

Creative Living Bible Study

Secrets of Kingdom Living

Studies on the Beatitudes

Matthew 5

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Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

The quest for happiness is the universal human longing from cradle to grave. But when we look at ways people pursue happiness apart from Jesus Christ, we see that most of these ways only lead to temporary happiness at best, followed by letdown, discouragement, and despair.

Jesus begins the famous “Sermon on the Mount” by describing the heart attitudes and character of the person who finds real happiness in the deeply satisfying and indestructible blessings that only faith in God can give (Matthew 5:1-12). This beautiful, simple, and profound passage, familiar to anyone who knows anything of Jesus of Nazareth’s teachings, is known as the Beatitudes (*beatitude* is Latin for *blessedness*). Hidden in the depths of these few verses are the divine secrets of fulfillment and joy, making an understanding of the Beatitudes invaluable.

Jesus names eight characteristics and eight blessings that belong to those who place complete trust in God.

Like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, the Beatitudes are to be taken as a whole, describing experiences and qualities the Holy Spirit gives to every committed believer. Jesus is not pointing to certain personality types as he speaks of meekness, for example. He is speaking of the meekness that He wants all His followers to have, including those like the tough and self-confident apostles, Peter and Paul.

In the Beatitudes, we also see the contrast between worldly and Christian values. While the worldly person pursues self-promotion and self-gratification, the person who regards Christ as King will focus on serving God and people as Jesus did. Because of this, the Christian living for God's Kingdom will be the opposite of the worldly person in what they admire and seek and do. This clash with the world's values can lead to persecution for the follower of Christ, but even in this, Jesus promises great blessing.

It is important to note from the beginning that the word *blessed* means more than happy, because happiness is an emotion often dependent on outward circumstances. "Blessed" refers to *the final highest good and spiritual joy of those who are part of God's family and kingdom*. The rewards of this kingdom are enormous: living in God's presence now and forever in heaven, being filled with His righteousness and called His child, inheriting heaven and earth and all that belongs to Christ.

So the Beatitudes describe "kingdom members" where Christ is King and we are like Him: humble before God and man, blessed, happy, at peace. The surprising truth of this study is how we experience these blessings at the same time as we are "poor in spirit," "mourn," "hunger and thirst for righteousness" and are "persecuted for righteousness." It is also encouraging to know

that these sufferings do not mean we are immature as believers, but rather that we are living the life common to all who have walked with God and experienced His divine blessing.

By the end of our study, you will be able to define each character quality Jesus speaks of in the Beatitudes, so let's begin with the definition of what it means to be "poor in spirit."

Blessed are the . . .

Poor in Spirit . . .

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3

While the world promotes pride and self-sufficiency, Jesus says God's kingdom belongs to the "poor in spirit." Jesus is not referring to a personality that is fearful, downtrodden or weak, or to the impoverished of the world. He is describing a spiritual disposition of humility before God. To be poor in spirit is *to stand in awe of God's majesty, power and holiness and see ourselves as insignificant in comparison*. It is also *to be aware of our sinfulness before a holy God and to feel our need for His mercy*. With this humble disposition, the poor in spirit will eagerly submit to God's will and trust His promises.

While Jesus never sinned, He modeled this quality of humility before God when He left His glorious place as the Son of God in heaven and came to earth to redeem us (Philippians 2:5-8). As a man, Jesus submitted Himself completely to God's will in all He said and did, depending on God's power to carry out His Father's will (cf. John 5:30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:50; 14:10). The Scriptures record that He prayed continually to discern the Father's direction in His ministry, culminating with agonizing prayers in

the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 22:41-42). He not only modeled perfect humility before God, the opposite of man's natural pride, but His complete submission, as we will see later, uniquely qualified Jesus Christ to be our redeemer.¹

Throughout the Beatitudes, Jesus also makes a subtle comparison of the truly godly with the proud self-righteous spirit of the Pharisees, the revered but hypocritical religious leaders of the day. They thought they were righteous because of their strict observance of religious laws and felt no need for God's mercy. The poor in spirit who will inherit the kingdom of heaven, on the other hand, would say, "God have mercy on me, a sinner." Painfully aware of his spiritual bankruptcy, he gladly embraces the gospel of Jesus Christ and is forever filled with gratitude that "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The mantra of the poor in spirit could be summed up as:

*Nothing in my hand I bring.
Simply to Thy cross I cling.*

To the poor in spirit, God responds in grace and love and increased revelation of Himself. Isaiah 57:15 states: "For this is what the high and exalted One says—He who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'" As Charles Spurgeon put it, "The way to rise in the kingdom is to sink in ourselves."

