

THE BEATITUDES

**A Biblical
Description
Of Those Who Are
Really Happy**

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INTRODUCTION

A beatitude is actually a literary form, a way of describing a happy person. The description begins with the word “blessed.”

As a declaration of happiness, the beatitudes mention individuals who are unique examples of moral behavior. Therefore, as a consequence, these people can anticipate a reward from God.

But, it must be remembered, beatitudes are not limited to one human behavior or one divine response. Rather, they mention various human behaviors and numerous divine blessings.

I. Beatitudes In General

When different beatitudes throughout the Bible are examined, certain characteristics of a happy individual are discovered

A. General Characteristics Of Beatitudes

Though beatitudes are not always formulated the same way, the Old Testament authors usually started their beatitudes with the word “blessed,” Psalm 1:1; Proverbs 8:34; Isaiah 56:2; Daniel 12:12. The authors in the New Testament did the same thing. Furthermore, throughout the Scriptures, the term “blessed” is followed by a word (or words) describing the “happy” person. And, most of the time, the fortunate state of the individual is followed by a reason for being happy (introduced by the word “for” or “because”) as in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:3-12.

B. Beatitudes In The Old Testament

Beatitudes in the Hebrew text are found almost exclusively in the Wisdom Literature. The literary form was used to highlight good conduct. For example, beatitudes were pronounced upon those who

were righteous, who abstained from evil, and who kept the Sabbath. Such people could look forward to peace, prosperity, the security of family, renewed strength, and the joys of temple worship, Psalm 41:1; 65:4; 84:4,5; 106:3; 112:1; 128:1; Proverbs 8:34,35; Isaiah 56:1,2. Usually the reward that was promised was bestowed during life in the here and now. Even a sufferer was blessed by his chastisement while living on earth, Psalm 94:12-14. The point of the beatitudes was not to emphasize the good fortune of certain humans but to show the nearness of God to the righteous. “*Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him,*” Psalm 2:12c. Indeed, happy are those who hope in Him, wait on Him, fear Him, and love Him. For they will not be disappointed, Psalm 32:1,2; 40:4.

There are many more beatitudes in the Bible than most folks realize. And certainly more than the ones found in the Gospel of Matthew (though we will focus our study on those mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount).

C. Beatitudes In The Apocrypha

In the apocryphal material of the Old Testament, the beatitude is still a literary form to describe the happy followers of God. For instance, “*Blessed is the man who enjoys his children, lives to see the defeat of his enemies, dwells with a wife of understanding, has not misused his tongue, has not served an unworthy master, has found prudence, is heard when he speaks, finds wisdom, and who fears the Lord because his days will be many on the earth,*” Ecclesiasticus 25:7-10; 26:1. The significance of the Ecclesiasticus passage (for our study) is that Ecclesiasticus is the first place where several beatitudes are recorded as a collection. Elsewhere beatitudes are single references to happy people. Except for Ecclesiasticus and Matthew, beatitudes are mentioned sparingly here and there as stand alone comments. Furthermore, the nine beatitudes in Ecclesiasticus state only one reward (for all nine) while in Matthew each of the beatitudes has a different reward!

Beatitudes appear most often in Matthew, Luke, and Revelation. To be exact, there are TWELVE in Matthew, Matthew 5:3-10; 11:6; 13:16;

24:46, SIX in Luke, Luke 1:45; 6:20-22; 23:29, ONE in John, John 20:29, THREE in Romans, Romans 4:7,8 (which is a quotation of Psalm 32:1,2); Romans 14:22, ONE in James, James 1:25, and SEVEN in Revelation, Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14. They appear much like the Old Testament beatitudes. However, while the Old Testament stressed “here and now” happiness, the New Testament emphasizes the “end of time” happiness for those who participate in the Kingdom of God. This distinction is vital to our study of the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. That difference becomes quite clear in Revelation, Revelation 1:3 and 22:14. In other words, those who in no way appear to be fortunate in the present—the poor, the distressed, the barren, or the martyr—are declared blessed. They will escape condemnation on the Judgment Day because they prepared for the return of Christ, Matthew 24:46; Luke 12:37,38; Revelation 16:15. They heard the word without being offended, Matthew 11:6. They demonstrated their faith in concrete acts of grace, James 1:12,25; Revelation 14:13; 22:7. Though Jesus’ beatitudes were a code of Christian discipleship, the rewards will come at the end of time, Matthew 5:3-10.

II. Beatitudes Specific To The Sermon Of The Mount

Jesus was inaugurating His ministry. He had chosen the Twelve. Now He instructed them on who they ought to be and what they ought teach. Some have called the Sermon on the Mount “the Manifesto of Christianity.” Everyone seems to agree that it is the core and essence of Christ’s instruction to His inner circle of helpers.

Both Matthew and Luke record a version of the Sermon on the Mount. The one in Matthew is 107 verses long. Of that number, 29 verses are mentioned in one place in Luke, 34 verses are scattered here and there throughout his Gospel, and 47 verses are not mentioned at all in the Book of Luke. Moreover, while Matthew recorded 9 beatitudes in the Sermon, Luke mentions only 4 of them. With these introductory remarks, we are ready to begin our study of the beatitudes in Matthew. May we be blessed by what we find.

CHAPTER 1

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Jesus begins His famous sermon with nine beatitudes. The first one mentions the “poor in spirit,” Matthew 5:3. Who is being described? What does that phrase mean? Does it include us?

I. Significance Of The Phrase

The term “poor” usually pointed to those destitute of material goods or lacking in the necessities of life. Notwithstanding, the word can refer metaphorically to the humble.

A. The Poor In The Old Testament

The word “poor” in the Hebrew scriptures was almost always used of those who were deficient in monetary wealth (though occasionally the term described those who needed deliverance from sin), Psalm 9:17,18; 69:32,33). Therefore, the “poor” were those who “languished” or who were “weak.” They were “impaired” or “helpless,” Psalm 82:3; Jeremiah 52:16.

B. The Poor In The New Testament

The Greek term “poor” also refers to those who are destitute of worldly wealth, II Corinthians 6:10. Hence, Christ became like a “beggar” for us, II Corinthians 8:9. Poverty also referred to craftsmen from the working class. The Gospel was to be preached to the poor, Matthew 11:5. The church cared for the “needy,” Acts 4:34. And the “poor” were accepted as members in the community of faith, James 2:5.

Moreover, in biblical times, the word “poor” apparently could be a reference to a particular religious affiliation. They were the faithful children of the covenant, Deuteronomy 15:11. The “poor” shunned wealth. The Dead Sea Scrolls seems to use the word “poor” as a label for

members of the Essene desert community. And, for some folks, the humble referred to the followers of Christ, i.e., “*the poor saints in Jerusalem*,” Romans 15:26.

