

BIBLE STUDY

The Life of Jesus Christ

The Beatitudes

Study Section 7



Jesus Christ: Part 15

The Beatitudes (1)

Following His departure from Peter's house, with the four disciples, Jesus continued to travel throughout the area. Matthew, Mark and Luke provide many details regarding this period, which are too extensive for us to consider in these short studies. Jesus continued to gather disciples, and His fame spread throughout the region. Matthew's fourth chapter provides a general description of this preaching through which His teaching and miracles of healing attracted great multitudes from areas in the north of Galilee and Decapolis, and from as far away as Jerusalem, Judea and beyond Jordan. (Matthew 4:23-25)

In our studies for the moment, we are going to jump forward in time to a period at the height of this activity, following the selection of Jesus' 12 Apostles from among the disciples. (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16) Both Matthew and Luke describe Jesus' teaching immediately following this selection. Luke does so in chapter 6 beginning at verse 17, but it is Matthew who provides the most complete detail. Referring to his description regarding the crowds who now followed Christ, Matthew says:

“And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And opening His mouth He began to teach them” Matthew 5:1-2

He then proceeds to deliver to them what are generally known as the eight Beatitudes, which portray and describe the godly characteristics of the righteous. He outlined the moral qualities of those that He would approve as being worthy of His Father's Kingdom. In this we see an echo of another servant of God, Moses, who was a type of Christ. Both Jesus and Moses ascended mountains and delivered God's law to His people. Both delivered what we could call “a Sermon on the Mount.” Moses stood before God as Israel's representative to receive commands and Laws which he was to pass on to the people:

“...stand here by Me, that I may speak to you all the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which you

shall teach them, that they may observe them in the land which I give them to possess.” Deut. 5: 31

The ultimate aim and intention, on both occasions was exactly the same:

“So you shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left.” Deut. 5:32

Moses was a mediator, who “received the law by the dispensation of Angels.” (Gal. 3:19; Acts 7:38, 53) However, in contrast God’s communication through Jesus was direct. Jesus “opened His mouth” and God’s words came forth. (Hebrews 1:1-4; Acts 3:22-23) This fulfilled a prophecy provided through Moses regarding the Messiah who would be eventually provided by God, and who would be a greater Prophet than Moses himself:

“I will raise up a Prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put my words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to my words which he shall speak in My name, I myself will require it of him.” Deut. 18:18-19

Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, echoed the sermon of Moses, while fulfilling the prophecy of being that Greater Prophet who was to come. Moses’ law listed blessings for the obedient, and offerings for the disobedient. (Deut. 28) However, Jesus spoke of blessings only. Whereas the disobedient lived under a curse as described in the Law of Moses, this class of people will be eliminated by Christ. They are not contemplated in His Sermon of Blessing because the disobedient will be banished at the commencement of His reign:

“And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness” Matthew 7:23

Although this teaching was intended primarily for His close disciples, it is evident that a considerable number of other people were also present:

“... When Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching.” Matthew 7:28

Although John does not record this early presentation to the disciples in public, he records, in detail, the long private talk of Jesus with the twelve Apostles at the end of His ministry. (John chapters 13-16) Jesus approach in presenting these eight introductory Beatitudes is very positive and encouraging. However, He also subsequently provides a grim counterpart in the eight woes which He finally pronounced upon the “Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” (Matthew 23: 13-29)

The opposition of these evil men was already evident, so that it became necessary eventually for Jesus to include in His teaching explicit warnings against their corrupted philosophy and practices, which had strayed far from God’s word. The list of blessings provided in the sermon on the Mount presents a picture of the type of character that should be developed in those who follow Christ and want to be ‘Christians’ in the true sense of the word. Throughout His ministry, Jesus used examples of this blessing, such as: “blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear;” “blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me;” “blessed is that servant whom his Lord when He comes, shall find so doing” etc.

If we watch for them in our reading of the Gospel, we will find many lessons that we must apply to ourselves in our life before Christ, if we are to be “happy in Him” and be included with those whom He welcomes into His Father’s kingdom.

