

**THE BEATITUDES**  
Matthew 5:1-12  
By Raymond White

*Matthew 5:1* And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: *:2* And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

The Sermon on the Mount, three chapters, begins with the Beatitudes. There are eight of them and they are foundation attitudes for life. Some have whimsically called them Be-attitudes and so they are. They are the keynote for everything else Jesus is about to say in this sermon. And each begins with “Blessed are...” which means “Happy are...”

**[1] POOR IN SPIRIT**

*Matthew 5:3* Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Of the eight Beatitudes, why is this one first? Because no one ever entered the presence of God on the basis of pride. Poverty of spirit is the only way in. You cannot be filled until you are empty. Truth eludes the prideful so humility must be first.

*Proverbs 16:5* Everyone that is proud in his heart is an abomination to the Lord.

This, of course, is the opposite of the world’s message, which is “I’m okay, you’re okay.” That’s comforting, but it’s simply not true. God has another message for us and it’s not one that people are generally happy with.

*Romans 3:9* We have before proved both Jews and gentiles that they are all under sin. *:10* As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one.

Depressing, isn’t it? If God is kind, why does he say this to us? Why not tell us how good we are, make us feel good about ourselves? It’s like, suppose you had cancer and your doctor, sensitive to your feelings, told you that you didn’t have cancer. He wanted to spare you the grief. Would that be doing you a favor? That would make you happy, but it would also make you dead. Lying to spare your feelings is no favor. Hiding the truth is not kind, it’s mean.

But God is kind so he tells us the truth so we can do something about it. The hard part is believing it. When we realize that we are sinners, that is being “poor in spirit.”

Now, just how poor is poor? There are two Greek words for poor: penes (πένης) and ptochos (πτωχός). Penes means so poor that one has to work. Ptochos means so poor that one has to beg. And there’s a big difference between the working poor and the homeless poor. Which is the word that Jesus uses here in this first Beatitude? Ptochos is the word here: begging poor, without anything, no spirit left, so empty, so without that they have to beg to receive what someone else has earned and gives freely. No wonder Paul wrote:

*Philippians 3:9* ...not having mine own righteousness but the righteousness of God.

Does that mean would should be sad? Well, we should mourn (next beatitude) but we should rejoice because Jesus said, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” How wonderful it is to be loved by someone who accepts the unacceptable.

## [2] MOURN

*Matthew 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

Or, in other words, happy are the sad, an oxymoron if ever there was one. What could Jesus possibly have meant by it? One thing is certain: the pleasure crazed world could never accept such an idea. Nonetheless, it is a familiar experience to Christian believers, this sadness that brings happiness.

There are lots of things to be sad about. Sometimes sadness is appropriate as for instance:

*Jeremiah 9:1 Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people!*

But sometimes sadness is very inappropriate as for instance when Ahab got all upset because he couldn't have someone else's vineyard.

*1 Kings 21:4 And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face and would eat no bread.*

His wife Jezebel gave him some advice: murder Naboth. They did. Ahab got the field. And then there was Amnon, David's son.

*2 Samuel 13:2 And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar...*

Amnon was not lovesick, he was lust-sick.

His friend Jonadab gave him some advice: rape Tamar. He did. Then he abandoned her.

Clearly, there is a right sadness and a wrong sadness. And just as clearly, Jesus never meant that God would comfort those who use sadness as an excuse to sin, like, “Oh I'm so deprived, I want what I want so I'll go ahead and sin.”

When Jesus said, “Blessed are they that mourn,” he meant those who mourn over what made them poor in spirit; that is, sin. God comforts those whose mourning leads them away from sin, not those whose mourning leads them to sin. It is right to feel sad about things that are wrong. Sin, ours and others, should cause mourning.

*Isaiah 6:5 Woe is me...because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.*

*2 Corinthians 7:10 Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation.*

People who say you should never feel sorrow are wrong. Sorrow has purpose. Guilt has purpose. Those who never feel sorrow for sin never feel God's comfort. Ironically, they are ill-prepared for grief and vulnerable to be destroyed by it. But those who mourn for sin have a shield against grief: faith. So God comforts us, in this life and in the next.

***Revelation 21:4** God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying...*

### [3] MEEK

***Matthew 5:5** Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*

Jesus was not what the Jews had expected. They had expected a deliverer as **Daniel 7:14** *And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom...* That's what Herod thought (**Matthew 2:3**), and John the Baptist (**Matthew 11:3**), and the hosanna shouting multitude (**Matthew 21:9**), and what Jesus' own disciples thought (**Acts 1:6**).

But Jesus had a different message. Rather than conquest, he taught meekness. The world, he said, will not belong to the violent, but to the meek, the gentle. They shall inherit the earth.

