

Sermon on the Mount I - Beatitudes - Paradox of True Happiness

by Michael Flowers

The Sermon on the Mount is a description of the life of Jesus and the nature of the kingdom of God, which is characterized by a paradox of true happiness that defies definition.

Duration: 16:44

Scripture: Matthew 5:3-12, 1 Corinthians 1:18

Topics: "Beatitudes"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, specifically the Beatitudes. The sermon starts by highlighting the two groups of people present: the crowds and the disciples. The preacher suggests that the difference between those who admire Jesus and those who become his disciples is their willingness to come to him. The sermon emphasizes that the Beatitudes are not recommendations, but rather a description of the life of those gathered by and around Jesus.

Transcript

Welcome to the fourth Sunday of Epiphany, and over the next five Sundays, the electionary, Year A, is going to take us through the gospel reading, through two chapters in the Sermon on the Mount, chapters five and six. We're going to look through just various sections of this amazing sermon, right? The Sermon on the Mount? How can you expound the Sermon on the Mount, right? I mean, it's probably one of the most earthshaking, history changing sermons that he preached. And so today we're going to contemplate the beginning of that sermon called the Beatitudes, just the first 12 verses.

May the Lord give us ears to hear afresh these words, though amazing, sometimes overly familiar, right? May we hear afresh the transformative nature of these 12 verses. Amen. Well, the sermon begins with two groups of people.

It says, seeing the crowds, he, Jesus, went up on the mountain. And when he sat down, his disciples came to him. So you've got these two groups of people, the crowds and the disciples.

And really what makes them disciples is that they're coming to him. The difference between those who admire Jesus and those who would be his disciples, says Stanley Hauerwas, is indicated by his disciples willingness to come to him. To come to him on the mountain.

Matthew tells us that Jesus has compassion on the crowds and for the crowds. He saw them like sheep without a shepherd. Perhaps because they were unwilling as the crowd to follow him as disciples.

Perhaps that's why they remained as sheep without a shepherd. Nevertheless, he felt compassion for them. And so with this scene of the crowds and disciples coming to Jesus, Bonhoeffer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests that Matthew is providing a contrast between those who choose to be a part of the crowd and those who respond to the call of discipleship.

Matthew perhaps wants us to ask this morning to which group we belong. Do we admire Jesus or do we come to Jesus in the fashion of a disciple? There are key elements to reading this sermon. And it's been read in so many different ways.

Craig Keener has some 38 different interpretations of the sermon on the mountain that he lists in his commentary throughout history, how the sermon has been read. And first of all, I believe that the sermon, far from being a code of ethics, illustrates the nature and the life of the instructor, the Lord Jesus himself. We thus must read the sermon from the inner life of Jesus as we abide in him and he abides in us.

These are not a list of commands. Secondly, we must read the sermon in the context of community. God's church, this is not a sermon to be isolated as one's individual attainment.

I'm going to sit down and I'm going to memorize the first 12 verses and I'm going to become such a person. I think we've all tried this because these paradoxical values make up the nature of the church in communion with Christ, who is divine mercy. God is love.

In communion with Christ, who is divine mercy in the flesh, his church, the recipients of his mercy are able to offer it to others only first receiving and being a recipient of this divine mercy and being in communion with this love that surpasses knowledge and blows our minds. Are we even able to offer it to others? And so forgiveness, being a part inseparable of what divine mercy is, being able to forgive is at the core of this sermon. The sermon is the reality of the new age.

The age to come made possible in time. Jesus tells us that the path to true happiness is paradoxical. For true happiness, true joy is part of the age to come made possible in time.

Joy and happiness is a gift, my joy I give to you, not as the world gives. So we are the recipients of this transcendent joy. That is not based on circumstance or situation.

In fact, in the face of circumstances and situation, it defies definition and being influenced in any other direction. The word blessed throughout the Beatitudes and it's where we get the word, it's the Greek word *mercarios*, and it's most often translated happy. Happy, he sat down and he began saying, happy are the poor in spirit.

That's why I'm saying it's paradoxical, right? What's so happy about being poor in spirit? Well, there's a gift attached to this and it's not one that comes immediately. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

Happy are the meek. For they shall inherit the earth. Happy, happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The state of hunger, happy are those who are in a state of hunger for righteousness. For they will be satisfied. Happy are the merciful.

