

## **Pursuing God's Likeness Through the Beatitudes**

The sad reality for many Christians is that they get stuck and settle for the little they have and reconcile themselves to remaining as they are. **COMPLACENCY** = "Self-satisfaction especially when accompanied by UNAWARENESS of actual danger or deficiencies."

Somewhere, deep in your heart there is a longing for more; more of the presence and character of Christ to be developed in your life.

But the question and dilemma is:

- How do you move in that direction?
- Where do you begin? What can you do about all the stuff that gets in the way?
- Everyone wants to be blessed in all areas of our lives.

The good news and the right answer is that Jesus knows where the blessing is to be found. When He speaks of blessing, He does so from the eternal perspective of really knowing how you and I can be blessed.

He spells it out in the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5:1-12:

"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 satisfied.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive 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 others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on MY account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

### **What does a blessed life look like?**

- Is it having a happy marriage?
- Having gifted children?
- Having a fulfilling position at a job?

- Financial stability?
- Opportunities to travel? A great retirement?

All of these things are great; but none of them are on the list of Jesus' description of a life that is blessed.

- Jesus doesn't say, "Happy are the happily married, but blessed are the poor in spirit."
- He doesn't say, "Blessed are those who enjoy good health, but blessed are those who mourn."

According to Jesus, the greatest blessings are not found in the places where we normally look, but rather in places that, at first, we may don't want to explore.

The Beatitudes are contrary to what we think they are saying or we expect:

- Being poor means you don't have resources. Nobody wants that life.
- But Jesus speaks of a kind of poverty that makes you rich.
- Mourning means you have great sorrow. That's not on anybody's wish list either.
- But Jesus speaks of a kind of mourning that leads to a deep joy.

### **How do you recognize a true Christian?**

#### **1. Many would say that it's by what one believes that makes them a true Christian.**

- John 8:24 "Unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins."
- John 6:29 "The work of God is to believe in the Father who sent His Son into the world."
- So, scripture teaches us there are certain beliefs without which a person cannot be a Christian.

But, James also reminds us that even the devils believe – James 2:19

- Satan knows Jesus died for sinners, rose from the dead and now is at the Father's right hand; yet refuses to submit to Him and continues to operate as a self-appointed lord of his own life.

#### **2. Many say you can know a true Christian by what they do.**

Again, a good answer, yet Jesus said: Matthew 7:24 "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

- But He also speaks of those who work in His name that He addresses on the Last Day saying: "I never knew you, depart from me." Matthew 7:23.
- Here people were active in ministry but evidently were not true Christians.

- These were people who taught the Bible, confronted evil in society, brought change for the good of many others, impressive works, but according to Jesus, none of them in themselves give conclusive evidence that a person belongs to Christ.

When Jesus revealed to those disciples and to us about life under the blessing of God; He did not teach them doctrine or a mandate for a mission [yet].

He described a Kingdom citizen as one who is:

- Poor in spirit.
- Mourns over his/her sins.
- Meekly submits to the will of God.
- Longs to grow in righteousness.

**It is in the life of this person that the blessing of God will be found.**

In the Beatitudes, Jesus calls us to:

1. Open your heart to the searching gaze of Jesus.
2. Examine your interior life.
3. Discern your spiritual condition – NOT CONDEMNATION of yourself for failures – God is not mad at you.

**Are the distinguishing marks of a life under the blessing of God evident in you?**

Ask yourself some honest questions:

1. “**Blessed are the peacemakers**”: Matthew 5:9 - Are you a person who brings peace?
  - Does peace follow you because it lives in you?
  - Do other people at home or at work experience tension from you because of the turmoil in your life?
2. “**Blessed are the pure in heart**”: Matthew 5:8 - What is the condition of your heart?
  - To what extent has your inner life been fouled up by your impurity?
3. “**Blessed are the merciful**”: Matthew 5:7 - How are you doing when it comes to forgiving others?
  - Are you a grudge holder or a quick forgiver?
  - Are you merciful toward the weaknesses of others who have failed you?

Jesus' words cut through the shallowness and cheap talk that often fills our Christian dialogue.

If you are standing on a halfhearted decision you once made to follow Christ as Lord; which has brought no change or effect in your life; you need to wake up to the call of Jesus' words from the Beatitudes.

### **Standing in Grace and Reaching for Growth**

The Beatitudes tell us what a true Christian looks like, but they don't tell us how to become a true believer.

**III:** A gold-finch is known by its distinctive yellow color, but the yellow color does not make it a gold-finch. The bird is yellow because it is a gold-finch. Its nature causes its color, and its color reflects its nature. Painting yellow dye on a blackbird would not make it a gold-finch.

This illustration clarifies the teaching of Jesus in the Beatitudes:

- A Christian is known by the distinguishing marks set out by Jesus.
- These characteristics of a believer are the evidence [fruit] of the New Life in Christ, not the cause.

Jesus' message is NOT: "If you humble yourself and mourn over your sins, and submit yourself meekly to God and get an appetite for righteousness, God will smile on you and you will get to heaven."

- That would be salvation by works and that is **not** the teaching of the Bible.

God's grace and favor comes to you when you trust what Jesus has accomplished for you by His dying on the Cross.

Then, being in Christ and Him being in you; gives you an entirely new position before God where you are cleansed from your sins so completely that they are not charged against you now or in the future:

Romans 5:1 "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 1:4-5 "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will..."

The reconciliation process of the Father, transforms your relationship from a sinner facing judgment to a son or daughter anticipating a glorious inheritance.

The distinguishing mark of the person who is saved by Christ's death is that he/she seeks to imitate Christ's life.

- We are not saved/born again by trying to copy Christ's life, that comes through our trust in His death on our behalf.
- But after we are born again, the saved person will hunger for a heart of holiness and obedience and to become like Christ.
- Our holiness is not the reason that we will enter heaven, grace is.
- But our hunger for holiness is the distinguishing mark/characteristic of a person who stands in grace. The two belong together.

Christ is the gift offered to us from God.

Within Him are multiple gifts we are privileged to partake of.

With Him, we have ALL the gifts, without Him, we have NONE of them.

God offers the ONE gift to us –JESUS, He is all we need.

For in Him we are blessed with every spiritual blessing – Ephesians 1:3

“Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...”

Here is how you know you are standing in God's grace:

- You hunger and start pursuing holiness.
- Your will is realigned with God's will – your great desire mirrors His.
- You began to reflect the beauty of Jesus, who now lives in you.

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