

The Character of the Kingdom – Part 2 – Matthew 5:7-12

Scripture Reading: Psalm 24:1-6

Introduction

Last week, we began our study of the Beatitudes by looking first at the idea of blessing and what Jesus meant when he said, “Blessed are...” and we saw that he meant that the one who was blessed had God’s approval

And we saw that Jesus taught that those who met certain conditions received proof of God’s approval

Perhaps one of the more surprising aspects of Jesus’ teaching is that the blessings are exclusively reserved for those who meet the various conditions listed

In other words, when Jesus said “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” in Matthew 5:4 he meant that the kingdom belongs only to “the poor in spirit”

God’s comfort is given to those who mourn, only the meek will inherit the earth, and only those who truly hunger and thirst for righteousness will find it

We also saw how the Beatitudes are like a ladder of sorts and how each one builds on the ones that come before it

How recognizing one’s true spiritual state should lead to sorrow and repentance for sin and how having a clear and accurate picture of oneself should lead one to be humble in their expectations

We could also categorize the first four Beatitudes a bit differently

When considering the characteristics in them we see that they all reveal what a believer’s heart attitude should be toward God – a kingdom dweller should be spiritually bankrupt, sorrowful over their sin, and unassuming

Therefore, we can rightly understand the fourth Beatitude as being God’s provision for the person who is caused to hunger and thirst for righteousness because of a proper appreciation and appropriation of the first three Beatitudes

Likewise, when we look at the next three Beatitudes in Matthew 5:7-9 we see they reveal the character of the character of the kingdom dweller as they relate to other people

In those verses we see the characteristics of mercy, purity of heart, and peacemaking which should describe the one who has tasted of God’s righteousness

Then, in verse 10, Jesus reveals the likely response of the world to the person who rightly exhibits the seven preceding qualities and the ultimate blessing that comes as a result of enduring the world’s treatment

We will begin this morning by looking at the final three conditions and blessings that make up the character of the kingdom dweller from verses 7-9

Then we will dissect verses 10-12 as we look at how we should expect the world to respond to someone who truly demonstrates the characteristics of the kingdom dweller

As you are likely discovering, the thought of perfectly living out the Beatitudes presents us with the realization that it may well be impossible for us to do

Since the Beatitudes reveal such a formidable standard, we will conclude by considering what living them out in our daily lives may well look like

So, without further ado, join me in Matthew 5 and let’s dig into the remaining conditions and blessings

I. The Conditions and Blessings

Matthew 5:7 states – *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*

Or, as we saw last week, “God approves of the merciful, because they alone will receive mercy”

A. The merciful/Shall receive mercy

Mercy and grace are closely related concepts and people often confuse the two

Grace is when someone is given some good thing they do not deserve

Whereas we typically view mercy as being when someone doesn't receive some negative consequence they do deserve

And that's generally an accurate way of looking at the two ideas

Concerning salvation, we understand that God saves us and imputes Christ's righteousness to us according to his grace

Salvation is a gift we don't deserve

And we also understand that, in saving us, God withholds the punishment that we all deserve according to his mercy

Without God's mercy we would be pitifully wretched creatures without any hope of being reconciled to God

But, even beyond the idea of salvation, we are surrounded by those who need help and are beyond hope without it

And that idea is what Jesus is referring to here in this Beatitude – **the kingdom dweller is to give help to the miserable**

“Merciful” then carries with it the concept of being compassionate but it's more than having a right attitude or feeling the right emotion upon seeing someone's affliction

Mercy is compassion put into action and it requires active good will

When we consider the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10, we readily understand that only the Samaritan showed mercy to the injured man because, no matter what the others may have felt, he was the only one to render aid

In the context of the Beatitudes, the mercy Jesus is speaking of is born of God's mercy to us and it flows naturally from the previous four Beatitudes

And it's the person who accurately recognizes their own spiritual condition and understands God's mercy to him who understands the weakness and the failures of others and will extend the mercy of forgiveness and forbearance to them

Showing mercy is evidence that one has received mercy and how much mercy you show is based on how much mercy you know – and by that I mean how much mercy you recognize you have received

The person who thinks they have little need of mercy for themselves tends to show little mercy to others

We see Jesus express this truth in the parable of the sinful woman when he explains the woman's lavish display of gratitude and contrasts it with the attitude of his host by saying **[Luke 7:47] - But he who is forgiven little, loves little.**

