

Bethel AMEC
Bible Study
Lesson: The Beatitudes: Developing Christian Character-Matthew 5:1-16
October 5, 2011

Introduction:

The Beatitudes form the introduction to the famous "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt. 5-7). Though the mountain's exact location is unknown, it was undoubtedly in Galilee, and was apparently near Capernaum.

Because of Jesus growing fame, multitudes of people came to Him "from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and from Judea, and from beyond the Jordan." The people have various motives: some want to be healed, some want to learn about God's kingdom, and some are just curious. In order to make it possible for such a large number of people to see and hear Him, Jesus goes up into a mountain. There, on an elevated spot, Jesus sits down to teach. This is common posture for a rabbi (teacher). It indicates that he is ready to begin teaching and His disciples (students or learners) come to hear Him.

"and he began to teach them by saying:"

I. Value of Right Attitudes (Matt. 5:1-6)

A. Right Spirit (v. 3)

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Who are the poor in spirit?

- People who are poor in spirit are aware of their own spiritual bankruptcy. They put all their trust in God's ability to supply their spiritual need.
- The word blessed should not be understood as a word of pity or sympathy. Jesus is not expressing sorrowful compassion for those he is talking about; rather, he is commending them! People who have the character traits and circumstances that Jesus lists are to be congratulated. In God's eyes they are better off, more fortunate, and in the long run happier than anyone else.
- People who are poor in spirit consciously depend on God, not on themselves, they are poor inwardly, having no ability in themselves to please God (Rom. 3:9-12)
- ***Example of poor in spirit (Luke 18: 9-13)***
- ***Building this character- James 4: 7-10***

2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted (v.4).

- Like the poor in spirit, those who mourn receive God's favor (Isa. 61: 2-3). Those who mourn for their own sinfulness will be comforted by the grace and forgiveness of God.
- The mourning of Christians in this beatitude is not based on financial loss, terminal sickness, the death of loved ones, loneliness, a divorce, or some rejection. Christians mourn because they realize that they have sinned against a holy God and have brought dishonor to his name.
- The person who mourns for their own sinfulness will be comforted by the grace and forgiveness of God.
- ***Building this character-Psalm 51***

B. Right Zeal (vv. 5,6)

1. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth (v.5)

- Meekness is the attitude of people who know their own spiritual poverty. To be meek is not to be confused with being servile. Jesus himself is our best example of this (gentleness, Matt. 11:29, 21:5) To be meek is to have strength reined in.
- Those who are meek are those who are eager to let God take the steering wheel.
- Those who are meek are truly humble and gentle and have a proper appreciation of their position.
- The meek person put all their trust in the Lord.
- The meek person says:"I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me
- ***Building this character-Proverbs 3:5-6***

2. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled (v. 6).

- Jesus recognizes that at least some in the crowd have come to hear Him because they are hungry and thirsty for *righteousness*.
- They have a burning zeal, an unsatisfied appetite, to pursue what is right.
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness have a spiritual appetite, a continuing desire for personal righteousness.
- These are they that the world has left them disappointed and unsatisfied; they are tired of living in the midst of wickedness.
- For those who really seek righteousness, Jesus has good news: their hunger and thirst will be filled. By coming to Christ, they can have their sinful slate wiped clear. They can be clothed in His righteousness. By joining God's community they can have God's own Spirit enable them to rise above their past failures and live a new life.

- **Character building-Matt. 7:7-8**

II. Right Actions (Matt. 7-12)

A. Right Responses (vv.7,8)

1. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy (v.7).
 - Mercy can be expressed in at least two different ways. First, the merciful person is forgiving to people who have wronged him or her. Second the merciful person is compassionate to people who are suffering or needy. The merciful person displays a generous spirit.
 - In return, the merciful person will obtain mercy from God. This does not mean that our mercy toward others forces God to be merciful toward us. The idea, rather, is that our merciful attitude toward others becomes an occasion of God's mercy to us.
 - This Beatitude requires a word of warning. As Jesus elaborates later in the Sermon on the Mount, people who are not merciful and forgiving to others cannot expect God to be merciful and forgiving to them. (Matt. 6:14, 15). We must respond in mercy as we have been shown mercy (Matt, 18:23-35; James 2:13)
 - **Character building-2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Eph. 5:1-2**

2. Blessed are the pure and heart, for they will see God (v.8).
 - The pure in heart are those who serve God with sing-minded devotion and unmixed motives
 - Those who are pure in heart are not polluted with either moral impurity or insincere motives.
 - God wants hearts that respond to Him in total devotion. The person who is pure in heart, will seek holiness, without which no man (or woman) will see the Lord (He. 12:14). The final reward for such a person is to live with God in Heaven where he or she will live with God, in Heaven, where he or she will look upon God's face (Rev. 22:4).
 - **Character building-Galatians 2:20**

B. Right Interactions (v. 9)

1. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
 - Peacemakers show others how to have inward peace with God and how to be instruments of peace in the world.
 - Even though we may have a right to be angry with someone, Jesus calls us to become instruments of peace (Pro. 15: 1; Matt. 5:39). Like Jesus himself, we try to live at peace with all (Heb. 12:14), to break down the walls of hostility (Eph. 2: 15-17), and to be agents of

reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20). People who value making peace will be called the children of God.

