

## Beautiful Attitude 1 (Matt 5:1-12)



Matt 5-7 is known as the greatest Christian discipleship manual. The Sermon on the Mount is not a message of 'salvation by works,' but 'working out our salvation' which God has graciously worked into us (Phil 2:12-13) – 'Christian saltiness.' Let us check the foundation of our faith in a world that is getting darker.

- a) Why did Jesus go up to the mountaintop? (Matt 5:1) Some of the answers may be: To get away from the crowd; To separate the genuine followers from the crowd; To use the surroundings as His pulpit; To be contrasted with Moses at Sinai.
- Whatever the reason, the crowd that began with Jesus' disciples became great multitudes when He finished His teaching (Matt 8:1). This sermon was meant specifically for His followers. But Jesus did not mind not-so-committed people overhearing His teaching on true discipleship, i.e. what it means to be a true follower of Christ. Matt 5-8 highlights how we practically carry our cross in our daily life. Jesus always put the cost at the front end.
- b) Jesus sat down to teach. He took time to explain the nuts and bolts of how the kingdom of God works inside of us. We need to pay attention or we will miss it, thinking we already know.
- (i) Character before conduct - 8 beautiful attitudes before dos and don'ts. What we do flows out of who we are or 'what we seek after.'
- (ii) Progression in Beatitudes - We begin by being poor in the spirit and finish up by being persecuted for righteousness. Yet, we need to constantly aim at these 8 attributes all our life. It requires prayer and careful cultivation of our hearts (Matt 7:13-14).

### 1. 'Blessed (are) the poor in spirit, for theirs in the kingdom of heaven.'

- a) What does it mean to be blessed? (*Greek: makarios*) It means to be happy, joyful, content, and even to be envied. Jesus is congratulating them. Who does not want to be happy and joyful? But happiness is deceptively elusive. To pursue happiness is the third unalienable right in the US constitution. How many people have we met who are truly happy, joyful, and contented?

Jesus captured the way of true happiness and unpacks it to us in the 8 inner spiritual qualities we can cultivate. He tells us happiness is essentially an inner condition. Jesus overturned the popular understanding of what it meant to be blessed. In doing so, Jesus emphasized the conditions of our heart that is *attractive to God*.

- b) 'Poor in spirit' - C.f. Luke 6:20 omits 'in spirit.' There is a link between spiritual poverty and material poverty. *How many rich people will we see in heaven compared to the poor?* 'Poor' is a relative term. We can find reasons to be miserable, looking at someone who has what we don't have, when countless people are longing and earnestly praying to be where we are in life. In Greek 'poor' (*ptochos*) means 'beggar' or 'destitute' who has absolutely nothing and no hope of getting out. We in modern Australia live very wealthy lives in comparison to all the past generations and the rest of the world. Yet we are living in an age plagued with unhappiness. How unwise it is to compare ourselves with others and fail to enjoy God's goodness and blessing in our lives.
- c) Two attitudes of Beggars:
- (i) They are fully aware of their need for mercy every day. The Laodicean church in Rev 3:17-18 was very unattractive to God in their many 'riches' because they were blind to their spiritual bankruptcy. Am I aware of my need for God's mercy every day?
- One Trappist Monastery teaches their monks to seek *not to be esteemed, not to be secure, and not to be in control*. I.e. be completely dependent on God, be poor in spirit.
- (ii) They are thankful for daily provision. C.f. Matt 6:34 – *'Therefore do not worry about tomorrow.'* C.f. Phil 4:11 – 'lesson on contentment'.
- d) *'For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'* – Although it may not feel like it, God is in fact, very close to those in the midst of suffering.

## 2. 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.'

- a) There are 2 extreme views on what it means to be spiritual. (i) 'Christians should always be happy.' (ii) 'Truly spiritual Christians should always be serious.' Note, Jesus was anointed with gladness (Heb 1:9) yet he was a man of sorrows well acquainted with griefs (Is 53:3). Mourning here speaks of the godly sorrow that brings repentance leading to salvation (2 Cor 7:10).
- b) *'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; Who can know it?'* (Jer 17:9) Have you ever wept for the desperate condition of your heart? Private tears no one sees? There is something so wholesome and right about shedding tears over the sickness of our hearts. When there are genuine tears of repentance in conversion, there is deep inner cleansing and healing, and lasting salvation that follows. Tears get the specks out of our eyes.

But if you have never wept over your sinfulness, you may not really know the joy of forgiveness and peace that follows repentance. Do the hardness of your heart, the people you've hurt, the lies you've told, and the greed and evil inside your heart make you weep? Have you never been wounded by the word of God?

- c) C.f. James 4:8-10; Luke 18:9-14. *'Blessed are those times when you mourn in private over the hardness of your heart, for you will be comforted with breakthroughs into a life of holiness and purity.'* The struggles of a butterfly to come out of its cocoon strengthens its wings for flying.

## 3. 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.'

- a) Jesus did NOT say, 'blessed the WEAK.' The word 'MEEK' dropped out of our vocabulary because we no longer value this virtue nor have great examples. Meek in Greek (*Praus*) is difficult to translate as it combines the meaning of 'strength' and 'control', i.e. 'demonstrating power without undue harshness.' This Greek word is used to describe breaking in a horse. Breaking in a horse does not make the horse soft, but brings all that wild energy inside the horse under control. The horse is still powerful, but now it is obedient. Samson was the opposite of this meekness and strength.
- b) Jesus (Matt 11:28) and Moses (Num 12:3), the two most powerful men in the Bible are described as 'meek.' Moses with all his learning, zeal, and powerful will ended up killing an Egyptian in his own strength. God had to mould him - break in Moses' fleshly strength - for 40 years in the desert to make him useful in God's hand. This is the training and shaping of God's chosen vessels.

What is God using to shape you for His holy purpose? Failure? Injustice? *A man who suffers injustice but does not seek revenge requires a great strength of character.* Meekness does not come from self-depreciation but from knowing our true value in God (C.f. John 13:3-4).

- c) *'For they shall inherit the earth.'* – C.f. Ps. 37:7-11. Domination is temporary, but inheritance is permanent. In the final resort, it is not the forceful nor the violent, but the meek who will inherit the earth forever. Are you willing to wait for God to allot to you your inheritance on that day? C.f. Note David's confession about his inheritance (Ps 16:5-6, Ps 73:25-28).