

JESUS CULTURE

MATTHEW 5:1-12

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds 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.”

Not all sermons are created equal. Sermons are like pizzas. There’re many different types of sermons...

For one, there’s **the rocking chair sermon**. It goes back and forth, back and forth, but gets you nowhere...

Then there’s **the casserole sermon** - a little bit of everything, but nothing solid to chew on...

And **the battle of Jericho sermon**. The pastor marches around the subject 7 times before it falls flat...

And **the Duracell sermon**. It keeps going and going and going... And **the oil rig sermon**. If you haven't struck oil in 20 minutes, stop boring... Then finally there's **the Atlanta Braves sermon**. It starts out on a good note, but the longer it goes the worse it gets...

Well, the Sermon on the Mount is none of the above!

If sermons were pizzas, this one would be *a sermon supreme!* In His sermon, Jesus lays out His manifesto.

He sets out a better way for us to live and interact.

For the folks sitting on the grassy knoll overlooking the Sea of Galilee - those who first heard Jesus' sermon - this was a sermon they'd never, ever forget.

Prior to this sermon, Jesus had been traveling the countryside preaching **"the Kingdom of heaven is at hand."** Here He explains the nature of His kingdom.

Jesus gives His followers a glimpse of what His kingdom looks like. The Sermon on the Mount is called **"the Christian Manifesto."** It's the heart of His message.

Matthew 5 begins, **"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain..."** When we visit Israel we stop at the traditional site of the Mount of Beatitudes.

On the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee there's a knoll overlooking the lake. As the hill slopes toward the water, it wraps around a banana grove forming an outdoor amphitheater. You can stand on the ridge and be heard hundreds of feet away. The acoustics are perfect for a man delivering a sermon to a large crowd.

“And when He was seated His disciples came to Him.” Notice a peculiarity, *Jesus sits down to teach.*

Today, the speaker usually stands, but the rabbi in the synagogue always sat. What he said walking or standing was considered informal - *off the record...* But when he sat down he was making an official statement.

This is why, even today, when a university's Physics Department creates a teaching position they call it, “*the chair of physics.*” Official announcements and formal teachings - are symbolically done from a chair.

When a Pope makes a proclamation he does so, “*ex cathedra*” - in Latin it means “*to speak from the chair.*” It's the same idea. The chair was the place of authority.

So when Jesus sat down to teach, His disciples knew He was about to make a heavy statement...

Remember, Jesus came on the scene preaching, “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” His motive was to bring heaven to earth. You could say, in coming to Earth Jesus had gone behind enemy lines to establish the kingdom of heaven among the kingdoms of men.

But what were the values and priorities of God's kingdom? Jesus answers that question in this sermon.

In fact, Jesus reveals just how are diametrically opposed the *priorities of heaven* are to the *traits prized on Earth.* And nowhere is this clearer than with these first eight beatitudes. The values of heaven stand in sharp contrast to the principles applied in this world.

Here's a summary of these eight beatitudes...

The world admires haughtiness. Heaven prizes humility... The world loves to laugh. Heaven listens to our mourning... The world is impressed with force. Heaven loves gentleness... The world is into the here and now. Heaven hungers for the spiritual and eternal..

The world demands justice. Heaven demonstrates mercy... The world assumes corruption. Heaven expects innocence... The world insists on its own rights. Heaven pursues peace... The world crushes its enemies. Whereas, Heaven loves its enemies...

The world we live in values **pride**, and **good times**, and **control**, and **materialism**, and **strict-enforcement**, and **cunning**, and **winning**, and **political correctness**.

And it's as if Jesus walked right into the store, and changed all the price tags. He turned life topsy-turvy.

Instead of "*happy are the haughty*," Jesus insists "**happy are the humble.**" It's not the *party crowd*, but *the people who can empathize with sorrow* that end up with the richest joy. It's not *the satisfied*, but *the seekers* - not *the hard-nose*, but *the forgivers* - not *the fighters*, but *the peacemakers* - not the *popular*, but the *persecuted* who walk out of this life with God's joy.

On the shoreline that day, our Lord Jesus launched a counter-cultural revolution - a movement that upset the whole social order. His Kingdom would be different.

Notice Jesus addresses these eight beatitudes - in fact, His whole sermon - *to His disciples*. Verse 1 "**His disciples came to Him...**" This sermon is for Christians.

The only way to live the life of the kingdom is in relationship with the King. The Sermon on the Mount is not some NT Law - a moralistic code of behavior.

It's the outgrowth of a life connected with Jesus.

