

The Beatitudes:
SHOULD WE REALLY LIVE BY THEM?

By Richard Jordan

In Matthew 5-7 we see Christ discharging His prophetic office as He delivers what has come to be called the Sermon on the Mount:

“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

“And he opened his mouth, and taught them (Matthew 5:1,2).

Many treat the Sermon on the Mount as the Gospel. They act as if it were the only important part of Scripture. “I live by the Sermon on the Mount,” they say, when actually they do not. If anyone is honest and will actually read the Sermon on the Mount, they will know they are not living up to it. They will also discover that it contains absolutely *no mention* of the death and resurrection of Christ.

So much for the standard approach! What then is the place and purpose of the Sermon on the Mount? Simply stated, the Sermon on the Mount is the King setting forth the manifesto of His kingdom which is yet to be set up on this earth. It sets forth the mind of Christ concerning the citizens of His kingdom and is *law* lifted to the highest plane. It is no way the *modus operandi* for believers living under grace.

The Sermon begins with the Beatitudes which set forth the inner character of the citizens of the Kingdom. As we consider them in the light of Scripture, we see clearly that they do not apply to us today.

“Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).

The citizens of the Kingdom are to be characterized by humility of spirit. They must recognize their need – their spiritual poverty and bankruptcy – in order to be eligible for the Kingdom.

“Thus saith the LORD, The heaven *is* my throne, and the earth *is* my footstool: where *is* the house that ye build unto me? and where *is* the place of my rest?

“For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the LORD: but to this *man* will I look, *even* to *him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Matthew 66:1,2).

On the other hand, Paul writes to the Body of Christ in quite another vein:

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12).

We do not put on the virtues of humility in order to gain either the Kingdom or heaven. These virtues are *already ours in Christ*, as they are elements of the character belonging to the new creation.

“Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

Israel’s recognition of her spiritual bankruptcy will spring from the realization of what she did to her King. This will cause great mourning until, and especially when, she sees her King coming in His Kingdom:

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his* only *son*, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for *his* firstborn.

“In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, ...

“And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart...” (Zechariah 12:10-12).

On the other hand, such mourning is not a characteristic of members of the Body of Christ.

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord” (Philippians 3:1).

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: *and* again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4).

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (Galatians 6:14).

“Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

This is clearly a quote from Psalm 37:11: “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

“But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth” (Isaiah 11:4). Meekness – patiently bearing the insults, persecutions, and rejection – is to be rewarded by inheritance of the earthly Kingdom.

On the other hand, the meek are certainly not inheriting the Kingdom now, nor is there any promise that believers today will do so in the future. There are no such earthly promises made to the Body of Christ. The believer today finds all reversed: our citizenship and home are in heaven. Paul declares:

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

“Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

Kingdom righteousness must be *obtained* – the *law* system. Hence late in the Sermon Christ declares:

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19).

On the other hand, the believer today may hunger and thirst for a more righteous walk with the Lord but we have *already obtained* and have been given “the righteousness of God in him” (II Corinthians 5:21) – that’s grace!

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

This is Kingdom law. Consider, for example, Psalm 18:24,25, where David declares:

“Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight.
“With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright.”

On the other hand, believers today receive mercy *by grace*, not by being merciful. Titus 3:5 tells us plainly: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.” Ephesians 2:4,5 asserts:

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,
“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)”

“Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Here is a kingdom promise! The truth is plainly stated in such passages as:

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?
He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully” (Psalm 24:3,4).

“The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

“He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;

“Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off” (Isaiah 33:14,15,17).

Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

The King is “the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6) and shall reign in righteousness and peace upon the earth. Those who promote His peace “shall be called the children of God” in His Kingdom.

On the other hand, believers today are *not* constituted children of God by any works, peace-making or otherwise. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26).

“Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10).

Again the issue is legal – suffering “for righteousness' sake” secures them a place in the Kingdom.

On the other hand, believers suffer with the Lord Jesus Christ and for *His* sake:

“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

“For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (II Corinthians 4:10,11).

“Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:11,12).

Here Christ speaks directly to the disciples – “blessed are ye.” Their “reward in heaven” will be brought to them when He returns to set up His kingdom on earth. Hear His words in Revelation 22:12 concerning that grand event:

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

These nine Beatitudes of the Kingdom are provisions with *legal conditions*. They are future blessings for those who will merit them by their own works.

On the other hand, for the believer today the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit of Christ is provided by grace as a present possession of his nature and life in Christ. Each is to be developed in our walk, growing from His life within.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, “Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22,23).