While the world promotes self-confidence, self-expression, self-reliance and giving an impression of success, Christ tells us that inner happiness begins with abject humility and awe in God's presence. To such a one, God pours out His mercy and guarantees the eternal blessings of heaven.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3

Lesson 2

Blessed are . . .

***Those Who Mourn . . .
for they will be comforted.***

Matthew 5:4

While the world says avoid sadness at all costs, Jesus now makes the statement “Happy are the unhappy.” In this shocking paradoxical statement, He is talking about a mourning in the heart of the godly that leads to the blessing of being comforted by God. Jesus was not speaking primarily about grieving the loss of a loved one, but rather about *mourning sin’s presence and destructiveness—in ourselves, in others, and in the world around us.*

In the first beatitude, we learned that the godly person is “poor in spirit.” That is, he acknowledges God’s greatness and his own insignificance in comparison. Also, in light of God’s holiness, he is aware of his spiritual bankruptcy and need for God’s mercy, and gladly receives God’s gift of forgiveness through faith in Christ. By this, he is “born” spiritually (John 1:12-13; 3:3) and becomes a new person inside (2 Corinthians 5:17). As a new creation in which God’s Holy Spirit lives, the godly person described by Jesus in the Beatitudes will naturally and continually grieve sin and its destructiveness in himself and in others and in the world around him.

This means the Christian life will not be all smiles and bubbly joy. Christ's mourning over sin brought Him to this world to give His very life to break sin's power over those who would believe in Him. Jesus was described as "a man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3) who would "comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:2). He wept over the consequences of judgment and death that sin brings to our world, and His devoted followers will weep, too.

But Jesus says that this mourning will lead to blessing—to happiness—because of the comfort and grace God gives. When our hearts break over the sin that trips us up, His Spirit leads us to repent and experience God's love and forgiveness and cleansing and a new start. When we see the ugly pull of our sin nature toward a certain temptation, His Spirit can give us power to resist. When we mourn the destructiveness of sin in someone else's life, we can pray, knowing our prayers are powerful, and follow the Spirit in what we might say or do to help. As we sorrow over the effects of sin in the world, we have the message of God's love and forgiveness in Christ to share, which alone can change people within from self-centered to be God-and-others-centered. The Holy Spirit also gives us ways to help the needy of our world.

Perhaps the greatest comfort God gives as we continually mourn the effects of sin in ourselves and our world is the promise of heaven. There, we will finally be holy like Christ (1 John 3:2) and shed no more tears over the sorrow caused by sin and evil (Revelation 7:17).

The world tries to avoid mourning over sin by excusing and redefining and even denying sin. It also promotes all kinds of escapes to avoid facing the pain of sin, even blaming God for sin's destruction. But Jesus shows His followers a different way. To those who mourn sin, He has made a way to find comfort and deep fulfillment in the battle. In this lesson we will observe these

various truths about the blessing and comfort that comes to those who mourn.

Lesson 3

Blessed are . . .

The Meek...
for they will inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:5

The world says meek people will get trampled. It is the tough and overbearing who will succeed. But Jesus says the way to our inheritance in Christ is not by might but meekness.¹ Happy—to be congratulated, to be envied—are the *meek*, Jesus declared. The Greek adjective Jesus used, *praus*, describes a person who is *gentle, humble, patient, long-suffering* and *free from pride*. When you look at this list, it is easy to see why Andrew Murray, in his book, *Humility: Beauty of Holiness*, calls this quality the root of all Christian virtue. It could well be said that meekness is an underlying quality in all the Beatitudes.

Vine's New Testament Dictionary defines meekness as an inner grace primarily exercised toward God. To be meek before God is to trust His dealings with us are good, and therefore accept them without dispute or resistance. While Jesus wished God's plan were different as He faced the cross, His prayer was "Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matthew 26:42). In Christ, we see that meekness does not fight, struggle or contend with God's plan. This attitude of submission toward God brings gentleness into

our relationships with others, even enemies. Jesus demonstrated this meekness toward others especially in His mock trial and crucifixion.

