

COUNTER REVOLUTION: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

We're in the world. And we're for it. But we're not *of* it. We don't march to it's beat. We march to a beat that transcends this city and its culture, this world and its ways. It's a beat from above. It's the beat of Christ's heart. Its rhythm is his timeless wisdom. Its tempo is his time-tested love. And the Sermon on the Mt is the song. In this Sermon, Christ teaches us to live the right way up, in an upside down world.

This commentary, written by Terran Williams, draws from some of the best available sources. It will aid in individuals and groups in their study of Christ's teaching in his Manifesto of Life in the Kingdom, Matthew 5-7.

My sources - Much reference will be made to these sources throughout this commentary. Each time I will mention the author and the page number, but I will not mention the book title.

- Carson, D.A. 1994. Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew. Zondervan Publishers: Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Eaton, Michael 1999. The way that leads to life. Christian Focus Publishers: Fearn, England.
- Guzik, David. Free online commentary of Matthew available on the web address of www.enduringword.com
- Hurbert, Zack. Free online study of the original Greek manuscripts. The site is called 'The Resurgence Greek Project' and is found at www.zhubert.com
- Stott, John. 1989. The Message of the Sermon on the Mount. Intervarsity Press: Leicester, England.
- Willard, Dallas. 1998. The Divine Conspiracy. Harper Collins Publishers: London.

Outline of the Sermon on the Mount

- the life God blesses (5:1-12)
- the call to influence (5:13-16)
- love for the scriptures (5:17-20)
- radical love (5:21-48)
- spirituality before the audience of One (6:1-18)
- pursuing that which is worthy of our lives (6:19-24)
- overcoming anxiety about the future and preoccupation with not-so-important things (6:25-34)
- how *not* to help each other change (7:1-6)
- strong encouragements to pray and love (7:7-12)
- responding to the Sermon's call to radical living (7:13-29)

Matthew 5:1-12 - THE LIFE GOD BLESSES

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.

A disciple of Jesus is someone who seeks to be transformed deeply by Christ's teaching.

- Matthew 5-7 has come to be called "the Sermon on the Mount". It's probably a summary of teachings given in one location over one day or perhaps several days. It is very likely, Jesus preached the contents of this message several times and in several places – which made it possible for the disciples to easily remember it. Incidentally, good disciples sought to remember what their teacher taught them. They would literally devote their lives to memorizing his teachings. Being Jews who at a young age had already memorized the first five books of the Old Testament, this wouldn't have been too difficult.
- There are some common misunderstandings of the Sermon on the Mount:
 - Some people wrongly think that the Sermon on the Mount is meant to persuade non-Christians that they are so sinful that they need a

saviour. In other words, it is seen as a tool to convict non-Christians in evangelism. But this is not the case. It's a message to disciples (v1). It is a message for Christians who want to make progress in their discipleship.

- Some people wrongly think it should be used as a law for all of society. But, again, this is not a message to society in general, but rather to the church. Jesus is calling the church of disciples to be a radical counter-culture.
- Some people wrongly think that it's a long list of rules that Christians should live by. The problem with this is that it takes some of the teaching in an overly literal and legalistic way, when the better way to take it is to discern the spirit of Jesus' teachings. This point will make sense later. Jesus' teaching is more about how the kingdom of God transforms us from the inside out, than it is a set of rules that we should try abide by.
- Some people wrongly think that it's impossible to live out the Sermon on the Mount, so we shouldn't even try. Listen to what Michael Eaton says in 'The way that leads to life': "Although no one will ever get to the point where he or she can say, 'I keep the Sermon on the Mount', we are intended to start climbing this holy mountain, even if we only reach the top in heaven" (pg 16).
- So what is Jesus teaching then? He is coaching his disciples in what it takes to be a truly godly person, someone who can serve him fruitfully. This is a teaching for Christians and churches. It is Jesus calling us to be truly transformed by his grace. It is Jesus coaching us to become the kind of people who will truly be salt and light in this world, a powerful counter-culture. It's extremely challenging and will often drive us to our knees in repentance and humility. But, as we draw on the resources of salvation and the Spirit, we will see that our lives can reflect Jesus' teachings. Certainly, Jesus expects nothing less than our whole-hearted study of his words, and our total co-operation in allowing his teaching to transform us.

The Beatitudes

He said:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

A disciple of Jesus is someone who lives in the kingdom of heaven.

- Verses 3-10 consist of what has been called 'The Beatitudes'. They are eight descriptions of the life of a disciple. The first (v3) and the last (v10) share the same phrase: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". This is Jesus' way of saying that a disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning to live in the kingdom of heaven, and reflect the qualities of its king, Jesus himself.
- Jesus had already established that his main invitation to people was to receive his kingdom, and to learn to live in it (see Matthew 4:17). What is this kingdom Christ is talking about? Simply put, the kingdom exists

wherever people actively submit to the wisdom, the leadership and the empowering grace of Christ, the king. Since Christ's first coming, his kingdom has been advancing in this world wherever people have actively trusted in Christ and his wisdom, leadership and grace. When he comes again, his wisdom, leadership and grace will be fully revealed to all creation.

