

“KINGDOM CONSTITUTION” – Lessons in the Sermon on the Mount 10.2.16

Matthew 5:1-12 “The Blessed Way” (Beatitudes Overview) Craig Crawshaw

Read Mathew 5:1-12

INTRODUCTION

Last week, in our introduction to the Sermon on the Mount we emphasized that this sermon gives the essence for who we are as citizens of the Kingdom of God. It does not offer what we are SUPPOSED to be as citizens, but what we already ARE as citizens. In that sense, it is indeed the CONSTITUTION of the Kingdom, that is, of what the Kingdom constitutes.

We said that the preamble to the Kingdom Constitution is the Beatitudes. They are 8 mystic and cryptic statements that explain what brings blessedness to the Kingdom’s citizens, and what rewards they bring. It is the “We the people ...” of the Sermon on the Mount.

The word “beatitude” means a state of blessedness or perfect inner happiness, from the same English word that we get the adjective “beatific” such as in the “beatific smile” of the Mona Lisa. Such a smile is said to portray inner blessedness and satisfaction. Thus, the beatitudes are so named because each of their statements begin with “Blessed are ...” teaching the way of blessedness.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BEATITUDES

So as we proceed, let us list the key characteristics of these Beatitudes. The first two we have stated already.

1. **They present the essential character of the Christian** (that is, who we are under the Kingship of Jesus).

We discover that Christians are poor in spirit, and mourn, and are meek. We further discover that Christians hunger and thirst for righteousness and are merciful and pure of heart. We are peacemakers and thus persecuted for our righteousness. This is who we are, mystery though it seems at the outset of our understanding. But as we dig deeper into the King’s descriptions of us, we find that this is exactly what He has made us to be.

2. **They are the path to true and lasting inner satisfaction, or blessedness.** Thus, “Blessed are” they who possess these characteristics.

Our world seeks for happiness and satisfaction in wealth, power and achievement. They seek it in eating, drinking and merriment. They seek it in excess of luxury, stimulants and sexuality. But wherever they look, they find but ultimate emptiness and still want more, never being satisfied. In the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount we find the secret for which the world has been searching for millennia – the secret of true inner satisfaction leaving no need for more.

The third characteristic of the Beatitudes we here mention is quite striking:

3. **They are counter-intuitive to the way of our world** They are an antithesis to the world’s way of achieving satisfaction and offer totally unconventional wisdom.

Let us pause to think on this striking characteristic.

GENERALLY - The world thinks of happiness and satisfaction coming from circumstances— having a “good day”, money in the bank, health, ease of life, good family and friends, things “going our way” and such. (And we would want these circumstances to be ours as well – anyone would.) The world would say these circumstances make me a “lucky” and “fortunate” person whether I have helped create these good circumstances or whether they have just come my way by accident.

A citizen of God’s Kingdom however, views these good circumstances in a strikingly different way. We favor saying we are “blessed” rather than “lucky” or “fortunate.” Why? It is because we are taught and convinced that all good gifts are from God, and that good circumstances are not accidents or by chance, but planned gifts of God. Our key teaching on this comes from James 1:17.

James 1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from

the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

Do you see how this verse informs our very perception of every good circumstance that comes our way in life? The Kingdom citizen does not view such a good circumstance as “luck,” “fortune” or something we have caused. Rather this Kingdom citizen views good circumstance, whether it be as trivial as a good parking place or as profound as the healing of a debilitating disease as a gift from the Father of lights and a blessing. This reaction is in stark and striking contrast to the perception of the world. So generally, this is how the Beatitudes are counter-intuitive to the way of our world.

SPECIFICALLY - As we look at each of the 8 beatitudes we find that those who are “blessed” are in stark and striking contrast to what the world thinks of as blessed. Those outside the Kingdom would never say that being “poor in spirit” or “mourning” is the way of blessed happiness. And being “gentle” or “meek” – well that is the way of little success, for success comes from being confident and forthright – even a little pushy, if need be, they would say.

To “hunger and thirst” for power, fame, success and personal happiness is what the world would say is “blessed,” not to strive for pleasing God in righteousness. Yet the Kingdom citizen is one who cares above all else to do what is right in God’s eyes, even if it conflicts with what he might want.

Many outside the Kingdom might call for mercy or peace, but not at the expense of getting even or receiving retribution for wrong. Yet the truly merciful and peacemaking citizen of the Kingdom desires and gives mercy and brings people together in peace abundantly – with second, third and even more chances – because he has been forgiven so much by His Heavenly Father, given an eternal peace with God.

And being “pure in heart” sounds good, but after all, who really is that pure of intention and action, says the world. Whereas the Kingdom citizen knows that that purity is indeed the way of blessedness, coming only from being granted that pure heart by the indwelling, living Lord of life.

And blessedness coming from persecution? Well you can see how that won’t fly with the world’s view. Yes, all 8 of the beatitudes are in stark contrast to the world’s view of true satisfaction

Now we continue with our list of characteristics of the beatitudes.

