

The Gospel of the Kingdom: Living the Sermon in the Local Congregation

Franklin Church of Christ
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November 5, 2006
AM Assembly

Introduction:

We might think the easiest place in the world to obey the scripture is within the local congregation. However, my experience has been we botch Christ's sermon in the local congregation as much as we do in every other aspect of our lives. I have heard some of the worst possible behavior between brethren, including physical violence. How does that happen? We have heard great lessons about living this Sermon in marriage, as parents, on the job and in school. However, we must not overlook how the Sermon ought to impact the local congregation. When the Sermon impacts us right here, then we will be a growing and vibrant body of Jesus Christ. If not, we will only be a mediocre attempt at greatness.

Discussion:

- I. What is the local church?
 - A. The Sermon begins, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (**Matthew 5:3**). It is predicated on the rise of the heavenly kingdom. Those who keep the commandments are great in the kingdom, those who do not are least (**Matthew 5:19**). If our righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, we enter the kingdom (**Matthew 5:20**). We are to pray for the spread of the kingdom (**Matthew 6:10**). We are to seek God's kingdom (**Matthew 6:33**). According to passages like **Matthew 16:18-19**, the church is the earthly representation of this heavenly kingdom. While the kingdom of heaven is the collective of faithful Christians and not of faithful congregations, each congregation is to be a manifestation in microcosm of this kingdom. Thus, by virtue of our membership in this local body, we demonstrate we are in the world, but not of the world. We might be Americans and Tennesseans, but we are more importantly Christians whose citizenship is in heaven (**Philippians 3:20**).
 - B. The local church is the light of the world (**Matthew 5:13-16**). Candlepower is one measurement of light's strength. Envision that as you think of the local church. Each of us is a candle, set on a stand in order to provide light to the whole house. As we are combined in this collective, the candlepower increases. While we gather together to provide solace and comfort from the world, the local church is not people taking their lights into a cave to protect them from the dark world. Rather, we come together in this relationship to provide strength and increase our brightness. As we join together in this fellowship, our candle power increases and our lights shine ever brighter. The local church is a beacon we must ensure stays lit.
 - C. Of course, that means we will also be a city set on a hill. We are the city the world wants to attack. They will attack us. They will embitter people against us. They will call us names. They will tell lies. They might even physically attack us. The reality is we cannot be the light of the world without being the city set on the hill. We must remember that and be prepared. When they attack, we are blessed and our reward is reserved in heaven (**Matthew 5:10-11**).
- II. What is the local church's foundation?
 - A. The church is made up of the few walking the narrow way (**Matthew 7:13-14**). It does not merely call Jesus "Lord," but does the will of God (**Matthew 7:21**). We have one foundation—Jesus Christ through His word. Jesus' parable of the foundations demonstrates a local congregation must heed the word of Jesus. Otherwise, we are building on an unstable foundation.
 - B. This means a local congregation with Jesus as Lord will look different. We will not have creed books, manuals or confessions telling us what to believe, teach and practice. We will have merely Jesus' word. According to **II Timothy 3:16-17**, the Scripture is enough to equip us for every good work to be the light of the world, turning the world's attention to God. We do not need councils to vote on correct doctrine. We do not need hierarchies and legislatures to develop laws. We need Jesus' word. Others will scoff. But only the local church founded completely, totally and solely on Christ through His word will prevail in the storms.
- III. How do we relate to God within the local church?
 - A. When we look to most churches today, we might think the church has been provided so God could cater to our needs. Worship is entertainment. Fellowship is food. Teaching tickles itching

ears. Evangelism means social welfare. This skews the relationship with God found in the local church, making the church about God catering to us, not us humbling ourselves before Him.

- B. **Matthew 5:3** lays the groundwork for our relationship with God. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." We have nothing. We are nothing. Like the Canaanite woman of **Matthew 15:27**, we recognize that we are but dogs hoping for crumbs from the master's table. He owes us nothing. There is nothing we can do to put Him in our debt. We must not be part of a local congregation to relax and be entertained. We must not be here to have our ears tickled or fleshly desires fulfilled. We do not come because we are the elite of society forming some spiritual country club. We come together because we are sick with sin and in need of the healing He offers through His grace.
- C. One of the saddest problems in most congregations is the picture that we have all already achieved righteousness. We dress in our best clothes. Put on our best faces. We act as though we have it all together. If I hear one thing repeated more than any other in discussions with other Christians, it is the fear we have to let our guard down, confessing to one another. We do not want anyone to know we are less than righteous. However, we are not here because we are righteous. We are here because we hunger and thirst for righteousness (**Matthew 5:6**). God has established congregations so we can help one another, stimulating one another to love and good deeds (**Hebrews 10:24**). Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. They will receive righteousness. But one of the means through which God satisfies us with righteousness is our relationship to one another.
- D. Finally, we are here to pursue righteousness not minimum requirements. We want to excel in God's righteousness. **Matthew 5:21-48** is a picture of minimalism and reductionism. The scribes and Pharisees were not interested in God's kingdom and righteousness, they wanted to know what was good enough. Where is the line drawn? The commandment said don't murder. I will not, but I will hate. The commandment said don't commit adultery. I will not, but I will lust and fantasize. The commandment said I must keep my vows to the Lord. I will, but I will not keep vows I have made by the earth or heavens. The commandment said I must love my neighbor. I will, but I am free to hate my enemy. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness means we do not seek the minimum requirement for getting into God's kingdom. Rather, it means we strive for excellence in His service, fulfilling every intent of His law. We do not argue about how many times we have to assemble. We do not argue about how often do we have to pray, how much do we have to study the Bible, how much time do we have to spend with brethren, how much evangelism do we have to do. We do not argue those things because we are not seeking to get just inside the kingdom of heaven's gate. The kingdom of heaven is our lives, our everything, our prime mover. Thus, we strive for excellence and not minimum requirements.

