

**The Beatitudes:
The New Character of the
Kingdom**

By Keith Greer

As we begin to study this wonderful sermon, referred to by many as "The Beatitudes," we need to understand that they tell us how Christians MUST BE to enter the kingdom. This is what God desires from His children. All Christians are expected to implement all of these characteristics, not just a few, or a "special one." Each trait builds on the one that precedes it. All of them, when put to good use, make us more effective and pleasing in His kingdom. Are these traits what we might think of as "natural tendencies"? No. Each of us must work on and perfect them. We must adapt them to the way we live and interweave them into all parts of our lives as God's children.

Why? Many times, we lose sight of why we need to develop these qualities. By having them, we exhibit the difference between those in the world, and we who are striving to walk in His ways. When Christians are like the world, or when the world is allowed to come into the church, how do we attract those who are outside of Christ? From the beginning, God wanted His people to be different from those in the world. In His kingdom, the emphasis is on our attitudes.

Jesus pronounces a series of blessings. One who would be a fit subject for His kingdom must exhibit a proper attitude. The heart must be prepared for entrance into this spiritual kingdom. These blessings are the highest form of true happiness man can attain with moral and spiritual prosperity. They are supreme blessings fellowship with God in time and eternity. Citizenship in the kingdom is the avenue where these blessings are found. God does not want us to misunderstand what He expects of His children and what He offers. The inner man's character is what makes him a fit subject for the new kingdom.

POOR IN SPIRIT. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." {Matthew 5:3} This opposes the thinking of our day when the wealthy and powerful are seen as the only ones who are rich. Spiritual poverty contrasts with self-sufficiency. To be truly poor in spirit is to be destitute of the spirit's need and to realize it! He who is poor in spirit depends wholly on God. He must come to grips with reality. The unsaved person needs God; he needs Jesus; he needs faith; he needs a remedy for his sins; and he

needs hope. Read Ephesians 2:12. One who delights in being unsaved feels no desire to have his sin removed. He must be humbled at his own weakness and understand his total dependency on God. This is the foundation, the fundamental trait that is needed by the one who would come and bow at the cross. Can one come to Christ without "yielding" himself? The one who finds the kingdom of heaven seeks with a "poor spirit."

THOSE WHO MOURN. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." {Matthew 5:4} This is true, deep, acute sorrow for sin. It is intense sorrow, sincere grief for the pain our actions caused God. This is sorrow for sin, and it must exist before God can comfort. Godly sorrow must be evident. "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." {2 Corinthians 7:10} The one who comes to God must exhibit a deep, penitent spirit. Only by understanding sin's destructive nature can one realize a contrite heart. How can God control the heart where there is no remorse for sin committed against Him? When one comes to this type of "mourning," God is truly the only one who can give comfort, because He can forgive sins. Man cannot be forgiven without "mourning" his condition.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK. "Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth." {Matthew 5:4} What does the word meek mean? Meekness is a Christian virtue. It means "Consistent mildness and gentleness of temper; gentle; humble, easily entreated; modest; longsuffering." Galatians 5:22,23 has it listed as one of the fruits of the Spirit. Many Bible characters had this quality in their lives. "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth." {Numbers 12:3} Moses was a man of great courage and leadership; yet, he had a meek spirit. Our Lord was a man of meekness as He lived before man. He possessed a perfect combination of courage, strength, and meekness to be submissive to His Father's will.

Meekness must be directed toward God and man. We must receive God's word with meekness. "Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." {James 1:21} One must be able to give, with meekness, a reason for his hope. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." {1 Peter 3:15} Restoration of the fallen must be done with a meek spirit. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any

trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." {Galatians 6:1} This is an inner quality, a willingness to submit, and not be controlling. It means treating others gently, even when I have been wronged by them. I must accept, without murmuring or complaining, what God called me to do.

What is "inheriting the earth"? The meek enjoy this earth, this life, with blessings a hundred-fold--true abundance. Understanding earth's temporal nature--that it is just a stepping stone to the next world--leads us to conclude that the meek do not inherit this physical earth. It will be destroyed when God's Son returns (2 Peter 3:4-11). Abraham looked beyond this world (Hebrews 11:10), so does the one whose spirit is "meek."

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled." {Matthew 5:5} He speaks of an intense longing, craving, starving for spiritual food and drink. The heart has a burning, intense desire to be right before God. How can this "hunger" be satisfied? Read Isaiah 55:1-3. According to Paul, (Romans 1:16), God's power is in His word. Righteousness is revealed in the good book. Why should we hunger? Our sins have separated us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). Man needs to find his way back and be reconciled to God. Going through motions will not place us in God's kingdom. A deep sincere craving to be right with God must be the only motive for coming to God. Why do so many wait? Could it be that they have no intense burning or desire to be right! This is an appetite which each person must develop for himself. Do you study? Do you meditate on, and desire to spend time with, His word? If not, you may be "hungering and thirsting" after the wrong things. Read Romans 3:23-27. When one gets caught up in life, he loses his desire for spiritual things. Do you have a difficult time picking up your Bible for personal study? It contains the words of life. What could be more important than taking time to read it? In order to be right with God, we must consult God's book. Who do you hunger after?

