

THE CHARACTER AND INFLUENCE OF JESUS' DISCIPLES:

MATTHEW 5:3-16

2 of 12, *Jesus on the Good Life: The Sermon on the Mount*

1. Actions flow from identity; Jesus begins with identity: you are blessed; you are God's agents.
2. Echoes Deut 33:29; Jesus' followers are the true Israel, God's new covenant people.
3. As such, we are to have character marked by faith, hope, and love; be distinct in the world.

I. The Character of Jesus' Disciples, 5:3-12

The Big Picture: Hope

1. "Blessed" does not mean "happy," but "favored by God"
2. Blessings summed up in the kingdom (vv. 3, 10); present tense vs. future tense in 4-9; already/not yet
3. We hope for what is to come, even as we begin to experience it now.

Beatitudes 1-4: Faith

1. Isaiah 61:1-2a; Jesus at the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4); read 2b-3;
 - note references to "poor"; "mourn"; and "righteousness"; only one missing is "meek"
 - In Beatitudes, Jesus claims to be the Spirit-anointed servant who proclaims *God's salvation*.
 - Virtue begins with faith in God; not a matter of self-effort.

(1) v. 3: "poor in spirit" = acknowledges spiritual bankruptcy; example: Pharisee & tax collector
- What I long for in my children more than anything: poverty of spirit; how many families fail here?

(2) v. 4: mourning in Isaiah 61:2-3 is for Israel's exile/sin; mourning = repentance; prodigal son
- "they shall be comforted" in the age to come and in anticipation of it; God will wipe away every tear.

(3) v. 5: Psalm 37:1-2; "Fret not"; see 8-9, then 10-11; "meek" = "those who wait for the LORD"
- meekness is complete reliance on God, submission to his sovereignty; opposed to fretting
- My temptation: to fret when I see injustice (especially against me); social media exacerbates this.
- We shouldn't be surprised at injustice; wait patiently for the Lord, and you will inherit the earth.

(4) v. 6: Hunger/thirst; we are not familiar with this feeling; longing to be virtuous.

2. Notice that all four of these highlight our inadequacy and God's sufficiency; call for *faith*.
3. Unless we are rightly related to God by faith in Christ, nothing else matters.

Beatitudes 4-8: Love

1. Faith fuels love for God and for others. Movement from vertical (vv. 3-6) to horizontal (vv. 7-12).

(1) v. 7: "merciful": those who show concern for the needy, grace to the guilty
- Parable of the unforgiving servant; 10,000 talents vs. 100 denarii
- Unmerciful spirit shows we have not grasped the depths of our sin and of God's mercy
- "will receive mercy" = at the final judgment; not a basis of our justification, but evidence of it.

(2) v. 8: Psalm 24:3-4: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully."

- Purity of heart = absence of guile, deceit, manipulation for one's own gain.
- Man w/5 kids at a restaurant who gets the wrong check; but he is honest and pays what he owes
- there is no greater hope than to see God; let that promise be held in your mind in times of temptation.

(3) v. 9: God is the chief peacemaker; when we make peace with others, we imitate him.

- “will be called” = at the final judgment

(4) v. 10: Jesus envisions our commitment to righteousness leading us to suffer for it.

- We are willing to suffer for righteousness because we love God, others; have hope
- Further commentary in 11-12: “on account of me” has replaced “righteousness”
- Jesus tells us not only to endure, but to rejoice; we are joining the company of the faithful
- The good life is not about escaping suffering; just the opposite: it *will* result in suffering.

2. Character of Jesus’ disciples: Marked by faith, hope, and love.

II. The Influence of Jesus’ Disciples, vv. 13-16

1. On the heels of vv. 10-12; Jesus’ point: not everyone will hate, oppose, reject you; some will believe.
2. Two metaphors: point of both is that they stand out; they cannot be missed; they influence.

The Salt of the Earth

1. v. 13: to us, salt is a seasoning; in 1st century, it was mainly a preservative.

- Jesus’ disciples have a preserving effect on the world; they slow its decay; influence is unmistakable.
- But what if the salt is corrupted by impurities? It can no longer fulfill this function; it hardens soil.
- The point: your influence will not last if your character is deficient.
- There is a wide chasm between poverty of spirit and hypocrisy; the two are opposites.

The Light of the World

1. v. 14a: Salt merely slows decay; light dispels darkness

- Isaiah 60:1-3: Jesus’ disciples are the true Zion

2. As such, we cannot help but display God’s glory: 14b-15

- City on a hill: lamps would be unmistakable at night
- Lamps are not lit to be covered up.

3. v. 16: Aren’t we supposed to avoid doing good deeds to be seen? (6:1)

- The issue is about *motive*, not *audience*.
- No one who is a true follower of Jesus will be able to keep that fact hidden for long.
- My life was changed in middle school when I was taught for the first time that my whole life bears witness.

1. The good life, the virtuous life, defined by faith, hope, and love.
2. It is a life of suffering, rejection; but also one that can’t help but lead some to glorify God.
3. Rest of sermon shows how, specifically, Jesus’ disciples are to stand out as different.