The Beatitudes

“Beatitude,” is not a word found in the Bible. It comes from the Latin word for “blessed” and it is applied to this sermon because it refers to the blessings of those who endeavour to develop the character described by Christ. The word which begins each of the eight statements in the original Greek means blessed in the sense of being happy. Jesus is describing a heavenly happiness, the happiness of being in favour with God, or “walking with God,” a happiness of the highest kind. (Compare Psalm 1:1-2; Deut. 33:29)

The personality and characteristics that Jesus describes are essentially His own. Those who desire to follow Him, will and indeed must try to emulate His character and dedication. The sermon bears no relationship to those outside the hope of salvation through Christ, in the promises of God. It portrays the moral qualities of people already in a relationship of commitment with God. There are eight Beatitudes, and in the Scriptures, the number eight is associated with a new beginning, and with circumcision, symbolic of the cutting off of the fleshly instincts. (Genesis 17:9-14; Lev. 12:3; Luke 1:59; Luke 2:21)

In each one of the eight Beatitudes, the person of whom Jesus speaks is pronounced “blessed,” or happy, not only because of the prospect set before him regarding the Kingdom of God, noted in the first and last, but also because of the continuing tranquility of mind of those who know and do their Lord’s will. As Jesus said: **“If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” John 13:17**

1. Poor in Spirit - (Matthew 5:3)

We compare this with:

“...But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my word.” Isaiah 66:2

Such a mind has chosen the way of God over being consumed with the attractions in the nature of the flesh. One cannot begin to accept the gifts of God while absorbed with achieving the prizes of the world. Human wisdom gives way to “trembling at the Word of God.” At the end of such “poverty,” there are great riches - - - an eternal abiding place in God’s Kingdom.

2. They that Mourn- Matthew 5:4

Such people are linked with the truth of God’s Word. They view the world from God’s position, and they lament a society that either has no interest in, or actively opposes, the things of God. Jesus’ words are an echo of Isaiah 61, where, in verse 3, there is a reference to “mourn in Zion.” They mourn the absence of their Lord, (Matthew 9:15), and they await “the times of refreshing,” referred to in Acts 3:19-21, when Jesus will be once again sent to this earth.

3. The Meek - Matthew 5:5

Such individuals are teachable and willing to learn. Jesus provides us with two very significant Bible echoes here. The first can be found in Psalm 25: 9-14, quoting only from verse 9 we read: **“The meek will He guide in judgment; and the meek will He teach His way.”** He ties this in with a similar promise made in another Psalm:

“But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” Psalm 37:11

Meekness and gentleness are characteristics quite often looked upon as weakness in our world. But in fact, the true meaning of this quality is to be found only in the strongest of characters.

“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” Numbers 12:3

Meekness is a quality which requires courage and self-control, not putting our confidence in the ways of human nature, but rather rejoicing in God’s words and striving to follow His ways:

“...Who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh,” Philippians 3:3

4. Hungering and Thirsting after Righteousness - Matthew 5:6

Once again, Jesus provides us with an echo from Isaiah:

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” Isaiah 55:1

The person, who fills their mind with the things of the world and is satisfied by the world, has no interest in spiritual food. However, the true disciple of Christ strives to put aside the ingredients that give satisfaction to the carnal mind and seeks fulfilment in the ways of God. The poor in spirit, the meek, etc., are blessed for qualities they already possess. But those Jesus is describing here, have an abiding hunger and thirst for ‘food’ that is more satisfying than the insubstantial ‘food’ that the world has on offer. The world cannot satisfy ones spiritual needs and the true disciples of Christ have within them an ongoing longing for righteousness. This longing can only be satisfied in God, in His Word, and in Jesus. Peter came to understand this longing:

“Like new born babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,” 1 Peter 2:2

Jesus Himself said: **“...I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” John 6:35**

5. The Merciful - Matthew 5:7

Self-discipline, if we are not careful, can produce a harsh attitude toward the failing of others. We must avoid this tendency and balance this with “goodness”, “kindness and mercy” as it is shown in God Himself:

“Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.” Romans 11:22

The motive for our mercy comes from the love of God. Once we come to know and realise His loving grace and generosity, and the way in which His mercy flows to us through His Son Jesus, it creates within us a responsive love. Love of God finds expression in the love of others. We cannot give like God, but we can and must learn to forgive like Him and to be merciful.