I've heard it put, "Jesus isn't saying if you do these things you'll be saved; rather, He's saying if you're saved you'll do these things!" The beatitudes are **a believer's birthmark**. These attitudes are proof we're part of His Kingdom. *Here's how the Jesus people roll!*

And here's the flavor of it, the essence of these eight beatitudes - **God is far more interested in what we "be" than in what we "do."** Throughout this Sermon, *attitude* proves to be far more strategic to God than *actions*.

What pleases God is not just *conduct*, but *character*.

That's why these are the *BE-attitudes* not the *DO-attitudes*. God's kingdom is all about motive and heart.

In contrast, the Jewish Pharisees emphasized "*performance*" - they taught "**do-do-do.**" While Jesus stressed our heart, our character. He says, "**be-be-be.**"

The Pharisees said, "**do-do-do.**" Jesus said, "**be-be-be.**" Frank Sinatra says, "**do-be-do-be-do.**" but that really has no relevance whatsoever to this passage.

What matters to God though, is not so much what we **do**, as what we **be...** The Pharisees did all the right things, but evil lurked in their hearts. Jesus desires a righteousness that comes from *the inside out*.

Remember Paul was a Pharisee before he became a Christian. After His conversion to Christ he said of the self-righteous life he'd manufactured, "**I count it**

but rubbish” - literally, *dung, manure*. He was saying his emphasis on “do-do” is just that, it’s **dung!** God knows if you’ll *be the right person*, you’ll *do the right thing*.

Verse 2 tells us, “Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed...”
And I love this word!

It means “*happy*.” But here it’s in the plural, so a literal translation would be “*happy, happy, happy*.”

Sounds like Phil Robertson.

The Greek word translated “*happiness*” is more that what we think of when we usually use the term.

The Greek writer, Homer, used it to describe the rich man immune from the cares of common-folk. *How he would pay for groceries? or this month’s rent?* never crossed his mind. Happiness was freedom from worry.

People assume this kind of happiness is the result of *what I acquire*, or the *acclaim I receive*, or the *projects I accomplish*. Not so, real, lasting happiness is the result of coming at life with the right **attitude**.

Jesus says adopt a certain mentality, and you’ll be free from the worries and cares that burden other folk.

And with the time I have left, I want comment on each of these beatitudes in rapid-fire succession...

First verse 3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
“*The poor in spirit*” stand in contrast to *the people who are full of themselves*.

They realize their debt to God is too large to be paid off by their own goodness. They've declared spiritual bankruptcy, and thrown themselves on God's mercy.

Author Max Lucado writes, "The poor in spirit... Their cupboards are bare. Their pockets are empty. Their options are gone. They have long since stopped demanding justice; they are pleading for mercy. They don't brag; they beg. They ask God to do for them what they can't do without Him." These are folks who are no longer making excuses, or justifying their indiscretions.

"*The poor in spirit*" are "the spiritual beggars." They realize their only hope is to humble themselves and plead for God's help. They look outside of themselves!

And Jesus will bless their humility, and admitted neediness - with the kingdom of heaven. Ironically, in the end *the spiritual beggars* end up *the royal heirs*.

Jesus promises, "*theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

Years ago I taught a Bible study on Romans 3. I entitled the sermon, "*What You Won't Find In Heaven.*"

In Romans 3 Paul embarks on a long discussion on the necessity of God's grace. He concludes in verse 27 (*And I'm reading from the Phillips translation...*), "*What happens now to human pride of achievement? There is no more room for it... the whole matter is now on a different plane - believing instead of achieving.*"

No one barter their religious deeds or good works for God's blessing. Everything about our relationship with God is based on *His grace*, not *our goodness*.

That means in heaven there'll be no one strutting - no room for pride. We'll realize nothing was earned.

Don't worry, there'll be no stuck-ups or snobs in heaven. No one holier-than-thou. Everyone in heaven will realize they did absolutely nothing to get there. The work was done by Jesus. All we did was believe.

Since the people who'll *show up* in heaven will be the *“poor in spirit,”* the same attitude will *show up* in them before they get there. The citizens of heaven - even while still living on earth - are *“poor in spirit.”*

A famous sculptor spent a lifetime studying Jesus.

He wanted to sculpt His statue. When the project was finished he invited a friend for a preview. The artist ripped off the canvas - his buddy just stood there in awe of the most beautiful sculpture he'd ever seen.

There was Jesus with His arms outstretched, His face looking down. After a long silence the man asked, *“I've got one question. Why is Jesus' face turned downward?”* The sculptor replied, *“When I studied the Son of God I quickly realized to see His face you've got to be on your knees!”* *“Blessed are the poor in Spirit...”*

And, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* The world we live in advertises itself as one big party... Party hearty... It's always party time!

