



SERMON NOTES

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Title: The worlds above, within and around belong to this man

#2 in the series on the Sermon on the Mount

1. Introduction

a. Review

- i. The Word of God is absolutely inerrant and relevant.
- ii. Jesus' life attracted the multitudes while His ministry changed them.
- iii. Jesus is foremost our Savior then the Teacher whom we love; He changes us to become what He teaches us to be.
- iv. Christianity is a devotion to a Person not an idea.
- v. Our attitude should be one of privilege not duty.
- vi. The SOTM is Jesus' working philosophy of life; it is the technique of being a Christian.
- vii. The SOTM was and is seditious; it finally put Jesus on the cross, and it will do the same for his followers who follow it in modern life.
- viii. The core of the SOTM is, "*you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*"

b. "Makarios" (blessed) has several meanings:

- i. it referred to the gods who had achieved a state of happiness and contentment in life that was beyond all cares, labors, and even death;
- ii. it referred to the blessed dead who, through death, had reached the other world of the gods;
- iii. it referred to the elite of society whose riches and power put them above the normal cares and problems and worries of the lesser folk.

c. Matthew in reflecting Jesus' thoughts then uses this word in an entirely different way. It is not the elite, the rich and powerful, the high and mighty, or the people living in huge mansions who are blessed. Instead, Jesus pronounces God's blessings on the lowly: the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the meek, the mourning. Throughout the history of this word, it had always been the other people who were considered blessed but Jesus turns it all upside-down. The elite in God's kingdom, the blessed ones in God's kingdom, are those who are at the bottom of the heap of humanity.

d. Mt. 25:34, "*Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'*" The community that hears itself pronounced blessed by its Lord does not remain passive, but acts in accord with the coming kingdom.

e. "Note, also, with delight, that the blessing is in every case in the present tense, a happiness to be now enjoyed and delighted in. It is not 'Blessed shall be,' but 'Blessed are.'" [Spurgeon]

f. "The fact is that every virtue needs correction by its opposite virtue. We have seen good people who were anything but attractive, for their virtues were uncorrected by opposite virtues.

Renunciation in spirit ends in barren asceticism unless it is corrected and supplemented by world-participation. Jesus, in his amazing balance, provided that each of the virtues laid down in the Beatitudes was to be corrected by its opposite virtue. But he went further than that, for virtues may thus cancel each other instead of combining in a higher third. He saw that they combined into a higher virtue which, summed up the best in each. Hence the Beatitudes go together, not in pairs, but in groups of three.” [E.S. Jones]

2. Mt. 5:3, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

a. Two great philosophies in life:

i. Nietzsche summed up the one, “Assert yourself. Care for nothing except for yourself. The only vice is weakness, and the only virtue is strength. Be strong, be a superman. The world is yours if you can get it.” This is the cult of self-expression; it is Darwinism as a philosophy of life. While Nietzsche’s cult of self-expression is ruthless and others’ may be more refined, they all hold that the way to find life is to look after yourself, whether by ruthless self-assertion or by refined self-culture.

1. “No two ways could be more opposed. Nietzsche died in a madhouse and the world that followed him went to the brink of hell in the last war a natural outcome of this self-assertive attitude. Its genesis is selfishness, its exodus is suicide.” [E. S. Jones]

ii. Jesus is the utter contrary saying that the way to find life is to lose it, that the way of self-realization is by the way of self-renunciation. Jesus says, “*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up My cross and follow me.*”

1. Luke 9:24, “*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*”

b. D. A. Carson, “Poverty of spirit is the personal acknowledgement of spiritual bankruptcy. It is the conscious confession of unworth before God. As such, it is the deepest form of repentance.”

c. Jesus asks for the only possession we have – ourselves. Everyone can start here; it isn't first blessed are the pure or the holy or the spiritual or the wonderful. Everyone can be poor in spirit. “Not what I have, but what I have not, is the first point of contact, between my soul and God.” [Spurgeon]

d. Self-renunciation is far deeper than world-renunciation, for one may give up the world and not give up himself. No man is free until he is free at the center. The gospel begins at the cross, so that a man chooses to be utterly vulnerable he wounds himself to death. Then he is impervious to wounds. You cannot defeat a man who has already accepted defeat; you cannot break Brokenness; you cannot kill a man who has chosen to die he is now deathless. Buddha saw that the end of life was death and that it stopped there; Jesus saw that the beginning of life was death, and that it did not stop there but went on to an Easter morning. [image of bird fighting itself]

e. Luke 18:9-14, “Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “*Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am*

not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'"

