

THE BEATITUDES

A General Introduction

INTRO: Because of the circumstances we find ourselves in at present, I thought I would shift gears and do some messages on the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. This passage has been a great encouragement to me over the past year or so, and I thought it might be that to you as well. I shared a little of this with the young people last summer. Turn with me this morning to Matthew chapter 5 (read 1-3). Nine times in verses 1-12, the word 'blessed' occurs. From that word we get the word 'beatitudes' and we will look more closely at this word later. For the next while, and it will take some time, I want to take us through the beatitudes section of the Sermon On The Mount. The Sermon On The Mount is Jesus' first major discourse in the Gospels, and it covers Matthew 5-7. The beatitudes take up the first 12 verses of that sermon. This first message is a general introduction to the Sermon on the Mount and then the beatitudes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

So let me begin by giving some background information. The Lord Jesus was born about 30 years before He began His ministry. He had been baptized by John just as He turned 30. After this, Jesus fasted for 40 days and He was then tempted by Satan. After this, Matthew, Mark and Luke leave out a large section which John fills in. John tells us that shortly after His baptism and temptation, He did the miracle of turning water into wine. He then went to Jerusalem, where He cleansed the temple. And eventually, He made His way from Jerusalem back to the Galilee area and Matthew, Mark and Luke pick up the story after John the Baptist is put in prison. So we pick up the story in Matthew 4:12-25 (read). When we come to Matthew 5, His ministry was probably only a few months old.

Because of His teaching and life, crowds of people began to follow Him. Let me tell you why I think that is. They were hearing a man who spoke the truth. The truth is tremendously powerful. Most people, when they come in

contact with spiritual truth back away. But there are always some who, when they find truth, gravitate to it, follow it and it holds them without ever moving. It is very powerful.

The Church, from time to time, has fallen into the trap of trying to win the world by being like it. So today we have music and many other things fashioned after the world to try to win the world. But when the Church does that, it becomes nauseous to the world. If the world will look for something, it will have to be something different from what it already has. And now the people are hearing and seeing someone different and they are following Him. So look at 5:1-2 (read).

It is here that Jesus gives that great sermon on the mount. It is Jesus' first discourse of any length and it is a very powerful passage of Scripture. So let us read the passage that we have called the beatitudes, Matthew 5:3-12 (read).

Now, let me say here that much of what I will say has been influenced by the writings of D. Martyn Lloyd Jones. I may not give proper credit to him because some of my thinking comes from him. But where I knowingly use his material I will quote him.

Now let me ask you a question: What do you think is the highest desire of people? When I shared some of this passage with the youth last summer I asked them this question. Then I gave them what I think it is. What we all want more than anything else is happiness. We want to be happy. When we are happy we feel pleasure. We feel good. We are joyous and contented. And if you want to know what the people of this world think makes them happy, just watch advertisements and you will soon know.

THE MEANING OF 'BLESSED':

Now I asked that question because many feel the word blessed means happy. So we need to take some time to consider this important word, blessed, which occurs nine times in our passage. It is no doubt that happiness is one of the supreme desires of all mankind. D. Martyn Lloyd

Jones says, "Happiness is the great question confronting mankind. The whole world is longing for it and it is tragic to see the ways in which they go about getting it."

Well, when we come to Matthew 5, some view this word 'blessed' here as speaking of happiness. For example, Ryrie's study Bible says that blessed means happy. But I do not think that the word translated 'blessed' here, carries the meaning of 'happy' at all. Take, for example, the second beatitude, "Blessed are they that mourn..." Would it sound right to say, "happy are they that mourn"? And maybe one might say, "Well, it is a paradox." That means it sounds like a contradiction, but really it isn't. But I think if it means happy, it is a contradiction, not a paradox. And so, as I see it, here in Matthew 5 Jesus' deals with, not the happy man, but the blessed man. That is the blessed man from God's perspective. And we want to see what it means when it says, "Blessed are...".

So, it is most important to understand what this word blessed means, because the state God looks on as the most precious state is described in these beatitudes. As a matter of fact, a continual happy state may not even be good for us. If the lost were continually happy they would never get saved. If the saved were continually happy, they would never be conformed to the image of Christ. It is not usually when we are happy that we seek God, it is when we are unhappy. As a matter of fact, to come to the state of the first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit", one must come under a great deal of conviction of sin. We are not in a blessed state when we are unsaved. And to get saved, we must become poor in spirit. And for that to happen, most of us have to come under a great deal of conviction.

