

LESSON I: INTRODUCTION & THE BEATITUDES (PART I)

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Today you are going to hear the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher that ever lived! Certainly, not me! **3** Today, we are going to begin studying Jesus' sermon recorded in Matthew 5-7 commonly referred to as the "*Sermon on the Mount*" (Lk. 6:20-38; 11 & 12).
2. **4** If you have never studied the *Sermon on the Mount* you are in for a rich experience.
 - (1) This sermon is a real "eye-opening" experience.
 - (2) It is extremely valuable:
 - (a) Serves as a self-examination tool (2 Cor. 13:5; Jas. 1:21-25).
 - (b) In sharing the gospel with others because it describes the mindset of the people God is seeking with the gospel (**Lk. 8:15**: "*good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.*").
 - (3) As we begin this series of studies I beg your prayers on my behalf (Jas. 1:5) and I beg all of you to study and pray for yourselves and examine yourselves (Acts 17:11; 2 Cor. 13:5).
3. **5** Amazingly this wonderful sermon has been the "lightening rod" of much opposition:
 - A. ****** Friedrich W. Nietzsche (pronounced: *neat-chu*) (German philosopher, 1844-1900) called the teachings and ethics of Jesus as the "most malignant form of all falsehood."
 - B. ****** George Bernard Shaw (English philosopher and playwright, 1856-1950) commenting on this very sermon said, "It is an impractical outburst of anarchy and sentimentality."
 - C. ****** John Herman Randall (American philosopher, pragmatist, religionist, 1899-1980) said this concerning Jesus' Mountain sermon, "Certainly the words of a Galilean carpenter could not be the last statement of human ethics." (His statement so accurately portrays the humanistic/liberal view of modern thought be it so-called "Christian" denominationalism or modern "enlightened" society.)
4. Arguably to the general public and those involved in denominationalism; and sadly, many in the Lord's church; the *Sermon on the Mount* is the most widely known, least understood, and certainly the least followed of all the teachings of Jesus.
5. However, I can stand before you today and say with all confidence that what Jesus says in this sermon is at the very core of **EVERY** teaching contained in New Testament.

"Though I have tried at times to dismiss it [the sermon on the Mount] as rhetorical excess, the more I study Jesus, the more I realize that the statements contained here lie at the heart of his message. If I fail to understand this teaching, I fail to understand him." (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 105)

II. DISCUSSION:

1. **6** Context: To understand the message Jesus preaches in the *Sermon on the Mount* it is an absolute necessity to briefly examine the context.
 - A. Delivered in the 2nd year of Jesus' earthly ministry; the year of His greatest popularity.
 - (1) In less than two short years the kingdom of God prophesied in the Old Testament (Isa. 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-2; Dan. 2:44) will burst on the scene (Mk. 9:1; Acts 2; Col. 1:13).
 - (2) And, as the time for the coming of that kingdom approaches Jesus begins His preaching: **Matt. 4:17**: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*"

