

SMALL GROUPS
FALL, 2008

TRANSFORMATIONAL KINGDOM
PRINCIPLES:
THE BEATITUDES



LESSONS

Transforming Lives: A Study of Kingdom Principles from the Beatitudes
Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ¹

Introduction

During fall 2008, our Small Group studies will focus on kingdom principles that have the power to transform our lives. The goal is not only more understanding and knowledge of the word of God; the ultimate goal is that our lives might be transformed and made new continually as we live out the reality of the principles of the kingdom. Over the next several weeks we will become aware that the principles Jesus sets for the in the Beatitudes are woven as threads in a beautiful tapestry throughout the gospel of Matthew.

Of course, a second purpose of our small groups is to provide entry points for friends and neighbors who want to look us over and find out if we are genuine. This goal suggests the need to work in smaller groups and to organize as many of our small group activities as possible away from the church building. Only with small groups and presence throughout the community can we genuinely influence the world immediately around us.

Please consider being involved in helping host our small groups. Your friends and neighbors, acquaintances and family, are most likely to attend a small group at your house. We will try to make groups small enough that more homes can handle a group. Finally, will you consider serving as a group leader or co-leader. Each week, materials are available with suggested texts, discussion topics, and questions. The leader does not have to have all of the answers—in fact, the most effective and open groups are those where the leader does not “teach” but serves as a “facilitator”.

Bible Text: Matthew 5:1-20

This text covers the first teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. It is larger than the Beatitudes, but includes the Beatitudes. (You might want to look at Luke’s parallel in the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6).

The later parts of the text suggest Jesus’ greater purposes in the Beatitudes. (1) God’s people are called to be salt and light as influencers of the world; (2) God’s people are called to do more than mechanically or robotically keep commands—we are called to live out the fulfillment of God’s presence; (3) God’s people are to live out the righteousness of the kingdom in the present age.

Lesson Aims

- Set the stage for a study of the Beatitudes, exploring basic kingdom principles, learning that these principles are radically different from those the world accepts and follows.
- Encourage one another in a journey of transformation as we walk together in the kingdom of God.

¹ These lessons were adapted and rewritten from materials supplied by Tim Maxcey. The original materials indicated that they were used at the Sunset Church of Christ in the early part of 2005, but the location of the church is not given.

- Grow in our appreciation of the emphasis in the Gospel of Matthew on kingdom concepts—that we might be kingdom people seeking kingdom things as we live out the reality of Jesus’ kingship in our lives.

Lesson Statement

Today we begin a series of studies focused in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12. We will identify kingdom principles, explore how those principles are woven into the gospel of Matthew, and discuss the power of these principles to revolutionize our lives, our church, and our community.

We will devote a week to each principle. Our focus in this introductory lesson is on these principles in the wider context of Jesus’ ministry. We seek to answer these questions: (1) What are these foundational principles drawn from the Beatitudes? (2) Do they spell out conditions we must meet in order to inherit eternal life? (3) Do they celebrate the power of God in the life of the disciples? (4) Could it be both? (5) How can we know? (6) Are these just attitudes that a disciple should strive to have in his life? (7) Or do they go much deeper than mere attitudes? (8) Are we speaking of transformation, a turning upside down of what the world uses to measure success and fulfillment?

The Beatitudes reveal the core values or principles of the kingdom of God and his kingdom people. This lesson introduces the study of the Beatitudes, challenging us to struggle with the spiritual realities of “transformed lives.” The Beatitudes cannot be properly understood unless they are lived out in the transformed lives of the citizens of God’s kingdom. This week we will be reading the Beatitudes in the larger context of the introductory section of Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:1-20. Let me encourage you to read and listen as though you were present, hearing these words of Jesus for the first time? What do they mean?

Lesson Encounter

These “Missional Bible Study” questions are designed to help us discover the truths in the text that can help us be God’s instruments “sent” into the world to glorify Him.

- **General:** What words or phrases popped out to you? While the reader kept on reading where did your mind stop to wonder and ponder? What is the overall message Jesus is communicating with these timeless words?
- **Context – Where are we?** What is the context of this biblical passage? Is there anything in our context today that is like the context of the biblical passage?
- **Gospel – What is God doing?** In the biblical text where is God at work? What is God’s good news for us? How is God calling us to change?
- **Church – How is God calling and sending us to participate in His mission in the world?** In this text how are God’s people being called and sent to participate in what God is doing in the world? How is God empowering us or providing us what we need to participate in His mission?

