

Sermon Series: Spurred on to Holiness (and Power) by Immersing Ourselves into the Life of Christ Through the Eyes of the Apostles – A Harmony of All Four Gospels

Sermon Title: Fighting Our Way Into the Kingdom of Heaven

November 24, 2019

Today's Scripture: See insert

Introduction: Does God really hate the rich and love the poor? Did Jesus really say it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God? Did James really say *James 5:1–6 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. (ESV)*

Main point: Only those who despise the world and despise their sin are worthy candidates for heaven. All others are deceiving themselves and are on their way to hell.

Context:

Exegesis:

1. A person's heavenly rank does not depend on earthly successes. *For verily I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen a greater prophet than John the Baptist*
 - Remember, John was in prison for condemning Herod's lifestyle of immorality and living with his brother's wife. The world would not consider that to be a successful ministry now would they. So they had to be reminded that success is not dependent on earthly measurements. But how was John greater?
 - Moses was esteemed to be the highest prophet in Israelites estimation. They often attributed to him the many miracles that God performed through Him. Yet Jesus puts John above Moses.
 - Elijah was an amazing man of God who called down fire from heaven on Mt. Carmel and killed 450 prophets of Baal single-handedly. Yet Jesus puts John above Elijah.
 - What makes John greater than these two and all the others? It couldn't be that John did greater miracles, he didn't do any. It was that he had a greater assignment. He was tasked with ushering in or paving the way for Messiah to come.
 - What did it mean for John to pave the way for Messiah's coming? It meant that he had to preach in such a way as to bring people to repentance. No one is going to welcome a savior unless they realize they need one.

- Imagine how hard that had to have been for him. No one wants to hear that they are a depraved and rebellious sinner and that God is quite angry with them.
 - To put all this in contemporary terms, imagine God giving you the assignment to preach repentance to the city of Alexandria. First of all how do you get them to come and listen to you? Are you going to rent Broadway Ballroom and send out invitations in the mail saying “Come and hear just how bad a person you are and how much God is angry with you”?
 - Maybe God hasn’t given you that assignment but he has given you the assignment to pave the way for your neighbor to come to Christ. Just exactly how are you going to do that? Do not say to God, “I am going to live a godly life in front of my neighbor and that will do the trick”. Nonsense. Ungodly people do not have a good opinion of their godly neighbors. They have words to describe them, one of them being “prideful” or “Bible Bangers”. Don’t say to God that you will live a loving life before your neighbors. That’s a thousand times better but it still falls short of bringing anyone to repentance. Step One is to live the life you preach, yes, and step two is to love your neighbor as yourself meaning invite into your home, have them over for dinner, visit them in the hospital, walk them through difficult times such as divorce, all of that yes, but only step three matters. You need to love them enough to say to them “You will not get to heaven unless you repent of your wicked deeds.” Can you do that?
2. Every member of the True Church (another name for the Kingdom of God) has a higher calling and ability than John the Baptist. *(although the lowliest in the Kingdom of God is greater than he).*
 - 1) John’s ministry didn’t save anybody. His was only a baptism of repentance that brought people only halfway.
 - 2) Our ministry is a baptism of the Spirit where we lead people to Christ and they are inhabited by the power and presence of the Spirit. John’s followers had no power to overcome their sinful behavior. Our disciples do.
 - 3) Because we are indwelt by the Spirit we can be led by Him and perform miracles through Him. *Ephesians 1:19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might (ESV)*
 - 4) John’s teaching was limited to the Old Testament law. Our teaching includes the transforming power of grace and mercy. He preached condemnation. We preach that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
 3. The only people who can be saved are those who are willing to admit they don’t deserve to be saved. They recognize they are sinners who have deeply offended God. *“And on hearing _____ (John) all the common folk, and the publicans, justified God by being baptized with the baptism of John, while the Pharisees and the doctors of the law disregarded the counsel of God toward themselves by refusing to be baptized by him.*

- There was no hesitation on the part of the masses to be baptized by John. They had nothing to lose. In that crowd were adulterers, swindlers, tax collectors, prostitutes, liars, sexually immoral (through deed or thought) murderers (through deed or thought) and they were convicted deeply and emotionally about their sin.
 - These were not people who said “I’m sorry I hurt you can we move on now”. In contrast these were people who were saying to God, I slapped you in the face God with my sinful behavior and I can never repay what infinite damage I did to you or to your child. Please forgive me.
 - Therefore **true repentance is always emotional**. It must reach the heart. There has to be genuine sorrow or it is false repentance.
 - These people justified God in the sense they said “Yes God, you are so right. We are wicked sinful people deserving nothing but your wrath.” Essentially they were telling God that he is truthful, unlike the Pharisees who were calling God a liar.
4. John the Baptist was the very first prophet who spoke of the Kingdom (and how to enter into it). *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of God is being preached – “For all the prophets and the law prophesied till the time of John.*
- The prophets, Isaiah – Malachi spoke of many things but very little about the church. Either they were addressing Israel’s apostasy or prophecies concerning Jesus’ first coming or his second coming, but very little is mentioned about the church age, the time when the Spirit of God will be at work among all nations bringing people into a saving knowledge of Jesus.
 - But when John came, one of the first things out of his mouth was “The Kingdom of God has arrived.”
5. Those who enter the Kingdom of God do so with extreme passion and zeal. True believers will let nothing get in their way of entering heaven. *the Kingdom of heaven is being won by storming walls of opposition, and all entering it are forcing their way.*
- First of all this means that true believers will not let family, or relatives or friends or business associates talk them out of repenting and believing. Certainly the Pharisees were an intimidating bunch who scorned the low-lives who were being baptized by John. But the people being baptized forced through those lines and emotions and fears to take their place among the repentant.
 - Secondly it means that every other priority in life will take second place. If a husband insists on and demands that his wife not worship or take children to church on Sunday the true believing wife will respectfully tell her husband she reports to a higher authority, and vice versa. If a boss insists a believer work every Sunday no matter what a true believer will fight through his insecurities and tell his boss respectfully that God will provide his needs another way. It means that previous goals such as accumulating wealth by a certain age is now overthrown by a greater desire, the desire to please their master first and foremost.
 - Third, it means that true believers will have a divinely inspired resolve to follow Jesus no matter what. Unlike people who make New Year’s resolutions one week and break them the next, true believers will take up their cross daily to follow Jesus. They do this

because they are so moved by the mercy of God that they never forget how blessed they are for receiving undeserved forgiveness. These are the kind of people the author of Hebrews described when he said *Hebrews 12:1–2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (ESV)*

Application

Measure your passion for Jesus and His Kingdom. If you are finding your passion for him waning, be very diligent to beg Him for greater passion and greater determination. Are you late for church because it is easier to sleep in an extra 10 minutes on Sunday morning? That's a warning sign. Are you not as hungry to read and study his word like you use to be? That's a warning sign. Then you are not forcing your way into the Kingdom because you are not as hungry now for God's mercy as you once were. No true believer should ever lose his hunger for Christ because if they do they have forgotten how far Jesus had to reach to pick them up out of the ash heap of their rotten lives. I pray for each one of you weekly that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind and strength. Please pray that for yourselves daily as well.