

Sermon on the Mount
Character Traits of a Christian – Part 1
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
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Text: Matthew 5:1-12

Purpose: Jesus has given us some character traits of the citizens of the Kingdom of God. The world calls us towards self-reliance while Christ is calling us to God-dependence. We are called blessed when we abide in the Spirit of Christ-likeness.

One of the first verses a Christian hears upon entering into the community of faith is found in Matthew 28:18-20. It says, *“And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”*

Do you remember the minister saying those words to you as you entered the baptismal waters? “I now baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

But what is the next phrase in that sentence in Matthew 28? *“Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”*

One of the largest blocks of teaching by Jesus is found in Matthew chapters 5-7. It is known as the Sermon on the Mount. While in Israel a few years ago, I visited the church that was built in remembrance of Jesus' teaching on that mountain side. As you walk up the hill side, the phrases spoken by Jesus are etched in stone –



“Blessed are the poor,”

“Blessed are those that mourn,”

“Blessed are the meek,”

“Blessed are those that hunger and thirst,”

“Blessed are the merciful,”

“Blessed are the pure in heart,”

“Blessed are the peacemakers.”

It is a beautiful, peaceful scenic view looking over the Sea of Galilee.

At the age of 30, Jesus began His ministry in and around Galilee. After He returned from His temptation in the wilderness, He began calling twelve disciples to come and follow Him. His time was spent traveling the region teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and disease among the people.

The people brought their afflicted friends and family to Jesus and He healed them. Multitudes began to follow Jesus from Galilee, the Decapolis (a ten-city region nearby), Jerusalem, Judea, and some even from beyond the Jordan.

Jesus saw the crowds and went to the top of a mountain and began to teach. Jesus sat down and His closest disciples sat listening. Jesus began to teach them about the Kingdom of God. For us, we need to understand that Jesus was laying down principles – or character traits – for His followers.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

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

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Imagine you are there on that beautiful scenic mountain with Jesus. Imagine you are there listening to the greatest person that ever lived on the earth. Imagine He was speaking to you. How do you feel? What are the thoughts going through your mind as Jesus is talking about being among the “Blessed?”



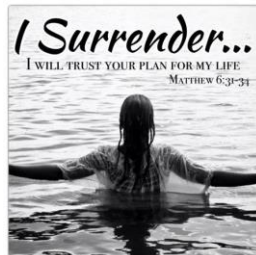
Earthly kingdom building throughout the ages has never involved being poor, mourning, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity, or persecution. Being the king of a kingdom involved wealth, jubilation, strength, totalitarian control, brute power, and subjugating your enemies. Jesus came into this world with a totally revolutionary way of thinking, being, and doing. Even Jesus' closest disciples didn't grasp it all until after Jesus' death and resurrection.

This extended teaching we find in Matthew probably was repeated on several occasions in Jesus' ministry. We find a portion of this recorded in Luke's gospel as Jesus was standing on the plain. What we have recorded in Matthew probably is only a portion of all that Jesus said that day to the disciples and the nearby crowd.

Through the years, I have heard individuals emphasize that the Sermon on the Mount was their gospel. They sought to live their life in such a way that they were poor in spirit, that they mourned, were meek, sought righteousness, and lived in such a way that they were pure in heart. The self confidence I have seen in some individuals attempting to make the Sermon on the Mount their supreme document of life has actually trapped them into a delusion of self-sufficiency.



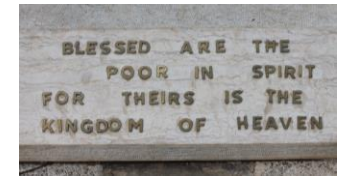
If you dig beneath the surface of the Sermon on the Mount, you will find that no one is able to live up to the demands of the law demonstrated here – especially verses 22 and 28 which we will examine another day. What I see in the Sermon on the Mount is that you must first come to God by way of the cross of Jesus Christ. You must first surrender your will to His will. You must acknowledge your sinfulness and repent. You need to accept the free grace of Jesus Christ – the free forgiveness offered by Jesus – in order to attempt to live out your life with the kingdom characteristics listed in this passage in Matthew. Apart from Christ, you cannot do this.



This passage of scripture is for the children of God. It is for those that have the spirit of Christ living in them. It is for those that seek the things of God. If anyone attempts to live their life apart from the forgiveness found in Christ, they are only fooling themselves. It doesn't matter how good, meek, or pure they act – only by way of the cross can we begin to enter into the kingdom of God and live in such a way we demonstrate these powerful character traits. As the old hymn says, "I must needs go home by the way of the cross, there is no other way but this." It is by way of the cross are we are able to live into these kingdom traits.

I. Poor in Spirit

Jesus said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"



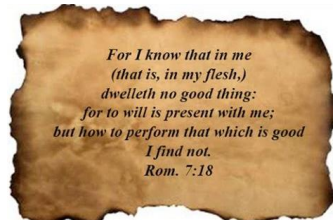
Two men went up to the Temple to pray. One said, "*God I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are.*" He listed all his good qualities and was quite satisfied. He only had two eyes; a good eye for himself and a bad eye for his fellow men, and no eye at all for God.

