

Sermon on the Mount
Character Traits of a Christian – Part 2
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
February 26, 2025

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.

Two guys were working for city public works department. One would dig a hole and the other would follow behind him and fill the hole in. They worked up one side of the street, then down the other, then moved on to the next street, working furiously all day without rest, one man digging a hole, the other filling it in again.

An onlooker was amazed at their hard work, but couldn't understand what they were doing. So he asked the hole digger, "I'm impressed by the effort you two are putting in to your work, but I don't get it -- why do you dig a hole, only to have your partner follow behind and fill it up again?"



The hole digger wiped his brow and sighed, "Well, I suppose it probably looks odd because we're normally a three-person team. But today the guy who plants the trees called in sick." ¹

How many of us feel as if the things we are doing accomplish little or nothing? The work we did last week, last month, or last year, is just like those hole diggers. I have found out more and more lately, that life is not in the doing – it is in the “being.” We all get caught up in the “doing” aspect of living. We need to turn our attention to the “being.” This passage of scripture listed in Matthew helps us focus on the inward walk of life, and not so much on the outward, material aspect of life.

Last week we began a three-part sermon series on a passage of scripture found in Matthew chapter 5 called the Beatitudes. Just before Jesus left this earth, Jesus instructed us to teach others what He said.

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. At the age of 30, Jesus began His ministry in and around Galilee. He had called the twelve disciples. He began his ministry by 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 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.

Last week we examined the idea of being “*poor in spirit.*” By humbling ourselves, we find the Kingdom of heaven. We also looked at those that “*mourn*” and how God is the great comforter when we turn to Him. We also discussed the idea of being “*meek*” and how we are called not to think too highly of ourselves.

Today, I want to examine the next three characteristics of a Christian.

Blessed are those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness²

Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*”



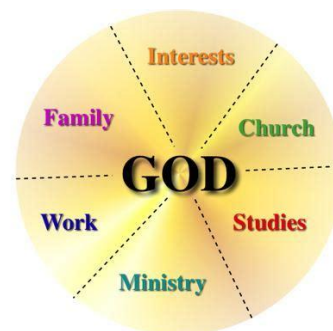
One day, a young man came to Buddha seeking the true way of life, the path of deliverance. According to the story as told by Dr. Ralph Sockman, Buddha led him down to the river. The young man assumed he was to undergo some ritual of purification or baptismal service. They walked out into the river some distance and suddenly Buddha grabbed the man and held his head underwater. Finally in a last gasp, the young man pulled himself loose, and his head came above the water. Quietly Buddha asked him, “When you thought you were drowning, what did you desire most?” The man gasped, “Air.” Buddha replied, “When you want salvation as much as you wanted air, then you will get it.

I believe Jesus would agree. Jesus said that we are to “*hunger and thirst for righteousness.*” When we do, we are then satisfied.

When we focus our mind on something, no matter what it is, we will work until the object of our imagination is accomplished. When I set my mind on building my home many years ago, I stayed with it until it was complete. When I decided to go back to school and finish my masters and doctorate studies, I stayed with it until I finished. When you begin planning a new crop, nothing will deter you until it is planted. When you focus your energies on one task, your time, talents, and resources become organized and dedicated to that task.

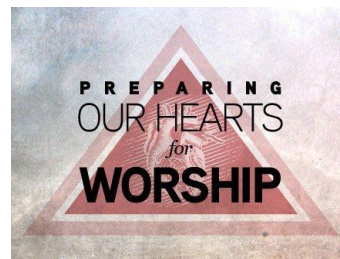
We can possess the things of God IF we first make God the center of our life. Matthew 22:37 instructs us the way in which we are to live, “*Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*” When we do that, we find God.

Psalm 14:2 reminds us that God is seeking those who are seeking Him. “*The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God.*” Psalm 34:8 invites us to “*taste and see that the Lord is good.*” Verse 10 goes on to say, “*Those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good.*”



On any given Sunday, I can look across the congregation and realize that some have come seeking God. Some are listening carefully, praying with me as I pray, opening their Bible and reading along with me, and singing from their heart. Others are simply bored and yawn, others sleep, some don't sing the hymns, and others chat about who's here and talk at random times.

What is the difference? Some have come to church with a need. They are hungry and thirsty for a word from God. **You will only get out of the service what you have prepared your heart to receive.** The church is made up of its members. Our attitude towards church and God is seen by everyone around us.



The story is told of a very pious churchman that was scolding a neighbor about his cursing. The cursing neighbor said, "Well my friend, I cuss a lot and you pray a lot, but neither of us really means what we are saying." Ouch!

