

October 3-7, 2022 Edition

Following

# The Year Of Jesus Part 40

The Beatitudes: Blessed Are The Who?!?!?

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](http://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

**Monday Reflection:** This week we are continuing to look at the introduction to the Sermon On The Mount- the most influential speech ever given in the history of this world. We began last week looking at the Beatitudes and this week we'll pick up where we left off last week by reading them:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:3-12 (NIV)*

So what are these very strange proverbs (the Beatitudes are really just proverbs with the word "blessed" at the beginning of them)? Theologians have argued over their meaning and debated if there was anything within them that Jesus was asking to do. Last week we looked in detail at why these saying are called the Beatitudes and what it meant to a first century Jew to be "blessed". This week we'll continue looking at what Jesus might have meant for us to get out of the Beatitudes.

One way to look at the Beatitudes is to see them as proverbs of surprise. We all know about proverbs in our culture. There are two kinds: proverbs of surprise and proverbs of instruction. Proverbs of instruction are things like "the early bird gets the worm". In other words get up early or you won't get the worm. Then there are proverbs of surprise like "better late than never." No instruction in that proverb but it is meant to stop people in their tracks and make them think about what they just heard.

That's part of what I think Jesus is doing with the Beatitudes. He keeps mentioning groups of people that the religious leaders had proclaimed to be "cursed by God" and turned the whole scenario around. The poor in spirit are actually blessed. Those in mourning are actually blessed. The persecuted- blessed. These groups are blessed not because of what they're going through but in spite of it. God has not given up on you or turned His back on you. That would have surprised a lot of people.

So in one sense the Beatitudes are not only proverbs of surprise but also a road map to find Jesus. He is letting us know first with His words and then with His actions that if you want to find Him you'll have to go to the groups of people listed out in the Sermon On The Mount. He will be with the poor in spirit. He will be with the mourning and grieving. He will be with the meek, those hungering and thirsting for righteousness and the persecuted.

In other words, He will be with the marginalized. The question for today is, where am I? Where are you? If you're looking for Jesus you will find Him among the marginalized, the broken and the hurting doing His best to be a blessing to them. How about you and me?

**Tuesday Reflection:** Another way of looking at the Beatitudes is to see them as proverbs of instruction- but not in the way that most proverbs of instruction work. Usually a

proverb of instruction tries to teach us the secrets of success. Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man (or woman) healthy, wealthy and wise. If you lie down with dogs you will get up with fleas. There are tons of them that we are familiar with and generally they suggest something that we do in order to be successful. Go to bed early and get up early and you'll be healthy, wealthy and wise. It's not universally true but you get the point.

I do think we can look at the beatitudes as proverbs of instruction but not in the usual way- in other words just because Jesus says, "blessed are the poor in spirit" doesn't mean we should try to make ourselves poor in spirit. He says, "blessed are those who are persecuted" but I don't think He's saying we should go and seek out opportunities to be persecuted. So then in what way can these be proverbs of instruction?

I think they are instructing us in how to find Jesus and how we should view the kinds of people that He mentions. And while it is surprising what kinds of people He lists in the Beatitudes who are "blessed" it shouldn't be. If we're surprised at the kinds of people Jesus is drawn towards then we haven't been paying much attention. If you put Jesus in a room with a bunch of people He will gravitate towards the person who is the most messed up that has messed up the most. What do we do with the people who are the most messed up that have messed up the most?

And there is your instruction in these proverbs- how are we treating the people that Jesus blessed the most? The religious leaders of Jesus' day treated those kinds of people pretty shabbily. They told those people that God had rejected them. That they were cursed by God. That they could never make it back. Which is fascinating when you consider how often God shouted from within the Old Testament scriptures that He cared deeply about the plight of the powerless and the broken:

*He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. Deuteronomy 10:18-19 (NLT)*

This is just one instance of dozens where God tells Israel that He expects them to be a blessing to the powerless and voiceless. In fact throughout the prophets God warns Israel that one of the reasons He is going to withdraw from them is because of how poorly they treated the marginalized (mainly orphans, widows and foreigners among them). But people being people we more often look for why the marginalized are marginalized rather than how we can be a blessing to them. Maybe for today we should spend some time thinking about how we're doing at being a blessing to the marginalized. I know it's a hot button political topic but this goes WAY beyond politics. It goes to the very heart of Jesus and politics will never fix the brokenness of this world- but an army of Jesus' people dedicated to being a blessing to the outcasts and the broken- now that will change the world.

