

SERMON ON THE MOUNT
RETREAT – OCTOBER 9-11-2009

INTRODUCTION

The New Testament is a record of Jesus' words, works, and legacy. Jesus was, and is, God's messenger. His minister made it possible for us to know God face-to-face. His only mission was to affect this relationship and open God's storehouse of blessings to us now. It is not necessary to wait until our after life to meet God face-to-face. We can do it now. Now is the time.

The "Sermon on the Mount" is Jesus' first recorded public discourse. In it is the key to the "abundant life." The first book of the New Testament is Matthew, where the "Sermon" is preserved in chapters five, six and seven. In it are the two best known lessons Jesus spoke, "*The Beatitudes*" and "*The Lord's Prayer*."

God's blessings are promised in each of the beatitudes, posted at the first of the "Sermon" in Matthew's chapter five. Each sentence begins with the word, "blessed". Our English expression for this condition is beatitude, from the root word, "beatify". We define "beatify" as having attained or received God's blessedness. Thus, "The Beatitudes" tell us that God's blessings are real, and provide great rewards.

Because we live in the material plane of existence, we usually think about blessings only at that level. We think that God's blessings are about health, wealth, and protection. But God's blessings are not that limited. His gifts do include supplying our material needs, but extend much further. He gives personal attention, individual spiritual gifts, and faith. He lets you know His reality, love and presence. These are private events between you and your Father, so you two can enjoy each other's companionship.

As we reflect on the Beatitudes, we see that attitude is the key to receiving blessings. Nowhere in His teachings does Jesus say our religious works, in church or out, are what causes God to act in our life. The reverse is true. He taught about attitudes. Our attitudes are what direct our acts and make them good or bad. Understanding this will open God's storehouse of blessings to us.

The Beatitudes are attitudes, not works. Do we already have the attitudes that bring God's blessings. Let's go outside, listen, reflect, and see where we are in this regard.

1ST BEATITUDE

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT: FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The first Beatitude blessing promise is to the poor in spirit. The Kingdom of Heaven is here, now, as opposed to some hereafter place. "The Kingdom of God," Jesus said, "is within you." Jesus' promise is that the poor in spirit will enter heaven while still living in earth.

This requirement has an unpleasant sound. No one likes the idea of being poor. Balanced against the negative of the word "poor", is the idea of heaven's grandness. Is this a paradox?

True, "poor" means being without. In Jesus' times the poor had nothing. They were destitute, paupers, beggars who were dependent on others. This beatitude says you are to be devoid of spirit so you can become totally dependent on God. What a contrast to modern life. You have been taught to be reasoning, independent, self-sufficient, and proud.

You will rebel at this idea unless you understand "spirit". Spirit is the energy of life. Simply spirit, or pneuma, means you, your personality as you are, and as you function. Your spirit includes your attitude about yourself and life.

Jesus' message here is that when you become small in your own eyes, you are ready to depend on God for your blessings. This is easy to understand. As long as you remain rich in spirit you are self-sufficient and never imagine that you need God. You manage your life and make your choices all alone.

Only after you realize that your efforts are not providing the inner satisfaction you crave, can you develop this poverty of spirit attitude.

2nd BEATITUDE

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN: FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED

This beatitude pivots around another word with negative connotation. Mourning usually carries the idea of survivors grieving after a death. But here, mourning has a different meaning.

Broadly speaking, mourning is the emotion of sadness. In this beatitude, Jesus puts value on sadness. Sadness, He says, brings blessings. What type of sadness? In the first beatitude, you were instructed to become humble, small in your own eyes, as start intensely relying on God

To get to that point, you reviewed your past and found it lacking. Past decisions and experiences have not brought the joy and hope you wanted. Looking back at those mistakes brings unspoken regrets. "If only..." These regrets are the sadness, the mourning of this beatitude.

Your sadness about what has been lost --- confidence, peace, joy and hope – led you to the broken spirit of the first beatitude. Your brokenness gave you a changed attitude about God. Now it turns you to a changed attitude about life. True mourning is regretting past sins, damage to others, and time wasted ignoring God. The result can be self-pity, or a stoic endurance or resolution to seek change.

Resolving to change your ideas and attitude is repentance. It is both turning away from the past and turning toward a new beginning. When you do this, God promises to bless you. He will actually come to you, comfort you and let you feel His love.

Forgiveness removes guilt. This is both a blessing and a comfort. When God puts His love into your heart, He lets you know you are forgiven. Your guilt for all your sins and mistakes is instantly removed. You are comforted, you are blessed and you know God is real.

