

Introduction To The Beatitudes

Introduction. Happiness is the greatest desire of mankind. The whole world is longing for it and it is awful to see the way that people seek it because the majority are doing so in a way that will produce misery. Avoiding your difficulties might make you happy for a short time, but in the end it will add to your problems. The deceitfulness of sin is always offering happiness, but it is always leading to unhappiness.

Jesus wanted to explain for His followers the true path to blessedness, and He did it through the sermon on the mount. But this teaching has not always been accepted well. George Bernard Shaw called the sermon on the mount an "impractical outburst of anarchism and sentimentality." Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher, looked upon New Testament morals as a "malignant disease." The beatitudes say, however, that if you really want to be blessed, here is the way. Burton Hills said, "Happiness is not a destination. It is a method of life."

Nowhere in human history has there been embodied in such few words truth so monumental. We are going to introduce the beatitudes today and then look at each beatitude in detail over the next several weeks to determine what sort of person God wishes us to be and how to truly find blessedness in a world of sorrow.

I. ***The Setting Of The Beatitudes***

- A. The time of the sermon on the mount.
 1. The sermon on the mount occurred in the summer of 28 A.D.
 2. Jesus had just chosen His twelve disciples (Luke 6:12-19).
- B. The place of the sermon on the mount.
 1. The sermon probably took place on a mountain in the vicinity of Capernaum, just to the northwest. It is marked by two humps rising 60 feet above the crown of the summit. This would have provided a natural amphitheater from which to speak.
 2. At this time Judea was filled with many problems.
 - a) The country was occupied by a tyrannical military government.
 - b) The people were treated as possessions by the Romans.
 - c) Taxes consumed one-third of a worker's income.
 - d) Racial prejudice was prevalent.
 - e) Slavery was rampant.
 3. In response, many answers were given by different sects of the Jews.
 - a) The Zealots, the terrorists of their day, said, "Don't worry about your inner life. Your only hope is military might."
 - b) The Sadducees said, "Survive by compromise. Make personal gain and the best bargain you can negotiate."

- c) The Pharisees said, "Live a clean, pure life (as defined by the Rabbis), trust in God, and He will do the rest."
4. In this midst of this turmoil, a lowly Galilean carpenter climbed the hills and walked through the valleys of Judea -- He knew the people and their hopes, fears, and confusion (Matthew 9:36).

II. ***The Addressees And Addressor Of The Beatitudes***

- A. To whom is the sermon addressed?
 1. Because of Jesus' growing fame, multitudes of people came to Him from the surrounding region. In fact, some had come from as far away as Tyre and Sidon to hear Him teach and be healed of their diseases (Matthew 4:23-25; Luke 6:17-19).
 2. At the time of the sermon on the mount, many had become His disciples, including the twelve. This was probably the height of Jesus' Galilean ministry and His greatest popularity among the people.
- B. By whom is the sermon addressed?
 1. It was presented by Jesus Christ who possessed the perfect qualifications.
 - a) He had intelligence and the Spirit without measure (Matthew 3:16; John 3:34). He knew man's heart (John 2:25; 4:29). He knew what, when, and how to speak.
 - b) His life was consistent with His teaching; that is, He did not possess the failings of human teachers (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:19; 2:22).
 2. Matthew 5:1 makes this even more clear.
 - a) "And after He sat down." A Jewish rabbi sat to teach officially. Some feel that His posture here should be seen as emblematic of a king sitting upon his throne, or a judge upon the bench.
 - b) "And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying." In the Greek, this was a solemn and grave utterance. It was used when a person opened his heart and fully poured forth his mind. This was not a "chance" teaching, but the beginning of the revelation of God's mystery.