II. Clarification Of The Reward

The nine beatitudes in Matthew are divided into two subunits: (1) the first four deal with our vertical relationship with God and (2) the last five beatitudes refer to our horizontal relationships with man. Of the last five, three pertain to relationships that the followers of Christ initiate. The last two reflect relationships that the world initiates.

A. Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit. It is surprising to hear Jesus say: “*Happy are the poor.*” However, one must keep in mind that in the first century, “poor” often meant having no influence or prestige. Therefore, “the poor in spirit” could be the down trodden and oppressed. In the final analysis, Jesus was probably saying, the “poor in spirit” put their full trust in God. In other words, “happy is the person who has realized his or her own helplessness and placed their complete faith in the Almighty.” The one who is “poor in spirit” realizes material things are of little value. God is their salvation.

B. Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven. The Lord did not say that poverty was a good thing. No! Poverty is not in itself desirable. Christ did not suggest one should be happy living in the slums. The kind of poverty He will bless is the poverty of the spirit. Such humility belongs to the kingdom. The kingdom is where the will of God is done. It is where God rules. It is where we realize our inability to cope with life. It is where we look to heaven to supply our spiritual needs. The kingdom is the possession of “the poor in spirit” because they have learned to trust and obey.

III. Application To Today

We are shortsighted and unwise. We are prone to call the rich happy (in their lavish spending and opulent lifestyle). Or, we often say, “Blessed are those who win the lottery.” But is that really true? Does that

actually bring lasting joy? Does such gladness reach into eternity? Or is it temporary and fleeting?

Good fortune is not necessarily a blessing. True happiness is a gift of God. It cannot be taken away by the world. It is not altered by the changes that are part of this mortal existence. It is not an outward ornament. It is high and holy. It is spiritual and heavenly.

The kingdom has come (in part). We have yet to see its fullness. When the Lord returns, He will establish His rule over everything. It will never be shaken. That concept is repeatedly mentioned in the New Testament. It is original. God will bring it to pass. We will experience the kingdom if we wait for it.

The “poor in spirit” are the ones who wait. They do not bring it about. They expect it. They know it is on its way. They act like they are citizens of it. They will inherit it.

The “poor in spirit” may be blessed with earthly treasures. Most often they are not. Their blessings are the endowment of the soul. The place of their wealth is in their spirit—the immortal part of their mortal body. That is where God dwells. That is where the righteous fellowship with the Most High. It is what God breathed into us at creation. It is what helps us feel the presence of heaven during our earthly sojourn.

In that realization, we feel our littleness. Humility washes over our soul. We take off our shoes. We bow in submission.

Lowliness is the beginning of holiness. We can make no real progress in becoming like Christ until we become “poor in spirit.” Those who want to be near Him must be like Him. We must be willing to take the lowest place so we can set at His right hand. *“Everyone who humbles himself will be exalted,”* Luke 14:11. When we are empty of ourselves, we have room for God. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,”* Matthew 5:3.

CHAPTER 2

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

The second beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount says, “*Blessed are those that mourn*,” Matthew 5:4. Since the first four beatitudes speak about our relationship with God, the “blessed” cry about something that concerns the Lord. But over what does a believer lament? Who is being described? What are the “blessed” sad about?

I. Significance Of The Word “Mourn”

The custom of mourning was expressed by beating the chest. Those that mourned usually sat on the ground. In Jewish circles, women most often did the wailing. The purpose of the crying was to honor the deceased, intimidate the demons, and/or garner sympathy from others.

A. Mourning In The Old Testament. In ancient times, the mourners often pulled out some of their hair, tore their clothes, and wore sackcloth, Isaiah 22:12; Jeremiah 4:8. A written lament had a specific form. Israel had a collection of such poetry, II Chronicles 35:25. The dead were addressed in the second person, Ezekiel 27:1-11. These laments were apparently sung antiphonally as funeral dirges, Zechariah 12:10-14. In addition to funerals, laments could refer to the sinfulness of the nation, Joel 2:12, and to those suffering divine punishment, Jeremiah 25:34.

B. Mourning In The New Testament. In the time of Christ, mourning practices were done in two stages. At death, relatives and friends gathered to offer private condolences. This initial stage of mourning lasted three days. A grieving family would often employ flute players for the occasion, Matthew 9:23. The second stage of lament lasted seven days. During the latter mourning, professional criers were frequently employed. Obviously, in the case of Lazarus’ death, Jesus arrived at the funeral of His friend during the second (and more public) stage of mourning, John 17:11.

It was against the law to mourn the execution of a criminal. But, when Jesus was on His way to Calvary, the women broke the law, Luke 22:37. Their lament was a courageous confession of His innocence. It was a first stage expression of sadness. Since the Lord was raised to life, the second stage of mourning was not observed (in His case). Lament lost most its significance in the resurrection. But customs die slowly. Funeral traditions lag behind faith. Hence, mourning still occurs (even though we believe the deceased are merely “*asleep*”)! The Lord resisted lament (though He wept at Lazarus’ funeral). Why? In spite of His tears, He turned death into awesome joy, Mark 5:35-43, cheerful praise, Luke 7:11-17, as well as grateful faith, John 11:45.

Mourning lost its meaning in the Messiah. It is still practiced (though for Christians) as a means of closure rather than an expression of hopelessness. Excessive wailing has nothing to do with God. Christ replaced it with hope. He robbed lament of its significance. Grief at the passing of a loved one remains (but, when Jesus returns, “*there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,*” Revelation 21:4).

II. Clarification Of The Reward

Greek has several words for mourning. This beatitude has the strongest term for mourning in the Bible. It describes the passionate lament for a loved one. It is the word used for the grief of Jacob when he was told his son Joseph had been killed by a wild animal, Genesis 37:34. But the mourner will be “*comforted,*” Matthew 5:4. There are three ways this beatitude is interpreted.

A. Blessed Are Those Who Are Sorry For Their Sins. Indeed, happy are those who repent. For, they will be forgiven. That makes sinners the subject of this beatitude. They see the remorse they have caused. They realize the cross is their only hope. Their hearts are broken. Their lives are shattered. “*A broken and contrite heart God will not despise,*” Psalm 51:17. Certainly faith begins when sin is recognized. Yet this way of understanding the beatitude ignores the words of Christ. Though the sentiment is good, the interpretation is not.

B. Blessed Are Those Who Are Sad For The Pain Of Others. The earth would be a terrible place without the sympathy of those who mourn its condition. These folks do what they can to help those who hurt. They mourn with those who cry, Romans 12:15. They make a difference. Their goal is to comfort the sad. Thank God for them. Yet, again, the words of the Lord are misapplied.

