

## MATTHEW 5:1-12 4-3-16

### *DISCIPLES WITH A DIFFERENCE*

Matthew **5:1-12** *When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

What is a Marxist? The simplest and most accurate way to answer that question is to say that a Marxist is one who follows the teachings of Karl Marx. What is a Confucianist? One who follows the teachings of Confucius. A Calvinist follows Calvin’s teaching, a Wesleyan follows Wesley’s teachings, a Freudian follows Freud’s teaching. I’ll give you three tries to tell me what a Christian does? You can say a great deal more about the Christian than this, but this you must say: a Christian is one who follows the teachings of Christ, or, at least, attempts to do so - Right? Would you not say it would be unfair and improper to define a Christian some other way? On other occasions I would be quite adamant in saying that the Christian is much more than this, but for the moment my point is that whatever else he may be, a person, to be called a Christian, must absolutely be a follower of the teachings of Christ. To call someone who does not do that a “Christian,” is to misuse the term; it is to prostitute the title. If Ted Cruz were to call himself a Marxist, the real Marxists out there would scream, “no way.” But somehow, this one title, “Christian” is constantly applied to persons who haven’t the slightest idea what Christ taught and to some who make no attempt to follow His teaching. Amazingly, some call themselves *Christian* who don’t even care what Christ taught. And what is really odd is that only a few find this situation disturbing. Little is said about people using and abusing the precious name of our Lord when, by definition, it does not fit them.

A Christian is one who follows the teachings of Christ and in our passage for today we look into the teaching of Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount, which goes from Matthew chapters 5-7, is part of his ethical instruction. And that means a Christian will believe and seek to live as Jesus here teaches. And one who does not is ipso-facto not a Christian. That is really very simple, but what it means for us is that we are striking at the very heart, at the essence of what being a Christian is all about. In Acts 3:22 Peter quotes one of the first prophecies about Jesus which can be found in Deuteronomy 18. *Acts 3:22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. This prophet, is, of course, Jesus. 23 And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'* God thinks it is a big deal how you respond to the words of Jesus. How will you respond?

The sermon today and for the next several weeks will be about a sermon, a sermon by Jesus. Specifically, we will look at the first part of that sermon which has commonly been called *The Beatitudes*. Today we will sort of step back and look at it as a whole. We will view the forest before we start taking on specific trees. We will ponder the general now, the specifics later. This morning I have a simple outline: the place of the sermon, the purpose of the sermon and the point of the sermon. The place of the sermon is clearly designated. Verse 1 says the Lord Jesus went up on the mountain. Now why would he do that? The mountain provided him with two things: good visibility and good acoustics. I come up on this platform to preach because it increases my visibility. I also stand up, but Jesus sat down. In the old days that is how they did it. The teacher got to sit and the students got to stand which can result in some very long lessons, but not many would fall asleep. Be thankful for the change.

Secondly, now let's look at the purpose of the sermon or should I say purposes. Why did Jesus say these things? The most basic purpose of the sermon is to teach his disciples how to live. If you are going to have some disciples you need to give them some guidelines. It only makes sense that Jesus would tell us how to be a disciple. You get directions for everything you get into. Often it comes in the form of a book. You buy a car and you get a book. You buy a microwave and you get a book. You buy a computer and you get a book. And it only makes sense that when God makes us believers and disciples He would give us a book. And He does. He gives us direction and instruction about following Him. That is what the Sermon on the Mount. is about. A disciple does not just come up with his or her own game plan. He does not

do his own thing, cut his own trail. Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.* Prosperity is found in subjecting your own way to the Lord's way, and a disciple follows. He listens and he learns, and he obeys. And one of the motivating factors for a disciple is to know that His master's teachings reveal how the Master views life. We learn about Jesus from His sermon and it explains why He did what He did. And I tell you - this stuff is radical. It is not easy by any means. But, it is not optional. What Jesus describes here and elsewhere is the Christian life, the normal Christian life, not something for the super-saints only, but for all who love Jesus. John 14:23 *Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word."* Simple enough. If we love Jesus then surely we will give heed to this sermon for here the Master tells us how to be and live as His disciple.