Good times - lots of laughs - eat, drink, be merry. *Isn't this the recipe for happiness?* Jesus says *“No.”*

The truly blessed person is the man or woman who's willing to *“mourn”* - who can be moved by another person's sorrows. They recognize the time for tears.

There's *sin within* and *sin around* - how can our eyes stay dry when we truly grasp sin's consequences?

Once a zookeeper's elephant died. He was sitting under a tree sobbing. A bystander commented, "*My, how he loved that elephant.*" His boss laughed. "You've got to be kidding. He has the job of digging the grave."

There're all kinds of reasons in life to "*mourn.*"

We grieve over pain and loss. We mourn uncaused circumstances. We cry over regrets and failures.

2 Corinthians 7:10 even mentions what it calls "*godly sorrow*" and "*worldly sorrow.*" "*Worldly sorrow*" is regret over getting caught. It's remorse that I'll now have to endure my sin's consequences. But a "*godly sorrow*" grieves over the hurt I've caused God and others. It causes a desire to turn from sin. It creates repentance.

A life with all jollies and no sorrow would make us such a superficial people. The happiest folks I know are not those who've been insulated from hurt, but those who've found God in the midst of their pain.

I've heard it put, "*In order to realize the worth of the anchor we need to experience the stress of the storm.*"

At the tomb of Lazarus, even "*Jesus wept.*"

Robert Browning Hamilton wrote a wonderful poem that reiterates this point. Listen closely, "*I walked a mile with Pleasure, she chatted all the way, but left me none the wiser for all she had to say. I walked a mile with Sorrow, and never a word said she, but, oh, the things I learned from her when Sorrow walked with me.*"

The first step in fixing what's broken in this world - and what's broken in me - *is realizing that it's broke.*

Jesus comforts the person who stops pretending all is well, and mourns the issues that grieve the Lord.

The third beatitude is in verse 5, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Here’s a definition... *meekness is strength under restraint.*

It’s choosing to hold myself back when it’s within my power to act. A “*meek*” person remains under control.

When it comes to meekness, think of colon. It needs to be worn in just the right dosage. If it’s too strong it turns people off... So it is with a person who comes across too forceful. He *intimidates* rather than *invites*...

Once, my son, Zach, was playing shortstop on his Little League team. A weak hitter was up to bat. He hit a grounder to Zach. Usually, my son would make the play - but this time, uncharacteristically, Zach air-mailed his throw over the head of the first baseman.

I was about to jump on him, when he winked at me, and whispered, “Dad, I just wanted to let the kid get on base and feel good for a change.” *That’s meekness.*

It’s not always having to *be right* or *be best*. A *meek man* knows it’s better to win your respect, than it is to win the game - souls are more important than scores.

It’s the ability to set aside *a win for me* to achieve a *greater, godly goal*. And God trusts *authority* to people with this kind of *priority*. “*The meek... inherit the earth.*”

The Athenian philosopher, Pericles, summed up the world of his day, “*Fishes in the sea... as men do on the land; the great ones eat up the little ones.*” This is the way of man, but thankfully it’s not the way of Christ.

Psalm 18:35 says of God, “Your gentleness has made me great.” His zeal could’ve eaten us all up, but He seeks what’s best for us, not what’s easiest for Him.

Nowhere is God’s meekness more evident than on the cross. The Almighty kept His emotions and power in check, in order to die in our place and reconcile us to God. Yes, one day, “*the meek shall inherit the earth.*”

And then verse 6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

What’s your driving passion?

What yanks your chain? Life is full of *stuff* that creates a bloated feeling for a time - that’s why we call it *stuff* - but it’ll never slake our deep down thirst.

The human experience has been summed up as follows, “We are born crying, live complaining, and die disappointed.” We learn early that a physical pleasure will never satisfy a spiritual hunger. We’re left longing...

Realize the words Jesus uses “*hunger,*” “*thirst*” - are brutal, strong, intense terms. They don’t hit *us* as hard, for few of *us* have really been *hungry* and *thirsty*.

But to impoverished first century readers, who woke up every day not knowing where their next meal might come from, these words were a punch in the gut.

Jesus is saying when a man is so *thirsty* nothing else matters to Him but quenching that need - *not what it’ll cost him - not maintaining his pride, or protecting his dignity.* But when a thirsty person becomes desperate enough to look to Jesus, then they “*shall be filled.*”

Jesus promises *satisfaction, fulfillment* to those who hunger and thirst for Him and what He says is right!

