



Matthew 4:23-5:10

“WHAT THE JESUS MOVEMENT LOOKS LIKE”

(Sermon Plus Study And Application Questions)

August 19, 2012

Pastor Phil Thrailkill
211 North Main St.
Greenwood, SC 29646

Church Office: 864-229-7551
Church Website: www.msumc1.org
Email: PThrailkil@aol.com (comments welcome!)

“Following Christ at City Center!”

I. MATTHEW 4:23-5:10 (RSV)
(As the text appears in your modern Bibles)

And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decap'olis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

- "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- "Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.
- "Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.
- "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.
- "Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.
- "Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God.
- "Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called sons of God.
- "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

II. SCRIPTURE SHEET AND SERMON
(As heard by ancient hearers)

MATTHEW 4:23-5:10 "WHAT THE JESUS MOVEMENT LOOKS LIKE"

4:23-25 The Kingdom's Healing Grace Precedes Demands Of Sermon On The Mount: Jesus First Heals. No Requirement/Confession Before Healing

²³And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. ²⁴So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.

²⁵And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. ¹Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. ²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

Moses Ascends Mountain (Ex. 19:3, 24:16-17, Dt. 9:9)

Not Entrance Requirements But Promise Of Disciples' Reward (Now & Later), Who Is Approved By God?

IIIB1: 5:3-10 THE WAY OF THE KINGDOM: EMPTYING & FOLLOWING GOD'S RULE IN JESUS. 13:16-17, Kingdom Is Near, Is.61:1-11 (Lament)

How Is One To Live *After* Discipleship/Healing Begins? Awesome Demands

1) vv.3-6 Focus On God: Passive Way Of Internal Emptying (36 Gk. words). **2) vv.7-10 Focus On Others: Active Way Of Following (36 Gk. words).**

(A wrong undone, a good rewarded)

Blessing (Makarism)= Congratulations + Audience + Reason

Is=Present (1, 8); Shall=Future (2-7), 8 Core Blessings, 3rd Plural

Two Ages: Kingdom Meets Resistance, Ostracized

5:12, 20 *my sake*

Pi
v.3
ptochoi (1) "Blessed are /
the poor *in spirit* (inner life before God),
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Beggars before God)

v.10 (8) Blessed are/
those who are persecuted **for righteousness sake**
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Martyrs) //4:23, 1 Pt. 3:14

(*Shalom* = Wholeness In Relationships)

v.4 (2) "Blessed are/
penthountes those who mourn,
for they **shall** be comforted.

v.9 (7) Blessed are/
the peacemakers,
for they **shall** be called "sons of God." (i.e. holy angels, Gen. 6:1-4)

(Hos.1:10; Mt.5:23-24, 18:15)

(Not Peace-fakers, Peace-breakers)

v.5 (3) "Blessed are/
praeis the meek,
for they **shall** inherit the earth.

v.8 (6) Blessed are/
the pure(clean) in heart,
for they **shall** see God.

(Ps. 24:3-4, 42:2, 73:1 Center Of Being)

(Single-Minded, Ps. 86:11) //5:16-18

(See At Last Judgment) **James 4:8**

//18:21-35, 25:31-36, James 2:13, 2 Tim. 1:18

v.6 (4) "Blessed are/
those who hunger and thirst **for righteousness**,
for they shall be satisfied. (Craving for God)

v.7 (5) Blessed are/
the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy. From God, **No. 4//No. 8 Righteousness**

(Ex. 34:6. Ps. 37:21, Prov. 14:21, 17:5)

(Hos. 6:6, Save Another: Open Heart)

What It Is Like To Belong To God's People Awaiting The End, Out Of Step With This World

vv.3-6 Path Of Emptying Into Desire For God.

vv.7-10 Path Of Identity With Christ.