C. Blessed Are Those Who Mourn For The Dead. The pain of losing a loved one is real. That is the message of the second beatitude. The mourner will be comforted. Blessed are those who go to a funeral with a faith in God. For, when mortal loss enters our life, we are driven to new understandings, to new depths of trust, to new strength of hope.

III. Application To Today.

This beatitude is a paradox, i.e., it mentions two things that do not logically go together. For, in effect, Jesus said, "*happy are the sad.*" However, when sorrow is seen as a teacher, we learn new lessons. Mourning is the pain of being human. It is part of life on earth. It can and should draw us closer to God.

The world runs after pleasure. It seeks to find fulfillment in this world. But Godly sorrow leads to repentance, II Corinthians 7:10. It takes life seriously. It rejects the folly of empty-headed fun. A funeral is a sobering interlude. It reminds us that an end is coming. A judgment waits. An accounting will be required.

Therefore, when we have these serious moments, it is the signal to listen up, seek truth, and live like there is an eternal tomorrow.

Before Christ departed back to heaven, He promised to send "*another Comforter.*" The early Christians walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, Acts 9:31. We are encouraged to rejoice in the comfort of that same Spirit. Therefore, we should be blessed when suffering the most painful loss in life because we are cradled in the arms of Him who is our Comforter!

CHAPTER 3

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

In contemporary English, the word “*meek*” has a different meaning from the term “*meek*” in biblical times. Nowadays it carries the idea of some one who is “*weak*” and “*submissive*.” It can refer to a “*docile*” and “*quiet*” person.

Who did Jesus have in mind? How did the meek in His day behave? What should this beatitude say to us today?

I. The Significance Of The Word “Meek”

The ancient world held the meek in high esteem. For the meek were “*gentle*” and “*kind*” in hostile circumstances. Meekness was governed by wisdom. It was the mean between harshness and indifference, between anger and unconcern.

A. Meekness In The Old Testament. The word is rarely used in the Hebrew Scriptures. It never refers to God. Notwithstanding, Moses was described as “*meek*,” Numbers 12:3. So, in our English versions of the Old Testament, the word “*meek*” is rendered “*afflicted*,” Psalms 76:9, “*oppressed*,” Isaiah 26:6, “*weakling*,” Joel 3:10, or “*gentle*,” Zechariah 9:9.

C. Meekness In The New Testament. Matthew is the only Gospel that mentions the meek. Jesus is described as “*gentle*,” Matthew 11:29; 21:5. Paul also refers to Christ as “*gentle*,” II Corinthians 10:1. And one of the fruits of the Spirit is “*gentleness*,” Galatians 5:23. Gentleness enables believers to correct others without arrogance, Galatians 6:1; cf. I Peter 3:15. Hence, the chosen of God are gentle, Colossians 3:12.

It is clear that we have no word in English that accurately expresses the full sense of the term “*meek*” in the third beatitude. The idea of “*gentleness*” comes close but is somewhat short of the mark.

It is a fact (borne out in history) that only those who control themselves

will achieve greatness. Moses was meek (but not a Milton Milk Toast). Indeed, he was far from being a push over. No one can lead others until he has mastered himself. Hence, those who yield to God will be meek. It is the “*meek*” that will receive a reward.

II. Clarification Of The Reward

Christ said, “*The meek will inherit the earth,*” Matthew 5:5. There are three interpretations of the words “inherit the earth.”

A. The Land Of Palestine. Since this beatitude is a quotation from the Book of Psalms, many believe it refers to the land of Palestine. The “meek” will inherit “*the land,*” Psalm 37:11. The idea is repeated in both Psalms (37:9,23,29, and 34) and in Isaiah (60:21a; 61:7). Though the wicked had power over Israel, the “meek” would eventually rule their country. Certainly, in Jesus’ day, those who heard the Sermon on the Mount would interpret this beatitude to mean throwing off the yoke of Rome.

B. The Whole World. Others think the “meek” will inherit the entire planet. Because the faith has spread beyond the borders of Palestine, this interpretation seems more fitting to our present reality.

C. The New Earth. A third group takes a different approach to this beatitude. They see “the land” as the end of time, renovated, “new earth,” cf. Isaiah 65:17; Romans 8:19-21; II Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-4. This position sees the reward in the first and third beatitudes as virtually synonymous.

III. Application To Today

The meek are gentle. They forgive. They do not retaliate. Consequently, the meek patiently suffer wrong, I Peter 2:19. They do not think overmuch of themselves. They are willing to labor behind the scenes.

True meekness is a welcome grace in an angry world. It respects others. It extends honor and dignity. Meekness may outwardly resemble cowardice but it is very different. For the “meek” are strong and resilient. They win through quiet effort where power and animosity fails.

Jesus did His greatest work when He was “led like a lamb to the slaughter.” Pilate was baffled by the calm strength of the Messiah. And the Lord offers a reward to those who act the same way. Are we ready to follow His example?

The “meek” lovingly bow to the authority of God. When they are hurt, they praise His name. When they are lost, He guides them. He teaches the “meek” His ways, Psalm 25:9. And He sustains the faithful in their journey through this life, Psalm 147:6.

Jesus was “meek,” Matthew 11:29. And, when He triumphantly entered into Jerusalem (a few days before His crucifixion), Matthew quoted Zechariah the prophet saying, “*See, your King comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey,*” Matthew 21:5.

The “meek” give soft answers to hard questions. They are like velvet bricks—strong but tender, powerful but kind.

Muhammad Ali, the heavy weight boxer, was in his prime. He boarded an airplane. When the plane was ready for take off, the stewardess reminded him to fasten his seat belt.

“But superman didn’t need no seat belt,” Ali protested. *“Neither did superman need an airplane!”* the petite stewardess replied! Ali fastened his seat belt!

Who won that confrontation: The boxing champion or the “meek” stewardess? Her action is the example we should follow. Indeed, she was “meek” but not a “limp lily.”

CHAPTER 4

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Words do not exist in isolation. Their meaning is derived from their context. This is particularly true of this beatitude. It conveyed a different meaning to those who first heard it compared to our understanding when we read it.

Very few of us know hunger and thirst like those who experienced it in the first century. For instance, the average person (if he was lucky) ate meat once a week. In other words, he was never far from starvation. Likewise, in the ancient world, neither did a home have easy access to water. Thus, in modern American life, there are no parallels to hunger and thirst like hunger and thirst in the days of Christ.

I. Significance Of The Words Hunger And Thirst

This beatitude is a challenge wrapped in a question. How much do we really want goodness? Do we desire it as much as a starving person wants food? Do we desire it as much as a parched traveller desires a drink? How intense is our hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Most of us believe in goodness. But our faith is relatively shallow. We can easily be drawn away from pursuing excellence. We are not prepared for the effort it takes to attain it. We plant the minimum number of seeds while assuming we will get the maximum amount of harvest. No wonder we never feel fully satisfied, Matthew 5:6.