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL. "Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy." {Matthew 5:7} What is mercy? "Pity; a will to relieve those who are in need; active kindness for those in trouble. A feeling of pity seen in active service." A true and tender desire to help others and to seek for opportunity to do so. God's people have always

been admonished to have this characteristic (Exodus 22:21; Deuteronomy 23:19,20; Hosea 6:6). However, the greatest mercy ever extended is found in God's kingdom. In this kingdom, forgiveness of sins is possible. But there is a condition--we must forgive others. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." {Matthew 6:14,15} We know God offers forgiveness through His Son's shed blood. Read Hebrews 8:12. God extends mercy to all who will come to Him. Christians must have this same trait in their lives. Read Ephesians 4:32; 1 Corinthians 13:6,7; Acts 7:59,60. I must have a merciful spirit toward helping with the needs of my fellowman. "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." {Galatians 6:9,10} We cannot expect to receive God's mercy if we do not extend mercy to others.

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." {Matthew 5:8} Man's heart is the source of all he is. His mind must be clean, clear, unsoiled, and free of worldly pollution. This controls his behavior in God's kingdom. Purity of heart involves three things: **ATTITUDE**--Proverbs 23:7; **THOUGHTS**--Matthew 12:34,35; **MOTIVES**--Matthew 6:20-24. The heart is the seat of affection, understanding, will, and emotion. God looks directly into our hearts. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." {Hebrews 4:13} The heart controls the whole man. "Keep your heart with all diligence. For out of it spring the issues of life." {Proverbs 4:23} How important is having a pure heart? Without a pure heart, I do not see God! Jesus is not speaking of physical sight, but of seeing with a pure heart that is undefiled with this world's thoughts, which seek to corrupt it. Who controls your heart--God or Satan? If you desire to one day see God, you must strive to have a pure heart!

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS. "Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called the sons of God." {Matthew 5:9} One who seeks peace seeks to make peace, not only for himself, but also for others. This is not civil peace, but a spiritual peace. First and foremost, man must be at peace with His Creator. How does he achieve this? Only by submitting to God's will. Romans 5:1; Philippians 4:7. We cannot be at peace with God until we are at peace with our brethren. 1 John 2:9-11; 4:19-21. Then we must seek to be at peace with all men. "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably

with all men." {Romans 12:18} We must follow after things that make for peace. All people need to reconcile to God. When we do, we become "His children." God's children seek for ways to bring about peace--not strife. Are you seeking after peace in your life?

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." {Matthew 5:10} Self-preservation is said to be the first law of nature. Men who are deeply devoted to the Master count it a joy to be persecuted. "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." {Acts 5:41} "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church." {Colossians 1:24} "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." {Revelation 12:11}

Man's love for carnality and sin causes him to reject the kingdom, truthful preaching, and those who strive to live godly lives. Why? Because men who live faithfully before God expose the sins of others. How do they react? By telling lies, impugning motives, misrepresenting, painting ugly pictures of the good man's character, and issuing threats. He may be trying to save their souls by pointing them to Christ? The early fathers were persecuted; the prophets were rejected; the apostles were mistreated; and Christ Himself was taken and hung on a tree! Will we escape persecution? "... and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." {2 Timothy 3:12}

If we remain steadfast, faithful, uncompromising, standing our ground, and allowing ourselves to be mistreated for the cause of Christ will it be worth it? "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." {Matthew 5:12} After the proving and testing, comes the reward. Remember our Lord. When His enemies led him to the cross, they must have thought they had finally defeated Him. But three days later, the Lord won the final victory! He withstood all that Satan and man could do to Him. We need to have this same commitment to the Father. Let us not make excuses, be resentful, bitter, or seek pity. Understand what is truly at stake here. This is how we get to heaven! The reward

will not be for those who are faint of heart! "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls." {1 Peter 1:6-9}

Do you want to be a real winner in life? Citizenship in the kingdom comes at a price. Are you willing to endure pain and pay the cost? Fully understand that we are not the first to suffer for the cause of Christ; nor will be the last. Yet, with all who have endured before us, we will share in victory. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" {Romans 8:31}

How many of these beatitudes do you have? Are you adding and refining them daily? God is not going to negotiate with us. If we desire to enter His kingdom, we must add these qualities to our faith. The decision is personal. If we hope to one day sit around the throne of glory, we must develop these traits in our lives. It's God's way or no way! Which is it for you?