1) v.3 Poor in Spirit (No riches, real need)

8) v.10 Persecuted For Goodness (Cross of Christ, confront evil)

2) v.4 Mourn (Loss, grief, pain at what is against God)

7) v.9 Peacemakers (Reconcilers of people to God, to one another)

3) v.5 Meek (Loss of power, status)

6) v.8 Pure in heart (Eyes to see the hidden God everywhere)

4) v.6 Crave righteousness (Physical desire for God)

5) v.7 Merciful (Wise and liberating love, not giving others what they deserve)

WHAT THE JESUS MOVEMENT LOOKS LIKE

"...and they brought to him all the sick... and he healed them."

The mercy and grace of God for broken bodies and souls.

M A T T H E W 4 : 2 4 b

In his novel *Girlfriend in a Coma*, Douglas Coupland tells of Karen who fell into a coma in 1979. Life went on. Teenage friends grew up, got married, got divorced, did drugs. In her vegetative state, Karen misses the fall of the Berlin Wall, the AIDS crisis, the advent of the personal computer. Seventeen years later, Karen woke from a dreamless sleep.

Her sudden reawakening is a huge story. She initially resists media hype but eventually agrees to a conversation with a local TV interviewer who begins with a question, "What's the biggest change you've noticed so far? What strikes you as the deepest change?"

"You know what it is, Gloria? It's how confident everybody comes across these days. Everybody looks like they're *rarin' to go* all the time. People look confident when they're buying chewing gum or walking the dog."

"You like that then?"

"There's more. You take the same people and ask them a few key questions, and suddenly you realize they're despairing about the world, that the confidence is a mask."

"What kind of questions, Karen?"

"What do you think life will be like in 10 years? Are you straining to find some kind of meaning? Does growing old frighten you?"

"Hmmm" the reporter responds, "We're a culture searching for meaning."¹

We were designed for meaning, for that deep sense of connection and purpose that is appropriate to creatures made, as the Book of Genesis teaches, in the image and likeness of God. Why then is it so hard today to find the connection to deep meaning? Why are depression and anxiety so epidemic? What do so many seem rootless, without place and belonging, floating without anchor through their own lives? Some find new roots; others just

¹ PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 4:18-5:10.

Matthew 4:23-5:10 5

float by on their way to who-knows-where. *Floater*s I call them, disconnected people, hungry for meaning, searching in all the wrong places.

Why is it so hard today to find the connection to deep meaning and to a church that is the carrier of that meaning across time? One reason is that there is now woven around us a great electronic web that entertains and distracts, that mocks and subverts the deeper appetites. It's the web of television background noise, ever breaking news, the endless chatter of talk radio, of music customized for every niche of the listening public. It's the flood of email and interruption of the cell phone. It is the inability to be still and quiet. It is delegating the work of my own thinking to others and the reduction of important issues to slogans and sound bites. It is an induced numbness in the soul that silences the cries of our own hearts. Frankly, I don't worry nearly as much about the presence or absence of *weapons of mass destruction* as I do about the pervasiveness of the *weapons of mass distraction*. The Evil One has a strategy, and in my imagination it goes something like this:

“If I keep their minds and hearts cluttered long enough, they will forget the call the Great Enemy has hidden within them. They will forget the sound of the voice. I will so enchant and place them under such a bewitching spell of electronic narcotics that they will never wake up til it's too late. They will walk into my arms thinking this virtual reality is all there is, and then we will be together forever in the place where there is no peace and where meaning is entirely absent, noise without end. Amen.”²

Listen! Can you hear it? It is the great humm of the world; to be plugged in is what it means to be a modern person, able to discourse at length on trivia of every sort. So pervasive is this atmosphere that it is increasingly difficult to get people to focus on any one thing for any length of time. We are hard-wiring the plastic brains of children for Attention Deficit Disorder, and we are building into ourselves a shorter and shorter attention span. It's hard to hear God with a noisy heart and racing thoughts and a mind that will not focus for more than ten seconds. It's not that God has ceased speaking; it is that we are losing the ability to hear. Mother Teresa wrote, “God is the friend of silence. Trees, flowers, grass grow in silence. See the stars, moon, and sun, how they move in silence.”³ Robert Benson writes, “It is in silence God is known, and through mysteries that he declares himself.”⁴

² An imagined conversation with his Infernal Majesty.

