

## THE BEATITUDES

- A. Introduction: We are taking time to look at Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible—who He is, why He came, and what message He preached. We are equipping ourselves to be able to recognize false christs and false prophets that Jesus warned would come on the scene prior to His second coming. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 23-24
1. The Bible reveals that when Jesus returns there will be a worldwide system in place that is presided over by the ultimate false christ, a man known as Antichrist. Dan 8:23-25; Rev 13:1-18; II Thess 2:3-4; etc.
    - a. This global system won't come out of a vacuum. The world is presently heading in that direction as we see increasing movement toward a global government and economy.
    - b. We are also witnessing the development of a universal brand of religion that uses some "Christian" language, but its core beliefs are contrary to the Bible. Here are a few examples:
      1. There are many paths to God. It doesn't matter what you believe or how you live as long as you're sincere and as long as you're a good person.
      2. God is a loving, non-judgmental being or power that would never allow someone to go to Hell. We're all God's children. If Jesus were here, He'd tell us all to love each other.
  2. Christians are especially vulnerable to these deceptions because Bible passages are sometimes cited in this new religion, and Bible reading and study is at an all time low in many circles.
    - a. I recently heard a political figure who is running for president roughly paraphrase something Jesus. This person was presenting social programs they promise to enact if elected. Matt 25:35-36
      1. This person said that the Shepherd (or higher power, or energy, or essence, or who or whatever God is to you) will one day commend the sheep and rebuke the goats. Sheep will be praised because they fed the poor and helped the downtrodden—and that's what my program will do.
      2. This political figure capped it off by saying that we must care for the poor and the marginalized because God is in them and because God is in all of us.
    - b. This is an example of deception—a lie that is mixed with some truth to make it more palatable. I'm not accusing that particular politician of trying to deceive people. They most likely believe what they said. However, they themselves are misinformed and ignorant of what the Bible actually says.
      1. Of course Christians should care for the poor and the marginalized. But not because God is in all of us—because He isn't, according to what the Bible says (including Jesus' own words). John 8:44; I John 3:10; Eph 2:3; John 2:24-25; Matt 15:19; etc.
      2. Are you able to recognize a lie even when it is wrapped up in some truth? You can't do it if you aren't a Bible reader. If ever there was a time to know Jesus as He is revealed in Scripture, it's now—who Jesus is and why He came to earth, as well as what message He preached.
  3. Last week we looked at a statement Jesus made that is often misused (like the one referenced by the politician): Blessed are the peacemakers (Matt 5:9). This verse is cited to support the idea that Jesus came to bring peace to this world and that part of our responsibility as Christians is to work for peace.
    - a. However, Jesus didn't come to bring peace between nations. He came to bring peace between God and man. He died to restore us to relationship with God by paying for our sin. Rom 5:1; Rom 5:10
    - b. The gospel that Jesus preached, and then sent His apostles out to preach, is supernatural, not social.
      1. A social gospel aims at fixing up society by working to end poverty, help the marginalized, and eradicate injustice through religious and governmental programs.
      2. A supernatural gospel aims at an inward transformation whereby men and women are changed from sinners by nature into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God by the power of God through faith in Jesus Christ and His work on the Cross.
    - c. In order to rightly interpret a Bible verse, we must consider it in context. This means we must consider who wrote it, who they wrote to, and why they wrote. A passage can't mean something to us that it would not have meant to the original writers and speakers, readers, and hearers.

