

## **Beatitudes: Not Optional Matthew 5:1-12 ZCC 9/15/13**

***1 Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 He opened his mouth and taught them, saying, 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. 10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (World English Bible)***

**Most of you have taken a biology course at some point in your life. You've probably seen at least a couple of minutes of the animal shows on the Learning Channel or Animal Planet or National Geographic.**

**I'm no scientist, but I'm at least aware of how science has divided up the species into branches like those of a tree. Why do you think cats are on one branch of the tree and dogs another branch? [different characteristics] Cats and mice are the same—different branches. I guess a lot of animals might be on the same limb but on different branches.**

**How about bacteria and humans—why are we not on the same branch of the tree?**

**These days we talk about genes and chromosomes and such things, but years ago, when science started to divide up the animal-tree, it was all about characteristics. Birds have feathers and lizards don't. Monkeys are warm-blooded but alligators are cold-blooded.**

**There were categories and characteristics were used to divide up the species. Scientists asked questions like: "does it have hair or feathers or scales?" and "does it lay eggs or bear live young?" and "does it have paws or hooves?" These kinds of characteristics were used to determine what limb and what branch of the tree each species belonged. For instance, if an animal was warm-blooded, had fur, and bore live young, then it was a mammal.**

**Most of the species follow a pretty set pattern, but some break the mold—for instance you probably know that Australia has a mammal that lays eggs instead of having live young—and by the way, it also a beak like a duck. What is that animal? [platypus] So, thinking of characteristics, what is the most obvious physical difference between a snake and a lizard? [the lizard's legs] BUT, there is a legless lizard that looks exactly like a snake to me—though his momma might be able to tell the difference. Generally, though, the characteristics of the species and of the wider divisions hold true.**

**The twelve verses I just read are of utmost importance to Christians—you see they are the basic characteristics of the Christian species. Sort of like a scientific Christian checklist.**

**I was in missile security with I was in the Air force—and we had checklists for everything. For handing over a security post. For handing over a vehicle. The checklists we used for responding to a security alarm was covered in plastic and it had check-boxes for every action. There was a grease pencil attached to the checklist and we were expected to literally check off every box as we did that task.**

**“Inspect the perimeter of the fence.” CHECK. “Inspect the main-gate lock.” CHECK. Inspect the soft support building lock.” CHECK. “Open the soft support building and check for any security breach.” CHECK. And on and on...**

**I forgot to bring my gease pencil—but looking over these eleven verses, they almost seem to be a checklist of sorts. I believe these verses are intended to outline the essential characteristics and features of Christians. I think that you and I can look at these verses and tell if our relationship with God is healthy. We can look here and see if we need to work harder. We can look at these verses and see where we are fooling ourselves and others. These are the characteristics of real, faithful, practicing, vital Christians.**

**The “Beatitudes.”**

**You’ve heard them preached individually. You’ve studied them in clusters. You’ve heard them discussed as a unit in Sunday School or Bible Study. That’s want I want to do today—in a sense an overview. I may want to look at some of the individual characteristics more closely in a few weeks, but I’m not sure at this point.**

**A word of warning: a checklist can do two things. It can show us where we are right—where we are doing the right things. It can also show us where we need to work harder and smarter. In the end, any checklist is supposed to help us do our jobs better and more completely—just like the checklists from when I was in the Air Force.**

**The Beatitudes are simply a list of Christian characteristics as outlined by Jesus. Jesus said that, as his people, if we have these characteristics then we will be blessed or happy in our lives. We will be living happy, fruitful, and vital Christian lives.**

**First I want to point out 4 basic, general truths about the characteristics Jesus gave us.**

**1. All Christians are supposed to be this way. Here we have a description of what each Christian is supposed to be. This is how we are supposed to function in our world.**

**Notice in the first two verses that this teaching was to his disciples—to his direct followers. The multitudes were privy to the teaching but these words were spoken directly to those closest to him, his disciples. Multitudes heard him, but only his followers can possibly live up to this checklist. Only his disciples can have and “BE” these attitudes.**

**One other thing to mention: This is not a SPECIAL list for SPECIAL Christians. This is not a Billy Graham list or a Mother Theresa list or an Alexander Campbell list or a preacher list or an elder list. It is simply a Christian list. I believe that Jesus intends for all of his disciples—that includes you and me—to possess all of these characteristics.**

**I've said before that there are no super-spiritual Christians and I honestly believe this is true. That idea goes both ways. Each of us has dark moments and each of us faces (and gives in to) temptations and each of us wonders how we are ever going to get it right. That said, each of us has the capability, through God's Spirit, to have these characteristics and to live the Christian life God has for us.**

**So the first truth is that we are all supposed to live this way—to live the Beatitudes.**

**2. The second truth is that Christians are supposed to manifest ALL of these characteristics. Not only are they meant for all Christians—each one of us are supposed to have all of them. We don't get to pick and choose.**

**You know, when it comes to the work of individual churches, it is fine that some of us do our work differently. God can use some churches to reach their community through feeding or clothing their neighbors. Some may shine with a strong evangelistic program. Some may shine by meeting needs through youth programs or programs that reach out to addicts.**

**There are many ways for a church to serve and for us to serve as individuals. The Beatitudes are NOT ways to serve, though, they are part of our core being.**