I believe too that there is a subsidiary purpose for the sermon. This is purpose #2, and that is it shows men their need for a Savior. In this way it functions as the law of God which Paul tells us is used to lead men to Christ by showing them their guilt and need for pardon. Galatians 3:24 *Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.* And surely any man who honestly holds up his life to the light of this sermon will find himself woefully insufficient. I know I do. I read where Jesus says to love our enemies and my response is, "I can't even love my friends and family very well, much less my enemies. Woe is me. I need a Savior." So, this sermon comes to us like the water-purifier salesman. Do you know what they're like? They want to come out and do a test and show us how the water that looks clean to us is actually a cesspool of impurities. The water test says, "You need a purifier." This sermon of Christ tests you and says, "You need a Savior," someone to provide forgiveness of your sins and purification of your heart.

In a similar way, there is a third purpose of this sermon. I believe it shows also our need for a change of heart, for a new birth. The virtues described here: turning the other cheek, meekness, loving enemies, going against social pressures are all unnatural. That is, they are not the way of sinful creatures – certainly not this sinful creature. To try to live the ethics of this sermon on your own strength is vanity. You need a changed heart, a new power within you. You need to be born-again to see, enter, and live in God's kingdom. John Stott says that only a belief in the necessity and possibility of new birth can keep us from reading the Sermon on the Mount, with either foolish optimism or hopeless despair. Having forgiveness does not mean that you can ignore your responsibilities. You don't get out of obeying and so you need

something more. You not only need the atoning death of Christ for you but you also need the empowering, enabling, sanctifying work of God's Spirit in your life. The ethics of Christ are only possible where there is the salvation of Christ. The law is fulfilled in the gospel. Romans 8:4 says God sent His son *Romans 8:4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* So, the purpose of the sermon is to teach men how to live as disciples, to show men their need for a Savior and their need for the new birth.

We've seen now the place and the purpose - now let's get right to the point of the sermon. How can I talk about the point of the Sermon on the Mount, or even of The Beatitudes? They make many points. I suppose what I mean to give you here is the major impression the sermon gives. From start to finish one thing stands out and is striking to the thoughtful reader and that is that a disciple of Christ must be different. Must be different. That's the point. There is a remarkable contrast between the lifestyle of a disciple and that of the non-disciple. Jesus seems to intentionally word his teaching so as to sound contrary to the typical view of things. Blessed are the poor. Love your enemies. Surely, if someone lives out this sermon he/she will be at least one thing -- different.

Now this great sermon by our Lord relates interestingly to the totality of Scripture and to redemptive history. For, it was long ago, in the Old Testament, that God had chosen a nation, an elect race, and called them out from the world to be different. Leviticus 18:1-4 (NIV) *The Lord said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the Lord your God. 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees.* God says, "Don't live like Egyptians or Canaanites." God says in many places and ways to Israel - *you are special, be holy*, and that word "holy" means "separate" and "different." But what did Israel do? Did they remain different? Oh no. Not long after they got into Canaan they wanted a king. Do you know why? The Scriptures say they wanted to be like the other nations. Look at II Kings 17. Instead of being a lighthouse to the nations Israel became like the nations. They sank into the darkness and God sent judgment - exile. In II Kings 17:7 he tells us why. II King 17:7-8 (NIV) *All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods 8 and followed the*

*practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced.* And it goes on to describe how Israel became like the nations and then too I Kings 17:19 (NIV) *even Judah did not keep the commands of the Lord their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced.* In Ezekiel chapter 11 God explains that He was sending His people into exile to teach them this lesson. Ezekiel 11:12 (NIV) *And you will know that I am the Lord; you have not followed my decrees or kept my laws but have conformed to the standards of the nations around you.* Do you hear the sadness of that church? God says, “I gave you a law, a way, a system of principles and values, but you followed instead the ways of the world.” Israel was supposed to be different but ---