³ Martin Manser, editor, *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations* (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 2001, 343).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

Matthew 4:23-5:10 6

Taking time for deliberate silence and disengagement may be *the* critical spiritual discipline of our time.⁵ To deliberately disconnect, to hide, to watch as your thoughts and emotions unwind themselves down to a place of stillness, and there to remember who we are and whose we are. This is subversive living against this grain of a noisy culture; this is a personal protest against the great flood of trivia and distraction in which we are soaking. We belong to God; we were made for meaning. Where we find a place to stand against the flood is in silence, to marinate our soul in the deep and probing silences of God. We are addicted to artificial stimulation, and silence is the cold turkey antidote for a shallow and trivial life. “Be still,” wrote the Psalmist, “and know that I am God.”⁶

Never perhaps has it been harder or more necessary to obey that ancient invitation. I often begin one-on-one pastoral conversations with an invitation to silence, to sit together for a few minutes in quiet with our eyes closed. I say to the person, “When it has been a few minutes, say an *Amen* for us both; I will then listen to you after we have both listened to God.” It normally takes not more than 20 seconds for them to nervously blurt out *Amen*. Silence, especially communal silence, makes us feel awkward. That God might speak is more threatening. But when the silence goes on for more than a minute or so I know that God is speaking to them. I catch myself and say, “Lord, what are you saying to me?”

I use these thoughts as a bridge from our meaning-hungry world back to the world of Jesus, the one who embodies the meaning of God in history. Theirs was a hard time of subsistence living and short life spans; but, on the plus side, it was quieter. No clocks and alarms, only the morning rooster. The times of the day were a seamless flow of morning and afternoon, afternoon and evening, evening and nightfall. The pace was the rhythm of walking and talking. Change was slow. I don’t want to idealize it, only to point out the clear difference between their times and ours. You could hear your own heart beating and befriend your own thoughts. Writing had long been invented; things could be recorded with a quill pen and a scroll of papyrus if you had the money and were literate, which most were not. No printing press, no mass communications except Roman coins stamped with Caesar’s imperial propaganda. Only gossip and an occasional report from Jerusalem and far off Rome. The Scripture read in the synagogue on the Sabbath was rolled over in ones mind the rest of the week and chewed like the cud of a cow. You talked about it in the family and with neighbors. This was the time of all possible times when God chose to come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It was the right time for the Word to be heard in person, and God chose to show up in an era of face-to-face conversation. Same human hearts hungry for meaning, but it was a time before the weapons of mass distraction were so skillfully employed.

⁵ For an excellent introduction to soul-training, see James Bryan Smith, *The Good And Beautiful God* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2009), the first in a series of three books.

⁶ Psalm 46:10.

The Kingdom At Ground Level (4:23-25)

When I meditate on the last three verses of Matthew chapter 4, I am frankly dumbfounded. I know the words to describe what I read: Jesus- as all the scholars acknowledge- was an itinerant Jewish mystic and rabbi known for his charismatic healings and exorcisms, but to imagine what it much have looked like in action fills me with awe and wonder and many questions, the chief one being, Why do we see so little of this healing power in our day? I have seen such, but they are rare. I have prayed for thousands, and- on occasion and without warning- sometimes remarkable things have happened.

Matthew takes extra care to emphasize both the geographic scope and comprehensive nature of Jesus' kingdom ministry of word plus deed. Verse 23, "And he went about *all Galilee*, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of God's rule and healing *every* disease and *every* infirmity among the people." No exceptions. Imagine that.

Jesus took it to the streets and to the people. At least in the initial stages it was not a *come to me* ministry but a *go to them* ministry. That shifts in verse 24 as the word gets out: "So his fame spread throughout *all Syria*, and they brought to him *all* the sick, those afflicted with *various* diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics (the word means *moonstruck*), and paralytics, and he healed them." Immediate non-medical healing because of the effects of the love and power that came through God the Son- Jesus of Nazareth, out of his intimate union and cooperative action with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

While the disciples are watching Jesus, their own attitudes toward the ill and demonized were being molded by his compassion. No one was asked for a confession of sin first. There were no entrance exams and prerequisites. Matthew simply says in this summary that he healed them all; it was a preview into the coming kingdom of God. When the active rule of God comes near in the power of the Holy Spirit, bodies and minds are restored. Jesus showed up; he then preached, healed the sick, cast out demons, all in in a seamless flow from theology lecture to the raw laboratory of human experience. This is what the kingdom looks like at ground level. New truths, new power, fresh hope for broken people. In Jesus God is present and at work. All these people later became sick again and died, but for a season it was as if they'd stepped through some invisible portal into a new world- which they had.

