

How is Life different in The Beatitudes: 1-4

**BASE 1: BUILDING
SESSION 5: Beatitudes 1
B.A.S.E. Discipleship**

-Handouts-

*By Steve Lokker and Craig Jarvis
Revised – 2011*

What are the rules to the race of life in the Eternal Kingdom?

There's a story about a bicycle race where the object is to go the shortest distance possible within a specified time. Everyone positions their bikes at the starting line, and when the gun sounds to start the race, the cyclists do their best to stay put. Racers are disqualified if they tip over or if their feet touch the ground. And so they inch forward just enough to keep their bike balanced. When the gun sounds to end the race, the person who has gone the farthest...loses; and the person closest to the starting line is the winner.

Imagine entering that race and not knowing how it was to be won. When the race starts, you follow your natural instincts. You approach this race following the rules to which you are most accustomed. You pedal as fast and as hard as you can. You look over your shoulder with delight as you see the distance between you and the other bikers increasing. Not only are you going to win the race, you're going to set a record! At last you hear the gun sound that ends the race and your delight turns into disappointment, even shock, when you learn that you have lost because you didn't understand the rules for how the race is run.

Jesus taught that the rules to running the race of life for His true disciples would be incredibly different from the rules of the race the world around them was running. In fact, the way Jesus' disciples live is simply misunderstood or even disliked by the rest of the world.

"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (John 15:19, ESV)

Jesus knew two things about life as His disciples. First, this would be a sprint but rather a marathon. So He began to form a team of disciples who He would train Himself in order to win the race of the New Life He offered. Secondly, as the Master of the race, He knew that the rules that would define this race and produce lasting results would be dramatically different from what they could imagine. In response, He gathered His disciples on a hillside on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee and he began to teach them the rules of the race they were entering together.

The "Sermon on the Mount" is arguably the best known of Jesus' sermons, and its "Beatitudes" defining the characteristics of the race in the Kingdom of God are among the most important words He spoke here on Earth. Jesus sat on that grass-covered hillside overlooking the deep blue waters of the Sea of Galilee, and made sure that His new followers knew what life in His Kingdom looked like. His teaching that afternoon is just as relevant and important to His followers today.



Looking from the Mount of Beatitudes over the four-mile long Plain of Gennesaret toward the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus was about to begin training disciples Himself. His sermon would give them the rules with which they might win this race. He knew the natural questions on the heart of every Jew who heard these words would have been, “Am I eligible to enter Messiah’s kingdom?” “Am I righteous enough to qualify for entrance?” “What are the rules that I must play by to win this race?”

Jesus announced the lifestyle to be adopted by all who submit to Him – the “Kingdom Lifestyle.” He began to make the point that the values of this world do not lead to blessing. Instead, blessing comes through living by values which the world despises, but God holds dear. In other words, for these listeners who were used to the rules of this world, they just might begin to think the rules had changed.

The impact of the kingdom message does not strike us with the same force that it would have struck the believer of Jesus’ day. We have the entire New Testament revelation; we’re aware that Jesus acts today in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. But to the men and women who were used to the rules of their world and their own religious sacred cows, when they heard Jesus teach; this kingdom concept was new and powerful. They were used to looking ahead to a future when God would act on their behalf. Jesus’ kingdom message made them realize that God was already exercising kingly authority.

The disciples who heard Jesus were accustomed to learning from the Pharisees who taught that righteousness was an external thing, a matter of obeying rules and regulations. Righteousness could be measured by praying, giving, fasting, etc. In contrast, the Beatitudes Jesus described was a Christian character that flowed from *within*. The Sermon and the Beatitudes establish for us a Christian value system, ethical standards, religious devotion, attitude toward money and ambition, lifestyle and network of relationships. They are at the heart of Jesus’ message.

Instead of a Charlemagne, Schwarzkopf, MacArthur, Patton...the Jews had Jesus...and to a downtrodden people yearning for emancipation from Roman rule, Jesus gave startling and unwelcome advice. “If an enemy soldier slaps you, turn the other cheek.” “Rejoice in persecution.” “Be grateful for your poverty.” “Don’t seek revenge against your enemy. Rather love your enemy.”

Each of the Beatitudes begins with the same word...“Blessed.” Greek scholars tell us that our interpretation today of the word *makarios* is far too sedate to carry the force that Jesus intended for his disciples to understand. He literally meant “Cry for joy, oh you lucky person.” Imagine how the crowd’s attention was riveted on Jesus when He uttered His first word: “Blessed.” This was a powerful word to those who were listening to Jesus that day. To them it meant “divine joy and perfect happiness.” The word was not used for humans; it described the kind of joy experienced only by the gods or the dead. “Blessed” implied an inner satisfaction and sufficiency that did not depend on outward circumstances for happiness. This is what the Lord offers those who trust Him!

“The Beatitudes tell us how to enter the kingdom and enlarge the kingdom; but they also tell us how to enjoy the kingdom.”

-- Warren Wiersbe

#1. Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge before God that because of our sin we are spiritually bankrupt. It means we must admit that we are sinners who stand guilty under the holy wrath of God and deserve nothing but His judgment. This is precisely why Jesus' first message was the same as John the Baptist; "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2, 4:17) We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, nothing with which to buy the favor of heaven.

Right out of the gate, Jesus makes it undeniably clear that the Kingdom of God is given to the poor, not the rich; the feeble, not the mighty; to little children humble enough to accept it, not to soldiers who boast that they can attain it by their own prowess.

