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Bible Study

Mathew Ch. 5 > Sermon on the Mountain

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Matthew Chapter 5 reveals aspects of God's focus as He chooses to bless mankind. It's no surprise that the following sayings of Jesus were given the name "Beatitudes." In the dictionary, "beatitude" is defined as divinely or supremely favored, fortunate, and/or happy. Christ provides us eight situations in which God is pleased to bless. They that find themselves humble, mourning, meek, striving for righteousness, merciful, pure, peacemakers, and persecuted are singled out. Later Matthew 5: 13-16 covers the calling of the blessed ones. Let's consider the eight Beatitudes as taught by Christ:

1. Matthew 5:3 – "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God".

Most of us think of the poor in spirit as people who moan over sufferings, or as people who are to be pitied or despised. Jesus says that they are the fortunate ones. Why? The word translated here as "poor" in Greek means "to make oneself little or lowly". Isaiah 57:15 says "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite". Again in 66:2, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word". When you read Psalms, you find that "the poor in spirit" are associated with a humble or broken spirit and a dependence upon God arising from pure need.

What the whole thing boils down to is that when we recognize our spiritual lack and can come to Christ humbly, we take the first steps to know the incredible blessedness of living in the kingdom of God. It is not being born into any particular family or faith, but the recognition of our poverty that leads us to God and every spiritual blessing that we have in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said that one should become as a child to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Little children have no sense of self importance and yet are confident of love and blessings from God. This is the opposite principle from the common worldly view: that "I alone" deserve respect.

2. Matthew 5:4 – "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

These mourners are people who are aware of their spiritual poverty and are sorrowful of the emptiness of their lives and have no answer for their sins. Jesus comforts them and promises to send the Holy Spirit to comfort them later (John 4:16). However this comfort is not given to people who are content with their emptiness, people who are unaware or do not seem to care about their shortcomings. These mourners are also those who have suffered a loss bringing



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great sorrow. Just as Jesus is able to comfort us in and exercise control over the storms of life (cf. when Jesus was in the boat tossed by the sea), His presence conquers grief.

3. Matthew 5:5 – “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Meekness in the scripture means being submissive and obedient to God. Examples of this kind of meekness would be the Virgin Mary and Moses. In Numbers 12:3, it says “Moses was a very meek man, more meek than all men that were upon the face of the earth”. And in Acts 7:22, “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, powerful in speech and action” and yet he was very meek. So meekness in the scripture does not mean being weak, but being submissive and obedient to God. This is the opposite of being proud and rebellious. Jesus says that the meek shall inherit the earth. The meek are always content because they know God loves them and has their welfare at heart. In 2 Corinthians 6:10, St. Paul alludes to “...having nothing and yet possessing everything...” here and in the future.

4. Matthew 5:6 – “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness”.

“Poverty of spirit,” mournfulness, and meekness are spiritual qualities. Once we acknowledge the lack of these qualities and grieve over it and are humble and submissive to God, we begin to hunger after righteousness. The promise is that we will be filled.

5. Matthew 5:7 – “Blessed are the merciful ...”

Interestingly, the first four Beatitudes entail an acknowledgement of our own lack. From the fifth Beatitude onwards, the Christian is asked to take an active role. The person that has received so much mercy and forgiveness from God is asked in turn to have mercy, compassion, love, and helpfulness towards everyone, including those who have behaved infamously. This does not mean that sin is condoned or that an indifferent tolerance should be encouraged. It does mean having compassion, understanding, and empathy for even “the undeserving”. For example, take the Good Samaritan – he did not know the man he helped. He had no obligation towards him, but only saw his need. This is the same mercy God asks us to extend towards others.

6. Matthew 5:8 – “Blessed are the pure in heart ...”

A pure heart loves God and serves Him and others in this love. Psalms 24:4-5 says “He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol, or swears by what is false, he will receive blessings from the Lord and vindication from God his savior”. We can deduce from this that a pure heart is one that is cleansed and forgiven through faith in Christ. Hebrew 12:14-15 says without holiness, no one will see God and we should be assiduous in seeing that nothing defiles this purity.

7. Matthew 5:9 – “Blessed are peacemakers”

Centuries of history have shown humankind’s capacity for is sin, greed, self-centeredness, envy, and violence. We have fought wars for land, power, and money.