And it did.

And it continues to change the world to this very day. How are we doing at being part of the solution? Want to find Jesus? Go hang out with the poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek, the persecuted. Because wherever they are- you can bet Jesus is there too.

**Wednesday Reflection:** This week as I continued to reflect on the beatitudes I was fascinated by how closely connected one of Jesus' parables was to the Beatitudes. Jesus is teaching about what the Kingdom of God would be like and He told a story we now refer to as the parable of the sheep and the goats. He tells this story alongside a few other parables about what the Kingdom of God was "like". In this particular story Jesus says that at the end the King will return and gather all the nations before Him. Then He will separate the nations like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats:

*Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'* Matthew 25:34-36 (NLT)

Notice anything interesting there regarding a connection to the Beatitudes? Sounds an awful lot like the people He mentions in His introduction to the Sermon On The Mount. The poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek, those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, the persecuted...

What is Jesus saying? Well, I think part of what He's saying is that His Kingdom will be made up not only of folks who are "blessed" but also by those who care about the broken and hurting recognizing that they are beloved by God and not rejected by Him. In that way maybe the citizens of Jesus' Kingdom will be those who are going to the people that the rest of the world runs away from. The citizens of Jesus' Kingdom will be working on behalf of the folks that the rest of the world has given up on. The rest of the world may reject these people because we believe they've brought this pain upon themselves by their own choices (and sometimes that's the case) but not Jesus' followers. Jesus' followers will remember that our Lord went to these people and dedicated His life to being a blessing to them. When Jesus returns (according to the parable) He will praise His followers who rather than rejecting the marginalized, went to the broken and hurting (even those who brought their pain upon themselves by their choices) and I love what He tells us His followers will say in response:

*Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'* Matthew 25:34-36 (NLT)

How are we doing?

Now before you start reeling into self doubt and loathing let me just say- stop it. I used to think the parable of the sheep and the goats was a check list and if I couldn't check them all off (feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, inviting in strangers, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and those in prison) then I was going to be lumped in with the goats (the ones who weren't a blessing to the broken and hurting of this world).

But it's not a check list- it's a heart check. A reality check. It's Jesus trying to shock us and wake us up so we won't do what we humans so often do- ignore the plight of the

marginalized and rationalize why we don't have to do anything for those messed up people since they've brought it upon themselves. So had Matthew (brought it upon himself that is), so had Mary Magdalene and Peter and Legion and...

Here's the thing- it doesn't really matter much to Jesus why people are in the circumstances they are in. What matters is that God's most often self-revealed attribute about Himself is compassion and if we're not growing in compassion towards those who get very little of it in their lives then we quite simply are not becoming more and more like Jesus. Now before your mind starts boggling at the seemingly infinite amount of brokenness and pain in this world just know- you don't have to do it all, in fact you can't.

I love the story about the guy walking on the beach in Florida after a hurricane. There were thousands of starfish that had been washed up on the beach and as he came across one he'd pick it up and toss it back into the ocean. Someone asked him what he was doing. "Saving starfish", was his answer. The other guy said, "there's too many of them. You can't possible make a difference here!" The first guy picks up another starfish, tosses it back in the ocean and says, "I made a difference for that one..."

None of us can do it all but all of us can do something.

So do something.

