

THE BEATITUDES (PART 1)

August 21, 2016

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Matthew 5:3-4

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SERMON SERIES: MATTHEW: JESUS, THE SOVEREIGN KING

SERMON TITLE: "THE BEATITUDES: KINGDOM CHARACTER, PART 1"

SCRIPTURE TEXT: MATTHEW 5:3-4 / (P. 809)

TOPIC: MATTHEW

DATE: AUGUST 21, 2016

-- One of my favorite mental images of my trip to Israel is that of a gently sloping hillside on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was late March, but in Israel it was a magnificent Spring day. The brilliant sun warmed our skin as we ate a picnic lunch, looking out on the placid, aqua waters of Galilee. Nearby, two beautiful Israeli children tended a flock of sheep.

That hill is the Mount of Beatitudes, the traditional site where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Built on that hillside is the octagonal (8-sided) Church of the Beatitudes, its eight sides representing the eight beatitudes pronounced by Jesus at the beginning of the Sermon.

The word "beatitude" comes from the Latin word meaning "blessed," which is the first word in each of these eight declarations.

Cf., Matthew 5:1-12

-- As we saw last week, some versions translate "blessed" as "happy," but the idea isn't happiness as we typically think of it. Rather, it's a very special and particular kind of happiness - the highest kind of happiness. Blessedness is not a temporary emotion but a lasting condition, a state of contentment and satisfaction and joy that comes from experiencing God's favor.

Blessedness doesn't depend on your circumstances (what you have) but on your character (who you are).

-- These eight beatitudes are a profile of Christian character. They are traits that are most valued in the Kingdom of God. They are the qualities that Christ possesses and that He produces in those in whom He dwells. The beginning point for all of this is the first beatitude.

v. 3

I. The First Beatitude (v. 3)

A. The Kingdom Characteristic: "The Poor in Spirit"

1. The Meaning

a. "Poor in spirit" does not refer to those who are poor in terms of money or possession but those who recognize their spiritual poverty, those who acknowledge their dependency on God. TEV, "Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor."

b. There are two words translated "poor" in the NT. One refers to those who work hard but make just enough to survive, but that's not the word used here. The word Jesus uses here pictures someone beaten to his knees by poverty; this is the kind of poverty that forces someone to beg.

2. Expressed in the Hymn

-- When Jesus talks about the "poor in spirit," He's talking about those who take the attitude expressed in the old hymn "Rock of Ages."

Not the labors of my hands / can fulfill Thy law's demands.

Could my zeal no respite know / could my tears forever flow,

All for sin could not atone / Thou must save and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hands I bring. / Simply to Thy cross I cling.

Naked, come to Thee for dress. / Helpless, look to Thee for grace.

Foul, I to the fountain fly. / Wash me, Savior, or I die.

3. Illustrated in the Tax Collector & the Canaanite Woman

a. Remember Jesus' parable of the sinful tax collector and the religious Pharisee who went to the Temple to pray.

Luke 18:11-14a The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **¹²**I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' **¹³**But the tax collector, standing far off, would not

even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.

-- The tax collector is a great example of what Jesus means by being "poor in spirit.

b. The same attitude is illustrated in the Canaanite woman who comes to Jesus in Matthew 15. When the woman pleads with Jesus to help her demon-oppressed daughter, He ignores her. When the woman continues to plead, Jesus tells her that He had come to the people of Israel, she still continued to plead, and then we find this exchange.

Matthew 15: 26-28 And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

When Jesus refuses to help because she isn't Jewish, she doesn't make a case for herself; instead, she agrees that she isn't worthy, picturing herself more like a family's pet dog than a child. It's her recognition of her unworthiness that opens the door to her blessing.

B. The Kingdom Assurance: "For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven"

-- And that's what Jesus assures us in this beatitude:

v. 3b, "...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

-- It's when we come to God confessing our spiritual poverty - when we see the awfulness of our sin in the eyes of a holy God and realize our unworthiness and inability to do anything to deserve God's love or acceptance - when we throw ourselves at His feet, like a beggar seeking mercy - it's then that the doors of the kingdom of heaven are thrown wide open.

II. The Second Beatitude (v. 4)

A. The Kingdom Characteristic: "Those Who Mourn"

1. The Meaning

a. To understand what Jesus means in this beatitude we need to see its connection to the first beatitude. These two beatitudes are linked together - the second beatitude builds on and expands the first. The first beatitude talks about acknowledging our spiritual poverty and sinfulness; the second takes us a step further - to mourning our sin. The second beatitude takes us beyond confession to contrition. It's one thing to confess "I'm a sinner." It's another thing to be broken and distressed over that sin.

b. Jesus says "blessed are those who mourn." It's a strong word that was used to refer to strong grief - like the grief you'd experience at the death of a son or daughter or a mother or father.

c. You don't experience this kind of grief about sin - you don't mourn your sin until you understand how serious and devastating sin is.

Ezra understood sin's seriousness and mourned its devastating effect on

God's people.

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Ezra 9:5-7a, 10:1 [>] And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, ⁶ saying: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. ⁷ From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt. ...

¹ While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly.

d. David Brainerd, the great missionary to the American Indians in the mid 1700s, who died before his 30th birthday, wrote in his journal:

"In my morning devotions my soul was exceedingly melted and bitterly mourned over my exceeding sinfulness and vileness."

e. Paul emphasizes the necessity of mourning our sin. Admitting your sinfulness brings you to confession of your sin, but it takes brokenness and mourning over your sin to bring you to repentance and turning away from that sin.

2 Corinthians 7:10 [>] For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation.

B. The Kingdom Promise: "They will be comforted"

1. The Meaning

-- When we are broken and grieved by our sin, we will be moved to turn from it, and then we will find the comfort of God's forgiveness and acceptance.

Psalms 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

2. An Example

-- William Carey, the great Baptist missionary to India in the early 1800s labored for years without seeing any converts and meanwhile enduring enormous obstacles - the death of family members, health problems and strong opposition. But he persevered for 40 years, and when he died he had translated the whole Bible into 6 languages and parts of it into 29 languages. The key to Carey's perseverance and productivity may be revealed in the epitaph he wrote for his grave marker:

William Carey / Born August 17th, 1761 / Died June 9th,
1834

A wretched, poor and helpless worm / On Thy kind arms I fall

-- Throughout his life, Carey mourned his sinfulness and unworthiness, and you see that as he calls himself "a wretched, poor and helpless worm." But the real key to Carey's perseverance is the last line of the epitaph: "on Thy kind arms I fall." Mourning his sin caused Carey to run to the arms of the gracious Almighty Lord, where Carey found comfort and strength to go on.