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Finding True Happiness in the Capitol (The Sermon on the Mount) Matthew 5:1-12

What makes people happy around the capitol? Winning elections? Parties gaining and maintaining control of the Senate or House? Rising to positions of leadership and influence? The passing of legislation? The success of lobbying efforts for organizations or issues? Everyone is looking for happiness in their work in the statehouse as well as in the rest of our lives. But true happiness cannot be found in any of these things. At times we'll fail in reaching these goals. Even if such things are achieved, they will not bring true happiness. In the Beatitudes, Jesus' introduction to His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares how each of us can find true happiness, both in the capitol and in the rest of our lives.

The West Virginia Ethics Commission exists to implement and enforce a "code of conduct" which governs the actions of legislators, elected officials, lobbyists, and staff, and other public servants who serve in government. Nearly everyone in the Capitol is extremely conscientious about following these ethics rules. In the Beatitudes, as well as in the rest of The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus lays out the guidelines and standards for the attitudes and actions of those who follow Him. He teaches that true happiness is found by those who express these attitudes and follow these standards. O that we might have the same concern for the standards found in The Beatitudes and the rest of Scripture!

Jesus introduces His sermon with these well-known words:

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. ²He opened His mouth and began to teach 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 gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

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

⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive 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 have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

¹²"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:1-12

The Beatitudes serve as the introduction to this great sermon. They describe in a general way the character of those who are Christians, those who genuinely belong to God's kingdom. The rest of the sermon gives specific examples of how that character is expressed in life. With the listing of the characteristics of Christ's followers come the promises of what will indeed make us "blessed" or "happy".

A Definition of True Happiness

The term "beatitude" is not found in Scripture. It comes from the Latin word for blessing or happiness. "Blessed" certainly means "happy", but it goes far beyond our understanding of the English word. "Happiness" today means a state of mind or emotions largely determined by our circumstances. "Blessed" speaks of a deep-seated joy, peace, and contentment which comes from knowing we are right with God. It is talking not so much about our emotional state of mind as it is a statement of fact about our life situation. "How fortunate" perhaps would be a more accurate understanding of what Jesus is saying.

Even a cursory reading of The Beatitudes causes us to realize the happiness or blessedness described here is

diametrically opposed to how the world says to find happiness. The Beatitudes say blessing is found through poverty, mourning, hunger and thirst, even persecution. The world says happiness is found through self-confidence, success, achievement, or activities. Amazingly, Jesus teaches we can be “happy” or blessed even in the midst of what the world sees as failure. This is because Jesus makes it clear that genuine happiness is only found by those who are in a right relationship with God. These are the people who are truly blessed.

A Description of Kingdom Character

In the Beatitudes we find a list of attitudes that will characterize the hearts of those who are Christians, those who are genuinely members of God’s kingdom. The rest of The Sermon on the Mount describes the life and actions of those who follow Christ. This reminds us of the vital truth that our actions will flow out of our heart attitudes and character.

There are nine “blesseds” listed. In verse three and verse ten the promise is “**for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**” and is in the present tense. The six in between are worded differently and are in the future tense. As we study the Beatitudes and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, we see that the “**Kingdom of Heaven**” is a theme that runs throughout (see 5:19, 20; 6:10, 13, 33; 7:21). What does Jesus mean by “kingdom of heaven”? Most simply we could say it is heaven – the presence of God. Jesus seems to be emphasizing to His audience that His kingdom is **NOT** a political or military one. It is primarily a spiritual one (John 18:36). There are three aspects of the kingdom of heaven that will help us understand what Jesus means in His sermon. First, wherever the reign of Christ is being demonstrated, the kingdom of heaven is there. When Christ was living, teaching, and ministering on earth, He proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was come to them and among them. As we see God’s work done through believers and the church, we see God’s kingdom here on earth.

Secondly, the Kingdom of God is present right now in the lives of all those who have repented and put their faith in Christ. All those have been rescued from the world are made part of God’s kingdom, and as they live in submission to Christ will indeed exhibit the qualities described in the Beatitudes and the rest of the sermon.

Finally, the kingdom of heaven describes the time in the future when Christ will completely rule and reign over all things. This reminds us that there are blessings of belonging to God’s kingdom in this present life, but there are some which may only come in God’s future kingdom when He rules and reigns completely. Just as we studied in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come”, there is a present aspect and a future aspect to God’s kingdom. A large part of the Christian life is having an

eternal perspective, looking forward to the future blessings of following Christ when it might be difficult and challenging here in the present.

The Source of Kingdom Character

When we consider the beatitudes, this list of qualities that will characterize the lives of true followers of Christ, we soon realize these are not traits we can produce on our own. While we might strive to develop and demonstrate these things, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit we fall far short of these high standards for living. That’s the whole point of “the gospel of the kingdom”. While Jesus does not speak specifically of it here, we know from the rest of His life and ministry and from the rest of Scripture that such character only comes from hearts that have been changed through faith in Christ and His death on the cross. True happiness and blessedness only come when we have this right relationship with Him.

Conclusion

One pastor sums up The Beatitudes quite well:

For the unbeliever, they are an **INVITATION**. Come find the forgiveness of sin and a right relationship with God through Christ and the great blessing that follows.

For the believer, they are a **CELEBRATION** of God’s work in our hearts and lives.

For all of us, they bear a message of **TRANSFORMATION** as we experience the work of the Word and the Spirit in our lives to make us more like Christ.

As you consider the wonderful words of The Beatitudes, are you exhibiting the character that demonstrates you are genuinely part of God’s kingdom?

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays

8:00 AM Government Org. Conference Room (East Wing)

12:00 PM Senate President’s Conference Room