Here's the core of the Beatitudes. Happy are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart or the.

Those who have a single heart is another translation. Happy are those with a single heart for they shall see God. Happy are the peacemakers.

For they shall be called sons of God. Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. And then the only two commands in these 12 verses are coming up now in verse 12. Rejoice and be glad in the imperative mood in the text.

In the midst of all of this. Earth shaking kingdom upsetting, you know, upside down kingdom stuff here. Jesus is saying, Rejoice and be glad.

He's in fact, he's saying, I'm going to command you now. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven. For so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is what our New Testament reading today is pointing out. As it has been wisely paired with today's gospel reading, the Beatitudes. First Corinthians 118 begins, and this is our message for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.

We've been given a message that's folly to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved, there's such a different perspective. It is the power of God for he has written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning. I will thwart.

Where is the one who is wise, Paul asks, where is the scribe, where is the debater of this age? Here it is. Jesus is talking about something that's crashing in to this age, and it's the life and presence of the kingdom of God coming on earth as it is in heaven. And it's a paradox.

Where is the debater of this age? What has God done? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? Do we believe that this morning, you guys, is the wisdom of the world foolish to us or is it tempting to buy and own because we're not going against the grain of culture up against the grain of culture and what the wisdom of the world is propagating for since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom. It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe, but consider your calling, brothers, not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many are were powerful people in this world, not many were of noble birth.

You see, in the wisdom of the world, it would be blessed are those who have enough in their retirement to make it through without stress and anxiety. Blessed are those who look after themselves and take care of themselves because one never knows what tomorrow will bring. Right.

But no, Jesus is saying something completely different. Blessed are those happier, those who mourn, who are poor in spirit, who are meek, for there's more to this life than this present age. He's saying now I know we're in heaven because I'm hearing harps.

I'm still alive, but I'm hearing harps. Is it bells? And so Paul is asking the question, where is the debater of this age? Because there's talk. Jesus is contrasting two ages here.

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? He asks. This becomes a problem for those who can't come to Jesus in this present age and have chosen to be a part of the crowd. It's important for us to know that Jesus has compassion on the crowd and that he sends us out.

Amongst the crowd to show mercy and have compassion, right? And not to point and go, oh, you're a part of the crowd and I'm a disciple. Coming to Jesus is coming to the age to come and letting it out in the present. Let me say that again, coming to Jesus, even in prayer, in worship and opening up your heart this morning is coming into the age to come.

Because he has risen, he has ascended. To the right hand of the father and he invites us there, coming to Jesus is coming to the age to come and living it out in this present evil age, as Paul describes. It is living in the presence of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

The sermon, therefore, is not a list of requirements, but rather a description of the life of a people gathered by and around Jesus. To be saved is to be so gathered. And this is why the Beatitudes are the interpretive key of the whole sermon, precisely because they are not recommendations.

No one is asked to go out and try to be poor in spirit or to mourn or to be meek. Rather, Jesus is indicating that given the reality of the kingdom, we should not be surprised to find among those who follow him those who are poor in spirit. Those who mourn and those who are meek.

Jesus does not suggest that everyone who follows him will possess all eight Beatitudes. You had a checklist yet. How many do you live into right? He's not it's not to be read that way.

Jesus does not suggest that everyone who follows him will possess all of the Beatitudes. But we can be sure that some will be poor in spirit, some will mourn and some will be meek, says Stanley Arwas. And so in looking at these beautiful descriptors of the kingdom of God, we might say that this is what is being illustrated as salt and light becoming the visible people of God in the midst of this present evil age.

This is the nature of the city set on a hill, his visible church. Where true happiness is not attached to any earthly circumstance, happy are those who live in the tension of the already not yet kingdom. And lastly, the only two commands that he gives us today are to rejoice and be glad.

Rejoice and be glad, whether this morning you are poor in spirit, whether you're mourning or whether you are among those who are meek. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so men persecuted the prophets who are before you. In the midst of opposition, rejection, ridicule, the church rejoices in the Lord and is glad in Christ Jesus himself.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Let's stand together and recite the Nicene Creed.

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