

The BE-Attitudes

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Many of us in the congregation are studying the Sermon on the Mount in various groups. The Sermon on the Mount is the best sermon ever preached. Jesus said in 10-15 minutes more than what the volumes of books that have been written on the sermon ever could.

Jesus begins the sermon with a grabbing introduction – what we call the “beatitudes.” The introduction has emphatic repetition about being “blessed.” It presents eight character traits we should possess, followed by eight promises that will follow if we do.

But what is “blessed”? Most say, “happy.” And, well so does the Greek. But what do we mean by “happy”? A passage that drives home this concept well is in Luke 11:27-28. “Happy” is the concept of knowing where we stand at all times because we are “God approved” (Psa. 1).

The first four beatitudes correspond to our relationship with God. They are vertical.

Take the first, **poverty of spirit** (Mt. 5:3). It is a personal acknowledgement of our spiritual bankruptcy before God. We know we are empty before God, and bring nothing of value to the relationship. It is the attitude displayed by the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14 and confirmed in Isa. 64:6.

The second builds on the first – **those who mourn** (Mt. 5:4). The Greek word “mourn” here is a passionate lament. It is the strongest word for “mourn.” We mourn over our sins when we realize the deficiencies that make us so bankrupt before God. We are aware that we are not what we need to be and mourn for what is missing. It is how Isaiah and Paul felt in Isa. 6:3-5 and Rom. 7:21-25, respectively. While it is humbling, notice the result is comfort – both in this age and the one to come.

Third to be **blessed are the meek** (Mt. 5:5). Meek are not the weak. After all, Moses was said to be the meekest man alive (Numb. 12:3). And the only time we have recorded where Jesus explains his temperament, He said He was meek (Mt. 11:28-30). Meekness is when we allow another’s interest to advance over our own, even when we do not have to (e.g., Abraham with Lot on choosing the land). It is strength under control. Just because a wild horse is broken, does not mean it loses the great strength that once fueled its wild nature. But it chooses to give up the reigns.

Fourth, highlighted are those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness** (Mt. 5:6). It is only when we realize that tending to our spiritual needs is as important as eating and drinking – essential to life – that we will be truly satisfied.

The first four characteristics are followed by our relationship with our fellow man. These are horizontal.

It is the **merciful** who will receive mercy by God. Grace is a loving response to someone who does not deserve it (Barnabas with Saul). Mercy is a loving response to someone who does not deserve it, and cannot do anything about it (e.g., the story of

the good Samaritan). But we cannot just recognize others' needs, we must do something about them (James 2:15; 1 Jn. 3:17).

To see God, we must be **pure in heart** (Mt. 5:8). That is, we must be free of duplicity and hypocrisy. Our faith must be authentic.

With others, we must also be **peacemakers** (Mt. 5:9). That does not mean we compromise truth. Or, we are for peace at any price. It means we are people who relieve the tension, not intensify it. We seek solutions, and do not just focus on problems. We calm the waters, not stir them up. We seek win/win without compromising God's word. The result is that people will know we are believers.

Finally, **blessed are those who are persecuted** or reviled (Mt. 5:10). It is not a matter of if, but when. The world will despise our beliefs and lifestyle. Because they shame the world. They convict it. The world persecuted Jesus, it will do it to us too (Jn. 5:20+). We must have soft hearts, but tough hides.

So, can we be "happy"? You bet we can. Knowing we possess the characteristics that make us approved by God can deliver us happiness, regardless of our emotional feelings.

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