### **Thursday Reflection:**

*From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Change your hearts and lives, because the kingdom of heaven is near." Matthew 4:17 (NCV)*

*Jesus went everywhere... preaching the Good News about the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 4:23 (NCV)*

*May your kingdom come and what you want be done, here on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10 (NCV)*

**Reflection:** Let's talk a little bit about kingdoms. When Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is near, what's He talking about? Isn't the kingdom of heaven up in the sky somewhere? How can that kingdom come near to the kingdom of earth?

I think our problem is that we think of the kingdom of heaven as a geographical location. That makes sense because that's the way kingdoms work on earth. People group together and create geographical locations where whatever the will of the king (or whatever form of government there is) is, that's theoretically what is supposed to happen.

You have your own kingdom, did you know that? If a kingdom is just the area in which someone's effective will is done then we all have at least a limited kingdom. There are things nobody can force you to do... They can imprison you, they can hurt you, they can threaten you, but unless you choose to do what they ask you can't be forced.

Taxes are a good example. Nobody can force you to pay your taxes. The IRS will put you in jail if you don't but they can't force you to pay taxes against your will. Your rule/reign/authority cannot be overridden even if your freedom can be taken from you.

So let's get back to the kingdom of heaven. Whose effective will are we talking about when we talk about the kingdom of heaven? God's, right? And when Jesus says part of our prayers should be:

May your kingdom come and what you want be done, here on earth as it is in heaven.

What exactly is He inviting us to? Here's what I think. The only place that you have control over whether or not God's will is done on earth the same way it's done in heaven is in your own little kingdom. The scope and area of where your effective will is done. What Jesus is inviting you to is to submit the range of your effective will to the will of God. And if you do that, then anywhere you go you take the kingdom of heaven with you.

So how about it? Are you willing to submit your kingdom to God's? He won't force you. This choice is all up to you. It seems like a radical thing to do, but that's what Jesus is, a radical. I think it's the only thing that will actually bring about lasting change in a life...

God is kind, but He's not soft. In kindness He takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life change. Romans 2:4 (MES)

**Prayer:** Father, today I want to live out that part of Your prayer... Today I pray, May your kingdom come and what you want be done, here on earth as it is in heaven. Let Your kingdom come, and let it begin with me. In Jesus Name, amen.

## **Friday Reflection:**

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemies.' But I say to you, love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you. If you do this, you will be true children of your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:43-45 (NCV)*

*"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life... Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. Matthew 6:25-34 (NLT)*

*"You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:27-28 (NLT)*

**Reflection:** What will it look like if I accept Jesus' invitation to a whole new way of looking at life. Well, that's a complex question that we'll be dealing with over the next several weeks but we can start with the verses above.

I don't think our problem with Jesus's teaching is usually that we don't know what He wants from us... I think usually it's that we aren't doing very well with what we already know. For instance, Jesus says love your enemies. That's a tough thing to do, but is your problem with that teaching that you didn't know that's what Jesus wants? Did you honestly think Jesus

would say that hate is a great strategy to become the person He dreamed of when He created you? Or is it that you're just having a tough time doing what you know Jesus is asking you to do?

How about worry? Did you know that Jesus says don't worry or did you honestly think that he was going to recommend worry and anxiety and great emotions and habits to be embraced to really spice up your life?

There's so much more to look at, but here's the point of today's devo. What Jesus is inviting us to is not just tweaking how we've always lived life. It's a complete rearranging of what makes sense to us so that we can live lives that are in step with Him... Lives we were created to live. Nobody wants to hang around people who hate and worry and are anxious all the time. Nobody really wants to be someone who hates and worries and is anxious all the time. So why not become someone else? Someone who chooses love over hate and faith and hope over worry and anxiety? It may not be easy or feel natural now but it will create in you a life that you never dreamed was possible. A life of peace and joy and meaning and satisfaction that will draw others to Jesus through your life.

Prayer: Father, today I want to choose to live life the way You designed me to live. Forgive me for the times I've chosen hate over love... For the times I've chosen worry and anxiety instead of faith and hope. Help me to do better today. In Jesus' Name, amen.