- i. Jesus is addressing the spiritual posture within the one's praying as they come before God. By speaking into the heart of those who were not poor in spirit, He was combating pride and self-righteousness that had become so engrained in the religious culture of the day.
 - ii. The parable turns both the socio-economic class system and the religious class system upside down. Jesus begins by introducing the two well-known representatives: a tax collector and a Pharisee.
 - iii. Jesus sums up the essence of being poor in spirit in one story. While the Pharisee spent time giving God his resume for why God should be impressed with his efforts and outer goodness that surpassed those of lesser people, the tax-collector simply acknowledged that he was desperate for the mercy of God. He had nothing to offer. He had no right to barter or negotiate. He simply asked for mercy because of the reality of his depravity.
 - iv. Jesus shockingly tells the crowd that it was the tax collector who went home justified.
 - f. Renunciation in spirit ends in barren asceticism unless it is corrected and supplemented by world-participation. [trance dance & drumming]
 - g. *"The kingdom of heaven is not given on the basis of race, earned merits, the military zeal and prowess of Zealots, or the wealth of a Zacchaeus. It is given to the poor, the despised publicans, the prostitutes, those who are so 'poor' they know they can offer nothing and do not try. They cry for mercy and they alone are heard."* [D.A. Carson]
3. Mt. 5:4, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*
- a. *"We are a culture of adrenaline-craving, happiness junkies."* Mourning is based on brokenness and refers to the grieving that believers experience as we come to grips with the darkness of our own sin and the sin of the world around us.
 - b. Mourning means an active sharing and bearing of the world's hurt and sin in order to cure it; if it means the kind of mourning that Jesus manifested when he wept over the city of Jerusalem, if there is the passion of the sorrow of the cross in it, then it is not an anti-climax, but a necessary counterpart and correction. The first beatitude without the second ends in barren aloofness, but with it, it ends in fruitful attachment. This verse cuts across those who would say that religion is an escape mentality from pain and sorrow. Here is religion deliberately choosing sorrow for itself in order to cure it in others. Blessed are those who feel for the world's sin and sorrow.
 - c. The Greek word for to mourn is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning for the dead, for *"the passionate lament for one who was loved."* [Barclay]
 - d. 2 Cor. 7:10, *"For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death."*

- e. Is. 6:1-8, *"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!' And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.' Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.' Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'"*
- i. King Uzziah was one of the few kings in Judah deemed worthy of the description of *"doing what is right in the sight of the Lord."* In the beginning he feared and followed God, listening closely to the counsel of the prophet Zechariah. However, later he became prideful and violated the temple of the LORD by offering incense against God's design. God punished him by striking him with leprosy, which would ban him from the temple, according to Mosaic Law.
 - ii. *"The picture Isaiah paints strikes awe and terror into one's heart; a person gets the idea that the observer has come a little too close to the majesty of the glory and has seen something that is far beyond the human sphere of experience and understanding."* [Gary Smith]
 - iii. Isaiah fully expects to be destroyed for being in the presence of the LORD while stained with his own sinfulness. He not only confesses his sin, he totally mourns over it. But he mourns not just mourn over his own sinfulness, but over that of Judah as well. Isaiah acknowledges his need for atonement by declaring *"Woe is me!"* in verse 5. Grief has set in.
 - iv. Having openly declared his misery over his sin and that of Judah, God responds by cleansing him of his sin by purifying the exact self-identified source of his sin – his lips. Guilt can no longer prevent Isaiah from the presence of God who now offers comfort. Instead of perpetually languishing in the filthiness of our internal and external sin, as followers of Christ, we have the blessing of confessing that sin and placing in the category of that from which we have been saved by Christ.
 - v. The glory of the freedom from sin should constrain us out of gratitude toward the likeness of Christ in our daily lives. The question is, how will we respond to that mourning? Will we, like Isaiah, say, *"Here I am! Send me!"* before we even know what the job description is. Or will we rather seek to take the elevated seat of judgment over those who are far from God?
- f. In the first beatitude there is the withdrawal with Jesus into the mount alone, in the second there is the joining of Jesus on the road to Calvary. The two Mounts are in these two verses: Mount of Olives the mount of withdrawal from men, and Mount Calvary the mount of drawing every man to your heart until it breaks. In the first you refuse to give yourself to any man, in the second you turn round and give yourself to every man. The first beatitude is the end of the egotist, the second is the beginning of the lover.

