

Beatitudes

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Saint Mathew in Chapter 5 records The Sermon on the Mount. Saint Luke in Chapter 6 records a second similar teaching called the Sermon on the Plain. The Sermon on the Mount is beautiful poetry with a great spiritual meaning. The Sermon on the Mount describes the steps of spiritual growth.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The first step toward spiritual growth is to understand that we are poor in spirit and to become humble. Jeremiah said it like this, “The heart is deceitfully wicked, and who can know it.” Isaiah said it like this, “Our righteousness is as filthy rags.” The opposite of poor or humble in spirit might be proud in spirit. Pride, not being humble, is the beginning of most of the wrong moves in our lives. Many mistakes and sins are caused by the pride of life.

I was in a Korean Refinery doing a troubleshooting for a BTX Plant at Christmas Week in 2006. There was a quote on the wall in the Control Room. “Humility is the acknowledgment that your achievements are the results of the investments of others in your life.”

My brother Victor commented one time on how proud I was. At times each of us has been for more arrogant than we should be. I have always been very lucky when taking a test, and as a result I do well in academic standards, and this is a reason to be proud for the people who have invested in my life. It is not a reason to think mankind or I am somehow transforming into something good.

The World War 2 General Omar N. Bradley had a great quote. "Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount."

Physiologists have the five stages of grief. If you have a loss in your life, such as the death of a parent or a divorce, there are steps that one needs to progress to recover from the loss. It was introduced by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her 1969 book "On Death and Dying".

This has become well-known as the "Five Stages of Grief." They are:

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

The death of a love one can take many years to work through the five steps. I worked with a great gentleman Jack Standland for many years. His wife died of cancer. He said it did not make sense because it was not her fault, but he was angry at her for leaving him, and this was several years after her death.

When it comes to spiritual growth there are many people today in the denial stage. They assert that mankind is slowly improving and we can take pride within ourselves. I am 53 years old, and I wish I could say I have seen improvement. Maybe 53 years is not enough time, Isaiah wrote about 700 BC, and it seems even 3000 years is not enough time. The first step toward spiritual growth is to understand that mankind and I am poor in spirit and we become humble. We can only have the kingdom of heaven if we are humble.

2. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

When we understand that we are poor in spirit, we should automatically become repentant and mournful for our shortcomings. When we see the evil that men do to themselves and others, we should become sad. Men are not punished for their sins, but by their sins. Joseph when tempted replied I will not sin against myself. What is amazing is that many people do not see the harm they are doing to themselves and others. They are blinded by the world and its teachings.

I feel sad when I see people hurting themselves and others. I feel sad when I look back on the times in my life when I have punished myself. The second step toward spiritual growth is to be sorry for our failures and take time to mourn and repent.

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;

A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal;

A time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose;

A time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew;

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate;

A time of war, and a time of peace.

We can only have comfort or peace if we are repentant for our wrongs. Many people live uncomforted lives.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

When we become humble and repentant, we can then actually have a change in spirit. Meekness is gentle, and easy to be entreated. Meekness would rather suffer injury than inflict it, not out of weakness, but out of humility, realizing one's own poverty of spirit, one's own sinfulness

When we think of inheriting the earth we think of battles and self interest, not the meek. Gentleness or meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with their self interest at all. Meekness toward God is our spirit being willing to accept His dealings with us as good, without disputing or resisting.

In the Old Testament, the meek are those wholly relying on God rather than their own strength to defend them against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and that He will deliver His elect in His time.

The story is told of an older minister that was asked to interview a young minister to be a missionary. The older minister had him arrive at 5 AM. At 8 AM he went out and asked the young minister his name. He then asked him to add two plus two. For a last question he then asked him to spell cat. The older minister thanked him for his time and said he would send a report to the board.

He reported to the board that he thought this candidate had all the requirements to be a missionary. I first tested his promptness – I had him arrive at 5 AM. I then tested his patience – I make him wait for me till 8 AM. I then tested his humility – I asked him questions and eight year old could answer. I believe he as all the requirements to be a missionary – promptness, patience and humility.