So, what state is the state God looks on as the most precious state for man to reach? Well, it is the blessed state. And this blessed state is a growing state. It begins by being poor in spirit; grows into mourning; which gives way to meekness; which gives way to hungering and thirsting after righteousness; which turns into making one merciful; which gives way to being pure in heart; which finally turns

people into peacemakers. And when one reaches the state of being a peacemaker, then persecution comes. Does this blessedness seem like a precious state to you? Or does it seem like a state to be avoided? Well, from a human standpoint, it is a state to be avoided at all cost; but from a divine perspective, now a man is on the right path.

Now this passage is called the 'beatitudes', and so we must ask, just what is a beatitude? One commentary says, "The sayings in this subdivision are called beatitudes from the word *beati* (meaning "blessed"), with which they begin in the Vulgate, or Latin Bible" (The Fourfold Gospel Comm.). So the word behind our English word 'beatitude' is Latin. The NT word that has been translated 'beatitude' though, is the word 'makarios.' Strong's says that *makarios* is "a prolonged form of the poetical *makar* (meaning the same); supremely blest; by extension, fortunate, well off..." end quote. This word *makarios* has been translated blessed 44 times and happy 5 times in the KJV.

Now, I mentioned earlier that many feel this word has the idea of happiness. But I think there is a better explanation. The People's NT commentary says, "The word 'blessed' is first applied to God, and means more than "happy," as it has sometimes been translated. Happiness comes from earthly things; blessedness comes from God. It is not bestowed arbitrarily; a reason follows each beatitude", end quote.

Because the state described by the word blessed is so important, it is important for us to seek to understand what is meant by it. This state of 'blessedness' is the precious state for man from a divine perspective. The beatitudes describe the state of a man who has the ultimate life. So it is most important to understand what is meant by it. And never will we find the life of the worldly man and the life of the spiritual man in sharper contrast than we will in these beatitudes.

So let me explain what I think this word, 'blessed' or *makarios* means. I believe the idea behind this word is Hebrew. There are two words in Hebrew translated *blessed*. I had studied these particular Hebrew words long before I

studied Matthew 5, and when I considered the beatitudes I said to myself, "I believe I know which Hebrew word is behind this idea." So I confirmed that by checking the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT. Look at Genesis 29. You see, Jacob had married two wives due to his father-in-laws trickery. And there was always competition between these two wives on who would bear Jacob the most sons. Rachel was Jacob's favorite from the start. So Leah found that very hard.

And each time one of them bore a son, it was a very great thing to them. So look at Genesis 29 (read 31-35). Now let me tell you that was hard on Rachel. So look at chapter 30 (read 1). Well, by various means she too bore sons to Jacob. And now we come to Genesis 30:9-13 (read). When Leah bore a second son through Zilpah, she said, "I am happy." And here is the Hebrew word I believe stands behind the word in our passage, makarios. It is the word 'asher'. Now look at this verse again. She said, "I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed." Now, both the word translated 'happy' and the word translated 'blessed' are the Hebrew word 'asher'. So, literally she said, "I am asher, for the daughters will call me asher." Or we might translate it, "I am blessed for the daughters will call me blessed."

Some time before Christ came to earth, the Jews translated the OT into Greek. That was 100-300 years before Christ was born. It is called the Septuagint. And in the Septuagint the word 'asher' is translated by the NT word 'makarios', which we have as 'blessed.' Now let me tell you what I think it means. A person who was 'asher' was a person who was envied in a good sense by others. Let me illustrate. Let us say a new store opened in town. And a customer won \$10,000.00 in a draw. We would consider that person 'blessed.' He would be *asher*. Why? Because we would all wish we had been in his place! And we might say, "Oh, I wish that had happened to me!" That is 'asher'. And I would translate it as 'to be envied' in a good sense. So, in our passage it would go like this: To be envied are the poor in spirit, etc..

