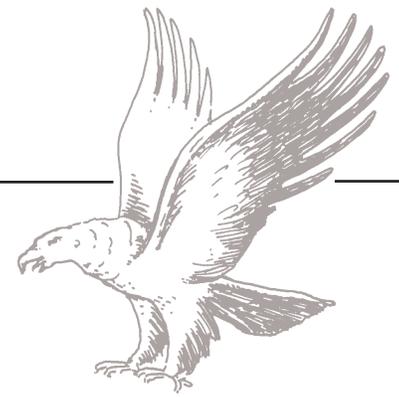


# Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



December 21, 2014

## The Gospel of the Kingdom

The Sermon on the Mount is an iconic summary of what Jesus taught while among us. Digging into this sermon unlocks a deeper understanding of what it means to be citizens of the kingdom of God.

*“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (Matt. 4:23).*



So what was this “gospel of the kingdom” that Jesus was preaching? The answer is found in the next three chapters of Matthew, a lengthy discourse that we now call the Sermon on the Mount. If we want to preach the gospel today, this sermon is a good place to start.

Before digging into the details, it’s helpful to notice two broad subtexts that run throughout this sermon: (a) life is hard, and (b) the secret to success in life is a pure heart. Keep these two ideas in mind as you read this Sermon, and they will reveal a world of meaning.

Jesus begins with the Beatitudes (5:3-16), inner qualities that allow us to find genuine contentment in life. Our purpose is not defined by possessions or status, but by having the right character.

This emphasis on the heart segues into the next section (5:17-48). Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, moralists who

were so careful to maintain an *outward* display of righteousness, disciples of Jesus concentrate on harnessing the *inner thoughts* that drive behaviors. This raises the bar, producing a character that more closely resembles that of God—especially in our treatment of enemies.

Even when we perform acts of goodness, they mean nothing if done for the wrong motive (6:1-18). Our objective must never be to receive glory from others, but to do good for the sake of the good itself. Even if no one ever knows what we’ve done, we’re okay with that, because our sole desire is to *do right*.

The vicissitudes of life plunge many people into worry about their physical affairs. But because they seek a higher destiny in life, disciples of Jesus are not overcome with anxiety (6:19-34).

In a world of people with wildly different backgrounds and outlooks, friction with others is inevitable. But there is a right and wrong way to handle those conflicts, and discerning the difference requires a great deal of wisdom. That should drive us to our knees seeking guidance (7:1-12).

Finally, Jesus warns that the path of wisdom He lays out in this sermon is not easy, and many charlatans will offer enticing alternatives to His teaching. We mustn’t take the bait (7:13-27).

Is this all there is to the gospel message? No way! Paul later identified the death and resurrection of Christ as the very foundation of the gospel (1 Cor. 15). That event, of course, still lay in the future as Jesus spoke. Neither does this sermon address topics such as church organization, worship, or discipline, all of which are addressed later in the epistles. This sermon was not intended to be the complete story, but *an introduction to a new way of looking at reality*. It forces the reader to wrestle with the fact that the path to God is primarily a function of the heart. Outward forms of righteousness, while important, flow out of that deeper well. In the absence of that foundation, religion becomes an empty, even destructive, theater.

Jesus’ audience was “astonished” at this message (7:28). We would be too, if we really understood the significance of this “gospel of the kingdom.”

– David King