The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

Our Beginning — The Mountain and the Plain

Pastor Mick's Introduction

Some Definitions:

Worldview — the deep, often unspoken framework through which we understand reality: who God is, who we are, what the world is like, what has gone wrong, and what makes life good and true. A worldview works like a pair of lenses; it shapes what we notice, what we ignore, what we assume is possible, and how we interpret the people, events, and circumstances around us. Because of that, following Jesus is not only about adding new information to our lives, but allowing the Kingdom to re-form the way we see the world itself.

This is why worldview matters before we ever begin comparing Matthew's mountain and Luke's plain. The Gospel writers are not merely giving us neutral geography, as if one remembered a hillside and the other remembered a field. They are shaping our imagination so we can see Jesus rightly. Matthew's Jesus goes up the mountain, sits, and teaches in a way that evokes Sinai, Moses, Torah, covenant, and authoritative instruction. Luke's Jesus comes down and stands on a level place, among the sick, the poor, the hungry, and the pressed-down, speaking blessings and woes with urgent social force. If we miss the worldview each writer is working from, we may flatten both sermons into a list of private virtues or disconnected moral commands. But Matthew wants us to hear Jesus as the faithful interpreter and fulfiller of Israel's story, while Luke wants us to feel the Kingdom arriving at eye level among those who need good news in their bodies, bellies, grief, and circumstances.

Reading them together, then, does not require us to choose one over the other. It teaches us to let each Gospel correct the ways we are tempted to reduce Jesus. Matthew keeps us from making Jesus merely a social reformer detached from Israel's covenant story; Luke keeps us from making Jesus merely a spiritual teacher detached from the material suffering of real people. The mountain gives us height: the grand vision of God's reign, the deep continuity with Torah, the call to become a formed and faithful people. The plain gives us ground: the nearness of Jesus, the dignity of the poor, the public and embodied shape of mercy, justice, and freedom for others. Together they train our vision. They teach us that the Kingdom is both revelation and release, both instruction and liberation, both the holy ordering of God's people and the healing of the world God loves.

That alternative worldview is especially important for those of us formed inside an American imagination that often begins with the individual: my rights, my preferences, my success, my

freedom, my private relationship with God. Matthew and Luke invite us into a different starting place. Jesus is not simply teaching isolated persons how to become better versions of themselves; he is forming a covenant people whose life together becomes a sign of God's reign. On the mountain and on the plain, blessing is not possession for the self but participation in a community where mercy, enemy-love, truthfulness, generosity, justice, and forgiveness become the shared practices of a new humanity. The Kingdom worldview asks not only, "What do I believe?" or "How am I doing spiritually?" but "How is my life increasing the freedom, dignity, healing, and flourishing of others?" In that sense, these sermons confront individualism not by erasing the person, but by relocating the person inside the beloved community Jesus is creating. The church becomes a place where we do not thank God for what He has done for us (even though we do give thanks for that) but give thanks to God for what He enables us to do for others. Our church is about conversations that focus on the surrounding community (our village) rather focusing on the church as an island unto itself.

Blessing

To be **"blessed"** in the Beatitudes does not mean simply being happy, lucky, comfortable, or materially successful. In Matthew and Luke, blessing means being named by Jesus as someone upon whom God's Kingdom favor is resting—even when outward circumstances do not look "blessed" at all. The poor, the grieving, the hungry, the merciful, the persecuted, and the peacemakers are called blessed because God sees them, comes near to them, and includes them in the life of the Kingdom. Blessing is not first a reward for having life together; it is Jesus' announcement that God's reign is arriving precisely among people the world often overlooks.

To be a **"blessing for" others** means that the blessing we receive is not meant to stop with us. In the Kingdom worldview, being blessed is not private possession but public vocation. God's mercy, comfort, forgiveness, justice, and peace become something we practice toward others. We are blessed so that our lives become channels of freedom, dignity, healing, and flourishing for the people around us. So the question shifts from "How has God blessed me?" to "How is God making my life a blessing for my neighbor, my community, and especially those most easily forgotten?"

It is in our fulfilling vocation in our community that the church becomes the visible embodiment of Christ in our midst. This is how that church will become relevant in our community.

My Suggestions

I will be teaching from the NRSVue translation. But any translation will do. Different translations widen our view. I would suggest that you keep a daily journal to use as you study what we are

discussing. Jot down your thoughts, your questions, what blesses you and what gives you trouble.

It is in our group discussion that growth happens.

"*Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."*" (Genesis 32:24–26, NRSVue)

This is where our group blessing happens. When we wrestle with Scripture, when we wrestle with God, and when we wrestle together, this is where the Scripture will open up for us and community growth occurs. This is our blessing that studying together brings. But it only occurs when we open up and speak what we feel God is saying to us.

Was Jesus Political?

Yes—but not in the reduced way we usually use the word *political*. Jesus was not political because he tried to win an election, seize office, build a party, or protect a national agenda. He was political because he announced and embodied the Kingdom of God, and a kingdom is always a public reality. It has allegiances, practices, priorities, loyalties, economics, relationships, and a vision of what the world is supposed to become. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor," "Love your enemies," "Forgive," "Do not worry about your life," "Do to others as you would have them do to you," and "Seek first the Kingdom," he was not offering private spiritual tips for individuals trying to feel closer to God. He was teaching a people how to live under God's reign in the middle of the world's competing reigns.

This is why both the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain are deeply political without becoming partisan. They challenge the way human societies organize power, honor, wealth, violence, retaliation, anxiety, and exclusion. Jesus blesses the poor, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, the hungry, the grieving, and the persecuted—not the powerful, the self-protective, the wealthy, the violent, or the respectable. He creates a community where enemies are loved, debts are forgiven, truth is spoken without manipulation, generosity replaces accumulation, and mercy becomes stronger than revenge. That kind of teaching threatens every worldview built on domination, scarcity, fear, and self-preservation.

At the same time, Jesus refuses the normal tools of politics as the world understands them. He does not coerce, flatter the powerful, demonize enemies, or build the Kingdom through violence. His politics are cruciform: shaped by the cross, expressed through servant-love, and witnessed in a community that becomes good news for others. So if by *political* we mean partisan loyalty, culture-war identity, or the pursuit of control, then Jesus was not political in that sense. But if by

political we mean the public ordering of life—how we treat neighbors, how we use power, how we handle resources, how we welcome strangers, how we respond to enemies, and how we imagine the common good—then Jesus was profoundly political. He came announcing a Kingdom that reorders everything.

I am overwhelmed and excited that we are taking the time to do this together.

Blessings,
Pastor Mick Finch