

# THE RADICAL RABBI: "RADICAL ATTITUDES"

(Matthew 5:1-12)

1.10.21

## INTRODUCTION

Remember the first day of school? No matter what grade you were in, as you settled into your desks and looked around the class - seeing both where your friends were as well as scoping out the people you didn't even know - the teacher would often start by explaining how the classroom was going to run -you know, how the teacher planned to conduct the class - so that you had some idea of what the expectations were.

Well, in a similar way, as Christ embarks on a major teaching moment that we have come to know as the "Sermon on the Mount," He begins with expectations as well - of what character traits please His Father and are the marks of members of the Kingdom of God. So, as we begin to look at those traits, **let's start with a word of prayer.**

## TEXT AND ANALYSIS

*Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them. He said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 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 Christ, Matthew 5:1-12.*

First, let's set the stage. We read that Jesus saw crowds. OK, so where'd all these people come from? Well, Matthew 4 tells us that, while Jesus had begun teaching in the synagogues, telling the people about the Kingdom of God while urging them to repent, He had also been healing people - of any and every disease presented to Him, both physical and spiritual - as we are told by both Matthew and Luke that demon possession was also healed, as the evil spirits troubling those people immediately fled at Christ's command to do so. As a result, as Luke tells us: *A large crowd of His disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases - Luke 6:17b-18a*, amplifying Matthew's telling us that people were coming in droves *from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan - Matthew 4:25*. Jesus was fast becoming a regional phenomenon. So as Jesus saw this vast crowd, He desired to not only minister to them physically but, most important, spiritually as well. His was a ministry of message as well as miracles. And so, He sat down (the usual posture when a rabbi was teaching) in an area where His voice could naturally be amplified to such a large crowd, and His teaching began.

Now as Christ begins, He will be focusing on character - on the inner person - and on what kind of character defines people in the Kingdom of God. Later on He will focus on the conduct of people in the Kingdom of God. Why does Christ go in this order? Because character defines conduct; in other words, what we are dictates what we do. It also reinforces in the NT an understanding of God from the OT: When Samuel was sent to find a man after God's own heart, God's guidance in this search

was expressed very clearly, by God Himself: *"The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"* - *God speaking, I Samuel 16:7b*. The heart is where a person's eternal destiny is determined.

This position of the primary importance of the "inner person" - that is, character, is what put Jesus immediately at odds with the scribes and Pharisees. For the leadership, holiness was completely an "outward" display: Righteousness was shown in outward actions, sin was confined to outward actions, and the righteousness of our lives was something to put on display for others to see in order to receive praise and recognition. All of this stands in stark contrast to the definitions of the Kingdom that Christ is about to share.

Overall, the Sermon on the Mount has three basic purposes:

1. Jesus wants to explain to his followers what true righteousness is. Up to this point, people had looked to the scribes and the Pharisees as the models of the righteousness that met God's expectations. They were the overall judges of what was right or wrong in the eyes of God. One consequence would be to expose the false righteousness of the Jewish leadership.
2. Jesus wants to explain the spiritual principles and truths that God uses in governing the lives of people.
3. Jesus wants to compare and contrast what he is teaching with the OT law that people already knew, along with the additional traditions they had been taught by their teachers and leaders.

Now while these Beatitudes are given in separated verses, they are not to be thought of separately, but rather as a composite, all these pieces fitting together to reflect the believer's inner filling with the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ.

Now collectively, verses 3-12 of Matthew 5 have come to be known as the "Beatitudes." You will not find that word in the Bible. It essentially means "blessing," and comes from a Latin word that means "blessed." When used in the Greek, it describes the kind of happiness that comes from receiving divine favor. The word can also be translated as "happy." But while human happiness is an emotion often dependent on outward circumstances, the happiness or blessedness that Christ is talking about here comes from a spiritual joy based on the salvation of God found in Jesus.

So, what are these blessings? What matters of the heart did Christ address? Let's take a look at the attitudes Christ proclaimed, that all begin with one singular, common word: "Blessed."

**Blessed are the poor in spirit** - This is an attitude within our hearts in which we both feel our need and acknowledge it. It is the beginning point from where we realize we need help from beyond ourselves and is the most fundamental position from which all Christian faith begins: "I can't." Unlike our world, which is constantly promoting the greatness of its intellect and achievement, "poor in spirit" acknowledges that I can't: I cannot save myself, I cannot change myself, I cannot guide myself - very much the point Jesus was making with His disciples when He told them: *"[A]part from me you can do nothing"* - *Jesus Christ, John 15:5b*. But Jesus says here that "blessed" are the poor in spirit. David memorably explained that blessing in Psalm 34 where he wrote: *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit* - *David, Psalm 34:18*. The fact is, when we are at our emptiest, and feeling our lowest, God is at His closest.

