

Sermon on the Mount
Character Traits of a Christian – Part 3
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
April 25, 2021

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 is to God-dependence. We are called blessed when we abide in the Spirit of Christ-likeness.

Three sisters, ages 92, 94 and 96, live in a house together. One night the 96-year-old draws a bath. She puts her foot in and pauses. She yells to the other sisters, "Was I getting in or out of the bath?"



The 94-year-old yells back, "I don't know. I'll come up and see."

She starts up the stairs and pauses, "Was I going up the stairs or down?"

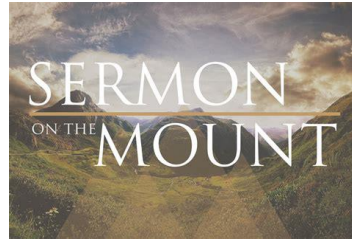
The 92-year-old was sitting at the kitchen table having tea listening to her sisters. She shakes her head and says, "I'm sure glad I never get that forgetful, knock on wood..."

She then yells, "I'll come up and help both of you as soon as I see who's at the door."¹

¹ Mikey's Funnies, A Sister Funny, March 11, 2011

We all can laugh because our minds are so easily distracted that we forget what we are doing. What is true for forgotten activities, can also be applied to our spiritual life as well. We forget who we are and what we are supposed to be. We need to be reminded that we are a child of God and we are to live like one!

Over the last two Sundays, we have been examining the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus gathered His disciples close and began to teach them about the key character traits of citizens that belong to the Kingdom of Heaven.



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.

We have examined the first six of the Beatitudes and today I want us to look at the last two, the peacemakers and the persecuted.

Throughout history there have been individuals that have attempted to facilitate peace in their day. War is ever present in every age of man and peacemakers are rare.



Franklin D. Roosevelt's last written words said this:²

We seek peace – enduring peace ... We must cultivate the science of human relations – the ability to work with all peoples, of all kinds, to live together and work together, in the same world, at peace ... As we go forward toward the greatest contribution to any generation of human beings can make in the world – the contribution of lasting peace – I ask you to keep up your faith.

This inner longing for peace is heard all around the world. Instead, we hear of conflict and the drumbeat of war. In April 2020, there were twenty-eight countries who were either involved in war or were experiencing armed conflicts within their borders. These nations included Afghanistan, Algeria, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Malaysia, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, the Ukraine, the United States and Yemen.³ If you were to write a best-selling book today, its topic would likely be on peace.

² Notes and outline from "God's Psychiatry" by Charles L. Allen p. 152-9.

³ <https://www.reference.com/world-view/countries-war-today-3e6af7ed79601953> (accessed 4/19/2021)

It is fitting that the first message at Jesus' birth were from Angels. They brought a message of "peace on earth." As Jesus neared His departure from this earth, Jesus said, "My peace I give to you." (John 14:27) This word has become a central theme among Christians every Sunday when they "Pass the peace."



Some have defined the role of peacemakers as those involved in the business of reconciling others back to God. If we can only lead the parties in conflict to acknowledge God first, then a peace process can be put together. But for most people it is easier to continue to stoke those smoldering grudges instead of working towards genuine peace.

Jill Jackson and Sy Miller wrote a song in 1955 which says, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me." The key to peace on earth actually begins with you and me.

Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman wrote a book titled, "Peace of Mind." In his book, he pointed out that there are many earthly things we desire – health, love, riches, beauty, talent, power, fame; but without peace of mind all those things bring torment instead of joy. If we have peace, no matter what else we may lack, life is worth living. Without peace, though we may possess all these other things, it is not enough.

What exactly is peace? It is not simply the absence of strife. When Jesus lived on earth, there may have been few battles or conflict in that region. The Roman Empire had

already forced the world to its knees and the people had lost its will to fight against Rome.



Peace is a positive force. You may clear a piece of land of all the weeds but it is still not a garden. It is only a barren field. It becomes a garden when something productive is planted there. Micah 4:3 talks about turning our swords into plowshares. It is not enough for the weapons of war to be destroyed – breaking the swords and spears. They need to be turned into something positive and productive like plowshares and pruning hooks.

For peace to rein in this world and in our hearts, we need to remove hate, suspicion, and fear. It needs to be replaced with love, joy, patience, and understanding. Before this can ever occur in this world, it must occur in us first. "A house divided against itself, will not stand." (Mark 3:25)

Dr. Ralph W. Sockman in his book, *The Higher Happiness*, gives us three ways in which a life can be divided. It can be divided between the inner self and outer self, the forward drive and backward pull, and between the higher and lower natures.

The Inner and Outer Selves



All of us can understand the tension between the inward life and the outward life. In the classic British comedy, *Keeping Up Appearances*, there is a humorous look at a woman, Hyacinth, who is an average citizen attempting to

live her life like royalty. She is so focused on what others think about her and how she is connected to socially important people that she is oblivious to how obnoxious she actually is.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were concerned about their outward appearances. They dressed in specific ways to draw attention to themselves. They prayed out loud in the streets for others to see. They tithed openly, pouring their pennies in the copper collection pots, so all could see how much they gave. Jesus described these men as "whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones."

