

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Taught by Bruce Bickel

Session: April 6, 2012

Father, we come into your presence this day with great anticipation that your Holy Spirit will once again guide us into all truth. We think upon the crucifixion, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the results of that for our lives. Father, we are just overwhelmed with a greater sense of gratitude because we recognize the sacrifice of your Son, for your glory and our behalf. May we respond accordingly this day by giving our attention to that which you would have us learn as your spirit teaches us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Let's turn in your Bibles please to Matthew 5. Want to continue our study of the introduction on the Sermon on the Mount. Last week, as we looked at, very briefly, the introduction in Chapter 4 of the book of Matthew, we saw that Jesus was moved with compassion. We learned from that in the introduction in the first couple of verses of why Jesus preached this Sermon on the Mount.

I'm going to ask you to just follow along. I want to read the first 15 verses or so of Matthew 5 as we begin walking our way through this portion known as the Beatitudes. So let us hear the Word of the Lord. I might ask also, brothers, let's stand and give honor and dignity to the reading of God's Word. If you're able, I'd appreciate if you'd just stand that we can show proper respect for the reading of His Word. This is from Matthew 5:1-16.

¹"Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹"Blessed are you when others 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 so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. ¹³You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." This is the Word of the Lord.

Audience Members: *Thanks be to God.*

Please be seated.

As we saw last week in our introductory portion of the Sermon on the Mount, looking at the first verse, "Seeing the crowds, he went up to the mountain, and when he sat down, the disciples came to him." We learned a couple of very significant points there just in the introduction. First of all, as we saw in Chapter 4, Jesus was moved with compassion because of the condition of the people. That's why he began to preach this message of encouragement, of mercy, of great exhilaration on the part of taking care of the needs of people who were hurting.

The second thing we learned was that the motive for evangelism is really compassion, not conversion. Jesus was moved with compassion. That was his motivation to begin to preach this wonderful sermon

that we call Sermon on the Mount.

As we make application in our modern day life, what is our motive for evangelism? It is not to convert people. That is not something we can do. Our motive really is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, the saving grace of God, because we have compassion for lost souls—people who are miserable in the condition of their sinfulness, just as you and I were prior to our regeneration. So we are moved by compassion to want to share the Gospel of Christ, the gospels of grace.

The second thing we learned was this—Jesus invited his disciples to come to him, but the masses heard it. There was a group of people who were sitting around who were in addition to the disciples who heard this. You can look at Matthew 7, the last Chapter, and you'll see the whole crowd, there's a response. There's a picture here that I think is very critical for us in our day and age, and it's this. You build the local church by teaching the core group, not the masses. You build the core group of the church, you're going to build the church. He directed this to his 12 disciples. This essentially was his first staff meeting. He gets his staff of 12 disciples together and basically says, "This is who you are going to become so that the movement of the Kingdom of God will become fluent throughout all the earth." You begin to see that he builds his movement by teaching the core group, the 12.

Now the other people heard it, so we can't exclude them. I'm not saying that we're isolationists at all, but I'm saying there's a principle here I think that we can learn. If you really want to build the body of the church, you've got to teach the core group. You've got to teach the leaders. You've got to teach the people who are serious.

Now contrast that with the modern movement of what we call the seeker friendly movement. What is their style? Their style is to preach to the masses, teach the masses and bring the message down so that everybody's appealed to it, and you don't teach the core group. There's a contrast here that I think is very serious.

When you look at the book of Colossians, Paul is writing to the core group of people when he builds the church. I think there's a principle that we can see here in ministry that if you really want the ministry to expand and to grow—grow meaning depth, expansion meaning breadth—if you want that to happen, then you've really got to spend time with the core group. That's what he does with the 12. But the other people heard it. That's where you trust the Holy Spirit to apply to other people the truths that are being contained.

Remember the job description of the Holy Spirit as Jesus described it in the book of John? It is to call attention to the works of Christ and to guide us into all truth. The real critical ingredient is teach the truth to the core group, let the other people hear it and the Holy Spirit will apply it. There's great, great illustration here of ministry for us, I believe, just in the very first verse.

If you're looking for an outline, the handout I gave you, session number two, I give you a couple of ways of outline this Sermon on the Mount. One of the ways we could do it would be true righteousness pictured by Christ. In other words, we're talking about the character of Christ. You'll see that in Matthew 5:1-48. The second grouping of this outline on the Sermon on the Mount could be true righteousness practiced by believers. That would be conduct of true believers. You see the character of Christ in Matthew 5, and then you go to Matthew 6-7:12 and you begin to see the conduct of the believers.

The conduct of the believers is directly related to the character of Christ. That's why you teach the core group the character of Christ so that the conduct of the believers begins to mirror the conduct of Christ. We are being conformed to whom?

Audience Members: Christ.