- B. Due to the nonsense preached by the popular preachers of the day; the people's own worldly-mindedness, and their lack of understanding of God's word; the people did not possess the correct concept of the Messiah or of His kingdom (Jn. 6:15; Acts 1:6).
- C. Times have not changed!
- (1) Modern preaching has turned the radical revolutionary doctrine of Christ into nothing more than "modern civility"; "be a good boy"; "stay out of jail and be halfway decent to people"; and "oh, by the way there is something in there about loving somebody."
 - (2) Also, in our study; many times, we will note a stark contrast between the *Sermon on the Mount* and the "feel good" sermons and religious/self-help books of today.
- D. What Jesus has to say here is the exact opposite of "Me! Me! Me! Make me feel good!" ** The whole sermon revolves around the questions that would naturally be raised in response to Jesus' statement in **Matt. 4:17**: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
- E. **7** This sermon is about the changes needed for one to become suitable for citizenship in God's kingdom (Jn. 18:36; **Lk. 17:21**: "For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."). ** **The change Jesus describes is internal, but it is: Radical, Total, Absolute**
- F. I would suggest the change Jesus is describing versus what most so-called "Christian" denominations preach is like comparing clipping your fingernails with open heart surgery!
- "Almost all of the so-called 'ministry' of this generation feeds pride, instead of starving the flesh; puffs up, rather than abases; and anything which is calculated to search and strip is frowned upon by the pulpit and is unpopular in the pew." (A. W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 16)
- G. Why? Because the *Sermon on the Mount* reflects the central theme of the Bible: **God wants a **special people** for Himself! (Ex. 6:7; 19:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:9-10) Hence, the *Sermon on the Mount* describes the characteristics of God's *special people* (all spiritual in nature!):
- ☛ **His people are going to go directly against the grain of popular culture.**
 - ☛ **His people will not ebb and flow with the tide of the majority opinion.**
 - ☛ **His people don't float downstream with the rest of society, they swim upstream against the current of what everyone else is thinking and doing.**
- H. Therefore, Jesus is saying in this sermon, "If you want to be a citizen of God's kingdom; if you want to be one of God's special people with all of its attendant blessings you're going to have to be radically different!" (Ex. 19:5; Jn. 10:1-18)
- I. Israel ceased being God's people (Matt. 23 & 24) because they ceased being different (Psa. 106:13, 21, 28, 35, 39-40).
- (1) We must realize if we are asking to be Christians we are asking to be a different kind of people...**radically, totally, and absolutely different** (Jn. 3:3-5; 2 Cor. 6:17; Lk. 9:23).
 - (2) And, it will be God through His Son that will determine what we will be, not what we think or what man teaches! (Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 3:17, 1 Pet. 4:11)
- J. I cannot stress this enough...the type of people Jesus is telling us we must be in this sermon is not ordinary, but extraordinary!
- (1) His people are not just doing what "decent, upstanding" people do!
 - (2) He is talking open heart surgery not a manicure!
- K. If you want to be a better person, a better citizen of your community, a better husband/wife; a better father/mother go "join the church of your choice"...most denominations will do that

for you! **But if you want salvation there is only one place to come!** (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:19-23; Eph. 5:23; 4:4; Col. 1:13)

- L. So, as we turn to the text itself let us ever remember the foundation upon which this sermon is built: **Matt. 4:17**: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
- (1) As we study, let us always remember that Jesus is telling us exactly the kind of people that are going to be accepted into the kingdom of God.
 - (2) He is describing for us kingdom citizen’s attitudes toward themselves, toward God, toward other people, and toward “things.”
 - (3) And, in the process, he will give us all a LOT TO THINK ABOUT! **Matt. 7:28-29**: “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”
- M. **8** Also, as we begin I want to make it perfectly clear that the type of person Jesus is describing here is not some sort of “Super-Christian.”
- (1) He is describing what **EVERY** Christian **MUST** be.
 - (2) Neither is He describing a *smorgasbord* of characteristics/attitudes from which each of us are free to pick and choose only those that suit us.
 - (3) We must pick **ALL** or **NONE**!
2. **9** *Introduction to the Beatitudes (5:1-12)*: Jesus begins His sermon with a series of startling paradoxes which at first glance appear to most to be nothing more than nonsensical “gibberish.”
- A. To understand the beatitudes, we must first understand the nature of His kingdom (Jn. 18:36; Rom. 14:17; **Lk. 17:21**: “*For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.*” Submission to God’s rule!). Once we understand that we can grasp the two primary goals of the beatitudes:
- (1) ****** Foundational qualities of mind that must characterize every citizen of His kingdom.
 - (a) They describe the only frame of mind in which a man or woman can be converted.
 - (b) Conversion totally impossible without **choosing** to possess these attitudes of mind!
 - (2) **10** The attitudes Jesus describes in the beatitudes are also *predictive* in nature; for they describe the only type of person that will be truly *satisfied* in the Messianic kingdom.
 - (3) These attitudes will either **attract** those whose hearts are seeking God’s will or **repel** those who will not submit to God’s will (Lk. 8:4-15; 2 Thess. 2:10-12).
- B. **11** To understand the beatitudes, it is critical to understand the word *blessed*. In each of the 8 beatitudes Jesus describes an attitude/characteristic that brings to its possessor *blessedness*.
- C. What is *blessedness*?
- (1) ****** The Greek word translated *blessed* in the beatitudes is *makarios* (btw: *beatitudes* comes from the Latin word for *blessed*).
 - (2) **12** Some popular modern translations have translated *makarios* as *happy*. But to express the condition Jesus is telling us about as *happy* is totally inadequate.
 - (3) **13** *Happiness* arises from what “happens to you” (i.e., a pleasurable or satisfying experience); thus, *happiness* arises from *external* circumstances. If you remove the external circumstances that produced *happiness*; *happiness* is no longer maintained.
 - (4) ****** *Blessedness*, on the other hand, is something quite different than *happiness*.
 - (a) It certainly refers to one who is thriving, prosperous, and in a good condition.

