



HG205: The Sermon On The Mount
(Be) **Attitudes To Follow**

Matthew 5:1-12

Home Group Study Notes

13 September 2020 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)

Ice Breaker

Who is the most peaceful person you know?

What makes him or her so peaceful?

What in your life holds you back from being peaceful?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)

Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon

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Introduction

Jesus gave His most well-known, and most famous, teaching, which we know as ‘The Sermon on the Mount’ after he was followed by the crowds who wanted to hear more about what He had to say about the Kingdom of God.

And this ‘sermon’ is as counter-cultural today as it was then. *‘The Sermon On the Mount’* is a Christian value system, looking at ethics, attitudes, ambition, lifestyle and living as kingdom people. Jesus focuses on our hearts, who we are, and provides us with both encouragement and comfort that we can trust the God who loves us and who will take care of us.

Today we look at the Beatitudes, from the Latin for ‘blessed’. They describe the ‘priceless’ qualities Jesus wanted to see in his followers. I’ve called them ‘Attitudes To Follow’. In fact, they are the Be – Attitudes! They are to be done! They are not a random collection of wisdom sayings, but a group of sayings that relate to each other. But the beatitudes don’t come naturally. They are the result of God working in our hearts and lives and Jesus challenges us to show to others that we are Christians by living in this way.

The first thing to notice is how they all follow the same pattern. The first line says blessed are ‘so and so’ and then we have the crucial link word ‘for’ which introduces the reason the blessing is given. And most importantly, they all have something to do with the Kingdom of Heaven.

1. The Poor In Spirit vs3

5:3 *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* In the Bible, wealth and worldliness, poverty and godliness often go together. The kingdom is given to the poor, not the rich; the feeble, not the mighty; to little children humble enough to accept it, not those in positions of power.

But to be poor in spirit is to acknowledge our spiritual poverty and to acknowledge we are sinners before a Holy God who deserve His judgment. We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, from which to buy the favour of heaven.

The hymnwriter Augustus Montague Toplady puts it this way in his hymn *Rock of Ages* ‘*Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling; Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless, look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to the fountain fly: Wash me, Saviour, or I die.* This is the language of the poor in spirit.

2. Those Who Mourn vs4

5:4 *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.* What kind of mourning will be blessed with God’s comfort? We might think Jesus is referring to those who mourn the death of a loved one, but I think the answer’s linked back to Poverty of Spirit. Those who are poor in Spirit, will be deeply sorry, or mournful, about their sin.

I love the way Thomas Cranmer puts this is the words of the Communion in the Book of Common Prayer “*We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness.*” Those who mourn over their sin, will be comforted; they will be forgiven, because they acknowledge their poverty of Spirit and seek refuge in the Jesus.

Jesus regularly mourned over the corporate sins of whole groups of people:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate.

Matthew 23:37-38

We’ve heard a lot about Britain’s involvement in the slave trade in recent months through Black lives matter. Before he started his campaign to abolish the slave trade, William Wilberforce broke down and wept at the utter depravity our nation had sunk into. He feared the Lord’s punishment of us as a nation if the corporate sins he was exposing were not rooted out and dealt with. And, as we know, he devoted his life to doing just that.

How mournful are we about the corporate sins of Britain today: about the exploitation of immigrant workers by unscrupulous middle men; about the trafficking of children in to the sex trade; about the spiralling amount of personal debt and gambling; about an increase in alcohol and drug addiction.

If we are to experience the fullness of Jesus’ promise of comfort to those who mourn, we need to rediscover what it means, as individuals, and as a church, to mourn over the sin of our nation as well as our own wrong doing.

3. The Meek vs5

This beatitude promises that the meek will inherit the earth - if that’s all right with you! Genuine poverty of spirit and mournfulness over sin will naturally lead to meekness. And immediately we see what meekness can’t mean. Because if we are bothered about sin, then like Wilberforce, we won’t be weak and timid.

After all, Jesus overturned the tables of the moneychangers and he was perfectly meek. If poverty of spirit and mournfulness over sin affects the way we relate to God, meekness is the outworking of those virtues in the way we relate to each other. As Don Carson puts it “*Meekness is a controlled desire to see the other’s interests advance ahead of our own*”.

4. Those Who Hunger And Thirst vs6

The poor in Spirit, who mourn over their sin will be meek in their relationships with others. And to maintain that meekness they will hunger and thirst for righteousness, v6. They will devour God’s word. They will develop a spiritual hunger and thirst for what is right in God’s sight. In many ways, we in this country haven’t a clue about what real genuine hunger and thirst is like because, if we did, we’d understand, in much more depth, what Jesus is saying. Those blessed few that hunger and thirst for the things of God will receive what they desire, and it will fill their hearts and make them complete.

5. The Merciful vs7

And it’s the same with mercy in v7. There are many people who think that being merciful means being easy-going, or to turn a blind eye to wrong things – Stephen spoke about this last Sunday. However, mercy is not a matter of temperament or smiling at law breaking or crime, or condoning evil. The mercy Jesus speaks of is the mercy we have received from God and because of that we’ll naturally be merciful to others. But the opposite is also true.

6. The Pure In Heart vs8

Many people today seem to be obsessed with improving themselves, whichever way they can. Whether it be: surgery, implants, liposuction, personal shrinks, fitness trainers, personal shoppers, etc. Magazines and TV are full of it! People are looking for a new image so they can enhance their self-worth and become one of the beautiful people.