A. The Most Demanding Beatitude. This saying of Jesus requires our full attention. For those who are truly hungry for righteousness will not be satisfied with a Sunday morning snack. Those who are really thirsty for godliness will not be content with a Bible class sip of water. The passage (in Greek) actually indicates that those who were hungry wanted the whole loaf of bread. And those who were thirsty desired the whole jar of water. Do we have that kind of appetite for the Lord?

B. The Most Rewarding Beatitude. If this blessing were only given to those who possessed a complete desire for righteousness, few would ever be blessed. But, thank God, the reward is given to those—in spite of their failures—who maintain a passionate desire and an insatiable quest to gain the righteousness of God, cf. I Kings 8:18.

II. Clarification Of The Reward

The point of this beatitude depends on the meaning of the word “righteousness.” Some scholars believe it refers to the conduct of a person that is fulfilling the commands of God, Job 29:14-16. Others see righteousness—in this beatitude—as the activity of God to establish His justice on the earth. “*My justice draws near speedily*,” God said, Isaiah 51:5. Thus scholarly opinion is divided. But, in this beatitude (which refers to our vertical relationship with heaven), likely the second opinion is correct.

The term “righteousness” always embodies the judicial ruling of heaven. No human can turn a guilty judgment into an innocent verdict. Only Christ can do that—which He did in His sacrificial death on the cross. In other words, righteousness is a gift of God.

When we desire righteousness to be established on earth (like a starving person wants food or a thirsty traveller desires water), we will be “filled.” Not here! Not now! For seekers are only partially filled in the present. But, in eternity, our desire will be completely satisfied. In other words, in due time, the Lord will disburse His full and perfect justice to all who look forward to it.

The word “filled” is a strong term. It was used to express the fullness of grace and truth in the incarnate Christ, John 1:14. Both the five thousand and the four thousand ate until they were “satisfied,” Matthew 14:20a; 15:37. And the first deacons appointed in the church were “filled” with the Holy Spirit, Acts 6:3. So those who hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God will also be “satisfied.”

III. Application To Today

Those who have Christ will possess all things. They will be full. As the psalmist wrote, "*I—in righteousness—will see Your face when I awake. I will be satisfied by seeing Your likeness,*" Psalm 17:15. Yes! We will be "satisfied" when the Lord returns.

This beatitude gives the believer assurance that his or her ultimate dream of a perfect world, his or her wish for goodwill on earth will be realized. It is not a mirage. It is not a vain wish. It will be a reality. It is out there. It is ours (when we genuinely hunger and thirst for it).

Many people are scandalized by the offer of rewards. The beatitudes mention them over and over. But they are not offered to everyone. They are not promised to those who make a minimal effort. They are genuine offers issued to those who really try. Pretenders need not apply. No! The rewards will not be gained by those with self-seeking ambition. The rigors of the pursuit will eliminate the hypocrites.

When we put our affection on an inferior prize, it will bring us down. We become what we pursue. Reason is insulted. Conscience is outraged. God is provoked. But, if we love something that is higher than us, we are motivated to greater achievements.

That is the spirit of this beatitude. It invites us to reach up, to live on a higher plane, to dream impossible dreams. We are stretched beyond our grasp. We take hold of what is higher than our own inclinations.

No earthly approval is equal to the approval of heaven. God only gives rewards to those who truly desire them. Only those will be "filled" who were actually hungry. Only those will be "satisfied" who were really thirsty. Only those who play by the rules will receive the trophy.

The beatitudes are asking those of faith to be spiritually minded. We do not "*live by bread alone,*" Matthew 4:4. For, as "*the mind of the sinful is death,*" so "*the mind controlled by the Spirit is life,*" Romans 8:6. A Christian longs for the world to be "filled" with the righteousness of God. And, when it is, they will be "happy."

CHAPTER 5

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

The fifth beatitude is a fundamental rule of life. It is a principle that runs through the New Testament. In order to be forgiven, we must forgive. Or, as James said, *"Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful,"* James 2:13. *"This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart,"* Jesus said, Matthew 18:35. He drove home this point repeatedly. For instance, *"if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins,"* Matthew 6:15.

I. Significance Of The Word "Mercy"

This (and the next two) beatitudes focus on our relationships with other people. Here is where we are encouraged to take the initiative. *"Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy,"* Matthew 5:7. The idea had deep roots in the Jewish culture. The psalmist wrote, *"The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness.... To the faithful You (God) show Yourself faithful, to the blameless You (God) show Yourself blameless, to the pure You (God) show Yourself pure,"* Psalms 18:24-27a.

A. Mercy In The Old Testament. The ancient boundaries of mercy were drawn around those in a covenant relationship. It expressed itself in loyalty and compassion. And, in the case of God, it was exhibited by grace. Divine mercy was expected because it had been promised. Thus, if we are merciful, we will be shown mercy (especially in salvation at the end of time).

B. Mercy In The New Testament. Believers are to be merciful to others because God has been merciful to them. The new feature of divine mercy in the New Covenant is its foundation in Christ. *"He saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of His mercy,"* Titus 3:5. *"Once we were not His people, but now we are the people of God, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy,"* 1 Peter 2:10.

II. Clarification Of The Reward

In all of the beatitudes, faith is presumed to be the tree on which all the fruit of blessedness grows. In other words, only the children of God are promised the blessing. Therefore, the merciful are gracious to others because God has been and (more importantly) will be gracious to them.

This beatitude has moved Christians to do all kinds of charitable works: hospitals, orphan homes, and schools. Help is provided for the hungry, safety for the oppressed, and refuge for the homeless. Heathen religions offer little mercy. Kindness is a direct result and unique feature of Christianity. Cruelty of pagan societies is an appalling sight. It is the handiwork of the devil.

A. Blessedness Of Being A Blessing. The merciful are twice blessed. They are blessed by giving a blessing. When we help others, it gladdens our heart. It is a reflux response. What would we be without pity toward those who need pity? Mercy holds hardheartedness in check. Did not the Lord pity us? Should we not pity others? We need His compassion to face our shortcomings. We need His compassion to face Him on the Judgment Day. Thankfully, God will not forget our works of mercy, Hebrews 6:10. If we show mercy, we will obtain mercy.

B. Blessedness Of Receiving A Blessing. Those who receive our mercy are also blessed. They are grateful for the mercy they are given. And God will return mercy for mercy—though the mercy we give will not equal the mercy we receive. No! His kindness will far outweigh our kindness. The comparison of what we give and what we will receive is a motivation to keep being merciful. The human heart touched by extending mercy will never be equal to the joy of His eternal mercy.

III. Application To Today

When we practice this beatitude, how should it change our life? What difference should it make in our behavior? Three things come to mind.

