

Life As It Was Meant To Be

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January 7-8, 2006
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Matthew 5:1-10

Some time ago a woman emailed me and told me that she had been attending the Vineyard for a few years and that she was absolutely heart-broken. The reason for her heart-break was that she had been sleeping with a guy who was attending the Vineyard also; a guy who professed to love her, but then in a very ruthless way dumped her and began dating another girl in the church. Within a month, this guy and this other girl were engaged.

She wrote and said: "I am absolutely devastated. I cry myself to sleep every night."

Another woman emailed me some time ago and said: "My husband is addicted to pornography. He has pretty much stopped going to church with me. As you can imagine, his addiction has driven a huge wedge between us. I thought when we married that he was a Christian, but now this. I don't know what to do."

A married colleague of mine in ministry with whom Marlene and I were pretty good friends, was fired from his church a few years ago when it was discovered that he had something like a dozen girlfriends around the country. His marriage ended in divorce. His wife and family, as well as his church, suffered horribly by the revelation of his numerous affairs.

A Christian acquaintance of mine told me recently that he had a lot of stress in his life because he and his wife were suing the building contractor in their church for numerous breaches of contract. His court case created tremendous stress and anxiety for him and his wife.

Dallas Willard, who used to be the Chairman of the Philosophy Department at the University of Southern California, wrote a book several years ago called *The Divine Conspiracy*. In the book he describes a church that was founded out of conflict with another church. Willard says that everything seemed to be going pretty well with the first pastor until he was discovered to be committing adultery and engaged in various improper financial acts. The congregation dismissed him and a second pastor was appointed. He was very popular and the church grew rapidly but he resigned after four years from stress. A third pastor was hired and was also quite popular. After a while, he started to give himself salary raises which the board never approved. After ten years he left and started another church within ten miles of his former church. He took 300 church members with him. A fourth pastor was called and, unfortunately, he had an affair also. When the affair became public knowledge, he said that he was called to another

community. He took another larger church in another city leaving behind a congregation, board and staff, full of strife and anger. All of this happened in one church within a 36 year period.

Now, why do I share these horror stories with you? Trust me; it is not to bring you down, or to try to be shocking or depressing. The reason I share with you these stories is because it is becoming more and more common in the church today to not expect life change as the result of coming to Christ.

SLIDE: Life that is Unchanged By Our Profession

People put those bumper stickers on their cars that say something like:

- “I’m not perfect, I’m just forgiven.”
- “I’m just a forgiven sinner.”

And that is true – as far as it goes. But the question that needs to be asked is: Is that all you are? If you are a Christian, do you expect yourself to be changed – not to be perfect but to be genuinely transformed?

One question that young adults often pose is what difference does the gospel make for people’s actual lives? Back in the 1950’s there was a famous gangster named Mickey Cohen, who supposedly became a Christian at a Billy Graham Crusade. He listened to the message from Revelation 3.20,

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Rev 3:20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

Mickey Cohen came forward and prayed. Lots of Christians were really excited and the story began circulating that this famous gangster had given his life to Christ.

But with the passing of time, no one could detect any change in Mickey Cohen’s life. Finally, Mickey Cohen was confronted by a few Christian leaders, who challenged him that becoming a Christian meant that he had to give up his old profession and his old ways. Mickey Cohen objected. He said, “Well, there are Christian football players; there are Christian cowboys and Christian politicians – why not a Christian gangster?”

Why not a Christian gangster? Or a Christian prostitute? Or an angry, nasty Christian? Or a dishonest Christian businessman? Or a Christian who sleeps with a girl, professes his love and then dumps her for another?

Again, I ask you the question: If someone professes Christ, if someone claims to be a Christian, if someone comes forward in a meeting and accepts Christ, if

someone kneels down by their bed and turns their life over to Jesus, shouldn't we expect them to be different? I don't mean that a person should become a self-righteous prig, judging everyone who has a glass of wine, or who watches a PG-13 movie. I mean shouldn't we expect that as a result of becoming a Christian, a person should become more honest, more loving, kinder, more consistent, and more authentic? Shouldn't we expect that as a result of becoming a Christian, a person would become a safer person, someone you didn't have to protect yourself from, someone who would not be ruthless in romance, or dishonest in business, or indiscreet with personal information? Aren't we supposed to live better lives as followers of Christ?

Over the next few months, I will be teaching from the most famous sermon ever preached – the Sermon on the Mount. I am calling this series: "Life As It was Meant To Be." Let's pray.