IV. How do we relate to others?

- A. In his book **Winning with People**, John Maxwell pointed out, "With one minor exception, the entire world is made up of other people." The same is true within the local congregation. Look around you. What do you see? Other people. There are more of them than there are of you and me. This alone should tell us something. This is not about me. It is about them. We ought not be gathering here for ourselves, but for them.
- B. Considering **Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18**, we must not be here to be seen by men. I'm not sure how many complaints I have heard about people unable to lead prayers, lead singing, wait on the table or preach as much as they would like. These kinds of complaints often generate in a heart that sees service as mostly a public issue. We don't need more people willing to lead public prayer; we need more people who are getting in their prayer closets. We don't need more people who will lead the congregation in singing, we need more people who will proclaim the joys of their salvation to a lost world. We do not need more people who will wait on the Lord's table; we need more people who sacrifice themselves in service to others. Our light is to shine so others will see God and glorify Him, not us (**Matthew 5:16**). Further, we are not to seek honor for ourselves but prefer others in honor (**Romans 12:10**).
- C. Because the congregation is made up of people, there will be problems. Yet, **Matthew 5:21-26** demonstrates we must deal with those problems quickly. We do not allow our anger to seethe unresolved. We do not call each other names. Further, when we have an issue with someone, we go to them. We do not go to the elders, the preacher or our favorite brother or sister. We go

to the person who has angered us and deal with the problem. When we have done something wrong, we do not simply go to God seeking reconciliation. We lay our gift at the altar, reconciling with our brother or sister first. Then we reconcile with God. We should be a group of people constantly meeting each other on our way to reconcile and forgive.

- D. Jesus said the merciful are blessed in **Matthew 5:7**. That should be our watchword within the congregation—Mercy. Mercy is more than forgiveness; it is actively relieving the suffering of the afflicted. We must be on the lookout for suffering among our brethren and seek to relieve it. Whether it be caring for the sick and shut-in, strengthening the weak, lifting up the fallen, encouraging the disheartened, visiting the widows and orphans in their distress, teaching the young, we must extend mercy. But this is also seen in forgiveness. If we wish to be forgiven, we must forgive (**Matthew 6:14-15**). It is too sad when brothers and sisters in Christ allow schisms in their relationships, withholding forgiveness and mercy from one another. Far too often, Christians spend their time trying to figure out what everyone else in the congregation is doing wrong instead of striving to help them grow in the Lord. This is the heart of **Matthew 7:1-5**. Instead of sitting on high, dealing out judgment and retribution, we should be among our brethren striving to help them overcome sin. We are all here because we hunger and thirst for righteousness not because we are already perfectly righteous. If we look hard enough we will find reasons to pass judgment on everybody and they will find reason to do so with us. But that is not why we are here. We are here to offer mercy, helping people out of the affliction of their sins.
- E. **Matthew 5:38-48** demonstrates we should be far more concerned with our relationships than our rights. It has happened to all of us. At some point in time, whether by word or deed, someone has wronged us. What is our proper response? Revenge? Retaliation? Retribution? After all, we have our rights and God certainly couldn't possibly expect us to put up with that from them. Or does He? **1 Corinthians 6:7** suggests otherwise. To God, the relationship between brethren is far more important than a brother standing up for his rights. It is better to suffer wrong and maintain a relationship in which we can help one another enter heaven than to destroy our relationships with one another in order to prove we were in the right or we were the victim. As such, when we are insulted, we offer the other cheek. We go the extra mile. We give to him who asks. Why? Because we want to be like our Father in heaven who loves even His enemies. When our enemies are within the congregation, we love them as well.
- F. Of course, it all boils down to the "Golden Rule" (**Matthew 7:12**). We treat others the way we want to be treated. Do we not want forgiveness and mercy? Then we offer it. Do we not want others to grant us honor? Then we grant honor to them. Do we not want others to go the extra mile with us? Then we will go the extra mile with them. As we do so, everything this Sermon teaches us falls into place.

V. How will the local church succeed?

- A. The local church is the light of the world, the salt of the earth, a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. We have a mission to glorify God. We relate to God by hungering and thirsting for righteousness. We relate to one another by pursuing peace and mercy, treating each other the way we want to be treated. We want the kingdom of God to be spread throughout the world. How can we succeed in our mission?
- B. **Matthew 7:7** says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." If we wish to succeed we must pray. **Ephesians 3:20** says God is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we ask. That means we must ask. However, we must do more than ask, we must seek and knock. Having begged for God's aid, we must act. We cannot pray and then sit on our hands. We must get busy doing the will of the Lord. When the asking is coupled with seeking and knocking, God will work through us and we will succeed in His cause. We will be the light of the world, spreading the kingdom through its uttermost regions.

Conclusion:

God did not establish local congregations to be wrapped around our fingers and provide for our every whim. Rather, He did so that we might be His holy offspring, satisfied with righteousness through the stimulation of one another. He did so that we might glorify and praise His holy name together. This is not about us. It is about Him. May we glorify Him by living His Sermon in our relationships here.