I love the old saying, “Jesus is the only permanently interesting thing you will ever find.” Jesus never grows old or stale. “His mercies are new every morning!”

In one of his hymns, Charles Wesley penned, “You, O Lord, are all I want, more than all, in You I find.”

Don't ever mistake the smug, self-satisfied person as happy. He might mask it on the outside, but inside he's empty. Real happiness comes from admitting we're thirsty - we're hungry - we're desperate for Jesus!

And verse 7, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” Once a soldier was brought to Napoleon for a second act of treason. The boy's mom intervened. She asked the General to show her son mercy!

Napoleon replied, “*But your son doesn't deserve mercy.*” The mother answered, “Sire, it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask.”

The General replied, “Well, I will show him mercy.”

I'm sure you've heard the adage, “Justice is getting what we do deserve. Grace is getting what we don't deserve. Mercy is NOT getting what we do deserve.”

Apart from God's mercy heaven is out of my reach.

And that's why I need to be “merciful.” Can I deny you my mercy, if I expect God to be merciful to me?

Jesus says *the more mercy I show, the more I'll know...* Bury the hatchet. Cut your brother some slack.

Show mercy today. Tomorrow you might need some.

It reminds me of the sign that hung on the wall outside the Catholic convent. It read, “**Absolutely No Trespassing. Violators Will Be Prosecuted To The Full Extent Of The Law.**” And the message was signed, “**The Sisters Of Mercy.**” It’s one thing to talk about mercy - but real mercy is quick to demonstrate itself!

1 John 3:17 asks, “**Whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in Him?**”

Happy, happy, happy is the man who isn’t stingy in extending mercy to others, God will be merciful to him.

And then verse 8, “**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**” A cup of coffee can be too strong, or too weak - and I’ll still drink it... but if I find a fly in my cup, suddenly that cup of coffee is intolerable.

And likewise, my love for God is sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, but it should always be sincere.

Hypocrisy becomes the fly in the cup. Jesus desires genuine faith. Only “***the pure in heart... shall see God.***”

The Pharisees tried to be pure on the outside. They constructed thousands of laws regulating every aspect of Jewish life. They thought stringent obedience to the rules could make them pure, but Jesus disagreed.

God cares about *purity of heart*, not *purity of hands*.

The Jews cleaned up and polished the outside of the cup, but inwardly their hearts were wicked. Jesus came teaching it’s “***the pure in heart... they shall see God.***”

In the OT the Prophet Samuel said to King Saul, “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” In God’s eyes sin lurking in the heart is just as evil as the brazen and ostentatious sin.

A person’s actions are his *fruits*, but his desires are the *root*. And the *root* is as much to God as the *fruit*.

When God promised Jeremiah a new covenant, He said, “I will put My laws in their minds, and write it on their hearts...” In Christ, God promises to clean up the inner person for us. He makes *His desires* our desires.

It’s a miracle, dirty people become “*pure in heart*.”

I like how JB Phillips renders verse 8, “Blessed are the utterly sincere.” The fountain of God emits a pure stream. Sincere believers are those who see God.

And look at the beatitude in verse 9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

Peacemakers ease the tension in the room, rather than inflame it. They work on the solution, rather than reiterate the problem. They lower their voice, rather than raise it. These people put off more light than heat.

We live in a dog eat dog world. I slap you - you go home and slap your kids - they take out their frustration on their friends at school - who retaliate against their parents at home - this is how the world goes round...

There's a ripple effect of anger and angst rumbling through society. Yet I like to think of Christians as “**shock absorbers.**” One guy slaps another guy, who slaps another guy, who slaps a Christian guy...

And all of a sudden a miracle occurs. That Christian absorbs the slap - turns the other cheek - returns good for evil, love for hatred. He stops the ripple. He takes a little of the anger out of the pot and injects some grace.

The peacemaker makes the world a better place. He takes the stones people throw at each other, and rather than throw them back, he uses them to build a bridge.

You could say a “**peacemaker**” likes to fight. He confronts hostility and assaults misunderstanding. She attacks problems with solutions. They war for peace.

A peacemaker sets out to destroy his enemy by turning him into a friend. And never are we more like God than when we seek to make peace. This is why in verse 9 Jesus calls the peacemakers, “**sons of God.**”

And then verses 10-12, “**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds 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.**”

Jesus warns us, that when we take a stand *for what's right*, or *for His sake*, those in the wrong will shoot back at us. Persecution follows the Christian.