We see all of these unchanged lives among those who profess Christ. We see so many churches that are not safe places, so many church leaders who we cannot assume will do the right thing. How, then do we actually change? How do we, who call ourselves Christians, live the lives that God meant for us to live?

One of the major ways that your life will change is if you begin to take the teachings of Jesus seriously and put them into practice. Again, quoting Dallas Willard in his wonderful book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Willard asks the question: "When you hear the words brilliant, well-informed, smart, genius – who do you think of?"

You may say Jesus, since we are in a church. But if you weren't in church and the question was asked, would your first response be, "Well, of course, that's Jesus!" Probably not. Your first response would probably be something like Bill Gates, or maybe Steven Hawking, the physicist, or perhaps your favorite journalist.

As for Jesus, we think of him as the Savior of the world because of his sacrificial death. We think of him as holy and perfect but we often regard Jesus as being, and I say this with reverence, but being almost clueless regarding the way the world really works, or how to live life as it was meant to be lived. We pray to Jesus. We sing songs to Jesus. We think that Jesus may have something well-informed to teach us about heaven, or about religious questions, but in terms of the day to day reality of life in this world, Jesus is pushed to the periphery. Jesus is on the margins. Jesus would certainly not be the first person that we would consult if we had a marital problem, or if we are thinking about money, or purchasing a new home, or a business decision that really was important to us and to our future, or issues of war and peace, or politics, or romance, or mental health, or almost any other thing that we actually think about 99% of the time.

SLIDE: Life That Is Taught By A Genius

We simply do not approach Jesus as being well-informed or knowledgeable about real life in this world much less a genius. We do not approach Jesus with even the degree of respect that we would give an intelligent counselor or a bright professor. Our lives are unchanged and we do not live the lives we are meant to live because Jesus is not our mentor. Jesus is not our primary teacher and advisor about life.

We see this in religious artwork all the time. If you go to the Cloisters in New York, which has galleries of medieval Catholic art, what you will find is dozens of paintings of Jesus as an infant sitting on Mary's lap, and dozens of paintings of Jesus hanging on the cross. What you won't find is many paintings of Jesus as a teacher with a group of students sitting at his feet in rapt attention, drinking his words in.

The avoidance of Jesus as teacher is particularly seen in the way that the Christian church has approached the Sermon on the Mount during the last five centuries. The church has done virtually everything with the Sermon on the Mount other than actually attempt to put it into practice on an individual basis and on a corporate basis.

One school of thinking here in America called dispensationalism has historically taught that the Sermon on the Mount is meant to be the law that pertains to the millennial kingdom. In other words, the Sermon on the Mount is only really applicable after Christ returns and sets up his millennial kingdom ruling from Jerusalem in Israel. It is a future teaching. It is not something for the present time.

Some teachers, most notably Albert Schweitzer, the famous Christian missionary and physician, said that the Sermon on the Mount was meant for an exceptional time. Schweitzer believed that Jesus thought the world was coming to an end almost immediately and so the Sermon on the Mount was intended for people who are living in the very last days of the world. Here is the way we ought to live assuming that the world is going to end tomorrow. But Schweitzer said inasmuch as Jesus was wrong about the dating of the end of the world, the Sermon on the Mount is quite impossible and inapplicable for people living in normal times.

It is meant for the future. It is meant for an extraordinary time.

During the middle ages, the church taught that the Sermon on the Mount is only intended for "first-class" Christians. These guidelines are just for monks, or for the clergy. The ordinary person couldn't be expected to obey the Sermon on the Mount.

Some of the Protestant Reformers said that the Christian lives in two realms, the realm of the world as a politician, a parent, a soldier, or a merchant and in this realm they did not have to put the Sermon on the Mount into practice. The Sermon on the Mount is something for your heart. It is totally internalized. It is a matter of attitudes. You can destroy your opponent as a politician as long as you aren't revengeful. You can pile up treasures on earth as long as you are not anxious about it. The Sermon on the Mount is only meant to apply to our interior lives, not to life in the real world – in the business world, the political world, or in our relationships. It applies to your heart.

From the Lutheran stream of Christianity, there was the notion that the Sermon on the Mount is an impossible ideal meant to convict us of our sins so that we might turn to Christ for salvation. The Sermon on the Mount is God's perfect law, according to the Lutherans. As we look at that perfect law, we realize how far short we fall of God's standards, so we are forced to cry out to Christ for salvation.