What exactly is meekness? Well, first of all, meekness is not weakness. Jesus said: **Matthew 11:29** *I am meek and lowly of heart*, and then he cleansed the temple. There was nothing weak about Jesus. Why did he do that, cleanse the temple? Because it needed cleansing. It would be too simple if meekness meant cowardice. It does not. Meekness is often a characteristic of great people, mild by nature but strong when evil needs to be confronted.

***Numbers 12:3** Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.*

Well if meekness is not weakness, that what is it? It is self-control, restraint, and gentleness. It is strength under control. Jesus said: **Matthew 5:25** *Agree with thine adversary quickly*. And: **Matthew 10:16** *Be harmless as doves*. This is the spiritual high ground, but it is also immensely practical, the simple secret for a happy — and prosperous — life. A short temper and a bad attitude never brought good thing to anyone.

***Proverbs 25:28** He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.*

***Proverbs 16:32** He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*

What do meek people get? Blessings, happiness, and the earth, a place where meek lions and lambs and people once lived together in a paradisiacal peace, and will again one day.

### [4] HUNGER AND THIRST

***Matthew 5:6** Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.*

People without food get hungry. People without water get thirsty. Our natural impulse is to seek what our bodies crave and do not have. Most people, at least in our country, have enough food and water so we never desperately crave either. But we are in short supply of righteousness.

*Isaiah 64:6 We are all as unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.*

The shortage of righteousness is enough to make anyone hunger for it. Well, not quite anyone. There are people who starve to death and don't know it. That is called anorexia nervosa, an aversion to food. That's what the world has: a spiritual anorexia: no righteousness and no hunger for it.

If we go too long without food, we die, whether we crave it or not. If we go too long without righteousness, we die, whether we crave it or not. In either case, it is the hunger that drives us to what we need and saves us — like the prodigal son whose hunger first made him eat with pigs, then to get back to the safety of his father's house. That's where God wants us, to be safely home with him. Hunger and thirst are good. They drive us to the food and the water.

How can a person in this world not be hungry for righteousness? Children are gunned down, sexual perversion is praised, babies die before they are born, wars rage in foreign lands and in our center cities, and our solutions, like gun control, very often only make matters worse. Please, dear Lord —

*Matthew 6:16 Deliver us from evil.*

And there are personal evils that are just as bad and worse.

*Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

Everyone wants good things. The problem is people want bad things with their good things. People want to be rich, but they squander their money on stupid stuff. Sorry, you can't have both. People want to be thin, but they can't stop eating the pastries, etc. Sorry, you can't have both. People want true love, but they want sexual sin at the same time. Sorry, you can't have both. You must choose.

Hungry people want only one thing: food. Not a car, not a boat, just food. People who hunger for righteousness want only one thing: righteousness. Not sin with their righteousness, just righteousness. Hunger focuses our attention to the one thing we are hungry for and away from everything else. If you focus your attention on that one thing, righteousness, Jesus promises to fill you up with it, to the brim.

#### [5] MERCIFUL

*Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*

Strange words from an age of cruelty, when slavery was legal, human sacrifice was common, gladiators fought to the death, and a male Roman citizen could legally kill his slave,

his wife, and his children, all legally. Cruelty was the norm, the natural man doing what came naturally. In the midst of all that, Jesus called the world to a new life, to do what was unnatural, to be merciful rather than cruel.

First of all, you needn't suppose that if you treat people mercifully, that the world will love you for it and treat you mercifully right back. Jesus was the most merciful person who ever lived. He healed lepers, cured the blind, and raised the dead, and the world showed its gratitude by nailing him to a cross. The world does not reward the merciful, it rewards celebrities. So forget about the world's reward. Jesus is saying that if you are merciful to others, God will be merciful to you. And God's mercy is what we need more than anything else.

***James 2:13** For we shall have judgment without mercy that showed no mercy: and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*

What is mercy? Mercy is not pity. The world is full of people who are willing to shed a tear for someone else's grief. We'll even cry at a good movie for a person who doesn't exist, even an animal that doesn't exist. Remember King Kong? Did you cry? He was just light on a screen. It's easy to tug at the heart strings. It's much harder to tug at the purse strings. Mercy is not what you feel, it's what you do — not feeling another's need, but meeting it.

***Psalms 37:21** The righteous showeth mercy and giveth.*

There are different forms of mercy. Sometimes mercy costs nothing, sometimes it costs plenty. Sometimes we show mercy to good people, and sometimes we show mercy to bad people who don't deserve it, and sometimes to people who have injured and betrayed us. That kind of mercy we call forgiveness. It's tempting to say, "I forgive you but I can't take you back." Does God say, "I forgive you but I can't let you in"? Always keep in mind that it is God's mercy and forgiveness that we rely on for absolutely everything. We should be more generous with it.

