

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
Sarasota, Florida

SAKLC CONVERSATIONS – THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2016

A STUDY OF THE BEATITUDES

INITIAL RESPONSIVE READING: Matthew 5:3-12

(spoken responsively by verses; Men odd vss. Women even vss.)

³Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Opening Pastoral Prayer:

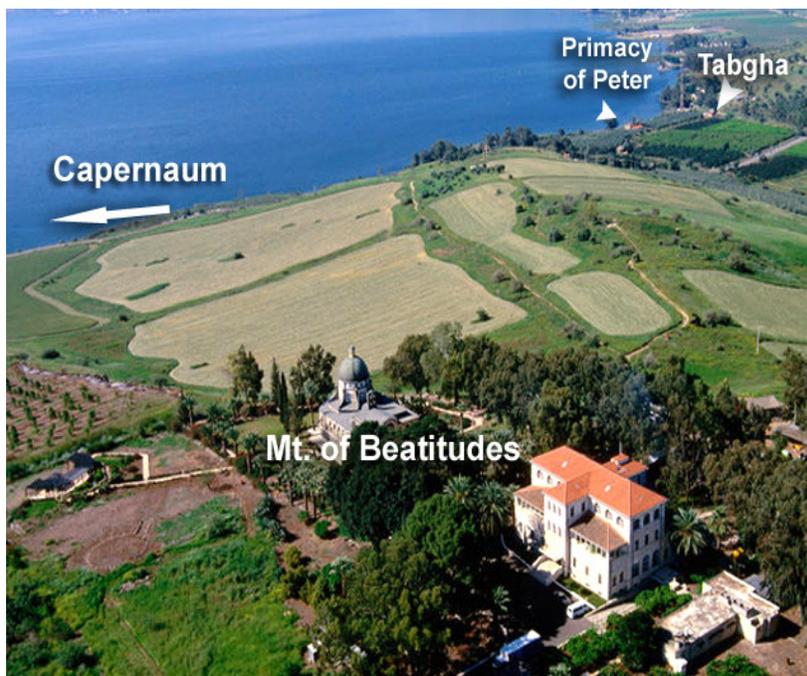
Becoming better acquainted with others through initial Small Group Discussion:

- A) Compare the passage that we have just read from the **NRSV** translation of the Holy Bible with the biblical version that you and other group members are presently using; do you note any differences? Share within the group....

- B) Now, compare Matthew's account of the Beatitudes with what is recorded in Luke **6:20-26**. Note similarities and differences between these accounts and be prepared to share them in the context of your small group and of the group as a whole.

1) A GENERAL INTRODUCTION to MATTHEW'S ACCOUNT of JESUS' BEATITUDES:

One of the most beloved of all portions of Scripture, the **Beatitudes** form the beginning of what is commonly called **Jesus' Sermon on the Mount**. They are recorded in the **Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5:1-12**. Most biblical scholars are now of the opinion that the preaching of this sermon probably occurred later, rather than earlier, in the actual chronology of Jesus' ministry. (*Probably in the 2nd year of that ministry.*) However, the account is purposefully placed here, near the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, because it serves as a grand proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven to which the rest of the Book of Matthew is devoted.



It is suggested that Jesus likely began his preaching/teaching ministry near **Nazareth**, the town of his boyhood. At an early time in his earthly ministry, and as the crowds following him increased in size, Jesus appears to have moved the focus of that ministry to the larger city of **Capernaum**, located on the northern shores of the **Sea of Galilee**. Capernaum, which still exists as a viable community, was in those days situated on one of the main commercial highways passing through the land.

As Matthew's account begins, Jesus has observed crowds coming toward him, so he went up on a mountainside and sat down – assuming *the traditional posture of a teacher*. The customary location of this “mount” is in the low hills rising up behind Capernaum and the other small fishing villages scattered along Galilee’s northern shoreline.



For many centuries this site has traditionally been called the *Mount of the Beatitudes*. A Byzantine church building is known to have been erected there in the 4th century C.E., in commemoration of this event in Jesus’ life. Today the location is occupied by a Roman Catholic Franciscan chapel, which was built in 1939 with the support of the then Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini. The “mount” overlooks the Sea of Galilee and the Plain of Gennesaret, which stretches below it and is approximately four miles in length.



Jesus' initial message to the crowds was that the **Kingdom of Heaven was at hand**. In his teaching and preaching he had been calling for people to **repent**. Now, in what some have described as the ‘*Manifesto of His Kingdom*,’ Jesus unveiled the foundations and character of life in that kingdom; he taught the *ethical guidelines for life* in His Kingdom; and, by His words, he described what that ‘*righteous life*’ should look like for citizens of that kingdom. The qualities described in the Beatitudes give a picture of the perfect disciple of Christ; Jesus does not here tell people how to become like this; that comes in his subsequent recorded teachings. The Beatitudes merely describe the blessed state of those who humbly submit themselves to the will of God. These are not different groups of people (*i.e. mourners, poor, meek, etc.*) but every Christian is meant to manifest every one of these characteristics.

