

25. Poor in spirit

April 3, 2016

In January 2001, my wife and I started a Bible study at one couple's home. The total congregation was a whopping 8. After two or three months there, we had to move to a couple of classrooms of the Sahuarita Elementary School, because we ran out of space in the living room and family room. We were there about 6 months, then, we outgrew those classrooms again. So, we rented a small auditorium of the Sahuarita School District. The first Book we studied in that auditorium was the Book of Matthew. In other words, we made a full circle to this Book. I love every part of the Gospels of Jesus. But I have to admit that one of my favorite portions in the Gospels is "the Sermon on the Mount" by Jesus in Matthew 5 through 7.

The Bible is never boring, especially what Jesus teaches us. But somehow Bible teachers and pastors manage to make their teachings of the Sermon on the Mount sleepy boring. If you get bored during our studies of this phenomenal portion of the Bible, it certainly is not a fault of the text, rather it is mine. Since I know my limit in many ways, I pray and hope that the Holy Spirit would expound this Word of God in your heart and make this come alive, feed your spirit, encourage you to walk closely with Him, strengthen you with His might, comfort you with His peace. Or He might prick your heart with convictions from Him, make you confess your sins to the Lord, and be right with Him so that you may live your life that brings glory to Him.

We can read all three chapters of the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus in 15 minutes or less. No teacher or preacher has ever packed more truth into such a brief period of time. I can see that some of you are thinking, "Maybe you should take a hint from Jesus and make your sermon under 15 minutes." For two reasons, first, I am not Jesus, thank God. Second, I am just trying to get your gas money's worth for driving to church.

A. THE BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Before we go into verse by verse study, let's take a look at a quick bird's-eye view of the Sermon on the Mount. This is also known as "Beatitudes" which means "A state of utmost happiness." The word "beatitude" is not found in our Bible. It simply means blessing and it comes from the Latin word for "blessed." So, what is it happy and blessed about? If we do what the Lord Jesus tells us to do, we would be happy and blessed in our lives, because our lives would be filled with the joy that comes from Him alone.

The first sixteen verses of Matthew 5 describe how to be the true Christian and deal with character. The rest of the Sermon on the Mount deals with conduct that grows out of character. Character always comes before conduct, because what we are determines what we do. It seems that nowadays a character of a person is the least important thing people want to know.

In Matthew 5:1-16, Jesus shows us that true righteousness is inward, and in 5:17-48, He points out that sin is also inward. Thus, He exposed the false righteousness of the Pharisees, who taught that holiness consisted in religious actions, and that sin was what you did outwardly only. How many people make these same mistakes today! God looks upon the heart, NOT our religious activities.

Note that the Sermon on the Mount deals with attitudes – what we think in our hearts and our outlook on life. “Beatitudes” is the attitudes that ought to be in our lives if we are true Christians.

B. THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Matthew 5:1-2 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

In the Israel teachers’ customary posture, Jesus sat down and the disciples stood and listened to His teaching. I like that idea, so let’s do that here, too. Y’all stand and I will sit.

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

“Blessed” Greek word is “makarios” which means ‘happy.’ I wonder if we got the word “Macarena” from this Greek word.

Why would they be happy when they are poor in spirit? Again, we must look to the Greek to understand this particular word “poor.” It is “ptochos” which mean “in needy, be humble.” It is hard to get the right meaning in English, if we translate it directly. It is one of those that was lost in translation. What Jesus meant is that the happy one is humbled and completely depend on the Spirit of God, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Listen, we must be empty before we can be full. As long as we hold onto the worldly desires, our God cannot pour out His blessings to our hands that are not open to receive. The opposite of this is self-sufficiency. Our sufficiency is not of ourselves. The world promotes self-sufficiency, yet God dwells with the person whose heart is broken with a contrite spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

C. WHOSE WHO MOURN

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Mourning here doesn’t refer simply to a general sadness from the loss of a loved one. Instead, Jesus, a faithful son of Israel, understood mourning in the context of His nation that had been brought low because of their sin. We should be in mourning as a response to the wages of sin in the world – our own sin and the sins of others.

Our attitude toward sin should be a true sorrow for sin. When a brand new born-again believer sinned against God, his heart was tender, he got convicted, and his heart was broken and mourn for the hurt that he caused to his God. When we see our sins as God sees them, we would sin less against Him.

D. THE MEEK

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

This should be our attitude toward others. The word “Meek” comes from the root word of a wild stallion becomes a trained and tamed horse. It has not lost its strength, but under control.

Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good without disputing or resisting. Gentleness or meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation.

Please don't misunderstand meekness as weakness. It is not wimpy, wimpy, wimpy, but hefty, hefty, hefty strength under control.

E. WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

The true servant of God possesses an insatiable appetite for what is right, a passionate drive for justice. Spiritually speaking, the servant engages in a pursuit of God – a hot, restless, eager longing to walk with Him, to please Him.

It includes not just looking upward, pursuing a vertical holiness, but also looking around and being grieved over the corruption, the inequities, the gross lack of integrity, the moral compromises that abound.

It seems that there are many people who think that they are entitled to do and have whatever they want including discarding righteousness and justice. If this country's judicial system doesn't deal with them because the system itself is so corrupt, the Lord will deal with them. When He does, they are going to wish that they didn't do what they did.

Isaiah 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

F. THE MERCIFUL

Because of the result of the poor in spirit, mourning, meek and hunger and thirst for righteousness, we can have the next four things. The rest of the Beatitudes show the results of the new life in the believer.

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

This is not legalism, but merely the working of the biblical principle of sowing and reaping. If we show mercy, because Christ has been merciful to us, then mercy will come back to us. We do not earn mercy, but we must have hearts prepared to receive it.

James 2:13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

G. THE PURE IN HEART

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

What does the pure in heart mean? Does it mean that we have to be like monks and nuns? I don't think that they are pure in heart completely. It is not sinlessness, but the truth within. It means a single heart, not divided between God and the world. The most miserable Christians are the backslidden Christians who have one foot in the world and the other in Christianity.

In this, the pure of heart receive the most wonderful reward. They shall enjoy greater intimacy with God than they could have imagined. Ultimately, this intimate relationship with God must become our greatest motivation for purity, greater than a fear of getting caught or a fear of consequences.

H. THE PEACEMAKERS

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

This does not describe those who live in peace, but those who actually bring about peace, overcoming evil with good.

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

One way we accomplish this is through spreading the Gospel, because God has entrusted to us the ministry of forgiveness as we have been forgiven by Him. The reward of peacemakers is that they are recognized as true children of God. They share His passion for peace and reconciliation, the breaking down of walls between people.

I must caution you that forgiveness does not automatically require reconciliation and restoration as before. As Christians, forgiveness is mandatory, but reconciliation and restoration depend on the situation.

A backslidden former law enforcement officer quoted this verse to me out of context and insisted that he was the peacemaker and he had a legitimate reason of his self-ish backslidden status. Wrong!

I. THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

We should never be guilty of deliberately asking for persecution. Some Christians think that sticking their spiritual long index fingers toward unbelievers and condemning their sin are good and godly things to do. They are obnoxious and not loving. The unbelievers might be lost, but they are not stupid. Actually, many of them are far more intelligent than us. They can see clearly whether we care about them or not. There is a tremendous difference between being persecuted falsely for Christ's sake and getting yelled at because some Christians are obnoxious for no reason other than being weird and mean.

March 28th, Georgia's Republican governor Nathan Deal stunned the state's religious community by vetoing legislation that would have protected preachers who refuse to perform gay and lesbian marriages as well as the Christian business owners who refuse to do businesses with them.

Big-name businesses like Coca-Cola, Netflix, Apple, Time Warner, and Marriott demanded the governor side with the LGBT community instead of Christians. The National Football League strongly suggested that Atlanta's Super Bowl bid might be jeopardized.

It became clear Gov. Deal was more interested in protecting the Almighty Dollar than he was in protecting followers of God Almighty. He will be accountable for this decision when he sees the Lord and he will regret it.

So the State of Georgia declared an open season against any Christian pastors and business owners who would uphold their belief in Christ and His Word. Don't think

that it is not going to happen to you. Obama is the most hostile president against Christianity to this date. If the American people elect Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders, either one of them will make their way against our faith in Christ.

If we live godly lives, suffering will come! However, note the rewards: we are in the same company as Christ and the prophets, and we shall be rewarded in heaven.

2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

J. APPLICATIONS

1) Jesus clearly tells us how to live blessed and happy as His followers.

We need to live humbly, hating our own sins as God the Father does, our strength under control, seeking His righteousness, merciful to others, pure in heart, keeping peace as much as we can and willing to live with the persecution against us for Christ's sake.

2) To be effective we must seek and display the Christian distinctive.

We can never influence the world for Jesus by becoming like the world.