❖ The Context of the Beatitudes

- Some call Matthew the gospel of the Kingdom, since the writer emphasized the King and His Kingdom.

- In Matthew, the word “*kingdom*” is used at least 54 times in standard English Bible translations and the word “*king*” is used at least 19 times. (*Use a concordance to look at some of the things that Matthew says about the “kingdom.”*)
- We are told to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).
- In Matthew 13 Jesus give at least six parables that describe the kingdom of heaven...“the kingdom of heaven is like...”
- How do you define the kingdom?
 - In Luke 17:20-21 we are told that the “kingdom of God is within us.”
 - The word kingdom *basileia* (bas-il-i'-ah) is primarily an abstract noun, denoting "sovereignty, royal power, dominion, the sphere of God’s rule, or the state of things on earth in which God’s will is being perfectly done.”
 - God’s kingdom then can be defined as “God’s rule and reign in the hearts of men.”
- Notice how the Sermon on the Mount is sandwiched between two similar summary statements about Jesus’ ministry. Matthew 4:23, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people." One way to restate that verse would be to say that Jesus made it his ministry to preach the coming of the kingdom, teach the way of the kingdom, and demonstrate the purpose and power of the kingdom by healing the sick. Almost the same statement is found in Matthew 9:35.
- Then when we look to see what is sandwiched between these two summary descriptions of Jesus' ministry, what we see are two major sections: chapters 5-7 are a collection of Jesus' teaching that we call the Sermon on the Mount; and chapters 8 and 9 are a collection of encounters with Jesus which deal with his healing ministry. So it appears that we have a five chapter unit designed by Matthew to present us first with some typical teachings of the Lord concerning the way of the kingdom and second with some typical healings and miracles to demonstrate the power of the kingdom. Matthew is an inspired apostle and the way the gospel is arranged communicates important truth. What does the placement of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew teach us?
- Matthew's point is that the Lord who teaches like this in the Sermon on the Mount is the same Lord who calls us to follow him through life and depend upon his power. His personal work and power are inseparable from his teaching.

❖ The Pattern of the Beatitudes

- **The Statement of Blessedness**
 - Each “beatitude” begins with a statement of “blessedness.” The Greek for “blessed” is *makarios* (*mak-ar'-ee-os*); meaning supremely blest; by extension, fortunate, well off, blessed or happy. The word happy comes closest to the original meaning, yet it leaves much to be desired.
 - Blessedness is a “state of being, a condition.” The Greeks used this word in various ways...
 - It was used to describe the “state of the gods” or the sphere in which the gods lived. The “gods’ lived in a state not produced or affected by man or outside circumstances.

- It was also used to describe the island of Cyprus. The island of Cyprus was known as the “blessed (*makarios*) isle.” It was said that man could be born, live, and die on the island and would never have the need to leave. All was provided on the island, it was thought to be unaffected by outside elements. One did not have to go outside of the sphere for anything.
 - In God’s kingdom we live a “God-contained” life. Kingdom people do not have to go outside of the sphere of God for anything and they are unaffected by outside circumstances.
- **The Description of Kingdom Character**
- List the core characteristics we are called to live in the Beatitudes? As you read and meditate on the beatitudes presented, what is the message being presented? How would these principles be received as a list of eight ways to succeed in life?
 - How does one know if they possess these beatitudes in their life? Is it by mere declaration? How are these beatitudes evident in the life of a disciple?
 - Some have called the Beatitudes the “Great Reversal,” in that the kingdom character presented is in direct contrast to values held by the world. (See Acts 17:6 the disciples “who have turned the world upside down” NKJV)
- **The Description of Kingdom Blessedness**
- List the promises of each Beatitude...
 - *Poor in spirit*...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - *Those who mourn*...for they will be comforted.
 - *The meek*...for they will inherit the earth.
 - *Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*...for they will be filled.
 - *The merciful*...for they will be shown mercy.
 - *The pure in heart*...for they will see God.
 - *The peacemakers*...for they will be called sons of God.
 - *Those who are persecuted*...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - What things do you notice from this pattern? Six beatitudes are placed between two present tense possessive promises—“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” It is a promise possessed today by those living in the kingdom of God and living out the kingdom values.
 - These six promises are blessings of the kingdom. The six promises have two identical bookends and are what you can count on when you are a part of God's kingdom. This is what the kingdom brings: comfort, earth ownership, satisfied righteousness, mercy, a vision of God, and the awesome title, son of God. They all belong to the kingdom.

Application

How do you see the Beatitudes relating to “kingdom living” or right living in a real world? How do you see the Beatitudes changing lives for those committed to kingdom principles? How can you help your family know and live these kingdom values?