**Blessed are those who mourn** - This is an attitude of true sorrow, in this sense, from our spiritual condition of helplessness in sin. Sin separates us from God; it simultaneously angers Him and deeply saddens Him. It is how He responded in the days immediately preceding the flood: *The*

*Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and He saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. So, the Lord was sorry He had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke His heart - Genesis 6:5-6 (NLT).* As He said through the prophet Ezekiel: *"As surely as I live," declares the Sovereign Lord, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" - God speaking, Ezekiel 33:11a.* That attitude has never changed so, when filled with the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ, we should be filled with same sorrow over our sins as He is - as well as the sins of all others. A great picture of this from the OT is the prayer that the priest Ezra spoke as he realized the depth of the sins of the Israelite nation: *When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness ... And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice. Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the Lord my God and prayed: "I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. From the days of our ancestors until now, our guilt has been great.... Lord..., you are righteous! ...Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence" - Ezra 9:3-7a, 15.* Our sins should similarly break our hearts.

**Blessed are the meek** - This is an attitude that really is a reaction to those around us, in that we are not proud or obstinate but teachable, willing to learn and, most important, instead of defending ourselves, being willing to admit those three most difficult words: "I was wrong." It is a reflection of the humility with which we kneel in surrender before God. When coming to faith in Christ, we exchange living for ourselves to living for Him. We give up asserting our rights to emptying ourselves of our rights, as Jesus Himself did in coming to earth. So, as Paul said: *Be completely humble and gentle - Paul, Ephesians 4:2a.*

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness** - This is an attitude that is a reaction to God, in that we welcome His righteousness into our lives because we understand how completely we need it and how empty our lives are without it. Once God has entered our lives, our desire to welcome His righteousness into our lives becomes an ongoing and "on growing" appetite for the things of God. Jesus very much affirmed that when speaking to some followers as recorded by John: *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty" - Jesus Christ, John 6:35.* It also becomes a kind of barometer because, by asking people what they desire, their answer reveals what they are like by revealing their priorities.

Now, from here on out, the rest of these "Beatitudes" are reflections of lives now filled with the righteousness of God:

**Blessed are the merciful** - This is an attitude of forgiveness, and of an unconditional love for others, reflecting the love that God has shown for us. And the more we are conscious and carry with us God's mercy to us, the more we will be able to show mercy to others. As Jesus said as recorded by Luke: *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" - Jesus Christ, Luke 6:36.* Our mercy to others can't be determined by somehow earning it any more than God's mercy to us was earned.

**Blessed are the pure in heart** - This is an attitude of rejoicing from living lives of holiness that are pleasing to God, and for which there are no substitutes. There is a singularity to how we live not in

any way divided between God and the world. The world sees holiness as "hokey" or weird, but the Christian sees holiness as unrivaled joy. And David wrote about the ultimate consequence of living pure in heart: *Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Savior - David, Psalm 24:3-5.*

**Blessed are the peacemakers** - This is an attitude that brings tranquility and calm, regarding both people and God, and between people and others. The intention of the gospel is peace between people and God. A consequence of peace between people and God is the ability to promote peace between people. And David for one told us to not be passive, waiting for peace, but rather to *seek peace and pursue it - David, Psalm 34:14b*. Particularly in the tumultuous times in which we live, the ability to bring peace into any situation is huge because, where there is peace, there is a much greater possibility for dialogue. For a Christian, peace provides a pathway for witness. And our witness should be a reflection of the peace we have come to know and experience in our own lives. The results will be wonderful, as told by James: *[T]he wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness - James 3:17-18.*

**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness** - This is the acknowledgement that all who live lives that proclaim Jesus Christ will open themselves up to insult and even injury because of Him. As Paul warned Timothy: *[E]veryone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived - Paul, II Timothy 3:12-13*. And as Peter pointed out: *If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name - I Peter 4:14-16*. If our persecution is truly on account of our witness for Jesus Christ, we will be blessed. And as Christ went on to say: *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 Christ, Matthew 5:1-12*. In other words, just think of the great company such persecution puts us in: Jesus Himself (think of the false witnesses at his trial), the prophets, the apostles, the early church, and Christians worldwide today. But if our eyes are kept on the prize of heaven and the eternal life that awaits in the presence of our Heavenly Father, then, as Paul told us, *light and momentary troubles - Paul, II Corinthians 4:17a* will not overwhelm us. No kind of persecution defeats the cause of Christ; on the contrary, we remain *more than conquerors - Paul, Romans 8:37* through the Christ who loves us and gave himself for us. In fact, we will always be more than conquerors when found in the life, love and grace of God through being found in the new life of our wonderful Lord!

And then, look and consider the wonderful rewards that await those who love the Lord and follow him; they are extraordinary! And again, not individual rewards but a composite of the amazing grace we will be shown and gifted from our wonderful Father:

*Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They will be comforted.  
They will inherit the earth. They will be filled.  
They will be shown mercy. They will see God.  
They will be called children of God.*

*Theirs is the kingdom of heaven (again, in case you missed it the first time!)*

And, to wrap it up, as if a coda: *Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.*

Wow - how much we have to look forward to when we are surrendered to and filled with the righteousness of God through our Lord Jesus Christ! That's why Paul could so freely celebrate: *[W]hatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him - Paul, Philippians 3:7-9a.* American missionary Jim Elliot, who was killed back in January 1956 at the age of 28, along with four companions, as a result of their work in trying to evangelize a tribe of Ecuadorian Indians, wrote in his diary the following words - just over 10 weeks prior to his death: *"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."* Jim Elliot is what Paul's words look like!