“If someone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar...” 1 John 4:20

Someone asked Jesus, “which is the great commandment in the law?” We are all encouraged to read and commit to our hearts the response that He gave. It is recorded in Matthew 22:37-38.

6. Pure in Heart - Matthew 5:8

A reference providing an echo back to Psalm 24 gives us a further insight into the nature of those who will see God:

**“...Who may stand in His Holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Thy face...”
Psalm 24:3-6**

Unless our hearts and minds are purified by being filled with the word and ways of God, then our lives cannot be pure. The lips may profess to know God and to love Him, but if the thoughts and motives are not pure, then the actions and deeds will also be tainted:

To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They confess to know God but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.” Titus 1:15, 16

Pure means “unmixed.” Gold is only pure when there are no alloys present. In order to purify our hearts, our efforts should be directed towards seeking God’s way rather than pursuing the inclination toward sin in the nature of man. The intention is that we endeavour to reject all forms of evil in our lives, not just some of them. But the LORD our God knows that this process is difficult. If we are to follow Jesus’ instruction, we should be searching our own hearts for any evils that we might be harbouring, just as God searches them out:

“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man always according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.” Jeremiah 17:9-10

We can most effectively work toward this goal by a prayerful and sincere concentration upon Jesus who is pure and holy, remembering the love that both Jesus and His Father have extended towards us. Even as we try to make ourselves morally and spiritually like Jesus, we do so with hope in the knowledge that when He returns, we can be perfected in Him and made like Him:

“...We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him ...And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” 1 John 3:2,3

7. Peacemakers - Matthew 5:9

A study of God’s Word on the subject of peace quickly reveals that peacemakers in God’s sight are not simply those who run around trying to make truces and creating peace among other parties. The book of Proverbs gives us an insight into this direction that Jesus is providing:

“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.” Proverbs 16:32

“Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.” Proverbs 25:28

Before the follower of Christ can make peace within and among others, he must quiet his own restless spirit. Peace is a fruit of the spirit provided to those who truly follow Jesus:

“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; ...those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:22-24

James, in his Epistle, says **“wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits.” (James 3:17)** The opposite is true of those who are controlled by natural fleshly wisdom, who have **“jealousy and selfish ambition in their hearts.” (James 3:14)** However, peace is difficult to maintain and must be pursued or diligently preserved:

“Being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:3

“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” Psalm 34:14

Those who are peacemakers, in this manner, says Jesus, are the sons, or the children of God. They are at peace with the Father.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” Romans 5:1

8. Persecuted for Righteousness’ Sake - Matthew 5:10-12

Jesus has been describing the characteristics of a saint, a “called out one” or “separated one” who endeavours to follow or emulate Him as much as possible. The character of such individuals is not attractive to the world in general. Those who reject a true understanding of God and His Son will often reject those who reflect the characteristics of Jesus, just as the world in Israel rejected Jesus Himself. This has been true throughout history, and many examples are found in God’s own word. At times of persecution for faith in God and His word, the hope expressed in the book of Isaiah shines through as a beacon and an ultimate haven of safety:

“Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at His word; your brothers who hate you, who exclude you for My name’s sake, ...will be put to shame.” Isaiah 66:5

Jesus’ disciples, those who actually heard His word during His day, would fellowship His sufferings, and share the impact of hatred and cruelty with Him. The measure of their faith would be the measure of their persecution. Suffering would develop trust and strength of character. They, too, would be made “perfect through suffering.” (Compare Hebrews 2:10; 5:8-9)

Those who live in the western nations have been blessed with the freedom to worship God and follow Jesus without fear of persecution. This has not always been true, nor is it true today, in many other areas of the world where people still face persecution for their beliefs. We must anticipate the possibility that things may change in those nations that currently enjoy freedom of worship.

