The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:1-16

*“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:*” Matthew 5:1-2

Chapters 5-7 in the Gospel of Matthew are collectively called the “Sermon on the Mount.’ This is not because the sermon is named after some important teaching of Jesus, but simply because He was preaching from the side of a mountain to the big crowd of people who gathered at the base of the mountain. We know from other passages that the number of people gathered was 5000 men besides women and children. It was a large crowd. Some might wonder how Jesus without sound magnifying equipment could make sure everybody heard Him. We are not given that detail, but based on Revelation 1:15 “His voice as the sound of many waters;” that Jesus had the capacity to make Himself heard. This is one of the longest sermons of Jesus recorded in the gospel, and it is one of His most powerful.

Bible scholars call the first section of the sermon that goes from verse 3 through verse 12 “the Beatitudes.” This word comes from the Latin adjective *beatus* which means happy, fortunate, or blissful. Because in these verses Jesus tells us ways in which we should be thinking, some call these verses the “Be Attitudes.” We should not think of these as optional behaviors and attitudes, but as critical for us to put into our person recognizing that Jesus is serious about how He wants us to think and act. Remember at the last supper, Jesus says this to His disciples *“you are my friends if you do whatever I command you.”* (John 15:14) Jesus also said that same night *“If you love me, keep my commandments.”* (John 14:15) These two passages make it plain that Jesus did not preach just to hear Himself talk, but He preached with the hope and desire of having life-changing attitudes become part of our thinking.

As we examine the Beatitudes, we must not make the mistake of thinking that if we have just some of these as part of our being then we are “good with God.” The reality is that these are a package, and our effort must be to exhibit all the qualities Jesus describes. It is critical that we understand that simply believing in who Jesus is does not count with Jesus as “saving faith.” To have faith that saves, we must believe Jesus. The idea is simple, Jesus tells us His expectations, we try to meet them with the confidence that it is the obedient effort that matters, not our having perfection in accomplishing what He asks us to do. This recognition of our failures is what makes our salvation by grace through faith, and not of ourselves, possible.

Jesus in the list of Beatitudes gives four characteristics we should exhibit:

To be poor in spirit, to mourn, to be meek, to be pure in heart.

Jesus lists 3 actions we are to take:

To hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, and to be a peacemaker.

He lists two things that we are to receive with the confidence that we will be rewarded:

To be persecuted for righteousness sake, and to accept people reviling us, persecuting us, and speaking evil against us falsely.

Whatever the category, Jesus makes it plain that to be correct in each of these areas results in wonderful blessings coming to us. It is important to understand that having the qualities in the “Beatitudes” in our life puts us on the front line in trying to win people to Jesus. Exhibiting these qualities show a high moral character, devotion to what it good, and courage in the face of fierce opposition. Let’s take a look at each one to see what Jesus intends for us.

* Poor in spirit—Christian scholar J. W. McGarvey describes this characteristic in his book the Fourfold Gospel. Here is what he says: “The poor in spirit are those who feel a deep sense of spiritual destitution and comprehend their nothingness before God. The kingdom of heaven is theirs, because they seek it, and therefore find and abide in it. To this virtue is opposed the pride of the Pharisee, which caused him to thank God that he was not as other men, and to despise and reject the kingdom of heaven. There must be emptiness before there can be fullness, and so poverty of spirit precedes riches and grace in the kingdom of God.” Notice that this attitude brings us to membership in the kingdom of heaven.
* Mourn—"The blessing is not upon all that mourn; but upon those who mourn in reference to sin. They shall be comforted by the discovery and appropriation of God's pardon. But all mourning is traced directly or indirectly to sin. We may take it, therefore, that in its widest sense the beatitude covers all those who are led by mourning to a discerning of sin, and who so deplore its effects and consequences in the world as to yearn for and seek the deliverance which is in Christ. Those to whom Christ spoke the beatitude bore a double sorrow. Not only did their own sins afflict their consciences, but the hatred and opposition of other sinners added many additional sighs and tears. Joy springs from such sorrow so naturally that it is likened to harvest gathered from the seed But sorrows, even apart from a sense of sin, often prove blessings to us by drawing us near unto God.” (from The Four-Fold Gospel, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2012 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.) We see that have this attitude brings us comfort when God redeems us.
* Meek—"His hearers were full of hopes that, as Messiah, he would glut their martial spirit, and lead them to world-wide conquest. But the earth was not to be subjugated to him by force. Those who were meek and forbearing should receive what the arrogant and selfish grasp after and cannot get. “Man the animal has hitherto possessed the globe. Man the divine is yet to take it. The struggle is going on. But in every cycle more and more does the world feel the superior authority of truth, purity, justice, kindness, love, and faith. They shall yet possess the earth” (Beecher). The meek shall inherit it in two ways: 1. They shall enjoy it more fully while in it. 2. They shall finally, as part of the triumphant church, possess and enjoy it. Doubtless there is also here a reference to complete possession to be fulfilled in the new earth.” (from The Four-Fold Gospel, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2012 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.) Meek does not mean “weak.” It signifies a person who doesn’t have to impress you with his or her accomplishments. The meek are not self-centered.