Andrew Murray suggests that humility, or meekness, is what Jesus brought back into our world to replace pride, the destructive poison Satan brought into the world at the fall (Genesis 3) and has used to dominate mankind since. Jesus demonstrated meekness before God as He often spent time alone with the Father and claimed to seek nothing for Himself, but only to do and say what the Father told Him to (John 5:30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:50; 14:10). His life was devoid of self-interest or self-assertiveness, and when his disciples squabbled over who was the greatest among them, Jesus told them that in God's Kingdom, greatness comes from being the servant of all.

Meekness in the ideal follower of Christ, then, comes from a heart of humility first toward God, then toward others. Far from being weakness, the meekness that God's Spirit produces in the believer frees us from pride and gives us the power *not* to retaliate or seek revenge when wronged or slandered, *not* to demand the best for self or expect certain treatment because of a position held, and *not* to strive for status, possessions, privileges or rank. Also, the meek person will control his tongue, *not* saying what he may want to say. When he is mistreated, he leaves judgment to God and his life in God's hands (1 Peter 2:23). His consistent prayer life is characterized by praise, faith and dedication to God's will.

It is clear from this description that only Christ living His life through us in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit can produce meekness in our lives. Apart from Him, we cannot overcome the pulls of our old nature toward pride and self-centeredness.

While the world views meekness as weakness and advocates self-reliance, self-promotion and boastfulness, Jesus modeled

and taught that in the Kingdom of God, it is the humble servant that is honored. Let's look at what the Scriptures say about meekness—the most profound reflection of Christ in our lives and the quality that serves as the root of all Christian virtue.

Lesson 4

Blessed are those who . . .

Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness . . .

for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:6

As stated earlier, everyone in the world is pursuing happiness. In his work and even more in pleasures, man is not only seeking the happiness of pleasant experiences, but he is unknowingly seeking to dull the painful results of sin in his life and world, the most painful being a spiritual void inside. The self-centeredness problem that causes so much grief is inescapable; his best efforts to be good and find happiness leave him discouraged, and the spiritual void cries out to be filled. Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French physicist and mathematician, summed up the problem by saying: "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man that cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus."

But Jesus gives a wonderful promise in the fourth Beatitude. He says that the deep happiness man seeks is possible for the person who *hungers and thirsts after righteousness—that is, to be right with God and live righteously*—for his desire will be satisfied, or filled.

Jesus would make this fulfillment possible through His death on the cross, where He not only took the punishment for man's sin so that he could be right with God, but also broke the dominating power of the sin nature over those who would believe in Him. Those who receive Christ are declared righteous before God as a gift (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8-9). God sees us as cleansed from sin because Christ took the blame for our sin as He died on the cross so He could credit His sinless life to each person who receives Him (Romans 4:24; Galatians 3:27). Thus, our hunger to be right with God is completely satisfied!

Not only are those in Christ declared righteous before God, but the power of sin over us is supernaturally broken. As we have already seen, when we receive Christ, we are given a new nature that desires to please God, and we are given the Holy Spirit to live within us. This is called being “infused” with the life of Christ (Colossians 1:27b). His life in us gives us an inner “hunger and thirst” to be holy and gives us power over the pulls toward sin of the world, the flesh and the devil.

Over time and as we persevere through the trials of life, the Holy Spirit makes us more and more like Christ in His loving, serving and consecrated nature (Romans 5: 3-5). But our yearning to be righteous will be totally fulfilled when we reach heaven and see Christ face to face. There we will be changed into His likeness, perfect and without sin (1 John 3:2) as He presents us faultless before God, “without stain or wrinkle” (Ephesians 5:27). And we will be surrounded by righteousness forever as Christ reigns as King.

The world tells us to pursue happiness to fill that inner hunger. But Jesus tells us that the fulfillment of our deep human desire for righteousness can only come from God. For the believer and unbeliever alike, righteousness does not come from seeking pleasure or striving to keep rules, but from faith in Christ alone to produce His life in us. It does not come from seeking to be good in order to be happy, but as we “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33).

Lesson 5

Blessed are . . .