Suggested Welcome Questions

Lesson #1

Describe a time when you have witnessed “extreme physical poverty.” How did you feel and did you do anything about it?

Lesson #2

What movie made you cry? Why that one?

Lesson #3

If you could inherit anything in the world what would it be and who would you inherit it from?

Lesson #4

What is the best meal you ever had? Describe the whole thing!

Lesson #5

What act of kindness have you seen around town in the last couple of weeks?

Lesson #6

What in nature best typifies beauty and purity to you?

Lesson #7

Describe some of the fights you got into as a kid.

Lesson #8

Describe a time when you had been falsely accused. How did you feel and what did you do about it?

Worship

Groups may want to share a time of worship or prayer, either to begin or end the group. Group members are encouraged to participate so that new and fresh ideas are used during this time.

Group Activities

Consider what kinds of activities the group might share, in serving or helping one another, helping others, or participating in community activities. Make specific plans together.

The Beatitudes – Poor in Spirit Lesson #1

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

Companion Text: Romans 3:9 – 18

Principles of the Text:

It is interesting to note that when Jesus began to paint a picture of what it means to be a follower of Jesus that He began with this verse. If we are going to accept the teachings of Jesus it will require two things: acknowledging our impoverished condition and depending upon God's graceful provision. We must see our poverty before God, our utter deficiency. As Paul addresses our own personal righteousness, he says, "There is no one righteous, not even one." Yet, our culture surrounds us with messages which tell us that we can do anything we put our mind to it and nothing is impossible with a lot of hard work. This beatitude stands as a direct contrast to such a mindset. No one can enter the kingdom of God without first humbling themselves before God. John MacArthur says, "You can't be filled unless you are empty." What kind of poverty is Jesus talking about here? The word "poor" is from the Greek word "ptokas" a noun that means poor in this world's goods. It is not just poor but begging poor! You have no resource in yourself even to live. Jesus says this is the happy man. Not only do we recognize our deficiency but we are convicted that God has and is everything. We see our poverty against His plenty.

Key Concept: Only one occupation exists in the kingdom of God: beggar!

Discussion Questions:

How do you know if you are "poor in spirit?" Describe such a person.

Why is this character quality so important to God? Or why would Jesus talk about this first?

How can a person cultivate a "poor in spirit" type of heart and life?

What is an area of your life that you struggle with being "poor in spirit?"

What is the significance of possessing the "kingdom of God" as a reward for being poor in spirit?

What can the group specifically do to help you in being a "poor in spirit" type of individual?

The Beatitudes – Those who Mourn

Lesson #2

Text: Matthew 5:4 – Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Companion Texts: Psalm 31:9 – 10; 51; 55:1 – 8; II Tim. 1:3 – 4; Acts 20:31; Jeremiah 9:1

Principles of Text:

This beatitude like the rest of the beatitudes flies in the face of the world's wisdom. The message from the world is do whatever you have to do to stay away from sorrow and pain. According to the world, mourning is something that is accepted but eventually must be dispensed with. Jesus on the other hand says that there is happiness in mourning. In fact mourning is held out as a kingdom characteristic. What does Jesus mean there is blessing in mourning? There are nine different words in the Greek which express the concept of grief or mourning. The word in this verse is the strongest most severe of all the terms. It is reserved for mourning for the dead. (Gen. 37:34; Mark 16:10; Ps. 32:3 – 5; 51:1 – 3) The verb tense in this passage is in the present tense which means a continuous action. Literally, the ones who continually mourn are continually comforted. In practical terms, what is Jesus saying through this beatitude? In Matthew 5:3, Jesus talks about the position of "poor in spirit." In this verse Jesus is bringing to bear the emotion of being a sinner. It is a godly sorrow that leads to a godly repentance. It understands my own sinfulness in light of the sinlessness of God. The promise for this continued activity of mourning is comfort. A comfort that can only be found in the forgiveness of God. (I John 1:9)

Key Concept: Godly mourning leads to godly forgiveness.

Discussion Questions:

Describe the different emotions involved in mourning.

Describe the last time you mourned over your own sinfulness.

Why is this an important attribute to Jesus?

How does one balance mourning over sin and being overburdened with the guilt of sin?

How is it possible to be happy and comforted in a continual mournful life?

Discuss an area of your life where you need the comfort of God.

Describe a time when God comforted you over your sin.

How can the group help you as a "mourner" or understanding the "comfort" of God?