Jesus knew that such persecution would take place throughout the ages until He once again returned. His true disciples, who endured such persecution, would be rewarded with life in the Kingdom to be set up at that time. He, therefore, provides further words of encouragement to be remembered during such times of persecution and distress. Matthew records these wonderful words of Jesus:

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matt 5:10-12

The persecutions that the righteous endure would align them with Jesus and the prophets. This would give them an incentive for they would be assured of a certain reward in the Kingdom of God. Thus, rather than be sad, they have great cause to leap for joy. (Compare Acts 5:41; 1Peter 4:13, 14; 1Peter 3:14; Philippians 1:29)

LESSON FOR US

We have not begun to “scratch the surface” of the depth and meaning in the eight Beatitudes provided by Jesus as He preached to His disciples. Hopefully, this study has provided an insight into them and a direction toward seeking the lessons from them which can be used to guide each one of us in our daily lives.

The picture that has been presented to us should not be intimidating, causing us to give up, feeling that it is beyond our feeble efforts to achieve. God knows and understands and forgives this. He is looking for our desire to strive for these characteristics and implant them in our daily lives. Our efforts are the seeds from which He will provide the growth, and which will be ultimately perfected at the time of Jesus’ return.

In all the history of mankind, only Jesus, His own Son, has achieved the full perfection of the perfect child of God. We are blessed, if, in a time of weakness or temptation, we surrender our hearts to His refining discipline. We are then controlled by the character of Jesus, and are blessed, if, for only a few moments, we have felt something near to it. These are moments when all thoughts of self have gone and we are conscious only of the nearness of the Father. To Jesus this must have been an abiding possession. To us, it can be a rare and passing moment of sublime devotion, but it holds within it the promise of eternity.

Like His disciples that day on the Mount, through God’s word, we have the privilege of sitting at the feet of Jesus to learn the manner of person that He would have us become. The disciple and follower of Christ can look to His words, and in these words hear the echo of our Saviour saying:

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:20

In turn, we might echo the spirit of the words in the last two verses of the Bible: “Come, Lord Jesus,” quickly come. (Revelation 22:20)

Test Yourself

1. What does the word beatitude mean?
2. What was the overall purpose of these beatitudes spoken by Christ?
3. Select two of the beatitudes and briefly discuss their meaning.

Jesus Christ Part 16

The Beatitudes (2)

Having just described the characteristics of the true disciple, Jesus then proceeds to outline the practical aspects of the behaviour and the morality which spring from such a character. His teaching on this occasion is recorded in both Matthew and Luke. Continuing from his record of the Beatitudes, Luke covers it in chapter 6, verses 24-49. Once again, however, it is Matthew who provides the greatest amount of detail in chapters 5, 6 and 7. Jesus begins this teaching by using three striking metaphors to demonstrate that those who follow Him have a responsibility to convey His message to others in addition to living a life in Him.

The Metaphors - Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world;...a city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” Matthew 5:13-14

Salt gives flavour to food and, far more importantly, it preserves it from corruption. Such is the vocation of a true disciple. But this is possible only of a disciple who shows evidence of a true calling in Jesus. It would be the example of the disciple, or the follower, which will give authority to all attempts to deliver the message of Jesus. A call to repentance on behalf of Jesus is worse than valueless if there is no evidence of change within the person presenting that call. If we claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, but by our way of life and our conduct do not show that we are different by displaying the ideals of Christ in our lives, then our presentation of God’s word will not guide others away from corruption. We will only bring shame upon the name of Jesus. Our power for harm will be greater than our power for good. Whilst true disciples of Jesus must mingle with the world, they must also rise above it. They are as lamps shining from a height spreading radiance far and wide. As a lamp illuminates the blackness, so they must seek out the dark environment where the Gospel of love can be preached. In the midst of evil, men must see and feel the contrast of their goodness.