***The Merciful . . .
for they will be shown mercy.***

Matthew 5:7

As we have moved through the first four Beatitudes, we have seen that when we recognize and confess our helplessness before a holy God, He answers with amazing love and mercy in the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we receive God’s forgiveness through faith in Christ, God transforms us within, infuses us with the righteousness of Christ Himself by His spirit, and gives us a persistent desire to live in a way that pleases God. Three characteristics of this transformed life are now highlighted by Jesus in Matthew 5:7-9—mercy, purity of heart and peacemaking. The first is *mercy: having compassion on people in need*.

Mercy is a quality supremely exhibited by God as He extends kindness and compassion in His desire to help any needy, hurting

person. In His compassion, He feels with us in our hurts and needs and takes the right steps to help us. When God revealed Himself to Moses, “compassionate” was the first word He used to describe Himself (Exodus 34:6).

On the human level, being merciful is not to be confused with the natural personality trait of being easy going. Nor is it overlooking sin or pretending we don't see it. It is not saying there is no right or wrong or smiling without concern when someone is going against conscience or breaking the law. No, God, who is perfect in His mercy, is also righteous, holy and just. His mercy, and His mercy in us, is not at the expense of truth. He knows sin brings pain, so He hates it, and so will we. Rather mercy *looks at misery caused by sin and feels pity and a desire to relieve it. It acts to relieve it.* Jesus saw our pitiful state and came to save us. The merciful person Jesus speaks of in this beatitude, then, extends kindness and compassion without compromising truth.

Being merciful toward others comes from first understanding our dependence on the mercy of God, as seen in the first four Beatitudes. We look at people differently when we realize that we ourselves would be nowhere without His gift of righteousness in Christ and His Spirit's power to live the Christian life. We see unbelievers where we would be, without Christ and without hope in this world or the next. We see the sin of others, Christian or non-believer, with an eye on the mercy God has shown us, and we respond with pity rather than judgment.

Jesus Christ modeled God's mercy throughout His life and especially on the cross. In mercy, He came from heaven to make a way of salvation for sinful mankind. He and the Father knew it would cost Jesus His life through a torturous death and the shedding of His blood. And as He hung on the cross, He was there as One who had never sinned, never harmed anyone, and only preached truth. But as He looked at those who jeered at Him in His agony, He had pity on them, praying “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they

are doing” (Luke 23:34). He saw His enemies as helpless slaves of sin, blinded by the devil, in desperate need of release from the bondage of sin that could only come through His death. This is mercy, and the mercy He can produce in us.

When we realize that God sees all our sins—past, present and future—and we are forgiven by Him only through Christ’s death on the cross in our place, we will naturally see the need for God’s mercy in the lives of those without Christ, as well as other flawed believers. This perspective gives us the ability to extend mercy. Because we have received God’s forgiveness without deserving it, we can forgive others. Because we have received His mercy, we can be merciful. When my heart is humble before God, I will have pity on those who are victims and dupes of the world, the flesh and the devil, even though their sin offends me. As the English theologian John Stott states so well: “...to be meek is to acknowledge to others that *we* are sinners; to be merciful is to have compassion on others for *they* are sinners.”¹

Mercy is never the world’s response (when it is true to its nature), or the church’s response when it is worldly. And mercy is rarely our first response to personal hurt or to injustice. But when we interact with Christ about it, He will replace destructive attitudes of judgment and vengefulness with the constructive attitude of mercy. As the saying goes, “hate is like taking a poison drug and hoping someone else will die.” God wants us to be free from bitterness, criticism and callousness that can drain our lives of the blessings He has paid a great price to give us. He wants us to be blessed as we bless, rather than curse the one who offends us, so that in our humility, we are open to receive the mercy that *we* need.

God is merciful, and the Scriptures are full of passages that have to do with being merciful. As we continue our study of *The Secrets of Kingdom Living*, we will observe some of these passages and their profound truths about extending mercy to others as well as to ourselves.

Lesson 6

Blessed are . . .

***The Pure in Heart . . .
for they will see God.***

Matthew 5:8

In the Beatitudes, Jesus' focus on heart attitudes was an indirect exposure of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. These self-righteous men were revered religious leaders of the day who taught that righteousness was an external thing, a matter of obeying rules and regulations. They prided themselves in this, and practiced praying, fasting, giving, etc., for all to see. Those who heard Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes would easily recognize the opposite heart attitudes in their proud and condescending leaders. Jesus was sending a clear message that genuinely godly character is not a matter of appearing religious outwardly. It flows from a pure heart.

