**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

**The Incarnation – Part XVII**

***Sermon on the Mount***

***Seek First His Kingdom & Righteousness***

***Matthew 6:14-34***

 **March 24th, In the Year of Our Lord 2024**

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard

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We continue our study of the Incarnate God, our Creator, Jesus, the Christ. . . deliver His first major sermon recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 5-7. Here, in about the middle part of the sermon (Matthew 6:14-34), Jesus lists contrasting life choices but reveals the path Believers must pursue in order to overcome the fallen world. Jesus teaches. . ."But seek **first** His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Remember that the Sermon on the Mount is delivered after Jesus is publicly identified by John the Baptist in water-baptism as the Messiah. . . and after Jesus spends forty days and nights in the wilderness which ended in exposing the devil to be the inferior being that he is and after Jesus calls His first disciples. Last week, we read the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). We then read in Matthew 6:13 the traditional ending of the Lord’s Prayer with the word “amen”, but the next verse is a continuation of verse 12, within the Lord’s Prayer, concerning forgiveness. Verses 14-15 are rather self-explanatory in that the Father’s response to us parallels our treatment of other people.

14 "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Jesus’ teaching here corresponds to His teaching recorded in Luke 6:31 and Matthew 7:12"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” God’s Apostle Paul writes. . . For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF" (Galatians 5:14). The pastor of the first church of Christianity being in Jerusalem, James writes. . . If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well (James 2:8).

Jesus then uses a series of contrasting human behavior addressing “*fasting, treasures, good or bad eyes, two masters, worries and little faith”.* But Jesus has a solution and points to what a person should seek **first** in their life. Again, these verses are self-explanatory and one does not have to be a theologian to understand Jesus’ simple message.

16 "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 17 "**But you**, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face 18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

 19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 "**But** store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

At this point in today’s message, I will share with you a life-experience story that I believe illustrates one of the main teachings Jesus is about to give at this point in His sermon.

 Like many of you, I was reared in a large metropolis, that being Houston, Texas, the nation’s fourth largest city. For those who do not know. . . Houston is an international city with an economic base that extends from oil and petrochemical production to the local grocery that must keep the working population well supplied with food. Over 600 square miles of humanity packed into a diverse multicultural environment that is from all over the world. The Johnson Space Center to the Houston Astro Dome, built in 1965, and called the “Eighth Wonder of the World” as it was the world's first indoor, air-conditioned domed stadium. In addition, Houston has an international airport and one of the largest sea ports in the country that maintains an economic hub that is vital to the nation’s economy.

Growing up in 20th century Houston. . .we all developed a big city worldview that is common to America. We learned to look at the world in a certain fast-paced way and measure everything through the lens of scientific inquiry, and, at the same time, life was moderated by God almighty. Houston, being part of the Bible Belt, we always knew God was watching over the whole show and our individual lives. God knew our names.

My two brothers and I grew up in a middle-class home. Many of my father’s friends were several years older than he. My grandfather died (1944) when my dad was sixteen, which was a catalyst for my father to go to work. Many of the men he met at Southwestern Bell Telephone company were WWII veterans. This group liked to go deer hunting in Colorado every year, and my father went with them every October. So, my brothers and I grew-up with the annual departure of my father and his friends going to hunt in Colorado but longing for the day when we would be old enough to go with them.

From a boy’s standpoint, it was the grandest of adventures. They packed the trucks and towed jeeps full of every supply needed to live for a few weeks in the woods. You can imagine WWII soldiers, who grew-up in the Great Depression, went well prepared. And then, we waited for the phone call from my dad when he would give us a report on how the big hunt was going. He did bag a few trophy deer over the years, but they mainly came home with deer meat for the year and stories of the hunt that would be retold over and over at the New Year’s Eve wild-game BBQ gathering we all attended.

And yes, finally the year came when I was old enough and had the money to go with my dad and his friends. There was no free loading. You had to pay your own way. As life worked-out, I was in my mid-twenties before I starting going with my father and his friends to hunt in Colorado. We hunted in the national forest and on BLM land (Bureau of Land Management) and at times private land. One year, we camped and hunted on private land that over-looked the western Colorado town of Montrose. From our camp site, several miles from town and much higher in elevation, we could see the town’s lights at night as they sparkled through the clear night sky. . . it was a postcard picture.

