

It's All About Him

Matthew 5:1-12

Pastor Tom Anderson

The “beatitudes” are the beautiful attitudes. They describe the supreme blessings of life. That’s what “beatitude” means in Latin, “blessed are...” The Greek word is “makarioi” and can also be translated “happy are...” Jesus was a profoundly happy man. No one on earth was as happy and blessed as Jesus Christ. These eight sentences are the blueprint for a happy life. But the teachings can’t be separated from the teacher. Happiness and blessing is something we can only receive when we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

What is happiness and how do I pursue it in this life? These are times of recession and uncertainty about the future. A lot of people are giving voice to anger and fear born of their deepest and most personal worries. A lot of people are discovering the tragedy of having invested their lives in looking for happiness in all the wrong places. They may have made great efforts to climb the ladder in life only to discover at the top that it is leaning against the wrong wall.

It is a really good time for us to rediscover the real sources of blessing and joyful living. I believe that everything you need to be supremely happy and to experience outrageous joy is right here in this room, right now. It is the Word of God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not without significance that Matthew makes the Beatitudes the opening of Jesus’ public teaching ministry. Verses 1-2 state, “When he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...” Teachers in the ancient world always sat down to teach and their students gathered around them. Jesus deliberately chose a mountain to teach on which puts him in parallel with the greatest of all Old Testament teachers, Moses who also taught from the mountain top the commandments God had revealed to him. This prepares us to hear with special attention for what Jesus has to say is not personal opinion but it is presented as the Word of God.

In the Old Testament, God called Moses to the mountaintop. But here it is Jesus who calls the crowds to the mountainside to listen and learn. This points to something special about Jesus: He is more than Moses. He is the divine Son of God who has come to speak directly to the world.

In the next few weeks, I want us to take a detailed tour of each of these eight great spiritual laws. I want to introduce you to some people who have lived these beatitudes and I want to inspire you to discover, apply and enjoy the beatitudes in your own life.

The Beatitudes as Jesus presents them are progressive and interdependent. They do not stand alone but they stand together and build on the ones that came before. And we will also see that they can really be separated from the one who first taught them: Jesus. This is not a set of self-help principles, but each Beatitude depends upon Jesus Christ as the giver of the blessing. The beatitudes don't say how you can bless yourself; they tell you how to open your life to receive the blessings Jesus Christ has for you. The teachings can't be separated from the teacher.

The first Beatitude is the prerequisite for all the others: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (5:3) In other words, Jesus is telling us that the very first thing I need to do to pursue happiness is to discover my poverty and learn how to ask for help. We need to learn how to say, "I can't do it alone, I need help."

Every one of us is poor in our own way. We can be financially poor. We can be occupationally poor. We can be intellectually poor. We can be emotionally poor. We need to discover our own needs and learn how to ask for help. Poverty handled in a positive way is an opportunity to involve good and generous people in our dreams. Poverty can be a positive possibility if it motivates me to a humble cry for help.

The late Methodist evangelist E. Stanley Jones used to begin retreats by having participants write down their deepest needs on paper. Occasionally, someone would say, "Dr. Jones, I don't have any needs." To which he would reply, "If you think you don't have a need, then that is your need." We should fear hiding and denying our poverty more than we fear the embarrassment of having needs or being poor. Happiness does not come from a false sense of self-sufficiency but it begins when I realize the most basic attitude: I can't do it alone, I need help.

I would like to suggest to you that there are two good confessions that will work miracles in your life. The first one is “I need help.”

The great evangelist Robert Schuler struggled for most of his life with a serious weight problem. He was told again and again by reliable people, like his doctor that he needed to bring his diet under control. But despite his best intentions and efforts, he found himself going off course a meal times. He was frustrated, angry with himself and deeply upset. “How is it,” he would say to himself, “that I can build churches and write books and inspire so many people but I can’t control my own eating habits?”

Finally, Schuler got down on his knees and cried out, “God, I’m not sure if you exist. I’ve preached and prayed that you do, but I don’t know if I live like you do. If you are there, please help.” That was his turning point. He continues to struggle with healthy eating habits but not like before. He said this, “As long as I continued to believe that I remain in control, I was doomed. But when I cried out for help I was saved.”

The second great confession is this, “I am sorry.” Psalm 51:17 says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

A couple of months ago I was talking with my son about his friends. Recently one of his old high school friends had come back into his circle of pals after a long absence. Craig remarked that he had really changed for the better since high school. At this point I charged in with brutal sarcasm, “What do you mean, has he taken a shower?” My son’s countenance fell and I knew my words had hurt him. The conversation was over between us but I kept turning it over in my mind all night. Why did I have to speak so negatively? Why did I have to give voice to the worst view of others?

The next day when he got home from work, I stopped him and said, “Craig, I’m sorry I spoke ill of your friends and it really was hurtful and uncalled for. Please forgive me.” He turned and gave me a big hug which announced his forgiveness. Things were right again between us.

Being able to use these two confessions—just six words—in your life; “I need help” and “I am sorry” will open the gates of blessed, happy living for you. What is it that holds us back? The answer to that question is *unholy pride*.

Unholy pride is when I falsely believe I can do it all myself. I put up a false front of self-sufficiency in all things. I fear embarrassment or rejection if someone else should

perceive me as weak or vulnerable. In blind arrogance I deny my need for God or for other people's help, even my own family. Unholy pride leads me to live in fear and ultimately despair because I can't hide my poverty and failure forever.

There is a holy pride that recognizes that even though I am poor and needy, God loves me and gave his life for me. I can believe in myself because God believes in me and will help me to be all that he intended me to be. Holy pride in myself leads me to ask for help and forgiveness because God really does love me and wants to help me.

Jesus once asked a paralyzed man, "Do you want to be healed?" That's not a dumb question! It is the most important question. Do you want to be helped? Do you want to be happy? The happiness recession ends when we say yes. Yes Lord! Yes Jesus! I need you, I can't do it alone.