Jesus has already described the heart attitudes of the person who is *pure in heart*. He is *first poor in spirit*, continually aware of his own spiritual bankruptcy and dependence on God's mercy in Christ. Secondly, he *mourns the sin still present in his life* and the negative results of sin in others and in the world. These heart attitudes make him *humble, or meek, before God and others*. He "*hungers and thirsts to be like Christ and extends the mercy and grace he has received from God to everyone he can*". Jesus promises that this genuinely godly person "will see God"—through the eyes of his heart now, and face to face in heaven.

This is who we want to be, but it is important to be aware that regardless of how long we have known Christ, we always have to guard our hearts. It is easy to become self-righteous and spiritually proud like the Pharisees because of what we know and do or have done spiritually. We can subtly begin to think these things make us better than others or acceptable to God, rather than always remembering “by grace we have been saved” (Ephesians 2:8-9) and not because we are better than anyone else. If we do not guard our hearts, we can become judgmental, unmerciful and critical with others, seeing them as “hopeless sinners,” and cease to care about making the gospel known, which has the power to save and change *anyone* from within. To guard against these attitudes, we have to take care that our hearts are continually filled with humility and gratitude.

So what else will be true of us if we are pure in heart? The Bible describes the person pure in heart as devoid of hypocrisy—wholly sincere with God and others. They are transparent both in public and private life. Their thoughts and motives are pure, with no trace of deviousness or ulterior or base motives. The pure in heart find hypocrisy abhorrent and are completely without guile. They have a pure love for God, knowing that with Him is the highest good. They are undivided in their devotion to Him and live to glorify God, loving Him with heart, mind, soul, and strength. They are unselfish and love people sacrificially.

Jesus, the only person who ever had a pure and guileless heart every second of His life, shows us more of what being pure in heart looks like. He didn't cloister Himself away from the world, but moved even in dangerous circles to offer the Kingdom to people. He finally gave His life on the cross to save those who would believe. The hallmark of the pure in heart, then, is a selfless sacrificial love for God and people. Even though we may want to be pure in heart, we will find the sacrifices involved impossible apart from allowing God's Spirit to work constantly in our lives.

The promised blessing for the pure in heart is that *they shall see God*.
In this lesson, we will observe in more detail the biblical truths
about the purity of heart that allows us this deep joy.

Lesson 7

Blessed are . . .

The Peacemakers . . .
for they will be called sons of God.

Matthew 5:9

The final quality listed in the Beatitudes is perhaps the most challenging. The believer is called to pursue peace, even when we feel like retaliating, and to seek to stop hostility and promote harmony between others. As peacemakers, we are also called to share the gospel that alone can bring peace with God and peace to people's hearts. God paid a great price in the cross of Christ to give us His peace and make peace with Him possible. And, as we will see in the next lesson, it will cost us to give the gospel of peace to others. But the Holy Spirit can empower us to both *promote harmony in relationships and be God's ambassadors*. Jesus says the deep joy that comes from being a peacemaker is being called "sons of God," children the Father is proud of because they reflect that He is a God of peace.

Before we delve more deeply into what it means to be a peacemaker, it is important to acknowledge what it is not. Being a peacemaker is not just having a naturally easygoing personality that overlooks wrong. Nor is it being a person who seeks to keep peace and avoid trouble any way possible. It is not

conflict avoidance or an unrealistic “can’t we all just get along” attitude that glosses over core issues. Nor is it the compromising person who lacks a sense of justice or righteousness and doesn’t take a stand where they should, because skirting around the truth does not bring lasting peace.

Having said that, a peacemaker is *not quarrelsome*, either, but rather *will go out of his way to produce and maintain peace*. He is active in this, not content with the “status quo” or to “let sleeping dogs lie.” Above all, he *knows that all men first and foremost need peace with God, and he focuses on what will promote this*.

Letting God’s Spirit control our lives is essential to being a peacemaker, as only He can give discernment in each situation and can overpower the selfish pulls of the old sinful nature. It takes the power of God in the Holy Spirit to give us the humility to put aside personal rights, privileges and dignity in order to be an effective peacemaker.

So let’s get practical about what being a peacemaker looks like in real life relationships. When the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives and people are difficult or offensive, we will not talk about them except with a trusted counselor(s). We will show compassion toward the offensive person, and if they are in some kind of sin bondage, we will grieve for their state with an attitude of pity. We will do anything we can to help them find relief.

