

**Handouts from the "Kingdom of God" teaching series by Dallas Willard
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A SERIES ON WHAT JESUS BELIEVED AND TAUGHT -- AND LIVED

first lesson

JESUS' GOSPEL AND OURS

I. WHAT JESUS TAUGHT: "Reconsider your strategy for life in view of the fact that you can now live under the rule of the heavens, the invisible reality of God immediately accessible to you by trust." (Matt 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15)

- a. The language used here:
- b. The grammar: "The perfect indicative generally expresses the present result of a past action."
- c. "is at hand" or "has drawn nigh" means "is now available to you," not, "is about to be here and in force."
- d. The significance of "heaven." "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God."
- e. Gospel passages to study: Matt 3:2, Matt 4:17, Matt 5:20, Matt 8:10-12, Matt 10:7, Matt 11:11-12, Matt 18:1-4, Matt 21:31 & Matt 21:43, Matt 23:13; Mark 1:14-15, Matt 9:1-7 (cf. II Peter 1:16-18), Luke 10:9-11, Luke 11:20, Luke 12:31-32, Luke 16:16, Luke 17:21, John 3:3 & John 3:5, John 18:38

II. WHAT JESUS DID: ANNOUNCED THE KINGDOM, TAUGHT OF ITS NATURE AND MANIFESTED ITS POWER IN ACTION (his miracles)

Matt 4:23, Matt 8:1-34, Matt 9:35, Matt 13:1-52

III. BRINGING HIS HEARERS THE LIFE WITHOUT FEAR AS THEY TRUST THE RULE OF HEAVEN WHICH HE ANNOUNCED.

Matt 6:25-34, Matt 10:27-31, Philippians 4:6-9, II Timothy 1:10, Hebrews 2:14-15

IV. CONTINUED IN THE MINISTRY AND WORKS OF HIS DISCIPLES

Acts 1:3, Acts 8:12, Acts 14:22, Acts 19:8, Acts 20:25, Acts 28:23 & Acts 28:31, Romans 14:17

(Handout for lesson two unavailable)

A SERIES ON WHAT JESUS BELIEVED AND TAUGHT -- AND LIVED

third lesson

The Beatitudes as Gospel. The MANNER of Jesus' Teaching

I. Jesus as minister of God's rule, of the kingdom of "heaven"

- a. "the spirit" comes upon Jesus. Luke 2:40, Luke 3:21-22, Luke 4:1, Luke 4:14, Luke 4:18-19
- b. What the anointing was for. What Jesus was to accomplish. Luke 4:18-19
- c. The three dimensions of Jesus' kingdom ministry:
Announcing the availability of the kingdom to all
Teaching about the nature of the kingdom
Manifesting the kingdom's power in healing, demon mastery, authority over nature

Matt 4:23, Matt 8:16-17, Matt 9:35, Matt 10:6-8, Luke 9:1-6, Luke 10:5-11

II. How Jesus taught. By parable and paradox, designed to get past the heart hardened in its own willfulness and self-absorption. Matt 13:10-15, Matt 13:52. He teaches in

such a way as to call to light and correct prevailing general assumptions underlying man's way of thinking. Luke 14:7-11 and Luke 14:12-14

III. The biblical principle of inversion between God's rule and man's way. I Samuel 2:1-10, Psalms 37:7-20, Luke 1:46-55, Matt 19:30, Matt 20:16, Matt 21:31, Mark 10:28-31, Luke 13:29-31

IV. The "Beatitudes" are statements designed to show the nature of the rule of heaven by contradicting the ordinary human assumptions about who is well-off and who is miserable.

Matt 5:3--"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That is: "Blessed are the spiritually deprived, the spiritually bankrupt since they too can have the kingdom." The intellectually deficient, uneducated, religiously disrespectful. The disciples Jesus chose were all of this sort. "This people who know not the law are cursed!" (John 7:49) And: "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46)

Note how the translators strive to turn "poor in the spirit" into something good. Luke 6:20 makes clear--the condition referred to is not a good one. It is one universally thought bad by human beings. So for all. Blessed are the hungry, the depressed, those who ache for justice, who have pity for others, cannot settle for anything less than perfect, pay the price to make peace, are persecuted for doing good.