To Christ-likeness, therefore we ought to have the conduct that the believers reflect what? The character of Christ. What do you have to teach the core group? The character of Christ. That's the role of the pastor/teacher in the church is to teach people the character of Christ so that their conduct reflects that. That's what you see Jesus doing.

The third division of this outline could be true righteousness proved by tests; in other words, confirmation of their conversion. What you see, three big themes here of the Kingdom of God in the movement on the Sermon on the Mount would be the character of Christ, the conduct of true believers, and then the confirmation of true conversion.

You're going to see in here some things that reveal there's such a thing a false conversion; somebody who says, "Yeah, I believe in Christ," but have they really been made regenerate by the transforming work of God's grace. They may or may not be. Part of the Sermon on the Mount, the latter portions in Chapter 7, deal with the confirmation of somebody who has true saving faith. So that's just one way we can divide this Sermon on the Mount as we begin an in-depth study of it.

There's a preamble to the sermon. The theme of the whole sermon is the Kingdom of God. In each Beatitude, which we move into, what we just read has three parts to it. There's an aspiration of blessedness. In other words, the blessing is pronounced upon the person who becomes this character and their character qualities. There's a description of the character of the person blessed. In other words, remember Jesus is moved by compassion and he's dealing with hurting people, and he begins to say "blessed." That's the first thing that he says, "blessed." Now what better news could a person who's mourning, a person who's in pain, a person who's suffering, hear than the word saying "blessed." There's an introduction. He said, "Blessed are you when you become this kind of a person." There's a description of blessedness, there's a description of the character that is required to receive that blessing, and there's an explanation of the blessedness. That's each one of these eight character qualities really are ascribed that way as we find them.

Jesus teaches how one enters the kingdom and how one lives as a kingdom citizen. That's a quick overview of the whole Sermon on the Mount. This is how you enter into kingdom, and this is how you live as a kingdom citizen. Remember Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He was a man who had a lot of his theology absolutely correct.

In fact, Jesus' conversation went something like this, "Nicodemus, you're a good theologian. I understand you understand about obedience. You understand about reward. You understand about life after death. You have a lot of your theology correct. But you made one fatal flaw. You have one tremendous error, and that error is that you have externalized religion. You've made it external. You think it's all about your own achieving righteousness. Nicodemus, let me remind you of this. Unless something supernatural happens to your life, until God takes a life that has its origin in heaven, not life in this earth, until he replaces the life that you have in this earth with a life that has its origin in heaven, you can't even see the kingdom." The word "see" there has several implications. It means the location of, how to enter into it and enjoy the blessings of. He's saying, "Nicodemus, you might have all your theology right, but unless your heart changes and God does something supernatural, you will not even see the kingdom of heaven."

This whole theme is about...this is how one enters into the kingdom of God and this is how one lives as a kingdom citizen.

Let's talk about this description of blessedness. What does this mean? First of all, it comes from a Greek word makarios which literally means this—happy in spite of circumstances. That's what it means. It means you're not dictated by the external sources in which you find yourself or the circumstances in which you find yourself. There's a state of your being that transcends and supersedes the environment in which you find yourself and you are literally happy in spite of the circumstances. In other words there's a breeding of some consistency in your life regardless of what's going on around you. Now guys, that is not natural. That is contrary to absolute human nature. This is something that is supernatural. That's why we need to understand and never forget the supernatural of the Gospel.

When somebody is converted, it is something that has happened supernaturally. God has done something that we cannot do ourselves. We cannot take our own heart that is a heart of stone and transplant that with a heart of flesh. All of a sudden when you're regenerate, you have a new desire. You see, that desire is not there in human nature. We don't have that desire for God. God has to plant that within us. That's what regeneration does. He gives you this desire now to want to pursue spiritual things. Jesus is saying this is how that desire is cultivated in you. And really, the end result is this.

Regardless of your condition, remember, he's speaking to people who are downtrodden. He's moved with compassion. The most critical thing he could say is "blessed." Happy are you in spite of the circumstance in which you find yourself, but there are qualifiers for this. You've got to come into the kingdom of God before you understand the character qualities and receive this understanding of blessedness. It's far more than just being happy, as I'm going to go into here in a moment. Literally it means this. Happy in spite of the circumstances in which you find yourself.

What's the focus of happiness? Of this Greek word? Well we need to understand its meaning. Blessed or happy in spite of circumstances. It doesn't mean that you're having fun in your life. It's not about fun. It's not about pleasure. It's not about physical gratification. It's not about significance. It's not about security. It's not about any of those externals. What this happiness is, this Greek word makarios, literally means it's a deep sense, an underlying state of satisfaction. It's an attribute of life. It's a state of being in harmony with life and with God himself. It's literally a state of being in harmony with all that's going on in your life and with God together, and therefore and because of this harmony that you have between your life's situation and God himself, you find yourself in this blessed condition of being happy in spite of circumstances.