- (b) The difference in blessedness versus happiness is the source of the condition.
- (c) ** Happiness comes from circumstances outside of us that produces a feeling within us (external conditions producing an internal state).
- (d) ** Blessedness has nothing to do with external circumstances; blessedness arises from internal conditions (internal condition producing an internal state).
- (e) Blessedness is a spiritual quality of inner joy, peace, contentment, and well-being that is entirely **independent** of our outside circumstances (what is happening to us) (cf. Job 1:20-22; 2:9-10; **Phil. 4:11**: “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.”; Acts 16:25; 2 Cor. 4:16-5:1)
- (f) To the Greeks *makarios* was a quality so wonderful it was available only to the “gods.”
 “...there is more to blessedness than happiness. In the world, the basis for happiness is happenings; but in the kingdom, it is a right relationship with God (Ps. 33:12). Secular happiness is an emotional state contingent on circumstances; Christian blessedness is rooted in character. This fact makes possible a life that is radiant and complete, despite outer turmoil (7.24-25). (K. L. Chumley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 83-84)
- (g) Thus, Jesus says blessedness is a quality of life achievable by those **willing to choose** eight specific characteristics of mind that are in direct opposition to the conventional wisdom of the world.

The world says: **

“Happy are the ‘pushers’: for they get on in the world. Happy are the hard-boiled: for they never let life hurt them. Happy are they who complain: for they get their own way in the end. Happy are the blasé: for they never worry over their sins. Happy are the slave drivers: for they get results. Happy are the knowledgeable men of the world: for they know their way around. Happy are the troublemakers: for they make people take notice of them.” (Phillips, *When God Was Man*, p. 26-27)

14 But, Jesus says: Matt. 5:3-12:

- 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.
- 15 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.

16 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.’”

- C. To understand and apply the beatitudes we must take them as a complete unit (cf. Gal. 5:22-23; 2 Pet. 1:5-7: *faith*→*virtue*→*knowledge*→*self-control*→*perseverance*→*godliness*→*brotherly kindness*→*love*).
- (1) They mutually dependent to make a complete, well-functioning citizen of God's kingdom.
 - (2) For example, we cannot mourn until we become poor in spirit.
 - (3) We cannot become truly meek until we empty ourselves of ourselves (poor in spirit) and are brought to our knees over our own sins (mourn).

D. And again, I cannot stress this point enough:

"The Beatitudes are neither the description of a 'Super-Christian' nor a set of elite qualities for the spiritual aristocracy. It is rather the description of common folk in the kingdom of God." (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 2)

3. **17** *The Beatitudes (5:1-12)*: Let us now examine each of the beatitudes in order. But as we look at these eight characteristics/attitudes also let each of us look in the mirror to see if we are fit for the kingdom of God (2 Cor. 13:5; Jas. 1:21-25).

A. **Interjection**: Before we begin, let me digress for just a moment. I want us to notice the manner of Jesus' preaching here (**Matt. 5:1-2**: "*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:*"). Notice...

- ☛ No theatrics involved!
- ☛ Jesus doesn't run to and fro on a stage using wild gestures!
- ☛ Although the exact manner of voice He used is not fully revealed, the text does simply say that, "...He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:"
- ☛ Therefore, I cannot imagine Him employing the tactics so many preachers of today (i.e., One second their voice is barely above a whisper, the next moment they are shouting at the top of their lungs!).
- ☛ The focus is where it should be: On the message, not the messenger! (**1 Cor. 2:1-5**: "*And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*"; 2 Tim. 4:1-4; L. Ron Hubbard, 'cult of personality')
- ☛ I'm confident there were times when Jesus raised His voice (**Matt. 23**; cf. **Isa. 58:1**: "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet"; **Ezek. 6:11**: "*Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Pound your fists and stamp your feet, and say, 'Alas, for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! For they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.'*") and He certainly used gestures/visual aids (**Jn. 8:8**: "*And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.*"). However, our emphasis must ever be on the **message** and not the messenger! Our emphasis should not be on some slick method of presenting!
- ☛ As we begin examining the beatitudes it is critical we all look in the mirror! Jas. 1:21-25
- (1) ****** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3)

