

Follow Jesus – Your Blessed Life NOW!

2/4/18 - Pastor Randy

Today we are going to begin a journey through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount; the title that the church has given to the lengthiest recorded teaching of Jesus in the gospels. Our mission at Calvary Church is to "learn, live, and share the good news of Jesus". This sermon series which I have entitled "FOLLOW JESUS" is designed to help us fulfill our mission; **learning** the principles that Jesus has instructed us to **live** by now that God has, *"rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins."* (Colossians 1:13,14)

The Sermon on the Mount is set against the background of Jesus' announcement that the Kingdom of God had arrived through Him (See 4:17 & 4:23). It needs to be read with the understanding that the principles it expresses are directed at Jesus' disciples, those who belong to the Kingdom of God (See 4:17 & 4:23). The Kingdom of God - most often referred to by Matthew as the Kingdom of Heaven - is referred to 8 times in Jesus' sermon. Jesus was not instructing his disciples with a new set of laws to follow. He was imparting to them wisdom to be applied so that they would live lives that fulfilled God's moral vision for His people.

To enter the Kingdom of God is to come under the Lordship of Jesus. As citizens of the kingdom of God, we don't have the right to act like those who are not citizens. The character, or nature, of the future kingdom and our hope in its certain arrival motivates God's people to begin to live like that now.

For the past few weeks God has reminded us that the greatest gift He has given us is the gift of the person of the Holy Spirit who has now come to dwell in us and empower us. Remember: This gift is the greatest gift because it is God giving Himself to us! The empowering presence of the Holy Spirit makes living out the sermon on the mount possible.

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Matthew 5:1-12

"Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And 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 satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive 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 others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Beatitudes: Your Blessed Life Now!

The Beatitudes is the name given to the list of statements by Jesus that begin with the phrase, "Blessed are".

What does it mean to be "blessed"?

To be blessed is to be fortunate, honored, privileged. Although the word 'happy' can be a translation of this Greek word it doesn't really capture the meaning. Being blessed is a condition, not an emotion. You can be happy but not blessed. However, happiness is the result of knowing you are blessed.

In Jesus day, not unlike our day, a person's social status and material prosperity was the metric used to determine how blessed he or she was. In the scriptures, the blessed person is the person who is fortunate because he or she is the object of God's favor, living in God's presence, under God's authority and provision as a member of His Kingdom.

These statements we call the beatitudes were not intended to provide

instruction as to how a person can be blessed and receive the future kingdom. Jesus was not giving his disciples a list of virtues and behaviors to pursue. Some of these are descriptions of the virtuous; the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, and those who hunger for righteousness. But suffering grief and being persecuted are not virtues to be pursued. The beatitudes are pronouncements or declarations intended to encourage people who are doing these God's way but not receiving the world's blessing in the present. Jesus encourages them by saying, I have come, the kingdom of God has arrived and guess what? It is not reserved for the pious, the privileged, the powerful, or the popular. It is available to those who are poor in spirit, who are grieving, who are humble, who hunger for righteousness, who are merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemaker, and the persecuted.

There is something very important about the pronouncement by Jesus that these persons are blessed. They are blessed both by what is happening to them now in the present and what will happen for them in the future. There is both a present and future aspect to the kingdom with present and future benefits.

In the first and the eighth beatitude Jesus exclaimed that the kingdom IS theirs! Right now, because you are my disciples, you are in God's favor, living in God's presence, under God's authority and under His provision as a member of His Kingdom. Sandwiched in between the first and eighth are six beatitudes that announce a future reward for those who have followed Jesus into the kingdom. They are blessed because of what is coming their way.

Have you seen the recent commercial for the Pennsylvania lottery? This woman is running around the office so excited about the potential \$3 million prize, that her co-worker thinks she must have won. She celebrates like she has won before she even scratched off her number! The ad ends with this statement: "Sometimes the moments before you scratch are as exciting as the moments you do. Not "sometimes", almost every time!" And the moments "before" are not "as exciting", they are way more exciting. This is what makes gambling so insidiously destructive. It generates intense excitement over a promise that it doesn't deliver. The commercial suggests

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that the excitement of playing is worth it whether you win lose. No, not really. Even though the lottery constantly entices people with a false hope, the situation for those who embrace Jesus as the door into the kingdom of God are offered a real hope, a certain hope, the hope of an incomparable inheritance that in Peter's words, *"is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* (1 Peter 1:4,5)

Jesus is saying to his disciples that his kingdom is eternal and the benefits of the kingdom that is yet to come are absolutely so certain that our future inheritance can be described as if it is already ours in the present. At the same time Jesus followers live with an eternal perspective. They don't live for short term gratification but long-term sanctification. That means we value holiness over happiness. We can endure weeping for a night, because we know joy comes in the morning.