In studying the Beatitudes, one hears in Matthew's Gospel account some echoes of the Old Testament prophecy of **Isaiah 61:1-3**. It was undoubtedly the Gospel writer's specific intent to show how Jesus came in fulfillment of that prophecy:

***“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me:
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion –
to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.”***

2) THE HISTORICAL and SOCIETAL CONTEXT IN WHICH THE BEATITUDES EMERGED:

- A) **Societal Problems** existent in Judea during Jesus' ministry (1st century C.E.)
- i. occupied by the military government of Rome – *tyrannical in nature*
 - ii. citizens were governed by absolute rulers – *the antithesis of democracy*
 - iii. widespread persecution – *common people were chattel for the Romans*
 - iv. exorbitant taxation – *taxes consumed about 1/3 of normal income*
 - v. extreme racial prejudice
 - vi. slavery was rampant – *there were approximately 3 slaves to every free person*
- B) **Traditional Responses** to this societal & political situation, given by various Jewish sects:
- i. **Zealots** (*terrorists of that day*) said, ***“Don't worry about your spiritual life – our hope is military might!”***
 - ii. **Sadducees**, said, ***“We can only survive by compromising with the world. Be cautious and negotiate for the best bargain you can.”***
 - iii. **Pharisees**, said, ***“Live a clean, ritually pure life (as defined by our Rabbis) and trust in God; He will do the rest.”***
 - They followed human traditions and put a “*hedge*” around the Torah.
 - It was said that the Sadducees bargained with Rome; but the Pharisees bargained with God.

C) **Jesus' Ministry in Response** to the overall situation:

- i. **Matthew 9:36** – *“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”* – he knew the populace; he had compassion on their miserable situation.
- ii. By the time of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus surely had had altercations with the Pharisees.
- iii. Having rejected the doctrine of the Zealots, Sadducees and Pharisees, he taught about the need for genuine repentance (**Matthew 4:17** – *“From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*)
- iv. The meaning of **“REPENT”** (in Greek – **METANOEO**; these definitions *provided by some authoritative lexicons and biblical dictionaries:*)
 - *“to change one’s mind and purpose”*
 - *“to have a change of heart, to turn from one’s sins; to change one’s ways”*
 - *“to change any or all of the elements composing one’s life attitude, thoughts and behaviors concerning the demands of God for right living”*
- v. Jesus was not just asking persons to change a few of their behaviors; He was asking them to radically change their entire lives and their worldview.
- vi. No one has the right to ask another to change the whole manner of someone else’s life, unless he can offer a better way.
- vii. However absolute Jesus’ Call to Repentance may have been it was a **message of Joy**, because the possibility of repentance exists. Because God has turned to man ... man should, may, can turn to God. Hence, conversion and repentance are accompanied by joy, for they mean the opening up of life for the one who has turned
 - The parables in Luke 15 (*lost sheep, lost coin, prodigal son*) all give testimony to the joy of God over the sinner who repents and call on men to share it.
 - God’s gift to men in their conversion is life.

- When the parable of the prodigal son pictures conversion as a return to the Father, it can be said of the man who has repented, ***“This my son was dead, and is alive again!”***

3) OBSERVATIONS ABOUT INTERPRETING THE BEATITUDES:

(The biggest mistake most people make in studying the Beatitudes is overlooking the very first word in each verse!)

- A) Each of the Beatitudes begin with the word ***blessed*** (in Greek: **MAKARIOS**)
- i. The word ***beatitude*** is not generally found in the text of our Bibles.
 - ii. The English word – ***“beatitude”*** - comes from the ***Latin*** word ***beatus*** (blessed)
 - iii. The Greek ***“MAKARIOS”*** corresponds to the Hebrew word ***“ASHER”*** and means: ***“blessed, happy and fortunate”*** all_at_once; there is no equivalent English word that exists.
 - iv. ***The Beatitudes do not tell you how to be happy, but how to be blessed!***
 - “Each beatitude tells how to be blessed by God. ‘Blessed’ means more than happiness. It implies the fortunate and enviable state of those who are in God’s Kingdom. The Beatitudes don’t promise laughter, pleasure, or earthly prosperity. Being ‘blessed’ by God means the experience of hope and joy, independent of outward circumstances. To find hope and joy, the deepest form of happiness, follow Jesus no matter what the cost.” *(a quote from Life Application Study Bible)*
 - ***Holman’s Bible Commentary*** states: ***“The Greek term for ‘blessed, happy’ was not nearly as difficult to understand for Jesus’ audience and Matthew’s readers as it is for us. Our modern idea of ‘happiness’ is a diluted version of the joy implied by the term Jesus used. Our idea of happiness is a dependence on circumstances. Instead, God’s happiness or joy is dependent on the assurance of God’s blessing (SOMETIMES PRESENT, OFTEN IN THE FUTURE), not on current circumstances, and it abides deep and undisturbable within the believer.”***
 - ***William Barclay***, English biblical scholar, comments: ***“Makarios then describes that joy which has its secret within itself, that joy which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained, that joy which is completely***

