

The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:1-16

Matthew 5:1-16 - *“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. ² Then He opened His mouth and taught 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 meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

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

⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain 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 are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³ You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Background Notes

Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 contain the well-known and well-loved “Sermon on the Mount” given by our Lord Jesus. It is called the Sermon on the Mount for an obvious reason: *“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.”*

The fact that the parallel passage in Luke 6 says that the Lord descended and spoke from a level place is not a contradiction in the Bible. The Lord could have descended a short distance from the top of the hill to a level place on the side of the hill, and given the sermon to the people seated above him, as in a theater or arena. On the other hand, the Lord could have preached the important content of this sermon on more than one occasion, and on more than one hillside, so Luke 6 might have been a different occasion.

The mountain where the Sermon on the Mount was given was in the Galilee area. It was probably near Capernaum, because Matthew 8:5 says, “*Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him...*” Exactly which mountain? We don’t know. There is a traditional location called the “Mount of Beatitudes” that overlooks the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum. On our Holy Land tours we always stop there and read from the Sermon on the Mount. But we can’t be sure that this is the right hillside.

Verse 1 says that the Lord sat down to give the sermon. In those days, sitting was the rabbi’s traditional and typical position for teaching. They stood up to read the Scriptures, and they sat down to teach.

Verse 1 indicates that the disciples were our Lord’s audience for the Sermon on the Mount, but His audience would have included more than just the twelve disciples. The multitudes of people who were attracted to the Lord’s ministry would also have been included. These multitudes are mentioned at the end of the sermon, in Matthew 7:28-29: “*...when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.*”

Doctrinal Points

1. The Sermon on the Mount does not present the way of salvation.

Did you realize this? You will not find the gospel in this most beloved sermon! Nothing is mentioned about the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins. Nothing is mentioned about justification by faith alone. The gospel is not in the Sermon on the Mount! So that brings up a good question: What is the correct view of the Sermon on the Mount? If it was not given for the purpose of salvation, then what was its purpose?

Some Christians say that the Sermon on the Mount was addressed to the Church, and that it is to be the rule of life for the Christian today. The problem with this view is that the Sermon on the Mount was **not** addressed to the Church! It was addressed to Jewish people who were living under the Mosaic Law. The Church was not even in existence at that time -- the Church began on the day of Pentecost, after our Lord returned to Heaven. The Church isn’t even mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew until Matthew 16, where the Lord declared “*I will build My church*” -- and notice that “*I will*” is in the future tense! So the view that the Sermon on the Mount was addressed to the Church, and that it should be the rule of life for Christians today doesn’t seem to be the right view.

Other Christians say that the Sermon on the Mount has nothing to do with today - it applies **only** to the future, when the Lord will return and set up His kingdom here on earth. After all (they would say), the King and His Kingdom were rejected by Israel and therefore the directives of the Sermon on the Mount would apply only when the King returns and His millennial Kingdom is established.

The problem with this view is that some directives that are given in the Sermon on the Mount can't apply to that future millennial Kingdom of Christ. For example, look at Matthew 5:10-11: "*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."* These conditions will not even exist during the time of our Lord's glorious kingdom here on this earth, because there will be no persecution then.

Probably the best view of the Sermon on the Mount is what's known as the "Interim View." This view is based on the historical context in which the Sermon was given, and thus it applies to the interim period between the time when the kingdom was offered to Israel and the time when the kingdom was rejected by Israel.

Remember John the Baptist's message in Matthew 3:2: "*repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" And then when our Lord began His public ministry, He proclaimed the same message. "*From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matthew 4:17). And in Matthew 10, we read that the Lord sent His twelve disciples throughout Israel with this same message. "*These twelve Jesus sent forth, and charged them, saying, Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ And as ye go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matthew 10:5-7.)

So a bona fide offer of the kingdom was made to the nation of Israel at that time. The Kingdom of Heaven was "at hand." The King had arrived and was offering the Kingdom to the Jewish people. The Sermon on the Mount was given in that historical context. The Sermon on the Mount gave the moral qualities that should characterize those individuals who had participated in John's baptism unto repentance and were preparing for the Kingdom of the Messiah. That is the context in which the Sermon on the Mount was given.

We know, of course, that Israel rejected their Messiah and His Kingdom, and thus the "interim" period was over! So from that time on, it has now become a matter of **appropriate application** of the Sermon on the Mount. For example, much of the Sermon on the Mount will apply when the Lord returns and sets up His kingdom -- but not everything! And of course, there is plenty of application for us today in the Sermon on the Mount -- but again, not everything.

God's moral laws never change, and thus there are many principles that we, as believers today, can draw from the Sermon on the Mount. At the same time, however, we should recognize the historical context in which the Sermon on the Mount was given. The Sermon on the Mount does not present the way of salvation.

2. The Sermon on the Mount does present the way of righteous living.

If Christ is our King and we're in a right relationship with Him, then these moral qualities of the Kingdom will characterize our lives today. Verses 1-11 are known as "The Beatitudes." The word "beatitude" derives from the Latin word for "blessed." All the Beatitudes begin with the word "blessed," meaning "happy." They could be called "the way of righteous living."

You are blessed if you are poor in spirit -- that is, if you recognize your weaknesses and depend on God. Depend on the Lord! You are blessed if you mourn in a world that has rejected Christ. You're blessed if you're meek and gentle in spirit. You're blessed if you hunger and thirst for righteousness – that is, not hungering for money or fame, but for righteousness! You're blessed if you're merciful and compassionate in the way that you deal with others in your family and at your workplace.

You're blessed if you're pure in heart and don't have mixed motives for what you do. You're blessed if you're a peacemaker - not a gossip, not a strife-maker, but a peacemaker. You're blessed if you're persecuted for doing what is right. Ungodly people hate people who do the right thing! You're blessed if you're persecuted for being a Christian. The world hated Christ, and it will hate us as well (John 15:18).

In the "beatitudes" we see that if we follow the way of righteous living, we're not only blessed now, but we're rewarded later. The Sermon on the Mount does present the way of righteous living.

Practical Application

Let's not lose our salt or hide our light!

In verses 13-14 the Lord said that His followers were to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

What does that mean - "the salt of the earth?" In those days, salt was used as a preservative to prevent the spread of corruption and decay in foods. In a similar way, believers are to act as a preservative in society and limit the spread of moral decay and moral corruption. Let's not "lose our saltiness" and become good for nothing, as evil increases all around us!

And let's not "hide our light"! In those days, the people would either put a bowl or basket over their small oil lamp to dim or put out the light - or they would put the lamp on a stand to give light to the entire room. We should be like lamps that are on lamp stands, and like lights on hills - lights that can't be hidden! Verse 16 indicates that we should let our light shine, not just with good talk, but also with good works for the Lord.

Now let me ask you: Were you like salt and light in this world over this past week? Convicting question, isn't it? Let's not lose our salt or hide our light!