

December 26, 2004
A.M. Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“How to Live Under God’s Blessing in 2005”
Matt 5:1-6 (NIV)

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

I want to tell you about some signs I’ve recently heard about and seen.

The purpose of a sign is to tell us where we are or to tell us how to get to where we want to go, or a sign can advertise something we may want or need or it can supply information, instruction, or warning. We place signs where everyone can see them clearly and they should be easily understood (unlike the signs in my illustration).

Have you ever thought of yourself as a sign, an advertisement or as one giving direction, showing others the right way to take? The way you live will be a sign that Christianity is real, that it works, that it is the way to live. The world is not as concerned to know if Christianity is true as they are to know if it works, is it real? And the world is watching you.

Christians also need a sign for themselves to make sure they are in the right place and going in the right direction. I recently did a Bible Study on this morning’s scriptures. It is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus taught in this Sermon a lifestyle for His followers. A standard to follow and it is a very high standard that He holds up for us.

Our culture is obsessed with lifestyle. There are TV shows and magazines that are devoted to clothes, health and fitness, dieting, homes and gardens and other lifestyles. They are concerned with how things look. But Jesus is much more interested in what we are, in what is underneath. His Sermon is a challenge to the lifestyles we in America are use to living. We judge others by what they do, their position, what they’ve achieved, what school they attended, their wealth, looks or possessions. Jesus teaches us that what matters most in life is not what we have or what we do but who we are.

It's been said that actor/comedian George Burns made a visit to a nursing home to entertain residents there. He walked up to a little old woman in her wheelchair, leaned toward her and teased, "Do you know who I am?"

The lady studied him for a moment and then answered cautiously, "No, but if you ask that nice nurse up at the front desk, I bet she could tell you."

It is a hard lesson to learn but we must learn it: what matters most in life is not what we have or what we do but who we are. In the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus holds up a sign that answers the question: What sort of people should we be if we want to live under God's blessing? He describes eight things we should be. The first four have to do with our relationship with God and the second four are about our relationship with others. Today we will only look at the first four.

You will notice that each begins with the word "blessed." The Greek word that is used means; God Blesses or you will "receive God's favor." It describes a joy and satisfaction regardless of outward conditions. Therefore, it means more than just happiness, which is dependent on circumstances. Jesus is telling us how we can live our lives under God's blessing.

Before we look at the first characteristic we need in order to live under God's blessing, let me just point out a few things from verse 1 & 2.

First is to answer the question, "Who are these words for - just Jesus' disciples (followers) or for all people? Keep in mind that the full sermon is not just the first 10 verses of chapter 5. What we commonly call the Beatitudes (or as Billy Graham has called them, "The 8 Beautiful Attitudes), is not the Sermon on the Mount, it is just a portion of the Sermon on the Mount. The full Sermon runs from chapter 5 through chapter 7. And while the sermon begins in 5:1 & 2 with, "His *disciples* came to Him, and he began to teach them," take a look at the end of the Sermon, (Matt 7:28-29) "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." It would seem that as Jesus spoke a crowd gathered. He began with His disciples listening and finished with everyone listening.

The next thing I want to point out may seem odd to us. Notice that Jesus sat down to teach. In our culture we stand to teach, in the time of Jesus a teacher would sit down. When we stand we are indicating we have something important to say. In the culture at the time of Jesus when a teacher sat people knew he was about to say something of great importance.

Another thing I want to point out, which may not as be as obvious in certain translations, so let me read it from the NKJV: Matt 5:2 – "Then *He opened His mouth* and taught them, saying:" In the Greek language the expression, "He opened His mouth" would be equivalent to saying, "He opened His heart and taught them saying:" Jesus was speaking from His heart to tell us how to live under the blessings of God. He says take these steps and you will receive the favor of God that will bring you great joy. Here is the first step (or sign that we are going in the right direction to live under God's blessing):