Martin Lloyd-Jones gives five how-to’s to peacemaking:

- ❖ Learn not to speak. “Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).
- ❖ Do not repeat things when you know they are going to do harm. Even though you feel like saying them, do not. Instead, pray for the person and “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).
- ❖ View every situation in light of building God’s kingdom. Don’t just think of yourself, but of all involved. Have pity on the offender.

- ❖ Become positive; go out of your way to look for ways and means of making peace. This could mean actively trying to meet a need of the other. It could mean humbling yourself and apologizing, or just trying to be friendly.
- ❖ Seek to bring peace whether at home or in public by being lovable and approachable, not standing on your “dignity.” This allows people to feel they will receive understanding from you even if they oppose your Christian perspective.¹

Martin Lloyd-Jones states that if God stood on His dignity and rights, all of mankind would perish (John 3:16). But the God of peace (Hebrews 13:20) did not stand on His dignity. Jesus left behind His glorious place in heaven and came to earth to make peace with mankind possible through the cross (Philippians 2:6-8). Through the death of His only Son, the Father provided a way of salvation for us. Peacemakers are like God—children who repeat His behavior—and He is proud to call them His children (Matthew 5:9).

As we keep our eyes on Jesus as the Prince of Peace and allow the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom and strength, we will be able to follow in the steps of Jesus as a peacemaker. Let’s look now at these *Secrets of Kingdom Living* in the Scriptures.

Prayer by 13th Century St. Francis of Assisi

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
 where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 when there is injury, pardon;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 and where there is sadness, joy.
 Grant that I may not so much seek
 to be consoled as to console;
 to be understood, as to understand,*

*to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying [to ourselves] that we are born to eternal life.*

Lesson 8

Blessed are those . . .

***Who are Persecuted because
of Righteousness . . .
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

Matthew 5:10-12

It is amazing that Jesus moves from peacemaking to the hostility of persecution. Jesus knew that no matter how hard we try to bring peace to the world by living a righteous life and sharing the gospel of peace, we will face opposition. But it stands to reason that if we live to please God, a world controlled by people with natures hostile to God and His way (cf. Romans 8:7) will also be hostile toward us. As John Stott explains, “Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems.”¹

Jesus is not, of course, referring to rejection and slander resulting from being offensive or obnoxious in our actions or from sharing the gospel without “gentleness and respect” (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). The persecution Jesus speaks of is not because of anything we do wrong. Jesus says it is “because of [our] righteousness” (Matthew 5:10) and “because of Me” (5:11). It is persecution for being like the Lord Jesus Christ and belonging to His Kingdom, which is “not of this world” (John 18:36). For this reason, Paul declares to Timothy, “...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

The life of Christ illustrates the kind of rejection believers can face. In spite of His holy life, profound teachings, and miracles which only God could do, Jesus was hated, mainly by religious leaders of the day. Something about Him condemned them and devalued their righteousness. In like manner, throughout the history of the church, gentle, loving and lovable people have suffered incredible persecution because of their testimony for Christ, often at the hands of so called religious people. Therefore, to shed the light of God's truth, like Jesus did, will inevitably bring persecution from a world that loves darkness.

But Jesus tells His followers to "rejoice and be glad" when this happens "because great is your reward in heaven" (5:12a). There we will inherit all that is Christ's and live eternally in unimaginable fulfillment, having left a sinful world behind forever. Jesus also tells us to rejoice because "in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (5:12b). When the world pushes us away, it proves that we are Christians, and we can take a place of honor in the noble succession of those who have suffered for godliness. Jesus is saying that persecution is a medal of honor for the faithful.

Rejection by the world can take many different forms. It can involve everything from social alienation, slander, ridicule, job loss and family rejection to being arrested, put in a concentration camp, tortured or martyred just for being a Christian and/or sharing the gospel. In any case, the believer facing rejection and persecution can find strength in remembering all that Jesus suffered for our sake (Hebrews 12:2-4). Drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit within, his response will be like Christ. He won't retaliate, harbor resentment or become depressed, saying, "Why is this happening to me?" He will instead rejoice that his faith is evident, feeling honored to suffer for being loyal to Jesus and His standards and truth. He will gladly suffer for the name of Christ in order to bring salvation to those who will believe. He will mourn for those who

reject him because they are without the peace and salvation Christ alone can give. He will remember that only through the grace and transforming power of Christ was he changed from the world's perspective himself, having been given a new nature and the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life that reflects Jesus.