Yet when you're in the fire, remember you're in good company. It's happened before to godly people. The folks this world calls *chumps*, God calls *champs!*

Jesus tells the persecuted, *“rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.”*

I like what AW Pink writes, *“It’s a strong proof of human depravity that man’s curse and Christ’s blessing meet on the same person.”* *Who God adores, man abhors.* A faithful Christian is hated on earth, but a hero in heaven. How ironic, we’ve joined *the hated heroes.*

One day our scars will be swapped for medals.

The eighth beatitude warns us that sometimes we’re persecuted for *“righteousness’ sake.”* Just take a stand for what’s *right... traditional marriage, or the life of the unborn, or decency in the media, or morality in the workplace...* and you’ll be persecuted by some people.

It reminds me of the man who died and went to heaven. The angel asked him what righteous acts had he done on earth? He replied, *“Once I tried to help a little old lady.”* The angel said, *“Great, tell me about it?”*

He told him, “Well, I saw a biker, a Hell's Angel - a real bully. He was beating up this old lady, so I stepped in. I kicked him in the shins, and told the woman to run for help. I even tried to punch the biker in the nose.”

The angel was so impressed by his bravery, *“What a courageous act, how long ago did this incident occur?”* The man answered, *“About two minutes ago!”* At times we’ll suffer for righteousness sake - for just doing good.

At other times, Jesus warns us that opposition will raise it’s ugly whenever we take a stand for *“His sake.”*

Expect persecution when you stand up for Jesus.

The world hated Jesus when He walked the planet. They crucified Him. Don't think it's done an about-face.

One of the Roman poets described the early Christian community as “the panting, huddling flock whose only crime was Christ.” They were the object of scorn for no other reason than their loyalty to Jesus.

Remember in John 16:33, Jesus Himself told us, “In the world you will have tribulation.” He knew this world would be a hostile, dangerous place for His followers.

In verse 11 He tells us, “*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you...*” The word “*revile*” means “to cast in one's teeth.” In other words, *they'll take a bite out of you.* Expect a cruel and vicious opposition.

“*Persecute*” means “to pursue you to the end,” or “hunt you down.” They'll deliberately pick on you - even seek you out for harm. Stand up for Jesus and what's right - and you'll become a target for spiteful treatment.

And that's not the worst of it, they'll “*say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake...*” You'll be the object of rumors, lies, false innuendo. As a matter of fact, in Luke 6:26 Jesus tells us, “*Woe to you when all men speak well of you...*” If everyone is nice to you, it means there's something wrong with your witness.

When you're persecuted for Jesus sake, always remember His promise in verse 12, “*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.*”

It's not enough that Jesus let us know we'll be rewarded, but He informs us it'll be a “*great*” reward.

I'm not sure what will make it "*great*," but "*great*" is better than "good" - and "good" would've been more than "*enough*." So just the word "great" should cause us to hang on just *a little tighter*, just *a little longer*.

A "*great*" reward is worth a few wounds and scars.

In the preamble to the US Constitution our founding fathers guaranteed us "*the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*." But the founding fathers were wise old owls - they knew they could guarantee the *pursuit* of happiness, but *finding it* was another matter.

Make happiness your only goal, and that's the best way to end up unhappy. Happiness is never the result of a direct pursuit. Real happiness, *the blessedness Jesus speaks of*, is a by-product of living life His way.

And the beatitudes paint for us *the Jesus Culture*.

I once heard of a bicycle race in India where the object was the exact opposite of most bicycle races.

The winner was the cyclist who traveled the shortest distance in a given time. Everyone was on the starting line when the gun sounded. If a bike tipped over or if a rider let his foot touch the ground he was disqualified.

Thus, the cyclists all inched forward every so slowly, moving just fast enough to maintain their balance.

But imagine, entering this race unaware of its unique rules. The gun sounds. You streak off from the starting line, pedaling ferociously, excited you're creating such a distance between you and the rest of the pack.

That's when you realize, you've got it all backwards! You thought you were winning, but you're the loser.

This is what happens to the person who doesn't understand the Jesus Culture - *these eight beatitudes*.

Don't be deceived. Don't get life backwards.

Happiness doesn't belong to the proud, but *the poor in spirit* - not the merry, but *the mourners* - not the manipulators, but *the meek* - it's not the materialist who finds happiness, but *the spiritually thirsty* - not the tough, but *merciful* - not the sneaky, but *sincere* - not the rebel rouser, but *the shock absorber* - and it's not the celebrities who end happy, it's *the persecuted*.

Blessed is the person who lives the Jesus Culture.