Those truths about mercy are easy to understand and accept

But we get tripped up a bit when Jesus says that only the merciful receive God's mercy

We don't really want to hear that but it's what Scripture teaches us in many places

Look with me at **James 2:13** which says: “...*judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy...*”

Or **Matthew 6:14-15** – *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Or we could consider the parable of the wicked servant who was forgiven an unpayable debt only to have his fellow servant thrown into prison over a relatively minor debt from Matthew 18

Each of those passages makes clear that mercy is dependent on mercy

But we need to be careful that we don't interpret that to mean that we can earn God's mercy simply by showing mercy

That would be contrary to all of Scripture which says that belief in Christ is the only way to receive God's mercy and reconciliation

What Jesus is teaching is that his followers should show mercy because of the mercy they know they have received and will continue to receive from God's hand

And that, if we don't show mercy to others we demonstrate that we don't truly understand any of the Beatitudes thus far expounded and the mercy we have received – or perhaps we have never actually received God's mercy at all

The person who knows God's mercy should leap to show mercy to others

Next, in **Matthew 5:8**, Jesus says – *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*

B. The pure in heart/ Shall see God

In the original Greek language the phrase, “pure of heart” carries the idea of unalloyed wholeness or completeness

So, to be pure in heart means to have a heart that doesn't contain mixed motives and divided loyalties but is wholly dedicated to its relationship with God

It's the undivided heart the psalmist prayed to God for in **Psalm 86:11** – *Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.*

And it's the “*undivided devotion to the Lord*” that Paul wanted for his audience in **1 Corinthians 7:35**

I find one of the most striking features of people today is their ability to hold completely divergent views simultaneously without seeming to experience any discomfort or even awareness they are doing so

But, when you consider the ever-present technology we are surrounded by and its continual, persistent siren song pleading for attention every waking second and inundating us with self-declared “experts” opining on every subject known to man, it's no wonder people have fractured thinking and fragmented loyalties

All we need to do is to look into our own hearts to see that focusing on God with the single attention and concern that Jesus speaks of here is perhaps one of the biggest, if not the biggest, challenge Christians face today

And the problem we face is intensified when we consider that the Bible reveals that it's from our hearts that all human problems arise

Jeremiah 17:9 tells us – *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*

And in **Mark 7:15** we read Jesus' words where he taught – *There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.*

Then jumping down to **Mark 7:21-23** we see him continue – *From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.*

The 19th Century Russian novelist, Ivan Turgenev once said – I do not know what the heart of a bad man is like. But I do know what the heart of a good man is like. And it is terrible.

We know all too well our tendency to the terrible of heart and that is what Jesus is concerned with

Notice that the blessing isn't conferred on the pure of action or the pure of intellect but the pure of heart

It's important that we understand that Jesus isn't talking here about purity of outward conformity to some standard or set of rule but of the inner person

This forces us to answer some very awkward questions such as:

What do you think about when your mind slips into neutral?

Why do you really do the things you do – even the “Christian disciplines”?

Would you be comfortable if your thought life were projected on a screen for all to see?

What do you want more than anything else? Or to put it another way, what do you love most?

To what extent do your outward actions and words cover up for what is truly going on in your heart?

Answering questions like those reveal the alloyed, divided nature of our hearts and the simple fact is, we are unable through sheer force of will or by depth of desire to have a pure heart

A pure heart comes from God alone and it is instilled in us judicially the moment we are saved and incrementally as we yield ourselves to the teaching of the Word and the urging of the Holy Spirit

And as we become more intimately involved with God we will see the corrupting, polluting influences in our hearts begin to diminish and fade enabling us to see more of God which leads to a further shrinking of alloying elements in our hearts

And that will allow the kingdom dweller to be more aware of God and see more of God in all areas – In nature, in God’s Word, in fellow believers in a continuing cycle

Scripture talks of unbelievers being spiritually blind and cannot understand God so the flip side of that is that believers should see more clearly and God has promised that blessing to those who are regularly becoming purer of heart

Then, in verse 9 [**Matthew 5:9**] Jesus says – *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

C. The peacemakers/ Shall be called sons of God

If you spend much time on social media or watching cable news these days you know there are far more people who could be described as warmongers or agitators than there are those who could be called peacemakers

It’s important that we understand what Jesus meant by a “peacemaker” because it might not mean what you first think

Let’s begin by looking at the second part of the word “maker”

That indicates that this person is active and not passive – the Greek word here is used to mean someone who manufactures or constructs something or someone who causes something to happen

The peacemaker isn’t someone who simply lives at peace or someone who longs for peace but someone who actually brings about peace through their actions

But what exactly did Jesus mean when he used the word “peace”?

