

## *Autumn on the Mount – The Beatitudes*

The setting of the Sermon on the Mount - the Jews were suffering violence and persecution under the thumb of Roman rule and occupation. Their eyes were peeled and ears were itching to hear from the Messiah who would usher in the Kingdom of God.

**Matthew 4:17-** Jesus began to preach [1<sup>st</sup> words of his ministry]: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”

No doubt some of his close followers followed him with their eye on his reign. They saw the Messiah as a man of eventual political power and military might.

His disciples often were fighting and clamoring to get to the best position, the top of the ladder, and then what does Jesus do at the Sermon on the Mount?

He takes the ladder and flips it upside down.

He ushers in what many would call his “Upside Down Kingdom.”

### **MATTHEW 5:3-12**

Jesus’ Kingdom Manifesto begins with the word “Blessed.”

Blessed can be loosely translated “Happy.”

And that’s notable because if our world desires & chases one thing above all else it’s happiness.

The biggest rule to live by in our society – “do what makes you happy.”

Yet for some reason we chase these pursuits and happiness remains elusive.

I saw a headline as I was studying for this sermon “*Are Humans Built to Be Happy?*”

*“If we are so obsessed with happiness, why are we so unhappy?”*

Why am I so unhappy? How do I get happy? What’s the secret sauce? What’s the cheat code?

These are the questions that captivate our culture.

Yale’s most popular class ever? A class on happiness.

Within 3 days 600 people had registered.

25% of the student body ended up taking this psych class on happiness.

*ALL OF US* want these answers.

And the Sermon on the Mount starts with the word BLESSED.

Only the recipe for blessing probably isn’t what we would cook up.

Consider the answer you would give if I asked you to give me a top 10 things that make you feel blessed.

Poverty probably won’t be on there.

Persecution probably won’t be on there.

Mourning probably won’t be on there.

If I expand it to the top 100... these probably still wouldn’t be on there.

A **paradox** is a statement that seems contradictory but is packed with hidden wisdom.  
Jesus gives us so many paradoxes in the Gospels.  
Want to be great? Be the least  
Want to be first? Be last  
Want to be rich? Be poor  
The Beatitudes are no different.  
These are countercultural. They are counterintuitive. They involve rethinking.  
But they are wisdom.

The temptation is to teach them one by one. Take one and apply it to a situation.  
But they are all strokes in a larger painting.

The Beatitudes paint the picture of justification and sanctification.  
This picture of how the life of a disciple takes root and how it bears fruit.  
You could title its theme as “The Character of the Disciple.”

### **The roots and the fruit.**

So often we look at growth through the lens of self help. Changing ourselves with external goals and change. Our tree is a Christmas tree. We put a bunch of stuff on it. We decorate its exterior.  
But the tree is dead.

God wants to change us from the inside out.  
He wants us to take root so we can bear fruit.  
The beatitudes show us both steps- the roots and the fruit.

When we look at the whole picture we see something similar to the 10 commandments:  
**10 Commandments** – first 4 are vertical- they deal with God, the next are horizontal- they deal with how we treat others.  
**8 Beatitudes** (with the 9<sup>th</sup> add-on) – the first 4 are vertical, the rest are horizontal.

In both cases, we see that *if your faith is solely inward focused, it's out of focus.*  
The result of rich faith isn't navel gazing self help, it's looking out into the world and loving and helping our neighbor- the second half of the beatitudes show us how to do this well.

### ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven...”***

This isn't to patronize the poor. We're called to work against poverty and help the poor.  
That's why it says in many a translation “poor in spirit.” As the Amplified version adds on:  
*‘[those devoid of spiritual arrogance, those who regard themselves as insignificant]’*

*PSALM 69:29 – “I am poor and sorrowful: let your salvation, O God, set me up on high.”*  
Some 30 times in Psalms - Poor is seen in a positive spiritual sense. Why?  
The poor in spirit have little to lose and are ready for anything. Especially GRACE.

Alcoholics Anonymous philosophy has so much to teach the church in this regard. The first step of healing is the step out of being proud in spirit- the illusion that we're in control and managing life and in power. That we're captain of our ship and masters of our fate.

It's a step into a poverty of spirit. A lack of poverty of spirit dominos into a lack elsewhere: Lack of prayer? It's because we don't realize our poverty. Lack of gathering? It's because we don't realize our poverty. Lack of God's word? It's because we don't realize our poverty. The end result? We become functional atheists. Proud in spirit.

LUKE 8:9-14 (NLT) - *Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else [AKA were proud in spirit]: "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*

Ultimately we are all sinners and there are two varieties: Proud in spirit and poor in spirit. Self righteous, and self aware. The self aware sinner, not the self righteous sinner, is the one who returned home justified before God.

***Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted...***

The same way poverty isn't about money, this verse isn't just about death. And this flows from poverty of spirit, because when you realize your sin before God, the proper response is what? To mourn that sin.

Good grief is mourning over your sin before a holy God.

Again if you look at the AMP version it spells it out:

***"blessed are those who mourn [over their sins and repent]"***

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra reads the law to the crowd, verbatim, from early morning to midday. *"Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were interpreting for the people said to them, "Don't **mourn** or weep on such a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the Lord your God." For the people had all been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law... Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!"*

What is the blessing? Nehemiah comforts them with good news.