V. These are not commands on what we must do to be blessed. The cause of the blessing is not in the condition in which the blessing is received. THEY ANNOUNCE THAT THOSE COUNTED BY MAN TO BE IN A HOPELESS CONDITION ARE NOT, DUE TO THE AVAILABILITY OF THE KINGDOM. {Compare: "Good things come in small packages!"}

VI. Now: You write some beatitudes for today. Who's blessed?

A SERIES ON WHAT JESUS BELIEVED AND TAUGHT -- AND LIVED

fourth lesson

Beyond "the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees"

I. Jesus' inversion of blessed and curseds flew in the face of those in charge of the religion of Israel, the scribes and Pharisees--as well as of the common people under their influence. They had succeeded in identifying God's order (the law and the prophets) with man's order, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men...Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition." (Mark 7:5-13)

II. Hence, that the "curseds" of man's order could, as dwellers in the kingdom of the heavens (ten basileian ton ouranon), be the salt of the earth and the light of the world--a position carefully reserved by the S & Ps for their own best practitioners--could only mean that Jesus was out to destroy the law and the prophets!

III. Jesus' reply is that only by going beyond or surpassing--not by setting aside--the "okayness" (dikaiousune) of the S & Ps can we come into contact with God's governing from the heavens and thus become able to fulfill the law by becoming the sorts of persons God intended us to be. God's kind of okayness is one of inner personality or heart, the kind of person.

IV. Only trusting the king and the kingdom transforms the heart, making the kind of rightness (okayness) God has the kind we have. <"Seek ye above all the rule of God and the kind of okayness he has." (Matt 6:33) "For they [the S & Ps] being ignorant of God's okayness, and going about to establish their own okayness, have not submitted themselves unto the okayness of God." (Romans 10:1-10--study this whole passage on okayness and its kinds and sources) We "believe unto righteousness." (Romans 10:10) Our acting in trust (without which there is no belief) meets the reality

of the kingdom, and its life increasingly fills and transforms our souls. Our hearts, from which evil comes (Mark 7:23), is made good. (Matt 12:33, Luke 6:43-45)

V. What are the marks of S & P "righteousness"? (1) It seeks the honor that comes from men, not God. (John 5:44, Matt 23:5-12) (2) Thus bringing bondage to appearance and to the opinions of others, and to self-justification. (Luke 16:15; Luke 11:46; Proverbs 29:25) (3) It "says and does not." (Matt 23:3-4) (4) It murders "in a good cause." (Luke 11:50-51) (5) It keeps people out of the kingdom of God (Luke 11:52), and turns it "converts" into "twofold more the child of hell" than are the S & Ps themselves. (Matt 23:13-15) (6) It is covetous and wealth seeking, serving mammon. (Luke 16:13-15) (7) It trust in itself that it is righteous and dispises and condemns others. (Luke 18:9) AND MOST ESPECIALLY: (8) Defines okayness in terms of externals, cleans the "outside of the cup and plate; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness." (Luke 11:39) etc. etc.

VI. Jesus illustrates kingdom okayness (of the heart) over against S & P ("ye have heard") okayness. (Matt 5:21-7:27) Remember: He teaches against prevailing false assumptions.

A SERIES ON WHAT JESUS BELIEVED AND TAUGHT--AND LIVED

fifth lesson

Beyond "the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, #2

I. Beyond the okayness of the S & Ps is a righteousness of the kingdom of heaven which doesn't just not kill, but has such tenderness that it rules out groundless anger and verbal abuse (Matt 5:21-22), a tenderness more important than religious ritual (vss Matt 5:23-24) or getting our way through the courts (Matt 5:25-26).

II. In sexuality, kingdom rightness would be pained to see others subject to the purposeful imaginings which serve to roil up "hot" feelings to be savored and slobbered over.

(Matt 5:27-30) A person whose heart is filled with welcomed lusts, and who uses the presence of others to excite themselves, has a sexually corrupted heart ("adultery in the heart"), and has little to boast about for not "doing it," since they only lacked opportunity. -- And one can't be righteous in divorce just by arranging for a legally proper "pink slip" for the one cast away. In Jesus' day, a woman divorced had her life ruined. She would never again know any but degraded sexuality. (Matt 5:31-32) You can't love a marriage partner and do such a thing to him or her.