Lloyd Jones seems to not have been real clear on the meaning of this word, though he does a phenomenal job on these beatitudes. Mostly he calls this man happy. But sometimes he substitutes the phrase, 'to be congratulated'. The man described in these beatitudes is to be congratulated. And I think that is much closer to the real meaning. At one point Jones even quotes someone else who said it meant, 'to be envied'. I believe blessed literally means, to be envied, or to be congratulated is the man described in these beatitudes.

Now we may all desire happiness, but in the end, that which truly satisfies is not happiness. I believe that which truly satisfies is not happiness but fulfillment. And I further think that fulfillment comes from finding and doing the will of God in one's life. Fulfillment is that which is achieved when we do that for which God designed us.

A worldly man who is gifted in art, may find a good deal of fulfillment in art. But there will never be the ultimate fulfillment that would be there if that gift, that special ability was brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. If that gift is brought under the control of the Holy Spirit, it then becomes a spiritual gift. There is no greater fulfillment achievable in this life than when one's life is brought under the control of the Holy Spirit and one finds that place God meant for us. And when that happens, and one finds that which God has gifted one for, then fulfillment comes.

WARNING:

Now let me sound a warning here. There is another one who promises blessedness. He offers fulfillment through sin. And sin always promises blessedness or happiness or fulfillment. And yet it always produces misery. Sin is deceptive. Maybe you have wondered if you would not have done better to marry someone else. Maybe you are dissatisfied with your marriage partner or any other of a myriad different things. And maybe you think, "If only..." Then you must listen very carefully to see who it is that is talking to you. Old slew foot says to the husband, "Blessed are the physically fulfilled." Or he says to the

wife, "Blessed are those whose husbands do this or that." And the evil one holds out such alluring things and he whispers that blessed is the man, or blessed is the woman who has thus or such. Let me say that sin never brings about a blessed state.

A lady went to see a marriage counselor and she said, "I am not sure I got the right husband." And the counselor said, "Did you marry this man?" And she said, "Yes." And he said, "Then you have the right man." We live in an age with every vice available right at our fingertips, literally. Oh what blessedness pornography or other such sins promise. Satan promises fulfillment and blessedness on every hand. But when we partake, in the end it bites like an adder. It is not so with those who are blessed by that which God sets before us.

BEATITUDES DESCRIBE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER:

Another matter to consider is that most of these beatitudes describe Christian character in one way or another. All Christians ought to take on more and more the characteristics given here. It is the first seven beatitudes that speak of character. There are the poor in spirit. That does not have to do with what happens outside of you. That which happens on the outside may cause this to come about, but this describes a person from the inside; that is, poor in spirit. Then there are those who mourn. Again, it is an internal thing. Then there are the meek. That also is internal. You see, this has nothing to do with possessions or such like. It has to do with what one is on the inside. Then there are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. That also is an internal matter. Then we have the merciful and the pure in heart. You can clearly see that all of these are internal qualities. And last of the character beatitudes are the peacemakers. There is some internal character that causes them to reach out and make peace. No one is naturally any one of these things. No one is naturally poor in spirit. No one is naturally a peacemaker and so on.

The next beatitude is, blessed are the persecuted. Now you see that is not something internal. Persecution happens to

one from the outside. It happens because of the other seven characteristics. It is inevitable. Those who display the other seven characteristics will experience persecution. So seven are internal characteristics. These are the cause of the eighth, which is external; persecution.

Let me mention as well, that the Sermon on the mount is Jesus first extended discourse. And the very first part of this discourse is the beatitudes of Jesus. Beatitudes describe the Christian. No man by nature is like any of the things described here. If some were born like this while others were not, and God preferred those whom He had made like this He would be a respecter of persons. But now, no matter with what characteristics we were born, we can all become like this. It may be true that some unbelievers look like they have some of these characteristics, but when they get saved God will have to work these into each one of them. So there may be some who look like this, but they are not like this. Nobody comes like this by nature. L.E. Maxwell tells of a woman who said, "I never knew I had a temper until I got saved."

If you live long enough with unbelievers, you will find that none are like these beatitudes by nature. You cannot go into the world and find a person like this. Consider for a moment what the world views as beatitudes. What man or woman does the world consider blessed or to be envied? View any advertisement and you will see what kind of person they think is blessed. The macho man. The pretty woman. The man with a beer and a tough look and a big pickup truck. The attractive woman. Watch whom the world considers the blessed man. It is nothing like what you find here. Consider what the world admires and you will know nobody comes with the character of these beatitudes.