A. It Will Keep Us From False Kindness. The story of Mary and

Martha speaks to insensitive mercy, Luke 10:38-42. Jesus wanted a respite from the tensions of life. The cross was only a few days away. Martha loved the Lord. He was her honored guest. She wanted to serve Him a special meal. She bustled about the kitchen. Jesus preferred fellowship. Martha meant to be kind. But she chose the wrong way of showing it. Mary chose the better way. So often, when we want to be kind, we make the recipient uneasy. Maybe they prefer our undivided attention. Sometimes our kindness would be doubly kind if we merely listened to those who wanted to be loved.

B. It Would Make Forgiveness Much Easier. There is a principle we often forget. People behave the way they behave for a reason. And, if we knew that reason, it would be easier to understand them and forgive them. Does not our past influence our present? If someone is impolite, sarcastic, rude, or cantankerous, might not there be a cause? We will never know unless we give them some slack, get acquainted, and show some mercy. Perhaps, then, we will treat them as we wish they would treat us.

C. It Will Clarify The Grace Of God. In the last analysis, when we show mercy, we begin to understand mercy. In Jesus, the Lord became acquainted with our predicament. *"He learned obedience from what He suffered,"* Hebrews 5:8. He lived as a human. He understands our situation. He knows our feelings. He is familiar with our thought processes. He faced our temptations. He knows what life is like on earth. He is merciful because He has walked in our shoes.

Queen Victoria lost her husband. About a year later a friend of Victoria lost her spouse. When Victoria visited, the friend stood and bowed to the monarch *"My friend,"* Victoria said, *"Please! Do not bow. For I come as your friend not as your queen!"*

That is what Christ did. He did not come as royalty but as a brother. He was not remote or isolated. He came as one of us. He knows our situation. He comes in mercy so that we might be merciful.

CHAPTER 6

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

This beatitude demands that we examine ourselves. For, surely, we are aware that we seldom do anything with completely pure motives. We may give generously to some cause to bask in the sunshine of our own self-approval as well as in the praise we receive from others. Or we may do a sacrificial deed so that others will see something heroic in us and regard us as a nice person.

There are ulterior motives in many things we do. Is our service in the church done for Christ or for our own prestige? Is our attending worship to meet God or to fulfill the conventions of Christianity? Is our religion a conscious need for Jesus or a gesture that contributes to our good feeling? In short, is our heart completely pure?

The Lord said the pure in heart would see God. Yet we see only what we are able to see. This is true in the physical sense as well as the spiritual realm. When a group of people looks at the night sky, most of them will only see small specks of light. But navigators will see the stars as check points for determining their location in the middle of a trackless sea. And astronomers will call the stars by name as if they know them like close friends. So how do we see God (if we see Him at all)? This beatitude warns us to keep our heart clean lest we miss seeing Him in eternity.

I. The Significance Of The Word “Pure”

The word “pure” denotes physical and moral cleanness. It points to a freedom from shame—innocence before the Lord. “*Create in me a pure heart, O God,*” Psalm 51:10.

A. Uncleaness In The Old Testament. In Judaism, uncleanness was incurred by touching or being in the vicinity of uncleanness—such as a leper or a corpse. The restoration of cleanness was primarily by water (though a sin offering could be required). Moreover, physical

purity was accompanied by a call to moral purity. Did not the Israelite receive a pure soul from God? He or she was to keep it that way. The demand for inner purity covered the whole of life: from thoughts, to speech, to actions. The Jews were to keep themselves from sin (seen or unseen). And, if they did, God promised His enduring presence.

B. Uncleaness In The New Testament. The Old Testament idea of purity is present in the New Testament. *“Clean the inside . . . then the outside will also be clean,”* Jesus said, Matthew 23:26. *“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water,”* Hebrews 10:22. What was clean was allowed to be near God. What was profane was excluded from the presence of the Almighty, Revelation 21:27.

In the New Testament, purity also applied to both physical and moral behavior. The purification that counted was the cleansing of the heart, Acts 15:9. Ritual impurity dropped away while moral purity replaced it. Jesus showed that ritual purity was only concerned with externals (which was inadequate), Matthew 23:25. Purity of the heart was far superior compared to purity of the hands. Now we are cleansed by the blood of Christ, Hebrews 1:3; 9:14. Indeed, *“God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life,”* I Thessalonians 4:7. And, when we do, He promised to welcome us into His presence.

II. Clarification Of The Reward

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who will stand in His holy presence? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,” Psalms 24:3,4; cf. Psalms 73:1. They will see God, Matthew 5:8. That is to say, the righteous will one day stand in the throne room of the Infinite Creator, the Powerful Judge, and the Sovereign Lord of the universe. This is far more than seeing God in Jesus or catching a glimpse of Him in Scripture. The pure in heart will have a face-to-face encounter with the Lord of lords and the King of kings. Thus, we are encouraged to *“call on the Lord out of a pure heart,”* II Timothy 2:22. No pretense! No hidden

motive! No selfish interest! For only “*the pure in heart*” will see Him in the “land of endless day,” I Corinthians 13:12; I John 3:2.

III. Application To Today

This beatitude brings a two-fold gladness. It speaks of a present joy and a future happiness.

A. Present Blessing. Will we work for a heavenly goal if all we have before us is an earthly vision? Not likely! But the believer sees through the eyes of Christ. “*The pure in heart will see God.*” With an intense craving to meet the Lord, with a consuming passion to know that God is with us, we press on. We seek a relative purity now so that we can see an absolute purity later. It will be different from what we presently envision (but none the less real).

Angels are all around us (though we do not see them). The body acts as a blindfold to obstruct our spiritual vision. But in death, the blindfold will be taken away. Then we in see even as we are seen. Our present eyes will be replaced. The new heaven and the new earth will appear. And we will have a clear view of God in all His glory.

B. Future Blessing. All of those who have this hope will purify themselves. They want to see Him as He is. Their dreams will disappear. Their imaginations will evaporate. Their notions will melt. God will be seen in all His beauty. Sin blinds the soul in this world. Purity gives us perfect sight in the next world.

“*Eyes have not seen, ears have not heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him,*” I Corinthians 2:9. Samuel “thought” he had a dream, I Samuel 3:8. Peter “thought” he had a vision, Acts 12:9. And, in his visit to heaven, Paul “was not sure” whether he was in his body or out of his body, II Corinthians 12:1-4. But the pure in heart will see. They will know. Our purity will qualify us for a nobler spiritual experience. And we will have an inexpressible happiness.

CHAPTER 7

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

This is the third of three beatitudes that is focused on horizontal relationships (where we have the initiative). Who are the peacemakers? The Septuagint says, "*The one who boldly reproves is a peacemaker,*" Proverbs 10:10; cf. Matthew 18:15; James 5:19,20.