*independent of all the chances and changes of life. The English word **happiness** gives its own case away. It contains the root HAP which means CHANCE. Human happiness is something which is dependent on the chances and the changes of life, something which life may give and which life may also destroy.”*

- v. **What is this blessing that is given?** The second half of each beatitude elucidates it: “They” possess the kingdom of heaven and “they” inherit the earth. The mourners are comforted and the hungry are satisfied. “They” receive mercy; “they” see God; “they” are called the sons of God; “their” heavenly reward is great. All these blessings belong together!

4) DO THE BEATITUDES HAVE ANY RELEVANCE FOR US IN 2016?

- a) Would it be worthy to have a New Year’s resolution in which your goal was to experience more happiness in God than ever before? People often divide Christendom into two attitudes toward pleasure and happiness. And each attitude can find a basis in Scripture.
- i. There are those who are ascetic and austere. Life is no laughing matter. Seriousness is next to godliness.
- James 4:8-9 ***“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection.”***
 - Ecclesiastes 2:1-2 ***“I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will make a test of pleasure, enjoy yourself.’ But again, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, ‘It is mad,’ and of pleasure ‘What use is it?’”***
- ii) Then there are the shiny, happy people. Life is good. Drink it up!
- Nehemiah 8:10 ***“Then he said to them, ‘Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”***
 - Ecclesiastes 3:12 ***“I know there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live.”***

b) Where are you?

- i. Is the goal of experiencing happiness/blessedness a worthy one?
- ii. This study of the Beatitudes will hopefully give you a theology of happiness that is both serious and joyful.
- iii. It's not the right circumstances, abundant material possessions, or dependent on your emotions.
 - We need to begin with what happiness is not.
- iv. We need to use the language of heaven to describe true happiness: it is **to be blessed**.
 - **Blessedness** is deep, lasting, spiritual, and accessible, not circumstantial, tangible, and emotional.
 - **Blessedness** is serious business.
 - **Blessedness** doesn't come from this world, but the next.
 - **Blessedness** is not from human resources, but divine.
 - To be blessed means to be approved by God. It is to sense His smile of endorsement upon you, His love and affection.
 - **Blessedness** is to appreciate your worth in His eyes.

FURTHER DISCUSSION:

- a) In your mind, what, if any, is the difference between using the words "**Happy**" and "**Blessed?**" Are these words totally synonymous? Are the words readily interchangeable in speaking the Beatitudes?
- b) What makes you *happy*? Tell other group members something during the past holiday season that truly made you happy.....
- c) When do you feel blessed?
- d) Is there any difference between your being "*blessed*" and "*happy*?"
- f) Name something that made you temporarily *happy*, but then wore off.....

5) OTHER BIBLICAL BEATITUDES:

(Beatitudes are not unique only in the New Testament, and to the teaching of Jesus; there are also examples found in the Old Testament, chiefly in the Book of Psalms; they commonly presented situations in which God's blessings could be found)

Psalm 1:1-2 ***“Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.”***

Psalm 32: 1-2 ***“Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.”***

Psalm 33:12 ***“Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.”***

Psalm 41:1 ***“Happy are those who consider the poor; the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.”***

Psalm 65:4 ***“Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts, we shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.”***

Psalm 106:3 ***“Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times.”***

Psalm 119:1 ***“Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.”***

Psalm 119:2 ***“Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart.”***

Proverbs 8:32 ***“And now, my children listen to me: Happy are those who keep my ways.”***

Proverbs 8:34 ***“Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.”***

Ecclesiastes 10:17 ***“Happy are you, O Lord, when your king is a nobleman, and your princes feast at the proper time – for strength and not for drunkenness.”***

Matthew 11:6 ***“Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”***

Luke 12:37 – ***“Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.”***

James 1:12 ***“Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”***

Revelation 1:3 ***“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.”***

Revelation 14:13 ***“And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead whom from now on die in the Lord. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.’”***

6) CONCLUSION:

- A) The Beatitudes do not describe different kinds of Christians – all Christians are meant to reflect all of these characteristics.
- B) Christians differ in what we seek after and long for
- Everyone will *“hunger and thirst”* after something. What is it with you?
 - Wealth?
 - Status?
 - Political Power?
 - The Righteousness of God?
- C) It is not enough to just hear the words of Jesus, we must obey Him
Matthew 7:24-27

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