Along with the other gospels, Matthew consistently distinguishes between healings (which involve the restoration of some lost function) and exorcisms (which involve forcefully removing a spiritual intruder which has set up residence on or in a person; a hostile being is expelled by the force of God's loving power). Not all maladies had overtly spiritual roots, though some did and do even today. I have seen remarkable changes in people who've been involved in the occult after they renounce these practices and turn in faith to Jesus. Most disease, however, is just the personal price we all pay for living in a radically fallen

Matthew 4:23-5:10 8

world as a vulnerable human being. Creation is broken at a deep level, and so are we. Other diseases are unnecessary and self-inflicted. People chose habits which rob their health. But whatever the root and the fruit, Jesus consistently restored people to physical, emotional, and relational wholeness. He was therapist, exorcist, healer and confessor, teacher and tutor in the kingdom of God. The spiritual gifts of healing, discernment of spirits, faith, and miracles flowed through him like a deep river. His was a profound partnership with invisible friends. The Father willed it; the Son obeyed, and the Spirit empowered. Jesus is the visible member of the Triune God, and he was, as some have titled him, the Great Physician. It was never a technique with him; you get the impression from reading across the gospel stories that each situation was customized by the Holy Spirit with whom Jesus was in constant partnership and who supplied him with a flow of insights, words, and visions. He watched and delighted as the Spirit worked through his yielded will.

Suspend for a moment the rational skepticism of your unbelief and picture the joy and ecstasy of the scene before us. Heaven come down and landed on earth so that all within its force field of love were made whole. Arthritic joints moved with ease instead of creaking with pain. Blind eyes saw. Syphilitic sores vanished. Clef palates closed without a scar. Cancers withered. Arteries opened. Drunkards were sobered. Diabetes vanished. Demons fled at his presence. Sanity was restored. Depression lifted. The power of the Spirit was moving through Jesus like a mighty torrent, and all who dared step into the flow were blessed. Jesus welcomed the eager masses of broken people and demonstrated among them what it meant to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."⁷ In his study of the historical Jesus, Dr. Marcus Borg summarizes a hundred years of critical research:

"Despite the difficulty which miracles pose for the modern mind, on historical grounds it is virtually indisputable that Jesus was a healer and exorcist. The reasons for this judgment are threefold. First, there is widespread attestation in our earliest sources. Second, healings and exorcisms were relatively common, both within Judaism and in the Hellenistic world. Third, even his opponents did not challenge the claim that powers of healing flowed through him.... By admiring followers and skeptical foes alike, he was seen as a holy man with healing powers."⁸

Most healing today- at least in our Western world- occurs through the application of medical and psychological principles, the truths God's buried in creation to be mined by inquiring minds and the scientific method. As researchers unravel the mystery of DNA- the building blocks of life, we will hopefully see a whole new range of therapies, maybe even

⁷ 3:17.

⁸ *Jesus- A New Vision* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 61.

Matthew 4:23-5:10 9

some from the Greenwood Genetics Center. What occurs through the God-ordained means of medicine is so amazing we are tempted to ignore the other hand of God for healing through prayer with the laying on of hands accompanied by spiritual gifting. I will know that we have become wise when we adopt a *both-and* rather than an *either-or* dichotomy. Science has done a good job with its resources; we in the church have not done a good job with ours.⁹

So let the doctors do their research and bring forth wonders, and let the church rediscover and not apologize for its own ministries of prayer and spiritual gifts. Not a false separation but a creative tension. They will be *high-tech*, and we will be *high-touch*. We welcome both the hands of God. To follow Jesus Christ, as the disciples did, is to be opened to a world where there are more wonders and surprises than ever imagined. One day they are fishing, the next observing up close a man through whom miracles are a regular occurrence. Talk about a steep learning curve! And the curve about to get steeper.