Why are we so afraid to be totally sold out to Jesus Christ? This cursing neighbor saw through the false front of this pious churchman. If we were so dedicated to Christ, we would not let a little bad weather keep us from church. We would not stay away if a friend or family member came for the weekend. We would schedule our vacation and time away in such a manner that we would be back with the people of God on Sunday morning.

Jesus is calling us to "*hunger and thirst after righteousness.*"

Blessed are the Merciful³

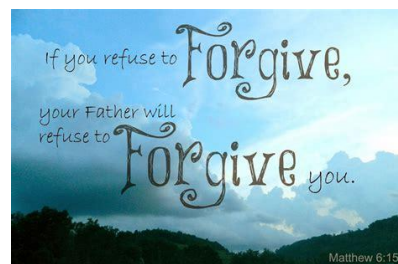
Jesus also said, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*"



Of the eight Beatitudes given to us, this one is the most appealing to us but it is the most difficult. It is the most appealing because mercy brings to mind kindness, unselfish service, and good will. How many of us want mercy extended towards us? I do.

If we genuinely examine our hearts, we find that we are in need of mercy. Without mercy, we don't have any hope. All of us have sinned and come short of God's glory. The only prayer we can pray is, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" (Luke 18:13)

In a prayer meeting, a man stood up and prayed, "Lord send justice. All we need is justice. Please give us justice!" Then another man stood up and prayed, "Please don't. Lord! Give us mercy. We need mercy, not justice!" Scripture plainly teaches us that it is



God's mercy that He has given with His grace that we should be thankful for. (I Corinthians 15:10) ⁴



Jesus told the crowds a parable of a King that forgave a man great debt. Some time later, that forgiven businessman was seen sending a poor person to jail because he had not re-paid a small loan. When the King found out what the businessman had done, the king was furious and had the businessman thrown in prison until it was all paid back. Jesus concluded that parable with this, *“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”* (Matt. 18:35)

We cry out for justice, but God is calling us to extend mercy.



A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and justice demanded death.

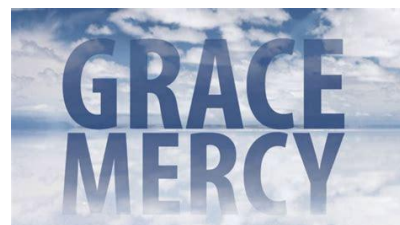
"But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained. "I plead for mercy."

"But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied.

"Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for."

"Well, then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son. ⁵

For mercy to become an active part of our daily life, it requires a right spirit on our part. We must overcome our tendencies of vindictiveness, jealousy, and littleness. Just as Jesus gave Himself for others, we are called to give of ourselves no matter the cost, no matter the excuse.



In the book, *High Winds at Noon*, Allan Knight Chalmers gives us a story of Peer Holm, who was a world-famous engineer. In Peer's lifetime, he built great bridges

and tunnels but later in life was overcome by failure, poverty, and sickness. He returned to his hometown and eked out a meager living.



Peer Holm had a neighbor with a dangerous dog that threatened everyone. The owner of the dog only sneered at everyone and did not heed anyone's advice concerning the dog. One day, Peer Holm came home and found his little daughter pinned to the ground by this vicious dog. The sheriff shot the dog, but it was too late for his daughter, she died.

All the people of the village hated this man because of what the dog had done. When sowing time came, no one would sell this man any grain. He had plowed his fields, but he could not beg, borrow, or buy any seed. Everyone sneered back at this man. Everyone, that is, except Peer Holm. Peer could not forget the man nor could he sleep at night.

Very early one morning Peer got up and went to his shed and got the last half bushel of barley. He climbed the fence and sowed his neighbor's field. When the seeds came up a few weeks later, the seeds told the story. A portion of Peer's field had none while the neighbors was green with barley.



Mercy requires that we sow good seed in our enemy's field, even though it means that part of our own field will be left bare. It is not easy. It is probably the hardest thing we will ever do, but it is a key to the kingdom of God. The way of the world requires an eye-for-an-eye, and a tooth-for-a-tooth. Hate always leads to hate. But the way of Christ is to extend mercy.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

Blessed are the Pure in Heart⁶

Jesus also described a key characteristic of the Kingdom of God as purity of heart. The reward of a pure heart is the ability to "see God." If you ever get a chance to study the life of Daniel, you will discover those who have pure lives can have visions from God.



The heart is the area of us that involves the “will.” It is the seat of affection and our desires. In many ways, it is the “Holy of Holies” in a man or woman. It is the secret chamber of the Spirit.

