

August 26th 2012: Sermon on Mount #2: Matt 5:1-12:
God's Recipe For Happiness

Many people when they think of the sermon on the mount think about the Beatitudes. That is the "Blessed are...statements with which it begins. Most don't realize that these 8 statements are just the beginning of a sermon that runs for three chapters in Matthew's Gospel. But just about everybody knows that these beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus are exactly opposite to what secular man is taught to expect. No person outside of Christ is going to accept the beatitude that says: ***Blessed are the poor***, unless they themselves are first rich, or ***blessed are those who are persecuted***, unless they are some sort of masochist.

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

***⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.***

***⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.***

***⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.***

***⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.***

***⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.***

***⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.***

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

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

Yet Jesus openly proclaimed such and more, and He used a very strong Greek word that means triumphant happiness, to make His point. He didn't say that they might be a little bit happy, but that they are triumphantly happy when they are in such a position. In fact the Greek word for blessed is:- μακαριος makarios from the root of which comes the English word macro. So our Lord is talking about the way to attain great happiness.

Now happiness is something that most people strive to attain without any reference to God. They believe they know what will give them happiness and set out to pursue that with all their strength. Unfortunately, many find that they never seem to attain their goal, while others attain it only to find that they are still unfulfilled; still inwardly unhappy; or that the happiness they have discovered is a fleeting and fading thing.

The great and triumphant happiness Jesus speaks here about is way different to the purely earthly happiness that the majority of Australians seem to be seeking. It is a great inward happiness that is itself eternal, and is poured into the heart by God. That's why the word is Blessed and not simply happy.

So we can understand from such a description of this 'blessedness' just how vital it is for us to know how to attain it.

And it is in these 8 statements that Jesus tells us just how we can do so. But to fully comprehend that, we must first recognize that the 8 beatitudes are in fact all part of a pattern. Rather like a recipe the first beatitude tells you what you will achieve that will make you blessed, while the last beatitude will tell you how you will know that you have achieved it. All the beatitudes in between are all parts of the different process you go through along the way.

Let me try to explain it to you:-

Look at the different reasons why Jesus says a person is blessed>

Blessed are the poor in spirit for **theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** Blessed are those who mourn for **they will be comforted.** Blessed are the meek for **they will inherit the earth.** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, **for they will be filled.** Blessed are the merciful, **for they will be shown mercy.** Blessed are the pure in heart, **for they will see God.** Blessed are the peacemakers, **for they will be called the sons of God.** Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, **for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Now the pattern is seen in the fact that the first and the last reasons why a person is blessed are the same.

The ones who are poor in spirit. Those who have come to realize that in the sight of God their spirit is poverty stricken. Their spirit is clothed in the filthy rags of unrighteousness. That it doesn't matter how much they have in terms of wealth, power, position or prestige, when God looks upon their

inner spirit all he sees is their sin. Those who have seen their true position in the sight of God and have cried out to Him for forgiveness and cleansing and receive it as a gift of His Grace, how blessed they are for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They have become citizens of God's glory. They have been transferred from the kingdom of evil and of darkness into the kingdom of God and of light.

In the song he wrote, John Newton presented this so well:

***Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.***

***'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed!***

And one of the ways the believer will know that this has happened is because the evil one will attack their new lives of righteousness in Christ. And when that happens, as it most certainly will, they will rejoice because it is proof that the kingdom of heaven is indeed theirs. Peter writes about his in 1 Peter 4:12-14

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Now this attack of the evil one comes in many ways. Through the situations of life that the devil uses to challenge your faith and thoughts about God. Through temptations. Through rejection and oppression from others. Through persecution and hardship that is directly connected to the fact that you are making a stand as a Christian.

When such things happen a Christian finds joy, not in what they are going through, but because the attacks prove that they are indeed in the kingdom of heaven.

So the first and the last of these beatitudes are like two bookends, and the other six that make up the middle section shed light on the type of person a Christian will be and the type of life they will live on this earth, and why such things will cause them to be the blessed ones, despite the way things may look to the non-believer.

So look with me first at **v4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

We all well know what mourn means: To grieve, to be sad, to sorrow, to weep, and once you become a follower of Christ there is a mourning that becomes part of who you are. We mourn at the sin that remains in us despite our prayers and best intentions. We mourn for those around us who refuse to claim the forgiveness and salvation that Christ offers. We grieve at the impact of sin in our world and at the evil which is rampant. We mourn because, as the hymn says, "death and decay in all around we see."

If you love the Lord Jesus you can't but be effected by such things—indeed you should be affected by such things. But your very mourning gives you the joy of knowing God's comfort. Comfort because He still loves you despite your failings and is so ready to forgive you. Comfort because despite the evil that is in the world He is still in control. Comfort because you look forward to the day when sin will be no more and God will reign forever.

Then in v5 ***Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*** Christ calls His followers to be meek, and too often in our 'might is right' society, meekness is seen as weakness. To turn the other cheek is far from an easy thing to do.

As I grow older I am beginning to realize that I'm not really a meek person. In fact I think it is too often the case that the older we get the more intolerant we become of those who seem to delight in usurping our place, position or authority. In fact just the other day I found myself arching up inside because I didn't feel that another had the right to criticize me, even though I realized that what they were saying was quite true.

Christ expects us to forgive even when others don't deserve it. To give even when others take advantage of our kindness. To remain silent when every part of us wants to give back as good as we are getting.

Now being meek doesn't mean becoming a door mat to someone's bad behavior, never standing up for our rights, or staying quietly in an abusive relationship. But it does mean following the example of Christ towards those who mistreat us and that is not a joyful experience. But the joy is found in

the reminder that it is the meek who will one day inherit the new earth and the new heavens. It is the meek to whom our Lord will one day say, Well done my good and faithful servant, enter into the kingdom prepared for you.

Then v6-9 we have four beatitudes that are obviously about how Christians should live:-

***6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.***

***7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.***

***8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.***

***9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.***

It should come as no surprise that one of the characteristics of a Christian is to be this hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Christ wants us to make right living our number one priority in life. If we ever have a choice between doing something that is right in the sake of God, whatever the cost, and doing something that may not be wrong in itself but stops us from being obedient, then we should hunger to do righteousness

The promise is that God will so fill us within with joy and satisfaction, that we will tingle spiritually.

Being merciful, being pure, being peacemakers are again all hallmarks of what it means to be a believer. All things Christ expects us to seek after doing or being whatever the cost, and each has its rewards for us that make us blessed people.

So there we have the Christian lifestyle that the beatitudes present and the blessings that accompany it, and the whole thing is non-negotiable. Here is the Christ-like life that will impact our world and will give you this blessedness—this triumphant happiness, that nothing can ever take away.

And the biggest thing to note is that the Lord was describing His own way of living when He gave us these 8 sayings. He was poor in spirit in that He depended completely on His father for all things. He mourned over the lost plight and sin of mankind and sorrowed over the rich young ruler who chose fading wealth over following the Lord of the Universe. He was meek and lowly of heart, lived a completely righteous life, and was merciful, pure of heart and a peacemaker. Finally, as Hebrews 12:2 reminds us:-

He endured the shame of being nailed to a cross, because he knew that later on he would be glad he did. Now he is seated at the right side of God's throne!

So in the conclusion the beatitudes are nothing less than Jesus encouraging us who believe in Him to become like Him in our living, for such is the path of true and great eternal happiness.