

1. 11-1-20

Sermon- "Happiness Is..."

Scripture- Matthew 5:1-12, CTW- Ps 34:1-10

Hymns- 687, 684, 236

Theme- Jesus began the greatest sermon ever preached with words that seemed to contradict what the audience might be expecting. We know that God's way of living usually contradicts that of the world. If you really want to live for God, you must be ready to say **and do** what seems strange to the world. Jesus says that if you do this, you will find true happiness.

## I. THE CHRISTIAN CHALLENGE TO BE DISTINCTLY LIKE JESUS

When was the last time you took someone up on a challenge? Not too long ago, it was the "cool" thing to do among the younger generation to challenge another person to some kind of difficult venture or unheard-of activity. This was supposed to be fun.

At our age and stage in life, I doubt that any of us feel up to such challenges for fun but we should never outlive the spiritual challenge Jesus put to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount.

With our world being topsy-turvy the way it is - crises popping up all over, not the least of which are threats facing Christians...

### **A. Our Christian challenge is to reexamine our core beliefs and renew our commitment to Christ.**

While it is the goal of fanatical religions to render Christianity helpless and even extinct, it is the goal of true disciples of Christ to become as distinct as Christ challenged us to become.

Christian "becoming" is a never-ending process!

A fellow Christian once said to me: "There is no way I can live up to the red-letter edition of the Bible! Christ's teachings are too hard to live by! His expectations are too high!"

How would you respond to that person? How do you feel about those Red-Letter Guidelines?

My response was to agree with the person...I said: "I know. But we have no choice but to get on with it, live it as best we can, and be happy in the pursuit of Christ."

A Quaker minister put it this way: "I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to my fellow human beings, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

**B. I trust you have heard that before and your response would probably still be "easier said than done!"**

In a world filled with attitudes and actions that reflect the opposite of good, the worldly way is to get lulled into sinful living by the lack of a moral conscience.

Senses have been dulled by too little conviction of "right versus wrong". We have been led astray by a lack of a "spiritual compass" and are discovering that the need for "spiritual awakening" is as great as ever!

When people long ago were searching for right answers, looking for the right person to follow and asking for a powerful spokesperson, God sent His Son.

Jesus' ministry to the masses really started with this sermon. He attracted huge crowds, many of whom became His disciples. The number of them would multiply greatly right after the Resurrection, and they are continuing to multiply to this day, to continue increasing until the consummation of this age!

In times like these, our Christian Challenge "to become", "to be", is the same as it was when Jesus saw these multitudes, and taught them as He did in the verses for today: Matthew 5:1-12, the **Sermon on the Mount**.

**II. "TO BE OR NOT TO BE . . . THAT IS THE QUESTION."**

Shakespeare did not exactly have Christians in mind when he penned this concise statement of life's objective, but it perfectly fits the crescendo of Beatitudes which Jesus used to describe what every follower of His ought to strive to become.

**A. Since it is true that, “as we think in our hearts, so are we”, these sayings of Jesus are often thought of as “Be Attitudes” – positive attitudes “to be” translated into actions. “Be this . . . be that . . . be blessed.” Motto: “Be a Blessing and Be Blessed.”**

In giving these eight Beatitudes, Jesus was not describing eight different categories or eight distinct groups that make up the Christian fellowship.

In this message, Jesus gave **eight qualities** of the same group, with a progression from first to eighth, with a crescendo of Christian distinctiveness! It would do every Christian well to remember..and live these qualities:

**(1) We enter into the Fellowship of Believers by first acknowledging that we are poor in spirit.** Just as folks who are poor in material goods admit that there is something they need but cannot provide for themselves, the Bible insists that all must admit spiritual poverty in order to position themselves to be blessed of God.

When we confessed our sinful condition we gained access to the kingdom of heaven: a “state of being” under the rule and reign of the LORD God . . . ours in the present yet living in anticipation of the ultimate fulfillment of His kingdom.

