

Serving in Multicultural Ministry

Reader 2

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The Beatitudes: A Servant's Character in Christ

Matthew wrote his gospel from a Jewish perspective addressing Jewish Christians during a time of great conflict over their identity after the second temple destruction. While they accepted Jesus as the Messiah, they still lived within the Jewish community and followed its traditions though different from Israel. The gospel author sought to reframe their new identity within the Christ community aligned to the nature and character of Jesus, King of Israel. This new identity also pertains to contemporary Christians. As Card wrote for this purpose “Jesus, tell me who you are, so I know who I am” (2013, Chapter 1, Section 2, para 8). Since Christ Himself embodied each trait, so too must His servants reflect His identity through their nature as salt of the earth and light to the world. The Beatitudes characterize servant citizenship in the Kingdom of heaven in their fellowship with God (vertical relationship) and all people (horizontal relationship) they encounter comprising their ideal heart character. To lead as servants of the Lord, believers in Christ then must surrender their former citizenship and take on the nature of the new with the eight Beatitude traits. Thus, what Kingdom characteristics should its members reflect for the ideal heart character as servants?

Kingdom Citizenship: Ideal Heart Character

The Beatitudes describe the ideal heart character for every citizen in the Kingdom of heaven. The heart character holds a critical facet to Christian nature. While “man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam 16:7c KJV). The Lord judges and values what lies on the inside, not the outside. Jesus taught eight beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10) as part of His Sermon on the Mount with the ninth explaining the one prior to it (5:10-11): Poor in spirit (v. 3); mourners (v. 4); meek (v. 5); hungry (v. 6); merciful (v. 7); pure (v. 8); peacemakers (v. 9); and persecuted (v. 10). Each beatitude functions in an if...then format based on the Old Testament (Ps 1:1) and Greek literary forms (Keener, p. 165). In Matt 6:33, Jesus said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you.” Thus, if believers seek His Kingdom and righteous first, then they receive His spiritual provisions. A blessing accompanies each beatitude Jesus pronounced for people who display it.

The biblical definition of the blessed (Greek: *makários*) does not connect to any worldly means or sense rather to God's favor and salvation from His approval (Matt 5:3 AMP). In other words, the blessed receive God's provisions (favor) and grace (benefits) because they obeyed the "Lord's inbirthings of faith" (Strong, 2015). Jesus taught a new type of blessing, which ran contrary to ancient Middle Eastern culture. Society in His day believed only the elite, wealthy, and powerful—those whose worldly riches and power raised them above the lower class—gained *makários*. Jesus proposed a new standard for living with blessings only found in His Kingdom. Consider this story to understand Beatitude blessings. A rabbi told his pupil, "In olden days there were men who saw the face of God." His student asked, "Why don't they any more?" The rabbi replied, "Because, nowadays no one stoops so low." (Stoffregen, n.d.). God gives His blessings to those who stoop low to seek Him, as opposed to those who desire gain through their own might and wealth. In Rom 12:2, Scripture directs believers not to be "conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (KJV). With a renewed mind and in-birthings of faith, the Holy Spirit transforms the believer's character to live out Kingdom actions: poor in spirit, mourners, meek, hungry and thirsty after righteousness, merciful, poor, peacemaker, and persecuted.

Jesus conveyed the Beatitudes in passive grammatical construction, a Semitic-fashioned Greek tense, indicating a divinely completed action. Only God delivers these blessings as rewards in the new heaven. He gave nine "Blessed are" promises (Matt 5:3a-11a) originating from God through Christ as Kingdom in cause and effect terms. For every mentioned action (vv. 3-11) a disciple of Christ takes, God fulfills it with an eschatological promise. Jesus bookended the beatitudes in verses three and ten with the overarching now promise (present passive tense) of "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (NIV)—as Keener called them, kingdom-time blessings (Keener, p. 165). Then, He followed the Beatitudes in verses four through nine with the specific then promises (future passive tense): "they will be comforted" (5:4); "they will inherit the earth" (5:5); "they will be filled" (5:6); "they will be mercied" (5:7); "they will see God" (5:8); and "they will be called sons of God" (5:9).

The Beatitudes relate to relationship within the fellowship of believers, directly linking to God's Kingdom. They build upon each other: vertically in a relationship between the disciples and their Master Jesus—poor in spirit to mourner to meek to hungry and thirsty (vv. 3-6)—and horizontally between the disciples and other people—merciful to pure to peacemaker to persecuted (vv. 7-10). The virtue of humility undergirds the Beatitudes.

Poor

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3 KJV). When first thinking about the meaning of the poor, a lack of material goods comes to mind. Likewise, poor in spirit reflects an emptying out of oneself for a total dependency on God. At the most fundamental level, Jesus became poor to save humankind from sin. Once people accept Him as Lord and Savior, the richness of the kingdom of heaven blesses them with an inner condition resulting from the work of God. As the opposite of a proud or haughty spirit (PBC, p. 1884), humbling oneself before God requires dependency on Him (v. 3b). A person poor in spirit impoverishes oneself to gain the riches of spiritual wealth and prosperity that comes from God's sustenance. Inward spiritual humility and circumcised heart shape an outward impoverished state. The external display of piety from rituals does not produce an impoverished demeanor (Lev 26:41-42). Through an impoverished state believers have the kingdom of heaven, the dwelling place of the saved steeped in the richness of grace.