- Jesus promises this blessing not to those who remained neutral, or to those who simply love peace, but to those who are actively involved in making peace. Christ Himself was the “Prince of Peace” (Isa, 9:6). He came to bring reconciliation between God and mankind and between individuals.
- **Character building-Romans 14:19**

2. Blessed are they who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (v.10)

- The last of the eight Beatitudes is the only one with a note of peril. And unlike the others, this Beatitude is expanded into two more verses of explanation (vv. 11, 12).
- *Persecution for righteousness sake* is the world’s response to us for doing the right thing. Those persecuted are still called *blessed*. It is far better to suffer such persecution and enter *the kingdom of heaven* than to avoid persecution by doing the wrong thing and then be punished throughout eternity.
- If you are not being persecuted, you should ask, “Why”? The answer may be that you are not living a Godly life.
- If you are living the life God requires, you will be persecuted.
- If you are one that faces persecution, then you should think:
 - My complete trust and faith is in Jesus Christ.
 - I belong to the kingdom of God.
 - I have been chosen by the Father.
 - I am not a false prophet.
 - I know that I have been truly born again.
- **Character building-1 Peter 4:14-16**

C. Right Acceptance (vv. 11, 12)

1. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me (v.11)
2. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (12).

- The persecution described by Jesus has two qualifications: First, the accusations in view are those leveled against the disciple falsely. It is no virtue to suffer punishment for actual faults (1 Peter 2:20); but to suffer for well doing is an honor (1 Peter 3:17). Second, Jesus speaks of persecution that is suffered for His sake. To suffer as a Christian is to bring glory to God (1 Peter 4:12-14).

- Whatever the form of persecution, those who suffer for Christ are to rejoice and be glad. The apostles learn this lesson well after Jesus ascends. After they are beaten by the Sanhedrin for preaching in the name of Jesus, they go home rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name (Acts 5:41). In their suffering, the apostles will be like the prophets who were also persecuted by religious leaders (Heb. 11: 32-38; James 8:17). Even though the apostles suffered, it did not stop their ministry.
- People possessing the qualities that were given by Jesus would naturally stand out in the crowd and would not be understood by others. Thus they would be persecuted; others would speak evil of them. However Jesus' words encouraged His followers, for they would be walking in the train of the prophets, who also were misunderstood and persecuted (1 Kings 19:1-4; 22:8; Jer. 26:8-11; 16: 37: 11-16; 38: 1-6; Dan. 3; 6, Amos 7:10-13).

III. Value of Right Witness (Matt. 5: 13-16)

A. Our value as salt (v. 13)

1. You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.
 - Salt is an important commodity in the ancient world. Roman soldiers are even paid part of their wages in salt (the origin of the word salary). Salt can flavor food, but in a time before refrigeration, salt's primary use is to prevent meat and fish from spoiling. Jesus challenges His followers to be the salt of the earth, to be a moral disinfectant in society preserving it from decay.
 - The important quality to note about salt is that if it fails to be salty, it has lost its purpose for existence and should be discarded.
2. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house, In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.
 - A light is meant to shine and give direction. Individuals Jesus described in verses 3-10 would obviously radiate and point others to the proper path, their influence would be evident, like a city on a hill or a lamp, on its stand. Light radiating people live so that others see their good deeds and give praise not to them but to their Father in heaven. The whole purpose of light is to shine and illuminate. Jesus challenges his listeners to let their light shine before men. They are not to be afraid to expose society's indecency.

SHINING IN THE DARKNESS

In the beginning when God created light, he called it "good". When the plague of darkness covered Egypt for three days, there was light where the Israelites lived (Ex. 10: 21-23). As God led Israel on its march to freedom from Egyptian slavery, he did so with a pillar of fire by night, providing both illumination and protection for His people (Ex. 13:21). When Moses came down from God's presence on Mt. Siani, his face was so radiant with God's glory that the Israelites were afraid to look at him (Ex. 34: 29-35). God likes light, God is light (1John 1:5).

When Jesus says we are the light of the world, he is saying we must reflect the divine glory and let the world see that we have been with Jesus. As our world becomes darker morally and spiritually, Christians should continue to let their light shine!....Standard Commentary

Study References:

NIV, Interpreter's Commentary of the Whole Bible, Shepherd Notes, Bible Knowledge Commentary, <http://Beatitudes.html>, Standard Commentary