

Restore Series 4: Restoring Society Pt 1 (The Beatitudes) // Steve Sutton

Intro

Over the past three weeks we have looked at two key words that are used to describe the dream of God for our lives and world: shalom (peace) and sodzo (to save or be saved) both words carry the ideas of = healing, restoring, rescuing, repairing, delivering, harmony, wholeness and wellness.

Helpful ways to think about these two words:

Shalom, the phrase = nothing broken, nothing missing (the ultimate end to which we are working)

Salvation = Latin 'salve' a healing ointment or balm (salvation describes our life as a healing journey as we move toward shalom and salvation in its fullness)

Shalom and salvation remind us that we are all broken in some way. But the good news is God is present in our lives and wants to be at work in the world to transform us. It's as if we should all be wearing a sign saying 'Under Construction'. Each of us is a work in progress.

Understanding this helps us to be patient with others and

ourselves. Appreciate the complexity and uniqueness of our fractured humanity.

So over the next few months we will be looking at how the restoration work we have stepped into as followers of Jesus practically outworks itself.

Today begin with the restoration of society...

*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **John 3:17***

The little phrase 'the world' which appears three times in this verse = kosmos – the universe, the earth, the inhabitants of the earth – by application refers to human society and community.

If we were students of New Testament Greek, we would read John 3:17 as follows:

*For God did not send his Son into the kosmos to condemn the kosmos, but to sodzo the kosmos through him. **John 3:17***

For God did not send his Son into society to condemn society, but to heal, rescue, restore, repair, deliver, bring

harmony to, make whole and make well society through him. John 3:17

What do we mean by society?

A simple definition of society: people ... living together in organized communities, with laws and traditions controlling the way that they **behave** towards one another. (Macmillan Dictionary)

Society is the web of human relationships, the activities, structures, institutions, traditions, cultural and behavioural norms, which groups of people like ourselves engage in.

John 3:17 suggest that human society / the communities we have built are broken and in need of sodzo – they need rescuing and restoring. Just ten minutes watching the news and you wouldn't dispute that.

The key question: What behaviours will cause society to flourish?

I propose that the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7 is Jesus' **blueprint** for a healthy functioning society and it gives us a glimpse of what good citizenship

looks like.

The Sermon on the Mount is arguably the most significant body of ethical and moral teaching the world has seen. It is impossible to measure the level of impact these 107 verses have had particularly on Western civilization.

Because it takes approximately twenty minutes to speak out the Sermon on the Mount, someone described it as the twenty minutes that changed the world.

This twenty minute sermon begins in Matthew 5:1-12 with what are commonly called the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes describe nine virtues that make up good character, which then enable us to live out a set of practices, which are found in the remainder of Matthew 5, 6 & 7 that help build a moral, ethical and flourishing society.

Virtues (those traits outlined in the Beatitudes) are defined as qualities of a person that make that person a good person in community, and that contribute to the good of the community... They are qualities of character.

(Kingdom Ethics, Stassen & Gushee)

A good community begins with people of good character.

Let's read through Matthew 5:1-12

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The Beatitudes ought to be a series within itself but because we only have about 15 minutes, we will quickly go through and paraphrase each of the virtues and then I will whet your appetite by briefly talking about two of them.

Virtue # 1. Be humble

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. We will come back to this one.

Virtue # 2. Be emotionally honest

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Virtue # 3. Be balanced

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. We will come back to this one.

Virtue # 4. Be passionate about righting wrongs

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Virtue # 5. Be compassionate

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Virtue # 6. Have right motives

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Virtue # 7. Prioritize relationships

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Virtue # 8. Don't live for the approval of others

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Virtue # 9. Live with eternity in mind

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you

and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.

Let's look at these traits...

Be balanced

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

We generally wouldn't take it as a compliment if someone said they thought we were meek. Meekness is often synonymous with weakness.

Yet, in the ancient world it was considered the number one virtue. That is because the Greek word for meekness is a fascinating word that means 'the balancing point between two extremes'.

The ability to find a happy medium.

Ecclesiastes 7:18, "A person of wisdom avoids extremes."

Meekness = moderation.

Meekness is the ability to develop a balanced lifestyle and hold in tension competing truths.

Let me give you some examples of balance.

A spendthrift is someone who is extravagant when it comes to spending money. They love to buy things. Money burns a hole in their pocket. They have to have the latest and greatest toy and treat.

Then there's the other extreme – **the miser**. They have money but won't part with it. They take you out for lunch but never take their wallet – you foot the bill. Count every penny – they are stingy and mean.

A person who is meek is able to find the happy medium: they save money, spend money and give money away.

Emotional extremists

Explosive anger – rant, rave and lose their temper over little things. (Chili con carne story)

But just as bad is those who are emotionally passive – never get angry about anything – nothing moves them.

A truly meek person is able to get angry at the right time, for the right reason and in their anger they do not sin.

Christian extremists

In the church we have plenty of extremists. Carried away by every wind of doctrine. Run off on all kinds of tangents.

Pentecostals = Holy Spirit, emotion, enthusiasm, experience

Evangelicals = The Bible – teaching, knowing truth and facts

We need both in equal measure, hold both in tension.

James 1:21 “receive with meekness the engrafted word of God.” Think balanced about the Bible.

The virtue of meekness helps build a flourishing society because it seeks to find balanced political, economic and social solutions to problems.

The second virtue I briefly want to highlight is be humble

Blessed are the poor in spirit. “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for God...” NLT

Poor in spirit = metaphor for humility.

The very first instruction given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is the key to unlocking and living out everything else that follows. If we don’t live with a heart of humility toward God and others – society breaks down.

The problem with each of us is pride. We all have a bias and propensity toward thinking that the world should revolve around us – that our ideas are the way things should be. We all lean toward selfishness and self-centeredness. The antidote to pride is humility.

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. **Philippians 2:3-4**

Conclusion

God's method of redeeming society is through people who cultivate the character traits found in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12, then live out the practices outlined in the rest of chapter 5, and chapters 6&7.

A transformed society is made up of citizens who are willing to undergo a process of personal transformation. Ideally, the church ought to be a microcosm of what a good society looks like. It's the place we learn to develop virtues and put into practice the teaching of Jesus. The watching world sees the church and says 'Oh, so that's how we are to live.'