Many people consider peace to be the absence of conflict or war and that certainly is one way to look at peace

But the word translated as “peace” in this case means more than just that

It has to do with the state of inner tranquility that comes from a sense or an awareness of well-being in all circumstances and the existence of harmony between different parties

It should seem obvious that the peace that is most needed in this world is peace with God so the one who actively shares the gospel with others is by definition a peacemaker

But Jesus isn’t restricting the term to the gospel and the kingdom dweller must not only share the gospel but must also actively seek to reduce tensions, resolve conflicts, find solutions, and ensure effective communication

Still, a peacemaker isn’t an appeaser who wants peace at any price because appeasement doesn’t make for peace

And the true peacemaker isn’t afraid of making waves when making waves is necessary

There is a sublime paradox involved with the peacemaker in that he is also a fighter who is willing to make trouble to make peace – the peacemaker actually wages peace

Notice that **Romans 12:18** doesn’t say to seek peace at any price but to as much as possible and as much as it depends on you to live peaceably with all

The temptation is to claim peace exists when we know it doesn’t and to paper over difficulties rationalizing that confronting issues to bring about true peace will only make things worse

But as we are instructed in **Romans 14:19** we are to “*pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding*” even if that makes things worse before they get better – that’s often the role of the peacemaker

I think we would agree that Jesus serves as the ultimate example of a peacemaker and yet he knew the peace he offered would also cause division as he said in **Matthew 10:34-36** so even Jesus knew peace would have a cost

Still, a peacemaker must be honest about how things are and must be tolerant of others

And though a peacemaker must be willing to risk pain in the pursuit of peace that doesn't give him a license to verbally slay others and we are always to speak the truth in love – with just enough strength to accomplish the goal

Above all, a peacemaker is positive in his outlook and patient in his demeanor listening to all sides and understanding that we are all fallen creatures who are far from perfect as he humbly pursues the God-honoring peace

Because in doing so, they reflect God and they will be called sons of God

First and foremost it is God who calls the peacemaker son but others will as well when they see God in their life

The translation “sons and daughters” or even “children” that we find in some English translations really doesn't work well here even though the peacemaker is not gender specific because the word “son” indicates someone who is just like the other

So, whether the peacemaker is actually a son or a daughter, when people see the peacemaker they are seeing something of God

One might reasonably expect that everyone would be pleased if people lived according to the Beatitudes but, as we'll see next in **verses 10-11** the world's response is seldom positive

II. The World's Response

In **Matthew 5:10** Jesus says, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

And perhaps because that seemed to be such a radical statement, Jesus repeats himself in **Matthew 5:11** – “*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*”

But notice that when he repeats himself he changes from the third person “those” to the second person “you”

This Beatitude, coming at the end as it does, completes the *inclusio* that was begun in verse 3 and it sums up all of the Beatitudes saying, basically, if you live according to my teaching you will be persecuted

To persecute means to chase after, to pursue and the implication is that the pursuit is for evil – to harass

We often have a too lofty idea of what it means to be persecuted that causes us to miss a great deal of persecution that goes on in the world against true Christ-followers

It's true that Christians in different places and times have and still do suffer intense persecution

There are believers who suffer physical and mental torture, starvation, deprivation, alienation and even death

But that shouldn't cause us to miss the less violent or overt forms of persecution that happen with regularity

And verse 11 amplifies the definition of what Jesus is talking about when he uses the word “revile”

To be reviled is to have people speak unfavorably about you when it isn't justified or to view someone negatively when it isn't warranted and then punish them or mistreat them accordingly

One need not be tortured to be persecuted

Now we need to be careful to note that Jesus didn't say blessed are they who are persecuted period – he qualified it

He said blessed are they who are persecuted *for righteousness sake* and when the persecution is *on my account*

Frankly, some Christians are persecuted for all kinds of reasons that aren't blessed and we delude ourselves when we think that any time we experience conflict we are bearing the reproach of Christ