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Corporate wars and private wars among families and neighbors are daily occurrences. The only way to true and lasting peace is to reconcile ourselves to God. Through strength in Him, we can then fully reconcile with each other. The Holy Spirit, received from our Father, speaks the same language in each of us and hence we can have oneness and understanding with each other. We can then see peace. All the artificial barriers of race, sex, culture, and caste disappear. When the heart is rid of the importance of self and endeavors to do God's desire, it moves people towards unity as the goal is to achieve God's purpose.

To be a peacemaker is to be a person who reconciles people and people to God. Remember what Christ said: "My peace I give unto to you, not as the world gives..."

8. Matthew 5:10 – "Blessed are the persecuted"

Through the millennium, we have seen Christianity "in fashion" and Christianity being persecuted. Today we seem to be in a phase where Christianity and all it stands for is being looked at with contempt in many circles. Christ throughout his mission said that Christians will never get away from persecution. Of course there have been years when there was tolerance and encouragement for the church. Those were times when the church should have made itself ready for the storms that usually follow. Periods of prolonged peace lulls us into a false sense of security which often makes us forget God. The church grows soft and ends up not preparing its people for the persecution and upheavals that are around the corner. People who have not received the strength of faith leave the church or hide behind pseudo-sophistication in their attitudes. I hope you understand that persecution is not just physical violence but can be spiritual persecution as well.

Jesus said that discrimination, rejection, and persecution of Christians is a cause for them to feel joy - not sorrow!!! Think about the Christians during the Roman times who were martyred in the arena. They went to their deaths singing with joy, praising God. Can you imagine how bewildered the pagans were? For example, Polycarpus, one of the early church fathers who was drawn and quartered by the Romans, went to his death with songs, not fear. We read of thousands of Christians during wars and battles that have shown their faith, love, and courage in Christ and have touched the lives of numerous non-believers.

Why have all these people been so joyful in sometimes painful death? I think it is because they recognize that their sojourn in this world is ending and they are moving towards the ultimate goal of being one with God. Christ suffered for us and redeemed us and in suffering for Him there is joy, but the ultimate joy is being with him in Heaven.

Perhaps a more tangible example for young people is David. When David was persecuted by Saul and fled the kingdom, a small band of supporters were with him. They too suffered many hardships and persecution with him. When David became King they shared his glory. Those who share in Christ's rejection have the promise that they will share in his glory.

Recapping the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12), the first four Beatitudes make us aware of our own drawbacks and the necessity of humbly and obediently acknowledging the



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need of God's help. What we have to do actively as Christians follows. It is clear that we can influence others for Christ by who we are more so than by what we say because our true nature speaks volumes to those observing. We need to learn, understand, and begin to develop faith before we can share the love and compassion of Christ with others – which is a Christian Life.

In Matthew 5:13-16, the Christian is asked to be like salt and light. What is salt used for? It flavors food and helps preserve it. What are the other things that salt does? Salt on a wound hurts but also heals. How does all this affect us? As Christians we are called to stop "corruption" or "deterioration" and to give meaning, life, and healing to those who are caught up in a worldly life without God. This is another reason why learning and understanding God's word is important.

A second reason is if we mix only with believers we are useless in the world we live in. Salt is useful only when it flavors food and not when it stays in a salt shaker. A Christian is asked to witness to non believers whether it is by spreading the Gospel or living the life of a true believer. With Christ's help, when we are motivated to react to evil with good, when we forgive and not take revenge, when we choose to trust in God and stand for truth & justice, we are being "salient".

Salt is invisible in its work though powerful, but light dispels darkness. Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12). Christians are called to shine their light in 'darkness' and help 'blind' people. If we witness Christ, God can then work through us. We can help people by talking to them, listening to their problems, and reassuring them with compassion and faith. After all, Christ said the second most important commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.

Finally we have to ask ourselves if we have an inward life in Christ. The outward life can only glow from a changed life which includes faith, compassion, love, and sacrifice.

Please read Romans Chapters 3 & 4 and Galatians Chapter 5:22. In fact, all the epistles in the New Testament contain further expansion on the Beatitudes.

I would also like you to think over what you have read

1. Are you aware of your spiritual poverty or do you float along in a life that is unaware of any shortcomings?
2. Do you say I cannot be meek, or can you like Moses or David, heroes in the Old Testament, say I can do everything through Him who gives me strength? (Philippians 4:13)
3. Are you the Good Samaritan or are you indifferent to others and try to justify that attitude?
4. Do you try to make peace in your home, among friends, at work, etc., or are you always adding fuel to the fire and enjoy creating more trouble?
5. Can you humbly pray for guidance and the ability to learn?

In the next installment, we will go over some of the other parts of the Sermon on the Mount.