that Jesus went up to the mountain, sat down, and began to teach his disciples. But by the end of his teaching, 7:28 tells us that the crowds were astonished. Who are the crowds? And what's happened so that he's already got a huge turnout following him? In 4:17, after Jesus comes out of the wilderness, Jesus is preaching and teaching a message of repentance because the kingdom of God is at hand. And then he calls his disciples (4:18-22) and then goes into the synagogue teaching about the kingdom and healing diseases and afflictions (4:23ff). So the crowds that join him on the mountain are those who have heard and believed the message of the coming kingdom.

In other words, this sermon is for the saved. The message of blessings for obedience is for those who have trusted in Christ and are following him. This message of the kingdom is about the salvation that Christ brings and the way that saved people should walk. Pleasing God through obedience can only happen if you've been saved. And so the call is to seek the kingdom of God. While the principles of this sermon are generally true, they are intended for saved people, people who belong already to the kingdom of God and are waiting for the fullness of the kingdom to come.

Seek the Righteousness of God

As Jesus teaches, he makes an astonishing claim: Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom. Some have thought that Jesus is teaching this sermon to bring you to the end of yourself – to show you that you can't perfectly obey God so that you would trust in him. But those who are listening to this sermon already trust him. So we need to understand what this word "righteousness" means here.

Some have thought that Jesus is condemning the law. He comes and says, "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you..." and assume that Jesus is attacking the law. But Jesus doesn't mean that he is attacking the law – he doesn't come to abolish it, but to fulfill it (5:17). Further, Jesus' teaching is a call to serious obedience (5:19).

When we hear the word righteousness, we tend to think of it in two ways. The first way is to think of righteousness in terms of right behaviour. So those who are righteous are those who walk rightly. The other way we think of righteousness is how Paul uses it – that we are declared righteous before God – that the pronouncement of heaven has forgiven our sins and we are no longer condemned but seen as washed clean. But Paul also talks about a righteousness that is revealed from heaven apart from the law, a righteousness that is by faith (Rom. 3:20ff). Righteousness is what God is, and throughout the OT, righteousness and salvation are often connected (see Isa. 45:8; 46:13; 51:5-6, 8, 56:1). In other words, the righteousness that the OT prophets looked forward to was a saving righteousness, a righteousness that displayed that God was remaking the world and restoring his order.

This is what the OT law was intended to do – it was to set God’s people on a different path than the rest of the world. And God’s instruction, his Torah, his law, tell us how we participate in the restoration of all things.

So Jesus teaches the instructions, the Torah, the law. “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you...” And Jesus goes through commands 5-10 from the law of Moses in the rest of Matt. 5. He is not getting rid of the instructions of Moses, but showing us how they are fulfilled and re-order and restore God’s good intentions. So the command to not kill is not only a command to not be angry, but a command to be reconciled to your brother. The command to not commit adultery is to pursue self-control by getting rid of the lust in your heart. The righteousness Jesus calls us to is not merely avoiding sin, but seek restoration.

This is the righteousness that the Torah intended. It’s not merely about avoiding the bad. It’s about remaking the world in the order of God’s intended design. This is why if you pursue righteousness, Jesus can say that you will have everything else that you need for life (6:33). This is the reason Jesus can say that we need to deal with our sin first and examine if we demand standards of others that we don’t demand of ourselves (7:1-5). The righteousness he wants from us is the outworking of salvation that seeks to reorder all things in our lives according to God’s instructions.

Seek the Wisdom of God

Finally, in chapter 6:19-34, Jesus teaches like Solomon does – looking at the world around us, learning the lessons of nature and living wisely. Just as Solomon presented to his son the way of the fool who would find death and the way of the wise that leads to life, so Jesus the Son shows us that you need the wisdom of God to live as a son of God.

But God’s commands only make sense to those who are sons of God. Wisdom is not the end goal. It is the kingdom and righteousness that are the goal (6:33). It is foolishness to those who want to shape their lives around the wisdom of this world. As Paul can say, it is foolishness to Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews. Why is it foolishness? Because the goal is God’s saving work in the world. Wisdom is shaped by God’s saving work. Since the kingdom and righteousness are for those who have been saved, these ways will seem crazy to those who are steeped in the ways of the world. From peacemaking to leadership, from desires to rest, Jesus teaches us that God’s wisdom has been embedded into the world and can be seen by looking at flowers, birds, and grass.

The way of this world creates anxiety. It places pressure on people to perform. It demands the infinite from finite creatures. Anxiety tries to control things – the messaging, the appearance of things, the behaviour of others. But Jesus says, “You can’t control the future. Any attempt to control the future will lead you to anxiety.” This is what happens to Gentiles.

Instead, the wisdom of Jesus is to remind us that the kingdom of God is arriving. He rules. He is remaking all things in the present. So you can't control the present with money, with your plans, with your strategies. This is why Jesus warns about money – either you will control it or it will control you. The way forward is by trusting in Jesus and following his ways.

The wisdom of Jesus is what shows that the kingdom of God is among us. Whenever we deviate from the wisdom of Jesus, it results in broken relationships in the family of God, division among the people of God, and brokenness. This is why Solomon was teaching his son about wisdom – it was to preserve the kingdom that he would inherit.

And as we see that Jesus' teaching points us to the kingdom, the righteousness, and the wisdom of God, we will...

Worship the Glorious Christ

If we look at what Matthew has been doing in his gospel account, he has been tracing Jesus' history out of Egypt, through the waters, out into the wilderness, and now up on the mountain. It is no surprise that Jesus goes up to the mountain to teach about God's Torah, because he is going to be leading his people into the Promised Land of the kingdom, the land promised to Abraham, secured by David. Jesus is not only a better Moses who teaches us the way of God yet doesn't fail, he is the David who secures the kingdom and passes it on as a better Solomon to his son. He is the one who secures our future. He teaches us in a way that isn't like the scribes and Pharisees. Why? Because he is fulfilling all righteousness. He is saving us as his people, giving us his law, bringing us into the Promised Land, and passing on our future as sons of the king, future kings and queens. Is it any wonder that the people were amazed at his teaching?

You can have some great teachers in your life. They'll point you to wonderful truths. They'll teach you with passion. But when you find a teacher who shows you how to live in the kingdom where all things will be made new, your heart will beat with a new passion. You'll live in a new way. And you'll follow him no matter where he leads.