The spirit of this beatitude is found in various passages. "*Let us make every effort to do what leads to peace,*" Romans 14:19. For, "*God is not a God of disorder,*" I Corinthians 14:33a. So "*be of one mind and live in peace,*" II Corinthians 13:11b. In other words, "*live in peace with each other,*" I Thessalonians 5:13. Indeed, "*live in peace with all men,*" Hebrews 12:14. Believers, on every occasion, should "*seek peace and pursue it,*" I Peter 3:11. We are at peace with God. Thus, as much as possible, we should live in harmony with our fellowman.

However, this is not peace at any price. The truth of God comes first. Friends are dear (though the Lord is dearest). Church disrupters, who insist on their divisive ways, are not included in this beatitude. True peace in the Body of Christ is a possession we must guard closely. Contentious, stubborn, and obstreperous folks must be reprimanded. Wherever strife arises, the followers of the humble Galilean meet the challenge in the power of peace.

I. Significance Of The Words "Peace" And "Peacemaker"

This beatitude (like all the others) requires a clear understanding of the key words involved.

A. The Meaning Of "Peace." "Peace" is a state of mind as well as a "respect" for others. It is the opposite of war. Hence, it is the absence of disturbance, of hostile feelings.

1. Peace In The Old Testament. The basic sense of "peace" among

the Jews was one of well-being. It described good fortune, health, or national prosperity, I Kings 5:12; Zechariah 6:13. Shalom was linked to the covenant. It was the foundation of “peace” with God and fellow Israelites, Ezekiel 34:25. Moreover, shalom was a gift of God: He created “peace” in heaven, Job 25:2, and He exalts in the well being of the faithful on earth, Psalms 35:27; 122:6-9. In the last days, a King will come in “peace,” Zechariah 9:9,10. Indeed, He has come as the “Prince of Peace.” He will shepherd His people. He is their “peace,” Micah 5:4,5.

2. Peace In The New Testament. As in the Old Testament, “peace” was a greeting, John 20:19. It was also used as a farewell, I Peter 5:14. Furthermore, the Gospel is a message of “peace,” Ephesians 6:15. When the disciples went on the limited commission, they offered “peace” to those who gave them room and board, Luke 10:5,6. When Christ was ready to return to heaven, He said, “*My peace I leave with you,*” John 14:27. “Peace” guards us today, Philippians 4:7. It should rule in our hearts, Colossians 3:15, though that “peace” does not always bring “peace,” Matthew 10:34.

B. The Meaning Of “Peacemaker.” The only use of the term “peacemaker” in the New Testament is in this beatitude, Matthew 5:9. It pronounces a blessing on those who promote human concord. God calls them his children because they are like Him.

II. Clarification Of The Reward

In Greek, this beatitude literally says that peacemakers will be called “sons of God.” This is a typical Hebrew expression. The Hebrew language is not rich in adjectives. So, when a Jew wished to describe someone, he used a phrase. For instance, instead of saying a person was peaceful, he would say the individual was a “son of peace.” Was not Barnabas labeled a “son of encouragement?” Acts 4:36. Peacemakers are children of God who is a God of “peace,” II Corinthians 13:11c.

III. Application To Today

This saying is interpreted in three ways.

A. Wishing Others Well. The seventh beatitude suggests that a person is happy when they greet others kindly. Abraham Lincoln once said: *“Die when I may, I would like it to be said of me, that I always pulled a weed and planted a flower (where I thought one would grow).”*

B. Finding Personal Peace. From earliest times, Christian scholars thought of this beatitude in a personal sense: “Blessed is the one who makes peace with himself.” Everyone feels an inner conflict with good and evil. We are pulled in two directions. All of us are a walking civil war. Thus, happy is the person who has internal peace.

C. Promoting Public Well-Being. Though the first two interpretations are possible, I think Jesus meant establishing right relations between those at odds with each other. There is much misunderstanding, bitterness, and strife in the world. And there is no shortage of troublemakers. But, thank God, there are peacemakers, too. These people pour water on the fires of conflict. They are gifted mediators. They heal breaches. And, since God is a God of peace and they are peacemakers, they are viewed as His offspring.

It is not easy being a peacemaker. It requires courage, wisdom, love and tact. For the upset do not usually want to quit being upset. The angry do not want to stop being angry. But there are those willing to accept the challenge. Peacemaking is a Christian characteristic.

Why are peacemakers happy? They are at peace with themselves, with others, and with God (which are the credentials for the task). There are virtues (like kindness) that come naturally to some folks. Peacemaking is usually not an inherited characteristic. It is needed but rarely possessed. It is necessary but seldom tried. And, when it is, it is seldom successful. But those who do the work of God are the “sons of God.”

Two church members were talking. *“I am glad to say I have the peace of God.” “Wonderful! But I have peace with God. Is that not better?” “Yes, it is, though, come to think of it, being a peacemaker for God might be best!”*

CHAPTER 8

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED

The next two beatitudes direct our attention to our relations with others when they are hostile toward us, Matthew 5:10. Our pain is not because we do wrong but because we have done right. So Peter wrote, “*But even if you suffer for what is right, you are blessed,*” I Peter 3:14.

I. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORD “RIGHTEOUSNESS”

In the Old Testament, the Law of Moses influenced the concept of righteousness. God gave Israel the rules. His law ordered life. It was not to be changed or neglected because His ways were right. Therefore, keepers of the law were “*righteous,*” Habakkuk 1:13d.

A. Righteousness Among The Jews. The term referred to conforming to the wishes of God, fulfilling vows, and observing legal statutes. Since God was “righteous,” His people should also be “righteous.” Thus, the word was applied to what was “good,” “correct,” and “right.” The Jews expected their Messiah to obey the will of God. In other words, Christ would be “righteous” as well as our “righteousness,” Isaiah 53:11b; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 9:9.

B. Righteousness Among Christians. The New Testament drew heavily on the Old Testament understanding (which frequently differed from the Roman ideal of righteousness). To Christians, God was fair in His judgment, Proverbs 29:26; cf. I Peter 2:23; Revelation 16:5b. His justice is present in the atoning death of Jesus, Romans 3:25,26. Therefore, He is just when He judges and when He saves, I John 1:9.

The wife of Pilate called Jesus “righteous.” Likely, she meant He was innocent, Matthew 27:19. Pilate shared her view, Matthew 27:4. The centurion felt the same way, Luke 23:47. So, as followers of Christ, we are expected to “*live upright*” and “*godly lives,*” Titus 2:12. This everyday use of the term is found throughout the New Testament, Matthew 20:4; Luke 12:57; Philippians 1:7; II Peter 1:13. Added depth was given to

“righteousness” when it was done “*in the sight of God*,” Acts 4:19. Thus, one who receives the “righteous” receives the reward of the “righteous,” Matthew 10:41. Why? He or she exercises their “righteousness” in practical charity, Matthew 24:37-40.