The Beatitudes – Those who are Meek Lesson #3

Text: Matthew 5:5 – Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Companion Texts: Psalm 123:1 – 3; I Cor. 1:26 – 27; Eph. 4:1 – 2; Titus 3:2; Col. 3:2

Principles of Text:

“Blessed are the meek,” this statement was a shock to those who heard this. To the religious community at the time of Jesus being spiritually proud, self-sufficient, pious, and outwardly religious was the norm of the day. When Jesus came He shocked everyone with the idea that meekness is the key to kingdom living. Our society is like theirs in that it the strong who are rewarded. “To the strong and victorious are the spoils of war.” Being macho, being tough are what is important. So what is this revolutionary meekness that Jesus is talking about? The scriptural “meekness” comes from a Greek word, “praos,” which means mild, gentle, tenderhearted, patient, and submissive.” Meek was used to describe a soothing medicine, a gentle breeze and a colt that had been broken and domesticated. Meekness is gentleness, mildness and a subdued character but not weakness. It is power under control. As MacArthur states, “it is a by-product of self-emptying, of self-humiliation, of brokenness before God.” Meekness says, “In myself, nothing is possible, but in God, everything is possible.” Paul best summarizes this concept of meekness in two verses found in Philippians. In Philippians 3:3, Paul states, that he put no confidence in the flesh but in 4:13, he says “he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him.”

Key Concept: “Christ power in control in our lives.”

Discussion Questions:

What images come to your mind when you think of “meekness?”

Define biblical meekness.

How did Jesus demonstrate meekness in His ministry?

How does meekness manifest itself in your life (be specific)?

Why is meekness an essential attribute for kingdom living?

Share a time when you exhibited biblical meekness.

Share a time when you did not exhibit biblical meekness.

What is one thing you can do this next week to demonstrate meekness?

The Beatitudes – Those who are Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness Lesson #4

Text: Matthew 5:6 – Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.

Companion Texts: Psalm 42:1 – 2; 63:1; Philippians 3:6 – 10

Principles of Text:

In a land of plenty it is hard to imagine such a condition, being hungry and being thirsty! Jesus was talking to people who understood what it means to be hungry and thirsty. The Greek words in this verse are very powerful. “Peinao,” means to be needy, to suffer deep hunger. The word “dipsao” carries the idea of genuine thirst. This verse speaks of a very strong desire, a driving pursuit, a passionate force inside us, an ambition. Jesus puts the strongest physical impulses in a continuous action. Literally, what it means is the ones who are hungering and the ones who are thirsting. As everyone knows food and water are necessities of physical life. Just like physical food and water are essential for physical life, spiritual hunger and thirst are essential for spiritual life. The promise for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. The word means you are absolutely satisfied. What a paradox! You must be continually hungry and thirsty in order to be satisfied.

Key Concept: To be spiritually satisfied, a deep craving for righteousness comes first.

Discussion Questions:

What would be the character qualities of a person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness?

Describe a time when you felt a hungering and thirsting for God.

Relate to the group the last time you were full spiritually.

How do you develop an appetite for righteousness?

What keeps you from having a hungering and thirsting for righteousness?

As a group, how would you rate our hungering and thirsting for righteousness? Why this rating?

What realistic steps can you take this next week to make you hungrier and thirstier for righteousness?

The Beatitudes – Those who are Merciful

Lesson #5

Text: Matthew 5:7 – Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Companion Texts: Hebrews 2:17; Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:4 – 9; Ps. 130:1 – 7

Principles of Text:

The first four beatitudes line up with the last four beatitudes. The first four are inner attitudes and the last four are the things the attitudes manifest. When we realize that we are beggars in the kingdom of God then we will show mercy to other beggars. The Jewish leaders of Jesus' time did not understand this mercy principle. They were proud, egotistical, self-righteous and condemning. Jesus' ministry ran counter culture to the leaders of the time. Jesus reached out to the sick and healed them. He healed the eyes of the blind. He welcomed and ate with prostitutes and sinners. He took the lonely and made them feel loved. He took little children into His arms and loved them. The word itself is from the Greek word "eliamosuna" which means benefactor. This word has a broader meaning than the feelings compassion and sympathy. It means sympathy and compassion in action towards anyone in need. Mercy is seeing a person without food and giving food. Mercy is seeing a person who needs love and loving them. Mercy is meeting the need, not just feeling it. The substance of mercy is in action both physically and spiritually. The wonderful award which awaits those who act in mercy is more mercy. Mercy portrays itself like this, God shows us mercy and then we show mercy to others then God shows us more mercy.