III. True okayness does not try to overwhelm others by verbal fireworks, calling in God and "betting your head" that such and such is the truth. Just state it and let it stand. Allow people to make up their own minds. More than: "It is this way" or "It is not that way" comes from an evil tendency of the heart to control people. Don't swear. The point has nothing to do with "cussin." (Matt 5:33-37)

IV. The person living from the Kingdom does not need to "get even" (vs Matt 5:38), strike back (Matt 5:39), refuse aid to someone who has beat them in court (Matt 5:40), refuse to further assist someone who has already compelled them to go out of their way (Matt 5:41), or have any reason but the request itself to give to someone who asks them for something (Matt 5:42). They find it easier to love than to hate their enemy (Matt 5:43), and are able to act (Matt 5:44) in a way that reveals the family resemblance in the family of God. (Matt 5:45-48) Thus they are "the children of your Father which is in heaven."

V. In specifically religious "righteousnesses" (ten dikaiosunen, Matt 6:1), the kingdom dweller conceals his activities of giving ("alms"), prayer and fasting (Matt 6:2-18), and orients himself solely toward his "Father which is in heaven." S & P okayness looks for rewards from man, gets them, and is ignored by "heaven," since heaven was not sought anyway. (vss Matt 6:2, Matt 6:5, Matt 6:16) By contrast, "heaven" falls upon those who seek it only.

VI. Kingdom okayness finds all its "treasures" in relation to heaven (Matt 6:19-25), is content with what the Father provides (vss Matt 6:26-34, and gives first priority to securing the rule of God and the kind of okayness God has. (Matt 6:33) It doesn't borrow evil from the future, because each day has enough in it. (vs Matt 6:34)

VII. Kingdom okayness doesn't try to "manage" others by condemning them (Matt 7:1-5) or by pouring the "best stuff" on them (Matt 7:6). It works through prayer (vss Matt 7:7-11) and considerate love (vs Matt 7:12).

VI. Entering the kingdom is a matter of doing the will of the Father, understood as going beyond S & P righteousness in the manner above illustrated. Miracles won't take the place of kingdom love and trust. (Matt 7:13-27)

THE LATEST DECALOGUE

Thou shalt have one God only; who
Would be at the expense of two?
No graven images may be
Worshiped, except the currency:
Swear not at all; for, for thy curse
Thine enemy is none the worse:
At church on Sunday to attend
Will serve to keep the world thy friend:
Honor thy parents: that is, all
From whom advancement may befall;
Thou shalt not kill; but need'st not strive
Officiously to keep alive:
Do not adultery commit;
Advantage rarely comes of it:
Thou shalt not steal; an empty feat,
When it's so lucrative to cheat:
Bear not false witness; let the lie
Have time on its own wings to fly:
Thou shalt not covet, but tradition
Approves all forms of competition.

Arthur Hugh Clough

A SERIES ON WHAT JESUS BELIEVED AND TAUGHT -- AND LIVED

sixth lesson

The Power of "The Word of the Kingdom"

Our new life, from Jesus' gospel of heaven's-open-door-now, is one of personal action and interaction. A kingdom is a personal network and process. PERSONS WORK THROUGH WORDS. The kingdom of God, his reign, works by words, and we share in it by using words--just as our share in satan's government is through the tongue, "a world of iniquity...defiling the whole body...set on fire by hell." (James 3:6) By words God's power goes forth to accomplish his will, by words your power goes forth, by speaking with God his power goes forth with ours: "In Jesus name----(e.g. Acts 3:6, Acts 3:16 etc) If we are to do kingdom work we must understand how the kingdom works through words.

I. Creation is by words (Gen 1:3, Gen 1:6, Gen 1:9, Gen 1:11, Gen 1:14, Gen 1:20, Gen 1:24, Gen 1:26; Heb. 11:3; II Peter 3:5) and is sustained (Col 1:16-17, Heb. 1:2-3, II Peter 3:7) and is ordered by God's word (Psalm 104, Psalm 119:89-91, Psalm 147:15, Psalm 147:18, Psalm 148:8).

II. The word of God is, accordingly, substance and power or agency (Deut 8:3-4 <Matt 4:4, Mark 14:22, John 6:57, John 6:63, I Tim 4:5>, Ps 107:20, Jer 23:29, Amos 8:11, Luke 4:32, Luke 4:36, Luke 8:11, Acts 6:7, Acts 12:24, Acts 19:20, II Tim 2:9, Heb 4:12, Rev 19:13)

III. The word of God brings the life from above, birth from above. (James 1:18, James 1:22, I Peter 1:23) It washes us. (Eph 5:26) Sanctifies us. (John 17:17) All due to its substance and power.

IV. King Jesus, through whom all things are made (John 1:3, Col 1:16-17), shows his will by spoken power over nature and spirits. (Matt 8:26-27, Matt 17:17-21, Mark 11:14, Mark 11:20-26, Luke 4:35, Luke 4:38-39, Luke 7:7, Luke 7:14, Luke 8:54-55, etc. etc. etc.)