These metaphors complement the Beatitudes, stressing that service before God rests in what we are, not in just what we do. Salt that is good inevitably produces a wholesome and saving influence. Light which is not hidden cannot do anything but

dispel darkness. So disciples who show the qualities that Jesus has described become worthy of Jesus who sent them.

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. It may be welcomed as a haven of rest by a weary traveller, or it may be avoided as a den of vice. But it cannot be hidden. A person who claims to be a follower of Christ cannot be ignored. He or she stands exposed to the public gaze for good or ill. In all ages, people will assess Christ, not so much by His precepts, but by the lives of men and women they see and know, who profess to be His followers.

Christ and the Law of Moses - Matthew 5:17-20

Moses' law judged outward acts, but Christ's law judged the thoughts from which the acts sprang. The moral and spiritual standard of life was set out in the law. Many of those who heard Jesus thought that He spoke with an authority which set aside the law. But Jesus now reassured them in the clearest terms:

“Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfil.” Matthew 5:17

Moses' law called for punishment upon the sinner. It is in the mind that the seeds of sin are sown and developed. If they are rooted out, acts of sin do not find expression. It is to illustrate this principle that Jesus frequently contrasts His law with the Law of Moses. But the principles of behaviour involved in the Law of Moses remained intact. The Scribes and Pharisees kept the law by formal observance for their own glorification. But in so doing they lacked any concept of righteousness and completely disregarded the condition of the heart. This would exclude them from the Kingdom in spite of all their formal observation and their declarations of belief in God. Jesus then went on to provide examples that would illustrate the spirit of the law in Moses which was to be applied to daily conduct.

Anger Forbidden - Matthew 5:21-24

Moses' law judged and condemned the murderer. Jesus condemned anger which He viewed as being the cause of murder. If we desire and want to be reconciled to God, then we must in turn have a desire to be reconciled with others.

The Nursing of Wrath Forbidden - Matthew 5:25, 26

Jesus exhorts humility and submission where a fault is found in others. Pride and stubbornness could lead to more serious consequences and bring shame. (Compare Proverbs 6:1-5; 25:8)

Adultery - Matthew 5:27-32

The very contemplation of adultery potentially leads to the act. To look is to lust, and to lust was to commit adultery in the heart. It is far better not to look. If lust persists, the only barrier to the desire to act is lack of opportunity, but in God's eyes, the desire amounts to the same thing. This principle applies to any act in which our faith and service before God are undermined. Eyes and hands combine to convert desires into deeds. Jesus' lesson is that sin can be avoided by a short sharp battle in the heart. A determined **"not wanted"** to evil thoughts wins the warfare against sin.

The Swearing of Oaths - Matthew 5:33-37

If only those words spoken by oath were considered binding upon a person, what about words without an oath? Was a person in that event freed from his commitment? Of course not! To suggest that words with oaths are more binding than words without oaths is to set a double standard. It is far better for all of our words to be meaningful and binding. Oaths had come to be considered very lightly, integrity mattered little and the giving of ones word was not honoured. Thus by making a promise or taking an oath in God's name using such words as, "as God lives" dishonoured Him when such undertakings were not performed. This is a serious matter so Jesus taught:

"But let your statement be, yes, yes, or no, no; and anything beyond these is of evil." Matthew 5:37

Non-Resistance - Matthew 5:38-42

In Christ, the accent is upon the individual, not the nation or the state. The individual is a pilgrim and a traveller until Christ reappears to establish the Kingdom. In the meantime, He commands His followers' conduct toward others. Jesus counsels non-resistance. His follower is to be generous of heart to all who might ask, not necessarily giving exactly what is asked, but certainly giving what is needed.

The object of non-resistance is to purge one's own bitterness, to take the initiative from the offender and win him to the higher principles of salvation.

The Law of Love - Matthew 5: 43-48

Far from hating enemies, Jesus commands an opposite, positive action:

“To love...bless...do good...pray...”

