

# The Way of the Kingdom

## Matthew 5:1-2

### INTRODUCTION

In my opinion, the Sound of Music is one of the all-time great musicals. The movie version starred Julie Andrews as Maria, a former nun turned governess for the Von Trapp family children. In the course of events, Captain Von Trapp (a widower) brings a new lady – a woman he plans to marry – to meet his children. In preparation for this introduction, Maria (the Julie Andrews character) teaches the children a song. It goes like this:

*Let's start at the very beginning, A very good place to start  
When you read you begin with A-B-C, When you sing you begin with do-re-mi*

I thought of this tune when I thought about where to begin tonight's message. How do you begin to talk about THE WAY OF THE KINGDOM?

As you know this Lenten season, we are focusing on the theme THE WAY, based on these words in John 14:6:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

I want you to memorize this verse because the message in it is essential in a world that tries to convince you that there are many ways.

- Just this week someone scolded me, saying "Your truth isn't my truth. Don't force your way on me."
- I reminded that person that I don't have a way nor do I have a truth. I simply follow Jesus, because He is the way, the truth and the life. It's His way. It's His truth.

It occurred to me that Julie Andrews began her time of teaching with A-B-C and do-re-mi. Jesus began His teaching with Be-Be-Be. The BE-attitudes. Blessed, blessed, blessed.

So here at the beginning of THE WAY, let's start at the very beginning. It's a very good place to start. We gather here on the side of mountain. The exact location of this mountain isn't known, but if you were to travel to the Holy Land, your tour guide would point out a specific mountain named "The Mount of the Beatitudes."

- Though we cannot be sure where this happened, tradition says that it occurred on a beautiful hill overlooking the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, not far from Capernaum. The Italian Franciscan sisters maintain the Hospice and Church of the Beatitudes there.
- But truthfully it could be any one of about a dozen mountains in that region of Galilee.

Many scholars believe that the Sermon on the Mount captures the essence of everything else that Jesus would say and do over the remaining three years of His life up to the time of His crucifixion.

- And so, if the only part of the Bible that you had were these words – chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew, you would be able to adequately summarize the teachings of the Christian faith and be able to incorporate them into your life.

I think I agree with that statement. And so, again, with that thought in mind, let's begin ... here, at the very beginning by showing you two pictures:

### **PICTURE #1: JESUS SAT DOWN**

Look at Matthew 5:1-2:

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. (Matthew 5:1-2)

For us in this time period and in this culture, we are used to seeing those who teach us stand up when they are teaching. The same is true whenever we want people to focus on us as we speak. We stand up to share prayer concerns or testimonies.

If you watch C-Span, you will always see congressmen and senators standing at the microphone as they deliver their statements. We stand when we say our vows in a wedding ceremony. For us, standing reinforces the importance of the words that are spoken. You stand up to speak and sit down to listen.

But in the earlier days of our history, the reverse was true. You sat down to teach. And the very act of sitting down meant people should listen to you.

Rabbis always sat down to teach. Once when Jesus went to His hometown of Nazareth on the Sabbath where He was asked to preach. He stood up, read His text from Isaiah 61 and:

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. (Luke 4:20)

We have a few remnants of that still around in our society. Many colleges have endowed a particular professor's position. When that happens, it is called a "chair" (as in the "Chair of Biblical Preaching." It's not a literal "chair" but a statement about the importance of that particular teaching subject.

When the Pope offers a papal proclamation, it is referred to as being "ex cathedra" (literally, "from the chair).

There was an air of authority when the teacher sat down. People knew they were supposed to pay attention because something important was about to be communicated. By the act of sitting, Jesus was effectively telling his audience:

I have something very important to say, and you need to pay attention to it.

We know this approach worked because when the Sermon on the Mount was over, Matthew recorded the reaction of the people:

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)

So what? Right? Why does this point matter? Well, the WAY OF THE KINGDOM isn't just a cool new idea. It is not "just another teaching." The way of the Kingdom is a NEW way altogether. It is a teaching with authority.

One of the alternative paths offered by our world is that:

Jesus was a good moral teacher.

But that is all He was. Just a teacher. Buddha was teacher. Mohammad was a teacher. And that is wrong. Jesus was far more than a teacher. If you reduce Jesus to being a teacher, what He offers is not THE WAY ... but simply another way.

Oswald Chambers is a name you may know, especially if you have used his devotional classic "My Utmost for His Highest." Chambers writes:

Beware of placing our Lord as Teacher first instead of Savior. That tendency is prevalent today, and it is a dangerous tendency. We must know Him first as Savior before His teaching can have any meaning for us, or before it can have any meaning other than that of an ideal which leads to despair. Fancy coming to men and women with defective lives and defiled hearts and wrong mainsprings and telling them to be pure in heart! What is the use of giving us an ideal we cannot possibly attain? We are happier without it.

If Jesus is a Teacher only, then all He can do is to tantalize us by erecting a standard we cannot come anywhere near. But if by being born again from above we know Him first as Savior, we know that He did not come to teach us only: He came to make us what He teaches we should be. The Sermon on the Mount is a statement of the life we will live when the Holy Spirit is having His way with us. (Oswald Chambers)

## **PICTURE #2: JESUS SAW THE CROWDS**

Look again at Matthew 5:1-2:

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. (Matthew 5:1-2)

The teaching ministry of Jesus was in response to the needs of the people He saw.

At the end of chapter four – just before these verses that start chapter five – we read:

News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. (Matthew 4:24)

Throughout the three years of His ministry, Jesus saw the needs of people:

- When they were sick, he healed them (chapter 4)
- When they were hungry, he fed them (feeding of the 5000)
- He came to seek and to save the lost

One of the great glories of the gospel message is that I don't get lost in the crowd. The gospel is for all of us collectively, but it is for each one of us individually as well.

- Remember the story of the woman with the issue of blood? In the midst of the shoving and constant contact of the pressing crowd, Jesus knew this woman's private, personal need.

The ministry and message of Jesus is for all of humanity – the big crowd. But it is also a personal gospel. If I align my life with it, my life will be blessed. Not everything Jesus teaches me makes me happy. But it is all for my good.

The WAY OF THE KINGDOM is not teaching for the sake of teaching. It is teaching that brings the good news to the very heart of the issues facing people.

- It is not an intellectual exercise.
- It is not a matter of the head. It's a matter of touching the hearts and making a difference in the way people live.

## **APPLICATION**

Jesus has a lot of good things to say in the Sermon on the Mount, and in all of His teaching through the three years of His ministry.

- Some of what He taught is easy to accept. You are the salt of the earth. Blessed are you when others say bad things about you. Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you.
- Some of what He taught is more difficult. Getting angry with someone is the same thing as murder.

But easy or not easy, His teaching points out the WAY OF THE KINGDOM.

One day when Jesus was teaching, a big segment of His listeners objected to what He had to say.

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (John 6:60)

And as a result of His teaching ...

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.  
(John 6:66)

They went to find a different way – one that matched their own ideas. Something that was easier to align with what they already believed.

In that moment Jesus turned to the Twelve – His closest followers and asked:

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. (John 6:67)

Peter’s response should be our response:

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:68)

Amen.