Greatness in leadership results from relying on God and living out His ways in their entirety for blessings of spiritual prosperity. This does not mean that the road will come easy. God will push a leader to the limits while journeying it, but won't let one's clothes wear out or feet blister. He will make a leader go hungry, only to feed the leader with the Word (Deut 8:2-7).

Mourners

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matt 5:4). Mourners bear spiritual sadness. They recognize themselves as weak (Ps 6:2). Those who mourn do so over their own sin and losses as well as the world's wickedness and suffering. Jesus blesses them with His comfort over their confession of weakness in sin. Jesus, the fulfilled Messiah, changes the grieving state of a mourner through His atonement of

our sin from beauty instead of ashes, oil of joy instead of mourning, garment of praise instead of a heavy, burdened, and failing spirit (Isa 61:3). He turns mourners into “trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified” for uprightness, justice, and right standing (v. 61:3b; cf. 2 Cor 7:10). Mourners also grieve over what grieves God. When they mourn for the sins of the lost, God comforts them with His compassion.

Meek

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth: (Matt 5:5). The meek seek the Lord (Ps 22:6; 69:32) and live out His will (Matt 26:39). The meek bondservant shows gentleness and humility (Gal 5:22) giving gentle correction for the truth of Scripture and patience when wronged (2 Tim 2:25). The Greeks used the word meek, *praus*, to describe “a wild animal who had been tamed and made gentle” (Forest, 1999, p. 49). To the Jews, a meek (Hebrew: *anaw*) person described one aligned in relationship with God, welcoming obedience to the Law. The meek make choices and exercise power from a divine rather than worldly reference point. Since God’s Spirit rules their heart, they have the inner strength to obey Him.

When a person inherits something, it indicates a handing down of a valued belonging. Jesus promised the meek would inherit the earth. God “adorns the humble with victory” (Isa 29:19). The humble (or meek) have God’s adornment of victory. This beatitude demonstrates a victory of both physical and spiritual promise of the Kingdom. Believers have spiritual citizenship in the Kingdom of heaven now and yet to come. Thus, the meek not only inherit the blessings of heaven, but also share in the Kingdom of God upon earth. The author of Ps 37:11 confirms this same, and expands upon the meek by noting they delight themselves in peace: “But the meek [in the end] shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

Hungry and Thirsty

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt 5:6). Those who hunger for God, long for Him in a spiritual sense. In Ps 42:1, the psalmist compares the deer panting for the water brooks to the soul panting after the living God (Ps 42:1-2). As a deer searched for water when thirsting in dry places, needing refreshment, or wanting shelter from danger to meet its basic need, so

too the hungry look to God (Gill, 1746-63). To the hungry comes sustenance from the Word of the Lord—the Gospel of salvation (Amos 8:12; Luke 1:53). Those who feel full, suggests origination from their self-sufficiency, and they will hunger (Luke 6:25). Jesus satisfies both hunger and thirst as the Bread of Life. People who go to Him will never hunger, and believe in Him will never thirst (John 6:35). Through this bread, His flesh, He gave life to the world (John 6:51). The hungry, who taste of His bread, live forever. Jesus invited the thirsty to come to Him and drink: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38).

Merciful

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt 5:7). The Hebrew word for mercy, *khesed*, provides a first glimpse of the Beatitudes’ intent. It means tenderheartedness, kindness, graciousness, loving kindness, and self-giving unconditional love. It describes God’s defining attribute in the Old Testament (Exod 20:6; Deut 5:10; Num 14:18-19; Ps 25:10) and asks for His help (Ps 51:1). In the case of the beatitude mercy (Greek: *e/eos*), the action presents itself in a horizontal relationship showing one who sighs, groans, moans, sobs, and laments for others conditions. Servants also will pardon them, just as Christ pardons those who seek His mercy: “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matt 6:12). Jesus highlighted its importance in the parable of the Good Samaritan. When Christ asked, “Which of the three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who was beaten by robbers,” the man answered, “The one who showed mercy on him.” Jesus responded to him, “Go and do the same” (Luke 10:29-37). In Jas 3:17, Scripture illustrates the merciful show compassion. Jesus will show mercy to those who showed mercy to the least for Him (Matt 25:40) in a reciprocal action. He called us to become people living the mercy of God, to love others without judgment, and forgive without bounds. In the final judgment of the nations, Jesus stressed six merciful actions that the faithful servant must accomplish for a blessed life: To minister by feeding the hungry; giving drink to the thirsty; welcoming the stranger; clothing the naked; visiting the sick and imprisoned. Believers live according to the one living God, rich in grace and who by grace “quickened us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to

come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6-7).