Or as the apostle Paul puts it in Gal. 3.24,

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Gal 3:24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

Now there is some truth to this perspective. The Sermon on the Mount does humble us. It does convict us of our sin and it does cause us to be cast upon Christ for his grace and assistance. But then Christ turns us back to the Sermon on the Mount and he tells us that he actually wants us to put it into practice. So the Sermon on the Mount as God's convicting standard is only half true.

There are, of course, some very superficial people found in certain mainline traditions who very glibly say, "Well, for me, Christianity just boils down to living out the Sermon on the Mount. I don't necessarily believe in all these supernatural things in the Bible. I don't necessarily believe in the virgin birth of Christ or in Christ's substitutionary death for my sins, or in a literal bodily resurrection of Jesus. I don't necessarily believe that Christ bodily ascended into heaven, or that he pours out his Holy Spirit from heaven. For me, Christianity is just a matter of living out the Sermon on the Mount."

About the best you can say regarding this superficial approach is that the person who is glibly asserting that they just live by the Sermon on the Mount has probably never read the Sermon on the Mount very closely.

- Love your enemies?
- Pray for those who persecute you?

- Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart?
- Anyone who is angry with his brother is subject to judgment?

OK, then, Mr. Superficial, just do it!

It is for the future. It is for an extraordinary time. It is for first-class people, but not ordinary people. It is just meant to be internalized. It is just meant to convict us. We can just put it into practice and forget the rest of Christianity – forget the Holy Spirit and the death of Christ.

The interesting thing about the Sermon on the Mount is that in the first three centuries of the church no other biblical passage was taught on or referred to more often than Matthew 5-7. The Christian church in the first few centuries believed that this message was meant to be deliberately obeyed and seriously applied to the life of every single follower of Christ, without exception. Whenever the Sermon on the Mount has been taken seriously, it has brought renewal to congregations, and revival to societies.

Jesus was not simply offering us hard sayings or high ideals. He was giving his followers concrete ways to put into practice the will of God in our lives in this world and to be delivered from the bondage of sin in our lives in this world.

Again, Jesus intends to be taken seriously as a teacher. You see, the gospel of Matthew, more than any other portion of Scripture, presents Jesus as our Supreme Teacher. Matthew is quite deliberate in his choice of words in Matt. 5.1-2,

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Mt 5:1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,
Mt 5:2 and he began to teach them, saying:

Throughout the book of Matthew, Jesus is seen as the new Moses. Just as Moses went up on a mountain and received the revelation of God's will in the Ten Commandments and the Law, Jesus goes up on a mountain, only he speaks the will of God to us. The gospel of Matthew is clearly organized around five central teachings of Jesus - the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7, Jesus' sermon on Missions in chapter 10, the sermon on the Mystery of the kingdom in chapter 13, the sermon on Management in chapter 18, and Jesus' second sermon on a mount, the Sermon on the Mount of Olives in chapters 24-25. Five sections of teaching, all of which terminate with a statement like this in Matthew 7.28-29,

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Mt 7:28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching,

Mt 7:29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

The reason that Matthew organizes his gospel around five blocks of Jesus' teaching is, again, because Jesus is coming to us as the new Moses, the one Moses pointed to as the ultimate teacher from God. Just as Moses gave us five books that we call the Pentateuch – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, or what Jews call the Torah, so Jesus gives us five blocks of teaching: the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon on Mission, the Sermon on the Mystery of the Kingdom, the Sermon on Management, and the Second Sermon on the Mount, this time the Mount of Olives.

It is clear that he wants us to put into practice these words of teaching in the Sermon on the Mount because we read at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7.24-27 these words:

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Mt 7:24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Mt 7:25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

Mt 7:26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

Mt 7:27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Indeed, if you call yourself a disciple of Jesus Christ, if you believe that you are one of his followers, one of his apprentices, then at the core it means you take his teaching seriously enough to obey it. That is what Jesus says in Matt. 28 in the passage that is commonly called The Great Commission. We read in Matt. 28.19-20 these words:

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Mt 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Mt 28:20 and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

As part of the "everything I have commanded you," we would certainly include the Sermon on the Mount.

So, do we just simply, like some in the mainline tradition, say to ourselves: Let's just go out and do it? Let's teach the Sermon on the Mount in the public schools.