- (a) ** The word Jesus uses here for poor is the same word used in the NT for *beggar*: “an adjective describing one who crouches and cowers”, “i.e., poverty-stricken, powerless to enrich...” (Vine)
- (b) So, who is Jesus saying is *blessed* here? Is Jesus saying that it is a blessing to be financially poor? No, the type of poverty of which He speaks is a *spiritual* poverty.
 “There is no virtue (and often no disgrace) in financial poverty as such, nor does it, of itself, produce humility of heart, for anyone who has any real acquaintance with both classes soon discovers there is just as much pride in the indigent as there is in the opulent.” (A. W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 16)
- (c) The person Jesus is describing is *acutely aware* of his/her spiritual poverty and the fact that on their own they are completely helpless, completely powerless to do anything about it! (Rom. 3:10-23; 6:23; 1 Tim. 1:15)
- (d) Like a beggar, they are completely dependent upon the good will of another (i.e., God) to improve their spiritual condition. They have a deep realization of the fact that they are spiritually bankrupt. (Lk. 18:9-14; Pharisee v. tax collector; “*would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’*”; **Matt. 18:3**: “*Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*”)

**“Jesus affirmed that those are well-off who know they are spiritually bankrupt. Those who have plumbed the depths of their heart and found nothing of their own doing of any value are the ones who truly will be happy. Those who desire citizenship in the kingdom of heaven and want to remain citizens need to see themselves as sinners condemned to a devil’s hell and unable to escape the wrath of a just God.” (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 2-3)

**“The poor in spirit do not rely on themselves, money, education, natural abilities, or morality. Instead they submit to God to become what they can by his grace (see 1 Cor. 15:10). Jesus called on his disciples to empty themselves first, then come to him for filling! There is no room for God’s filling if a disciple is full of himself!” (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 3)

(e) **18 Notable examples:**

- ☛ ***Daniel*: **Dan. 9:3-19**
- ☛ ***Pentecostians*: Acts 2 (esp. **v. 37**: “*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’*”).
- ☛ ***Ethiopian eunuch*: Acts 8:26-39 (esp. **v. 36**: “*Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’*”).
- ☛ ***Cornelius*: Acts 10 (esp. **v. 33**: “*So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.*”).
- ☛ ***Philippian jailor*: Acts 16 (esp. **vv. 29-30**: “*Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’*”).

19**Note in each case those that are *poor in spirit* not only realize their *spiritual* bankruptcy; they also are *totally* submissive to God’s will! No quibbles! No excuses! No procrastination!

- (f) *Poor in spirit* is something we **ARE**...it continues throughout our life! We should never get to the point we can forget our spiritual bankruptcy and our need for total submissiveness to God's word! (cf. 1 Sam. 3:10: Samuel ever ready to serve the Lord.; "Speak, for thy servant heareth."); [**One who quibbles, makes excuses, procrastinates, etc. has not come to grips with his spiritual bankruptcy!**] 1 Tim. 1:13-15: "although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.").
- (g) There is no place in God's kingdom for the self-sufficient or self-righteous who have not come to grips with, or who have forgotten, their total spiritual bankruptcy. Nor will those find blessedness in the kingdom who place their own "think-so's" on an equal or elevated level above a "What saith the Scripture" (Matt. 7:21-23; Rev. 3:17-19).
- ****"But why admit only the humble into the kingdom? They are the only ones who were seeking it! The proud, self-righteous, and self-important [self-sufficient and self-absorbed, cvt] person is not suited for the kingdom. He will not be looking for it and would not be happy if he found it." (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 3-4)

III. CONCLUSION: 20

1. Have you come to grips with your spiritual poverty? Ignoring it? Forgotten about it? Don't care?
 3. Do you realize that spiritually you are a total beggar? Do you realize that we have absolutely nothing, deserve absolutely nothing, and have absolutely no claim to any spiritual blessings? Until we realize this and **ARE** this, there is no room in the kingdom for us!
- Isa. 66:2b:** "...But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word."
4. God in His abundant mercy and grace "...has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," (Eph. 1:3). Do you see your need? Only the "poor in spirit" will receive these blessings!
 5. Invitation (Matt. 11:28-30)

IV. REFERENCES:

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