

S e r m o n s o n
Matthew

The Beatitudes

Part 2

Matthew 5:1-12

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
4/4/2004*

The Beatitudes

Part 2

Matthew 5:1-12

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.² Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.¹¹ Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:1-12).

Annuals or Perennials?

My wife enjoys making our home cozy and attractive. One of her hobbies is gardening. Once she planted a beautiful garden but within months the plants and flowers began to fade and die. I asked her why. She informed me that the plants were *annuals*. Later she planted another garden. These plants, although they would occasionally fade, did not die but re-blossomed. I asked her why. She informed me that these plants were *perennials*.

By outward observation I couldn't tell the difference between the annuals and the perennials. Similarly, by outward observation, people seem to have a difficult time distinguishing between the true kingdom of God and false religion. One might walk into a churchish building and observe some form of religiosity. There may be large numbers and great fervor and commitment. But is that which is taking place more similar to an annual or to a perennial?

Gamaliel made this same observation in dealing with the apostles.

And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men.³⁶ For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing.³⁷ After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed.³⁸ And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing;³⁹ but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God" (Acts 5:35-39).

Church Growth According to Jesus

At a time when the nature and advancement of the kingdom of God was grossly misunderstood by the religious leaders (and, therefore by those under their care), Jesus

preaches a sermon about the kingdom. He teaches about the nature of it, the nature of its citizens, and the blessings attached to it.

One might call the Sermon on the Mount a church growth sermon *par excellence*; after all, how many church growth programs promise the inheritance of the whole earth? What we learn from Jesus regarding the kingdom is that it is more akin to a perennial than an annual.

Salvation and Naturalization

The preaching of God's word and administration of His sacraments are the means by which God intervenes in and interacts with His kingdom. These actions are designed as a means of producing two things: 1) Genuine saints. Faith comes by hearing the preached word (Romans 10:17) so we can trust that God, by His Spirit, will save souls when sermons are heard. He brings in new citizens. 2) Godly attributes. We might call this a sort of heavenly *naturalization*. When a person becomes a citizen of a country they're naturalized; that is, they learn the language, the laws, the culture, the constitution, etc. These unifying factors form a strong nation.

Similarly, when people become a citizen of the kingdom of God, God promises to put His Spirit "**within [them] and cause [them] to walk in [His] statutes, and...keep [His] judgments and do them**" (Ezekiel 36:27).

All this to say that the Sermon on the Mount, among other things, is a sermon which informs members of the kingdom of God how to live in such a way as to form a perennial kingdom which floods the earth with untold and manifold blessings.

The life to which Christians are called is, in many respects, counter-culture and counter-intuitive. Jesus appears to call us to be just the opposite of what our human nature demands. We are to be poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking, and those who rejoice when persecuted.

Poor, Mournful, Meek

As we learned previously, instead of being comfortable with our spirituality, we are to realize that we are *spiritually destitute*—as beggars we plead for spiritual food and Christ grants us His own flesh as the Bread of Life thus making us rich citizens of His kingdom.

We are called to mourn our spiritual destitution. Christians should continually mourn, for we are ever dependant upon our Savior. The branches never become so ripe or viable that they have no need for the vine. We should also mourn for our fellow man for we live in a fallen world full of unclean lips. We should seek to bring the kingdom near that the lost might have life as well.

The inheritance of the earth goes to those who are *meek*. This is not to be confused with weak or feeble. Vine's definition bears repeating:

Meek is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting; it must be clearly understood, therefore, that the meekness manifested by the Lord and commended to the believer is the fruit of power. The common assumption is that when a man is meek it is because he cannot help himself; but the Lord was "meek" because he had the infinite resources of God at His command. Described negatively, meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is equanimity (calmness) of

spirit that is neither elated nor cast down, simply because it is not occupied with self at all.¹

We now continue our examination of the beatitudes.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6).

At least in this case the blessing is bestowed, not upon the righteous, but upon those who *hunger* and *thirst* for righteousness. By its very definition to be hungry or thirsty for something means you don't have it. In contrast to the Pharisees, who appeared to be quite content with their own behavior, Christ's kingdom is inhabited by those who live in constant awareness of their need for righteousness. As we spoke of earlier, this includes both the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ.

The promise accompanying this attribute is that they shall be *filled*—literally *to feed, to fatten*. The meal of righteousness served to the Christian is a never-ending meal. Perhaps the small portions we utilize in our partaking of the Lord's Supper do not adequately represent the fullness promised. The hungry person comes to the table and eats. The fullness in his stomach reminds him that the meal represents the complete satisfaction of righteousness. But the human, sinful creature will soon be hungry again—hence the command of our Savior to provide the meal until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26). Woe to the church—woe to the Christian who comfortably neglects the table of the Lord. Are they truly hungry?

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

One of the righteous attributes Christians are to seek (one many of us fall dismally short of) is the attribute of being merciful. James writes,

For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy (James 2:13a).

James tells us that our responsibility to show mercy is so wrapped up in our faith that to be remiss in this means that we will receive judgment without mercy. I believe what James is telling us here is that any Christian who truly grasps, even to the slightest degree, the mercy that God has shown them in Christ, must evidence that by showing similar mercy to others.