V. Power and authority (Luke 9:1) given to his pupils (Luke 9:2-6, Luke 10:1-20) to act with the governance of God. Though not, as with Christ, "without measure." (John 3:34) Enough, however, that his people will do his works and even greater because Jesus' power is heightened in his present position with the Father. (John 14:12)

VI. What it is to act "in Jesus' name." (Not necessarily to say aloud the words "in Jesus' name," but to act in reliance upon his agency to accomplish his glory. (Acts 4:30, Acts 13:9-11, Acts 14:9 etc. But notice Acts 19:13-16)

V. The relationship of "speaking" to "praying." They are essentially the same, and it does not matter how you use them since in both cases you are acting with God.

VI. Should you individually expect to do all of these kinds of things? No. Though you should not rule any out. You should seek and teach and pray and wait upon every manifestation of kingdom power for the glory of God to be present in the church of your fellowship. Don't force your faith. Don't try to make things happen, but seek the faith that comes from God speaking to you. Seek to live before the shining face of the God who speaks to us in love and calls us out to be his co-laborers. (II Cor 6:1)

A SERIES ON WHAT JESUS BELIEVED AND TAUGHT -- AND LIVED

seventh lesson

How to become a disciple. Disciples and Christians

I. Jesus invites us to walk with him as he walks in the kingdom of heaven and learn to walk as he walks: to have his heart, his faith, his love, and to act in his name, under his authority, as his co-laborers. (Matt 11:28-30, Luke 6:40, I John 4:17)

II. This is something we learn how to do. To follow Jesus is not to do as he said and did, but to be with him

to learn how to do what he said and did. That is, it is to be his pupils, his students, his disciples. The New Testament accordingly is a book by, about and for disciples of Jesus. The word "disciple" occurs 269 times in it, the word "Christian" only 3 times, being introduced to refer precisely to disciples. (Acts 11:26) We become able to do progressively more of what he said and did as we through practice learn to trust the rule of heaven and act from it. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3:14)

III. The New Testament does not recognize a class of non-disciples who are Christians.-- "Vampire" Christians: "Well, thank you Jesus, I would like to have a bit of your blood to cover my sins, but I wouldn't care to keep constant company with you! I have far better things to do!" Yet the leading "discipleship" group in Western Christendom divides Christians up into: convert, disciple, and worker, clearly teaching that you can be and remain a Christian forever without becoming a disciple, much less a worker.

IV. The disciple of Jesus is one who, in response to the Word of the Kingdom of Heaven:

1. Sees living in the kingdom to be the most important thing in life. (Deut 30:11-20, Psalm 42, Jer 29:13, Matt 6:33, Matt 13:44-46, Luke 14:25-33)
2. Plans, and constantly reviews and revises plans, taking all appropriate steps or measures to so live. (Rom 8:13, Rom 13:14, Eph 4:22-24, Phil 2:12, II Peter 1:5-11)
3. Increasingly does the deeds and bears the fruit of the Kingdom life. (John 8:31-32, John 13:34-35, John 15:8, Luke 8:15, Matt 7:21-27)

V. We become a disciple of Jesus by deciding to be with him to learn to be like him. We are his disciples, his students, by "continuing in his word" (John 8:31-32): that is, by immersing ourselves in his example and teaching from the four Gospels and by venturing to put into practice what we see there, which will bring his constant presence into

our ongoing life as a tangible reality. (John 14:18-26, Rom 8:4 & Rom 8:11, Heb 6:18-20, Heb 13:5-6, I Peter 5:5-7)

VI. As disciples we can now obey the Great Commission by going to all kinds of people and making them disciples (students). (Matt 28:19) You make disciples by ravishing people with the word and reality of the Kingdom of Heaven and King Jesus, so that they pine for it, ache for it, and crash the party with tears of repentance and joy.

VII. Then, having become students of Jesus and been surrounded ("baptized") by the power and authority (the "name") of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we teach them to observe, to do, "all things whatsoever I have commanded you," with the "all power in heaven and in earth" that is given unto him who said: "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt 28:18-20) We say: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (I Cor 11:1) And: "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. (Phil 4:9)

The Great Omissions from the Great Commission are: We don't lead people to discipleship and we don't even try to teach them how to do what Jesus said and did. I do not know of a single church in existence today with a program designed and intended to teach people to do what Jesus said and did. How can we justify this? Our failures do not justify it. We must be willing to endure the tension of Christ's call or we will never be given the spiritual substance to meet it.