The other man prayed, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" That man may have possessed great wealth, he may have had the courage of a conqueror, but he realized that he lacked something which only God could supply (Luke 18:10, 13). The poverty which is a key to God's kingdom is the realization that, though we possess all things, without God all our things are nothing.¹

¹ God's Psychiatry, by Charles L. Allen, p. 131

Isaiah 57:15 says, *“For thus says the High and Lofty One, Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”* The God of eternity seeks out the contrite and humble of heart. God does not strive with the proud or boastful.

This contrite spirit involves a broken heart which demonstrates a deep sense of personal unworthiness. It requires distrust in our own self. Philippians 3:3 reminds us to have confidence in Christ Jesus and not have confidence in our own flesh. We fool ourselves if we think we are holy and righteous enough. Our flesh is weak and we are prone to stray away. The only thing we should boast in is Jesus Christ. Romans 7:18 summarizes it best, *“In me dwelleth no good thing.”*



We need to come to a point of acceptance that our life is to be lived by faith and faith alone. John 15:5 tells us our faith life is like the relationship between the trunk of a grapevine and its branches. Jesus said, *“I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”* Our Christian walk of faith involves abiding and living near to Christ. When we stray away and attempt it on our own, we accomplish nothing.

II. Blessed are those who Mourn

Jesus said next, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*



Has there ever been a time in your life when you mourned over something? Maybe it was the loss of someone you love. Maybe it was the loss of a job. It could be a financial catastrophe. It could be bad news from a doctor concerning you, or someone you know and love. At one time or another, we all have experienced this kind of mourning.

Jesus is reminding us that in the midst of living, there is going to be grief, loss, and mourning. Jesus wants us to lean upon Him so that He can be the source of comfort. I have met many people in hospitals that have told me, “If it wasn’t for the Lord, I don’t know how I could make it through this.” Then they always add, “I don’t know how those that don’t know Christ can make it through.”

But I want us to draw something deeper from this idea of mourning. When Jesus entered into Jerusalem one time, He looked over the city and simply wept. He was mourning for the separation and rejection that was coming very soon. He was mourning and longing for them to call upon Him as their Savior. But Jesus knew they would reject Him. Jesus was grieved over the lost souls of Jerusalem.



When was the last time you actually prayed for the soul of someone you know that has rejected Christ? Don't you realize that individual is on a straight path to hell if they don't turn back and accept Christ? Shouldn't that burden our heart so much that we actually cry out to God on their behalf? Shouldn't we be telling them about the love of God and the forgiveness they can receive from God? We should be mourning over their eternal separation from God.

What about mourning over your own shortcomings in your walk of faith? I don't know about you, but I am not praying enough. I am not studying the bible enough. I am not telling others about Jesus enough. Why am I so content in staying exactly where I am and not growing in the likeness of Christ? I should be mourning over my disobedience in this area. You should be mourning as well.

We are also instructed to pray for our enemies as well. There are individuals that have set their heart, mind, and soul against the things of God. You may have a co-worker, family member, or neighbor that has totally rejected God. In doing so, they have intentionally become enemies of the cross. We should even be mourning over the enemies of the cross.

The good news is that God hears us when we cry out to Him. When we lose our job, a dear friend dies, when our plans are interrupted by sickness or loss, God becomes our great consoler. God does not berate you for your lack of praying, He will only encourage you "Draw close to Him." God does not beat you up for your shortcomings, He will only say, "Come and follow me."



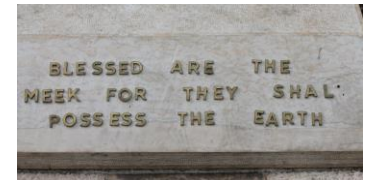
God does not condemn you for failure to pray for the enemies of the cross, He would only say, "Seek me first." I am so glad our God is a God of comfort.

It is a strange path God allows us to go through to help purge and purify us. Years ago, churches designated a bench at the front as a mourner's bench. People would come and sit on that bench if there was a burden on their heart. The great news is when we cry out to God, He hears and will be our comforter. But today, where do we go? We go and seek solutions to our mourning from counselors and psychologists. We need to stop and seek the face of God.

Today we want the blessings of God without the pain of God's purging. We would enjoy hearing a sermon on how to win friends, how to have peace of mind, or how to forget our fears. But we must remember that Christ came to make sinful men good rather than to merely make them feel good about themselves. Mourning draws us closer to the heart of God.

III. Blessed are the Meek

Jesus said, "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*"



This is actually a quote taken from Psalm 37 which says, "*But the meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.*" (v. 11) Psalm 37 is an acrostic wisdom psalm which compares those individuals that are evildoers and those that seek to delight in God. Those that are evil, the scripture say they are like grass and will be cut down early in life. Those that delight

in God feed on the faithfulness of God. Those people live a long time on this earth.