This is action. This is the way in which right triumphs over evil. By acting in such a manner, Jesus’ follower manifests the Father, who causes the sun to rise and sends His rain on the just and unjust. In this way God shows love for all “His” enemies, and desires their salvation. In so doing, He sets a pattern of conduct for His children. (Compare Romans 5:8-10; John 3:16) If love is confined to the family circle, and those who love us, we are no different from unscrupulous Publicans. We then reflect no particular likeness to the Father. If we would be like Him, our love must be extended to all.

Hypocrisy - Matthew 6:1-18

The word “alms” in verse 1 of the King James Version is more correctly rendered as “righteousness” in the modern translations. Our righteousness is not to be practiced as a show before others simply to gain honour and respect for ourselves.

The Pharisees were very guilty of this. The examples which Jesus provides were common practices among them, as we learn from other references throughout the Gospels.

He presents examples for His followers which were typical of the Pharisees’ hypocrisy:

- Public display in alms giving
- Praying in conspicuous places
- Counterfeit fasting

In each case He denounces such religion, which is motivated by self-interest and self-acclaim, as being of no avail in attaining a reward of the Father. Such alms, prayers and fasts, were not expressions born of love for God, but for the good opinion of men. They would receive the applause of those around them, but that is all they would get as a reward for their hypocrisy. It is impossible to serve God, if we are wholly preoccupied with gaining the esteem of others. (Compare Luke 16:15; Jude 16)

In the examples given, Jesus is obviously concerned about the place of prayer in the hearts of all who would follow Him. Already Jesus had taught His disciples this by example. It would be impossible for them to be unaware of His relationship with His Father. They saw an awareness of God and a dependence upon Him which had not been seen since the days of David. They had seen Jesus return to them from His sleepless nights on the distant hills, having spent a quiet solitude in communion with His Father. He was thus prepared for the tasks of yet another day. He then gave them a pattern which true disciples to this day have treasured as the “Lord’s Prayer.”

This prayer and the application of it in our lives is a study in itself. In simple summary, it focused attention first upon God and His purpose, and then turned to the needs of the one approaching Him. Request for temporal blessings is limited to immediate necessities. It concentrates more on the needs of the heart - - forgiveness and the strength of spirit to forgive, an appeal for deliverance from temptation, and a final declaration of eternal power and glory to God.

Faith and the True Riches - Matthew 6:19-31

True worship has been contrasted with hypocrisy, and now true treasure is contrasted with greed. Hypocrisy and greed are twin perils opposing the pursuit of righteousness. The righteousness of hypocrites is hollow, and so are their riches. Such riches are symbols of this world which will perish with those who set their heart in it. The heart will turn as surely as the needle of a compass to what we truly value. Jesus sums up His instructions against anxiety over riches by declaring that if God is master, He can be trusted to supply all needs. Live each day in Him without worry about the next. There are sufficient temptations to be overcome in any one day, that we don’t have time to worry about the next day.

Judgment - Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus presents a vivid picture of a man, all but blinded by an obstruction in his eye. He is absorbed with the task of removing the smallest splinter from his brother’s eye. Such a comparison becomes the key to understanding of Jesus’ parable regarding the Pharisee and the Publican or Tax Gatherer. (Luke 18:9-14) The picture of this man with a log sticking out of his eye while complaining about a speck in another person’s eye, might provoke a smile, but it is vivid enough that the lesson it provides should not be forgotten:

“For in the way you judge, you will be judged...” Matthew 7:2

There can be no greater discouragement to the tendency to pass judgment upon others than this realization. Those who are too conscious of their own virtues, and too obsessed with the failings of others, tend to be fault finding and intolerant. (Compare 2 Peter 1:9; Romans 2:3; Romans 14:1-4; 1 Cor. 4:3-5) A true understanding of this takes us back to the 5th Beatitude:

**“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy”
Matthew 5:7**

Rejection of Jesus - Matthew 7:6

Sadly, some individuals will never appreciate the salvation and hope that is offered to them through Jesus Christ. The disciples were, therefore, given advice that prevails unto this day. They were not to try to force salvation upon the unwilling and resentful. (Compare 2 Peter 2:20-22)

