



Hard Sayings of Jesus

Lesson 3 The Upside-Down Kingdom

Opening Prayer

Introduction

Psalm 73:1-4, 12-13, 16-17, 25-26

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.
For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.
This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth.
Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me
till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.
Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

- 1.) What was the psalmist, Asaph, struggling with as he looked at life in this world?
- 2.) List some examples from life now that might make you feel the same way.
- 3.) Where did Asaph's comfort come from?
- 4.) Why is it surprising that God records Asaph's words for us? What makes it wonderful that he did?

Studying God's Word

The Beatitudes are easily misunderstood. They've often been viewed as a manual of how to "get right with God"—after all, this is the way that God tells us to be or a summary of what it means to be a Christian.

The Beatitudes are Jesus' words to people who had begun to follow and believe in him. They were part of the kingdom of heaven. In the Beatitudes, Jesus explains that life in the kingdom works

differently than life in this world. It's a kingdom of grace, forgiveness, and mercy, instead of a world of power struggles and self-reliance.

But more than that, this is *reality* for a believer in Christ. It's the way existence *truly* works, even though much of it is hidden from our eyes for now. After all, it's life by faith in the Son of God.

Matthew 5:1-12 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them, saying: ³ "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."

- 1.) Select and share a Beatitudes that's particularly difficult for you to hear and understand.
- 2.) Try rewriting some of the Beatitudes from the perspective of this world.
- 3.) Just as Asaph learned, having the right perspective on this life makes all the difference. Living according to the Beatitudes seems to bring pain, not blessings! Yet what does Jesus clue us into that we need to remember at those times (v. 12)? List some other Bible passages or stories that reinforce the same truth for you.
- 4.) Get practical: How can you help remind yourself of the way the world *really* works for a believer?

Matthew 5:38-42 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' ³⁹ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

- 1.) Consider especially Jesus' first words here. Where was this "said"? It was said in Scripture! You can find those words in Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. It should also be noted that in both of these contexts Moses is talking about the judges and authorities dispensing justice.
- 2.) Jesus wasn't contradicting God's Word. To understand these words, an important distinction is necessary. This was originally part of God's "civil law code" for the nation of Israel. It was a way to make sure *the punishment fit the crime*. Who were these words really meant to protect? But how were people using them?
- 3.) Jesus isn't forbidding self-defense. The Fifth Commandment commands us to preserve and protect life. You could paraphrase his words this way: Your first concern shouldn't be about getting _____ but showing _____.

4.) This is hard! What do you need to remember as you try to put this into action?

Matthew 5:43-48 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

1.) Let’s start at the end of this section. How does Jesus make these difficult tasks even harder?

2.) Fill in the blank: If you show love to the people in your life who love you (and that’s it!), you’re acting like a wonderful _____.

3.) How do the words “your Father in heaven” comfort and encourage us when we realize that we haven’t kept the commands of the Sermon on the Mount perfectly?

Summary

- Jesus says life in this world doesn’t work the way it *seems* it should. Because that’s true, much of what he says can seem upside down to us.
- God’s will for our lives is summed up in *love*. Our first concern is to love those around us. This isn’t hard because *love* is bad but because this means loving people who hurt us.
- A Christian can find the reason and strength to do this in God’s love for us.

Prayer