A disciple of Jesus is someone who pursues the life that God blesses.

- Nine times in these opening lines to his Sermon, Christ uses the word 'blessed'. What does it mean to be "blessed"? In today's terms it means something similar to 'lucky', 'enviable', 'fortunate', and 'privileged' and 'happy'. In fact the word 'blessed' means 'happy'. Although, as we look at Christ's teaching, we will realize that it refers to the deep, lasting kind of happiness, not the short-lived, circumstance-dependent kind of happiness. A person who is blessed can joyfully praise God and trust that God's way is best. It means to be someone on whom God pours out his favour and approval. The word "blessed" can mean "congratulations!" It's as though God is congratulating us for the place in which we find ourselves – "well done, you have done so well!" It also means to live with the promise of great future blessing (when Christ returns), although much of that future joy can already be experienced now.
- It seems that every culture has its own version of what a blessed life looks like. Blessed are the rich. Blessed are the good-looking. Blessed are the healthy. Blessed are those who have no worries or problems. Blessed are the clever. Blessed are those who are well connected. Blessed are those with optimistic attitudes. Blessed are those who have found lasting romantic love. Blessed are the lottery winners. Blessed are the famous. The list goes on and on. We will see that Jesus' description of what a truly blessed life looks like is quite surprising, and far less superficial than the typical list that is generated by our culture. Jesus has a eight-point list to describe the truly blessed life - or at least the life that God blesses...

First, blessed are the poor in spirit.

- What does it mean to be "poor in spirit" (v3)? Carson tells us that it doesn't mean "to lack courage but rather to acknowledge one's spiritual bankruptcy and one's need to depend on God alone" (pg 22). We must humbly discern how much we need God's grace and help to live life as he intends us to live it. We need to learn how to run on God's empowering grace much like an aeroplane runs on fuel. The Christian life is impossible without a daily dependence on God's grace. The only way to experience grace in the kingdom is to live humbly and dependent on God.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Second, blessed are those who mourn.

- What does it mean to mourn? Verse 4 is not a command. We're not told to mourn. It simply tells us that as disciples in this world there will be times when we will mourn. Although the dominant emotion of the Christian life is joy (and remember that the word "blessed" – used nine times in these verses – means "happy") there will be times when we will rightly grieve over our own spiritual bankruptcy, our sinful tendencies (see 1 Corinthians 5:2) and the sinfulness in the world around us (see Philippians 3:18). Jesus reminds us that though sadness and tears are a part of the Christian life, they are not the main part – and are only temporary: God will comfort us in our mourning. Joy and comfort, not grief and mourning, are the last words that Christ speaks over us.

<p>5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.</p>

Third, blessed are the meek.

- What does it mean to be "meek" (v5)? It means to avoid pride, aggression and defensiveness. Instead of being proud, we humble ourselves and see ourselves as we really are. We have neither an inflated nor a deflated view of ourselves. Instead of being aggressive, we treat people gently and with self-control. Meekness is, however, not weakness. Rather, it is the control of our strength. And instead of defending ourselves, we trust God to look after us and our reputation. We are secure in God, and like Moses (the humblest person of his time – see Numbers 12:3), rather than defending ourselves, we fall facedown to pray when attacked and criticized. And, wonderfully, as we find our security and trust in God, rather than being proud, aggressive and defensive, God allows us "to inherit the earth" – which means ultimately that we enjoy the new heavens and the new earth one day. This also means that now God provides for us and wonderfully compensates for all loss with the outworking of his plan and the provision of his presence!

<p>6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.</p>
--

Fourth, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

- What does it mean to "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (v6)? To hunger and thirst for anything is to passionately pursue it as one's highest priority. As we get to know God and discern his will for our lives and the world we live in, we begin to deeply crave that his will and transformation will come into our lives, freeing us from sin and unrighteousness. And we start to yearn for God's will to come to the world around us, freeing the oppressed and the victim from exploitation. As we proactively and passionately give ourselves with total abandon to God's will, God's kingdom comes. There is a measure of satisfaction as we see the will of God being done in our lives to a degree, and in the

situations around us, again, to a degree. But unrighteousness remains until that day when we are in the new heavens and the new earth, the home of true righteousness (2 Peter 3:13). So our full satisfaction comes in the future, but already now we taste and drink of it as God's will is progressively embraced.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
--

Fifth, blessed are the merciful.

- What does it mean to be merciful (v7)? It means to hold back on the impulse to avenge those who have hurt us. It means to be generous to others, especially when they don't deserve our generosity. It means to forgive our offenders. It means to have compassion on those who are hurting or lacking. We must remember that the disciples had already started to experience Christ's mercy toward them. He had already lavished warmth, acceptance, healing and teaching upon them. Now he is saying that we are not only recipients of this mercy, but we need to be conduits of it too. And the wonderful promise is that as we extend this mercy to others we will experience even more of God's grace, mercy, kindness and forgiveness flowing towards us. This is part of what it means to "be shown mercy".