So, now in the gospels Jesus has come to usher in the new age, and the kingdom of God and what does He do? He gathers around Him followers who are to be different. God is out to get some people who will stand out, be holy, who will be light in darkness. Christ wants His followers to be different. Are we? John Stott has written a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, which he entitled, “Christian Counter Culture.” The term *counter-culture* became popular in the 60s when so many young people were rebelling against society’s values. They wore long hair, strange clothes, protested and formed communes. They established a sub-culture meant to be counter culture, non-conformist. They criticized adult society for its phoniness and materialism. They claimed they were looking for meaning, peace, love, reality. Maybe they were looking for the right things but if they were they were looking in the wrong places. Stott says: “The first place to which they should be able to turn is to the one place which they normally ignore, namely the church. For too often what they see in the church is not counter-culture but conformism, not a new society which embodies their ideals but another version of the old society which they have renounced.” I tell you what - no criticism of the church stings me like hearing, “You are just like everybody else.” And it is tragic to say, but it’s too often true that the institutional church and her members are like the world. We have let ourselves be dominated by the prevailing ideas and values of our day. This is exactly what Satan wanted us to do and we bit his apple with gusto and most church-people are hardly aware of a problem. Some even flaunt it and glory in their worldliness. The World Council of Church’s motto is that the world sets the agenda for the church. One west coast super-pastor says, and I quote, “We are trying to make a big, beautiful impression upon the affluent non-religious American.” And so what does he do? He builds a 60 million dollar building and puts

on lavish shows to entertain and dazzle. Who is he trying to impress? Unchurched Charlie and he does it just like Hollywood. No real difference. But, our Lord calls us to be different. But, but, but, Pastor Dan you must understand that the only way to influence the world is to be like the world. I understand. There is some truth to that idea. I agree with Thomas Jefferson that in matters of style we should swim with the current. But Jefferson went on to say that in matters of principle we must stand like a rock! And when we do that we will certainly be different but we may also change the world.

But it's hard. So very hard to be different. We all have a tendency to conform, to go with the flow. We want to be like the "in" crowd. We are tempted to dress like them and talk like them and act like them. Don't fall for it! It's a trap! If you are a Christian you must be willing to be different when loyalty to Jesus demands it. I know it's hard, but it's right. And the way of wisdom really is the way of joy. The way of wisdom is seldom the way of immediate gratification. It is seldom the most glitzy and impressive way, but it is the solid and true way. Don't buy what our culture is selling. You be different.

But, how am I to be different? Should I dress funny? Should I drive a buggy? Paul writes this of Jesus in Titus 2:14 (ESV) *Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.* The King James Version says in verse 14 that we are to be a "peculiar people." Often I've seen a Christian do something weird or goofy, even stupid and say, "Well, we're to be a peculiar people." But of course, that is not what Christ meant. Our peculiarity is to be found in our righteousness, our purity, and in that we are zealous for good deeds. Folks, that is peculiar enough. You don't need to look for symbols of our difference. What you need is obedience to the teaching of Christ. Christ calls us in the Sermon on the Mount to be different by being pure in heart, meek, and hungry for righteousness. Christ Jesus calls us to reconstruct our system of values, and we must build our value system according to God's word, not man's. In Luke 16:15 we read this: 15d *that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.* So a Christian value system is topsy-turvy to the world's system. That means the way you spend your time and money will be vastly different. I saw a bumper sticker recently; I really like. It said, "*If you love Jesus TITHE, anybody can honk.*" One of our members told me a while back that he got to talking with his dad about tithing and his father said, "Nobody does that." Jesus calls us to much more than tithing but here is one man to whom tithing seemed

ridiculous. Friends, our values and the world's values are different. Expect to be misunderstood and to be thought strange at times, and rejoice when it happens. When Christ gives us a description of the Christian life, lived under His rule we see how different it will make us. I hope you know how joyful it will make you as you walk in the ways of Jesus and in the presence and blessing of Jesus.

Are you prepared for that? Are you ready to hear the word of Christ? Study it, understand it and then live it? That is what it means to be a disciple, and the disciples of Christ are disciples with a difference. That difference is located largely on the inside, in our hearts – hearts devoted to living no longer for self but for the One Who purchased us with His blood. But that very One did give us certain external things to set us apart, to speak of our belonging to Him. One of those things is the Lord's Supper which we are about to share. Our Confession of Faith says this about the Sacraments, which include baptism and communion: *Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace. They represent Christ and His benefits, to confirm our position with and in Him, to demonstrate a visible difference between those who belong to the church and the rest of the world.*