3Rd BEATITUDE

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK: FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH

In this beatitude, again there is a word that gives negative feelings. On first glance, meek implies weakness. A popular idea of a meek person is one who lacks spirit and courage. A second look at the dictionary yields other and more positive definitions.

The meek is one who is strong but not violent, able to endure injury with patience and without resentment. A better idea of the meaning is “humility”. The meek person of this beatitude is one who is secure, humble, and unassuming. Jesus called himself meek and gentle. It describes a person who is able to handle conflicts and insults without an ego crisis. In our time, we say the meek person is one who “has it all put together”.

Jesus said these non-aggressors would inherit the earth. What did he mean? Inheritance is to receive an unearned gift. The recipient is an heir who, without personal effort, takes control and ownership of property as a beneficiary. This idea contrasts with the popular belief that you must work harder, think faster, and compete aggressively to succeed.

But it is here – the meek shall inherit the earth. What is the earth? Here “earth” means the realm of your existence. It is your environment. It is the place and circumstance of your life.

So the humble and gentle will be given control of their existence. God will do this. He will cause harmony between the meek person and all the circumstances of his life. Toil and effort to exist, survive, and succeed are no longer required. The God who controls all things takes control of your life to make your efforts easier, more productive and satisfying.

Strife can become a thing of the past when your life is in God’s hands, and is managed by His power and love. Worry and anxiety go away. This is His gift, His blessing to the meek.

4th BEATITUDE

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED

Everyone imagines their motives are pure. Ask anyone why he made a particular choice and they always give a righteous reason. You have never heard anyone say, "I did that just to be mean, ugly, and stupid."

It would be good to look back over our past and say our actions are always blameless and full of good intentions. You already know we can't. You faced that issue at the mourning beatitude.

Doing a dumb, angry, or revengeful act is painful in two ways. First, it is terribly embarrassing for your mistakes to show up in public. Next, bad results always come from bad acts. So you need to make righteous choices that translate into moral acts for you own sake. It makes life easier.

But that doesn't always happen. The truth is that most of us are as Paul described himself in his letter to the Romans. "I do not control my own actions. I do not do what I want, but do what I would not." Guilt and damage caused by this quirk of human nature makes your soul "hunger and thirst" for right choices and habitual righteousness.

Hungering is a discomfort caused by lack of necessary nutrients. Thirsting is a strong need for live sustaining fluid. Hungering and thirsting puts all other needs into the back of your mind. "I must," we say, "get something to eat and drink, now!"

Built into us a hunger to be right. We want to be seen as righteous. Righteousness is the food and drink of our spiritual health. It makes us comfortable. To be complete, we must be righteous: free from guilt, shame, and sin.

Being made righteous is to be set upright and in conformity with God's laws. You can depend on God's promise to grow His righteousness in you.

5th BEATITUDE

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL: FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY

No doubt a most popular short prayer is, "God, have mercy." Even when abbreviated simply to "God," or sometimes "Oh, God" our petition is the same. We ask God to be merciful with us, and hope He will. This prayer expresses our instinctive human belief that God is merciful.

Mercy is a compassionate attitude toward others, with a desire to alleviate their discomfort or distress. In times of disaster, compassion and concern for the distress of others seems to be our natural and normal behavior. In such times many will put aside their personal interests and work for the common good as best they can. Some might say Jesus' mercy beatitude is unnecessary because we have some internal drive for compassion.

A close look at mankind's history proves the opposite. Man's inhumanity to man has always been a ruling force of history. The tragic story of our past is selfishness, inconsideration and cruelty. The continual result is political oppression, war, poverty, and slavery. General indifference to social distress has generated mandatory government welfare programs addressing every human need.

So our core nature is not generous mercy but self-concern and indifference. In this beatitude, Jesus tied giving mercy with receiving mercy. Here we are told God's rule is for mercy, and the more mercy we give, the more we will receive. That has always been a spiritual law, "as you sow, so shall you reap."

God's will for us as a merciful attitude that will bring about merciful acts. He promises His mercy to us. He asks us to be as merciful to others as we want Him to be merciful to us. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." Mercy is marvelous. Mercy brings its own rewards.

6th BEATITUDE

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART: FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.

No doubt the most visited discussion topic is purity. Can you remember the last time you had a good conversation about it? Think about radio and television talk shows. Have any of those dedicated a show to this subject? And what about Church sermons Can you recall a good window-rattling sermon on purity, and its cause and effect?

Jesus wants us to consider purity. So the sixth beatitude of His sermon is, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God". The very reason He wants us to think about purity is why we would rather not. Purity takes some mental concentration and dedication. He wanted us to be dedicated to God's will and purpose.

Dedication to an unseen God, who rewards us in private, may be outside our realm of experience. That makes it difficult for us to concentrate on spiritual activity. Yet this is the very activity that lets us "see" our invisible God.