What is the comfort? It's the Good News.

The comfort is that *"the burden of sin is lifted."*

The problem is that we all want comfort, but we skip the first part of the equation. But this is upside down. It's counterintuitive. We go down to go up. Death before resurrection. Roots before fruit.

Nobody would say “I go to church to mourn.” We come to be comforted.  
But there’s no good news without the bad news. The bad news comes first.

The stands in opposition to the stance of many people in our culture, and even in the church  
*“I’m basically a good person...”*

But the comfort of the Gospel doesn’t start with “I’m basically a good person,”  
As Tim Keller puts it - *We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.*

***Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth...***

Our culture usually files meekness away with weakness.  
What is meekness by definition - strength under control.  
Jesus was meek by all accounts. Yet he was weak by none.  
*“Think being meek is weak? Try being meek for a week.”*

Being selfish and fighting for self is easy. Duh. It’s how we’re wired. It’s our impulse.  
Giving up your will for the will of God, or giving up your will to serve others? That’s hard.  
Yet it’s what Jesus did.

**Philippians 2:3-5**

*Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus...*

This stands in opposition to selfish ambition that stiffarms whoever is in the way.

To be meek doesn’t mean we forfeit our ambition.  
The key is ambition as Christ defines it in his upside down kingdom is ***rising downward***.  
Jesus didn’t say let go of ambition and pick up humility instead.  
He said add humility to your ambition.  
Greatness is found in being a servant- selfish ambition is replaced with ***selfless ambition***.

***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.***

What the opposite of hungry? Full.  
Jesus is saying blessed are the empty.

When we empty ourselves before God, we get new appetites, and then we are filled.

This first 4 is where the character of the disciple takes root – emptying ourselves before God, and letting him fill us.

The first 4 are where the character of the disciple takes ROOT  
The second 4 are where the character of the disciple bears FRUIT.

The fruit here is pointed outward. The concern is with others.

***Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy...***

**MATTHEW 18:21-35** – The Parable of the unforgiving debtor

It challenges us to respond to the immense mercy and grace we've received from God with mercy and grace for others.

A servant is forgiven of the equivalent of millions by his master a number so great the servant would have never been able to satisfy it, and then he goes onto harass

*"Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?"*

And for this he's punished.

What cripples the flow of mercy?

Unforgiveness. The thought *"I would never do such a thing."*

But when we've realized our poverty of spirit and we've gone through the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 beatitudes...

We realize the richness of God's mercy, and mercy should flow forth from our hearts.

***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God...***

Your heart is the seat of your desires.

**Proverbs 4:23** – every one of life's issues flows from the heart.

Where are my desires?

***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God...***

God called us to be peacemakers, not peacekeepers.

Peacekeepers strive to keep the peace at all costs.

God called us to be peaceMAKERS.

Small difference as word-structure- huge difference in meaning.

Prov.10:10 *"People who wink at wrong cause trouble but a bold reproof promotes peace"*

While peacemakers tackle a problem, peacekeepers wink at it and keep it moving.

As MLK once said:

*True peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice.*

This is the fruit of the disciple who is rooted. Not aggression. But fighting for peace.

The Bible confirms this in 2 Corinthians 5.

Fruit of the new creation in 2 Cor 5:17? It follows in 2 Cor 5:20 - Ministers of reconciliation.

***Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God...***

With these final two beatitudes, Jesus has officially thrown his followers for a loop.

And then just in case they think they misheard him, he doubles down.

*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Jesus is setting expectations.

Jesus is, in effect, walking out some of **parenting 101** –

You can save yourself a headache by setting expectations ahead of time.

Clearly Jesus smashes and redirects expectations in the beatitudes.

*Great is your reward...* where? Here? No. In Heaven.

Will you necessarily get a reward here on earth? No.

Will it be worth it eternally? Yes.

But delayed gratification isn't exactly our culture's strength.

How much more a view for *after* this life.

There's a future reality to this.

But Jesus wasn't just keenly aware how the Kingdom of Heaven works.

He understands how life here works – after all, he created it.

There's also a present reality to this.

When we are able to do everything we can to achieve personal happiness, we often find it most illusive. Somehow, in the process of losing our lives, we truly find them.

Somehow, seeds never take root and bear fruit until they fall to the ground and die.

Somehow, we truly rise downward.

Again- paradoxes.

Philip Yancey writes the following about the Beatitudes:

*“In the Beatitudes, strange sayings that at first glance seem absurd, Jesus offers a paradoxical key to abundant life. The Kingdom of Heaven, he said elsewhere, is like a treasure of such value that any shrewd investor would “in his joy” sell all he has in order to buy it. It represents value far more real and permanent than anything the world has to offer, for this treasure will pay dividends both here on earth and also in the life to come. Jesus places the emphasis not on what we give up, but on what we receive. Is it not in our own self-interest to pursue such a treasure?”*

Ultimately- again paradoxically- selfless ambition is in our own self interest.

May we remember Philippians 2.

These aren't impossible ideals handed down by a mystic.

These are qualities and equations that Jesus himself embodied.

As Christians- little Christs- we're called to do the same.