Let's have Congress pass a law requiring everyone in America to obey the Sermon on the Mount, and then we will have a happy society. Let's just do it.

Before we run out and try to put Jesus' words into practice, we need to understand the context in which this teaching of Jesus was given. Context is really important if you want to teach someone about character.

I don't know how many of you saw the movie *Jersey Girl*. It was one of these frothy movies that is nice to watch on a Friday night after a really hard week when you don't want to think at all. The central character is this Jersey girl, who lives with her working class father, who taught her to be herself and to be loyal to her close friends and to not pretend that she is something other than what she was. Jersey Girl is this wonderful, delightful, loving, spunky, and very cute young woman who teaches little children in a preschool.

Her boyfriend is trying to climb the corporate ladder. He drives an expensive Mercedes. He stabs a fellow employee in the back in order to make money. He plays fast and loose with the truth in order to get ahead. Finally, he ditches Jersey Girl because she is beneath him.

Well, Jersey Girl is a fighter and a lover. She lets her boyfriend know that he has been cut off from his roots. He has lost his moral compass. She confronts his lying and his falseness. She jolts him back into finding his roots again. He quits his job and crashes his car into a fire hydrant in front of the preschool where there is a geyser of water that goes off. All the preschool kids celebrate with Jersey Girl and dance in the water.

Here is the idea. You don't develop character on your own just through will power. You develop integrity from being part of a larger community. You develop integrity and character from the larger context of your life. Jersey Girl had her family. She had her friends. She had her workplace. She had her town. This boyfriend cut himself off from all of that and tried to succeed. But he was cutting himself off from the roots that give integrity to life.

Character is developed, in other words, as part of a larger story of life, of which you are just a part. When you see yourself living out of a bigger drama, you are an actress or actor in a larger drama, then and only then, can you fulfill your role and act out the Sermon on the Mount.

See, contemporary society pulls us away from our roots. It cuts us off from thinking that we are part of any kind of larger story, larger drama, or larger community. It tells every one of us to just make our decisions on our own, navigating life with our own moral compasses. We find ourselves completely isolated and completely alone trying to figure out how to have a good life without any guide or help or direction.

Jesus says: No, friend, I want to invite you to be part of something bigger than you. I want to invite you into a story that is going to give you a moral compass to live by. I want to invite you into a story, into a drama, that will really cause your life to work well. I am very smart. I'm very well-informed. I am very knowledgeable about all of life.

What is the larger drama into which we put our lives and put into practice the Sermon on the Mount? The larger drama is the gospel of the kingdom of God. Look at this with me.

The context for Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount is Matt. 4.23-25.

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Mt 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Mt 4:24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.

Mt 4:25 Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

SLIDE: Life That Is Impacted By The Kingdom Of God

What is Jesus doing here? He is preaching and demonstrating the Kingdom of God. Jesus is preaching the gospel. What is the gospel of Jesus? What did Jesus go around preaching and demonstrating? Here is what we read in Mark 1.14-15,

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Mk 1:14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

Mk 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Jesus is going around announcing and demonstrating a great fact. He is telling people that history has reached a fulfillment point. This Kingdom of God that people were looking forward to as a future reality, towards which they were on the way, this kingdom of God has permeated and invaded their earthly existence. Jesus is going around telling people that a whole new world order is breaking in upon them. Another kingdom is invading their world.

Get it? You don't get it. Let me show you this.

1 of 8 SLIDES – God Creates the Universe

2 of 8 SLIDES – We experience the Fall.

It is because of the Fall, the rebellion, the turning away from God, the pushing of God to the margins of life, the refusal to take God's Word seriously, the refusal to allow Jesus to be taken seriously as our teacher and mentor and leader that we live with the brokenness and pain that all of us live in this world.

3 of 8 SLIDES – God's willingness to not turn away from our broken world.

He could have abandoned us. He could have said to the world, you made your bed, now lie down in it, but God didn't do that. He makes a way in the Old Testament for people to come to him. Theologians call it "Salvation History." The Lord chooses one person, Abraham and through that one person, he creates a nation – the nation of Israel – to point people back to God, to assist people to know who the true God is, who the Creator is, what the Creator is like, what the Creator's will is in this world.

God sent prophets in the Old Testament and they looked down the timeline of history. They saw a day coming in the future when God would intervene in a cataclysmic way. They called it the Day of the Lord. On that day, God would defeat the enemies of his people. He would judge the world.