The sources of happiness are not found in this world. You don't find it in the world's system. It's not finding it in doing your own thing. It's not feeling a sense of freedom or independence, or in entertainment, or in constant activity. It's not busyness. It's a state of being that God implants in your life, at regeneration, that radically changes the desires that have in your heart, the way you think, the way you act, the attitudes that you have, and he begins to shape those to mirror the conduct of Christ. Jesus is saying in spite of your circumstances, you people who are grieving, there is a blessed condition you can have when you understand what it means to enter into the kingdom of God and become a kingdom citizen, and you live like that.

Now folks, that is radically different than anything the world's going to offer. We should never forget that this is something that only God can do. What I'm so struck by is the very first word that Jesus is speaking to a group of people who were downtrodden, he offers this word—happy in spite of circumstances.

***Don:** I think it's interesting, too, that the word, I have heard that word happy and the word happen come from the same root word, and so happy means your circumstances dictate the way you [UNCLEAR], because it just happens to work well for you, but this is far richer, blessed, the favor of God is upon you despite your circumstances.*

Excellent. The favor of God is upon you in spite of your circumstances. That's what it means to be a kingdom citizen.

Let me give you some more introduction to this. Joy is the state of the person. Happiness is the expression of the person. Joy is the state of the person. There's a difference between joy and happiness. Joy is the state of condition in which you find yourself, and happiness is the expression of that. There's a difference.

As Don just indicated, the world would say that your happiness is dictated because things just happen. If things happen correctly, then you're going to be happy. But you see, we're talking about something that is much deeper into the soul. It's basically saying that you have this state of condition, that within the context of your life, there's a wonderful harmony between you, your situation in life and your relationship to God the Father through God the Son. That creates a condition in you of joy. Now that joy that is expressed by your expressions of happiness because you understand what it means to be blessed. It's far deeper than just relating and responding to those things that are happening around you.

You see, joy begins when the journey begins. Joy begins when the journey begins. Happiness depends on the traveler, not on the journey. You see, joy starts at the beginning of the journey. That's because of the state of the condition in which you find yourself. Happiness comes, or blessedness comes not by passive waiting, but by active participation. In other words, this is just not something you sit back and let go and let God. There's active involvement here that you and I have because God now gives us the desire, when he regenerates us and changes our heart, and we now begin to realize that I'm entering into a state of joy because of my relationship to him. I have responsibilities to express that. That comes through our obedience.

Bill: *How is this blessing different than the Old Testament patriarchs when the child inherited the blessing? Like Jacob and Esau and sold his birthright for a bowl of stew [UNCLEAR]...after that, the father gave the blessing to Jacob rather than Esau.*

That's an external blessing that the father gave externally to the son. This is an internal blessing that God creates in a person.

Bill: *[UNCLEAR] we have that as a birthright because we're born of God? That blessing.*

Well we are all blessed of God because of his creation. Is that what you mean?

Bill: *No.*

I have no idea what you're talking about.

Bill: *We are regenerated, we are born from above, we become God's sons. Isn't that in a sense inheriting the...*

You're inheriting that blessing that God gives us. Yes. Jesus is taking this to a different level and says now this is how you live out that blessing. That's the kingdom movement. So yes, we are blessed of God when we become regenerate. God saves us. We then take on the blessing of God anointing us to be his children. Jesus is saying, "Now you begin to shape in the conduct that I have, and now you begin to live out that blessing," and that's a state of being blessed in all the conditions of your life." So it's an expression of the blessing that God gives us.

Ted: *I think, following up on Bill, I would say that the blessing that the patriarchs gave was a prototype, an Old Testament configuring of what was to take place in Matthew 5.*

Good thank you.

Don: *I'm sorry, Bruce, but...maybe I'm not. {LAUGHTER} All these Beatitudes that you're going to go into in-depth, but are these all, are these characteristics of a believer, of one who has been born again, or are these talking about unfortunate circumstances that people are in...for example, there are people who might think, "Well, look at me. Woe is me. I have no financial, I'm very physically poor," or "I'm mourning. Somebody has died." You see where I'm going with this? Is this talking about qualities of a kingdom citizen or is it talking about being blessed in spite of circumstances? Or both?*

It's a description of the qualities of a kingdom citizen. Now I tried last week to help you recognize...look how discouraging this would be to a non-believer. Pursue righteousness and be pure of heart. That's going to be absolutely discouraging to somebody who doesn't have the desire to do that. That's what I was trying to say last week. Until you're born again, this doesn't make any sense. These are character qualities of a person who has entered into the kingdom, and they're characteristics of a person who is a true believer, and so they are characteristics of a person who has been born again. It would be ludicrous for me to stand in front of a group of people who are non-believers and say, "Be pure in heart." How can I do that? I don't even want to do that. I don't even know what that means. That's discouraging.

