

## What Would Jesus Preach? The Sermon on the Mount – Part 1 – The Beatitudes'

### The Beatitudes

- “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
- God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.
- God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.
- God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
- God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.
- God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.
- God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
- “God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. 12Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

I asked a youth class once: *“How would you describe Jesus in one or two words?”*

They used words such as: love, goodness, humble, pious, kind, caring, devout, meek and gentle.

*“So, what would Jesus look like based on what you saw in the movies or read in the Bible?”*

They mentioned long hair, pale skin and a constant smile... like a flower child of the 1960's holding two fingers in a 'V' saying... *“I'm for peace, man.”*

Still, another student's description reminded me of Mister Rogers as he pats a child on the head and says... *“It's a wonderful day in the neighborhood. Will you be my neighbor?”*

But, Jesus was no Mister Rogers! Something about Jesus made the Jewish leaders angry... they wanted to arrest him, whip him and hang him up on a cross? Apparently, Jesus was no flower child or Mr. Rogers. Yes, Jesus can certainly be described as loving, full of goodness, humble, pious, kind, caring, devout, meek and gentle but there is so much more...

So how can we learn more about Jesus. Who He really was? Why he made so many in leadership so angry?

Jesus was a prophet and a preacher. If you want to learn about a preacher... one way is to understand his message, his sermons and his teaching.

Jesus likely gave many sermons throughout his short ministry. But only one stands complete and ready for us to examine and apply: The Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 5 through 7. And in a different form in the Gospel of Luke. I've preached on parts of the Sermon on the Mount for years but until I put the whole thing together I didn't fully understand how relevant and necessary this sermon is toward understanding our faith and our mission as servants of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5 – What a follower of Jesus acts like and how impossible it is to truly be one.

Chapter 6 – Provides new tools and a new tool box to help you in your walk of faith.

Chapter 7 – Puts it all together and shows how a follower of Jesus truly lives.

Let's start from the beginning with perhaps the most well-known part of the sermon. They are commonly called the Beatitudes'. I like to say the Be-Attitudes. What is your attitude to be as you take this walk of faith with Jesus Christ?

One of our more cynical writers wrote a set of Beatitudes in the real world we might post:

- Blessed are the rich for they will be in control.
- Blessed are the proud for they will be our leaders.
- Blessed are the strong for they will be number one.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for pleasure for they will be on Talk-shows.
- Blessed are the selfish for they will be pampered.
- Blessed are the excuse makers for they will be politicians.
- Blessed are the trouble makers for they will get an audience.
- Blessed are those who whine they are victims for they will have their way.

Wikipedia defines Beatitude as consisting of two phrases: the condition and the result. In almost all cases the phrases are familiar from the [Old Testament](#), but Jesus elevates them to new levels and teachings. Together, the Beatitudes present a new set of ideals that focus on love and humility rather than force and exaction.

I think that's putting it mildly. I believe Jesus starts out the sermon laying out the ideals of what a Christian should and could be.... Each Be-Attitude starts with the word blessed. In Greek the word is "Makarios" which can be described as, "O How exceedingly happy..." or "Oh the indescribable joy..."

That's the one I like: "Oh the indescribable joy..."

**"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.**

Oh the indescribable joy of those who realize they are helpless and put their whole trust in God. Those we see on the covers of magazines, on talk shows often mask a deep hurt inside. Where are you putting your trust as we begin this new year.

Anyone who has ever entered a 12-step program knows the value of recognizing their deep need for God. In many ways, this where our walk of faith begins. Recognizing our need for God above all else is the beginning of the journey to true happiness and contentment.

**God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

Oh the indescribable joy are those who passionately care for others. A boy diagnosed with leukemia became discouraged. The family tried to cheer him up with no success. They called a local flower shop to order flowers hoping to brighten his spirits. The young sales clerk heard about him and as he fixed the flowers, he added an extra note of his own. "I work at the flower shop. I had leukemia when I was seven years old. I'm twenty-two now. Good luck. My heart goes out to you." The boy's face lit up when he saw that note.

The Chicago Tribune wrote: "It's funny; he was in a hospital filled with expensive medical equipment and was being treated by highly trained doctors. But it was a part-time sales clerk in a flower shop who gave they young boy the hope and will to carry on.

**God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.**

Oh the indescribably joy for those who are gentle and lowly for the whole earth belongs to them. A little boy was frustrated because his mother kept calling him, "little lamb." Finally, he couldn't take it anymore and he said, "Mama, I'm not your little lamb. I'm your little tiger!"

In Scripture meekness doesn't mean weakness. To the contrary, it refers to strength that comes from commitment to God, the poise that comes from trust in God, the gentleness that comes from imitating God and God's gracious and self-giving spirit. It's the humility that comes from realizing how much we need God. The meek are those who are surrendered to God's will, are steadied by God's presence and are self-giving for God's sake.

Like the chorus – Melt, me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

**God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.**

Oh the indescribable joy of those who hunger and thirst for justice. Rev. Ray Buchanan has traveled all over the world for Stop Hunger Now and has seen poverty at its worst. When I traveled with him, he was relatively quiet with us but when he was around poverty stricken areas, came to life, especially with children. When I talk to Meghan Cotter at Micah, I see an energy in her whenever the subject is about helping others.

