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## Benefits of the Beatitudes

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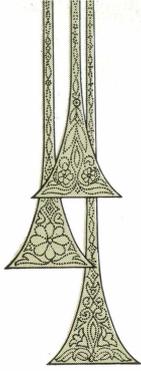
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# THE BENEFITS OF THE BEATITUDES



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# The Benefits of the Beatitudes

The Sermon on the Mount was one of the early events in our Lord's ministry. Matthew, in his Gospel, gives three entire chapters to this great discourse. In Matthew this world renown message follows Jesus' triumph over Satan in the wilderness temptations, and His first trip through the province of Galilee "teaching in their (the Jews', jac) synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people" (Matthew 4: 23).

We could spend our entire time quoting the reactions to this Sermon of men from every era since Christ. The Sermon on the Mount has compelled the response of friend and foe alike. One writer, attempting to explain this phenomenon, said, ". . . the sermon creates conscience where it did not exist" (p. 155, Amos N. Wilder, *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 7). A profound consciousness of evil and good confronts every honest listener to this lesson from the Master. Another student of the ser-

mon explained its uniqueness on this basis: ". . . the Speaker goes clean contrary to maxims and ideas of life and happiness which prevail and always have prevailed among mankind" (p. 13, E. Lyttelton, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*). One does not read very far into chapters five through seven of Matthew without sensing our Lord's radical departure from human wisdom.

The Sermon on the Mount reveals God as our loving, life-giving Father, who sustains us and guides us. It also reveals the divine authority of Jesus as God's Son. This is seen in the daring quality of the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). Jesus' radical reinterpretation of the traditional religion of His day with the six counter statements that begin, "but I say unto you," also shows His mandate from God to bring the badly adrift Jewish society of His day back to God's word for them. The way our Lord announces the final judgment in this sermon further opens His supreme authority to our consideration and obedience (Matthew 7:21-23). Then comes the conclusion of the sermon with the magnificent parable of the wise and foolish builders whom Jesus clearly shows to represent the obedient and disobedient to His teaching from God (Matthew 7:24-27). That "a teacher come from God" was on the scene, the audience reaction to the sermon indicates. "And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:28, 29).

But our attention today is drawn to the first section of this gripping discourse — the Beatitudes. Matthew records, "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain: and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you" (Matthew 5:1-12).

I want to especially impress our minds and hearts in this discussion with "the benefits of the beatitudes." Why

such a striking prologue to the Sermon on the Mount? What purpose or purposes are actually served by these famous statements? In the midst of an almost universal familiarity with these unusual statements of blessing, we ask "Why did our Lord teach them"? If today we can understand the "benefits" of the beatitudes it is my belief that we are then better prepared to understand, in succeeding lessons, the real meanings of these famous statements.

We probably begin at no better place than to inquire about the structure of the beatitudes. Each statement begins with the adjective "happy" or "blessed." Each statement in the original language contains no connecting verb between the exclamatory adjective "blessed" and the quality or condition so pronounced "happy." We further recognize that each beatitude has a special preposition, which in the original language of the New Testament, introduces the reason for such "blessedness" or "happiness."

This brief discussion of the beatitudes' structure brings us to ask about the nature of the "blessing" offered to those described. The word "blessed" is that which gives us the name "beatitude." The Greeks as early as Homer used the term to describe outward prosperity conditioned on material and intellectual power. The Biblical use of the term, in both Old and New Testaments, gave it a moral and subjective tone, ". . . a sense of God's approval founded in righteousness which rests ultimately on love to God" (p 35, Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. 1).

Someone else has said that what is really meant by the word "blessed" is ". . . something like 'enjoying God's favour and destined to enter his eternal kingdom.'" (p 45, A. W. Argyle, *Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible, Matthew*). Words like "happy," "fortunate," "glad," and "blest," are used by different translators to express the meaning of this significant term. *The Amplified New Testament* presents the fullest explanation of what "blessed" means in the following words, "Blessed-happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous (that is, with life - joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions) . . ." (Matthew 5: 3). Above all, the blessing conveyed by this term is a fact for our lives today. The beatitudes do not begin with "may they be blessed" but rather "blessed are . . ." Finally, we must say about the meaning of the term "blessed" that when the conditions and qualities described in these statements are realized in our lives we are "enviously happy and fortunate;" we are truly and spiritually "blest."

But the actual question of today's lesson remains unanswered, that is, in any direct way. How do the beatitudes benefit modern man? What purposes do they serve in my busy, hurried, frantic life? I hear them read occasionally on Sunday, if I attend church services. I sometimes listen to radio and television ministers who talk about them and read them. But what connection with my life do the beatitudes make?

Within these nine verses of Matthew, chapter five, man's proper attitude and conduct in three directions is presented. Regarding one's internal strength and balance Jesus says, in the beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: . . .; Blessed are they that mourn: . . .;" and "Blessed are the pure in heart: . . ." (Matthew 5:3, 4, 8). Concerning our relationships with others, the beatitudes direct, "Blessed are the meek: . . .; Blessed are the merciful: . . .;" and "Blessed are the peacemakers: . . ." (Matthew 5:5, 7, 9). With regard to God and our attitude and conduct toward Him Jesus, in these statements, counsels, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: . . .;" and "Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: . . ." (Matthew 5:6, 10-12). In every important direction — inwardly toward self, outwardly toward others, and upwardly toward God — the beatitudes provide counsel and direction from Jesus.

