

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT
(The Sermon on the Mount I)

Matthew 5:1-16; 17-48

Key Verse: 5:3

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

Jesus gave this Sermon on the Mount as a standard for all Christians. We can call these rules that Jesus gave "The Constitution of the Kingdom of Heaven." No one can keep every rule. But man must have rules, just as the universe has rules that maintain its order. These golden rules are given to all Christians so that they can live in this world with a standard and a principle. If we live in the world without a standard or a principle we become lawless people. We call verses 1-12 "The Beatitudes," or the Eight Blessings. Simply speaking, the Beatitudes connote the inner attitude of God's people before God as well as before man. In verses 13-16 Jesus speaks of the role of his people in the world. In verses 17-48, Jesus speaks of the new standard of the law, referring to the old Jewish traditions. Today, we want to study from verses 1-16 how to live as the blessed children of God.

I. The Beatitudes (1-12)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them (1,2). Jesus gave this sermon to his disciples in the presence of the crowds. So it is clear that this sermon is spoken to the disciples and to all people as well. In verses 1-12 Jesus gives eight secrets of happiness to God's people.

First, blessed are the poor in spirit (3). Look at verse 3. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The word "blessed" means "happy." But "blessed" ultimately refers to the distinctive spiritual joy of those who are members of the kingdom of God. The truly happy men are not men who have wide knowledge, high honor and great wealth. Such people are self-sufficient and egoistic. They are like the rich fool who enjoyed his wealth selfishly, not caring for his poor neighbor, and went to hell (Lk 16:19-31). Such people have no room for God in their hearts. Their hearts are full of ungodly things that make them truly unhappy. They are unhappy not because of others, but because of themselves. They claim to be wise. But they are foolish because they invite unhappiness due to their ungodliness.

The man who is poor in spirit is the man who seeks God earnestly, realizing his utter helplessness, and puts his whole trust in God. The man who is poor in spirit is the man who has realized that the things of the world are not everything, but God is everything. The man who is poor in spirit is not greedy or self-sufficient. Rather, he is always hungry for the truth of God. He seeks God earnestly. King David is a good example of a man who was poor in spirit. He was an able man. He had many things to depend on. He could display his power and glory. But David did not claim his own righteousness. He went to God in [prayer for help](#). Psalm 5:2,3 says, "Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,

for to you I pray. In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation." To people's eyes, those who are poor in spirit look foolish. People of the world say to them, "You have no self-esteem." But verse 3 says that those who are poor in spirit can possess the kingdom of God. It is much better to possess the kingdom of God than to possess all other things.

Second, blessed are those who mourn (4). Look at verse 4. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Mourning is the expression of sorrow. The world is full of sorrows and meaninglessness. The world is full of despair. People seem to live to get old and die. The phenomena of the world only make people sorrowful. These kinds of sorrows devastate mankind.

But there is one sorrow that makes man happy, the sorrow that comes from a repentant heart. Those who mourn because of their sin of selfishness, greediness, pride and unfaithfulness before God are those who are truly seeking God and his grace of forgiveness. Those who mourn because of their sins, and those who mourn to seek God for his grace of forgiveness are truly humble people. They can find God and God restores their souls. Those who mourn to seek God's grace can grow spiritually. David was a king. His throne was indeed glorious. But he cried many tears when he thought about his transgressions before God. David said in Psalm 51:1,2, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." God accepted his repentant heart and blessed him. God raised the Savior of the world from his family line.

Third, blessed are the meek (5). Look at verse 5. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." A man has to be tough. A man has to make a success in this world. Tough men can do something in the world. But as history proves, tough men too frequently oppress others in order to rule over them, not with humbleness and gentleness, but with fist and sword. In this world, those who make a success in such ways are known as tough men. They are Nero, the Roman Emperor, and Levi, the former tax collector, and so on.

But the truly happy man is a meek man, because meekness is stronger than toughness. Moses was once rejected by his sister and other rebels. But he did not blow up in anger. Rather, he humbled himself, kneeling down on the ground before God, and asked God for his mercy and help. Then God helped Moses solve this rebellion problem. Numbers 12:3 says of Moses, "(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)" Moses could lead 600,000 stiff-necked Israelites with his meekness.

