

Matthew 5:1-12    Second Baptist Church, Lincoln, NE  
January 17, 2010

Jesus First: Model for Humanity

<sup>1</sup> Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down.

His disciples came to him,

<sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

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

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

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

What would Jesus do? That was the bracelet, t-shirts and bumper stickers of the 1990s. But you may not know this: it was also a popular phrase 100 years before that in 1896 when Charles Sheldon wrote the book, *In His Steps*. The subtitle was, "*What Would Jesus Do.*" With the republishing of his work in the 1990s, the phrase "WWJD" became popular and teenagers wore the wristbands and adults sported the bumper stickers. Sheldon wrote the book from his Christian Socialism perspective to awaken people to the needs of the poor, with Jesus being more of a moral example than a Savior. By no means was this the first book of its kind nor was it the last. Thomas a' Kempis wrote the great Catholic book "*The Imitation of Christ*" in the year 1418. It basically was a primer on living a closer walk with God by walking in the steps of Jesus.

My goal in this series of sermons this month is to challenge myself and each of you to become better acquainted with Jesus. I want us to be able to define his character as well as his mission. Two weeks ago we focused in on his role as Savior. He came for the purpose of dying on the cross so that we would not be condemned, but instead have opportunity for eternal life.

Last week we discussed his identity as both a human being and as the eternal God. He identified with us by becoming flesh, but he never ceased being God.

This morning, I want to do what Charles Sheldon did by lifting up Jesus as a moral role model for us as we try to live like Christ. Hopefully, we ask that question on a regular basis, “What would Jesus do?” In our text today, we get a glimpse of the heart of Jesus as he recites the beatitudes. What we see is a definition and description of the life of a person who is immersed in living a life consistent with God’s kingdom. This is a WWJD text simply because each of the characteristics like: poor in spirit, mourner, meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, etc. – are all descriptions of the character of Christ. Jesus has authority to recite these beatitudes because #1, he is the SON OF GOD and #2, THESE ARE DESCRIPTIVE OF HIM. From poor in spirit all the way to persecuted for righteousness sake describe him. We can find texts throughout the gospels that match these various characteristics.

This morning, I am going to describe what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. I don’t claim to have mastered this, but scripture gives us some ideas about what it means to follow Jesus as our example.

### *Poor in Spirit*

Verse 3 says, “**Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**” Some might question how Jesus is *poor in spirit*” Is he not spiritually rich, being the son of God and existing within the spiritual realms since before the beginning of time? This term does not mean that someone has a lousy spirit. It doesn’t mean their spirit is poor. It means they have a spirit that sees through the eyes of poverty and lives a simple life with little regard to financial wealth. Let’s examine what the term *poor in spirit* means. To be poor in spirit is to recognize that all we really have is God’s gift: our very existence, our families, our health, our talents, our situations in life-- and even our successes. This poverty perfectly describes Jesus who did not come to earth to amass wealth – in fact the prophets said he didn’t even have a place to lay his head. He owned the clothes on his back and stayed in the homes of followers. He was able to focus on his mission or redemption by maintaining a poor spirit. This attitude of humility in the context of the harsh realities of life makes a person open to receive the blessings of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus offers here.

Jesus later demonstrates this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man had focused all his attention on the material wealth of life and had ignored the poor beggar Lazarus – but it was Lazarus who enjoyed eternal rewards in heaven.

*Blessed are those who mourn. (v. 4)*

Those who are spiritually poor also mourn their losses in life. Whether it be losing our wealth, our job, or most importantly our loved ones, we are then open to receiving the help that comes from God. The person who is self-sufficient and in need of nothing is not usually open to the comfort and help from God. In fact, they are feeling pretty smug about life and their successes and gains. When it is all taken away and is replaced by mourning, they are more ready to experience the spirit of God. The Psalmist understood this when he wrote, **“<sup>136</sup>Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.”** The mourning and grieving leads to a desperation whereby we cry out to God for his help and strength – and it is then that we receive the comfort from him. We also know that this is a characteristic of Jesus. He wept over the death of his friend Lazarus. He wept over the city of Jerusalem when he considered her coldness and rejection of the things of God.

