

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XXXVIII : THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT — PART 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE BEATITUDES

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
5:2		6:20a		

Matt 5:2 And He opened His mouth, and taught them, Lk 6:20a And He lifted up His eyes on his disciples, and said, saying,

Jesus begins His “Sermon on the Mount” (A.K.A. The Teaching on the Hill; A Comprehensive Summary of Christ’s Whole Doctrine; the Magna Charta of the Kingdom) with a description of the ones who belong to this kingdom. “Even when His mouth was closed He was teaching by his life; yet He did not withhold the testimony of His lips. Earnest men, when they address their fellows, neither mumble, nor stumble, but speak distinctly, opening their mouths. When Jesus *opens his mouth* let us open our ears and hearts.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

General observations concerning the Beatitudes:

• **Some make more of the differences between Matthew’s and Luke’s account** than is justified (e.g. John Brown in *Sayings and Discourses of Christ*, et. al.). For example, Matthew lists at least eight beatitudes and Luke only four followed by four woes, but this does not mean that either of them records all that was given that day. “Those who, comparing Matthew’s report of this sermon with Luke’s, see a contradiction, will find it difficult to prove this. In each case what has been preserved of this sermon is a summary. Would it not be unrealistic to believe that Jesus spoke less than fifty minutes? Nevertheless, it takes the average reader only about seven minutes to read Matt 5-7, and only about two minutes to read Luke 6:20-49. As long as what each reporter has left us is what was actually said, main points being accurately reflected, there is no real problem, no conflict.” [Hendriksen, *Luke*] For the purposes of these SS lessons we will look at Matthew’s and Luke’s Sermon on the Mount as a single unit.

<i>The Beatitudes as Recorded by Matthew and Luke</i>	
<i>Matthew’s Account</i>	<i>Luke’s Account</i>
(1) blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven	(1) blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God
(2) blessed are the mourners, for they shall be comforted	(3) blessed are you who now weep, for you shall laugh
(3) blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth	
(4) blessed are those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for they shall be fully satisfied	(2) blessed are you who now are hungry, for you shall be satisfied
(5) blessed are the merciful, for they shall have mercy shown to them	
(6) blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God	
(7) blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the sons of God	
(8) blessed are those persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven	(4) blessed are you when men hate you, etc. ... for great indeed is your reward in heaven

<i>Luke’s Blessings and Woes</i>	
blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God	but woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your consolation in full
blessed are you who now are hungry, for you shall be satisfied	woe to you who now are well-fed, for you shall go hungry
blessed are you who now weep, for you shall laugh	woe to you who now are laughing, for you shall mourn and weep
blessed are you when men hate you, etc. ... for great indeed is your reward in heaven	woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in just the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets

• **The number of beatitudes** vary between authors. Bruce [*Gk NT*] says that while at first count there appears to be eight, the “traditional” number is seven with Matt 5:10-12 regarded as a transition to a new topic. Others who want to establish the Beatitudes as the NT Decalogue separates Matt 5:10-12 making each one a single beatitude. The issue is arbitrary and immaterial,

and this study will assume the number to be eight. If so, it may be said that each beatitude follows a three-fold pattern: the ascription of blessedness (“blessed are ...”), the description of the person blessed (“the poor in spirit, the meek, the mourners,” etc.), and a statement giving the reason for the blessedness (“for they shall be comforted”, etc.).

- Wester defines Beatitude to mean “supreme blessedness, exalted happiness” and is so used because of the repeated phrase “blessed are ...”.