### APPLICATION

I love how pastor and teacher Warren Wiersbe refers to the Beatitudes. He calls them "be attitudes" - the attitudes that should be in our lives as a result of Christ being in our lives. And the entire Sermon on the Mount contains a paradox: It is at once meant as a message only for believers who, at the same time, are the ones who most clearly understand the impossibility of becoming what the Beatitudes suggest- the realization of "I can't" in the light of all these desired attitudes driving us to simultaneously realize our desperate need for the righteousness and the life-changing power of God in us through Christ.

I also love a couple of the meanings of the very fact that Christ was teaching us anything at all:

First, our lives are meant for so much more than our salvation. Our lives are also about expressing our salvation. That's why we remain here after we have been saved. It is the simultaneous purpose of spreading the gospel even while the Holy Spirit is molding us and making us to be even better agents of spreading the gospel. We are meant to reflect Christ to the world because God maintains a passionate love for the world, a God *who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth - Paul, I Timothy 2:4.* One means of conveying that message to all those around us is for people to see the profound difference that Jesus Christ has made in our lives as well, and the incredible joy of living his life, as well as the building, overwhelming excitement we have for our future because of the promises God has made for our future. God wants people to envy our lives because he wants people to see something in us that they realize they don't see in themselves - peace, fulfillment, joy, love. That is why we are here - and God's intention for each and every one of us.

Second, by his teaching, Christ is telling us how we can please God - which goes back to God's desire for relationship with us. He is telling all of us what coming into relationship can mean in terms of lives that honor him and bring glory to him. And he is telling us the blessings, the joys, we can know within that relationship - the joys that come when our lives are surrendered to him, when our lives are ruled by God and lived for God through the filling up of our lives with the righteousness we can know through Jesus Christ. Wow! Now just think about this: When we surrender ourselves - all our hopes, dreams, ambitions, skills, talents, everything we are - to God through his Son, we come into the greatest relationship we will ever know. But then think about this: God wants us to be in relationship with him. His Son died so we could be in relationship with him. The power behind everything in the entire universe - who is truly King of kings and Lord of

lords, and a God who being completely self-sufficient in and of himself and therefore has need of nothing - that God wants relationship with us. Our lives will never be better, our lives will never know anything better, than the life that comes directly out of relationship with God through Jesus Christ - and that's exactly what God desires to give us!

## CONCLUSION

What the Beatitudes are most about is simply this: Christ not only came to earth to give us life but, as his teaching ministry shows, how to live that life he has given. He intended that our faith looks like something; his teachings give us an idea of what that means. And then all of that has outcomes in mind: an outcome where people are impressed with the grace and strength and life-changing capabilities of the gospel by seeing that gospel play out in our lives, and an outcome where we are experiencing the gospel for ourselves, resulting in our falling more and more in love with our Heavenly Father. And just think of how exciting our church family time together will be when we are all experiencing the joy of the Heavenly Father coursing through our lives. Imagine that!

It does beg the question: What is the greatest desire of your life? What do you want more than anything else in this world? Has knowing Jesus Christ changed what you see as your purpose in life?

This week we saw chaos, and anger, and mobs. People were being injured, and even dying, out of all that. It felt like the world was going out of control. And for what? None of what was being fought for is going to last. Not elections, not politics, not presidents, not governments - none of it. And I got a flash for you: Apart from Jesus Christ, out of control is the best, the very best, that the world will ever be able to accomplish on its own - all of which will someday end, and eternally be gone.

And, at the same time, we continue to see incredibly different pictures of truth. "You have your truth; I have mine." Really? There are different truths for everybody? Can anyone ever believe anything they see or hear or read? Well, as a matter of fact, that answer is an absolute unqualified "yes." There is the absolute truth of God, shared in his word and shown through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ - truth that will never change, never yield, never grow old. And at the end of all time, one incredible truth: ***[A]t the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father - Paul, Philippians 2:10-11 (NASB2020).*** Every atheist and agnostic, every Hindu and Buddhist, ever Muslim and Jew, every Republican and Democrat, every ethnicity, every creed, every color, will acknowledge what every believer has come to know: Jesus Christ is Lord! It will be unanimous. Now there's something I can't wait to see - and someday, I surely will. The Bible says so.

And that's why, as a church, we are committed to teaching the truth and nothing but the truth of Scripture. Why? Because the truth of Scripture given to lives surrendered to Jesus Christ creates the kind of transformation that Christ desires for all his followers, that, after meeting him, everything is different. That's why we make Bible studies and Sunday School a part of our church life - not because they're "churchy," but because those things bring us transformational truth, that can continue to change our lives into the lives Christ wants ours to be. Why? So that we can ***"[g]o into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" - Jesus Christ, Mark 16:15.*** Whether across the street or across the world, that's what we're here for: Transformed to be transformers. Let's pray!