

Words of blessing – Sunday 27th April 2014

***“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive 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 those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”(Matthew 5:7-12)***

Beloved in The Lord,

Today we continue our meditations on Jesus Sermon on the Mount. We will consider the last four Beatitudes. So far we have seen that Blessed are the poor in spirit; those who mourn; the meek; and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Today we will see that blessed are the merciful; the pure in heart; the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

Firstly, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. A principle in God's Word, that we cannot escape in life, is that we reap what we sow. If we sow mercy, we shall also receive mercy. We are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Mercy/Grace is one of the great attributes of God. So often, in both the Old and New Testaments we read that God had mercy, He was moved with mercy. God has a merciful heart. If God was not a God of grace and mercy then we would not have salvation from our sins. Easter happened because God is a God of mercy. God does not desire for any man to be lost in eternity and that is why He extends His grace to us. That is why He sent Jesus to this world in order that He could bear our punishment upon the cross. Jesus was our substitute. He took our place; He bore our punishment. He did it so that we could be justified, receive forgiveness and inherit life eternal with The Father in Heaven.

We do not deserve our salvation. It is a gift freely given to us. Having received God's mercy and grace we are to show mercy and grace to our fellow man. Jesus told this parable which powerfully illustrates the point that I am making. We read in Matthew 18:23-25:

"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with

me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

I think that this parable does not really require much explanation. As I stated earlier we are to do to others as we would have them do unto us. God has shown us a tremendous amount of grace and mercy, wiping out our sin debt completely. It is a debt that we could never pay ourselves. Having received His forgiveness we are to forgive all who sin against us, no matter what. If we are merciful we will receive mercy. That is Jesus promise here in this Beatitude.

The next Beatitude states that Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. It is only when our heart is pure, that we can have real fellowship with God. Sin is what separates us from God and destroys fellowship with Him. When our sins are forgiven, washed away with Jesus blood, then our heart is pure, and we see God.

Repentance and confession of sin draws us to God. When our hearts are pure, then The Holy Spirit can work powerfully in and through us. He works to show us God.

If our heart is worldly, full of carnal thoughts; then there is no room for The Holy Spirit. If our heart is contaminated with earthly desires, lusts and ungodly things, there is no room for The Holy Spirit. Where we exalt our own selves there is no room for Him. The Holy Spirit can only fill an empty vessel. That is why David prayed:

" Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit." Psalm 51:10-12

Create in me a clean heart, O God. This is a prayer that brings blessings. When we have a clean heart we see God in a completely different light. We go so much deeper in our relationship with Him. God's Word tells us: ***" The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, And He will make them know His covenant." Psalm 25:14***

When we fear God, then He reveals His secrets to us. Fear of God and a pure heart go hand in hand. Let us pray asking God to cleanse our hearts of all that does not honour Him, and we will find that our relationship with Him and our love for Him becomes so much stronger. Jesus said: ***"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."***

The next Beatitude is for the peacemakers. ***"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God."***

Paul in his letter to the Romans wrote:

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:18-21

The operative words here are - if possible. It is not always possible to be at peace with all men, but it should at least be our aim. In Hebrews we read:

" Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal" (Hebrews 12:14-16).

Our witness is of utmost importance. We are to try to be persons of peace. The Old Testament greeting which was carried over into the New Testament was a pronouncement of Peace. Peace be with you.

Usually when a person has peace with God, then he also has peace with his fellow man. We have peace with God when we live according to His Word.

The last of the Beatitudes deals with being persecuted for the sake of righteousness. All throughout history people have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness. If you decide to live for God, to follow Jesus with all your heart, are committed to obeying God's Word; then you will be persecuted. Sooner or later, to a greater or lesser degree you will be persecuted. This has always been the case. If your life reflects Christ, there will always be people that do not like it. This is because your holy way of life pricks their consciences and makes them feel uneasy. The normal reaction is to resist you, make fun of you or even persecute you in some form.

If you take a stand for the absolute authority of God's Word, as we have as a congregation, then there will be those who taunt, sneer, jest, gossip, and tell lies about us. We should not be upset by this. We need to take on board what Jesus says about this: ***"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."***

To tell the truth, if no one is persecuting us, if no-one is speaking false things about us, if no one is making fun of us, then we must seriously question if we are standing on the truth of God's Word alone.

All of the Beatitudes tie in with one another. Taken together they give us a picture of a Christian life as it should be. They show us that true happiness, true peace, true life comes when we are totally committed to our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us allow these words of Jesus to inspire and encourage us to stay close to Him. We need to read these words regularly; to use them as a spiritual mirror by which we check our spiritual well being.

Remember that a tree that is no longer growing is dead. May we never be stagnant in our Christian growth. May with each and every day we grow in Christ our Lord and so not only be blessed ourselves, but also be a blessing to others.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.