BEATITUDES NOT PRECEPTS TO BE FOLLOWED:

Then I want to make another point. These beatitudes are not designed to be precepts to be followed. What I mean is you cannot decide to become poor in spirit, and then be poor in spirit. You cannot decide to mourn and then mourn. You are not like this or you are. You cannot make yourself become like this by wanting to be like this. When one is not a

Christian, one is simply not like this. If you concentrate on becoming like this, say by being financially poor, or mourning or chastising the body and so on, you will never truly become like this. Take men like Francis of Assisi, so revered by Catholics and so admired by many Christians, was he truly poor in spirit? Can one become poor in spirit by becoming poor in purse? No, these beatitudes are not designed to lay down precepts to be followed. Nor do you become a Christian by trying to become like this. These beatitudes simply point out the character of one who is a true Christian. They tell us what a true Christian is like.

Francis of Assisi was born to rich parents. He was a bit of a rebel and eventually had a deeply religious experience and ultimately became the founder of the Franciscan order. The Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary says of him after his religious experience, "Following this (he) went into seclusion, made a pilgrimage to Rome. His strict asceticism estranged him from his father and divorced him from society. He devoted himself strictly to religious life. Dressed scantily, ate sparingly, took up abode with the lepers, and rebuilt several chapels, one of which became a holy place to him" (pg 148).

Now I ask you, can you attain the blessed life like this? Can you become poor in spirit by becoming poor in purse? No. You see, these beatitudes are not precepts to be followed. They are descriptions of those who truly get saved. They show what happens in a man who truly gets converted.

Then also, because these beatitudes do not show up in a person until he becomes a Christian, it does not mean that when one becomes a Christian one is fully developed in all of these things. When one becomes a Christian then one should begin to grow in these characteristics. And let me add to that, that there seems to be a natural progression in these beatitudes. For example, being poor in spirit, the first beatitude, is also the first step in this progression. The last beatitude deals with those who are persecuted. Persecution wants to be the result of the other seven.

BEATITUDES DESCRIBE A LIFE DIFFERENT FROM THE WORLD:

Let me mention another introductory thing. It is a natural thing for those who truly become Christians to want to win others to Christ. And we Christians fall into the trap of trying to win the world by the things the world calls blessed. We try to Christianize worldly things to attract unbelievers to Christ. But we can never win the world by being like they are. We attract the world by being different from the world. Any honest man in the world knows that the things considered beatitudes by the world do not really produce either happiness or blessedness. When the worldly person desires something for real, he is looking for something other than what he has already been living in. The Christian and non Christian belong to two entirely different realms. We must always remember that. And to win them, we must characterize the Gospel, not the world. And the Gospel is different from the world; very different.

IS LUKE 6:20-26 A PARALLEL PASSAGE?:

Let me point out one other matter to consider regarding these beatitudes. Go to Luke 6 (read 20-26). The question is this: is this a parallel passage that took place at the same time as Matthew 5:1-12, only it is worded differently? Bible scholars are divided on that question. It is possible, that they are parallel passages. I do not view this as a parallel passage to Matthew 5. I think it is a separate message given at a different time.

DISPENSATIONAL TEACHING:

Let me mention yet one more introductory matter. These beatitudes have been viewed in various ways, I want to point out just one of them. There is the dispensational view of Scripture which places the Bible into seven different dispensations or time periods. And some who hold to these dispensations view the sermon on the Mount as being addressed to the Jews, and not the Church. They say this sermon does not apply to us now. It applies to the Jews in the millennium. Lloyd Jones expresses this view like this: "They say our Lord began to preach about the kingdom of God, and the preaching of the Sermon on the

Mount was in connection with the inauguration of this kingdom. Unfortunately, they continue, the Jews did not believe His teaching. So our Lord could not establish the kingdom, and therefore, almost as a kind of afterthought, the death on the cross came in, and as another afterthought the whole Church and the whole Church age came in, and that will persist to a certain point in history. Then our Lord will return with the kingdom and again the Sermon on the Mount will be introduced. That is the teaching. It says in effect, that the Sermon on the Mount has nothing to do with us. It is meant for the kingdom age", end quote.

