

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
October 30, 2011

Living as God's People

Matthew 5:1-12

Key verse: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:1-12).

Living as a follower of Jesus and a citizen of God's kingdom means living by values which are radically different from the values of our world. For example, when Jesus describes what it means to be blessed, happy, and to be envied, His description hardly sounds like a recipe for happiness and success. But these Beatitudes describe what it means, in God's eyes, to be truly blessed and ultimately happy....

1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The only person God cannot help is the person who believes he doesn't need God's help. So, this first beatitude could be paraphrased, *Blessed are those who know how desperately they need God!*

2. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." The great Christian relief organization, World Vision, started when its founder Bob Pierce was confronted with the extreme need of one little Chinese girl. Pierce pledged a monthly amount to a local missionary to provide food and medical care for the girl. Out of that encounter with the world's poor, World Vision was born. And Bob Pierce wrote in the flyleaf of his Bible, "Let My Heart Be Broken by the Things That Break the Heart of God." The second beatitude might be paraphrased, *Blessed are those who share God's concern, first for the sin and brokenness in their own lives, and for a world that is broken, needy, and lost.*

3. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Meekness is not weakness! True meekness is strength under the control of God and at the service of others. Jesus demonstrated this trait when, in the Upper Room, he wrapped a towel around his waist and washed his disciples' dirty feet. In John's account, he prefaces this part of the story with these words: "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing...and began to wash the disciples' feet" (John 13:3).

Meekness is not weakness! True meekness is strength under the control of God and at the service of others. To be meek is to be submissive toward God and

humble and gentle toward our fellow men—because, like Jesus, we know who we are and *whose* we are.

4. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” People are driven by various kinds of hungers and desires. Some of them lead down paths that end not in fulfillment but in despair. But Jesus says there is one kind of hunger that leads to lasting happiness and fulfillment—and that is a hunger for God and for the things of God.

5. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” If the second Beatitude expresses an inner attitude—“Blessed are those who mourn,” this fifth Beatitude involves outward action. If we really care, we will do something about it. To be “merciful” is to dare to care like Jesus cares—and to demonstrate that caring by our actions!

6. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns us not to be like the “hypocrites” who practice their religion as an act for people to see rather than for God. (See, for example, Mt. 6:1-18.) The word “hypocrite” came from the Greek theater, where actors often wore masks to portray their characters. Jesus is saying, if you want to be close to God, be genuine and real with God—take off your masks! Don’t try to be something on the outside that you are not on the inside. This Beatitude might be paraphrased, *Blessed are those who are free from the tyranny of a divided self.*

7. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” This Beatitude reminds me of the church bulletin announcement: “The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled due to a conflict.” Our world never has a shortage of conflict. This Beatitude might be paraphrased, *Blessed are those who help restore right relationships—between people as well as between people and God.*

Being a “peacemaker” means helping restore right relationships between people: Blessed are those who seek to avert quarrels, to harmonize differences, to strengthen friendships, to avoid petty bickering, to work for understanding between loved ones, friends, neighbors, social classes and races.

Being a “peacemaker” also means helping restore right relationships between people and God—by pointing people to faith in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 describes this aspect of peacemaking: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

8. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” To paraphrase this one, *Blessed are those who stand up for what is right—even when it costs them.*

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