- The word *blessed* is the Gk word makarioi (μακάριοι) explained by Vines to mean “from a root *mak-* meaning large, lengthy, found also in *makros*, long, *mēkos*, length, hence denotes to pronounce happy, blessed ... **In the beatitudes the Lord indicates not only the characters that are blessed, but the nature of that which is the highest good.**” [Vines, *Expository Dictionary*] “This word and its cognates occur at least fifty-five times in the New Testament ... and is commonly rendered *blessed*, both in the AV and Rev, and that rendering might properly be given it in every instance. Its root is supposed to be a word meaning *great*, and its earlier meaning appears to be limited to *outward* prosperity; so that it is used at times as synonymous with *rich*.... In the OT the idea involves more of outward prosperity than in the NT, yet **it almost universally occurs in connections which emphasize, as its principal element, a sense of God’s approval founded in righteousness which rests ultimately on love to God.... Shaking itself loose from all thoughts of outward good, it becomes the express symbol of a happiness identified with pure character. Behind it lies the clear cognition of sin as the fountain-head of all misery, and of holiness as the final and effectual cure for every woe....** The vague outlines of an abstract good vanish from it, and give place to the pure heart’s vision of God, and its personal communion with the Father in heaven. Where it told of the Stoic’s self-sufficiency, it now tells of the Christian’s poverty of spirit and meekness. Where it hinted at the Stoic’s self-repression and strangling of emotion, it now throbs with a holy sensitiveness, and with an admonition to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep.... **The Christian word *blessed* is full of the light of heaven. It sternly throws away from itself every hint of the Stoic’s asserted right of suicide as a refuge from human ills, and emphasizes something which thrives on trial and persecution, which glories in tribulation, which not only endures but conquers to world, and expects its crown in heaven.**” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

- **All Christians are to be like this.** “Our Lord does not say here that He is going to paint a picture of what certain outstanding characters are going to be and can be in this world. It is His description of every single Christian. I pause with that for just a moment, and emphasize it, because I think we must all agree that the fatal tendency introduced by the Roman Catholic church ... is to divide Christians into two groups — the religious and the laity, exceptional Christians and ordinary Christians, the one who makes a vocation of the Christian life and the man who is engaged in secular affairs. That tendency is not only utterly and completely unscriptural; it is destructive ultimately of true piety, and is in many ways a negation of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.... Therefore let us once and for ever get rid of that false notion. This is not merely a description of the Hudson Taylors or the George Müllers or the Whitefields or Wesleys of this world; it is a description of every Christian. We are all meant to conform to its pattern and to rise to its standard.” [Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon*]

- **All Christians are meant to manifest all of these characteristics.** “In other words it is not that some are to manifest one characteristic and others to manifest another. It is not right to say some are meant to be ‘poor in spirit’, and some are meant to ‘mourn’, and some are meant to be ‘meek’, and some are meant to be ‘peacemakers’, and so on. No; every Christian is meant to be all of them, and to manifest all of them, at the same time. Now I think it is true and right to say that in some Christians some will be more manifest than others; but that is not because it is *meant* to be so. It is just due to the imperfections that still remain in us. When Christians are finally perfect, they will all manifest all these characteristics fully; but here in this world, and in time, there is a variation to be seen. I am not justifying it; I am simply recognizing it.... Indeed, I think we can even go further and say that the character of this detailed description is such, that it becomes quite obvious, the moment we analyze each Beatitude, that **each one of necessity implies the other.** For instance, you cannot be ‘poor in spirit’ without ‘mourning’ in this sense; you cannot mourn without ‘hungering and thirsting after righteousness’; and you cannot do that without being one who is ‘meek’ and a ‘peacemaker’. Each one of these in a sense demands the others.” [Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon*]

- **None of these descriptions refers to what we may call a natural tendency.** “Each one of them is wholly a disposition which is produced by grace alone and the operation of the Holy Spirit upon us.... No man naturally conforms to the descriptions here given in the Beatitudes, and we must be very careful to draw a sharp distinction between the spiritual qualities that are here described and material ones which appear to be like them. Let me put it like this. There are some people who appear to be naturally ‘poor in spirit’; that is not what is described here by our Lord.... **These are not natural qualities; nobody by birth and by nature is like this....** A man does not determine his natural temperament, though he governs it up to a point. Some of us are born aggressive, others are quiet; some are alert and fiery, others are slow. We find ourselves as we are, and these nice people who are so frequently brought forward as an argument against the evangelical faith [i.e., that a person portrays the characteristics of a Christian while denying the teachings of Christianity] are in no sense responsible for being like that. The explanation of their condition is something biological; it has nothing to do with spirituality, and nothing to do with man’s relationship to God.... But, thank God, that is not the position at all. **Any one of us, every one of us, whatever we may be by birth and nature, is meant as a Christian to be like this. And not only are we meant to be like this; we can be like this.** That is the central glory of the gospel. It can take the proudest man by nature and make him a man who is poor in spirit.” [Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon*]

