

+ *A Salt and Light in the World* + (The Sermon on the Mount)

A New Righteousness:

It Will Exceed That of the Scribes and Pharisees

Introduction

Matthew's recording, written to a first century audience located in Antioch, Syria.

A program, if you will, for church behavior and Christian ethics.

Written by (if you assume Matthew's authorship) a scribe (Matthew 9:9) which could account for its balance, order, and well-written form.

The sermon demonstrates a change of masters: from the tyranny of the world's ethics to the instruction of Jesus Christ.

Central to the teaching is Matthew 5:48—Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Perfect. The word expresses totality, wholeness, something without blemish. Righteousness, blamelessness, upright. However, the word *does not* imply “absolutely flawless” but rather perfect righteousness, within the Spirit's persuasion to live the loving life.

Gandhi said,

“The message of Jesus, as I understood it, is contained in the Sermon on the Mount. It is that sermon which has endeared Jesus to me. The message, to my mind, has suffered distortion in the West. Much of what passes as Christianity is a negation of the Sermon on the Mount.”

I. Jesus on the mountain, not unlike Moses, begins with a series we call the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3-12.

A. The strangeness of blessings amidst woes, joy in sadness.

1. Illogical to be blessed and be in poor spirit, or mourning, or as one persecuted.
2. The illogic is instructive to the radicality of blessing amidst.

B. Luther described the blessings as “a fine, sweet, and friendly beginning.”

1. The message of the Beatitudes begins with God. God blesses. God establishes covenant. God is the place where all discipleship life begins. From a blessing!
2. The Beatitudes draw on anti-wisdom. Gregory of Nyssa: If one looks at it from the point of view of the world, one will certainly say that the words are ridiculous and argue like this: If one calls blessed those people whose life is spent enduring all matter of misfortune, it follows that those who live without sorrow or care must be miserable.

II. The Beatitudes.

A. Matthew 5:3. *Blessed are the poor in spirit.*

1. Blessed are the crushed, dispirited, disheartened, both in economic poverty and a spiritual condition that accompanies it. This blessing is completely contrary to conventional wisdom.
2. Isaiah 61:1-3. Luke 7:22-23.
3. The good news of this blessing is brought to the poor and poor in spirit that the kingdom of heaven is near.

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

1. Continuing to turn conventional wisdom on its head. Can the grieving be comforted?
2. Those who know the blessings of God can be comforted at funerals amidst the death's sadness.

C. Matthew 5:5. *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

1. Psalm 37:11. Psalm 25:13.
2. Really? It seems like the proud and arrogant inherit the earth.
3. The meek, who assume they can be wrong. The humble of heart.

D. Matthew 5:6. *Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness sake, for they will be filled.*

1. *Righteousness*, a favorite term of Matthew, exceeding the scribes and Pharisees.
2. *Righteousness*: what is right, to see the right prevail, vindication, salvation.
3. Hungering and thirsting, yearning, also suggests righteousness cannot be possessed.

E. Matthew 5:7. *Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

1. Mercy is expected of the people of God. (Micah 6:8. Matthew 12:7)
2. Acts of compassion toward the poor, suffering, and needy.
3. Showing mercy, obtaining mercy, avoiding the name of God but implying a Godly mercy.

F. Matthew 5:8. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

1. Psalm 5:10. Psalm 73:1. One without deceit; neither evil motives nor intention.
2. Singleness of heart, no double-mindedness.
3. Psalm 24:3-6 provides the background for this Beatitude—seeing the God of Jacob, seeing God’s glory, experiencing the divine.

G. Matthew 5:9. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

1. Happy is the person who established peace—peace between persons, peace between nations.
2. *Shalom*: health, well-being.
3. Peacemakers as constructive agents of peace. Christians are to be activists for peace.

H. Matthew 5:10. *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

1. A blessing on the persecuted, the hated, the excluded, the reviled (Palestinians).
2. To be persecuted is to be pursued or chased after, persecution where hostility has taken on legs.
3. This blessing concludes with the same as the first Beatitude, *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, surrendering to Christ amidst persecution in the world.

I. Matthew 5:11. *Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

1. This is a transitional Beatitude in the “second person.” *You* speaking to audiences present and future.
2. Christians will be made to suffer slander, defamation, and disgrace.
3. Upbeat ending gives evidence to the incongruity in the blessings throughout.
4. 1 Peter 4:13-14. Persecuted/rejoice and be glad.
5. Prophets in the face of kingdom persecution juxtaposed with the kingdom of heaven.