These are characteristics of a person who's been born again. These are characteristics of a person who has entered into the kingdom and how they live. That's what Jesus is saying in the Beatitudes. He starts off by saying "blessed," but there's a reality that goes behind that blessedness that we're going to see what it means. Poor in spirit—it doesn't mean that you're poverty stricken. It means that you're a beggar spiritually. We need to understand that each one of these Beatitudes describes the condition of blessedness. You're blessed when you have this attitude because you now have this desire to be that kind of a person. It's really a description of a true believer. That's why when you look at verses 6-7:12 in the outline I just gave you, it is the conduct of the believer. The character of Christ is Chapter 5. The conduct of the believer is Chapter 6. So these are characteristics of a true believer who enters and now lives the kingdom citizen life.

Don: *But aren't these characteristics something we don't do, but the Holy Spirit produces in us, which creates the blessing.*

Oh absolutely. Absolutely. No question. This is supernatural work. That's why it's discouraging for me to preach to a non-believer and say be pure in heart, be poor in spirit. They'll say, "I don't want to be a beggar. Look, I've got my MBA from Harvard. You're telling me that I need to be a beggar. You're telling me I need to have [UNCLEAR] of life. Wait a minute! I've been to Andrew Carnegie. I've learned all this stuff. They tell me I need to puff myself up. I need to work on my self-esteem." You see, the non-believer is going to respond...this is going to be nonsense to a non-believer. They're not going to understand what it means to be poor in spirit. You can't do that unless God has changed your heart. You see, that's what I was trying to say last week, that this is really going to be discouraging for a non-believer because it makes no sense. The only ones to whom this makes any sense is somebody who has been regenerate, God has given you this desire in your heart to want to become this. That's the supernatural work, and that's what Jesus is saying. It's that person who's the blessed one. It's that person. This doesn't deal with your wealth. It doesn't deal with your health. It deals with your state of being about all of life. That's why it's so important to realize that this word "blessed" has conditions upon it. Those conditions are our response to the work of grace of God in our life. So there are some conditions to each one of these.

Happiness, or blessedness, is endless because it extends beyond life. It extends beyond life. This is the beginning of a journey, and it extends beyond life. Actually, when you look at the pursuit of happiness, or the pursuit of blessedness, is a duty that we have when you're pursuing it in the right means, in the right manner. There's nothing wrong with pursuing blessedness as long as we're doing it in the correct way and the correct manner, and that would be understanding through the Beatitudes.

***Audience Member:** I just wanted to say, on what you're saying, in the world we live in today with all the new age teaching and there's a big "S" on self, and so this bankrupt spirit is totally antithetical to teaching, and when you talk about that, it's blessed is the person who's poor in spirit, to expound on that, blessed is the person who recognizes they're poor in spirit because everybody is poor in spirit. All the bankrupt people are that way. It's the recognition...*

They just don't know it.

***Audience Member:** Exactly.*

We're going to get into each one of these Beatitudes. It may take us a whole week to go through the first one. The first one, in my judgment, is foundational to all the others. If you don't understand "blessed are the poor in spirit, what that means, all the others are going to be more difficult. So it's really foundational that we do a clear, get to the point of understanding what this first Beatitude, "blessed are the poor in spirit" means. We're going to start that next week. We're not going to do that today because we're still in the introduction phase, helping you get the big picture.

Happiness does not come through all the things which obviously cannot produce happiness, such as our idols. Now here's where we need to understand what idolatry is. Idolatry is trusting someone or something to give us only what God can give us. Who can give us blessedness? Only God can do that. You and I have a tendency in our human nature, in our fallen nature, in our depraved state, we have a tendency to look at things to give me the blessedness that I want to achieve and pursue. Those become idols. An idol is trusting someone, another person in your life, your wife, your children, your marriage—I don't know what your idols are—but any time you're trusting someone or something to give you only what God can give you, you've made it an idol. That's why we're told in the Ten Commandments, don't have any idols. Get rid of the idols.

For me, as I've told you over the years, one of my idols was being a father. I just wanted to be a dad. I was so fortunate that the Lord was pleased to give me the father that I had. My whole dream was I just want the chance to be a dad like my dad was a dad to me. The Lord, in his providence, has seen that not to happen in my life. I have no children of my own. I have two step-children, but I don't have my natural blood line. For years, guys, I really struggled with if I could just become a dad, I'll be okay; my life will be complete. Yeah, I'm a Naval Academy grad. That's wonderful. But if I could just, just give me the chance to be a dad. Well that's not ever happened to me, and it won't happen to me. It took me at least 20 years to struggle with that one issue in my life. It wasn't until I realized that I had taken a very, very good thing, a very good, honorable thing, fatherhood, and I made it an idol. Because I was saying, "If I can just become a dad, I'm going to be blessed. I'm going to have this happiness in spite of circumstances. That's all I'm looking for." It wasn't until I realized that I had made an idol out of something that was really good, and I had to confess that as sin. It wasn't until I said, "Father, forgive me for making this good thing called fatherhood an idol," and when I confessed that as sin, it was a sin in my life, all of a sudden, I was set free from that.