1. We can't impose 21<sup>st</sup> century social, political, or religious ideas on the Bible. Jesus was born into a world and a culture very different from ours—first century Jewish people who were expecting the Messiah.
    - A. They knew from the writings of their prophets (Old Testament) that Messiah will establish the kingdom of God on earth, and they knew that only the righteous can enter God's kingdom. Dan 2:44; Dan 7:27; Ps 24:3-4; Ps 15:1-5
    - B. When Jesus came on the scene He had their attention because He came proclaiming that the kingdom is at hand, and they needed to repent and believe the good news. Mark 1:14-15
  2. In this lesson we're going to continue to examine the historical context into which Jesus came to help us rightly interpret Scripture and be able to identify inaccurate interpretations.
- B. The statement "Blessed are the peacemakers" is found in the Sermon on the Mount. This particular portion of Scripture has a number of verses that are frequently misquoted and misapplied. We're going to examine some of them, but first we need to set the stage for this famous passage of Scripture.
1. Jesus' three year earth ministry was a time of transition as He gradually prepared Old Covenant (Old Testament) men and women for the changes that He was about to usher in—a new relationship between God and man, made possible by His death, burial, and resurrection.
    - a. In His teachings, Jesus didn't immediately spell everything out because, not only was He gradually preparing people for this new relationship between God and man (that of Father and son), but because His primary mission was to make that possible by dying for the sins of men.
    - b. And, He has to broaden their understanding of the kingdom. Based on the writings of the Old Testament prophets, first century Jews were expecting a literal, visible kingdom to be established. When Jesus preached that the kingdom is at hand, that's what the people heard.
      1. The prophets were not given every detail about what Jesus would do. They didn't see clearly that there would be two separate comings of the Messiah separated by 2,000 years. Jesus came first to die for sin and make it possible for men to become sons of God. He will come again to establish the visible kingdom of God on earth. Isa 9:6-7
      2. The prophets also did not see that the kingdom of God would take two forms. The visible kingdom on earth would be preceded by the kingdom or reign of God in the hearts of men through the new birth. Luke 17:20-21
    - c. Jesus also had to broaden His audience's understanding of the righteousness needed to enter the kingdom. Everything the people knew about righteousness came from the scribes and Pharisees.
      1. Early in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told His listeners: Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom. Matt 5:20
      2. The bulk of the Sermon on the Mount is directed at exposing the false righteousness preached and practiced by the Pharisees as Jesus prepared the people to receive the inward righteousness He would provide through the Cross.
  2. Matt 5:3-12—Jesus opened His sermon with a description of the kind of people who will enter the kingdom. These verses are often referred to as the beatitudes (a word not found in Scripture).
    - a. Beatitude comes from a Latin word (beatify) that means blessed or happy. The word blessed in the Greek means happy, fortunate, well off. Jesus uses the word blessed nine times as He described the characteristics of people of the kingdom.
      1. The beatitudes have been the basis of many sermons about the characteristics that Christians are to display—meekness, mercy, peacemaking, etc. But Jesus wasn't talking to or about Christians. There are no Christians yet because He has not been to the Cross.
      2. To properly interpret this passage, we must remember who Jesus is talking to and why—1<sup>st</sup> century Jews who were looking for a kingdom and a king. What was Jesus trying to convey?