II. Clarification Of The Reward

Those who are persecuted because of righteousness will be rewarded the kingdom. This was the same promise that was given to the “poor in spirit,” Matthew 5:3. Earlier the Lord removed all occasions for spiritual pride. Now He comforts those who stand out from the crowd.

A. In The Old Testament. The Hebrew word for “kingdom” rarely appears in the Old Testament. Yahweh was king over Israel, Deuteronomy 33:5. His kingdom is eternal, Exodus 15:18. These concepts slowly became the messianic beliefs in Israel.

B. In The New Testament. The messianic kingdom is the final and eternal kingdom, Daniel 7:19-22. Christ is the King of kings, I Timothy 6:15. He enters Jerusalem as a king, Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5. Therefore He will officiate on the Judgment Day, Matthew 25:34.

III. Application To Today

One of the outstanding qualities of Jesus was His sheer honesty. He never left any doubt regarding what would happen when people chose to follow Him. He did not make life easy but wants us to be exceptional.

A. Why Were They Persecuted? At first glance, it seems so contradictory for Christians to be persecuted. But it happens. Throughout history, somewhere in the world, the saints have been victims of harassment for their faith. Two reasons are given.

1. There Were Malicious Slanderers. Believers have been accused of all kinds of things. For example, (a) they were charged with cannibalism. The unleavened bread and fruit of the vine were symbolic

of the body and blood of the Lord. In the first couple of centuries, this was twisted into rumors of eating human sacrifices. (b) Members of the church were indicted for sexual orgies. They greeted each other with a holy kiss and had love feasts. Both of these innocent practices were grossly misinterpreted as adulterous shenanigans. (c) The followers of Christ were accused of arson. They spoke of the world being cleansed by fire. These ideas were turned into terrorist threats. And (d) the saints were taken to court for breaking up families. Indeed, the faith split marriages and disrupted homes. There were plenty of grounds to make real or imagined accusations against the new religion.

2. There Were Political Reasons. The most fertile ground for persecution was government regulations. The Roman Empire was a vast territory with different tribes, languages, and cultures. How could these competing systems be unified? The Roman government welded them together under a single religion—emperor worship. The emperor had brought peace, prosperity, and all-weather roads. People were to go to the temple, burn incense, and say, “Caesar is Lord.” Christians refused. The battle lines were drawn.

Caesar worship was a test of loyalty. The obedient were issued a certificate that allowed the recipient to worship any other god they pleased. Christians were automatically outlaws. The empire could not tolerate pockets of rebellion. The crime of the Christians was Jesus. They put Christ above Caesar. And, for that, they died by the thousands. But, like them, if we suffer for what is right, we are blessed, I Peter 3:14.

“Happy are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” Matthew 5:10.

Yes! The choice is ours. The outcome is clear. Others have paid the price. Will we? If we suffer now, we will celebrate later!

In former days, the faithful “*went about in sheepskins and goatskins,*” Hebrews 11:37. The “green” hides were sown around the bodies of the saints. The skins shrunk. They squeezed the life out of the innocent. In comparison, we sacrifice so little for Him who did so much for us.

CHAPTER 9

BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN PEOPLE INSULT YOU, PERSECUTE YOU, AND FALSELY SAY ALL KINDS OF EVIL AGAINST YOU

What follows is a description of the “blood strained way.” It is an awesome scene when one realizes it was spoken to recent recruits to the cause. But Jesus had eyes that saw beyond His immediate present. He understood the greatness involved in the issues at hand. He did not back away from the difficulty of following the Almighty, Matthew 5:11. And neither should we.

I. Reality Of Persecution

The Lord predicted His martyrdom. The cross was no surprise. His crucifixion was expected. And, for those who followed Him, persecution was also “part of the package.”

A. Jewish Opposition. The Sanhedrin attempted to ban the apostles from preaching about Christ, Acts 4:17,18. The warning was ignored (even though the apostles had been “flogged),” Acts 5:40,41. A short time later Stephen was stoned (which was the ancient punishment for blasphemy), Acts 7:59. Then, Saul went on a rampage. He dragged men and women from their homes and threw them in prison, Acts 8:3. And, soon thereafter, King Herod targeted leaders of the church. He executed James and imprisoned Peter, Acts 12:1-3. The Jews in Jerusalem had turned against the saints. However, that Jewish hatred was held in check by the Roman authorities.

B. Roman Hostility. For thirty years after Pentecost, the church had to contend with continual public harassment of the Jews. The Romans did what they could to shield the believers from violence. For example, when they failed to protect Paul in Philippi, they apologized from their negligence, Acts 16:22,23, 35-39. In Ephesus, when an angry mob brought Paul to court, the Roman proconsul dismissed the charges, Acts 18:12-16. And, a detachment of Roman soldiers rescued Paul from a mob in Jerusalem, Acts 21:27-36. But the apostle was not afraid to

appeal to Caesar (who, at that time, was Nero), Acts 25:9-12. Paul had even assured the saints in Rome that “*rulers are not a terror to good conduct*,” Romans 13:3. Yet, a short time later, this protection was suddenly removed. The burning of Rome in July of 64 AD was a pivot point. Nero accused the Christians of arson. After merciless torture, some of the believers falsely confessed. A flood of persecution followed. Members of the church were now targets of both the Jews and the Romans. It was a crime to be a Christian. The rest is history.

II. Significance Of Persecution

When we see how persecution developed, we are in a position to see the glory in such mistreatment. Any mention of bliss in suffering seems out of place, but the Lord knew what He was talking about. “*Rejoice and be glad*,” He announced, “*because great is your reward in heaven*,” Matthew 5:12b.

A. Suffering Is An Opportunity To Show Loyalty To Christ. One of the most famous Christian martyrs was Polycarp. He was a student of the apostle John. At eighty-six years old, he was given the choice to worship Caesar or die. He said, “*How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?*” So the Romans burned him at the stake. We have never made nor likely never will make a sacrifice like that for Jesus. Yet, should that be our lot, I hope we will do what Polycarp did. And, when that time comes, if it ever does, it will be our opportunity to show our loyalty to Him who died for us.

B. Suffering Is A Way To Walk In The Shoes Of The Prophets. Did not our Lord say, “*in the same way they persecuted the prophets*,” they will persecute His disciples? Matthew 5:12c. Suffering for God is to join the parade of the faithful. It is an honor to be in their company, to follow their example, and to march in step with the same drummer.