1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

The Greek word used here, translated “poor” means someone in such a desperate state that they are dependant on others for support. So it could read, “God blesses those who realize their need for Him.” Have you ever heard people say, “I live a good moral life”? They say that because they are comparing themselves with other people not with God’s standard. It is spiritual pride to say, “I’m a good person.” The person who thinks God is satisfied with the way they live has not read the Sermon on the Mount. To be “poor in spirit” is to recognize how far short we fall of God’s standard and to beg for God’s mercy. Years ago there was a book written called, “I’m Ok, You’re Ok.” A Christian author said at the time he wanted his first book to be called, “I’m a Mess, You’re a Mess!” To those who cry out, “Lord, I’m a mess, I fall far short of your standard, I need you” to them Jesus says, “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount, to know God’s standard, find it impossible to live without the help of the Holy Spirit and ask for God’s mercy. The way into God’s kingdom is not by trying to be good enough to enter, rather it’s to see we will never be good enough, the sermon helps us to see our need for Jesus. Jesus is the way into the Kingdom of God and only those who are poor in spirit, who recognize their spiritual need and crying out in faith to Jesus will enter. This is why Jesus says next...

2. “Blessed are those who mourn.”

The Greek word means to be sad or to grieve. Now don’t think that Jesus is teaching that His followers should never be happy. “You must always be serious and stern, no joy and absolutely no laughing in church.” Certainly that is not what Jesus means. Of course, that doesn’t mean Christians are never unhappy either. I’ve met some bizarre Christians whose “praise the Lord, hallelujah (s)” amounts to living in denial. Sure we grieve and are sad at times. We grieve when we loose a loved one and we are sad when people are hurting themselves and other by what they do. It is the cause for much weeping and tears. But the weeping that Jesus is focusing on here is mourning over our spiritual poverty. It is being broken hearted that we fall short of God’s standard and will. Even as Christians we let Jesus down and need to weep. Why does that unhappiness bring blessing? Because “they will be comforted.” God’s Holy Spirit, Who is received by all who put their faith in Jesus, is known as The Comforter, Who comes along side to help us in time of need. He comes to encourage us, forgive and cleanse us when we see our spiritual need, and are broken over it. But we need this next step too...

3. “Blessed are the meek.”

Meek does not mean weak, and it does not mean bleak. It means gentle, considerate, humble someone we may describe as down-to-earth. People who are meek are not super sensitive about themselves and always on the defensive; they are not always watching their own interests, not worried about what other people say; they are not always protecting themselves. They never feel sorry for themselves; because they have surrendered their life to God and their strength and confidence is in God. It describes strength under submission. Everything they receive they know they don’t deserve and so they consider it a gift. That’s why Jesus says, “they will inherit the earth.” When we realize our spiritual need because we fall short of God’s standard, and we mourn over that, and humbly surrender to God then we will be in a position to receive all God wants

to give us in this life and in the life to come. But there is one more step, one more sign that we are going in the right direction...

4. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."

One time there was a man walking in the desert with no water and he became very thirsty. He saw a man coming towards him and said, "please sir, give me something to drink." The man said, "I don't have anything to drink. I'm selling ties. Do you want to purchase a tie?" The thirsty man says, "Ties? What do I need a tie for, I need water."

The tie salesman shrugs his shoulders, says, "suit yourself" and walks on. Later the man is crawling in the sand desperate for even a drop of water on his dry, parched tongue.

Suddenly he sees an oasis and on the oasis is a building and from a distance he sees a large sign on the building that says, "We have ice cold drinks." As tired and weak as he is he is motivated to get up and run toward the oasis. When he gets there he is about to go in when a man at the door stops him and says, "Sorry, I can't let you in without a tie!"

Most of us in America cannot understand what it is to be really hungry and really thirsty. To be so desperate for food and water that we don't think of or desire anything else.

When someone is that truly desperate, satisfying that thirst or hunger is an all-consuming passion. Jesus says that is the attitude we should have toward righteousness. We should long to be in a right relationship with God, we should long to live according to His right ways and we should long to see justice and right living in our society. The Greek word for righteousness used here does not mean a partial righteousness it means a desire to be entirely righteous. It is not enough to live like a Christian sometimes, when we feel like it and at other times live any way we feel like. It means a desire to live a righteous life all the time to be good 24 hours a day. A desire that everything we think, say and do would please God all the time. The problem is many are just not that desperate. But the promise that Jesus makes to those who are desperate for right-way-ness is that "they will be filled."

It is not enough to see our spiritual poverty, to mourn over it, admit it and even let others draw attention to it. We must also hunger and thirst to live differently, righteously. These are signs that we are headed in the right direction. These are the steps toward living under the blessing of God.