The Heavenly Father’s Gift - A Child’s Response - Matt. 7:7-12

The disciple, or follower of Jesus, is encouraged to be persistent in approaching God through prayer, to ask, to seek, and to knock. If persistence prevails even over evil men, says Jesus, then:

“...How much more shall your Father who is in Heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” Matthew 7:11

Human stubbornness can be worn down. This should make us realize that our gracious and loving Heavenly Father is much more willing and indeed ready to respond to our prayers. (Compare James 1:5-7; Matthew 15:21-28; Luke 11:5-13) Our response to our Father’s gracious care and concern, says Jesus, should be the application of what we know as the “Golden Rule”:

“Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them...” Matthew 7:12

This is the essential message of the law and the prophets. Jesus provides instructions for His followers to present a life style that reflects the honour of His name, and His Father’s name. In considering this, we must remember the direction He provides in Matthew 6:14-15 and in the two great commandments that Matthew records in chapter 22, verses 37-40. So Jesus concludes the description of the principles of the Kingdom

He had come to proclaim. He had shown the disciples (and all others who listened) the blessings that were associated with it both in this life and also in that which is to come. He had set forth the price that it demanded of them in self-control, humility and self-sacrifice. For this very reason the great mass of people would find it unattractive and would prefer selfish pleasures and temporary rewards. Only the few would walk the narrow path of life and accept the invitation to enter the Kingdom at the narrow gate.

In concluding His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds His listeners of the two alternatives that are open to all those who hear His words. A final message regarding the two alternatives is provided in the Parable of the two builders.

Two Ways - Matthew 7:13, 14

Like Moses, Jesus sets before His disciples two ways and the fact that they would have to make a choice. In this He provides an echo of the vivid description Moses gave regarding these choices. (Deut. 30:15-20) God's Word clearly establishes that there is no middle path, and that the correct way has never been popular among mankind.

Two Trees - Matthew 7:15-20

Jesus then offered His disciples sound advice to guide them in discerning between true and false Religious Leaders. This guidance was valid in the first century and is equally valid today. He says that two classes of men would offer their services. To discern the true from the deceitful, the disciple would have to examine the fruit of both, for like a tree, the fruit is true to its kind. (Gen. 1:12) Fruit is seen in words and works. If the words were not in accordance with God's word, and their works were not modelled after the example of Christ, they could safely be rejected. (Compare Isaiah 8:20; 1 Peter 2:21)

Many would claim to follow Jesus and claim that they spoke and acted on His behalf, but in so doing they would practice lawlessness. In the coming of His Father's Kingdom, Jesus will cast such individuals away, declaring that "He never knew them."

Two Builders - Matthew 7:24-27

The word divides humanity into those who are wise and those who are foolish. The wise who absorb the word and then act upon it, are building on a solid foundation: “For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” 1 Cor. 3:11

Anyone who hears Jesus’ words and rejects them will fall in the time of storm and in the time of judgment. (Compare 2 Tim. 2:15)

LESSON FOR US

In outlining the morality of the Kingdom, Jesus specified the qualities that will characterise those who through grace are accepted into His Father’s Kingdom. At the same time He makes it clear that He will be the judge of all who seek to enter the Kingdom. However, as we become familiar with Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and come to know and love its passages, our association with it demands an answer which will determine our position in the day when the law-giver and the mediator assumes the role of judge. Are we doers of the word?

As we look to our own lives in answer to that question, we are urged to consider Jesus’ own words regarding His judgment. He compares the two classes that will stand before Him when He comes in His glory to assume the glorious throne. Matthew records Jesus’ statement regarding that day (see Matthew 25:31-46).

If we apply the lessons of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount to our lives, and follow His instructions regarding seeking salvation in Him, we can live in hope of hearing Him declare a further and final blessing upon us:

**“...Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”
Matthew 25:34**

Test Yourself

1. What did Jesus mean when He spoke to the disciples and described them as ‘the salt of the earth’?
2. Why did Jesus condemn hypocrisy?
3. If we desire to be children of God how should we seek and respond to Him?