Key Concept: Mercy is more than a feeling but a feeling put to action.

Discussion Questions:

What does it mean to be merciful?

Describe a time when mercy was shown to you.

Share with the group when you showed mercy.

Why is mercy important to God?

When is it most difficult for you to show mercy?

Who is a person you know you need to show more mercy to? Why that person?

Share with the group one act of mercy you plan on carrying out this next week.

The Beatitudes – Those who are Pure in Heart

Lesson #6

Text: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Companion Texts: Proverbs 4:23; Psalm 51:10

Principle of Text:

In the Bible the heart is seen as the inside part of man, the seat of his personality. Predominantly, it refers to the thinking process; the heart is not restricted to the emotions. The issues of thinking, and feeling and acting all generate out of our heart. The phrase “pure” is from the Greek word “katharos” which means to cleanse from filth and iniquity. It means free from sin. The Latin word is “castus” and the root English word is chaste. Medical personal know that a cathartic is an agent used to clean a wound or infected area. “Katharos” is not just pure in motive but is also purity in deed. According to Acts 15:9 our hearts are cleaned by faith.

What happens to the pure? The verb tense indicates a future continuous action. They will be continually seeing God. You will continually live in His presence.

Key Concept: A person with a pure heart and mind will always be able to see God.

Discussion Questions:

What comes to your mind when you think of purity?

Why does God care about purity in heart?

Describe things of this world that tear away at our purity of heart.

Which one do you struggle with the most, purity in thought, purity in feeling or purity of actions? Why this area?

If you could do one thing to become more of a pure person, what would you do?

According to Acts 15:9, our hearts are made pure by faith, how would you describe the strength of your faith? (Note: the level of our faith will give us indications to the level of our purity in heart.)

The reward of a pure heart is seeing God, how is this possible?

The Beatitudes – Those who are Peacemakers

Lesson #7

Text: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Companion Texts: Hebrews 12:14; James 3:17; I Cor. 7:15; Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:15

Principles of Text:

The idea of peace is predominate throughout the Bible. The Bible has over 400 references to peace. In this passage God calls us to be agents of peace. Some people define peace as the absence of conflict. To God it is not the absence of something but the presence of godly righteousness that causes right relationships. Peace is creating righteousness. Biblical peace means you may struggle, experience pain but in the end peace is achieve and is authentic. Peace is resolving conflict by the truth, as you bring to bear the righteousness of God. The benefit of peace is that we will be called sons of God. “Sons” comes from the word “huios” which speaks of dignity, honor and standing before God. When I am a peace maker, I am acting in line with the dignity and honor of being a son of God.

Key Concept: When I bring peace to a situation I am acting in line with the dignity and honor of being a child of God.

Discussion Questions:

What kind of character is found in a peacemaker?

Based on these character qualities how would you describe yourself in this area? Or would people describe you as a fighter or a peacemaker? Why?

The Bible talks about God being “the God of peace,” what has God done to prove He really is “the God of peace” in your life?

Why is it difficult to bring peace to a situation?

Describe any situations in your life where you are not at peace.

What can you or the group, do to help you resolve this conflict issues?

What are the benefits of being a peacemaker?

The Beatitudes – Those who are Persecuted

Lesson #8

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

Companion Texts: Matt. 10:34; James 1:2 – 4; I Peter 5:10; II Tim. 2:12; 3:12; John 15:20; Hebrews 11:35

Principles of Text:

Living according to the kingdom principles in the Beatitudes brings peace and also creates persecution. While this beatitude is hard to accept, it is the natural consequence of living a kingdom lifestyle in contrast and conflict with the world. The world cannot tolerate a person who is poor in spirit, meek, a God-seeker, merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker. What kind of persecution may come our way when we decide to live the beatitudes? We can expect to be called derogatory names, we will be ridiculed and false things will be said about us. Notice the reason for the persecution. It is not because we are rude or obnoxious. We are persecuted because of our association with Jesus. The prophets were also persecuted; their faithfulness during persecution can encourage us.

Key Concept: What are some of the persecutions in the world today?

Discussion Questions:

Share with the group the story of someone you know who has gone through persecution for their faith in Christ.

What is the most common type of persecution you face?

Share with the group a time when you were persecuted for your faith.

Why is it hard to endure persecution?

How can a Christian anticipate future rewards when experiencing unjust pain now?

How can persecution be a blessing?

What can you do specifically for a friend who is under fire for their faith? Be specific.

What kind of persecution, if any, do you believe our group will face in the future?