Purity

When we think of the word “purity,” we are quick to recognize that we are not pure. Purity involves an absence of those things that pollute us. Every now and then, the city of Stantonsburg will send out a letter telling all the citizens the test results they have received when they have tested the water. It checks for asbestos, benzene, chlorine, fluoride, as well as a long list of contaminants. If we test the air, we look for pollutants like carbon monoxide and pollen. I know if we tested for pollen in the early spring, it would be significant! In order for our air to be pure, it needs to be free from these and other contaminants.

But what does it mean to have a “pure heart?” It means that it is returned back to its original condition - brought back into harmony with God. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had a pure heart. But through a decision of the will, they sinned and each of us since that time, have inherited a heart that is sinful.

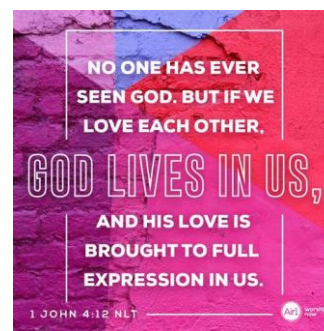
If all have sinned and come short of God’s glory, then is it possible that any of us are able to ever see God? Since we have all sinned and nothing sinful shall ever enter into the presence of God, is there any hope for any of us?

Yes, there is hope! We see over and over again in scripture people that have been sinful in the past, restored and made whole again. Moses murdered an Egyptian.

David committed adultery with Bathsheba. Jonah ran from the Lord. Peter denied Jesus three times. Each time, we see they were made right with God by faith and through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Acts 15:9 says that we are justified with God through “*faith in their hearts.*” Hebrews 9:14 reminds us that it is through the blood of Christ that cleanses our conscience from dead works so we may serve the living God.



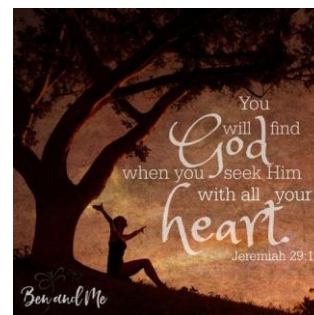
Our works can never purify us. Only through the substitutionary death of Christ on Calvary can we ever see God. Our hearts can remain pure as we continue to abide in the word of God. John 17:17 says, “*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*” We need to



continue to apply God's word to our life, thereby sanctifying, or cleaning us. Ephesians 5:26 also says we can be cleansed by the washing of water by the word of God.

The blessing of a pure heart is the ability to see God. God is ever present. He is not confined only in heaven.

1. **God can be found in Jesus Christ.** On several occasions, Jesus said *"When you have seen Me, you have seen the Father."*



2. **He can be found in the scriptures.** As you take time out each day to meditate on God's word, you will find God right there among the pages of your Bible. His Spirit inspired the words written there and when you read them, they penetrate your heart and God is in the midst.

3. **You also see God's divine hand upon your life in the daily activities of life.** In the people you meet, in the places you go, God is present in numerous ways when our spiritual eyes are open. I have gone certain places and knew that God was in the timing of those events. I have met certain people and knew God planned that meeting – not me.

4. **You can also find God right there in your own heart.** "You ask me how I know Jesus lives; He lives within my heart." There is an inward knowing when you draw close to God.

Seeing God is only for the pure in heart. Impurity blinds our eyes from seeing the things that are holy. If you have jaundiced eyes, all the objects are colored. If you have cataracts, then the things you see are cloudy. Only a pure heart can see God.



The question that comes to my mind is this: "Is my heart pure?" The only way to have a pure heart is to turn to the only one that can cleanse it.

What can wash away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus.
 What can make me whole again, nothing but the blood of Jesus.
 Oh! Precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow;
 No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Psalm 139:23 helps us have a God centered life:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”



I am sure most of you here this morning have already made a commitment to Christ. But maybe there is someone here that has not confessed Jesus Christ as their Savior. As we sing our closing song, I invite you to come and ask Jesus into your heart. If your church membership is at another church and you would like to join Spilman this morning, I will also be up front to receive you.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Mikey's Funnies, March 2, 2011

² Notes – God's Psychiatry by Charles L. Allen p 140-4

³ Outline – God's Psychiatry by Charles Allen, p. 144-8

⁴ Practical Bible Illustrations from Yesterday and Today, p. 231

⁵ Luis Palau, Experiencing God's Forgiveness, Multnomah Press, 1984

⁶ Outline from Handfuls on Purpose, Vol. II. p. 262-3.