**They are not like spiritual gifts that we have one or more individually and then share those gifts of hospitality or teaching or encouragement or mercy or any of the others—for the good of the whole. It's not like "well, I'm a mourner..." or "you are poor in spirit..." "we are both meek (or gentle)..." We are intended to have all of these at the same time. I know that none of us are perfect, but God intends us to manifest each of these characteristics.**

**It seems to me that these characteristics are also interconnected. We cannot be poor in spirit without being meek We cannot poor in spirit without mourning. We cannot be meek without being poor in spirit. BUT if we ARE poor in spirit, we will also be meek.**

**The Beatitudes are a complete whole and any division is artificial. They are interconnected. They are interwoven.**

**It also seems pretty clear that these are not natural tendencies. The Beatitudes are spiritual characteristics. They are extra-human, Godly characteristics. You may know someone who is naturally meek, but the Beatitudes are spiritual and are brought to bear through grace.**

**Remember, these can be used as an “am I doing OK?” checklist, but not as an “am I a Christian?” checklist. I actually have a non-believing friend who exhibits many of these characteristics—some of them better than most of us believers do. He is meek and mild and loving and never has a harsh word to say about others. That doesn’t make him a Christian—a follower of Jesus Christ—it just makes him a very good person.**

**Some people seem to just be Good people naturally and in that goodness they may mirror the Beatitudes. Jim definitely does. Goodness seems to be his natural tendency—outside of his spiritual beliefs. Some of you may be that way. Being a Christian and acting like it may be pretty easy for you. Good for you! Some of us though, find that our natural tendencies are to be hot-headed instead of meek. You can even see those natural tendencies in the hospital nursery—even when we are newborn our tendencies can come out clearly.**

**Those of us who struggle the most and need the most grace may have tendencies that are the opposite of what Jesus requires. I’m pretty sure I fall in that category. Maybe you do also.**

**So, the first truth is that ALL Christians are supposed to look like this. The second is that all Christians are supposed to be manifesting ALL of these characteristics, not just some of them.**

**3. The third truth is that the Beatitudes show the difference between Christians and non-Christians. As I said, there are some who have natural tendencies, but having the total spirit Jesus outlines in the Beatitudes is something that only Christians can do—and then only through the power and the grace of God through the Holy Spirit.**

**The world and the church have blurred the lines. We Christians dabble in the world. Now, I am not a separatist—I don’t believe we are to move to the mountains and start a commune—away from the world and away from cars and TV’s and computers. After all, if we ARE the salt of the earth and the light of the world—then we need to be present in the world for that to matter. We are to be IN the world, but not OF the world. God intends us to make a difference by being different.**

**Jesus expects us to be different by what we desire and who we admire. The world admires a strong leader who is a bit pushy and boastful. The world admires self-made men and women who are masters of their exitance and who are self-confident. Christians admire those who are confident in God—who are poor in spirit: knowing that they need God every second of every day and who REALLY depend on God for their guidance and their strength.**

**We are to be different in what we seek in life. “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst...” After what? [that’s right—righteousness—not money and status and position and publicity and power]. We are to hunger and thirst after being “right” with almighty God. What does the world want most of all—is it to please God? No, I don’t think so. The world wants more for self—to get ahead in life.**

**We are to be different in what we do. The world lives for this life alone. “You only go ‘round once...grab all you can.” You’ve seen the bumper sticker, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” You may have also seen the other one, “He who dies with the most toys is still dead.” We Christians live in this world and we have a connection to this world—but we are to ultimately live this life with an eye on another world—a spiritual world. Since I’m stuck on bumper-sticker wisdom today, we can’t take it with us but it may be that we can send it ahead.**

**Wh entire concept of the Beatitudes and the whole Sermon on the Mount is the challenge us to be what we are—what God intended. There are essential differences between the world and Christians. They don’t come naturally and they can be difficult to maintain, but we are to exhibit these spiritual characteristics by the power of our relationship to God. When we live our lives as Christ did, we will stand out in contrast to the rest of the world.**

**So there were three basic truths—and I’ll add one more for good measure.**

- 1. All Christians are supposed to be like this. We are to reflect God’s love and grace by having these characteristics.**
- 2. All Christians are supposed to exhibit ALL of these characteristics. It is not a buffet-style list that we can pick and choose what we like or what we are good at naturally.**
- 3. Having these characteristics will highlight the difference between Christians and the rest of the world.**

**The last truth I want to share may be the most important.**

- 4. Simply living out this list or trying to do so will not make you a good Christian—in fact it won’t make you a Christian at all—even if you manage to exhibit each characteristic perfectly.**

**Why not? Because Christianity is about relationship and cannot be reduced to simple actions—even GOOD actions. This thinking is the legalism that tripped up the Pharisees.**

**Instead, think of the Beatitudes (being poor in spirit, mourning, hungering after righteousness, meek or gentle, mercy, purity, peacemaking, persecution) as being spiritual in nature—by-products of what is inside us as children of the living God.**

**Still, it is important to remember that this checklist can be used to see how we are doing as we seek to follow Christ in this world. CAUTION: the checklist is a personal one—one to use on ourselves, not used to judge others.**

**You know this list is kind of like having a teacher give us the answers to the questions on the day before the big test. After all—the one who gave us this list will be our ultimate judge.**