Outwardly they appeared to have peace, but inwardly they didn't demonstrate a life at peace. For our life to be at peace, our outward and inward life must be in harmony.

Forward and Backward

Our lives are also oriented forward and backwards.

Physically, we are made to go forward. To walk backwards is awkward. A little girl was trying to button her dress up in the back. Finally, she gave up and went to her mother for help. She said, "I can't do this because I am in front of myself."

But mentally we are just the opposite. We can think backward better than we can think forward. We know what happened yesterday, but we can only guess about tomorrow. It is easier to live in the past instead of struggling to build a future.



It is easy to load ourselves down with the regrets and mistakes of yesterday. When we continue to dwell on the burdens of our past mistakes, we live in a state of regret instead of seeking repentance. We need to abandon remorse – it only re-inflicts the wrongs of yesterday. Instead, we need to embrace repentance – which is redemptive because it enables us to bury the past and live under the hope for tomorrow. We can then move forward.

Higher and Lower Natures

Our lives are also being pulled in two directions by our higher and lower natures. In the New Testament, Paul repeatedly talks about the inner struggle everyone has between the good we want to do and the sins that so easily beset us.



So many individuals are caught between two opinions. Do I follow God or do I follow my own agenda? Elijah stood before the people of Israel on Mount Carmel and pleaded, "How long will you falter (waiver) between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." Elijah asked them to choose and they answered not a word. (I Kings 18:21) Can you imagine that scene? They answered not a word. Their silence condemned them. God demonstrated mightily who was Lord and all the prophets of Baal were killed by Elijah that very day.



There is a peace that comes from those that are totally dedicated to God that cannot be explained to those that have rejected God. I have stood with families at the

graveside and noticed a peace that passes all understanding among the family members. For those that are in Christ, death can be a celebration of life instead of tragic despair. In times like that, knowing Christ is everything. The world that does not know Christ does not have this kind of peace.

For those that have turned their backs on God there is only inner turmoil and strife. For those that have not dedicated themselves to God, there is the inner struggle of sitting on the fence. Those that are hiding from God are the most miserable.



As we read through the Sermon on the Mount, we find Jesus is calling us to do more than vote “yes” for these character traits. He is actually asking us to apply them to our life. He wants us to be “doers” of the word, and not simply “hearers.”

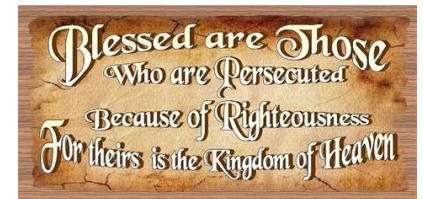
Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount by listing the character traits of a Christian as being poor in spirit, mourning, demonstrating meekness, desiring righteousness, showing mercy, having a pure heart, and being a peacemaker. I don’t know if you caught the foundational phrase for all the beatitudes. It is the first one that says we are to be “poor in spirit.” That is the one that ties all the others together. It is a right recognition of ourselves – our sinful selves – in light of a Holy and righteous God. As we humble ourselves, we grow in our ability to demonstrate mercy to others and in living a purer life.

As we reflect upon our lives, and see others around us, we understand better that we are to be the agents of peace. Reconciling others back to God. Winning the lost before it is too late. Showing forth an example of a loving, forgiving God. How are you doing with that? Are you demonstrating those character traits in your life? If you are, have you intentionally set about being a peace maker in our war loving world?

Jesus is calling us to be peacemakers – reconcilers – in our communities, families, and our own hearts. When we do, we are called “*Sons of God.*”

Blessed are the Persecuted for Righteousness’ Sake

Jesus concluded the Beatitudes by saying, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”



In the Book of Acts, we find the first martyr of the church to be Stephen. He was one of the seven deacons selected by the church in Jerusalem. He demonstrated these kingdom characteristics and for Stephen; it resulted in persecution and death. To actually live out these character traits of the kingdom of God will cost you something. But unless they are translated into real life, they are worth nothing.

Jesus never promised ease to those who follow Him. He never said you would be financially blessed like some evangelists on television promise. He never said you would



be praised by the world. He talked about “*denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Him.*” Taking up a cross of dying to self. Taking up a literal cross of persecution and death. To enter the kingdom of God may mean choosing to turn your back on your family. Here in America, being a Christian is easy. But in other parts of the world, it could mean the loss of your family, your children, your job, your property, or even your life.

In Revelation 2:10 (NKJV) it says, “*Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten (limited) days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*” The King James Version says, “*Be faithful unto death.*” That means, be faithful, be willing to make whatever sacrifice is required, even death, before you will deny God.

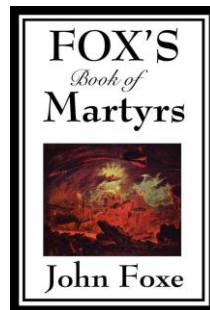
No person has really lived until they have found something worth dying for. You never can possess the kingdom of God until the cause of God becomes more important than your own life.