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
--

Sixth, blessed are the pure in heart.

- What does it mean to be "pure in heart" (v8)? It means three things. First, it means to have a heart that pursues one thing only. In this case it means to pursue God and God alone. As God goes to work in us, his grace causes us to want him and his righteousness and his kingdom. Our lives are simplified by this single desire. We are not looking for glory, for comfort or for pleasure. No, we are looking for God and his wonderful kingdom to advance in and around our lives! Stott writes that to be pure in heart means, "to be single-minded, free from the tyranny of a divided self" (pg 49). Second, it means to be transformed in the depth of our beings, having a righteousness that transcends the superficial or any kind of external behaviour modification; a righteousness that comes from a heart-level change. Third, it means we are free from deceit and false motives and camouflage. Said another way, we are an open book before God and man.
- And what a wonderful promise awaits us if we're pure in heart: we shall "see God". One day we will experience what theologians call "the beatific vision" when we shall in the brightness of day gaze upon the face of God (see 1 John 3:2). But already now God wants us to see his face by faith, by spiritual discernment. Like Moses, we "see him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27). We don't see him with our natural eyes, but

with our spiritual eyes. Energized by the Holy Spirit, we delight in his wonderful presence and beautiful character.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Seventh, blessed are the peacemakers.

- What does it mean to be a peacemaker (v9)? It means to be a person who actively, and not passively, pursues authentic, not superficial, harmony with God and man. God himself is a peacemaker: through Jesus Christ he has paid the price to make it possible for us to be reconciled with him (see Colossians 1:2) and then with each other (see Ephesians 2:15). Once we are at peace with God, we begin to live in peace with others, as far as it depends on us (Romans 12:18). This doesn't mean we settle for pseudo-peace where underlying tensions and conflicts go unaddressed. Sometimes being a peacemaker will entail being a peace-breaker. We may have to expose some painful issues to bring about real peace. We need to seek reconciliation between us and God, us and others, and between conflicting parties. This will require that we care, that we're tactful, that we watch our tongues, that we're diplomatic, that we're courageous. Wonderfully Jesus promises that as we give ourselves to being peacemakers, people will discern that we really are agents of the God of peace. We will be perceived as God's sons and daughters as we reflect his peace-making character and intention in a conflict-filled world.

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Eighth, blessed are the persecuted.

- Many won't appreciate the changes Christ makes in your life. The eighth beatitude is different to the rest in that it does not describe the life of a disciple as much as it describes how many people will respond to us when we live out the previous seven beatitudes in dependence on Jesus.
- You would think that people everywhere would delight in the positive impact Christ makes on us – we become increasingly dependent on God's grace (v3), deeply concerned about sin in our lives and in the world (v4), less prone to pride, defensiveness and aggressiveness (v5), desperately committed to the pursuit of God's will being done in our lives and the world (v6), extending grace, compassion and mercy to those who have wronged us, and to those in need (v7), given to living single-minded, transparent, integrity-filled lives (v8), and actively seeking authentic harmony everywhere (v9). And certainly some people

will welcome these changes (as verse 16 shows), but here Jesus warns that many will react very badly.

- Some will openly insult us. Some will speak falsely about us behind our backs. And some will do far worse. Why is this? There are at least three reasons. 1) Because of righteousness (v10) some people will feel guilty when they are exposed to our righteousness and will angrily lash out at us in guilt. 2) Because of our association with Christ (“because of me” – v11) those who hate Christ will hate us also. 3) Because we are agents of change: if we kept our righteousness to ourselves people would most likely be okay with us, but Jesus calls us to seek righteousness and justice (v6) and to be peacemakers (v9), which will prompt us to challenge people around us – and some people don’t want to change.

A disciple of Jesus is someone who seeks reward from God.

- “Great is your reward” (v12). Although all Christians are equally accepted by God (on the basis of their faith in the blood of Jesus), not all Christians are equally rewarded. Jesus teaches in the beatitudes that our rewards are dependent on our level of character transformation.
- But what are the rewards of a transformed life? The first and eighth beatitude remind us that the reward is that we more fully possess and experience the kingdom blessings. The second to seventh beatitudes speak specifically of what these kingdom blessings and rewards are. They come partially in this life and fully in the next life. We will “be comforted” (v4), “inherit the earth” (v5), “be satisfied” (v6), “be shown mercy” (v7), “see God” (v8) and will be “called sons and daughters of God” (v9). Although a transformed life will cause us some setbacks and persecution (v10, 11), these troubles are nothing compared to the wonderful rewards that we receive from God, now and forever. “All our momentary troubles are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed” (Romans 8:18). Let us “rejoice and be glad” (v12) – life in the kingdom is the most rewarding life there is!