## [6] PURE IN HEART

***Matthew 5:8** Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

If ever there was a longing in the human heart it is this: to see God, to confront face to face the majestic origin of all things, to see with our eyes the purpose of being, to see it all, the fountain of existence, God.

***1 Corinthians 13:12** For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known.*

To know God as God knows me, omniscience, that is a great promise. But it is only for the pure in heart. Sin has been the gulf between man and God since Adam and Eve first violated God's will. How can we cross that gulf? Jesus was asked, twice, how to inherit eternal life (**Luke 10:25, Luke 18:18**). He said to the lawyer love God and love your neighbor. He said to the ruler keep the commandments and follow me. It is not enough to keep the commandments, one must follow Jesus.

*1 John 1:7 The blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin.*

Jesus bridged the gulf of sin. But is following him enough. After all, there are followers who stop following, (**John 6:66**). Where is the momentum to endure to the end? The issue is not just following or obeying or doing any external deed, the issue is the heart which motivates those deeds. Without the internal commitment, the external deeds cannot be sustained. A wrong heart will eventually produce a wrong life, and a right life can only come from a right heart.

*Proverbs 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of the heart.*

*Matthew 15:18 Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart.*

Jesus said we must be pure in heart. Pure means undiluted, seeking righteousness and not seeking unrighteousness. God wants our hearts to be like pure gold, refined, unmixed, without impurities. With such a heart, one will automatically live a godly life and in the end will see God.

## [7] PEACEMAKERS

*Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

When God created the world and put people in a garden, there was peace. When God reclaims the world and restores paradise, there will be peace again (**Revelation 2:7**). God wants peace (**1 Corinthians 14:33**). Jesus wants peace (**John 20:21**). Man wants peace (**Acts 12:20**). If everyone wants peace, why is it so hard to find?

In 1945 the United Nations adopted the motto: "To have succeeding generations free from the scourge of war." There hasn't been a day of peace since. Humanity just can't get along with itself. Why?

*James 4:1 From whence come wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*

The reason that men cannot have peace with other men is because men have no peace within themselves. Mankind is looking for the wrong thing. It's been said that "Peace is that when everybody stops shooting to reload."

Is peace just not fighting. No. It is more than that. It is resolving the issue that the fighting is about. That's peace. Not fighting is just a truce.

There is an ongoing war between man and God. They both want peace, so what's the problem? Sin is the problem. God wants holiness and peace. Mankind wants unholiness and peace. People want it both ways: to sin and have no consequences. But sin always has consequences, and declares war on God. Without righteousness, peace is impossible, and that's what the human race refuses to understand.

*James 3:17 First pure, then peaceable.*

*Hebrews 12:14 Follow peace...and holiness...*

The two are inseparable: peace and holiness. There is no such thing as peace without holiness. Silence in the face of sin is not peace but truce, and truce is only a pretend peace, a temporary halt in violence while both side reload.

Peacemakers are active, not passive. God wants peacemakers, people who rebuke sin, demand repentance, plead for holiness, work for peace between men and God, and men and men. People who do that are the true peacemakers and they are the children of God. Who are the children of God? They are the brothers and sisters of the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, the one who —

*Colossians 1:20 Made peace through the blood of his cross.*

### [8] PERSECUTED

*Matthew 5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. :11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. :12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

The irony of peacemaking is that peace makers seldom enjoy peace. People who arbitrate wars tend to get shot at from both sides, and people who preach and righteousness often make enemies rather than friends. The only explanation is —

*John 3:19 Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

No one wants their sins exposed. Conscience is a nuisance that most people would rather ignore. But Jesus wants us to be salt and light (*Matthew 5:13-16*) exposing evil and stinging consciences. That draws fire and brings on persecution. Now, persecution is something we'd all like to avoid — Jesus advised us to be wise and harmless (*Matthew 10:16*). But persecution or not, we must always stand for two things:

*Matthew 5:10 ...righteousness' sake... [and]*

*Matthew 5:11 ...my sake. [Jesus]*

Our duty is twofold: defend righteousness and defend Jesus. Think about this: The world hates Christ, but he is no longer here. So, since he is out of range, who does the world target now? Who does the world now focus its hatred on? Well, if Christ is in you, the world looks at you and sees Christ. That makes you the target.

But that's a wonderful thing. Jesus took the shaft that death aimed at us, and now we have the opportunity to take some of the darts that the world aims at him.

*Philippians 1:29 For unto us it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake.*

If that's you, a sufferer for Christ, then rejoice.

*Matthew 5:12 ...for great is your reward in heaven...*

### [9] ALL TOGETHER

Now let's put this all together, these eight Beatitudes, and see if we can find a flow, an order, connections that give the entire a sensible meaning. Here's a network that I came up with.