One evening the rancher’s son, whose land we were leasing, came up to show us access to a mountain water spring that literally seeped through some rocks. He was about my age, and we had good conversations. The high-country Colorado ranching upbringing showed through his personality. We were set-in around the campfire, and I asked him how it was growing up there and what all he had experienced. At one point, I asked him what our elevation was at our campsite, thinking he would know exactly how high we were because he grew-up there. To my surprise, he said. . . “Well. . . all I know is that we are up here, and Montrose is down there.” I said, “Yea, but how may feet? I mean how high are we?” He responded. . . “We just do not look at it that way” . . . as he talked in a slow speech that he normally spoke. “Montrose in down there, and we are up here.”

My reflection from that conversation is that I was all caught-up in a fast-paced city life and had to define everything mathematically and/or materialistically. I had to know everything through a modern industrialized life-lens. Where the rancher’s son accepted the simplicity of “up here and down there”. He was not *worried* about every detail in life with which I was consumed. The rancher’s son had accepted God’s provisions without over analyzing his landscape. With age, I have moved closer to the simplicities in life, but I am still in pursuit of that future peace that grows in us as we mature in the Lord.

This takes us to Jesus’ teachings.

 22 "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 23 "**But** if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. 25 "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

 26 "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you?

You of little faith! 31 "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

 33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

A whole sermon can be delivered on each of these topics Jesus presents (*fasting, treasures, good or bad eyes, two masters, worries and little faith).* But itis the cure-all solution Jesus gives to avoid the pitfalls in life by “first” seeking His Kingdom and righteousness. At Jesus’ trial, when He told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), He gives us a life-goal we really think about. . . that is to seek “first” His kingdom and His righteousness.

It is important for us the see that there are two parts to Jesus’ statement…His kingdom and righteousness. The problem we see in our culture is that many claim to be seeking God’s kingdom and want to be and claim to be a citizen in God’s kingdom but they do not seek to practice a righteous life as Jesus taught. We constantly cite Jesus’ words. . *."If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.* And this is impossible for us achieve unless God assists us. We Believers must explain in our witness that Jesus does not call us to practice life seeking His righteousness and keeping His commands on our own. No. Jesus tells us. . . "*I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;* *that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.* (John 14:15-17)

But briefly. . . we are just a few days away from observing the historical event of the Cross in the year of our Lord 2024. When we say ‘the Cross’. . . we can include many things. For sure. . . we can include the Passion Week, Jesus’ Last Supper, Gethsemane Prayer, arrest, trials, crucifixion, physical death, bodily entombment, bodily resurrection, personal resurrection ministry and the bodily ascension. For today, we reflect upon Jesus’ teaching. . . that we should “first” seek His Kingdom and righteousness…let us read what He told the Roman Governor Pilate when He was brought before him for trial.

**John 18:33-38**

33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

34 **Jesus answered**, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?"

35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?"

36 **Jesus answered**, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" **Jesus answered**, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him.

From reading this Scripture. . . we should remember that Jesus’ earthly life was coming to an end and Pilate pressed Him looking for a legal reason he could tell the Jews of why Jesus was not guilty. We can all learn from Jesus’ response and in reflection upon His Sermon on the Mount when He said. . . “*first” seek His kingdom and righteousness*.” From this, we receive the spiritual empowerment, in all of our life-situations, to seek God’s kingdom and righteousness even in the face of life-threatening events. Jesus never deviated from His Incarnation purpose which was to pay the price for all of fallen humanity’s sin. By this, He sought His kingdom goals as an example to us.

Therefore, all that the temporal world offers us, challenges us and all of our possessions are disposable and not comparable to our imperishable lives to come. In addition, we must keep focused on ‘God’s plan for our lives’. Jesus kept focus on His life plan for us. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them* (Ephesians 2:10).

 God’s Apostle Paul received from Jesus direct revelation (Galatians 1:12) and wrote to the church in Corinth in order to give them spiritual relief about their challenging circumstances in life. Paul sought the Lord’s kingdom first and His righteousness,

**1 Corinthians 15**:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead.

It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; . . .

. . . 50 Now I say this, brethren,

that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;

nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet;

for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable,

and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable,

and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable,

and this mortal will have put on immortality,

then will come about the saying that is written,

"DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" (Hosea 13:14)

AMEN