Perhaps the best example of how riches can keep us from crying out to God is the nominal church of Laodicea to whom John was instructed to write a letter.

"For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:17, ESV)

In short, being poor in spirit does not mean false humility or cowardice. Jesus began his message to His new followers by explaining that they must have a proper and honest attitude towards themselves, realizing how weak and sinful they are when they are apart from Christ.

It's important to understand why Christ shared this Beatitude first. It is the foundation upon which our relationship with Him is built. If we fail to understand that because of sin we suffer from extreme spiritual poverty, then we also fail to recognize our constant need for our Lord's love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

o The Poor are the Benefactors.

The Kingdom of God is given to the _____ and the _____.

Jesus emphasizes these characteristics because these would be what it would take to acknowledge before God that I am a _____.

#2. Blessed are those who Mourn, for they will be Comforted.

What is it that we as Christ's disciples should mourn for or about? It is sin, lost people in need of a Savior, evil at loose in the world running amuck. Christ is not talking about the sorrow of bereavement here. We mourn because we have a sincere sorrow for sin...for our own sins and for

the sins of others. We mourn over the consequences that people suffer under by living in a world plagued with sin.

The first Beatitude tells us to recognize and acknowledge that we are sinners. The second involves a deep anguishing grief over the fact that we, and others, are sinners and we live in a physical world that groans under the weight of sin.

Jesus wept over the sin of others, over cities that wouldn't receive Him (Lk.13:34-35), and over the bitter consequences that sin brings in judgment and death. On the occasion of the death of Lazarus, we see a powerful picture of this:

"Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept." (John 11:32-35, ESV)

Those who mourn their own sinfulness will be comforted by the only comfort that can relieve their distress...namely the free forgiveness of God. Jesus promises us that we will be comforted by the presence of the Living Christ (Romans 7:21-25).

- o **For Disciples, it takes more than Acknowledgment of Sin.**

In addition to acknowledging our sin, Jesus tells us that we are to _____ over the fact that we are captive to it.

The all-consuming _____ of _____ upon our world and all humanity causes God's heart and the heart of His disciples to break.

#3. Blessed are the Meek, for they will Inherit the Earth.

There may be no Beatitude more contradictory to what the Jews were looking for during the first century and to what our world preaches today than Christ's uttering "Blessed are the meek..." The multitude listening to the Master's voice echo along the hillside and across the plain were looking for a ruling king foretold in the Old Testament; a strong and mighty prince who would sweep aside the occupying Roman army. They wanted a conquering hero who would establish a worldwide kingdom centered in Jerusalem. This is similar to our world today. Our dog-eat-dog world today cheers the strong and the mighty. The Kingdom of this world teaches the race is won by the strong and the earth belongs to those who take it.

In contrast, Jesus uses a Greek word that is translated gentle, humble, considerate, and courteous. He is telling His disciples that meekness is a true view of ourselves, expressed in our attitude and conduct toward others. We are to exhibit self-control. This makes us gentle, humble, sensitive, and patient in all our dealings with others. To be meek is to demonstrate a humble, pliable attitude that willingly receives from God the help he offers to us; the needy.

How is it that those who are meek can possess the earth? To whom does the earth ultimately belong? And to whom do we as Christians belong?

"Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace." (Psalm 37:1-11, ESV)

As He so often did, Jesus set an example for us to follow on this very topic. Jesus was meek. In Matthew 11:29 He says to "take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart"

- **Disciples are a Reflection of Christ.**

Jesus teaches that meekness is a reflection of our _____ and _____ toward others.

Meekness is not a _____ attitude toward sin so that it goes unchallenged. It is rather a proper view of self in a sin-plagued world.

#4. Blessed are those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness, for they will be Filled.

Imagine for a moment how someone who has gone without food and water for an extended period of time will act when they suddenly have their hunger and thirst satisfied.

Simply wanting *some* righteousness is not the characteristic of a child of God. Jesus is telling us that spiritual craving should be the characteristic of God's people. His disciples should seek after it with the same eagerness, the same desperation, and the same fervor as someone who has gone without food or water.

What is our appetite for the things of God and how is it displayed in our lives? In what ways will we be filled? Do you want a deeper relationship with Christ as much as a starving person wants food, or as much as one dying from thirst wants water? Christ is saying that it is not enough to mourn over past sin; but we must also hunger for future righteousness.

"As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1-2, ESV)

There is a final paradox to the fourth Beatitude. The more we hunger and thirst for what Christ has to offer, the more we are filled. And the more we are filled with and experience His love, mercy, and forgiveness, the more we hunger and thirst for it.

"The secret of spiritual growth is a spiritual appetite. Those who eat little will grow little; those who eat much will grow much. Those with a voracious appetite for the Word of God and the Person of Jesus Christ, and who satisfy that appetite by feeding on the Word and by communing with the Lord, will grow to spiritual maturity, to giant-hood."

–Dwight Pentecost

Spiritual Growth

What are the things that create distance between me and Christ?

What are the things that draw me closer to Christ?

What are the things that help me maintain and strengthen my relationship with Christ?

SUMMARY OF THE FIRST FOUR BEATITUDES

There is a natural and spiritual progression to the first four Beatitudes. Jesus tells us that as His disciples, we are expected to:

1. Acknowledge and turn away from our sin.
2. Mourn the fact that we and everyone else has sin in our lives.
3. Surrender our sinful nature to God.
4. Crave the goodness of being a Child of God.