The fruits of the Spirit of God are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness (or meekness) and self-control - against such things there is no law. To have our full birthright which is the earth – we must be humble, repentant, and gentle.

4. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

This beatitude uses the strong words hunger and thirst. Hunger and thirst refer to some of our most basic physical needs and desires. They are related to our very survival, so that they are not optional, and we cannot be nonchalant or indifferent about them. In a similar way, God's people hunger and thirst for personal righteousness. It is a basic need, and not just a preference.

To those who genuinely hunger and thirst for righteousness out of a regenerated heart, Jesus promises that they will be filled. Just as the righteous and the wicked desire opposite things, God has ordained opposite destinies for them:

"The desire of the righteous ends only in good, but the hope of the wicked only in wrath"
(Proverbs 11:23)

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

The beatitudes 1,2,3,4 and 6 discuss our relationship with God. Numbers 5, 7 and 8 discuss our relationship with our fellow man. Many people confuse grace and mercy. Grace deals with sin itself, and provides pardon from sin and guilt.

When a person works eight hours and receives pay for his time - that is called a wage.
When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy - that is called a prize.
When a person receives an appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements - that is called an award. When a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award - yet receives a gift anyway - that is called grace.

Mercy deals with the results or consequences of sin. Or to put it another way, grace is concerned with forgiveness of sin, while mercy is concerned with relief from the pain, alienation, misery, and distress that is caused by sin. An example of mercy is the Good Samaritan who possessed a loving attitude towards those in misery.

6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God

Many people may mourn over their sinfulness, but never reach pure in heart. One definition of pure in heart is a singleness of heart, with honesty which has no hidden motive, no selfish interest, and is true and open in all things.

If you give something, a present, expecting something in return, this is called a trade or barter not a gift. If you give something expecting nothing in return, this is called a gift.

Pure in heart refers to one who is sincere, honest, without hypocrisy. Such a quality is necessary to see God. This virtue grows out of our personal experience of the mercy of God.

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.

The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Many people may reach the stage of being meek, but not a peacemaker. This blessing is for those who actively make peaceful relationships happen.

"Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" Psalm 34:14."

Since peacemaking involves active interventions in difficult relational conflicts, and since it works against the sinful dispositions of man, it is not out of weakness, but a spiritual strength by which the peacemaker overcomes evil with goodness and wisdom. True peace comes by satisfying divine justice, not by ignoring it. Peace does not imply a passive acceptance or tolerance, but an active role in making things right. This also means that peacemaking can often be very costly.

If you are struggling with step number 3 (meekness) or step number 6 (pure in heart) your chances of being a peacemaker will be small. If you approach a difficult relationship with aggressiveness and hidden motives most people will see through you.

The beatitude says that the peacemakers will be called "the sons of God". This refers to adoption, whereby God establishes a relationship with those whom he has chosen, but it is also an expression in which to be the "sons of" someone means to bear the likeness or the characteristic of someone.

If you are not a peacemaker you are not following the likeness of God. God commands Christians to live in peace among themselves. However, Christians seldom live in perfect harmony because they are still sinful people living in a sinful world. Therefore, even Christians can sometimes be selfish, contentious, and even dishonest.

8. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

One might think that the world would readily welcome those described by these beatitudes. Surely no one in his right mind would hate or oppose those who are humble, merciful and pure in heart. But the righteous and their message will contrast against the wicked who will not tolerate being exposed and embarrassed by righteous people. It is easy to continue in wickedness if there is not good example. Christians are to be the salt of the earth, to set the example of righteous living.

To be;

1. Humble - Blessed are the poor in spirit
2. Repentant - Blessed are they that mourn
3. Gentle - Blessed are the meek
4. Righteous - Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness
5. Merciful - Blessed are the merciful
6. No selfish interest - Blessed are the pure in heart
7. Peacemaker - Blessed are the peacemakers
8. The Salt of the Earth - Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake

General References

1. Vincent Cheung, Sermon on the Mount
2. Mark A Copeland, Sermon on the Mount, Topical Sermon Series