The freedom came in stages. It didn't come immediately. Angels didn't bounce off the walls. It came in stages because there was a state of being that affected me gradually because I began to realize this, "I'm

blessed in spite of the circumstances of not being a dad, so quit griping. Get on with your life. Enjoy it. Enjoy the happiness that you have by being blessed even though you're not a father, because you made that an idol."

Brothers, I don't know what your idols are. It might be your marriage. I know some young people say, "If I could just get married." What do we do in the Christian circles? I went through this for years. Some of you guys may have gone through this, "Bruce, when are you going to become complete? You're single. When are you going to become complete?" "Well Colossians says I'm complete in Christ. I didn't know a woman was going to do that." {LAUGHTER} But yet people well meaning; they were meaning well. They just said, "Bruce, there's something lacking in your life. You need to be married. When are you going to become complete?" Sometimes we even make something as good as marriage, a relationship, you make it an idol because you're trusting it to give you only the blessedness that God can give you in his grace.

***Audience Member:** They usually have the right person in mind, too.*

Oh, they do. {LAUGHTER} And my opinion is never asked.

***Bob:** I just wanted to mention, in a manner of speaking, you're a father to all of us.*

I understand that.

***Bob:** We thank you for that.*

Amen. Thank you. I'm really blessed. I'm really blessed in that. You see, I had to go through that and realize that I had made an idol of something because I was saying that this thing, this wonderful relationship, will give me exactly what blessedness means, that's something that's a function of the grace of God, not anything that we can achieve.

We need to understand the pursuit of blessedness is fine as long as you don't pursue it incorrectly through idols. It may be that your idol is a position. It might be power. I don't know what it might be. But brothers, one of the great hindrances to our understanding this concept of being blessed is understanding that we've got to get rid of our idols because it'll be an interference.

***Audience Member:** I think metaphorically what Bill was saying about Jacob trying to receive the blessing from his father, was the same that we were doing when the angel of God wrestled with Jacob, he gave him the blessing internally.*

Sure. Yeah. This is an internal blessing that changes the desire of everything, how you look at life.

***Don:** It's been said that you really can't say and mean, "All I need is Jesus," until all you have is Jesus.*

Correct. And you can't say all I need is Jesus until you realize you have absolutely nothing. That's poor in spirit. You can't say that until you understand I have no resources in my own life. We're going to talk about that next week. So come with your thinking cap on next week because it's critical that we understand the most foundational of all of these Beatitudes, and that's the first one. What does it mean to be poor in spirit? It is absolutely contrary to the American way of life. I'm not attacking America. I'm just saying it's contrary to everything that we learn in our human existence in the world's system. We'll spend some time on that one next week.

True happiness is only found in following sort of a biblical pattern that we're going to go through in

these Beatitudes. First of all, godly living comes through obedience. We need to understand that as we go through these Beatitudes, there is a requirement for us, that there are some conditions imposed upon the person who is blessed. Not only are there responsibilities, but there are some duties that we have to make sure that we are feeding and our understanding our understanding of being poor in spirit and merciful and so forth.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. What is our responsibility? It's to give away what God has given you. What has he given you? Mercy. The one thing, brothers, that you and I should never run out of is what? Mercy. Why is that? Because you're not the source of it. God's the source of mercy. He was merciful to you when he granted you saving faith. You've got all the mercy you're ever going to need. It's just that we don't want to use it, because I think I have a right. I have a right. Now I'm entitled to be angry. I'm entitled not to be merciful because look what she did to me. Look what he did to me. Look how she treats me. Treats me with a lack of respect. No dignity. I have a right to defend myself. Oh really? Scripture says be merciful. There's an obedience there. That's not easy. That's where the desire of the Holy Spirit has to penetrate your heart. This is so discouraging to a non-believer who doesn't have that desire, "You're telling me to be merciful to somebody who just stabbed me in the back. That's ridiculous!" It is ridiculous until God changes your heart through regeneration and gives you that desire.

***Audience Member:** How about patience? [UNCLEAR]...*

Moving on. {LAUGHTER} Don said, "Lord give it to me and I want it right now." {LAUGHTER} I think I told you this story. My first church in Kansas, we were talking about the holiness of God in a series from the pulpit. A very gracious elderly woman, very mature in her faith, came up to me one Sunday and said, "You know, Pastor Bruce, I just want you to know that this week I've been doing everything that you've been teaching us from the pulpit in your sermons of these past several weeks. It's just been wonderful because this is the first week in my life that I lived a sinlessly perfection life." I said, "I'll bet your proud of that, aren't you?" She said, "Yes." {LAUGHTER} So we have to be careful. Patience.