C. Suffering Is The Ticket To The Throne Room Of God. There is something always thrilling about joining the crowd at a great event, on a memorable occasion. The first century martyrs were brought into the presence of God, Revelation 7:13-17. When we are called upon to suffer

for our faith, it is a momentous occasion. It is not a penalty but a privilege. Christ said to “*rejoice and be glad*,” Matthew 5:12a. The Greek word for “*glad*” means to “*leap with joy*.” Like the lame man that Jesus healed, we should rejoice. Like a climber reaching the summit of a mountain, so the saint will celebrate his or her victory over persecution.

D. Suffering Makes Things Easier For Those Who Follow Us. We enjoy the blessing of religious freedom because others paid the price to purchase it. They made it easier for us. And, when we remain steadfast, we make it easier for others. Those who died building Boulder Dam are immortalized on a plaque attached to that imposing structure. The plaque says, “They died so that the desert may blossom like a rose.” And, in a similar way, those who follow in our footsteps will find it easier to blossom in their time. Our sacrifice will eliminate a barrier in their path.

E. Suffering Will Never Be Endured Alone. If we are slandered, if our property is confiscated, if we lose our life, Christ is by our side. Thus, we can say with certainty, “*The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid, what can man do to me?*” Hebrews 13:6. If God is with us, who can be against us? “*Do not let your hearts be troubled*,” John 14:27.

So why is persecution inevitable? Well, the church—if she is really the Body of Christ—is the conscience of society. She will uphold the good and disapprove the bad. But the world does not like condemnation. Thus, we will not escape the inevitable if we remain true to our calling.

III. Application To Today

The offense of the cross has not ceased. There is still suffering—though often of a different kind. It exists in many villages and neighborhoods, in various workshops and schools. The cold looks, misrepresentations, nicknames, taunts, lies, and persecutions abound. Holiness is not popular. The world resists. “*Blessed are those who suffer because of Me*,” Christ said, Matthew 5:11a.

The beatitudes in Matthew should be read, memorized, and lived.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the beatitudes consists of two metaphors: one is a warning and the other is an encouragement, Matthew 5:13-16. These portraits of discipleship serve two purposes. (1) They show that good people have an effect on those around them. And (2) they also indicate that good people can become bad. The Lord drove His point home by switching from the third person plural (“they”) to the second person plural (“you”). He was speaking directly to His disciples, Matthew 5:1,2.

I. Meaning Of The Metaphors

The Lord spoke plainly. He used everyday concepts—“salt” and “light.” His message hit home. The disciples paid attention.

A. Significance Of The Salt. Jesus provided us with an expression we still use today. When we wish to compliment the worth of a person, we say, “They are the salt of the earth.” In the ancient world, salt was a highly valued commodity. The Romans believed there was nothing more useful than salt. Salt referred to three things.

1. Purity. No doubt its whiteness made that connection easy. Salt was assumed to be pure. It was the most primitive offering given to the gods. The Jews added salt to all of their sacrifices, Leviticus 2:13. Hence, if a Christian is to be the salt of the earth, he must be pure.

One of the characteristics of this world is the lowering of its standards of honesty, morals, diligence, speech, and conduct. A follower of Christ must not entertain such a notion. We cannot withdraw from the world, but we must “*keep ourselves unspotted from the world,*” James 1:27.

2. Preservation. In the Middle East, salt was a common preservative. It was used to keep food from spoiling. Salt keeps things from corruption. If a Christian is to be the salt of the earth, he or she must have an antiseptic influence on others. There are certain people in whose company it is easy to let down our guard. There are others in whose presence a dirty joke is prohibited. The faithful must be a

cleansing influence. He or she must defeat corruption and encourage righteousness.

3. Flavor. The most obvious quality of salt is its pleasing flavor. Food without salt is dull, tasteless, and unattractive. Christianity is to be what salt is to food. Unfortunately, people often think just the opposite. They think believers are killjoys. They take the spice out of life. Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not acted like undertakers." Or, as Robert Louis Stevenson wrote in his diary, "I have been to church today and amazingly I am not depressed!"

We need to discover the lost radiance of the Christian faith. It is not a dull or drab exercise to follow Christ. In a sad world, the believer should remain happy. In a hateful world, a believer should continue to love. We are different and should act like it. We must not behave like mourners at a funeral or criminals on death row. We have been redeemed. Our future is bright. We are the salt of the earth. We should celebrate.

"But," Jesus said, "if salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men," Matthew 5:13. This is a baffling statement until the culture of first century Israel is understood. Salt does not lose its flavor. In other words, salt is salt—unless it is mixed with something else! In ancient Palestine, the cooking stove was in a separate building. It was constructed of stone on a base of tile. In order to retain heat, a thick bed of salt was laid under the tile. After a length of time, the salt became mixed with ashes. The tiles were taken up and the polluted salt was thrown into the street (where pedestrians passed by). We become useless to the kingdom when we are mixed up with the world.

II. Meaning Of Light

The greatest compliment a Christian can get is to be what Christ was. For, the Lord said, *"I am the light of the world,"* John 9:5. When Jesus commands us to be light, He is demanding we be like Him. The Jews

were “*a light to the Gentiles*,” Isaiah 49:6. They did not shine their own light. They were given light. We are to shine in the same way. We are to be the radiant glory of God in a very dark world.

A. Light Is For Seeing. The light of God must shine through us. “*A city set on a hill is not hidden*,” Matthew 5:14. Neither should we stay out of sight. Every house had a lampstand so the light could fill the room where it was, Matthew 5:15. We are not a light for the church. We are a light for the world.

B. Light Is A Guide. A light pierces the darkness. It illuminates the harbor at night. It shines on the path. It shows the way. We must be an example. Those in darkness need a beacon to follow, a ray of hope to draw them to the Lord.

C. Light Can Be A Warning. It says there is danger ahead. It is a duty to shout the caution, to identify the hazards. We “*speak the truth in love*,” Ephesians 4:15. That can be difficult. It is hard to rebuke in a way that does more good than harm, gathers rather than scatters. Yet, if warnings are given, not in anger, not in irritation, not in criticism, and not in condemnation, but in kindness, they can be effective. It is a fine line but a doable gesture. It is our assignment.

We are to let our light shine, Matthew 5:16. It is not optional. That light is the light of God. He shines through us. The world will see His good deeds in us. That is why the lost will come to the light.

There are two words in Greek for “good.” The one used here means winsome. Beyond a doubt, Christianity is attractive. We are encouraged to devote ourselves to doing what is good because “*it is excellent and profitable for everyone*,” Titus 3:8.

Sadly, so much goodness is wrapped in cold harshness. There is goodness that attracts and a goodness that repels. We must make sure we wrap the goodness of God in loveliness. As Paul wrote, a Christian is “*full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and competent to instruct others*,” Romans 15:14. Let us be sure to do His assignment His way.