Jesus was despised and rejected and finally crucified. But we don't find any hint of human toughness in Jesus. Jesus was humble and lowly. Jesus was meek to the end. Because of his meekness, he became a man of sorrows, and at the same time he became the Ruler of men's souls (Php. 2:6-11). In Jesus we can take rest, for Jesus is gentle and humble in heart (Mt 11:29). May God help us to be meek men. May God help us to be humble and gentle.

Fourth, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (6). Look at verse 6. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." In this verse "righteousness" refers to Jesus, who is God's righteousness (1 Cor 1:30). Those who become like hungry and thirsty men to know Jesus will be filled with heavenly joy.

Modern men can hardly comprehend hunger and thirst. In the ancient world, laborers ate one meal a day. They could not get water by turning a tap. They had to struggle to draw water from a well. Also, there are many who are hungry and thirsty for worldly things, such as physical pleasure, money-making and building up future security. Many people have attained what they had wanted. Still they are not satisfied. Rather, they look grumpy. Sometimes they look haggard even after a big meal. One person is very successful like Nicodemus. He has great wealth and honor. He is very able to make many friends in the rank and file. He knows how to make himself very popular among people. So he should be happy. But he is not happy at all because of his seriously high blood pressure. In reality, he is not happy because he does not seek Jesus, but he seeks people's praise obsessively, not knowing that they are all sick people. His wife tries to convince others she is happy. But she is not happy because she cannot eat, due to her stomach ulcer. She is not happy because her husband is not happy on the inside. But in reality she is not happy because she is not hungry and thirsty in seeking Jesus.

Jesus is the source of joy and meaning of life. Everyone must seek Jesus until they are hungry and thirsty. Jesus wants us to seek first his kingdom and righteousness. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Fifth, blessed are the merciful (7). Look at verse 7. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." To hate those who are hateful is easy. But to be merciful to those who are obnoxious is not easy at all. When we want to be merciful, we must see all kinds of people through God's love. Reverend Sohn was a pastor in a leper's asylum. He ate and slept with the lepers. During the Korean Civil War, communist rebels killed his two sons. But Reverend Sohn adopted as his own son the man who had killed his sons. It is unbelievable. But it is a true story. Reverend Sohn could do that because he saw him with God's eyes. We thank God who has been merciful to each of us when we were hopelessly wretched.

Sixth, blessed are the pure in heart (8). Look at verse 8. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." The really happy man is the man who is pure in heart. That is true. Those whose hearts are impure can see all kinds of dirty things that they really don't want to see. They have no choice not to see dirty things or evil things even if they really don't want to see them, because their impure hearts direct them to do so. They are very unhappy people. On the other hand, those whose hearts are pure can see all the good things in other individuals' hearts. Moreover, they can see God in Jesus because God who is holy reveals himself to those whose hearts are pure. God hides his face from wicked people, but he visits those whose hearts are pure (Mi 3:4; Ez 39:29).

Seventh, blessed are the peacemakers (9). Look at verse 9. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." There are two kinds of people. One is troublemakers, the other, peacemakers. Troublemakers are children of the devil. Peacemakers are children of God. Peacemaking is not easy. But we must be children of God by being peacemakers.

Jesus is the peacemaker. Jesus died on the cross to make peace between God and men. Ephesians 2:14-15 says, "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace." Jesus destroyed his body in order to make peace between God and men and between man and man. May God help us not to be troublemakers, but to be peacemakers.

Eighth, blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness (10). Look at verse 10. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." People want happiness, not persecution. The world persecuted and crucified Jesus simply because Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus wants his people to be persecuted in order to be right with God. The truly happy people are those who are persecuted for the glory of God. Such people will be hated by the world but will inherit the kingdom of heaven and receive their great reward from God. Many say, "I don't want a reward." But the Bible teaches reward and punishment very clearly. Let's rejoice to be persecuted in order to be right with God.

II. The role of God's people (13-16)

As we have studied, Jesus' people appear to be nobodies to the eyes of worldly people. According to Paul, Jesus' people are like the scum of the earth and the refuse of the world (1 Cor 4:13). Nevertheless, they have two obligations. First is to be the salt of the earth and second is to be the light of the world.