They are people of good character and inner strength who keep moving forward regardless of any opposition. Those who have this quality of meekness will inherit the earth.

* Hunger and thirst for righteousness—Appetite is a big issue. What is it you hunger for? If it is simply for things that satisfy the flesh, you need to reorient you whole system. Clearly our body needs to eat, but to hunger and thirst for righteousness is to seek the food that is good for the soul. People today often laugh at the idea of righteousness, but ignoring this appetite is resulting is increased murders, rapes, children born out of wedlock, thefts, home invasions, sexual abuse of children and more. Jesus calls those who would follow Him to seek to do what is good. He plainly says that if we seek righteousness, we will be filled.
* Merciful—to be merciful is to be compassionate in treatment of those in distress. Whether the distress is caused by the guilt or penalty of sin or by a debilitating physical condition, mercy is there to help. In the case of sin, mercy is the willingness to forgo giving sinners the punishment they deserve. When we don’t understand the value of mercy and will not extend it to others who may have caused us harm or to others who are in distress for whatever cause, we create a situation for ourselves in which we will be denied mercy and end up suffering for eternity. Jesus is plain. To obtain mercy, we must be merciful.
* Pure in heart—This characteristic is seen in people who do not use filthy language, who don’t tell filthy jokes, who don’t want to see pornography, who don’t want to steal, or violate their marriage. People with a pure heart love to worship God and Jesus and they are not willing to yield to temptation to satisfy what the flesh wants to do instead. The pure in heart dress differently, love differently and care about doing good to others. Jesus says those with this characteristic will see God. O, Father, help me by you Holy Spirit to have a pure heart.
* Peacemaker—We need to be aware of the fact that Jesus considers peacemaking an essential characteristic. Jesus was/is a peacemaker having made peace between God and man by His death on the cross. It is so sad to see people who are supposed to be in the family of Christ refuse to try and make peace when they find themselves at odds with somebody. Many time this writer has experienced an obstinate attitude on the part of some Christian who refuses to initiate an effort to be at peace. The apostles teach us to live peaceably with all men with the idea that if there is no peace it is not our fault (Romans 12:18). Jesus says here that to be a child of God, we have to be a peacemaker.
* Persecuted for righteousness sake—This helps us recognize that we are not in the fight against evil by ourselves. When stand for truth in the face of threats, injury, even death, we know Jesus is with us. Jesus wants us to recognize the temporary nature of our life here and promises us that if we persevere, the kingdom of heaven is ours. Recognize that having trouble because we are doing wrong or for issues not related to right or wrong don’t bring the promised blessing.
* Reviled, persecuted, with all kinds of evil spoken against you falsely for My sake—Here Jesus begins affirming what He says later, “*you will be hated by all men for My name’s sake.*” We are in a war with evil. It is important that we endure difficulties as good soldiers of the cross. The time is coming when all who speak against Jesus will be made to kneel before Him and confess His name to glory of God the Father. Remember the summary of the book of Revelation: The devil loses, Jesus wins, and we need to be sure we are on the winning side. Jesus makes this promise to us***—"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*** Read Hebrews 11:35-38 to see some of what earlier prophets and godly people endured. *“Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.”*

Now Jesus turns to the intent of our having these blessings. As always, our Lord is thinking about redeeming the lost. Here He makes His point on our part in this plan. It also shows you the value He places on us. Please don’t miss this.

* You are the salt of the earth
* You are the light of the world.
* You are a city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Notice that Jesus begins this section with a warning. If we as the salt of the earth do not fulfill our responsibility, we are good for nothing and will be tossed out. Fulfilling our role results in some positive things. Jesus actually lists those for us. Here they are:

* We give light to all who are in the house.
* People may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

It is plain that God wants us to be His agents in helping people find the truth. No one needs to be in darkness if we will show Jesus in us regardless of what enemies we face. No one needs to ignorant of the power of God when they see us do good and help people. God isn’t promising us glory, but is telling us that we will cause men to glorify Him. How wonderful it is to see even one sinner brought to the truth.

Seek all the blessings Jesus promised by having the qualities in your character that Jesus desires you to have.