The Upside-Down Kingdom (5:1-10)

This is the setting for the Sermon on the Mount, not an isolated discourse but an extended teaching to the crowds that had been drawn to Jesus because of their pain and his power. For many- then and now- it is the love of God shown to them by a display of mercy that initially draws them through the doorway and into the academy of discipleship. God's love remains an abstraction til after they've experienced a touch at the point of their pain. This did not embarrass Jesus, and it should not embarrass us. But there came a time when- according to Matthew- Jesus sat down on a mountain before the outer circle of the multitude and the inner circle of the disciples, opened his mouth and offered another kind of healing, not for broken bodies but for darkened minds and hard hearts. "You have experienced an aspect of the kingdom," he said, "but what does it mean to dwell there? Listen to my teaching. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...."

What follows in the first eight beatitudes are not entrance requirements for the kingdom, nor are they a listing of the eight categories of people who get to heaven when they die. They are simply honest statements from one who knows who it is that does business with God.¹⁰

⁹ As an appendix to this sermon, see the balanced statement found in *The United Methodist Book Of Worship* (Nashville, TN: UMPH, 1994), 613.

¹⁰ For a profound treatment, see Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1998), Chapter 4, "WHO IS REALLY WELL OFF- THE BEATITUDES," 97-127.

Matthew 4:23-5:10 10

Who is it that does deep business with God? Who is really well off from God's perspective? It is first of all those who know there's nothing on their side of the ledger when it comes to God; they have nothing to bargain with; they are *the poor in spirit*. What is it about the poor and the poor in spirit that makes them eager recipients of the kingdom of God? Monika Helwig, a Roman Catholic theologian, gives us searching list of ten:

1. The poor know they are in urgent need of redemption.
2. The poor know not only their dependence on God and on powerful people but also their interdependence with one another.
3. The poor rest their security not on things but on people.
4. The poor have no exaggerated sense of their own importance, and no exaggerated need of privacy.
5. The poor expect little from competition and much from cooperation.
6. The poor can distinguish between necessities and luxuries.
7. The poor can wait, because they have acquired a kind of dogged patience.
8. The fears of the poor are more realistic and less exaggerated, because they already know that one can survive great suffering and want.
9. When the poor have the gospel preached to them, it sounds like good news and not like a threat or scolding.
10. The poor can respond to the call of the gospel with a certain abandonment and uncomplicated totality because they have so little to lose and are ready for anything.¹¹

Who does business with God? Secondly, those who are pained over the sin and evil of this world, including their own; they are *those who mourn*. So if this world and its stories make you sad, you're in good company. Don't get better too quickly, else you will lose your emotional grasp on things that break the heart of God. Ask God to turn your grief into some new and unexpected good. Receive divine comfort in the midst of a broken heart.

Who does business with God? Those who do not push themselves forward and are not impressed by status and wealth; they are *the meek* who wait for God to lead so they can follow. Oswald Chambers wrote:

“The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather, he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God

¹¹ Quoted in Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 115.

Matthew 4:23-5:10 11

has declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is, in the sight of God, more important than angels. ... He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring.”¹²

Who does business with God? Those with a ravenous, almost physical, appetite for God’s work, first *for them* for their own sake and then *through them* for the sake of the world. They are *those who hunger and thirst after righteousness*. God wants you hungry!

Pat Summerall- the well known sports announcer- overcame alcoholism and became a follower of Christ in his late sixties. He said this about baptism: "I went down in the water, and when I came up it was like a 40-pound weight had been lifted from me. I have a happier life, a healthy life, and a more positive feeling about life than ever before."

About prayer meetings and Bible studies Summerall comments: "It's like an alcoholic looking for a drink. If he wants it bad enough, he can find it- no matter what. I'm like that when it comes to finding prayer services and Bible studies. No matter where I'm working, I know that they're out there and I can find them."¹³ Summerall was hungry.