4 of 8 SLIDES – The Day of the Lord

5 of 8 SLIDES – God would usher in the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God – that is what Jews throughout the Old Testament and Jews in Jesus' day were longing for. That period of time when our pasts could be taken care of through the forgiveness of our sins and our futures could be taken care of through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Righteousness would reign in the world. There would be healing for our bodies and healing for our relationships, and healing of creation.

6 of 8 SLIDES – The good news that Jesus was preaching was that this future kingdom had broken in through his coming into the world.

This kingdom of righteousness, peace, healing and forgiveness was not just something way off in the by and by, but is now permeating this world and our reality in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, his ascension, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This future world is now in the process of transforming our present day existence.

Right now Jesus is healing.
Right now Jesus is forgiving.
Right now Jesus is changing lives.

Before the end of time, Jesus is saying, I am bringing to you the presence of the future. And so Jesus calls individuals into this kingdom. But you see, as the result of the fall, we live upside down lives.

7 of 8 SLIDES

Not everyone can enter the Kingdom of God. There are conditions that must be met. According to the Sermon on the Mount, the only ones who enter the kingdom are those who are poor in spirit. Matt. 5.3,

SLIDE

Mt 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Those who are obedient. Matthew 7.21,

SLIDE

Mt 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

To use the apostle John's language, the only one who could see or enter the kingdom are those who are born from above, or born again. John 3.3 and 5

SLIDES

Jn 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Jn 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

One general way that Jesus describes the condition for entering his kingdom is that we must repent and believe the good news. Mark 1.15,

SLIDE

Mk 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

8 of 8 SLIDES

We live in an upside down world, but when the kingdom of God breaks into an individual's life, or breaks into a church's life through faith and repentance, we start living right side up. Until we turn to Christ, we don't see how upside down the world is, how confused is the thinking, how distorted are the desires, how insane the values. One author actually titled his treatment of the Sermon on the Mount, "Living Right Side Up in an Upside Down World." Everything changes.

Everything is turned on its head. Our character changes. Our actions change. We have new lifestyles. We have new behaviors. We have new attitudes.

- When the kingdom of God invades a couple's life, their marriage changes.
- When the kingdom of God invades a child's life, their relationship with their parents changes.
- When the kingdom of God invades a worker's life, their whole approach to work changes.
- When the kingdom of God invades the church's life, the church becomes a safe place, a healing place, a place that you can trust that you are going to be cared for and protected.

The context for understanding the Sermon on the Mount and specifically the first ten verses of the Sermon on the Mount is the Kingdom of God. Notice how these first ten verses are bracketed. Matt. 5.3,

SLIDE

Mt 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5.10,

SLIDE

Mt 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' intention is to produce people fit to live in the kingdom of God.

Matthew uses the kingdom of heaven interchangeably with the phrase Kingdom of God. In fact, Matthew mentions the Kingdom of God 8 times in this sermon and 41 times in his book.

Let me bring this down to earth. The qualities that we read about in the Sermon on the Mount,

- Poor in spirit
- Mourning
- Being Meek
- Hungering and thirsting for righteousness
- Being Merciful
- Being Pure in heart
- Being a peacemaker

These are not natural qualities. See, the superficial approach to the Sermon on the Mount is to say: Well, this is a wonderful sermon. It is meant to be practiced. Let's just go out and do it. But you can't go out and do it any more than the boyfriend in Jersey Girl could go out and live a good and decent life cut off from the community and roots that would sustain his character and integrity. The only way that you can put the Sermon on the Mount into practice is if the gospel of Jesus Christ has gotten a hold of you.

Has the kingdom invaded your life? Is your life now lived under King Jesus? Has he permeated you through the born again experience? Have you felt this new world breaking in on you?

Friends, Jesus is not going through the world right now looking for a few people who are poor in spirit, or who mourn, or who are meek, or who hunger and thirst after righteousness so he can say: "Ah, those are the people that I can bless." These are not natural qualities. The Sermon on the Mount is not a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" kind of ethic. What Jesus is saying here is a description of what happens to people when the gospel of the kingdom really grabs hold of them. The Sermon on the Mount is saying that this is the character that is produced in the life of anyone who is a kingdom person, who is a gospel-saturated person – The kingdomized man, the gospelized woman.

As the great expositor, John Stott, puts it: "The Sermon is spoken to men and women who have already received forgiveness, who have found the pearl of great price, who have been invited to the wedding, who through their faith in Jesus belong to the new creation, to the new world of God."