3. Jesus was preparing His listeners to receive the spiritual kingdom (inward transformation in their hearts by new birth) rather than a physical, material kingdom. All the beatitudes have reference to a spiritual condition and attitude. None of them are natural traits. Poor doesn't mean natural, material poverty. Mourn doesn't refer sorrow over loss of something or someone.
- b. v3-5—Jesus opened His teaching with the statement that the kingdom of Heaven belongs to the poor in spirit or those who sense their spiritual poverty (Berkeley); feel their spiritual need (Goodspeed).
  1. Jesus' audience knew that their sin had to be dealt with if they were going to enter the kingdom. They would have been familiar with statements from the prophets about God dwelling with those who are contrite and humble in spirit. Isa 57:15; Isa 66:2.
  2. Poor in spirit is a man's attitude toward himself. He recognizes his spiritual poverty before God. Mourning or sorrow follows the recognition of our complete lack before God.
    - A. Remember, Jesus opened His ministry with the word repent. The word is used of turning from sin and implies a feeling of sorrow and regret.
    - B. Those who recognize and mourn over their sin will be comforted or encouraged because the Messiah has come to deal with sin by paying for it with His own blood.
  3. The meek shall inherit the earth. The Greek word translated meek does not carry the idea of weakness as it does in English. It has the idea of a strong man's choice to control his reactions in submission to God (*Strong's Concordance*).
    - A. In other words, this is someone who has seen his spiritual poverty, mourned over his sin, and is ready to submit to God and receive true righteousness, the kingdom within (new birth), and ultimately receive the kingdom on earth.
    - B. Jesus' audience would have been familiar with Ps 37:11 (the meek shall inherit the earth). The theme of the psalm is: Don't fret over evil doers. There is coming a day when the righteous will be rewarded. They will inherit the land and possess the physical, visible expression of the kingdom. v9, 22, 29
- c. v6-12—Jesus' audience knew that they must have righteousness to enter the kingdom, and He tells them it is attainable. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. The merciful shall obtain mercy, the pure in heart shall see God, and peacemakers shall be called the children of God. (lots of lessons for another day)
  1. Based on what Jesus has said up to this point, it could almost sound as though the poor, the meek, and the merciful earn entrance into the kingdom by being poor, meek, and merciful.
  2. But Jesus is broadening their concept of the kingdom by listing the spiritual qualities of those whose righteousness qualifies them for it. He is about to expose the false righteousness taught and lived by the Pharisees and scribes. They had correct outward actions but were inwardly bankrupt (more on this next week). Matt 23:27-28
    - A. The righteousness required for entrance into the kingdom cannot be produced by human effort. It must be received by faith in Christ and His sacrifice. (The audience doesn't know anything about that yet. Jesus is preparing them for what is to come.)
    - B. The audience would have been familiar with Ps 24:3-4—The pure in heart shall see God. The man who mourns over the impurity of his heart can be made pure in heart through the coming new birth made possible by the Cross.
  3. The righteousness that qualifies one for the kingdom will draw persecution like what the Old Testament prophets experienced at the hands of religious leaders. But, Jesus told His listeners, you can rejoice because the reward awaiting you in the kingdom of Heaven is worth the cost.
- d. v13-16—Those who display the qualities that Jesus has just listed will function as salt and light in this world. Salt is a preservative and light exposes darkness. The world, because of sin, tends

toward corruption and darkness. The person who lives a life of true righteousness functions as salt in his sphere of influence, and show the way out of the darkness.

3. We'll discuss this more fully in the next lesson, but consider this thought now. In His sermon, Jesus is not only broadening their understanding of the kingdom and the righteousness needed to enter the kingdom, He will deal with purpose, motives, and priorities.
  - a. Jesus will refer to men as sons of God (our created purpose). Remember, the Jews had no concept of an individual Father-son relationship between God and man.
  - b. He will introduce the idea that sons of God are supposed to live with the consciousness that we have a Father in Heaven who cares for His children and that we are supposed to live in a way that brings honor to Him and that accurately represents Him to the world around us (motives and priorities).
  
- C. Conclusion: Before we close, I want to make one thing very clear so that there is no misunderstanding of the point I'm making in this particular part of our series.
  1. Based on what we've discussed in the past several lessons, it could sound like I'm saying that Christians aren't supposed to help the poor, the homeless, and the victims of social injustice.
    - a. That's not at all what I'm saying. The Bible (Old Testament and New) does place emphasis on helping those who are less fortunate than ourselves (lessons for another day). But the giving is always connected to and comes out of a desire to glorify God and live in a way that honors Him.
    - b. Jesus came to earth and died for our sin so that we can be cleansed and changed internally by the power of God. This transformation makes us sons of God who are then instructed to treat people like our heavenly Father treats them. John 1:12; I John 5:1; Matt 5:44-45; Matt 5:48; etc.
  2. Remember our purpose in this series—to be able to recognize false gospels. There is an increasing emphasis in the culture (and even in parts of the church) to make the gospel about helping society, not about receiving remission of sins through surrendering to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The gospel has become social and not supernatural.
    - a. It is possible to support the poor, the marginalized, and the victims of social injustice with no thought of pleasing God or living a holy life. An atheist can be a charitable giver.
      1. People are charitable, people give, for many reasons other than a desire to glorify God. Some give for a tax break. Some give to impress people. None of that is Christian giving.
      2. Some give to try to earn and deserve blessing from God. Some give because it makes them feel good or it relieves guilty over having so much when others have so little. None of that is Christian charity.
    - b. Remember one of the characteristics of the days before Jesus returns is that people “will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly” (II Tim 3:5, NLT).
  3. We must learn how to read individual verses in context so that we can recognize false gospels. We have much more to say next week!