

## Faith 101; Sermon 1

There's a book out that's titled "The Shack." The book is about a man named Mac who experiences a tragedy that focuses on an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness, and four years later in the midst of his great sadness, he receives a suspicious note, apparently by God, inviting him back to the shack for a weekend. *A fascinating book that I am now going through for the third time and what I like about this fiction novel, is how biblical it is and how it gets to the very core of issues of faith.* The book, in an extremely creative and unique way, God confronts the main character – Mac about some deep hurts in his life and how they have kept him from living the abundant life that God wanted him to experience and then an amazing transformation occurs. Now I don't want to say too much because I'd love for you to read the book, it will be transforming!

But one of the key elements of the book talks about how our faith, isn't about "Church" or worshipping with the right liturgies, or following the right traditions... our faith is about a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and how God is still with us today through the Holy Spirit. Also part of the book is how the main character is freed from misconceptions and misunderstandings of God and the debilitating darkness that crept in because of his false beliefs, while tackling the question, "Where is God in a world so filled with unspeakable pain?"

I wanted to mention the book up because it makes such a good introduction to the new Sermon series we're starting today, "Faith 101, The Hardest Simple Thing." Think of some of the great preacher you've heard, and I'm sure names come to mind: Chuck Swindoll, David Jeremiah, Charles Stanley, Andy Stanley, Toney Evans and the list goes on! Now try thinking of some great sermons. Does the flood trickle to a stop? Most likely - but there's 1 sermon most Christians know; the "Sermon on the Mount" which also includes the Beatitudes!

Of all the sermons ever preached, this one stands as the pinnacle of sermonic perfection. It occupies only three chapters in the Bible, yet it has inspired countless commentary books, not to mention reams of transformed lives. **Each facet of the Sermon on the Mount sparkles like a masterfully cut jewel, flashes of truth shining with almost blinding brilliance.** Today we want to squint with a jeweler's eye at one facet of that sermon-the Beatitudes. For it is here that we will behold the flawless qualities of simple faith.

As we go through this sermon series, we'll look at Jesus' Sermon and how it answers the deep question, **"What is real Christianity?"** So let's turn to today's scripture, **Matthew 5:1-12** and see how this powerful scripture answers the question of "What is real Christianity" by providing us with a great portrait of what a Christ-like life would look like.

Before we to far into today's message, let's stop a minute and survey the terrain of this scripture. The Sermon on the Mount can be read in only fifteen minutes, yet it sums up authentic righteousness better than any other sermon ever been preached. *Behind Jesus' uncompromising words is a heartfelt concern for those who had been taught to substitute artificial religion for authentic faith.* In the 3 chapters of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is talking to a multitude who had been led astray by a cast of hypocrites - Israel's religious leaders and in his sermon Jesus tells the people the key to His sermon in Matthew 6:8, "Do not be like them." And Matthew 5 falls neatly into three parts, each answering a question: What does it mean to have character? (vv. 3-12); What does it mean to make an impact? (vv. 13-16); What does it mean to be godly? (vv. 17-48).

- **Matthew tells of the setting of the sermon v. 1-2: 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."**

Let's take a quick look at Matthew's introduction. Jesus delivered the sermon outside and not inside, no sound system - that's why He went up on a hill. And when Jesus sat, he remained approachable - standing was the customary style of teaching in His day. Plus - Jesus taught rather than preached. Most Preaching professors agree that The Sermon on the Mount is a textbook example of solid teaching, logically arranged.

Also, Jesus blessed the crowd, he didn't scold them. Nine times Jesus says "Blessed are..." maybe Jesus wanted to emphasize the blessings that were available to those who listened then and today.

- **But as we look at verses 3 -12, I want to raise a couple of questions about these blessings and then think a minute about each individual character quality that Jesus stressed.**

**What is meant by the term "blessed?"** It describes two different things. One was the social level of the wealthy - because of their riches; they live above the worries of the world - they had everything they wanted. The other as in The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says true blessedness doesn't come from power or privilege. True contentment and fulfillment comes from turning away from the world's false values and being in God's plan - embracing the ways of God's kingdom. Blessings are the guidelines of authentic Christian character.

- **The first beatitude is in verse 3,** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The poverty referred to here has nothing to do with material or economic insecurities. It describes a contrite and humble spirit that acknowledges its spiritual bankruptcy before God!

According to Jesus, the blessing reserved for these humble people is nothing less than "the kingdom of heaven" (v. 3). These are the people who will enter into a new way of life where the King guides, guards, and directs.