So let's look at the character and experiences of those who Jesus pronounced a blessing upon.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit & the meek.

These two are related in that they each describe a person who is humble at heart. The meaning of the phrase "poor in spirit" has been the subject of much debate. Some suggest that it means those who are downcast in spirit due to the experience of oppression. Others see the phrase as identifying those who, aware of their sin, view themselves as spiritually helpless, in need of God. These two ideas may both have been in Jesus mind. In either case the state of blessedness is pronounced on those who find themselves in a position of utter dependency upon God. When Jesus was criticized for eating and spending time "with tax collectors and sinners" Jesus response was *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."* In Matthew 21 Jesus said the tax collectors and prostitutes were entering the kingdom ahead of the pious religious leaders. Not because the tax collectors and prostitutes were more virtuous, but because they recognized they had no virtue in themselves and needed God. In Luke 14 the crippled, the blind, and the poor end up in the Kingdom instead of the religiously observant Jews for the same reason. When you have nothing you discover you need God for

everything.

The poor in spirit are those who are humble in their relationship with God. The meek are not weak people. They are people who refuse to join the world's way of stepping on people, using and abusing people in order to get ahead in life. They are humble in their relationships with others. These people may at times appear weak to ungodly people because they are unwilling to manipulate, exploit, and push their way to the top at the expense of others. That is not weakness. That is the strength that comes from humility.

One of Jesus key axioms was that God will exalt the humble and humble the exalted.

2. Blessed are those who mourn and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

As I said earlier, mourning is not a virtue. Jesus was certainly not commending cry babies and those who weep every time they don't get their way. His words in John 14 have essentially the same meaning when he said, "In this world you will have tribulation, but be encouraged, I have overcome the world." You might be weeping now, experiencing the sorrows and hurts of a corrupt world full of sin, evil, violence, sickness, pain, and death...but Jesus has come to bring comfort in the present, and He is coming again to conquer all evil and remove all physical and spiritual corruption from his creation. The similarity between the mourners and those who hunger for righteousness is that they are both pained by the brokenness and evil in the world. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed because those hunger pains are about to be satisfied by Jesus. He invites us to become citizens of God's kingdom whereby God's rule is established in our hearts and our hunger for personal righteousness begins to be satisfied by the Holy Spirit. In addition, we have a sure eternal promise of the new heavens and earth where righteousness dwells and sin is no more - in us or around us!

3. Blessed are the merciful and peacemakers

The merciful are those who follow Jesus example and extend mercy and forgiveness to those who have hurt them. Some people mock those who forsake vengeance and choose instead to forgive. The world thinks the

blessed person is the person who does unto others before they can do unto them. But the real blessing is in being able to overcome the evil that others do to you rather than being overcome by it and turned into an evildoer yourself. Peacemakers strive to create peace and attempt to reconcile things and people that are at odds with one another. Our God is the great reconciler and those who work towards real reconciliation are those who are blessed because they reflect the glory of their almighty, glorious creator. Peacekeepers, on the other hand, strive to keep peace at all costs. Solomon, in Proverbs 10:10 (NLT), says, "People who wink at wrong cause trouble, but a bold reproof promotes peace." Peacekeepers, by not acknowledging wrongdoings in an effort to maintain peace, are actually winking at them. Peacekeepers and peacemakers can actually be considered complete opposites of one another.

You might be keeping quiet, but you aren't keeping peace. The merciful and the peacemaker are both committed to reconciliation, the heart of the gospel!

4. Blessed are the persecuted.

If there is anyone who doesn't feel blessed it is the person experiencing persecution such as insults, false accusations, threats and even physical attacks. But if we are persecuted because we have done what is pleasing to God, because we have taken a stand humbly yet firmly for truth and justice and righteousness, then we are blessed, no matter what others do to us or say about us. Jesus says if you are persecuted for the same reason I was persecuted, be encouraged! Jesus says, "That is evidence that you and I are one, and there is no better place to be than in unity with me!"

Let me close with my definition of the blessed person based on Jesus words. The blessed person is the person who is fortunate because he or she is the object of God's favor, living in God's presence, under God's authority and provision as a member of His Kingdom. He or she is further blessed because they have the sure hope of an eternal inheritance from God their Father.

For those of us who have accepted Christ as our Savior-King, our blessed life begins now!!

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