**God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.**

Oh the indescribable joy of those who can truly forgive for they will be shown mercy. There is something special about mercy. One reason, we like it so much is that we need it. We need to receive mercy and we need to pass it on.

A woman wrote a long letter asking forgiveness from a pastor she had been particularly hard on. She had literally harassed him no end. He wrote back with three words: Forgiven! Forgotten! Forever!

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator.  
If our greatest need had been technology. God would have sent a scientist.  
If our greatest need had been money, God would send an economist.  
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would send an entertainer.  
But our greatest need is forgiveness so God sent us a Savior to forgive us and then sends you and I out to be agents of forgiveness and mercy

**God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.**

Oh the indescribable joy of those who can keep their motives and actions pure. Who hasn't struggled with impure thoughts and motives? Being pure in heart is a lifelong struggle against desire that can strike with the force of a tidal wave. Self-discipline alone will not stop it. In the end there is one central reason to fight to be pure. Purity brings us closer to God. It's as simple and as difficult as that.

**God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.**

Oh the indescribable joy of those who help heal the conflicts between people and nations.

Childish people fight. Spiritually mature people heal.

Childish people build walls. Spiritually mature people build bridges.

Childish people resent. Spiritually mature people reconcile.

**God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.**

Oh the indescribable joy are those who are willing to suffer for what they believe. The movie Gandhi has a scene where a missionary and Gandhi find their way blocked by two robbers. The missionary wants to run but Gandhi stops him. "Doesn't the New Testament say if an enemy strikes you on the right cheek you should offer him your left?" The missionary mumbled something about he thought that was more a theory. "I'm not so sure," Gandhi replies. "I suspect he meant you must show courage – be willing to take a blow, several blows, to show you will not strike back nor will you be turned aside. And when you do that it calls on something in human nature, something that makes hatred decrease and respect increase. I think Christ understood that and I have seen it work."

Max Lucado went back and looked the Be-Attitudes as a sequence describing our journey of faith.

- God blesses those who are poor... You recognize you are in need.
- God blesses those who mourn... You repent of your self-sufficiency.
- God blesses those who are humble... You quit calling the shots and surrender.
- God blesses those who hunger and thirst... You yearn for more of God.
- God blesses those who are merciful... As you grow closer you become more like God.
- God blesses those whose hearts are pure... You change your outlook.
- God blesses those who work for peace... You love others more intensely.
- God blesses those who are persecuted... You are willing to endure injustice.

If you can do this, the next part of Scripture becomes ever more meaningful for you and for those you come in contact with.

**Teaching about Salt and Light** - "You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

This is no casual shift in attitude. It is really Jesus offering to destroy our old self and helping us create a new life with God. The more radical the change we are able to make, the greater the blessing and the joy. And I would add, it is worth the effort.

Because you are no longer impacting yourself. You are like salt and light making a difference all around you. The changes in you are noticed and people begin to ask questions. Why are you acting so different lately? Some will like the new you and some will feel threatened by what you represent.

As you get closer to God and as your light shines brighter and as your salt gets saltier, you will be perceived differently and at times you will be misunderstood, condemned and in some extreme cases, you will be persecuted, threatened and possibly harmed.

That's the Jesus of this sermon and he's calling out to you to... have the courage to "Follow Me."

That's why Jewish leaders hated him so much. He threatened their comfortable way of life with a call to radical discipleship, and they knew they had to respond. A few chose to follow him but most chose to first ignore him and when he couldn't be ignored any longer. They got rid of him.

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This is usually the part of the message where I look for that ending story that will truly help you not only grasp the message but strengthen your desire to make some sort of adjustment in your life. As you get to know me better you will come to expect it and hopefully enjoy it.

However, this is not one of those messages. I believe the ending to this message is still sitting out in the congregation among you. I believe the proof of this message will be played out this year as more of you become more and more a part of this church and the ministry we are trying so hard to accomplish.

For the last 6 months, I have really enjoyed the experience of being a part of Fredericksburg UMC. I am amazed still at the ministries and the missions we are involved in. I've also been thrilled to see so many people either coming back or coming from other places or coming because for some reason, you felt a need to be here. I am very aware that God is doing something special in this church.

Over the next few weeks, I will be working to share a vision for our church that I hope will guide us for 2017 and possibly beyond but there is one thing I've learned when it comes to casting a vision for a church. I am not the only one who casts that vision.

This is where you come in. I can cast a broad vision but the details are sitting out here among you. I believe some of you are going to be touched by God in significant ways and I need to hear from you. I believe part of our vision is waiting to be shaped by you and your relationship with God, not just mine or Pastor Robb's or any of our other staff or leaders.

Next week, in addition to continuing our exploration of the Jesus Sermon we are going to participate in an old-fashioned John Wesley Covenant Service or commitment service where our leaders will be recognized and blessed but where you too will hear John Wesley's call to ministry.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn tells of a moment when he was on the verge of giving up all hope as a prisoner in a prison camp. A fellow Christian moved toward him cautiously. With his cane the man quickly drew a cross in the sand and then quickly erased it. In that brief moment, Solzhenitsyn felt all of the hope of the Gospel flood his soul.