- **In verse 4 we discover the second beatitude:** "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." The word used here for mourn means "passionate grieving." It describes the sorrow of a broken heart and the anguish of a troubled mind. It maybe because someone is mourning the evil in the world or because of the personal loss of a loved one. Most likely the mourning Jesus is talking about here refers to a passionate spirit of contrition, where a person sees their true spiritual condition and are praying for God to help them!

The blessing for the brokenhearted is the salve of God's comfort. God promises to be near them (Ps. 34:18) and to bind up the wound of their broken hearts (Is. 61: 1).

- **The third beatitude is in verse 5:** "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." All too often when we think of being meek, we think of being a "wimp" or a "doormat." But in Jesus' day, meekness meant something much different. It described a wild stallion that had been brought under control, words that soothed strong emotions, or an ointment that took pain out of a wound. Those who are humble, courteous, and treat others with respect are called "meek." Matthew called Jesus meek in Matt 11; 21:5).

And the blessing that comes with being meek is the inheritance of the land. Unlike the Roman Empire, the kingdom of God was not something that could be possessed by power and control, but by meekness.

- **The fourth beatitude is found in verse 6:** "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." This beatitude describes someone with an unquenchable thirst to know more about God and His Word. It describes someone with a deep hunger for fellowship with God.

The promise to those with this burning thirst and gnawing hunger is just what you'd expect from a loving father! "they shall be filled – some translations say that they'll be satisfied." The hungry spirit will be filled to the brim with God's goodness.

<p><b>As we look at the fifth blessing, notice a slight shift in focus.</b> Just as the first tablet of the Ten Commandments concentrated on our relationship with God and the second on our relationship with people, in the last four beatitudes, we turn from our attitude from God to our attitude toward other people.</p>
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- **With that in mind, let's look at the fifth beatitude in verse 7:** "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Mercy goes beyond sympathy to empathy. A merciful person sees what the suffering see

and they feel what they feel. True mercy never stops with an outpouring of emotion; rather true mercy offers to help. Just think of the Good Samaritan who assists those who suffer the consequences of sin, pain, misery, or distress.

The promise to these people is an abundance of mercy. It is the principle of reaping and sowing, you get what you give. Anyone who is unmoved when they see others in need will receive the same, but those who enter into the world of another's pain even if they don't know them, they'll receive the same from God and others.

- **The sixth beatitude is in verse 8:** "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Maybe "an uncompromising heart toward God" would be a better definition. It pictures someone whose entire life is free from hypocrisy and is lived transparently before God and others, they have no hidden motives.

The blessing reserved for them - "they get to see God." The pure in heart see God because they have a real eye of faith, they see because there is no intentional sin blocking the view. Isaiah 59:2 explains that sin blocks prayer and our view of God!

- **The seventh beatitude is in verse 9:** "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Peacemakers don't look for conflict. They ease tension, they seek solutions, they are "quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger". ***But make no mistake, in the bible, a peacemaker is not an pacifier.*** To overlook outright sin for the sake of peace only cheapens it. This is not peace at any price. Luke 17:3 says, "If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." It cheapens peace to treat an offense lightly when there's no heart of repentance.

What is the blessing for a true peacemaker? They will be called the sons of God, if you look to 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, you find that when people reconcile those alienated from each other, they reflect the character of God.

- **The final beatitude is in verses 10-12:** "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." The persecution here comes as a result of our faith - not because we've simply been offensive or fanatical or opinionated. Persecution comes when two irreconcilable world views collide. When that happens, people will chase you down and lie about you in an attempt to turn off the light from you that is revealing the dark, cobwebbed corners of their lives.

The best response in such situations is not revenge or retaliation because of rejection - but to rejoice. Why? Because, ultimately, a heavenly reward is waiting for you... and because you belong to a noble succession of prophets who suffered in the same way. ***Everyone enjoys being liked and respected,*** but having everyone like you is as much a hallmark of false prophets as persecution is of a real prophet.

#### **A Couple of Suggestions to applying Jesus' Words today:**

The Beatitudes come to us like a big box of character qualities labeled "Assembly Required." The task of assembling the component parts of Christ-like character can be overwhelming. But instead of being intimidated, we should just take the project one bite at a time – work in these characteristics intentionally.

***God offers a better world, but He will have to turn us right-side up before we will be able to see it. And He turns us right-side up with the Beatitudes.***