*Blessed are the Meek... (5:5)*

Jesus could be both meek and mild and he could be bold and aggressive. Yet we see the harsh behavior when he dealt with the religious people who were self-righteous and hypocritical. On the other hand, when he was with the weak (like the sick and lame) or with the sinners (the tax collectors, the woman caught in adultery or the Woman at the well), he was meek and docile. We have conflicting messages of how we should behave in our society. Meekness in its simplest definition means “gentleness.” It’s one of the *Fruits of the Spirit*. The Bible tells us to be meek and gentle with people, but our society says to stand up and be strong and don’t let anyone get the upper hand on you. Jesus reserved meekness for those who had been so brutally treated by society that they needed a tender touch to their wounded soul. On the other hand, he levied harshness and aggressiveness against those who had been brutal in their treatment of others.

Meek does not mean WEAK. A.W. Tozer once wrote, “The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life.”

MLK Jr. was MEEK. He spoke boldly, yet his approach was non-violence at a time when others like Malcolm X and the Black Panthers were encouraging violence. I hope that we will always err on the side of meekness in how we treat each others. In a church conflict, meekness is a far greater tool when our desire is to find common ground and peace. These people will gain a reputation as a peacemaker and will in essence – inherit the earth.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*

There are a lot of things in this world that are sought after aggressively by people with insatiable appetites. Read the daily news of online scams that started up immediately in the wake of the Haiti earthquake in order to swindle people during a time of international tragedy. We hear of people with voracious hunger for sexual fulfillment, other who have an unhealthy appetite for other pleasures of the world. The flip side of this is what we see in the beatitude: Hunger for healthy, productive, pure and righteous things. Jesus taught this and led by example. He said if your eye offends you, remove it. If you had a limb that offends you, cut it off. It is better to enter heaven as an amputee or blind man than to enter hell as a sinner.

Those who have a hunger for righteousness will not only remain pure, but they will bless the lives of others by committing unselfish acts of kindness toward others. If you hunger for righteousness, you will be filled with a divine satisfaction that nurtures the soul.

*Blessed are the merciful.*

A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and justice demanded death. "But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained. "I plead for mercy." "But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied. "Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for." "Well, then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son.

Mercy is often seen as stupid and senseless because in our culture, justice is so revered. Dave Ramsey on his radio show always responds the same way when some begins the on-air conversation with "How are you." He says, "Better than I deserve." All of us are better off than we deserve. We are sinners condemned by our very actions, but Christ's death brought us life.

When the woman was brought to Jesus to be stoned because of an adulterous affair, Jesus said to her accusers, “**You who is without sin cast the first stone.**” When they all dropped their stones and walked away, “**Jesus said, “Woman, where are your accusers?”** He then said, “**Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.**”

*Blessed are the pure in heart*

In the sixth beatitude, Jesus goes to the core of human life, the heart. This is not unique to his teaching because the Old Testament also emphasized purity and how this single-minded loyalty to the things of God will affect every area of their lives. The result of living a pure life with eyes focused on the standard that God sets, is that we SHALL SEE GOD.

*Blessed are the Peacemakers*

In the time of Jesus, the Jewish zealots were trying to restore national strength and self-rule against the Romans by inciting violence. Some were even hoping Jesus would be the kind of Messiah who would lead them into battle against the Romans. But he came with a message of peace. It was more in what he demonstrated when he was led as a lamb to the slaughter during his arrest, trial and execution.

Peacemakers bring enemies together and form friendships and bond. Peacemakers are part of the whole persona of the Messiah who was described by Isaiah as “The Prince of Peace. Those who are peacemakers will be called Sons of God.

*Blessed are those who are Persecuted because of Righteousness.*

Keep in mind that these Beatitudes are not pre-requisites for going to heaven, otherwise persecution and martyrdom would be the way to salvation. Rather, Jesus is comforting those who might have suffered persecution and encouraging those who might face it in the future.

Those who face persecution and martyrdom? Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The rewards of having suffered are relief from the suffering of this life.

*BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN PEOPLE INSULT YOU.*

Now it seems that Jesus is talking straight to the disciples rather than the crowds because he uses the word “YOU”. He knew that they would be mocked and insulted because of following him.

Conclusion....

These beatitudes demonstrate the character and person of Jesus. It answers that question, "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?" by laying out a series of standards by which the follower of Jesus can live.

There is no need for any of us to go around confused as to how we should represent Christ. There is no reason to be baffled by that question, "What would Jesus do?" when we have the answers scattered throughout the four gospels.

Just in these few verses in Matthew 5, we get a category by category outline of how to live our lives for him. Do these characteristics match your behavior and lifestyle? Is this how you treat others? Amen