

Lesson 13

The Beatitudes for Today

Introduction

What happened that day on the side of a mountain by the Sea of Galilee changed the world forever. What Jesus proclaimed certainly did not fit what the majority in the crowd would have envisioned coming from the long foretold Jewish deliverer or Messiah. Jesus disarmed them all. What He brought forth as basic principles of kingdom living were the opposite of what the world believes as the way to success. The truths Jesus brings forth in the Beatitudes will be relevant and applicable for as long as time remains.

We may look at the crowd who gathered there that day and at first glance think that their world and lives were completely different from ours. And while we enjoy countless blessings and comfort through the advancement of medicine, technology, and science, the problems confronting humanity are rooted in the very same causes as what the Jewish people faced 2000 years ago.

- *Political upheaval.* Just like us, the Jews lived in a world full of uncertainty and hatred toward their political/governmental leaders.
- *Racial discord.* Jews hated Samaritans. Greeks hated Jews. Philosophy and manmade religion failed to bridge these divides.
- *Economic disparity.* The gulf between the rich and poor was as wide as ever. Today we hear of the 1% and then there are the rest of us. Things were the same then. Those with wealth kept themselves away from the poverty stricken ... and looked for ways to keep them distracted and content.
- *A bitter, agitated society that was constantly on edge.* Division was everywhere. It permeated families, religion, and the government. Anything at any moment could provide the spark where unfettered emotions sent people over the top.

Do all these things sound familiar? I am certain you can think of modern examples of all these problems. And just like then, Jesus' teaching in the beatitudes still ring true:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the humble, 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 sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. "You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you, Matthew 5.3-12.

What is the answer to all the problems outlined above? What are the virtues here that, when applied, will provide solutions to real world problems created by sin and help us come to experience true peace, happiness, and contentment? It is in the beatitudes where we see the timeless godly virtues of humility

and forgiveness, compassion and mercy, as well as purity and peace become the operational attitudes of Christianity. When Christians practice these things, they truly become agents of change in this world ... the salt and light that Jesus will mention as He begins the rest of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.13-16. These principles were continually focused upon by the apostles as they encouraged the early church while it spread across the world like no other religious movement in history.

These foundational building blocks of Christian teaching have helped shape the way we look at others. Rather than disregard the dignity and worth people possess, the beatitudes challenge us to be agents of mercy and humility as we interact with our fellow man. Every person has been created in the image of God and that fact alone should impact the way we treat those that society labels as insignificant or unworthy of our time.

They have also solidified the way we look at the purpose of human existence. Life is far more than just survival. Life is not a purposeless existence with no aim for something higher or more lasting. We have been brought into existence for the purpose of loving others, serving others, and filling the earth with goodness.

And finally, the beatitudes remind us that there is much more to come after this life. Humans are headed for an eternal destination. Inside them we read of the kingdom of heaven where believers will reside throughout eternity. Those who embrace the type of life characterized by the Beatitudes can trust that they will receive something far better than anything this world could promise. Eternal peace, rest, and relationship with the Father, Son, and Spirit.

The Beatitudes Can Still Impact:

The World

As I write this lesson, Russia is in the initial phases of invading Ukraine. I made three evangelistic mission trips to Mariupol during the 00's. As I think of the unfolding events, my first thought goes out to the people in those areas who will be experiencing great suffering, heartbreak, and loss. It's just one example of how the world remains a cold, frightful, and destructive place. This year is an election year. Although it will not rise to the heights of a presidential election year, the midterms will most likely shape up the way most of the election cycles have in my lifetime. People are increasingly angry, agitated, and opinionated. The hatred is only growing. Add to that all the public platforms where people share their thoughts with the world through social media. If a major crisis comes, will our nation be able to withstand the pressure, come together, and work out a solution? Worldly philosophies and accepted behaviors will certainly not provide the solution ... a brief look at history demonstrates the human ability to work things out.

The only *real* solution comes from above ... from someone outside our world. The beatitudes provide the way out ... because what they promise is *the only* solution for curing the bitterness, hatred, discontent, and division the world thrives upon.

The Church

It is still amazing to think of what happened within 30 years of the death and resurrection of Christ. From an obscure man born in an out of the way place to the most common of people, Christianity went from Jerusalem to the world. Paul says:

if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and are not shifted away from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a servant of it, Colossians 1.23.

And from that first generation of Christians ... spread the life-changing values that shaped the Empire. Despite the greatest of efforts by various Emperors and regional and local rulers ... persecution of Christians only led to its growth. It revolutionized the way people regarded marriage, children, slaves, and women. As the world observed their perseverance through the gravest of difficulties and loss, many came to see the love of Jesus manifested through the humble hearts of dedicated Christians. Through them, Jesus was drawing all sorts of people to Himself.

The challenge for us today remains. Our application of the principles found in the Beatitudes is how the world will see us make the greatest impact for change. Lives can be changed. Which leads to families being changed. Which leads to communities being changed. Which leads to nations being changed. For all of that to happen, the world needs to see us living out the values and hear our explanation as to why those values are preferable to the ones they have learned through the world.

Will we embrace the mission given to us in the Beatitudes?

The Family

When you think of the life of the family, of what impact would the greater implementation of the values of humility, mercy, purity, and peace be? Christian virtues and teachings will do nothing but good for our families. As we look inside our world, one of Satan's greatest targets is the home. If the devil can succeed in breaking apart the family, he will cripple the church, and break the nation down. Today, many of society's ills can be traced to the destruction of the family. How many marriages are in danger? How many families are dealing with some sort of addiction? Stressful parent/child relationships? Divorce? Single-parent families?

The Beatitudes provide the solution to the root causes of every issue in the home. Christians should be living out these principles every single day and showing the world the beauty of righteous living. For this to happen, husbands, wives, and children must all come to embrace their God-given roles. Time must be spent in the word. Priorities must change. When these things are embraced, it literally can change the direction of a family for generations to come.