

Mountainside Visits: The Teachings of Jesus

The Sermon on the Mount is not a chance piece of teaching; it is Jesus opening up his heart to those who would follow him. Advertisers claim they have the “official drink of the Olympics,” etc. This sermon could be considered the “official teaching of Jesus.” It is the summary of all Jesus believed, taught and lived.

We sometimes define “blessed” as “happy” or even “superlatively happy,” but even that is a bit of a misrepresentation. The word “blessed” would be devalued if defined as “happy.” Happiness implies chance and is dependent on circumstances, weather, moods, physical health, other people, etc.

Sometimes Randy asks me, “Are you happy?” I have to stop and think. Am I in a good mood? Am I feeling good and cheerful? But what he is really asking me is: “Are you remembering right now that you are blessed?” It is possible to always answer “yes” to that question, no matter what is going on (or not going on) in our lives.

“Blessed” describes a joy that is independent of all the circumstances of life. Blessed means that there is a joy and a strength and a help from the very presence of God to see us through all the difficulties, tears and pains of life. Nothing can take away blessedness. You can lose your money, your job, your health, your plans and still know that you are in the company of Jesus—so you are blessed. This is not an ideal or a “wish,” but it is a truth, a reality.

John 16:22 claims that “no one can take away your joy”—this is the blessedness that Jesus talks about. How do we have this? It is not by doing it the way the world says to: “Look out for number one. Do what you feel is right. Don’t let anyone tell you what to do. Give yourself pep talks, etc.” No, we gain this blessedness by living our lives according to what Jesus says in his word.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:28-29)

Within this sermon, Jesus laid out the basics of what it means to be a follower of his—and the people were amazed at his words. These teachings are too often overlooked. The goal of the following nine lessons is to revisit this sermon, to be reminded of the foundation of our faith and to allow his words to amaze us once again. His words can change our lives. Matthew 7:24-27—Resolve to put the teachings of Jesus into practice and to keep your house on the rock. Sit at the feet of Jesus while he preaches the Sermon on the Mount. Be prepared to rebuild your house according to Jesus’ words.

Humility

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:1-5)

It is important to realize why Jesus started his sermon by talking about humility. Humility must be the quality that we strive for above all else. Without humility, the rest of the sermon is impossible. You cannot obey Jesus’ teaching without first and foremost having a heart of humility.

Poor in Spirit

Never does Jesus condone or admire material poverty for its own sake—if he did, then the prodigal son in his worst state would be considered “blessed.” When he speaks of the “poor in spirit,” he is describing a heart that acknowledges its neediness, emptiness and spiritual poverty without God. The woman who is poor in spirit recognizes that she lacks the resources to meet all of life’s demands and can find help only in God.

This has to be the first teaching because, unfortunately, humankind is horribly egocentric. We are convinced from childhood that the world revolves around us. We look at everything from our own point of view. We see things from our own eyes. And we believe that our perspectives are the absolute best and most superb perspectives that there are.

I’ve caught myself doing the following, perhaps you have too: Someone is telling you a story—you feel you have to add to it or top it. So you try to get the conversation to come back to you. You are listening, but inside you are thinking, “Enough about you, let’s talk about me!” This is a flagrant display of our self-centeredness and our self-absorption, all caused by the ability we have to put ourselves on the throne, on the pedestal of our lives. We have a haughty view of ourselves. But remember that Jesus called us to take “self” off of the throne and put God there!

Remember that God is sovereign, that he is Lord, and there is no other (1 Kings 8:60). There was a movie several years ago entitled *Rudy*. One of the characters, a priest, said this classic line, “I’ve been serving the Lord for thirty years, and in all those years I’ve learned two things: (1) that there is a God and (2) I’m not him.” Hopefully most of us have figured out the first thing—it’s the second one we need to become more sure of. Extreme self-centeredness can masquerade as humility in the person who says: “Oh, I’m such a wretch, such a terrible person. There is no way God could love me. I am so worthless. I have nothing to offer.” This person is making a judgment that God never made! She is looking at herself through self-centered, self-pitying eyes and not from God’s viewpoint.

Those Who Mourn

This ties in with the discussion on humility, because it deals with a sorrow for any misery in this world—and the worst misery of all is sin. Christianity begins with an awareness of sin. What good is a Messiah, a Savior, if we don’t see what we need to be saved from? When we truly see our sin, we are aware of our need, we mourn our sin and the hurt it has caused God. This brings about true humility.

Even as disciples, we can forget our desperate need for God's mercy and grace (read Luke 18:9-14). The prayer in this passage should never be far from your lips.

When we look at the cross, we are reminded of what sin does. Sin takes the most perfect, wonderful, loving person who ever lived, and destroys him. That is the horror of sin and the horror of the cross. But when we look at the cross, we also see that God loves us so much! This is the comfort we have.

The Meek

When we see our need for God and recognize our sin, it brings about a meekness in us that is pleasing to God. The word "meek" is another of those often misunderstood words (meek, mild-mannered Clark Kent). It implies spinelessness, weakness to many of us.

Meekness is the ability to recognize our needs and to exemplify this humility in the way we respond to God and to others. Meekness describes our acceptance of our need for God and our need for others. Meekness is not condescension or flattery, but says, "I need God. You need God. We should help each other to 'get there.'"

Meekness says, "I will do whatever God has called me to do. There is no task too big or too small that I won't accept. "

Is there any role or task that you are saying, "Anything but that?" Then you are not being meek. A meek person just wants to walk with God all day long and take whatever job he is given: sweeping floors, babysitting, making phone calls, preparing meals, preparing communion, singing, teaching, performing. They are all things that God has given us to do, and we cannot shirk any of them.

When we are meek we are saying that we are not superior in any way to our fellow human beings. We are acknowledging: "I have a proper place on this earth, and a plan of God's to fulfill. So do you. We may be different and receive different roles and plans from God, but your part is just as important as mine."

Can you really say this to your sisters and brothers? Can you say it to the people around you, even non-disciples? Yes, even non-Christians have a role in this life, and we can learn from them.

You may be thinking the teaching on humility is over after verse five...now we go on to other things. No...

- How can we be salt—on our own, without God?
- How can we trust that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law—if we rely on ourselves?
- How can we settle matters quickly—without meekness?
- How can we pray—without knowing our need for our Father in heaven?

The message of humility is found throughout the Sermon on the Mount, so we'd better get it. The message of humility is found throughout all of Jesus' ministry and throughout the Bible! So many disciples do not realize the harm their pride and self-sufficiency can cause. Yet, without humility, we can never be right with God or with our fellow human beings.

A Humble Woman

I want to close by looking at a woman who exemplified humility. We read about her in Matthew 15:21-28. She saw her need and was desperate for Jesus' help. But many of us, after the apparent "dis" from Jesus, would get huffy and walk away. She didn't, because she was in such need. She wasn't trying to prove how important or superior she was, but rather she

acknowledged that she deserved nothing. She was begging for mercy. She “got it.” And because she recognized her need and didn’t let her pride get in the way, her life was blessed.

Humility enables us to learn, to love and to live. Our lives will be blessed, only if we start, continue and end with humility.

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