Of course, just like any other work, our ability to achieve a genuinely merciful disposition will be retarded by our very natures. But it should be there nonetheless. And if a merciful disposition is not evident in the life of a Christian, he is revealing a lack of understanding of the grace extended to him and the price paid for him. This lack of understanding is so dangerous that the person may be evidencing his own exclusion from God's grace.

Jesus dedicated an entire parable to this in Matthew 18:21-35 but He sums it up quite neatly in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. It is important to point out that we don't earn God's mercy by being merciful to others. We must not read this verse "blessed are the merciful for they have earned mercy." We don't merit mercy by being merciful. Our exercise of mercy demonstrates that we realize we are citizens in a kingdom of mercy.

We must ask ourselves in what kingdom do we wish to tarry. In terms of our personal dispositions toward others do we wish to demand justice, judgment, and full payment before we render our good favor? Or will we tarry in the field of mercy—giving it and receiving it?

¹ Vine, W. E. (1996). *Vine's complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words* (Vol. 2, Page 401). Nashville: T. Nelson.

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

Ponder the Pharisees who, perhaps, listening at a distance, could feel these words penetrating their duplicitous hearts; for being man-pleasers was at the core of their religious devotion (Matthew 6:2).

Jesus pronounces His blessing upon those who seek God in *sincerity* of heart; their devotion is un-mixed. They are not two-faced. Members of this kingdom devote their lives to embracing their new citizenship and eradicating the vestiges of their former citizenship. Perplexing it is when people leave their country to inhabit another country then seek to raise the flag of the country they abandoned.

In Christ's kingdom one does not seek to wave the flag of Rome or the banner of secularism. The only terms for this peace are an utter repudiation of our former allegiances. Do I raise my children according to Christ or Freud or Spock? Do I determine my business ethics according to Christ or Carnegie or Napoleon Hill? Are my politics determined by Christ or Marx or Dewey? Do I determine truth via Christ or Aristotle or Hume?

The only way Christ's kingdom can become a blessing to Rome, or any other nation, to secular thinkers, or any other pagans, is to abandon all affections toward those worldviews and serve but one Master. Jesus, in this same sermon, will teach,

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other (Matthew 6:24).

In the context of a kingdom or church where Christ is presented in an un-amalgamated manner, He will be *seen*. Perhaps now in a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12), but He will be seen nonetheless.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9).

How does one reconcile the commission to be a peacemaker with what immediately follows, which is a clear prediction of all the persecutions accompanying what appears to be dissident (rebellious) behavior? Add this to the words of Jesus later in Matthew.

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34).

Paul perhaps clarifies matters for us when he writes,

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18).

Implicit in these words is the recognition that at times it is not possible to live peaceably. Occasionally the physician must cut to heal. Peace at all costs is not peace at all, but merely the calm before the storm. Ignoring fundamental differences is not being peace-making, it is mere procrastination.

In California we have occasional tremors. I am told that these small tremors are the shifting of tectonic plates. These plates are side-by-side landmasses moving in opposite directions. I am also told that these minor tremors are good. For if the landmasses do not continually make these minor adjustments they will build up their forces for the Big One.

Christians should never think they're being peaceful by avoiding the issues. There will never be genuine peace among men until there is peace with God. And peace with God comes by Christ and by Him alone. This message can be both stirring and offensive. But it is the only effective surgery.

True *Sons of God* continually reveal who their true father is.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:10-12).

Apparently the stark contrast between the kingdoms of men and the kingdom of God will not be winked at by men. There will be conflict. The first dose of medication is not sufficient to heal the disease. The battle rages between the infection and the cure. In the early stages of treatment it appears that the cure is no match for the disease; the first missionaries entering an un-evangelized culture are often martyred. But, like at Normandy, they just keep coming. And eventually Christ's kingdom prevails.

It's been said that a man's integrity can be measured by the character of his enemies. Jesus seeks to bring solace—even more He calls Christians to be exceedingly glad—because of the great reward bestowed upon those who take rank with the prophets rather than those who are wise in their own eyes.

We see very little persecution in our current culture but there are many tremors. I fear we, like many Californians during a small earthquake, are merely sleeping through them. We forget our citizenship, we ignore our constitution and in doing so forsake our King. May we, with a whole heart, pursue those attributes that cause Christ's kingdom to be a perennial kingdom. And may this bring honor to the king.

Questions for Study

1. Is the kingdom of God to be thought of as an annual or perennial kingdom? Explain (pages 1, 2)?
2. What do the preaching of God's word and administration of His sacraments produce (page 2)?
3. How are the beatitudes counter-culture or counter-intuitive (page 2)?
4. For what should Christians hunger and thirst? Why (page 3)?
5. How is this hunger satisfied (page 3)?
6. It sounds as if being merciful is a prerequisite for receiving mercy. Is this true? Explain (pages 3, 4).
7. What does it mean to be pure in heart (page 4)?
8. In what respects does someone see God (page 4)?
9. If Jesus came to bring peace, why did He say He came to bring a sword (page 5)?
10. How is true peace attained (page 5)?
11. What kind of response should Christians expect from an unbelieving world (page 5)?