**(2) Those who admit their spiritual poverty should mourn; they lament their losses caused by sin.** Such “mourning” occurs in connection with repentance, which is why the prophet Joel and John the Baptist pled with a sinful nation to repent: “Even now”, says the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with weeping and with mourning.” “Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand!”

**(3) To mourn over loss caused by sin is to be comforted - which literally means “to have someone come along beside you”.** How fortunate Christians are to have the Holy Spirit of God come alongside us as divine comforter and spiritual guide!

**(4) With God as our Father . . . Christ as our Savior. . . and the Holy Spirit of God “by our side” we are empowered to be meek - the opposite of weak!**

In ancient literature, meekness was thought of as an ethic or a virtue, as striking a balance between opposite extremes.

For example, "Blessed is a Christian who is always angry at the right time but never angry at the wrong time". "Blessed is a Christian who is neither a spendthrift nor a miser but a wise, though generous, giver".

A good example of this is Moses, who has been said to be the meekest man on earth. He was smart, strong, bold, humble, obedient, disciplined and willing – just enough of each - to live in submission to God and still experience the joy of serving the Lord.

So one of the lessons we must learn here is that **Balance is the key!**

To live in moderation was the happy medium Paul urged believers to adopt as their objective for achieving happiness in the Christian life – Listen to his words in Philippians 4:4-7:

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Next we are to understand the state of blessedness:

**(5) Those who live in the blessedness of trusting God sensibly become those who hunger and thirst after righteousness!** Once believers and doers of the Word taste the blessedness of a life fully dedicated to the Lord, it whets their desire to experience more of the same . . . "thrilled, filled, spilled out as our cup runneth over!"

**Righteousness** (a right standing with God) has that kind of effect on the person who truly loves the Lord.

I have come to believe that a person cannot be a true disciple of Christ without a definitive spiritual change that is brought about by honest confession, genuine repentance, submissive trust, and

a heartfelt desire to be filled with a right spirit that manifests itself in doing the right things.

These first five statements of Jesus speak to the inner being of a Christian - to you and me - with regard to our relationship to God – **that vertical relationship**, which we have talked about before.

However, there is also the matter of our **relationship to others -that horizontal relationship** – to be addressed.

God blesses not only our inner attitudes but also our actions toward others in the sense that not only do we sing “**mercy there was great and grace was free, pardon there was multiplied to me,**” (which is our closing hymn number 236, “At Calvary” by the way), **but we also apply** that same measure of mercy in our dealings with “neighbors” both inside and outside our group.

Mercy is a two-way street. We receive, we give, mercy. The mercy our Lord gives us in the here and now plus the mercy we give others is a prelude to greater blessings to come!

**(6) To give as well as receive mercy is a process by which true disciples are to become pure in heart** – inasmuch as one’s disposition, their feelings, will, and thoughts become more and more like Jesus. This is so that, like Jesus, His disciples are blessed with “godly vision”...the gift of discernment...the ability to “see through” the facades and charades in life . . . to see God at work in the world - and to join Him in His work!

**(7) To see God at work is to know and understand that: God is at work for the purpose of bringing peace.** God expects His children to be **peacemakers** by virtue of our personal relationship to His Son the Prince of Peace.

Peace on earth begins in the hearts of individuals transformed by the One who came to bring peace with God and with one another. Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin in me.

**(8) Peacemakers are not always popular, and Lord knows us humans love to be popular. But that may not be in our futures.** Here Jesus says that Regardless of popularity, we must

preach peace for the sake of righteousness. Our lives are to emulate our Lord and Savior in word and in deed. We who are His, MUST who stand up to enemies of the Gospel and subject ourselves to being despised if not hated.

As we go further into this world of crisis and unbelief, Christian peacemakers get to know God through Christ, and emulating Him!

**So, by faith we must press on,** believing that the Lord God will not forget us and leave us behind, but will be faithful to His own, see us through the valley of the shadow of death, and bring us home to receive the greatest blessing of all!

Therefore, rejoice and be exceedingly glad! Amen? LET US PRAY!