4. They show a progression in spiritual maturity

We will see this in greater detail as we study each beatitude in successive weeks. But for now, note that (1) when a believer acknowledges his/her poverty of spirit apart from Christ, this brings him/her to (2) mourn over the debilitating and inescapable power of sin both within and without.

This brings about (3) a temperament of a meek and gentle spirit, as opposed to a proud and self-confident one. And it also yields an emptiness (4) that longs (hungers and thirsts) to be filled with the righteousness of God.

As this growing believer reaches into his/her world there is much wrong and unfairness, and yet this believer, filled with the Spirit of God, finds himself (5) being merciful, rather than vengeful. Thus, in all his/her ways this Kingdom citizen exhibits (6) a pure heart in striving to be a person of integrity, honesty, morality in a world that is so often just the opposite.

Against his/her natural tendency, this citizen supernaturally wants to share the gift of love and grace of God that has been given with others, that they might make (7) peace with God and become new citizens of the Kingdom. But this living with a pure heart and sharing the gospel hope of Christ brings (8) persecution from the world.

Do you see the progression? And it is not that a Kingdom citizen is at one point or another along the journey from 1 to 8. No. The journey is made hundreds of times through every awareness of sin and every hungering for God’s best and every attempt to share the gospel and every rejection. But I trust you see the progression through which we continually go in our quest to be what God has called us.

SUMMARY OF THE CHARACTERISTICS

- 1. They present the essential character of the Christian**
- 2. They are the path to true and lasting inner satisfaction, or blessedness**
- 3. They are counter-intuitive to the way of our world**
- 4. They show a progression in spiritual maturity**

In our companion book, “Studies in the Sermon on the Mount” by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, he makes the following 3 important observations about the Beatitudes in Chapter 3, which pertain to ALL CHRISTIANS.

PERTAINING TO ALL

- 1. ALL Christians are to be like this (not just the “super-Christian”)**
- 2. ALL Christians are meant to manifest ALL, and at the same time**
- 3. ALL are supernatural, non-natural tendencies**

Let us examine each of these in turn.

- 1. ALL Christians are to be like this (not just the “super-Christian”)**

There is an unfortunate tendency in many churches to speak of “clergy” and “laity” as if there is some fundamental hierarchy that makes one class of Christian above another in spirituality. Yes, the Bible teaches us to honor and support our spiritual leaders, but not to revere them as anyone more “spiritual.”

The Catholic Church and some Protestant churches, such as the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America (St. Athanasius Orthodox in Santa Barbara) canonize certain departed Christians as “Saints” to be revered and even prayed to. And the Roman Catholic church holds the Pope and Cardinals, as an example, as those to be revered. And even the parish priests are to be called “Father” in respect of their position as spiritual leader. And the mother of Jesus is called the Holy Mother of God, commanding special worship in many churches.

From the Pope to Billy Graham to the church pastor to the lowliest of sinners, all are in Christ’s eyes “poor in spirit” and we are equal in His eyes as undeserved sinners saved by grace. The Beatitudes call all Kingdom citizens to embrace and live out these characteristics in equality before the King.

- 2. ALL Christians are meant to manifest ALL, and at the same time**

We are not to be poor in spirit and meek but not merciful. We all undergo persecution, not just the bold evangelist being a peacemaker to thousands.

And, we are not to one day be hungering for righteousness and the next day focus on being a peacemaker. Every day we are impoverished of spirit apart from Christ and pure in heart by his indwelling grace.

This is similar in concept to the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. It makes no sense to say that I am loving, joyful and peaceful but have no self-control or patience. These are the fruit of the Spirit – all His and all the time – not my fruit. I may need to work on allowing his self-control to come through me more completely, but all His fruit are in me, or none are.

Likewise, the Beatitudes, as manifestations of the Kingdom citizen are All to be active ALL the time.

- 3. ALL are supernatural, non-natural tendencies**

This flows well into our final point – that these characteristics of blessedness are not natural tendencies, but supernatural ones – not possible without God’s gift. In other words, they are products of God’s Spirit abiding in my human frame.

Oh certainly there are those who are naturally gentle and meek, and those who have merciful dispositions apart from being believers. But these are not what the Beatitudes speak and are.

The Kingdom citizen is meek because of his being poor in spirit and having mourned over the power of sin in his/her life. This is the one who like Paul has cried, in essence,

Romans 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

And this understanding produces a supernatural meekness and gentleness.

The Kingdom citizen is merciful because he/she is well aware of his sinfulness and that God has forgiven all his sin completely, so he must forgive others. Our mercy is a direct reflection of God's mercy, not a natural tendency of personality.

And so on with all the others. They are supernatural characteristics of God's grace which enable us to live life in blessedness which is not a derivative of our accomplishments or of chance, but by the direct good gift of God.

You may have never looked at the Beatitudes in this way before. Or, you may have hardly looked at them at all. But may we over the next number of weeks look closely at the supernatural character that God has given us as member of His Kingdom here on earth. And may we learn well the rewards of blessedness that are ours because of these characteristics.

May we better learn WHO we are in Christ in these Beatitudes, that we may better LIVE OUT the Kingdom principles of the Sermon on the Mount. And by so doing may we give our world a clearer picture of the wonder of what it is to be citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Amen!