Pure

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8). The pure walk with biblical integrity and obedience to truth, abstaining from passions of the flesh (1 Pet 1:22; 2:11). They seek God for a steadfast spirit (Ps 24:4; 51:10) because they depend on Him in His righteousness. God calls His children to righteousness (or holiness) leading to a pure heart (Prov 22:11; Matt 5:8). “Without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14b KJV). The children of God must draw continually near to Him at the throne of His grace since sin runs in opposition to a pure heart. “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded” (Jas 4:8).

To the pure, the Lord will give righteousness from His salvation through Jesus. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7b NIV). In Ps 24:3, David posed the questions, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?”(KJV). Then, scripture in Matt 5:8 answered these questions with the response the pure will see God. The two questions from Ps 24:3 relate to those who will have the qualifications for fellowship with the fulfilled Messiah in His holy place as He reigns on His hill at the spiritual Mount Zion, “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (literally, Zion is Jerusalem in this context; cf. Heb 12:22; Rev 14:1; Segraves, 2007).

Peacemakers

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt 5:9). The peacemaker (Greek: *eirénopoios*), an adjective descriptor, occurs once in the New Testament. It means “pacifist, loving peace” (Thayer, 2009, p. 188). To view *eiréopoios* from a peace-loving standpoint elicits a topical dimension void of its spiritual significance. Anyone can serve as a peacemaker, but not every peacemaker can call oneself a son of God. So, what precondition does God require of peacemakers so “they will be called sons of God” (5:9b)? Christian peacemakers conform to God’s will in thought and deed through His righteousness. He imparts heavenly wisdom—pure and undefiled—to the sanctified. In turn, His Spirit’s purity of wisdom inwardly manifests the outward nature of peace. Heavenly wisdom does not exhibit “jealousy (envy), contention

(rivalry and selfish ambition), confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) or evil and vile practices (Jas 3:16 AMP). Internally, peacemakers think on whatsoever holds true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praise so that the God of peace guards their heart and mind (Phil 4:8). Externally, they endeavor to keep unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:3 KJV).

“When believers in Christ submit to His Spirit’s leading for peace with themselves and others, peacemaking actions produce a harvest of righteousness namely, “concord, agreement, and harmony between individuals, with undisturbedness, in a peaceful mind free from fears and agitating passions and moral conflicts” (5:18b). God is peace (Phil 4:7). The peace of God through Christ Jesus guards believers’ hearts and minds (Col 3:15) against earthly bitter, envying, and strife (Jas 3:14). When believers enter and live in the peace of Christ as peacemakers (Eph 4:7c) “they will be called sons of God” (Matt 5:9b NIV).

Persecuted

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:10). The structure of the Beatitudes swings full circle in this verse to “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (vv. 3; 10), both promises. Jesus emphasized the persecuted must rejoice highlighting expanded linkage with the continuity of the prophets (vv.11-12). Rather than praise from the world for the sake of His righteousness, believers should expect persecution in the same manner as Jesus (John 15:20). The opposition pursued Him with hatred. Luke 6:22 described the Pharisees reviling Jesus to the point of being “filled with madness” (or rage) as they conspired of what they might do to Him (KJV). In reference to signs of the end (v. 10), Jesus told His disciples people will seize (12), betray (16), and kill some of them for their association with His name.

Despite tribulation, tried faith (Jas 1:2-5), and suffering, the persecuted should stand like conquerors and testify about Him (14). As God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, Christ followers must reflect the light of the progressively revealed God in flesh for His glory and majesty (2 Cor 4:6). The power of God from the indwelt Comforter will bear witness of Himself (John 15:27 AMP). Their reward is victory from Him who loved us. Though people will revile and passionately despise the people

of God for their stance as servants in the Kingdom, “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:37 KJV). The love of God in Christ Jesus always remains in His beloved.

Servants of the Lord should view testings of faith from persecution as building of Christian endurance, which leads to spiritual maturity and inner peace. “Let endurance have its perfect result and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfect and completely developed [in your faith], lacking in nothing” (Jas 1:4 AMP).

The lesser becomes greater in Christ Jesus with rewards those in power cannot attain on their own. In short, the persecuted servants gain much from Kingdom of heaven benefits indwelt during their earthly walk and carried over into eternity. The blessings provide Jesus’ presence, strength, and perfection creating character not found in this world and receiving a crown of glory in heaven.

New Citizenship: For Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:” (Matt 5:1 KJV). Before taking on citizenship in the Kingdom of heaven, servants must surrender their worldly passport by abandoning their former identity and yielding to the new. Christian discipleship requires citizenship in a new kingdom—life in the Kingdom of heaven. Disciples must commit their hearts to God’s Kingdom of heaven. The question remains, can you abandon your old ways and follow Him for a beatitudes nature?

Online link: <https://specs12.wordpress.com/2015/10/27/the-beatitudes-a-servants-character-in-christ/>

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