

Living the Beatitudes of Jesus

Jesus died penniless as Roman soldiers cast lots to divide among themselves Jesus' only possessions, the clothes on his back. Jesus died hungry. There is no record that Jesus had anything to eat the day of his death. What we call The Last Supper on Thursday evening may very well have been Jesus' last meal. He died on the cross Friday at sunset with an empty stomach. After his last supper, Jesus headed for the Garden of Gethsemane where he prayed and wept. Jesus died hated. Caiaphas, the greatest religious authority in Israel called him a blasphemer. The crowds wanted a murderer freed before they would see Jesus pardoned. And his disciples deserted him. In the Gospel of Luke, chapter six verses 17-26 are recorded the teaching we call The Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are a wonderful description of what disciples are supposed to be like. Turning to his disciples Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven."

In all honesty, few of us ever come close to truly living them out. And Here's the reason why - because it calls us to sacrificial living. The Beatitudes are an admonition to sacrificial living and sacrificial living is the door to Christian Freedom for all who claim Christ as Lord and Savior. We have been conditioned all our lives to work hard, build wealth, and provide for our families. But these beatitudes turn all of that upside down. Jesus turns away from the crowd and speaks directly to his disciples saying, "Blessed are YOU who are poor." They are the ones who have become poor. They are the ones who have worked day after day without food. The disciples, I am sure, wept on occasion and they were hated by many because of their allegiance to Christ. The Beatitudes then are not instructions on how to live. They are commendations for how the disciples are already living. They left family and home to serve with Christ and He is proud of them. He says to them: Blessed are you twelve for you have given up your careers and become poor to serve with me. The Beatitudes are an admonition to live unencumbered by worldly wealth. But as soon as we are reminded that Jesus calls us to sacrificial living, we are immediately reminded of the next car we ought to buy and the next meal we should eat. We are slowly and methodically told it is O.K. to live our life of luxury while others live their life of poverty. But it is not so in the Kingdom of God! To reclaim the Beatitudes in our daily lives we must stop and hear Jesus say to us, "Blessed are You who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who give, who do without, who sacrifice.

Jesus cautioned His disciples against riches and worldly happiness. The magnificent thing for us humans that is different from animal instincts is that by choice we can rise above purely animal desires and become a part of another kingdom, the Kingdom of God. Jesus is appealing to the most unique thing on this planet, the human capacity to love and sacrifice for a cause that is greater than us. We must ask ourselves will I be a selfish animal and take care of myself or a human and take care of others? Will I be rich in this life or poor here so that I might be rich in the next? Will I fill my stomach or go without so I might be satisfied in the life to come? Will I live for the moment or do the hard work of sacrifice, which may bring some discomfort in the here and now, but will yield heavens worth of joy in the next? What does my discipleship look like when I compare it to the Beatitudes? Because sacrificial freedom is greater than financial freedom. Ultimately, if we are going to heed the Beatitudes then the focus of our lives cannot be about what brings happiness and wealth, but what honors God and gives eternal meaning and purpose to our lives! To be poor in Jesus' mind is to be free from the entanglements of the world and therefore free to serve in the Kingdom of God. Which is the only thing that will bring us purpose, meaning, eternal life, joy and peace in this life and the life to come.

I believe John Wesley sums up for us our proper response to the Beatitudes of Jesu in His Covenant Prayer: "I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will and place me with whom you will. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you, praised for you or criticized for you. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service. And now, O wonderful and holy God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, you are mine, and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it also be made in heaven. Amen." I pray that this will be your prayer as we each strive to live the Beatitudes.