- g. The strange thing happens that those who deliberately take on themselves trouble and pain in behalf of others find happiness they are comforted. The most absolutely happy people of the world are those who choose to care till it hurts. The most miserable people of the world are those who center upon themselves and deliberately shun the cares of others in the interest of their own happiness. It eludes them. They save their lives and they lose them.
 - h. God allows this grief into our lives as a path, not as a destination.
 - i. The Beatitudes put no premium on mere mourning. Senseless suffering is not comforting it is dulling, disintegrating. This, then, must be a suffering of a particular quality a gladly chosen pain. This brings comfort. There is nothing so absolutely blessed as to be able to suffer well. The sorrow of the world brings death, but this sorrow brings life.
4. Mt. 5:5, "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*"
- a. It is impossible to translate this ancient Greek word "*praus*" (meek) with just one English word. It has the idea of the proper balance between anger and indifference, of a powerful personality properly controlled, and of humility. Strength under control, like a strong stallion that was trained to do the job instead of running wild.
 - b. D.A. Carson defines the biblical concept of meekness or gentleness this way: "*Meekness is a controlled desire to see the other's interest advance ahead of one's own.*"
 - c. Gentleness, though, is the character of God within us that allows us to assume a posture of appropriate deference to the will of God. That means that we will do what God wants us to do, regardless of what it costs. In doing so, we will choose to see the desires of God advance ahead of our own selfish desires. It is not a position of weakness, but one requiring great strength and discipline.
 - d. Luke 22:39-46, "*Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."* Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow. Then He said to them, "*Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.*""
 - i. This story demonstrates the difference between Jesus' approach to submitting His will to the Father's and that of the disciples. When faced with the difficulty of submitting to the will of God, Jesus engaged the Father in prayer and sought His face. The disciples slept from sorrow and avoided the decision. Consequently, when the hard choice to follow the will of God was presented, Jesus followed God with resolution but the disciples ran away.
 - ii. Jesus had to seek the face of God in anguish to be able to relinquish the will of His flesh in favor of faithfulness to the greater will of God, why should we think that, as sinners, it will be any less necessary for us? It takes a tremendous amount of determination and spiritual

strength to be able to say with honesty, as Jesus did, “*Father... not My will, but Yours be done.*” But that is the essence of biblical gentleness and God has called all believers to it.

- e. *“The meek of England, driven by their native land by religious intolerance, have inherited the continent of America.”* [Bruce]
- f. The first two beatitudes, corrected and supplemented by each other, result in a synthesis of the two and become a third, namely, the meek who inherit the earth. Meekness is usually considered weakness. Not here. It is a combination of two elements: the power and decisiveness that dare to be renounced in spirit, and the passion that so deeply feels the pain and sorrows of men that it gives itself in service. Those who want nothing from the world of men and things and yet are willing to share everything, because they feel so deeply, are the meek. As hydrogen and oxygen, two diverse elements, coming together produce an entirely new product, water, so the spirit of renunciation and the spirit of service coming together in a man make a new being, the most formidable being on earth the terrible meek. They are terrible in that they want nothing, and hence cannot be tempted or bought, and in that they are willing to go any lengths for others because they feel so deeply. Christ standing before Pilate is a picture of the Terrible Meek. He could not be bought or bullied, for he wanted nothing, nothing except to give his life for the very men who were crucifying him. Here is the supreme strength it possesses itself, hence possesses the earth. It is so strong, so patient, so fit to survive that it inherits the earth.

5. Take-aways

- a. The first three beatitudes strike at the aggressive attitudes of life. They show God's invasion of us, taking away our self-sufficiency, our very self -life, getting us ready for the most amazing offensive of love the world has ever seen. He disarms us in order to put entirely new weapons into our hands. Unless these first three verses become actual, the rest of the Sermon on the Mount becomes impossible. The rub is not at the place of turning the other cheek; the rub is at the place of letting go the essential self. Do that, and turning the other cheek is a necessary and natural outcome. To sum up: The renounced in spirit gain the kingdom of heaven, the mourners gain the kingdom of inner comfort, the meek gain the earth. So the world above, the world within and the world around belong to this man. Wanting nothing he inherits all worlds.
- b. The community that hears itself pronounced blessed by its Lord does not remain passive, but acts in accord with the coming kingdom.
- c. There two opposing world views at work
- d. Poor in spirit is a self-renunciation that goes much deeper than world renunciation.
- e. Mourning is a spiritual brokenness for our sin and those around us that makes us useful to extend His Kingdom.
- f. God allows grief into our lives as a path, not as a destination.
- g. Meekness in accepting His will to be done.
- h. The power of the Terrible Meek
- i. The world above, the world within and the world around belong to this man.