- **The Beatitudes indicate the essential difference between the Christian and the non-Christian.** “Our ambition should be to be like Christ, the more like Him the better, and the more like Him we become, the more we shall be unlike everybody who is not a Christian.... **The Christian and the non-Christian are absolutely different in what they admire....** What the world says about

the true Christian is that he is a weakling, an apology for a man, or that he isn't manly. Those are its expressions. The world believes in self-confidence, self-expression and the mastery of life; the Christian believes in being 'poor in spirit'. Take the newspapers and see the kind of person the world admires. You will never find anything that is further removed from the Beatitudes than that which appeals to the natural man and of the world.... Then obviously **they must be different in what they seek.** 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst.' After what? Wealth, money, status, position, publicity? Not at all. 'Righteousness.' And righteousness is being right with God.... **They are absolutely different in what they do....** The non-Christian is absolutely consistent. He says he lives for this world. 'This is the only world, and I am going to get all I can out of it.' Now the Christian starts by saying he is not living for this world; he regards this world as but the way of entry into something vast and eternal and glorious. His whole outlook and ambition is different. He feels, therefore, that he must be living in a different way. As the man of the world is consistent, so the Christian also ought to be consistent. If he is, he will be very different from the other man; he cannot help it.... **Another essential difference between men is in their belief as to what they can do.** The man of the world is very confident as to his own capacity and is prepared to do anything. The Christian is a man, and the only man in the world, who is truly aware of his own limitations." [Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon*]

● **The Beatitudes forces the Christian to make a potentially dangerous decision.** Looking at the Beatitudes we immediately see areas of our lives which do not correspond to the description given here by Christ. While this demands a decision from the believer, in reality the same decision confronts us whenever we study the Word of God. The choices presented to the Christian are as follows:

■ **THE REBEL :** some ignore the teaching entirely, "humbly" admitting it is not them but then refusing to deal with the situation. **What they try to pass off as humility is actually rebellion,** and much of the Bible's teachings deal with our knowing the truth and turning from it (e.g. Matt 7:21-28; James 1:22-25).

■ **THE PHARISEE :** What is a modern Pharisee? — I like to describe them by two generalities: **(1) they take the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law; (2) when even the letter of the law is beyond their reach, they modify the meaning until it is attainable.** Having done these two things, the Baptist Pharisee can strut in self-righteousness, condemn and look down on others, feel smug and spiritually content while they attend church, give financially, "serve" the Lord, etc. A couple examples of some taking a Pharisaical approach: the Bible gives standards for pastors and deacons, one of which is accepted among most Baptists to be that they be men never divorced. I have first-hand knowledge of a church that appointed a divorced man to be a trustee. In doing so, the Pastor made a statement to the effect that the Bible speaks of deacons not being divorced (so the church did hold to that interpretation) but that it nowhere says the same concerning trustees. *By the letter of the law* the pastor was correct, but for that matter the Bible does not even mention trustees. That is an office required by our civil laws and many churches list their deacons as the trustees. By taking that position the church rebelled against *the spirit of the law* concerning the moral standards by which a leader is to exemplify himself, revealing the Pharisee within. As another example, I once heard a *Baptist pastor* say the Bible teaches to turn the other cheek but it doesn't say what to do after the cheek is turned. Finding it difficult to live up to the commandment, the pastor changed the meaning to make it something which the old man could live up to.

■ **THE CONTRITE BELIEVER :** this is the only proper scriptural solution. When we honestly accept what Jesus says about how we are to live and realize we do not live like that, we can then cry out in broken despair: *Father, this is not me! I cannot live such a life. Father, live your life through me, giving me the strength and the will to be the Christian You would have me to be.* If coming from a sincere heart, the answer to that prayer is typically a revelation by the Holy Spirit of how much we are not a Beatitude Christian (the Lord will not allow us to think that once the change has happened, it was due to any effort on our part). **As we realize our helplessness, the Holy Spirit then spends the rest of our lives conforming us to the Beatitudes which is the image of His dear Son. But there must be a brokenness, a willingness, a submissive spirit, an understanding of our true nature, and a dependence upon the Holy Spirit to work within our hearts.** The change will not be immediate and there will be relapses, but God will conform us to Himself (Rom 8:28,29). I would like to challenge us all to make this the prayer of our hearts: ***make me a Beatitude Christian!***