What are the appetites only God can satisfy and for which you’ve tried everything else? That is precisely the locus of lasting satisfaction, “...for they shall be satisfied.” Let Jesus Christ transform your cravings into an appetite God loves to satisfy.

In order to make sure the first four blessings are read together, Matthew arranges them so that the key word in each begins with the Greek letter *pi*. The English words *poor*, *mourn*, *mEEK*, and *hunger* all begin with the same Greek letter and can be rendered as, “Blessed are the *poor* in spirit, the *plaintive*, the *powerless*, and those who *pine* for righteousness.”¹⁴ Each of the two groupings of four also has the same number of words in Greek: 36. Someone has taken great care to make these words memorable.

These are the ones who do business with God. They are internally emptied. They are the poor in spirit who weep over sin’s awful powers of devastation. They are the powerless ones and at the same time unimpressed by worldly powers; they are famished for the things of God. That is not a profile of this world’s ideal of success. The world does not know what to do with this stuff. For them, “Blessed are the pushy, for they get on in the world. Blessed are the hard-boiled, for they never let life hurt them. Blessed are the complainers, for they

¹² PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 5:1-10.

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Quoted in David Garland, *Reading Matthew* (New York: Crossroads, 1994), 54.

Matthew 4:23-5:10 12

get their way in the end. Blessed are the indifferent, for they never worry over their sins.”¹⁵ Each beatitude has a negative mirror image, and if you compile such a list you will see our world described. Jesus’ vision is cross-grained to the way life is now organized.

Jesus is not giving a formula for success on the world’s terms under current management. He’s setting his people as the contradiction of the world in light of the world that is coming. Part of the kingdom is now, thus the present tense of the first and last statements, “Theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven.” The other six are future, “for they *shall be*...”

But what about the second panel of four, beatitudes 5 through 8? They are the path of increasing identity with Jesus Christ. The one who works *in us* to increase spiritual hunger now works *through us* to spread the effects. No longer is mercy withheld; it flows freely because of God’s compassion towards us. The purified in heart now see God everywhere because the center of the self has been cleansed of alien programming. Because you are now at peace with God and yourself, your presence brings peace to others. The wisdom of God finds fresh ways for people to come to agreement. You bring new possibilities to old log jams. You are a kingdom peacemaker, living out of a new reality.

In his book *The Life Giving Church*- written before his tumble- Ted Haggard reminisces about a kindly Amish family, the Royers, that lived near his childhood home:

“One night a group of drunken high school boys went to the Royer farm after a football game and began breaking watermelon- the produce that provided the mainstay of their annual income. While the boys were yelling and cussing in the field, the light of a glowing lantern began flickering in an upstairs bedroom of the farmhouse. From the field the boys could see the light being carried down the stairs and then onto the front porch. As the light approached them through the darkness, the boys prepared for a fight. Instead, Mr. Royer told the boys they could have all the melons they desired, but that the melons they were breaking were not his best. He offered to lead them to the best field and give them as many as they wanted. The boys were embarrassed and respectfully apologized before leaving. Mr. Royer invited them in for a glass of lemonade- he said they needed it. But the boys declined, trying to soak in their vivid lesson on Christian character.”¹⁶

That is not weakness but great strength. The overcoming of hate and revenge, the

¹⁵ J.B. Phillips’ parody, as quoted in Calvin Miller, *The Book of Jesus* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 332.

¹⁶ PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 5:1-10.

Matthew 4:23-5:10 13

power to turn enemies into friends. Such is the influence of those who walked this path.

