

June 30, 2019

Lesson 5: Jesus Teaches About Right Attitudes

Scripture: Matthew 5: 1-12

Context:

This week's lesson moves us to the gospel accounts of Jesus and covenant. The next few weeks move through the gospel of Matthew and how Jesus established a new covenant in his ministry. He constantly refers back to the covenant of old and then builds upon it with a different perspective.

Today we read of Jesus going to the mountains in the region of Galilee. Crowds have gathered to hear him and perhaps receive a healing. But Jesus's focus that day is on words of comfort and healing. He goes to the mountain so that the crowds can spread out around him.

As he does so, his disciples gather around him to hear his words. Jesus then begins to preach a series of those who are "happy" or blessed, and "because." In what has become known as the beatitudes, Jesus gives blessings to those who fall into different categories. It is hard to find a translation for the word *makarioi*, the first word in each of the beatitudes.¹ However, as Jesus is speaking in a Semitic context, it might be helpful to think of the word as happiness that is less subjective than objective.² For example, in the secular word, happiness is tied to how you feel. The biblical context attributes happiness more to a right relationship with God.³ His words are meant to be encouraging, evocative, and empowering.

Each line of the beatitudes builds upon the next covering different groups of people that Jesus has in the crowd. For those who are hopeless, they are reminded there is a different kingdom than the one that they see in front of them. For those who grieve, they will receive comfort. For those who are humble, they will receive more due to their good spirit. Those who thirst for justice will see it eventually come to fruition. Those who show mercy will also receive mercy. Those who are pure will experience and see God. Peacemakers will be called God's children. Those who are persecuted because they are righteous or those who are prophets will receive rewards as children of God. Every group will receive something that gives them strength and uplifts them.

Jesus continues on with the beatitudes, but this starting of the sermon is powerful. Here, people are given a peace even if they are struggling with what is going on in their lives. They are reminded that they belong to God and that God will work in their lives despite what may be going on around them.

Application

If you're a visual learner, it might be helpful to imagine Jesus telling this sermon

¹ Douglas R.A. Hare, "Matthew," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1993), 35.

² *Ibid.*, 35.

³ *Ibid.*, 36.

on the mountain. The front of the lesson book is a picture from the Church of the Beatitudes in Galilee. It is a beautiful chapel that overlooks the gardens and the Sea of Galilee.

When I went to this chapel on my trip to the Holy Land though, it was not the same scene. We went during the winter, when it rains in Israel and the land is wet and misty. When we got to the chapel, you could hardly see the sea and you had to button the top of your coat to keep out the chill. The people who gathered there were all pressed together to stay out of the rain.

At first, I wondered how this was supposed to be holy or moving. But as we read the words on the portico of the chapel, I realized the scene couldn't be more perfect while reading these words. We were tired from the travel and the elements seemed to be beating down on us. Perhaps the weather was the same as those ancient listeners gathered to hear Jesus bring a good word to their dreary lives where some might not have even had an extra tunic to bear in the exposed landscape.

The power of the words gives strength in and of themselves: "Blessed are those," and fill in the blank. How powerful to be reminded when you may feel hopeless, oppressed, bereaved, hungry, revengeful, and victimized that God is on your side rooting for you. No elements can stop that promise that God will be with you and that the Kingdom of God is among you.

As I read these words, I find so much hope from our God. When I think about situations that I've seen people struggle with in their lives, these words remind me that evil or injustice never have the final word. There will always be seasons in our lives where things do not turn out the way we expected or we watch as others we love who are persecuted and attacked because they are good people. We will all have times where we mourn or feel abandoned. Yet in all these things, God is with us.

For the happier parts of the beatitudes, I see those evident in my life. Those who are humble are those who persevere. Those who thirst for righteousness strive with all their being and don't give up when the going gets tough. The peacemakers are those who do the right thing and they are the people we look to when things get rough. And we are reminded that even when we do the right thing, the results may not be what we want them to be. But God still works through it and we inherit other things that the world cannot bring us.

As you read the beatitudes, I would encourage you to see where those statements play out in your lives, as well as those around you. Perhaps tuck them away for snippets of encouragement when you see others going through something. Or maybe even when you are going through something, return to them and receive a blessing from the Word.

I will never forget that in the midst of a grieving situation someone sent me the phrase from Matthew 5:4. It was not a platitude but a reminder that God comforts those who mourn. A challenge for you this week might be to read one of these, think of someone who fits the description, and then pray for that person and reach out to them. Perhaps God is calling you to participate in the covenant he has made to always encourage and inspire humanity.

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