Far too often those who claim to be believers aren't persecuted for living out the attitudes found in the Beatitudes but because evidence of the influence of the Beatitudes is absent from their lives

Christians are often mistreated, shunned, and persecuted because they have unpleasant personalities, because they're rude and insensitive and thoughtless or even piously obnoxious

I once worked with a young man who got himself in trouble at work because he simply couldn't stop bothering others when he should have been working

Oh, he was sharing the gospel and talking to them about the Lord but his work suffered and he kept those he was talking to from working and he was viewed as a pest and a slacker

I have no doubt he went home each day after he had once again been told off by a co-worker and reprimanded by the boss thinking he was suffering for Christ

But it wasn't righteousness or even the cause of Christ that caused his "persecution" it was his lack of discernment

Still, the world cannot tolerate a person whose life reflects the righteousness of the Beatitudes

Poverty of the spirit is opposed to the pride of self the world tells us we should have

The mourning, repentant heart is not appreciated

Meekness is seen as weakness and that's anathema to a world where the strength is prized

Hungering and thirsting for true, biblical righteousness is repugnant to a world that says "Go for it, you only live once"

The person who demonstrates mercy, compassion, and forgiveness doesn't fit in with a "don't get mad, get even" world

The pure, single-minded heart focused on God is foreign to a self-focused culture

The one who considers all sides and is willing to wage war if necessary for peace causes too much discomfort to a society where tribalism rules and might makes right

But the bottom-line reason such a person will be persecuted is because he or she is like Christ and as Jesus taught in **John 15:18-21** –

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

When it comes right down to it, we shouldn't be surprised when persecution comes but rather, concerned when it doesn't

If a person who claims to be Christ-followers never experiences any form of rejection for the sake of the kingdom they should question first of all if they are part of the kingdom and if they are if they aren't living according to kingdom values

Think about it, if we aren't out of step in any way with the culture that surrounds us and if we never suffer any kind of disapproval for how we live and the choices we make as we practice God's ethics doesn't that present a problem?

In large part, I think the church has avoided persecution because the church has become like the world

Still, we need to be careful that we don't get too down on ourselves or each other because no one suffers persecution all of the time and no one lives out the Beatitudes perfectly all the time

And that brings us to the final point of the day – living the Beatitudes

III. Living the Beatitudes

If this look at the Beatitudes hasn't caused you some discomfort as you considered how well you are living them out, I think you may need to think about them some more

The fact is, none of us are doing as well as we should be and all of us, at best, live according to God's standard sporadically and partially

We should recognize that they are actually an impossible standard for us to achieve this side of heaven

But they do represent the ideal character that we should be striving for and asking God to help us achieve

Because, God will bless us in proportion to how well we live according to the character traits that should define every follower of Jesus Christ

Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:12-13** that Christ-followers are to work out their own salvation – in other words strive to become more like Christ and to live up to your salvation because God is working in us to achieve that same goal

When we get to heaven the Beatitudes will be our reality and we will then live them perfectly forever

That's why Jesus says in **Matthew 5:12** – *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven*

For as we endeavor to see God mold our characters and make them fit for his kingdom, persecution will let us know that we are making progress

And in that we are in good company along with Isaiah, Jeremiah, the saints listed in Hebrews 11, and many more who we don't even know

Conclusion

I don't know about you, but the Beatitudes leave me with the realization of how far short I fall of the kingdom ideal

However, that is true for every believer

Some do better at one another does better with another but we all have a lot of room for improvement

None of us is likely as humble as we should be, I've heard it said if you want to know what kind of servant you are look at how you react when someone treats you like one

None of us truly hungers and thirsts for righteousness as we should and, truth be told we often want to have just enough of righteousness to be acceptable in polite society

None of us is quite as pure in our motives and affections as we should be as many other things vie for our affection and our attention

And so on...

And we could easily become discouraged as we question our fitness for the kingdom

But we can take heart and be encouraged in the knowledge that we will one day all perfectly match the characteristics we see in Matthew 5:3-12 as we walk with the Lord in heaven

Still, we can experience much of the eternal quality of life that is ours here and now as we conform our attitudes and our hearts to the characteristics we have studied these past two week

So, let me encourage you as we close in prayer to seriously ask God to help you to tailor your character to the kingdom now

Let's pray