They also describe the thoroughly happy man. Never have more people attempted more vainly and unsuccessfully to find happiness than in our day. But, all the while, happiness is revealed by Jesus in these wonderful truths. Paul has no hesitation in asking the Christians at Philippi, "Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). He knew the bases on which Jesus had earlier revealed true and abiding joy or happiness. Because of the conditions of life described in the beatitudes, conditions that are possible for us today, the same apostle a few verses later in Philippians instructs, "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). Happiness eludes you? You haven't found the secret to happiness in this life of pain and suffering, evil and destruction? Go with me to the beatitudes for the happiness that lasts — eternally! One observer has written of these truths, "They mark the character of true blessedness in opposition to carnal views of man's happiness" (p. 611, J. Marcellus Kik, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Vol. 1).

A third benefit of the beatitudes arises from the complete description contained therein of the kingdom-citizen. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth" (Matthew 6:10). In keeping with Old Testament prophecy and the preparation of Jesus' personal ministry, the church or kingdom did come on the special Jewish feast day of Pentecost following our Lord's ascension. This great event is described in Acts, chapter two. Jesus explained during His earthly life that the kingdom of God would not, as the Jews had expected, consist of earthly pomp and material might. He said to the Pharisees, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21).

But with the kingdom of God's dear Son a reality, according to Paul in Colossians, what qualities would distinguish the citizen of that spiritual kingdom? (Colossians 1:13). How does one act as a citizen of God's kingdom? This is one of the questions answered by the beatitudes.

Within these succinct statements one also gains a picture of the Christian's character. The beatitudes give us a preview of what the New Testament Epistles are almost totally devoted to doing — unfolding the realities of living the Christian life within a hostile environment. What Peter says about the Christian "graces" in his Second Epistle simply restates what Jesus had already said in the beatitudes. Listen to the apostle's charge. "Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge self-control; and in your self-control patience; and in your patience godliness; and in your godliness brotherly kindness; and in your brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Peter 1:6-8). "The Beatitudes open to us a new world of spiritual character and holy beauty, and consequent joy, such as had not entered into the heart of man to conceive" (pp. 55, 56, W. C. Smith, *The Sermon Bible*, Matthew 1-21). Jesus tells us of the kind of life in Him that will please God.

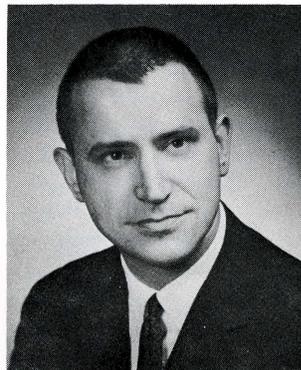
It is also in the beatitudes that the essential qualities of the disciple unfold. Jesus' call to us is the call of discipleship (Luke 9:57-62). But this call is a demanding one (Luke 14:26-32). Once we have "denied self" and answered His summons, what kind of life is to follow? How does the disciple live so as to please his Master? Jesus said, "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his teacher, and the servant as his lord" (Matthew 10:25). But what does the disciple do and how does he live so as to be like his master? This is what the beatitudes are all about!

The beatitudes benefit us because they provide God's antidote for every evil current of twentieth-century "winds." "Blessed are the poor in spirit . . ." counters the arrogant humanism and pride of today's man (Matthew 5:3). "Blessed are they that mourn . . ." speaks directly to the pleasure worship of our time (Matthew 5:4). "Blessed are the meek . . ." brands as evil all forms of barbarism and exploitation (Matthew 5:5). "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness . . ." says that man's lust and greed cannot experience true satisfaction (Matthew 5:6). "Blessed are the merciful . . ." calls for our involvement in others' needs. It counsels us to sensitive concern (Matthew 5:7). "Blessed are the pure in heart . . ." cries out against the pornography and moral relativism rampant in today's world (Matthew 5:8). "Blessed are the peacemakers . . ." calls on all who would follow God to consider the ultimate conclusion of all their words and deeds. This beatitude points to the way all hostility can be abolished (Matthew 5:9). "Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake . . ." says there is no room in the Christian's heart for bitterness and resentment (Matthew 5:10-12).

What the earnest seeker for truth finds in the beatitudes is "the most excellent way" of life offered modern man. Here is where one comes to know the assurance of God's help for today's living. The beatitudes reveal the way for Christians to effectively counter and reshape a confused world, as "children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; . . ." (Philippians 2:15, 16).

But, my friend, the moral and spiritual qualities described in the beatitudes are the Christian's way of life. They teach the qualities of a disciple and reveal the attitudes of a kingdom-citizen. To know this kind of life one must have a beginning point, which, in the New Testament is clearly marked. One first considers the claims of Jesus, the message of the Gospel. Out of this comes faith in Jesus as the Christ and as Lord of your life (Romans 10:17). At this point the New Testament commands that the new believer make a radical break with all sin and rebellion of the past. This is repentance (Acts 2:38). In making the beginning of the Christian life one must also publicly confess his faith in Jesus as God's Son (Romans 10:9, 10). Then comes the opportunity, as taught in God's word, to be united with Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:26, 27). According to all New Testament teachings, this is the point at which all your sins are forgiven and you are provided a place in the kingdom, made a member of Christ's body, the Church (Acts 2:47; I Corinthians 12:18;

Colossians 1:13). Now the beatitudes become a guide for life. Now Jesus' great teachings benefit you in the ways we have just discussed. Begin your "new life" with Christ today by obeying His commands! Let the beatitudes "benefit" you by guiding your life as God's pleasing follower.



John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program.

He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.