

## ***"If It is Saints We Would Be..."***

All Saints Sunday  
November 5, 2017

There is nowhere in all of scripture any better summary, any more complete synopsis, of the teachings of Jesus, than the Beatitudes.

To understand the Beatitudes is to understand what Jesus was all about! If you don't understand the Beatitudes, you can't understand the rest of what Jesus said. They encapsulate Jesus' fundamental vision and fundamental message.

And, they are full of surprises, full of the unexpected; and, for a great many people, full of the unacceptable.

Don't be led astray by their seemingly gentle words. The Beatitudes turn things upside down; they mark a dividing line between grace and legalism, a line that is as sharp as a newly honed knife blade. A line that leaves no doubt about which side Jesus is on.

They announce a distribution of gifts to the most unlikely of recipients; they announce a *surprising*, and *unmerited*, and *unjustifiable*, and *unfair*, and *undeserved*...**generosity**. The Beatitudes bestow grace and blessings, not upon the pure and blameless, not upon the righteous and those who keep the Law, not upon those who follow the rules, but upon those who are humiliated by their own sinfulness and poverty of spirit.

Now, you need to answer this very difficult question: Is that you? Are you humiliated by your own sinfulness and poverty of spirit? That is the question put to us by the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes don't begin: "Blessed are the blameless, the sinless, the righteous, those who keep the Law." No, they begin: "Blessed are the poor in spirit. They bless people who seem to themselves and to others to be deficient, lacking in spiritual gifts, who are blessed neither with such gifts, or, in Luke's version of the Beatitudes, with material wealth which in Jesus' time was understood to be an indication of God's approval. In other words, "Blessed" are those who, from all outward appearances, ***don't deserve it!***

"Blessed are those who mourn." Those who recognize and agonize over their own sin, Those ready to declare bankruptcy in the economy of faith. Blessed are those who know and mourn over the fact that they *are so undeserving* of the love of God.

"Blessed are the meek," The humble and gentle, whose lives display no selfish ambitions, who at first glance have little to offer to others, but who, in fact, model a humility that God approves and blesses.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Blessed are those who absolutely ache to be made right with God, whose aching grows from their own despair about ever being acceptable before God; who fall on their knees and beg God to help them, thinking all the while they have no business asking God to do anything for them because they know they don't deserve it.

"Blessed are the merciful." "Have mercy!" is the cry of the debtor. The primary need of the poor and broken is for mercy, and God blesses them with mercy beyond all telling.

"Blessed are the pure in heart." Those whose will and mind are not divided between loyalty to God and loyalty to self, but who see nothing in themselves worth clinging to, and whose affection and devotion are therefore centered on God alone.

"Blessed are the peacemakers." Those who in humility go and beg for peace, who give up justice for themselves for the sake of making peace with others.

And, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake." Who make themselves vulnerable, who suffer, because they are doing what God has asked of them.

In the world in which Jesus lived, a world of people who valued just the opposite, of those Jesus here called "Blessed," in that world this was to say the least an unlikely collection of beneficiaries. In fact, it was just plain scandalous. You have to imagine the people who were listening to Jesus reacting with incredulous disbelief.

Nothing has changed. Nothing has changed. Jesus spoke the words of the Beatitudes at the time of the Essenes of Qumran and the Pharisees who taught that the pure and blameless, those who kept the law perfectly, who made themselves worthy and righteous before God, those people would be the recipients of God's blessings, and citizens of the kingdom. And that is why the Beatitudes were so shocking then, and that is why the Beatitudes are so shocking now.

Nothing has changed. Oh, yes, we say we admire these qualities in others, but we do not value them or seek them for ourselves, for in our hearts we are resentful, when we have given, and received nothing in return; we are bellicose and combative when we know we are in the right; we grieve more over the injustice done to us than ever we mourn the injustice we have done; we are not humble, but imagine ourselves to be good, quite good; we do not ache for God except when we are desperate and he can be of service to us. Our mercy is contractual; our purity of heart is divided; our peacemaking is through power and intimidation; and persecution sends us running. Now that is the truth about us, and it is a truth that should make us mourn and grieve for it is a truth that sorely grieves God. **That's the bad news.**

**Here's the good news.** God knows we cannot live a sinless and blameless life; he knows we are not able to be this way. And that is why he sent his Son to save us because we cannot save ourselves.

Now, in response, he asks of us that we come to *know* we are not able to save ourselves, to *admit* that we cannot save ourselves, to *grieve* that we cannot save ourselves, and to ache for him to save us.

He stands before me, so tall, imposing,  
And I before Him so small, supposing  
That, by all which is just, I will surely hear  
His angry voice fall on my ear;  
His righteous charge upon me laid

That I have done what he forbade.  
And just and righteous it will be,  
For no doubt there is that I'm guilty.

Axe to my roots He should take rightly!  
For I have taken Him so lightly.  
No business have I before Him here;  
I ought to run, to disappear,  
Before the judgment I deserve  
Comes on my head; but I've not the nerve  
To move a muscle, nor blink an eye.  
Bereft of words, I only sigh.

He hears these sighs too deep for words;  
The Spirit speaks what can't be heard.  
His hand behind my head does rest  
And pulls me gently to his breast,  
My face against his heart is pressed.  
Embraced am I, torn soul caressed.  
More! Welcomed like a long lost child  
Who with the Father is now reconciled.

And, that, dear friends, is the whole point of the Beatitudes.

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