But Jesus is not taken in by celebrity. He tells us that the pure in heart will see and experience God. It's not external holiness that matters, it's what's happening internally that matters. The use of the word 'heart' is a word that refers to the whole person. It is our mind, will, and emotions – not what we look like. *Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.*

The word 'pure' literally means clean. The Jews placed a great emphasis on the washing of hands and feet and washing their food (kosher observance). Through doing these 'religious acts' they believed that they were purified. But purity is more than the absence of dirt - it is the presence of the good things of God in our lives: the fruit of the Spirit.

7. The Peacemakers vs9

Notice it's not blessed are the *peaceful* but blessed are the *peacemakers*. And of course, the greatest peacemaker was the Lord Jesus who made peace between God and His people through His death on the cross.

The context of vs2-9 is relationships and so peace-making in this context primarily means to be making peace between people. Every Christian is meant to be a peacemaker both in the community and, more especially, in the church. And of course, the hardest act of peace-making is when you've personally been offended or hurt by someone, especially if that person is a Christian. I have to be honest and say Christians have hurt me more than non-Christians over the years. This is when the rubber really hits the road so to speak. But no one said the Christian life would be easy.

Paul writes in Romans 12:18: *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with all men."* The key words here are *as far as it depends on you*. Sometimes it's not possible to live at peace with everyone, simply because some people are never willing to forgive, or simply unwilling to forget the wrongs of the past. We can build a bridge to others, but sometimes people don't want to cross over. Sometimes, full reconciliation and restoration of a broken relationship might not be possible.

We are not responsible for the sins of others, but we are responsible for how we react to the sins of others, even when we've been badly hurt. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Blessed are the peacemakers, they will be called children of God, because they reflect God's character of peace-making.

8. Those Who Are Persecuted vs10-12

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, vs11 makes it clear this means being persecuted for living a Christian lifestyle. True discipleship, for Jesus, was costly. It involved suffering and persecution. Jesus never shared the Gospel without first telling people the cost involved (Luke14:25-35). Jesus said that the world hated Him and will hate us.

Since all the beatitudes describe what every Christian disciple is intended to be, we conclude that the condition of being despised and rejected, slandered and persecuted, is as much a normal mark of Christian discipleship as being pure in heart or merciful.

No-one has understood the inevitability of suffering better than Dietrich Bonhoeffer. As a German Lutheran Pastor, before and during WW2, he never wavered in his Christian opposition to the Nazi regime, although it meant imprisonment, the threat of torture, danger to his own family and finally death. In fact, he was executed under the direct order of Heinrich Himmler in April 1945 in the Flossenburg concentration camp, only a few days before it was liberated.

It was the fulfilment of what he had always believed and taught: *“Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship.”*

Now thankfully it’s not like that for Christian’s in our nation. But the winds of anti-Christian attitudes are blowing and it’s becoming increasingly difficult to be a Christian in this country, whether that be at work, school, university, neighbourhood.

We say we live in a tolerant society but not when we stand up for Christian principles. Persecution can be the snide comments by family, friends, or work colleagues. It can be the social exclusions by those who find your morals and values too challenging. It could be that you’ve been passed over for promotion or a job move because you’ve taken a certain ethical stand based on the Scriptures. Remember Jeremy Hunt’s review of persecution – home and abroad – when he was Foreign Secretary?

But whatever form persecution takes, Jesus assumes that Christians will be persecuted. And so when we are, we’re to remember that it’s always been the case for God’s people throughout history; and when you are persecuted for being a Christian, remember that you will be blessed eternally with your reward in heaven.

A Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to retain an eternal perspective on all we’ve thought about. Help us to be thankful of the blessings of eternal life. Help us to be poor in Spirit, mourn over our sin and be meek and merciful in our relationships with others so that we might make peace on earth. Help us to hunger and thirst after your righteousness so may we be filled with more fruit of the Spirit. Give us the strength and endurance to endure persecution and the humility to turn the other cheek. In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2020

*“The Lord Your God is with you. He is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with
His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.”*

Zephaniah 3:17



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. As you read through *The Beatitudes*, write down:

One thing you are glad to hear.

One thing that sounds challenging.

One thing you want to learn more about.

2. Choose two of *The Beatitudes* which you feel are prominent in your life.

Choose two of *The Beatitudes* which you feel are not prominent in your life.

3. These are difficult characteristics to measure ourselves against! Write down a word that sums up how you feel when you read these verses.

Which of these characteristics can be improved by your actions?

Which of these characteristics require God to work in you?

4. The central theme of Jesus' teaching in *The Sermon On the Mount* and *The Beatitudes* is the Kingdom of God. It's mentioned 50 times in Matthew's gospel alone.

How might this teaching impact on you as an individual?

How might this teaching impact on us as a church?

5. Why does trying to live as a Christian, and living according to *The Beatitudes*, provoke such a negative reaction from the world?

6. Look out for examples of those who display characteristics of *The Beatitudes* in the coming week. They might be members of your family or people in the news, church members, work colleagues or individuals from history. Make a note of them and share them next time.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD

P 01277 632120 **E** emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org **WA** EmmanuelCM12

T @EmmanuelCM12 **W** emmanuel-church.info **FB** [EmmanuelChurchBillericay](https://www.facebook.com/EmmanuelChurchBillericay)

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