If you were to look around us today, you will have to agree, the meek are not inheriting the earth. The rich and arrogant seem to be getting richer and more powerful and the poor are getting poorer and less influential. It doesn't matter if you tax the rich and give to the poor; the poor still are with us.

But I think Jesus was talking about a time in the future during the Millennial Kingdom. It is during that time; Jesus will rule and reign over this world. Right now, the powers of darkness have been given temporary reign here on earth.

The meekness that is described in this passage of scripture is the kind of meekness that was demonstrated by Jesus while He was here on earth. Even though Jesus was ruler over all creation, He humbled himself to take on the likeness of human flesh. This kind of meekness is manifested only through the Spirit of God abiding in us.



meekness
is not
weakness.
just strength under control

The fruit – or out flowing characteristics of the Spirit of God abiding in us is – love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, temperance, and meekness. Only the Spirit of God can break you and make you meek. If you attempted to be meek by your own determined will, you would destroy it by bragging about how meek you are. Only the Holy Spirit can produce meekness in the heart of a yielded Christian.²

² Thru the Bible, J. Vernon McGee, Vol. 4, page 30.

One of my favorite verses in the bible is Proverbs 3:5-6. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”* A dependence on God produces a spirit of meekness and humility.

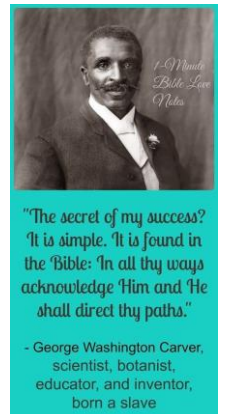
Trusting and depending upon God is not in our nature. We need to determine to Trust God with all our heart. And then Trust Him with the results.

An Illustration³

It is said of George Washington Carver that he got up early in the morning each day to walk alone and pray. He asked God how he was to spend his day and what He wanted to teach him that day. (How many of us need to start out our day that same way?)

Carver grew up at the close of the Civil War in a one-room shanty on the land of Moses Carver - the man who owned his mother. The Ku Klux Klan had abducted him and his mother, selling her to new owners. He was later found and returned to his owner, but his mother was never seen again.

Carver grew up at the height of racial discrimination, yet he had overcome all these obstacles to become one of the most influential men in the history of the United States. He made many discoveries with the use of peanuts and sweet



³ Quoted from Os Hillman, July 3, 2007 Titled, "Your Epitaph" who quoted from John Woodbridge, More Than Conquerors (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1992), 312.

potatoes. However, after he recommended farmers to plant peanuts and sweet potatoes instead of cotton, he was led into his greatest trial. The farmers lost even more money due to the lack of market for peanuts and sweet potatoes.

Carver cried out to the Lord, "Mr. Creator, why did You make the peanut?" Many years later, he shared that God led him back to his lab and worked with him to discover some 300 marketable products from the peanut. Likewise, he made over 100 discoveries from the sweet potato. These new products created a demand for peanuts and sweet potatoes, and they were major contributors to rejuvenating the Southern economy.

As he made new discoveries, he never became successful monetarily, but he overcame great rejection during his lifetime for being black. He was offered six-figure income opportunities from Henry Ford, and he became friends with presidents of his day, yet he knew what God had called him to do. His epitaph read:

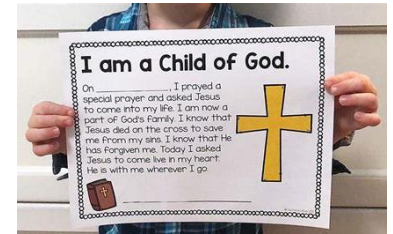
He could have added fortune to fame,
but caring for neither,
He found happiness and honor
in being helpful to the world.

Conclusion

The message Jesus gave His disciples that day on the mountainside is still applicable to us today. Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, for theirs is the kingdom of God, they shall be

comforted, and they shall inherit the earth. We will examine the rest of the Beatitudes next week.

What I want each of us to do next week is examine our heart and determine if we have made that transaction with God which makes us a child of God. Have we confessed our sin? Have we accepted Jesus as our only Savior? Have we repented from our sinful ways? Before we can even begin to apply the truth's taught during the Sermon on the Mount, we need to make sure we are a child of the kingdom of God.



Once we are able to settle that question about our salvation only being found in Jesus Christ, we need to ask ourselves, "Are we allowing the Spirit of God to rule and reign in our life?" Or are we governing our life by self rule. Kingdom living involves surrendering to the King. If we surrender our will to His will, then these kingdom character traits will grow in you and they will be manifested.

The word "Blessed" implies a happiness that only comes about through "being" instead of "doing." We live in a world that measures the value of a person by what they do instead of what they are. Jesus is inviting us to "be Christ-like."

I challenge you to look inward and see who you are becoming.

LET US PRAY