

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
Session 2 – The Beatitudes, Part 2
(Matthew 5:7-12)

The first four Beatitudes deal with our attitude toward God. Now there is a shift to our attitude toward others. (As we saw last week, the greatest commandment is to love God, the second is to love others.)

1. Jesus says the merciful will be shown mercy. In what ways might our treatment of others affect God's treatment of us? **Read 1 Peter 1:3-4** and see the greatest example of Christ's mercy.

Mercy is compassion for people in need. Here, Jesus does not specify who should receive our mercy. But just as God's mercy extends to people in many situations, so should ours. Jesus deals with this issue in greater detail in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:29-37**). See also **Matthew 23:23**.

The natural world is often unmerciful, as are we when we are not focused on God's will. This can then lead to a lack of forgiveness or compassion, sometimes because of a desire to insulate ourselves from people's pains and difficulties. **Read Matthew 18:23-35** – the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. Do you think the servant who had been forgiven the large debt really understood what mercy is all about?

William Shakespeare talked about mercy in The Merchant of Venice:

*The quality of mercy is not strain'd
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that give and him that takes.
It is an attribute to God Himself
And earthly pwer doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.*

Think of some ways you could show mercy to those around you: materially (James 2:15-17; Galatians 6:10); emotionally (Romans 12:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4); and spiritually (Ephesians 2:4-5; Romans 9:1-4)

How does showing mercy – learning to love as Christ loved – sometimes involve risk? C. S. Lewis, in his book The Four Loves, wrote,

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.”

2. Remember the old Ivory Soap commercials.... “99 44/100% pure”! In the Old Testament, the word for “pure” described metals without alloys, liquids without admixtures, grain that had been winnowed, an army without defectors or a sacrificial animal without blemish. So someone has suggested that we might translate the first part of this Beatitude: “Blessed are those with unmixed motives... with unadulterated loyalties.”

Jesus frequently spoke of the importance of a singular focus and commitment, as in, “No one can serve two masters.” Or, “the narrow way leads to life and the broad way leads to destruction.”

Paul wrote to his young friend, Timothy (**1 Timothy 4:12**): “*Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*” Even if you are not young, what difference does your “purity life style” (as well as these other things) make in your witness to others?

This matter of purity was especially an issue for those in Jesus’ day. The Pharisees were particularly obsessed with external, ceremonial purity. (This is demonstrated in the priest’s and Levite’s reaction to the wounded man in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.) They thought that the **appearance** of purity was most important.

What distinction do you see between being “pure in heart” and pure in outward behavior? Why would the promise of seeing God be reserved for those who are pure in heart? **Read Psalm 24:3-6. Proverbs 4:23** (New Living Translation) says, “*Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do.*”

Eugene Peterson in his paraphrase, The Message renders this verse: “*You’re blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart – put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.*”

British pastor and author, John R. W. Stott writes: “Only the pure in heart will see God, see Him now with the eye of faith and see His glory in the hereafter, for only the utterly sincere can bear the dazzling vision in whose light the darkness of deceit must vanish and by whose fire all shams are burned up.

So the Bible promises believers that we will “see God” not only with spiritual eyes, but in actuality on the day when we join the Lord in the heavenly realms!

1 John 3:3, again from The Message says, “*All of us who look forward to His coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus’ life as a model for our own.*”

3. “Peace” was and is a common greeting in Hebrew: Shalom. It was not just the absence of conflict or bad things, but a desire for all good things.

The opposite of a peacemaker is a “peace-breaker”. Some ways this happens in everyday life is through gossip, slander, being judgmental, and putting others down. Can you think of any other ways?

Notice that the Beatitude doesn’t say, “Blessed are the peaceful,” but “*Blessed are the peacemakers.*” The emphasis is on the making or establishing of peace.

Humility is one characteristic of a peacemaker. Can you think of others?

How can we be peacemakers in our homes, in our church and in society?

Read the following verses. What does each say about being a peacemaker?

1 Peter 3:11 –

Hebrews 12:14 –

Romans 12:18 –

Are there sometimes costs to being a peacemaker?

Are there times you might be a peacemaker when you had nothing to do with the problem?

Again, as with mercy, there are certain risks involved in being a peacemaker. Why?

To better understand our role as peacemakers, **read Ephesians 2:11-22**. What does the Apostle say is the source of true peace? The same verb used here is applied by the apostle Paul to what God has done through Christ. *“For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.”* (**Colossians 1:19-20**, NIV) Peacemaking is a divine work, for peace means reconciliation, and God is the author of peace and of reconciliation, so true peacemakers are thus called the “children of God.”

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18. What is the relationship between what God has done and what we are to do. William Barclay translates this Beatitude: *“Blessed are those who produce right relationships in every sphere of life, for they are doing a God-like work.”*

4. The Christian Church and Christians have had a long history of persecution. To the best of our knowledge, 10 of the 12 original disciples were martyred. Even to this day, Christians around the world are persecuted in various ways, even unto death. Why would the world hate the kind of people described in the Beatitudes? (Look at each Beatitude and consider how a person’s exemplifying those things might lead to persecution.) What types of persecution are mentioned in vv. 10-12?

Christians in the first century had many false things said against them. For example: Christians were cannibals (a misunderstanding of the Lord’s Supper); they were immoral (a misunderstanding of the church’s “love feast”); they were home-wreckers (resultant problems when one family member would become a follower of Christ); they were political insurrectionists (they wouldn’t say “Caesar is lord”).

In today’s world, Christians are sometimes persecuted because they are viewed as the “de facto” conscience of others because they hold to biblical standards. (“persecuted for righteousness”) John R. W. Stott wrote, “Persecution is simply the clash of two irreconcilable value systems.” Sometimes the fact that you are being persecuted is a sign of genuineness and authenticity of our Christian life. What did Jesus say about that in **Luke 6:26**?

Some questions to ask yourself:

* If I were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me?

* When we are persecuted, it is important to ask: Why am I being persecuted? (Is it really because I am a Christian, or is it something else?) Have you ever experienced persecution because you were a Christian?

Read 2 Timothy 3:12. What does it tell you about persecution?

5. Note what we are to do (and not do): we are not to retaliate, sulk, sink into self-pity, “grin and bear it” or pretend we enjoy it. We are to “Rejoice and be glad”. What reasons does Jesus give us to rejoice when we are persecuted? **Read James 1:2-4**. What reasons does James give us? Remember, we may lose everything on earth, but we will receive everything in heaven.

In **Acts 5:17-42** we see the apostles putting this teaching into practice. Having been beaten and threatened by the Sanhedrin, they left *“rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”* (v. 41) One of the “early church fathers”, Polycarp, who was a disciple of John and the Bishop of Smyrna was given a choice: sacrifice to Caesar as God, or die. His reply was: “Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

When we are persecuted, we need to remember that we are in the same company as those who have suffered the same things down through the centuries. As the hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers" says, "Christians, we are treading where the saints have trod."

6. Again, consider how the Beatitudes can or should change you. Read through the beatitudes again and note how you could/should respond to each one.