III. ***The Significance Of The Beatitudes***

- A. The beatitudes develop basic principles found in the Old Testament (Psalm 18:25; 37:11; 40:17). The beatitudes are to the New Covenant what the Ten Commandments were to the Old Covenant. Compared to the cold, empty, formalistic religion that prevailed among the Jews at the time, the beatitudes did seem strange and unusual.
- B. The sermon, which is the Lord's longest discourse recorded in scripture, is perhaps best seen as a forecast and an epitome of the

entire ministry of Christ (cf. Luke 16:16). Every precept of the New Testament finds its origin in the basic teachings of the beatitudes.

- C. The sermon on the mount was both radical and reasonable; it was both spiritually idealistic and sensibly down-to-earth. As an opening salvo, the beatitudes focus on the character demanded of citizens in the kingdom (Mark 1:1, 14-15).
 - 1. The beatitudes describe how each Christian is supposed to live -- there is no "laity" or "priestly" concept.
 - 2. All Christians are saints, not simply those with exceptional holiness (Philippians 2:21; 2 Thessalonians 1:10).
 - 3. The principles of the beatitudes are principles which can be acquired and must be acquired.
- D. The beatitudes teach that we are distinct from the world around us.
 - 1. We are different in what we admire (poor in spirit in contrast to self-confidence).
 - 2. We are different in what we seek (righteousness in contrast to status, money, etc.).
 - 3. We are different in what we do (1 Peter 2:11-12).
 - 4. We are different in how we find happiness (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

IV. ***The Meaning Of The Term "Blessed"***

- A. When someone inherits a lot of money, others may say, "How fortunate!" When someone enjoys good health, many think, "What good genetics!" When someone is honored for an achievement, a typical response is, "How happy you must be!" The one word that sums up these responses is "Congratulations!"
 - 1. When the ancient Greeks expressed these ideas, they used the same word attributed to Jesus in the beatitudes. We translate it "blessed." They used this word to congratulate parents on their children, to congratulate wise men on their knowledge, and to congratulate rich men on their wealth. For them, these were of great value.
 - 2. Whenever we congratulate people, we are making a statement about values. But Jesus congratulated people on a very different set of values. In His shocking appraisal of the human condition, He called those who were poor in spirit, meek, and persecuted "blessed."
- B. "Blessed" originally described the happy state of the gods as opposed to the state of mortal man. Among the Greeks of Jesus' day only the gods were truly the blessed ones.
 - 1. "Blessed" finally came to mean outward prosperity and therefore was synonymous with "rich" or "happy." Happiness in the usual

- sense is a result of man's feelings produced by exterior circumstances and depends largely on the chances of life.
2. Used in the beatitudes, "blessed" conveys the highest form of spiritual and moral prosperity. It is possible because lives are truly committed to the one who is supremely blessed (1 Timothy 1:11; 6:15).
 - a) Blessedness depends on what a man is and includes both the feelings of man and the approval of God (Philippians 4:7; 1 Peter 1:8).
 - b) True blessedness is only found in Christ (John 14:6; Ephesians 1:3; 3:14-19). This blessedness is separate from man's outward condition (Psalm 32:10-11).
 - C. Most Americans are seeking happiness in a standard of living rather than a standard of character. Blessedness is found in total surrender to God, not in self-seeking. It is found by spiritual means, not carnal. Apart from God, all that man acquires to produce happiness can only produce a temporary state of well-being.

Conclusion. A lot of people only admire the sermon on the mount because of its literary attractiveness. They disregard Jesus' teaching and as a result they lack the spiritual ethic demanded by Him, and few in the world enjoy the blessedness of life in Christ. The challenge for Christians is to embrace His values and stop admiring people for wealth or achievements that have no value in the sight of God. Instead, we must learn what has true, eternal value.

The beatitudes call us from the inventions we have sought to make a search of our heart divided asunder by God's word (Hebrews 4:12-13). These beatitudes, the introduction to the sermon on the mount, was indeed, "a spiritual shot heard around the world." As we go through our study for the next few weeks, I want you to ponder this in your heart, change the way you live if necessary, and then teach these wonderful beatitudes to those who are lost.