Purity is to be free from taint or pollution. It is to have unmixed desires. In this verse, it does not mean you must be sinless before you can see God. You must simply want to be pure in thought, word, and deed. When you want to "clean up your act", you have made a start on this beatitude. You will become pure in the full sense only after God Himself removes your impure thoughts and acts. God purifies you. Our job is to cooperate with Him. Here Jesus teaches that your heart – your thoughts, feelings and emotions – must concentrate on meeting God. Knowing and pleasing God needs to be so important to you that it is your main desire. When you make this your priority, God will come to you. He will reveal Himself to you so dramatically, it is as if you have actually seen Him.

Your face-to-face encounter with God proves His reality and nature. "Seeing" God and knowing Him as Abba – your Daddy – is the blessing promised in this beatitude.

7th BEATITUDE

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS: FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD.

This sounds simple enough. Peacemakers are called God's children? By whom? When? Why? Where? Will this buy bread?

Most people think peace is a good idea, as long as they get their own way. When they don't get their way, there is hell to pay. So many talk peace – "mir" while they may be the world's worst leading terrorists, planning world conquest.

Peace, according to Jesus, starts within personal attitudes and behavior. In the "Sermon," Jesus detailed this project. We are told not to return evil with evil. We are to turn the other cheek, do what is asked of us, and forgive affronts. We are to love unconditionally, always treating others as we would want to be treated if our roles were reversed. We are to forget ourselves, never retaliate, and let hostilities stop with us.

Sounds impossible, doesn't it? It is, except for God's promise that you will be blessed and will be called – known as – children of God. What He asks you to do, He will empower You to accomplish. His grace is sufficient.

What does it mean to be called God's child? What would it mean to you if your father was President of the United States, or king of a great nation, or some famous celebrity? You would be famous by association, privileged in many ways, and protected by his position.

So it is when you are a child of God. God oversees your life, handles your retaliations in His own way, and protects your person. He continually sends you blessings, both spiritual and material. You get what you want and need by His grace, usually without even asking. Peacemaking brings harmony into our lives.

8th BEATITUDE

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Along with the good news comes some bad news. There had to be a catch somewhere, didn't there? Well, here it is in the eighth beatitude. Blessings and rewards are still there, but persecutions are added. Persecutions? Who wants them?

In the fourth beatitude, Jesus asks you to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Now, He says you could be persecuted if you are righteous. But, He says, don't worry about it. You will be blessed with the benefits of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The standard definition of persecuted means to be harassed. Types and degrees of harassment can vary. The fact is that some will seek to injure you in one way or the other because you are righteous. They know they reflect poorly in your light.

When you turn from worldliness and all that means, and see a face-to-face relationship with God, you change. Your outlook and goals become spiritual instead of material. Now you are different. This threatens those who don't understand that life's base is spiritual.

In the natural, people put goods first and God second. Now you have to put God first and goods second. Your outlook seem to be crazy. You are crazy, but you are crazy like the fox. You now have the best of this life and the life yet to come.

9 BEATITUDE

BLESSED ARE YOU, WHEN MEN SHALL REVILE YOU, AND PERSECUTE YOU, AND SHALL SAY ALL MANNER OF EVIL AGAINST YOU FALSELY, FOR MY SAKE. REJOICE, AND BE EXCEEDINGLY GLAD; FOR GREAT IS YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN; FOR SO THEY PERSECUTED THE PROPHETS WHO WERE BEFORE YOU.

One thing we know for sure about Jesus: He said you will have trouble because of Him. How can that happen to you? What association will you have with Jesus that can cause you problems? What will you two be doing?

This beatitude, included in the Matthew's Gospel, records that you will be "reviled". You are going to be reviled? You? Yes, you are going to be "bad mouthed" – taunted, upbraided, chided, grieved, harassed, and criticized. For Jesus' sake. Are you ready for this? Maybe not, but ready or not, if you take Jesus seriously and report Him favorably, you are in for that.

Why is this? It is because He is grossly misunderstood by the masses. They think Jesus came to shout down their party and turn out the lights. The masses have no idea that Jesus came to start a real party, the biggest party the world has ever known, with lights so bright they light up the world.

But, if you take Him seriously and stick to this course, when you graduate, He will give you a party. There is something great in store for you. Great is your coming reward. You are to be blessed beyond measure.

Did you notice Jesus compares you to the prophets of old? What does He mean? He means this: When you meet our Abba God, and realize what He really did for you, you will be His energetic supporter. You will be telling about Jesus; opening up God's might works. People who don't like to think about god, or Jesus' message, won't like you. Remember that.