Another way of our following a biblical pattern not only by being obedient, but it's taking on the character qualities of Christ. That's what these Beatitudes are. They're character qualities. We're trusting what God gives us, and we give that away. We get our eyes off of self and get our eyes on other people. We need to be not self-centered, but we need to be other-centered.

One of the things we're going to see in these Beatitudes, the kingdom citizen is other-centered. Now I have a close friend in church who has a young son who's a wonderfully brilliant young man. But he's extremely self-centered. I was talking with the family, "How do we get him out of this self-centeredness?" I said, "The only way you can really do that apart from grace is to help him become other-centered. Get his mind off of himself." You see, that's the danger of self-esteem. Self-esteem is the disease, in my opinion, not the cure. It's basically saying you need to think more about yourself than you do other people. The way to deal with your self-esteem is do something for somebody else and watch how you feel. That's contrary to our human nature because we think we have rights and I'm entitled. I need to think about me. So we spend all this money training youth about developing a core being of being focusing upon their self and self-esteem, when really we need to be teaching them to think of other people. But that's not easy to do unless you're a believer. One of the things we're going to see in this whole series of the Beatitudes is it's going to help us become other-centered rather than self-centered.

Moving on, you'll see here on your outline those who are blessed will generally be profoundly happy because happiness is an expression of their joy. But blessedness cannot be reduced to pure happiness.

We need to be careful that we're not saying that blessedness is a synonym of happiness. We can bless God and God can bless us; therefore, the whole concept of being blessed means fundamentally to be approved by God to find approval. Literally that's what it means. To be blessed means to find God's approval. What Jesus is teaching us in these Beatitudes is this is how you become approved of God. This is how you become approved. So blessedness cannot be limited to happiness. It transcends something far greater than that. It literally means this—you found God's approval. You blessed him and he's blessed you and you're happy in spite of circumstances, and happiness becomes the expression of your joy.

The question we have to ask ourselves as we move through these Beatitudes, guys is this. Whose blessing do we seek? That's a tough question. Whose blessing do I really seek today? Boy, that's a battleground, isn't it? At least it is for me. Whose blessing do I really seek today? My boss? My wife? My kids? My family? My church? Whomever. My friends? Whose blessing do you really seek? You see, that's the root of being blessed. It's the whole idea of whose approval do you seek? That's the concept of being happy in spite of circumstances.

You see, God's blessing is always correlated with the condition of each Beatitude. As we go through these Beatitudes, we're going to see that each of them has a condition behind it. Blessed are the poor in spirit, and then there's a result—for theirs is the kingdom of God. So we'll see that.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, could you clarify the blessedness as being the approval of God as opposed to our somehow achieving the approval of God? Sometimes this gets mixed up [UNCLEAR]. Isn't the blessing the approval is what I'm trying to say.*

Good question. Blessed is not something you achieve, it is something you receive. It is something that God gives you at regeneration. In other words, he now gives you the desire. Now with that blessedness comes a responsibility that we have to exercise and operate within the umbrella or the realm of that blessedness. That's what we call obedience. We do not achieve this; we receive it, because at justification, you're given what? Absolute approval, because you get credit for sinless perfection and perfect obedience. That's why when you look at the cross, and Jesus says, "It is finished," he did not, at that statement, say, "that I'm making your salvation possible," he said, "I am making it accomplished. I accomplished your salvation; I didn't make it possible."

Look at this logically. If you believe in a works-oriented salvation, that you can earn your salvation and therefore earn the blessedness of God, through your efforts, you have to remove that statement from the cross, "It is finished," because it's not finished. You're basically saying, "The job isn't done yet and I'm the one who's going to finish it." At the cross, you have to remove, "It is finished." You now have to say, Jesus would say, "It's up to you." But he didn't say that. He said, "It is finished." What is the "it?" "Your salvation has been achieved. Now by faith, you receive that salvation. It's achieved. You have God's approval because I accomplished that for you." Now what Jesus is saying, the word "blessed" is you begin after you receive that, you begin to live that out and express that in your conduct as a kingdom citizen. That's how this all fits together. It is not something that we achieve; it is something we receive. But that's a significant statement. For those of you who would hold the issue that you can earn your salvation, you've got to get rid of the statement, "It is finished." It would have to be replaced with, "There's something left to be done." What is that? It's whatever I choose to do, to think that I can earn my way.

***Audience Member:** That's Ephesians 2:8-9. We're saved by grace alone, and that not of ourselves.*

Yeah. You see, it's finished. It's finished.