Let me put it slightly different. I really want you to understand this. You know, Christians speak about eternal life. We say that if you trust in Christ you will have eternal life. But eternal life is not just some veneer, some cheap wood paneling that we nail over walls that are rotten or collapsing, so that if you pull off the veneer behind it, you see this broken down plaster. Or if you pull back the veneer you have cockroaches running through the studs.

When we say that if you trust in Jesus Christ you will have eternal life, it is not just an extension forever of my broken down, fallen, rotten life. It is not me being what I am in my broken existence, with my distorted desires and aggressiveness and grabbyness and lustfulness and jealousies, with all of my mental confusion continuing on forever. That is NOT what eternal life is.

Eternal life is the gaining of an entirely new life – the life that God intends us to live. Eternal life is right side up living in an upside down world. Eternal life is the impact of the kingdom of God so that you and I become the kind of people to whom the Sermon on the Mount makes sense. Before the kingdom breaks into your life, before you receive eternal life, you read the Sermon on the Mount and it just seems insane. It seems impossible. It seems utterly unrealistic and out of

touch with this world. But when the kingdom breaks into your life; when the gospel lays hold of you, you read the Sermon on the Mount and you say: What Jesus is saying makes total sense. Since I am now living right side up, I realize, of course, this is the way to live. Of course, this is the best way, the freest way, the most wonderful way. Jesus is giving you and me the opportunity to right now experience the quality of the life of the age to come in this world, in your body, in your circumstances, at your job.

If you are a Christian, you are more than what the bumper sticker says. You are more than just a forgiven sinner continuing to live out the broken life that you've always lived. If you are a Christian, you are given the privilege in the present tense to begin to live the life of the future kingdom of God right now. If you are a Christian, you are given the privilege of living the life that God always meant you to live right now.

SLIDE: Life That Is Engaged By Active Participation

Now, this is not an automatic. The gospel of the kingdom is something that God invites us to actively participate in. It is not an automatic that just because a person turns to Christ they will manifest all of the qualities of the Sermon on the Mount. This is one of many passages in the Bible, in which God's work in us and God's work for us becomes an incentive for us to make every effort to put his will into practice.

There is a wonderful example of this kind of text in 2 Peter 1.3-5,

SLIDE

^{2Pe 1:3} His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

^{2Pe 1:4} Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

^{2Pe 1:5} For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;

Because God has given us everything we need for godly life, Peter says make every effort to grow in obedience to God and in godliness. In other words, the biblical message is not: Let go and let God; just be passive. Nor is the biblical message: God has done his bit by sending his Son to die on a cross, now it is all up to you. The biblical message is, because God is powerfully at work in you, because the Kingdom of God has invaded your life and is powerfully impacting you, because the Spirit of God lives in you, because you have been grabbed hold of by the gospel, because God is at work in you, you must make every effort to live this message out.

The life that you were meant to live is one in which you are an active participant and partner with the grace of God. In other words, just because the Sermon on the Mount is for folks who have been grabbed hold of by the kingdom, doesn't mean that we do absolutely nothing.

God's grace and our discipleship are not in opposition. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Cost of Discipleship* called this "cheap grace." He said it is grace without repentance, grace without concrete change in our way of relating to others, grace without cost to us. It is easy believism. Instead, Bonhoeffer said that Christ is in the very center of your life and when God breaks into a person's life, he empowers you to partner with him in the kind of life he wants you to live.

You are to be fully engaged. The Lord is not just working on you. A Christian is not a patient in a coma. A Christian is an actor in a drama written and directed by Almighty God. You are a dancer in a dance led by Jesus Christ. It is because of the grace of God that you and I can participate with God's intention for our lives by actively putting into practice the words of the Sermon on the Mount. Submission to these words will enable us to live life as it was meant to be lived. Let's pray.

Life As It Was Meant To Be

Rich Nathan
January 7-8, 2006
Life As It Was Meant To Be
Matthew 5:1-10

I. Life That Is Unchanged By our Profession.

II. Life That Is Taught By A Genius.

- A. Avoiding The Sermon On The Mount
- B. Respecting Jesus As A Teacher (Mt. 5.1,2; 7.28, 29)

III. Life That Is Impacted By The Kingdom Of God. (Mt. 4.23-25; Mk. 1.14, 15)

IV. Life That Is Engaged By Active Participants. (Mt. 7.24-27; 2 Pt. 1.3-5)