

Be In Christ

Matthew 5:1-12

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Do you remember either the TV or radio commercials for the US military, “Be, all that you can be – in the ...! We have all asked our children, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” We want to know that they are thinking about the future, what they will “be”, what they will make of themselves as they get older. Jesus of course, be-ed something other than most parents would want their children to be, for He be-came sin for us, so that we might “be” freed from sin.

How about yourself? When we talk about “be”-ing something, we talk about what each of us must accomplish. We say it in terms something like, “If you want to “be” something in this world, you have to do it, nobody’s going to give it to you for free.” And, in this great nation, you can be whatever you want to be.

With this type of attitude in our minds, we come to our Gospel lesson. This passage of Scripture has long been called the beatitudes. What is more, you have probably heard it said again and again that these are the qualities that should be exhibited by the followers of Christ. Too often, these verses have been handled by preachers to teach a perversion of the Gospel, “If you exhibit these qualities, God will bless you.” This is a form of “prosperity Gospel,” if you do this, God will give you whatever you want.

I suppose I could take such an approach to this text. I could simply instruct you to live as these verses suggest, and if you do, you will be blessed. But, it is equally true that if you do *not* live in the prescribed manner, you will deal with the consequences later – eternal consequences.

If I were leave you with these verses as the way for you to be blessed by God, I would leave you depressed and despondent. I would leave you guilty and guilt-ridden. Why? Because it wouldn’t take you long to realize that you can never fulfill the requirements stated in our text. Think about this logically. You would need to be meek, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, persecuted for righteousness sake, and finally reviled and persecuted, having all sorts of evil spoken about you because of your confessing Christ. Have you earned being blessed by your accomplishments of these things?

But there are some other things you would have to be, you would need to be poor in spirit, mourning, and hunger and thirst for righteousness. These are not things you want to “be,” are they?

OK, I suppose you *MIGHT* come away feeling less than guilty. For a short time, you might come away feeling that you have fulfilled them. You might look at yourself in comparison to the rest of the world, and in that comparison, you might even begin to feel that you have accomplished what these verses suggest. But, there would be a lingering doubt. Why? Because you would know that although you may try to keep God’s law, you also know the deep dark secrets of your heart. You know that you are not perfect, that you do not live up completely to the strict demands of God.

YES, these verses do describe how the righteous are supposed to live, they are the marching orders for those who are God's children. I also propose to you that these beatitudes are not simply a prescription for you. They are also a description. What I mean is that in the Beatitudes, Jesus is not prescribing what He expects as behavior of believers. Instead, He is describing the redeemed. These verses give a description of what the people of God look like because of God's grace, it describes those who live in the blessings of God in Christ Jesus.

Herein lies the first beatitude, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* The Christian sees no worth in him- or her-self, they are poor in their own spirit. At the same time however, they are wealthy beyond compare, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom is God's gift to them, not because of anything of themselves, but because of the riches of God's mercy and the wealth of His grace given in Christ Jesus their Lord.

Those who cannot describe themselves as poor, who believe they are righteous by their own work, as if they keep God's will, like the Pharisees, this blessing is not theirs. They have no blessing from God for they delude themselves by thinking that they have earned it. Jesus speaks to their delusion, "They are like white-washed tombs, pretty on the outside, but full of dead men's bones."

The rest of the beatitudes are nothing more than God's continued description of those who are blessed because of God's great mercy in Christ Jesus. We could look closely at these beatitudes and see that we fall far short of doing what is right before God. But, more importantly in them we see how God has made us right with Himself through His own Christ. These verses are a description of the blessings that are yours in and through Christ. In understanding this, you can read the beatitudes with joy and gladness.

Blessed are those who mourn. You mourn because God's Spirit has moved you to know of your sinfulness. You know that death is the wages of those who sin, and so, your repentance is a constant weeping over you sins – you are constantly mourning. It is in repentance that you find comfort, for comfort comes in the knowledge and peace of forgiveness purchased by Christ. In Christ crucified for you, *YOU are comforted.*

The meek bring nothing of their own, for they are humble, "nothing of my own I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." You, the meek, inherit the earth. You walk this life with a confidence and peace which few ever come to know. Most people are caught up in the pursuit of earthly things, and never attain them – and hence, are never satisfied. The meek are those whom Christ calls to Himself and gives His righteousness and His kingdom for eternity. They do not trust in themselves, but Christ also bestows on them earthly contentment.

God's children, those blessed by His Spirit, see their own incredible need for righteousness. In this text God promises that you who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. God leads you to Himself, to His Christ, and Christ feeds and nourishes you, even as He fed the thousands. He feeds you that which seems like nothing, bread and wine. They are His body and blood, and in this gift, you are filled with Him.

While we might think of ourselves as merciful, we are not. How often have you withheld forgiveness and reconciliation from someone? How often have you continued to harbor a grudge against someone who confesses the same God and Savior you do? And yet, Christ is merciful, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” God’s mercy in Christ Jesus claims you and makes you His own

Pure in heart? Who can be? Lust, greed, avarice, all the seven deadly sins, are impurities of the heart. In fact, Jesus Himself says that out of the heart proceed all sins. In the heart is where all sin begin, in the sinful desires of the heart. Who possesses a heart free from all these things? Christ! Christ alone has such a heart, a heart free from the stain of sin.

And it Christ alone who *gives* you such a heart. Purity of heart is given to all those to whom God gives faith in Christ. In Christ, hearts are purified and cleansed of all sin through His work of repentance. And in repentance, believers see God for what He truly is, the merciful God who grants forgiveness through Christ. It is what Christ gives to you who love and trust in Him as their Savior.

Christ Himself is the Peacemaker, He purchased peace between men and God with His own flesh. All you need to do is turn on the news and you can see that peace is not breaking out among men. From the Middle East, to urban America, men and women take the lives of others whom God created in His image. Only in Christ is there peace, a peace He gives which seeks to forgive when death is what is sought and what is earned by each of us.

That is why Christ was persecuted, for He brought peace with God, without works of the Law, but in repentance. Christ proclaimed a repentance for the forgiveness of sins, without perfect works of the Law. Christ was persecuted. He was laughed at, ridiculed, spat upon, beaten, whipped, and crucified for He was righteous as the leaders of the church never could be. Yet in so doing to Christ, they were instrumental in bringing about the kingdom of heaven. In the death of Christ, the kingdom of heaven was brought to all who believe in Him for the forgiveness of their sins, as a gift of God’s grace.

I cannot speak for you, but I love the beatitudes. It is nice to know that I am blessed by God for Christ’s sake. I read them with new eyes, eyes that see in these verses, Christ for me. I am blessed because of who God is and what God has done in the world, in and through Christ Jesus. So are you also blessed.

What will you be? Be in Christ! Christ became poor in spirit, giving up His kingdom, that you might have the eternal blessings of the kingdom of heaven. He wept over the world, that you might have the blessed comfort of eternity with Him. He humbled Himself, came to earth, that you might be blessed to inherit all His wealth. Christ’s mercy was shown on the cross and you are blessed to have mercy given to you. The pure heart of Christ was given unto death to purify your heart, blessing you to see God for all eternity. In making peace with God on the cross, you have been blessed to be called the sons of God. Through His persecution because of His righteousness, you are blessed to be given the kingdom of heaven.

Dear Friends, you are the blessed of God – you are so, because you are in Christ Jesus. But, as

you are the blessed of God, you will be called names. You will be insulted. You will be falsely accused. You will BE all this because you bear the name of Christ and live in the blessings He gives to you.

Rejoice and “be” glad, because you are blessed – and great is your reward in heaven, for you be in Christ. Amen.