I see some value to dispensational teaching, but I am not dispensational enough to adopt that particular view. I was teaching a SS class on some part of the Sermon on the Mount on the campus line at Prairie Bible Institute years ago. And later that week I went past the door of one of my teachers and he called me in and said, "I'm glad to hear you are not so dispensational that you believe the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to us." And I said, "I am a dispensationalist, but I don't let it get so sweet that I become a hyper dispensationalist."

Well, what is in view in these beatitudes is character. They do not teach us how to live. And the life they call for, in my view, is much more applicable to our age than the millennium, where the Lord Jesus will rule with a rod of iron. They describe how a true Christian lives. They do not teach us how to get saved. They teach us how the saved live. What is the character of a true Christian? Well, the very first one tells us the very first thing that happens to the character of anyone who enters the kingdom. He becomes poor in spirit. And so, the first seven beatitudes speak of, I think, a progression of Christian character. The last one speaks of the results of such character. And maybe this is why Paul says, "And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

THE PLACE OF THE BEATITUDES IN THE WHOLE SERMON:

Let me say a word now about the place of the beatitudes in the whole of the sermon. Matthew 5-7 is one sermon. The beatitudes are the first part. Here is our question: What

part does Matthew 5:1-12, the beatitudes, play in the whole picture. Well, what does the whole picture look like? As I view it, I would call the whole sermon something like, "The Life Of The Blessed Man." Or, "The Life Of The True Christian." And what does the life of the true Christian look like?

I suppose this sermon could be dissected a number of different ways. But as I outline it, the beatitudes speak of the internal life, or the character of the true believer and its consequences. He is poor in spirit; he mourns; he is meek; he is hungry and thirsty for righteousness; he is merciful; he is pure in heart; he is a peacemaker and the result of true godliness is persecution. So Paul says all that will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. There may well be a reason why some of us don't suffer persecution.

Well, after Jesus explains the internal life of the believer, He turns from that to consider the true believer as to his external life. Maybe we could call it what D. Martin Lloyd Jones calls it: the believers conduct. First his character, in the beatitudes; then his conduct in the rest of the sermon.

So, for the time we have left, we will take a brief overview of the conduct of the believer. In the verses immediately following the beatitudes, in 5:13-16, we find the life of the true believer with relation to the world (read 5:13-16). He is the salt and light of the world. There are many professing believers who are not truly salt and light. They may never even have truly entered the Christian life.

Then in 5:17-48 we have the moral life of the true believer. We find this in general in verses 17-20 (read). In verses 21-32 we have it in particular. As hating one's brother in 21-26; adultery in 27-30 and divorce in 31-32.

As I divide it, in 5:33-7:12, we find the spiritual life of the believer. First, regarding oaths in 5:33-37; regarding non-resistance in 38-42. Then in 5:43-48 the believer is told how to treat hostile unbelievers (read?). In 6:1-4, it

deals with giving alms; prayer in 6:5-15; fasting in 6:16-18; daily cares, 6:19-34; judging, 7:1-5 and discernment, 7:6; and last in this list, regarding acquiring things.

CONCL: And so we conclude with the two final warnings Jesus gave as He finished this sermon. The first is in 7:13-14 (read). The second is with regard to false prophets (7:15-23). These two warnings have always been important during the Church age, but never more so than today.

And when the people had heard Jesus preach this sermon, notice their response in 28-29 (read). The people were astonished. Robertson's Word Pictures says, "The verb means literally "were struck out of themselves." They were absolutely amazed. They were not familiar with this kind of preaching. Albert Barnes says, "The scribes were the learned men and teachers of the Jewish nation, and were principally Pharisees. They taught chiefly the sentiments of their rabbins, and the traditions which had been delivered; they consumed much of their time in useless disputes, 'vain jangling.' Jesus was open, plain, grave, useful; delivering truth as *became* the oracles of God; not spending his time in trifling disputes, and debating questions of no importance..."

In Jesus preaching there was pure unadulterated truth. It was straight forward and plain and simple. Jesus stated things the way they were.

And so, we might divide this sermon into two parts. There is the character of the true believer in verses 3-12. Then we have the conduct that this kind of character produces in the rest of the sermon. And we will be looking at the character part. This character of the Christian is what produces godly fruit and we will be looking at it in some detail.