***Audience Member:** Even as a believer, though, a lot of times, after people get and the kingdom, or*

believe, sometimes we get this impression that now it's time to really crank up our work.

Yeah. Now you see, often times, we realize this. I agree that we're saved by grace, but I maintain by works. You maintain by how? Grace. It's all of grace. Now works become the expression of what? Gratitude. It's a gratitude expression of the grace that God's given you. You're saved by grace and you're maintained by grace. That's why you have the wonderful doctrine of the perseverance or the preservation of the saints. Who preserves you? God does that. I don't preserve myself. The reason I persevere, have the desire to do that, is because Christ has preserved me. So I persevere. But you see, that's something that he does. So not only are we saved by grace, but you're maintained by grace. You've got to be careful of this higher life theory that says you're saved [UNCLEAR] but you've got to add these things to it. No, we add things to it; our good works are expressions of gratitude for the saving grace of God. We'll get into that as we go through these Beatitudes. That's a good question.

Tom: *Wouldn't you say the Beatitudes are not things that we're supposed to do, as much as these are the characteristics we are to become?*

Absolutely. That's what Jesus says. Notice what he doesn't do. He doesn't say, "Here's our strategic plan for beginning the movement called the kingdom of God." He doesn't hand them a three-year strategic plan or bring in a consultant and say we're going to pay him \$25 grand to tell us what to do. He never tells them what to do. He says, "This is who you're going to become." You see, the kingdom of God is becoming, and it's a result of that becoming, that desire that God implants in you at regeneration, you now have a desire to do things that reflect your becoming. It's an expression. That's why I tried to simplify the outline of this. Chapter 5 is the character of Christ, Chapter 6 is the conduct of the believer. There's a direct correlation between our understanding the character of Christ and our conduct as children of the kingdom, through kingdom citizenship.

Bishop Rogers: *That's why verse 10 is attached on to 8 and 9 in Ephesians 2.*

Absolutely.

Bishop Rogers: *Ought not leave it off.*

That's right. Good works that God prepared beforehand. You see, that's the expression of our gratitude. We ought to be about good works.

Let me give you a stupid illustration. You've see me do this. Those of you who have been with me for 16 years, just hang on. {LAUGHTER} The most natural thing for a kingdom citizen is to bear fruit. The most natural thing in the world for a Christian to bear fruit.

I'm a tree. I'm an apple tree. Did you ever see a tree grunt? Did you ever see an apple to bear fruit go like this? "Hmmmmm! Uhhhhh! I wish I can. I think I can. Come on! Hmmmmmm! If I just try a little harder." All of a sudden, "Uhhhhh," pop, there's an apple. It doesn't work that way in the kingdom. Here's the way it works in the kingdom. [pause]

Don: *How does it work in the kingdom?*

You just bear fruit. {LAUGHTER} Hey, Don, I didn't fly the [UNCLEAR] for nothing. You stand by. I owe you. {LAUGHTER} Anyway...oh humility is wonderful. {LAUGHTER}

Audience Member: *It's giving us all a good laugh.*

That's right. Bearing fruit for the believer is the most natural thing there is. As Bishop Rogers reminded us of this—we're saved by grace, but there's four of the good works that God has prepared beforehand. And brother's there are things that you will do today that I can't do, and the person sitting right beside you cannot do because they were prepared for you. You alone. Take great comfort in that. When you leave this room, there's going to be good works that you will do today that nobody else in the history of the universe can ever do because you are right there at this point in time that God has ordained them in his providence that you are the one to do it. Just let it happen. You see, you don't have to grunt.

Now I'm not saying that you're irresponsible. Yes, there's duty. Yes, there's obedience. But I'm saying the result of that is, as we're going to see in these Beatitudes, there's an expression of the conduct of the believer that is reflective of the character of Christ because of the desire God has implanted in you at your conversion. This is a message for the kingdom of God people. This is how we become mission minded-members of a movement motivated by mercy for ministry in the marketplace. This is our movement, guys. We're going to study the movement of how we get into that.

These first and last Beatitudes promise the same thing. There's what we would call an inclusion. Everything bracketed between the first two can readily be included under one theme, and that is this: the kingdom of heaven. You'll notice the first one, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and the last one, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." You see, everything else is in between those two things, and the whole issue of the Beatitudes is this: the kingdom of heaven.

We have a few moments in closing. I think it would be appropriate that we just remind ourselves of something about resurrection Sunday coming up this Lord's Day, so let me take you to the book of Acts. Turn with me to Acts 2, just very briefly. I want you to see, brothers, the reality and the results of the resurrection. As you know, Easter is not a Christian term. Easter is the holiday established after the goddess Eostre, who is the goddess of light and fertility. The resurrection was only added onto the Easter celebration several centuries ago. Prior to the resurrection being associated with Easter, there was a whole series of Easter celebrations, of which the primary one was the Easter egg, because it was the sign of fertility. It was also the symbol of the moon. That's why Easter is picked to be at a certain in the year because it's a reflection of the position of the moon. That all goes back to the pagan holiday of Eostre (Easter).