Have you ever decided to be a disciple of Jesus? Committed yourself to be with him to learn from him how to walk in the kingdom as he did? To learn how to be with him?

You probably won't drift into discipleship. You will have to decide.

A SERIES ON WHAT JESUS BELIEVED AND TAUGHT -- AND LIVED

eighth lesson

Discipleship and Disciplines for the Spiritual Life

Pursuant upon our last lesson, let us understand, then, that being a disciple of Jesus is a perfectly definite state of being which one is either in or not in. You can fail to be a disciple of Jesus. Many people are not in a state of discipleship to him. Some know it. Some are confused about it. Some think they are though they are not, because they have been led to suppose that simply being a "Christian" by some definition automatically involves being a disciple of Jesus. We have, however, noted that the dominant tendency in our times, with regard to discipleship, is to try to lead Christians to enter "discipling" activities, all the while assuming that they might very well remain Christians though they decide not to become students of Jesus, abiding with him to learn how to be and do as he did.

Realization of the New Testament ideals of abundant life and love and power are the results of sustained discipleship to Jesus, and of that alone. Many dear and devoted Christians doggedly carry on with their lives in spite of the fact that their spiritual aspirations and hopes for life in Christ don't work out very well. They have not found a plan for spiritual growth into the peace and power of Jesus for their own lives, and the religious activities which they engage in are not adequate to the end hoped for.

I. The secret of the easy yoke. (Matt 11:28-30) In two parts: (1) "Take my yoke." That is, get into the harness with him. Be his person everywhere and he will be with you in the same harness. Stop trying to save your life and do "your own thing": "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt 16:25) LIVE TO DO THE WILL AND WORK OF JESUS! (2) "Learn of me." Watch the way Jesus lived in the Gospels, do the same things and he will meet you in them now, for that is where he is. What did he do on his

days off or during breaks? What he did while "off the spot" is the key to his power when "on the spot." ADOPT HIS OVERALL STYLE OF LIFE.

II. Disciplines: Activities we can engage in by direct effort that enable us to do things we CANNOT accomplish by direct effort. The "disciplined person" is the one who is able to do what needs to be done at the time and in the way it needs to be done.

III. Spiritual disciplines, or disciplines for the spiritual life, are disciplines in the general sense just stated, but they are specifically designed to enable us to interact with the spirit of God and receive his grace "to help in the time of need." E.g. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt 26:41, cf. Rom 6:11-14, Gal 6:7-8, Eph 5:15-16 & Eph 6:11-18, Col 3:1-17)

IV. What were some of Jesus' "off the spot" activities? Study (Luke 2:46-49, John 7:15), submission (Luke 2:51-52, Matt 3:15, Heb 5:8), solitude (Matt 4:1-2 & Matt 14:23, Mark 1:35 & Mark 6:31-32) fasting (Matt 4:2-4 <Mark 6:16-18>, John 4:31-34), secrecy (John 7:1-12 <Matt 6:1-18>, Luke 4:42, Luke 5:16 & Luke 9:21). IN THESE ACTIVITIES HE DWELT IN THE RICHNESS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN FROM WHICH HE DREW TO LIVE AND MINISTER ON THE SPOT. (John 5:30, John 8:16 & John 8:29, John 10:30).

V. These and other activities such as silence and prayer and service and worship and confession and celebration-- some more or only suited to our condition and not his--are activities which we can choose and in which we learn to draw from him and his kingdom the truth, love and power we need to be the light and salt in our place. He will personalize the disciplines to us as we seek him in them, for he will be our teacher. We will learn to know his voice.

VI. The disciplinary activities:

- A. Are not for merit but for access and reception of grace.
- B. Are of no use if they are not needed (Like medicine or training in other respects).
- C. Are our part in "working out our own salvation with fear and trembling because God is working in us." (Phil 2:12-13)
- D. Constitute ways, and can become a coherent plan, for placing our time and our bodies at God's disposal, "redeeming the time" (Eph 5:16) and making our bodies "living sacrifices" (Rom 12:1-2)
- E. Are for disciples only, for those who have found the pearl of great price, life in the kingdom of heaven, and really want to possess this gift of God.
- F. Require the ministry of a discipline fellowship with ministers equipped to bring the kingdom to bear upon real life.

"Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (II Peter 3:18)