It is our nature to desire happy endings. But this list of eight does not end that way. It hangs between poverty of spirit in No. 1 and outright persecution in No. 8. It ends as Jesus' life ended, which is in suffering because of obedience to God, "Blessed are those who are persecuted *for righteousness sake*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

This following letter was written by a Southern Baptist Missionary to Iraq, Karen Watson, prior to leaving for the Middle East. The letter is dated March 7, 2003. Karen, along with four other missionaries, was killed March 15, 2004. Here is her letter:

"Dear Pastor Phil and Pastor Roger:

You should only be opening this letter in the event of my death. When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you as much as possible, my heart for the nations. I wasn't called to a place. I was called to him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, his glory my reward. One of the most important things to remember right now is to preserve the work....I am writing this as if I am still working with my people group. I thank you all so much for your prayers and support. Surely your reward in heaven will be great. Thank you for investing in my life and spiritual well-being. Keep sending missionaries out. Keep raising up fine young pastors. In regards to any service, keep it small and simple. Yes, simply, just preach the gospel....Be bold and preach the life-saving, life-changing, forever-eternal gospel. Give glory and honor to our Father.

Then comes an appendix. It's titled *The Missionary Heart*:

"Care more than some think is wise.
Risk more than some think is safe.
Dream more than some think is practical.
Expect more than some think is possible."

The letter concludes:

"I was called not to comfort or success but to obedience.... There is no joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving him. I love you two and my church family. In his care, Salaam, Karen."¹⁷

¹⁷ Idem.

Conclusion

I cannot make this Christian thing easier than it is. Jesus Christ will gleefully disrupt your plans and turn your world inside-out and upside-down. He will empty you out and finally set you as a holy protester in the face of the sin and evil and corrupted power that has infected every nook and cranny of the earthly enterprise. Fallen angels will rough you up and seek to corrupt your motives. You will be buffeted within and without.

That our churches and lives are so comfortably situated is an indictment of how little we know of our great king and the uncompromising demands of his kingdom. But this is what we are to be about: calling disciples, healing the sick and spiritually tormented, living into the hungry depths and dizzying heights of these beatitudes. Why? So that when this alternative kingdom arrives in fullness we will enter it not as strangers but friends.

I cannot offer you a discount on the cost of discipleship. I will not trade in a prosperity or a feel-good gospel, and I refuse to dumb-down this great faith to some point-by-point life improvement plan you can do without doing business with God. There is no good life without knowing and following this fearsome Yahweh, the Lord God of the Jews who showed up in our neighborhood in Jesus. We modern preachers have tried it for too long-the discounted version I mean; it is not working, and it is killing our churches. No more!

I want the real deal. I don't have time for anything less or anything other. Do you have any idea how desperate I am? I'm hungry, and - according to Jesus- that's a good place to be, a place where kingdom things may be about to happen. Mercy, God sightings, peace-making, getting in on God's mission in our world.

So may God Almighty have mercy upon me, and upon you as well as we work out what it means to follow Jesus together in this place. It is not an easy path; it is the only path. Down into hunger, up into an increasing identification with Jesus and his conflict with our world as currently managed. Easy life or blessed life? Which will it be?

Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
August 19, 2012

AN INTRODUCTION TO HEALING SERVICES AND PRAYERS

(Taken from The United Methodist Book of Worship [1989], 613-615)

Scripture strongly affirms ministries of spiritual healing, which in recent years have received renewed emphasis throughout Christ's holy Church. The root of the word healing in New Testament Greek, *sozo*, is the same as that of salvation and wholeness. Spiritual healing is God's work of offering persons balance, harmony, and wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships through confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Through such healing, God works to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity, among individuals and communities, within each person, and between humanity and the rest of creation. The New Testament records that Jesus himself healed the estranged and sick and sent out his disciples on ministries of healing. James (5:14-16a) calls us also to pray for and anoint the sick, that they may be healed.

All healing is of God. The Church's healing ministry in no way detracts from the gifts God gives through medicine and psychotherapy. It is no substitute for either medicine or the proper care of one's health. Rather, it adds to our total resources for wholeness. Healing is not magic, but underlying it is the great mystery of God's love. Those who minister spiritual healing are channels of God's love. Although no one can predict what will happen in a given instance, many marvelous healings have taken place.

