

The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount

(Matthew 5:1-12)

Introduction

Here we find the richest of the passages of Scripture. These are the words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He chose these words to speak as preeminent to all else he chose to say. Perhaps these words are a complete summary of everything he came to say and the rest of the Scripture are only details of what he proclaimed in the beatitudes. As we will see in this study, these few verses tell us volumes on how to be citizens of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus spoke what is called the "beatitudes" he spoke of an attitude of being. These beatitudes are guiding principles for those who seek to inherit the kingdom of heaven. An attitude is generally thought of as a "mind-set," like in the phrase, "ready-set-go," or what I prefer to call, "a mind prepared for action." With the attitude there is a preparedness for whatever might come along -- a predetermined response to any situation, real or imagined. "Being" is described as the inner-most essence or nature of a person's existence or life. "Being" is true nature who we are. In these Scriptures, Jesus is offering an attitude for life that will result in true happiness. He presents these beatitudes as the character of those who inherit the kingdom of heaven --the truly "saved."

These beatitudes call for a full examination of one's life. In the beatitudes, Jesus lays a test on any person who claims to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. 2 Corinthians 13:5 states "Test yourself to see if you are in the faith." This is present tense not past. It is the continual action of testing in the present. **Jesus offers a new standard for living** that goes beyond the law given by Moses. It is a new criteria for self-examination. It is how a citizen of the kingdom of heaven really lives. The standard is righteousness, and this standard is to be the character of a believer's life.

Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and the Pharisees you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven," Matthew 5:20. This is shocking! For to look at the outward life of the Scribes and the Pharisees you might think they were righteous. They were people who went to the temple daily. They paid tithes. They fasted. They prayed. They wore cool religious clothes. They were religious freaks! However, their outward behaviors did not meet the essential requirements of God's righteousness.

Righteousness, which God requires is about living under God's standards -- standards by his definition -- not ours. Titus reveals this when he said, "They (the pretenders, the posers, the hypocrites) profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deeds," Titus

1:16. Profession to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven means nothing without obedience, without righteousness according to God's standards, without holiness, without walking away from sin and the pattern of this world.

Obedience is the character of the truly saved. It is the character of those who know the source of true happiness and walk accordingly. Jesus said, "If you abide [rest, obey, hold fast] in my word [command, teachings, promises], then you are truly disciples of mine," John 8:30-31. It goes beyond just knowing his word--it requires believing his word, which results in obedience to his word. You cannot say that you believe his word if you don't obey it--if you don't live by it. When we don't live by his word we live by the word of the world, the enemy, or our flesh.

Be warned, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1John 2:15. Following the attitude of the world is in direct opposition to the attitude that Christ requires of his followers. Be careful, many will try to come into the kingdom of heaven on their own terms. The Scripture is clear--they will be turned away for they will seek to come with a righteousness of their own invention, c.f. Matthew 7:13-23.

Our life of obedience flows from our relationship with Christ. It is not the easy-believism that we see so prevalent in the world and all too often in the modern church. It is a life that holds fast, to the commands, teachings and promises of God, even when from an earthly perspective it makes no sense at all. The result of all this is blessedness and true inner happiness. In the sermon on the mount Jesus describes the standard of kingdom living --and the key to it all is righteousness.

Jesus came on the scene preaching "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near," Matthew 4. He was pleading for them to enter the kingdom they had long awaited, but he did not mislead them-- he told them clearly that they cannot enter and bring the world and their self-righteousness or any other worldly strategy with them. Although he had compassion on the multitudes he gave no one false hope that they could enter by their own standards. He made it clear that they had nothing to offer in exchange for the kingdom. A person can only enter the kingdom by the terms of the King. Jesus states in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness." This is the way-- this is the standard.

How to come to God, Matthew 4. Jesus made it clear that no one can enter the kingdom without repenting--turning from the pattern of this world in which we live. We are told not to conform to the pattern of this world, Romans 12:1-2; for the pattern of this world is rebellion against God. It is an attitude of self-sufficiency without God. Jesus begins his teaching by instructing the disciples and the listeners how to come to God. He declares that there needs to be repentance based on the revelation that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. He is declaring with urgency the need for the hearers to

turn from their own way and follow and obey God for he is near and present. He spoke this with such urgency that there was not time for the hearers to go home and contemplate or make some kind of earthly preparation to obey these words. The time to repent was a hand -- as it is today. It was and is to follow and obey now -- for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

This word "blessed." The Greek word "makarios" (blessed) means happy or blissful in the genuine sense of internal joy. The word is not in the usual sense of happiness based on positive circumstances. It is the character or nature (being) of God who is blessed in himself-- a state unaffected by external circumstances -- holy. For humans, it is the inner joy that is the fulfillment of every longing given by God in the human heart. It is a word used to describe God, i.e. "*Blessed be to God,*" PS. 68:35; 72:18; 119:12; 1 Tim. 1:11. Whatever this state of being is, it is true of God, 1 Tim.6:15. The people who willfully experience it are those who are partakers of God. Second Peter 1:4 tells us that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ "*are partakers of the divine nature.*" And that includes blessedness.

The way Jesus is using this word "blessed" is not usually what a person would expect to hear attached to such statements. Who would normally ascribe happiness to poverty of spirit or of mourning? Yet Jesus did, for he knows the outcome of such states. He knows that through suffering comes comfort from the Spirit of God, which results in rejoicing and exceeding gladness. And he was willing to demonstrate it in his own life. Jesus walked out the beatitudes in full obedience to God. Jesus begins by talking about a new way of living and he begins with that you must be poor in spirit in order to enter into his kingdom.

In the following lessons, we will examine the attitudes of being a citizen of the kingdom of our Lord: poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, being merciful, being pure of heart, being peacemakers, and being persecuted for righteousness.