Foxe’s Book of Martyrs

In the book, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, you find a long list of believers that were willing to lay down their lives instead of denying their faith.

*Be faithful,
even to the point of death,
and I will give you the
crown of life.*

Revelation 2:10



All of the disciples of Jesus died a martyr’s death except the beloved Apostle John.

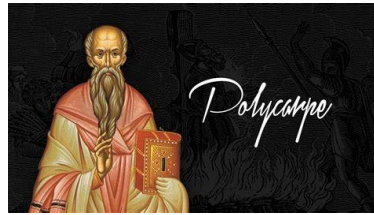
- James, the brother of John, was beheaded in 36 A.D.
- Thomas was killed in India.
- Simon, the brother of Jude, was crucified in Egypt during Trajan’s reign.
- Mark was burned and buried about the same time.
- Bartholomew was beaten, crucified, and beheaded in Armenia.
- Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother was crucified in Ethiopia in 80 A.D. When he faced the cross he said, “O cross, most welcome and longed for!”
- James was testifying about Jesus standing on the walls of Jerusalem on Passover when the Pharisees threw him off the wall. The fall didn’t kill him, but someone hit him on the head and killed him.

Nero persecuted the Christians so severely that Eusebius records, “a man might see cities full of men’s bodies, the old lying together with the young, and the dead women’s bodies cast out naked, without reverence of that sex, in the open street.”

Peter was crucified during Nero’s reign head down because he said he was not worthy of dying in the same manner as His Lord.

Rome persecuted Christians because Rome did not understand that the kingdom of God was not an earthly kingdom. They also persecuted the Christians because they would not bow down and worship the Roman gods. The brutality of Rome was relentless.

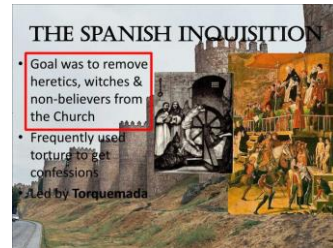
In 161 A.D., during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Polycarp was taken prisoner. He knew his captors were coming for him so he met them and invited them into his home and prepared a meal for them. As they brought him into the stadium, a voice from heaven was heard saying, “Be strong Polycarp, and play the man.” As he stood before the proconsul, they begged him to recant. But he replied, “Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He never once wronged me. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”



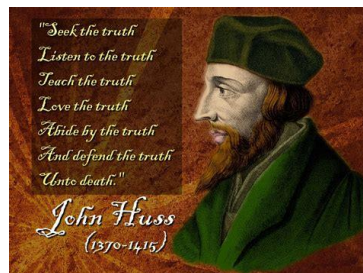
William Tyndale was burned at the stake in 1536 A.D. in Augsburg. His dying words were: “Lord! Open the King of England’s eyes!”

Repeatedly during the Protestant Reformation, people were sentenced to death in Scotland, England, Spain, Rome, and throughout Europe for failure to follow the teachings of the Catholic Church. Many people that arrived on the shores of this country were attempting to escape the religious persecution of England, Rome, and Spain. Anabaptist (the forerunners of modern-day Baptist’s) were especially hated by both Catholics and many of the Reformers.

Waves of persecution for Christians occurred again in 200 A.D., 235 A.D., 249 A.D., 270 A.D., 303 A.D. 361 A.D., and again in 429 A.D. The Spanish Inquisition in 1200 A.D. caused a total of 31,912 Protestants to be burned alive and 291,450 put in prison.



John Huss was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415 A.D. by the Catholic Church for adopting the teachings of Wycliffe.



Around the world today, people are giving up their lives instead of recanting. Jesus reminded His disciples that they would face persecution. That word is echoed down to today.

Ulrich Zwingli was the great reformer who led Zurich to turn away from the traditions of the Catholic Church. The end result led his church to abandon the mass, altars, and images in the church. He died in 1531 A.D. defending the city from soldiers sent by the Catholic Church.

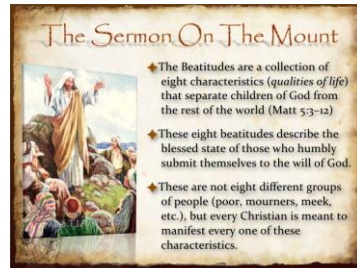
Jesus said in Matthew 5:10-12, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward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

Jesus is calling us to be obedient even to the point of death.
I pray if I ever faced that decision, I would have the strength of character to follow Christ no matter what.

Summary

The Beatitudes highlight the character traits of Christians.

- To be poor in spirit means to give up our pride.
- To mourn means to be penitent to the point of surrendering our sins.
- Meekness means that we must surrender our very selves to the plans and purposes of God.
- Our hungering and thirsting for God mean turning away from our ambitions for all other things.
- To be merciful means to pay good for the evil we have received.
- For purity we must give up all things impure.
- To be a peacemaker is to wholly choose God and invite others to know God as well.
- These eight-character traits are often bought with a price. Blessed are those who pay the price, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”



LET US PRAY