

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Beatitudes	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	1	Gary L.W. Johnson
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INTRODUCTION TO THE BEATITUDES

The Beatitudes constitute the introduction to “the Sermon On the Mount.”¹ As John R. W. Stott has observed, “Everybody who has ever heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and knows anything at all of his teaching, must surely be familiar with the Beatitudes with which the Sermon on the Mount begins. Their simplicity of word and profundity of thought have attracted each fresh generation of Christians, and many others besides. The more we explore their implications, the more seems to remain unexplored. Their wealth is inexhaustible. We cannot plumb their depths.”²

The word *beatitude* comes from the Latin *beatus*. It is used to translate the Greek word *makarios*. This in turn is used in the LXX of the Old Testament to translate the Hebrew *'asre*. This is translated in English in a variety of ways.³ The thought of “happiness” is indeed involved. The problem with the word “happy,” however, is that it has, as D. A. Carson observes, “been devalued in modern usage.”⁴ We use the word in a highly subjective sense. Each person will define happiness in a different way, but everybody longs to be happy. It is, in fact, our greatest quest. “The whole world is longing for happiness, and it is tragic,” writes Martin Lloyd-Jones, “to observe the ways in which people are seeking it. The vast majority, alas, are doing so in a way that is bound to produce misery. Anything which, by evading the difficulties, merely makes people happy for the time being, is ultimately going to add to their misery and problems. That is where the utter deceitfulness of sin comes in; it is always offering happiness, and it always leads to unhappiness and to final misery and wretchedness.”⁵ The Beatitudes provide us with the key to true happiness. Before examining the particulars, we need to observe certain governing principles at the outset.

- I. ***PRINCIPLE ONE: THE PEOPLE DESCRIBED.*** The Beatitudes are not descriptive of only *some* exceptional saints. *All* believers are called to conform to this pattern. “The beatitudes are Christ’s own specification of what every Christian ought to be. All these qualities are to characterize all his followers.”⁶
- II. ***PRINCIPLE TWO: ALL CHRISTIANS ARE TO MANIFEST ALL OF THESE CHARACTERISTICS.***⁷ We are not allowed to be selective here. Granted some may manifest certain aspects and not others, but that is not because it is *meant* to be so. There is an obvious reason for this. Each Beatitude of necessity *implies* the other. Note the sequence: if poor in spirit, then you will be mourning, which in turn implies hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Likewise, a meek person *is* a peacemaker. “Each one of these in a sense demands the others.”⁸
- III. ***PRINCIPLE THREE: THE BEATITUDES ARE PRODUCED BY GRACE.*** These are alien to our natural tendency. We must not confuse certain personality traits with what Jesus is describing. No one by birth and nature is like this. Although some types of people may

appear to possess by disposition some aspect mentioned here, the Beatitudes are produced by grace and *not* by natural temperament.

IV. PRINCIPLE FOUR: THE BEATITUDES MANIFEST A PERSON'S CHARACTER. They deal with the essential character of a person. In a sense they express the value system of the believer. As such they show the *contrast* between the Christian and the unbeliever. They are *different* in what they seek and in what they do. One is a citizen of this world and one is a subject of the kingdom.

CONCLUSION: The question that confronts us is this: Are *you* a subject of *this* kingdom? What is *your* reaction to King Jesus? How do we react to the Beatitudes? Do I seek to be like this? Why is this important? Because the Beatitudes reveal to us the attitudes of our hearts. Are we happy? What makes us happy; and how happy are we? The late James Boice makes this observation: "We cannot go very far in our study of the Sermon on the Mount without realizing that by its own definition Jesus was himself most happy. In his study on the Beatitudes Billy Graham has written, 'If by happiness we mean serenity, confidence, contentment, peace, joy and soul-satisfaction, then Jesus was supremely *happy*. We never read of His laughing, though I am sure He did. He was not given to pleasure-seeking, hilariousness, jokes or poking fun at others. . . . His happiness [was not] dependent on outward circumstances. He did not have to have an outward stimulus to make Him happy. He had learned a secret that allowed Him to live above the circumstances of life and fear of the future. He moved with calmness, certainty and serenity through the most trying circumstances – even death! . . . Certainly if anyone had genuine happiness and blessedness, it was Jesus.' Is it not true that when we turn to the Beatitudes we find them to be a portrait of Jesus? Who is the man who was poor in spirit but who possessed the kingdom of heaven? Jesus! Hence, Paul can say about him that he *humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross for which cause God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow* (Phil. 2:8-10). Who is the man who mourned and yet was comforted? Certainly, it is Jesus! The 22nd Psalm describes it. It is possible to find verses that identify each statement of character in the Beatitudes with Jesus, to show that he is the meek One, the One who hungered and thirsted after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemaker, the One persecuted for righteousness' sake, and so on."⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ Augustine, the theological giant of the 4th century, was the first to refer to Matthew 5-7 as the "Sermon on the Mount," cf. his *De Sermone Domini in Monte* in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* VI, ed. Philip Schaff (rpt. Eerdmann, 1979), pp. 1-63.

² John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (InterVarsity Press, 1978), p. 30.

³ The KJV, RSV, ASV, and NIV have the standard "Blessed." The NEB is "how blest . . ." JB Phillips has "how Happy." The TEV reads "Happy." The LB is "fortunate."

⁴ D. A. Carson, *Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary* VIII, ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Zondervan, 1984), p. 131.

⁵ M. Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon On the Mount* (Eerdmann, 1959), p. 32.

⁶ John R. W. Stott, op. cit., p. 31.

⁷ Without giving undue offense, I must at the start of this series state that I do *not* accept what is called the *dispensational* view of the Sermon on the Mount. This position, as set forth in *The Scofield Reference Bible* and in the writings of L. S. Chafer, J. D. Pentecost, C. C. Ryrie and J. F. Walvoord, declares in essence that the Sermon on the Mount is not addressed to Christians and has no direct bearing on the church today. Chafer wrote, "Sad, indeed, is the spectacle when Christians assume that the Sermon on the Mount represents the high calling of the church and attempts to modify the character of sovereign grace to the end that it may conform to a merit system." *Systematic Theology* V (Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), p. 109. More recent Dispensationalists have tried to temper this position, but it is inherent in the system of C. A. Blaising and D. L. Bock. *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (Zondervan, 1992).

⁸ Lloyd-Jones, op. cit., p. 34.

⁹ J. M. Boice, *The Sermon on The Mount: An Expository Commentary* (Baker, 2002), p. 15.