

Mount Pisgah AME Church

Rev. Jay B. Broadnax, Pastor

Bible Study, Wednesday, November 6, 2019

Developing Christian Character *Kingdom “Attitudes”*: *A Study in The Beatitudes* *Matthew 5:1-12* *Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit*

In his explanation of “*The Fruit of The Spirit*,” The Apostle Paul describes nine evidences (or “fruits”) that will be apparent in increasing measure in the character of a Christian believer in whom the Holy Spirit lives. These evidences identify us as true believers.

Similarly in Matthew, Jesus describes the types of attitudes and dispositions that will be the characteristic of people who are living successfully (i.e., “blessed” people) as citizens of the Kingdom of God that he is ushering in. In doing this, Jesus is painting a picture that is in stark contrast to the types of people who are living “successfully” in the world as it now stands, a world that is passing away.

Context

After Jesus’ baptism and wilderness experience (preparation for ministry), Jesus began his public ministry by beginning to preach, proclaiming that “the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” He then called his first disciples and went about Galilee preaching the “good news of the kingdom” and healing the sick. His reputation preceded him and he began drawing large crowds of followers from all over the region. (Mt. 4:23-25) Although it is thought that since he began in the synagogues that most of these were Jews, his reputation as a healer likely attracted non-Jews as well.

Jesus’ agenda is “the Kingdom.” He demonstrates through his healings that a characteristic of the Kingdom is POWER, healing and liberty for those who are bound. (See also Luke 4:18-19.) It is a higher state of existence than what people can experience in their current society and context.

However, “The Kingdom” also has a culture. That culture is different from the popular/current culture, and what works in “The Kingdom” is *not the same as* what works in popular culture.

Kingdom Citizens must learn a new set of cultural values, or standards of success. Thus, Jesus begins to teach these values here through what are known as “*The Beatitudes*.”

What do we mean by “Blessed?”

- Blessed is more than happy.
- Blessed is a term that seems to refer to an inner joy and peace that comes through being right with God.
 - “Rightness with God” may be one’s condition regardless of whether or not one is in harmony with one’s surroundings.
 - A person can be “right with God” and be in the midst of intense sorrow or under severe criticism
- Blessedness has nothing to do with material possessions, political influence, or even harmony with people around a person.
- The “Blesseds” in Matthew 5 might be contrasted with the “woes” Jesus said to the Pharisees in Matthew 23
- Another interesting contrast is found in Proverbs 6:16-19 – Seven things the Lord hates.

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

Old Testament Background – Description of the Messianic Kingdom

- Review Isaiah 61:1-3 (the passage Jesus referred to in Luke 4)
- We think of “the poor” financially, but the word Isaiah uses describes the people who had been taken into exile. They were not just poor, but afflicted and oppressed, they were powerless and without hope, and were desperate. Their *physical* poverty was intensified by the poverty in their spirit.

The Meaning of the Text and application

- The word in this text describes the financially poor, but also those who have been humbled. They are those who have been “broken” and have learned to rely completely on God.
- It also refers to those who have humbled *themselves* and repented of sin. They have abandoned all self-reliance.
- Those who are poor in spirit have no self-righteousness. They are free from their own pretensions, and are therefore available for God.
- Everyone who wants to enter the kingdom must be “spiritually poor,” because salvation is a gift from God.
- Everyone who realizes that no matter how much material wealth they have, that they are on equal footing before a Holy God, qualifies. This is therefore “good news” both to the rich and the poor.
- “Theirs is the kingdom of Heaven” – doesn’t mean that all poor people are in heaven. However a requirement of entering the kingdom is the knowledge that one cannot attain it by one’s own accomplishment.
- The phrase “poverty of spirit” can be thought of as repentance and submission to the will of God.
- “The poor in spirit” are those who do not just humble themselves to enter the kingdom, but live their lives in a posture of humility, dependence and obedience.

When we have been broken before God, we are positioned to be blessed!