God does not promise that we shall be spared suffering but does promise to be with us in our suffering. Trusting that promise, we are enabled to recognize God's sustaining presence in pain, sickness, injury, and estrangement. Likewise, God does not promise that we will be cured of all illnesses; and we all must face the inevitability of death. A Service of Healing is not necessarily a service of curing, but it provides an atmosphere in which healing can happen. The greatest healing of all is the reunion or reconciliation of a human being with God. When this happens, physical healing sometimes occurs, mental and emotional balance is often restored, spiritual health is enhanced, and relationships are healed. For the Christian the basic purpose of spiritual healing is to renew and strengthen one's relationship with the living Christ.

Patterns of healing services grow out of both Church traditions and the needs of the moment. Prayers for healing, accompanied if desired by anointing with the laying on of hands, may be incorporated into any service of congregational worship as a Response to the Word. Also, there may be a healing service at a stated time each week or month, or healing may be ministered privately to individuals. Many find not only prayer but also Holy Communion, laying on of hands, and anointing with oil to be healing.

Laying on of hands, anointing with oil, and the less formal gesture of holding someone's hand all show the power of touch, which plays a central role in the healings recorded in the New Testament. Jesus often touched others--blessing children, washing feet, healing injuries or disease, and raising people from death. Biblical precedent combines with our natural desire to reach out to persons in need in prompting us to touch gently and lovingly those who ask for healing prayers. Such an act is a tangible expression of the presence of the healing Christ, working in and through those who minister in his name.

Anointing the forehead with oil is a sign act invoking the healing love of God. The oil points beyond itself and those doing the anointing to the action of the Holy Spirit and the presence of the healing Christ, who is God's Anointed One. Olive oil is traditionally used in anointing but can become rancid. Sweet oil, which is olive oil with a preservative, is available in any pharmacy. Fragrant oils may be used, but care must be taken because some people are allergic to perfumes....

It is important that those ministering in services of healing be sensitive to the differences that exist among those who come for healing ministries. Sound preaching, teaching, and pastoral care are essential for healing ministries to accomplish their purpose.

IV. STUDY QUESTIONS

Matthew 4:23-25

1. There is a pattern in these verses to be noted. First a travel report, then a ministry report. It is repeated three times. Travel + preaching and healing (v.23), travel + healing (v.24), travel + teaching (v.25). Why did Matthew describe the ministry of Jesus this way.
2. Take out a map and note how in v.25 the place names form a circle around all the points of the compass. Is this Matthew’s subtle way of say that Jesus is for all the world?

Matthew 5:1-10

3. How does it change our reading of the beatitudes when we see them not as eight different items but as two groups of four that describe the downward and outward movement of God’s rule in those who follow Jesus?
4. Which of the first four pierce your heart the most? The second four? Why?

V. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. The two following books will stretch your thinking on how Jesus’ healings continue in our day.
 - a. Francis McNutt, *The Nearly Perfect Crime: How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2005). A church history of healing.
 - b. Alexander Venter, *Doing Healing: how to minister God’s kingdom in the power of the Spirit* (Cape Town, SA: Vineyard International, 2009). Great summary from the Vineyard movement.
2. Re-read the sermon with two questions in mind, “How addicted am I to the world’s humm?” “What would happen if I threw the whole of my life open to Jesus’ meddling with me?”
3. How will maturing as a disciple of Jesus bring me into painful opposition with the world’s current values and practices? How does joining Jesus in his ongoing battle sound to you?

VI. PRAYER

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray:

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we read of the mighty words and deeds of Jesus Christ,
how he relieved pain and healed the tormented with a touch.
His words about your present and coming kingdom
have filled your people with hope since first they were spoken.
But look at us now, O Lord.
We abuse the bodies you have given and pay the consequences.
We forget the rest of the Sabbath and are filled with anxieties.
We pursue happiness and forget blessedness.
We seek out entertainments and often ignore the poor.
We are silent when we should take a stand against evil and oppression.
Without the aid of the Holy Spirit we cannot change our ways.
We are rich in many things but poor in spirit.
We are all beginners in this life of the kingdom.
Treat us like beloved children, and not like the rebels we are.
Remember the cross of Jesus, and pour out forgiveness upon us all.
Amen.** (Silence is kept for confession. Absolution is announced.)