Secondly, rabbits was introduced because there's a tradition that says there was a German woman who was putting eggs for her children in the orphanage, and she went behind this one bush and a rabbit came out. All of a sudden, the tradition began that the Easter bunny brought these eggs. So you begin to see that there's a whole mish mash of stuff we call Easter. But Easter is not a Christian term.

We need to be celebrating the resurrection, not Easter Sunday, resurrection Sunday. Now let me just give you an illustration quickly. I wish I had more time to do this, but I just think it's important that we set our minds right as we worship this Lord's Day and celebrate resurrection Sunday, but not Easter.

In Peter's great sermon, in Acts 2:22-33, I want to read this for you and then just quickly give you an outline of it, "²²Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—²³this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵For David says concerning him, "'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness

with your presence. ²⁹Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³²This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.”

Very quickly, wonderful sermon on the resurrection. Peter deals with two things—the reality and the results of the resurrection. The reality is this—he says, “Jesus was a real man. God is a real God. Jesus experienced a real crucifixion and a real death.” He’s dealing with facts. He’s not dealing with superstitions or prophetic utterances; he’s dealing with facts. Jesus was a real man. God worked through him. God is a real God. He went through a real crucifixion and he experienced a real death.

He’s agreeing with his adversary. These are his adversaries whom he’s talking to. He’s saying, “I’m just going to deal with the facts—a real man, a real god, a real crucifixion and real death.” That’s the reality. Now the results are multiple. Read the rest of the passage. Do you realize that the resurrection is more for God than it is for us? It’s more about God than it is you and me. There are four results that Peter gives us in that passage.

First of all, for us, death was conquered (verse 33). Death was conquered. For Christ, his position was exalted. His position was exalted—sits at the right hand of God the Father. For God, his Word was validated. How is his Word validated? Because Peter quoted David. He quoted the Psalms. He quoted what David had said in Psalm 16. So first of all, you see it’s really for the glory of the Trinity that the resurrection occurs. For Christ, it’s his position is exalted. For God his Word is validated. For us death is conquered. And lastly, for the Holy Spirit, his ministry is commissioned. His ministry is commissioned. You see the work of the Holy Spirit right now. You see, the resurrection caused those four things, and the result of the resurrection are really for God more than us.

Yes, we receive the benefit of the resurrection, but it’s really for the glory of god. You see, for Christ he is now exalted at the right hand of the Father, where he intercedes for us (Romans 8). He’s interceding for us as a result of the resurrection. God’s Word is validated as a result of the resurrection. You and I can now study the Scripture with confidence and know that it is the truth. Look at Psalm 22. It’s a foretelling of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. It was written several hundred years before the Hebrews even knew what a crucifixion was. They had no idea what a crucifixion was. They were not under Roman bondage yet, and all of a sudden, you’ve got the Psalmist talking about a crucifixion and a resurrection. How did he know about that? That wasn’t part of their culture. It was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. You see, you and I can realize that God’s Word has been validated by the resurrection. You can read it because it’s true. You can trust it because it’s true.

For God, his Word was validated. For us death is conquered. For Christ, his position is exalted. His person exalted. And lastly, for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it was his commissioning day. Now the Holy Spirit does what? He convicts us of our sin, he convinces us of our sin, he converts us from our sin, he comforts us in our new way of life, and he counsels us in our life’s journey. You see, the Holy Spirit now has been unleashed upon the world. Our greatest weapon is the proclamation of truth. What is his role description? To guide us into all truth. The moment you and I begin to play around with lessening the truth of the Scripture, we begin to eliminate the work of the Holy Spirit because his role is to guide people into all truth. Resurrection caused that.

So guys, there are results of the resurrection that you and I need to worship on Sunday. As we go to our house of worship this Lord’s Day, may we just be reflective of the magnificence of the significance of a

Trinity being glorified by the resurrection. Easter Sunday, guys, is not about you. It's not about me. It's not about us. It's about the glory of God. It's about the glory of God. Let's just rejoice this Lord's Day as we worship and celebrate our wonderful resurrection day. Charles Spurgeon says this, "Every day for the believer is a resurrection day," and may it be so for Jesus' sake. And all of God's men said...Amen!

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the power of your Word. We thank you that your Word has been validated by the resurrection. We thank you that your Son's person has been exalted by the resurrection. We thank you that your Holy Spirit's ministry was commissioned by the resurrection. Lord, we thank you that death was conquered for us for your glory and our benefit because of the resurrection. May we come into our places of worship this Lord's Day with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the results of the resurrection for eternity, for your glory. Amen!