The Welsh theologian D. Martin Lloyd-Jones summarizes the response of the godly to his or her persecutors in this way:

Ah, unhappy people; they are doing this because they do not know Him and they do not understand me. They are incidentally proving to me that I belong to Him, that I am going to be with Him and share in that joy with Him. Therefore, far from resenting it, and wanting to hit back, or being depressed by it, it makes me realize all the more what is awaiting me . . . joy unspeakable and full of glory. All this is but temporary and passing; it cannot affect that. I therefore must thank God for it because, as Paul puts it, it 'works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'²

The believer is called to live life, as Jesus did, in a world hostile to God and His truth. In this last lesson on the Beatitudes and the *Secrets of Kingdom Living*, we will observe what the Bible says about dealing with the inevitable rejection and persecution that living for Christ brings.

*10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.
12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5:10-12*

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Jim Elliott

BEATITUDES SUMMARY

Our study of Jesus' famous teaching called the Beatitudes has been a survey of the qualities Jesus wants every one of His followers to possess. As we walk humbly with God, Jesus promises supernatural happiness, blessing, and the deepest fulfillment imaginable.

We also saw that the character Jesus commends here is opposite that which the world tells us will bring happiness, like pride, lust, and self-sufficiency. Jesus challenges the non-believing world through the Beatitudes to see the way of God to true fulfillment. As John Stott writes:

*The ways of the God of Scripture appear topsy-turvy to men. For God exalts the humble and abases the proud, calls the first last and the last first, ascribes greatness to the servant, sends the rich away empty-handed and declares the meek to be his heirs. In brief, Jesus congratulates those whom the world most pities, and calls the world's rejects 'blessed.'*⁵

Jesus is offering hope for those weary of failure or emptiness from the world's way and is challenging those wasting their time in pursuit of money, sex and power. Jesus' desire for every person is that they find Him as "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).⁷

We also saw repeatedly in our study that the Christian cannot live the life described in the Beatitudes in his or her own strength. But God gives each believer a new heart and the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit to win the battles with the world, the old nature and the devil. The Beatitudes are also an encouragement as they show us that to mourn over our continual battle with sin and yearn to be more Christlike is the experience of all truly committed children of God. In summary, John Stott writes:

The Beatitudes paint a comprehensive portrait of a Christian disciple. We see him first alone on his knees before God,

acknowledging his spiritual poverty and mourning over it. This makes him meek or gentle in all his relationships, since honesty compels him to allow others to think of him what before God he confesses himself to be. Yet he is far from acquiescing in his sinfulness, for he hungers and thirsts after righteousness, longing to grow in grace and in goodness.

We see him next with others, out in the human community. His relationship with God does not cause him to withdraw from society, nor is he insulated from the world's pain. On the contrary, he is in the thick of it, showing mercy to those battered by adversity and sin. He is transparently sincere in all his dealings and seeks to play a constructive role as a peacemaker. Yet he is not thanked for his efforts, but rather opposed, slandered, insulted and persecuted on account of the righteousness for which he stands and the Christ with whom he is identified.

Such is the man or woman who is 'blessed,' that is, who has the approval of God and finds self-fulfillment as a human being.⁶

A wonderful poem that shows this point is by an unknown author.

I Met the Master

*I had walked life's way with an easy tread,
Had followed where comfort and pleasures led,*

*Until one day in a quiet place
I met the Master face to face.*

*With station and rank and wealth for my goal,
Much thought for the body, none for the soul,
I had entered to win in life's mad race,
When I met the Master face to face.*

*I had built my castles and reared them high,
Till their towers had pierced the blue of the sky.
I had sworn to rule with an iron mace,
When I met the Master face to face.*

*I met Him and knew Him, and blushed to see
That His eyes, full of sorrow, were fixed on me:
And I faltered and fell at His feet that day,
While my castles melted and vanished away.*

*Melted and vanished, and in their place
Naught else did I see but the Master's face.
And I cried, "O Christ, wilt Thou make me meet
To follow the steps of Thy wounded feet.*

*My thought is now for the souls of men.
I have lost my life to find it again.
E'er since one day in a quiet place,
I met the Master face to face.*

Author Unknown