First, "You are the salt of the earth" (13). Look at verse 13a. "You are the salt of the earth." What is salt? Salt is a salty article. It has no value in itself, but it is an indispensable nutrient in maintaining the physical body. Salt gives taste and flavor to food. Salt preserves things from corruption and decay. Most of all, salt melts itself into other foodstuff until it is unseen. Jesus compares his disciples to salt because of its great efficiency in an invisible way. "Very effective" but "unseen"--we can define this as "influence." Jesus wants his people to be influential. In the Christian life, influence is the most important.

How can Jesus' people be influential? David became influential, not because of his human greatness or kingship, but because of his repentance. When he was not right with God because of his sin of adultery and murder, he repented sincerely. Thus he became a man of good influence. Peter became an influential person because he repented his failures and mistakes sincerely when he met the Risen Jesus. St. Augustine became a most influential person in Christian history simply because he repented sincerely of his intellectual hedonism and became a

man in Christ. Man has nothing to give to God but repentance. When we give God our sincere repentance, we can be influential individuals. Without Christian influence, the world cannot maintain its spiritual life. On the other hand, if Christians have no power of spiritual influence, they are useless (13b).

Second, "You are the light of the world" (14). Jesus' people must also be the light of the world. Look at verse 14a. "You are the light of the world." When Jesus said, "You are the light of the world," it meant, "You are the children of the light." 1 John 1:5b says, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." John 1:9 says, "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." Jesus' people are the children of the light. We, as Jesus' people, must receive Jesus' light and shed it to the people around us.

Why is it necessary to do so? Those who do not know God do not know God's truth. They do not know what to do with their lives. In short, they do not have God's light in their hearts; so they are only groping in the darkness without true life direction. Jesus' people must have a clear direction in Jesus and lead others to God. Jesus' people must lead those who are in darkness to God through one-to-one Bible study. The Bible calls David "the lamp of God" (2 Ki 8:19) because of his clear life direction in God. The world is dark. But when Jesus' people play the role of the light of the world or the lamp of God, there is hope in the world (16).

In this chapter we learn that truly happy men are not just physical men but spiritual men who have membership in the kingdom of heaven. Let's not be outrageous; let's have the golden rule in our hearts so that we may please God and be truly happy men.

III. The standard of the law (17-48): Advanced Study

This part tells us the contrast between Jesus' teaching and Jewish traditions. The traditional Jews were observing the Law of Moses to gain merit, ignoring its spirit. To the legalistic Jews, Jesus seemed to break all the Law of Moses.

But this was not so. Jesus fulfills the Law of God given to Moses. Jesus gives several examples in order to teach the spirit of the Law and at the same time to repudiate the keeping of the laws only externally. Let's see the contrasts.

First, murder (21-26). In the Law, anyone who murders will be subject to judgment (21). But Jesus says that anyone who is angry with his brother or says to his brother, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell. To Jesus, an angry man is like a murderer.

Second, adultery (27-30). In the past, those who were guilty of marital unfaithfulness were considered guilty of adultery. But Jesus says in verse 28, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." We must see the opposite sex with the eyes of God in order to avoid this sin.

Third, divorce (31,32). Moses' Law demands that a man give a certificate of divorce to his wife if he wants to divorce her. But

Jesus says the motive of divorce is to commit adultery with others. In truth, Jesus forbids divorce. Mark 10:9 says, "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Fourth, oaths (33-37). The ancient Hebrews had a custom of swearing oaths. But in reality, no one can keep his oath. Jesus saw the custom of swearing oaths as a means for one to justify himself. Jesus taught his people that instead of swearing oaths, they should learn to say just "Yes" or "No." Read verse 37. "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

Fifth, an eye for an eye (38-42). The Law of Moses teaches how to get even. It was "eye for eye, and tooth for tooth" (38). But Jesus teaches not to resist an evil person. Read verse 39. "But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Jesus' people's battle is spiritual, not physical, so we must win the spiritual battle, not physical battles. Read verses 40-42.

Sixth, love for enemies (43-48). Moses' Law says, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...." (44) It is impossible for us to pray for our enemies. But this is a rule in the kingdom of heaven.