

## *THE BEATITUDES, PART II*

Matthew 5:1-12

March 1, 2020

When Jesus calls you, He calls you to be poor on behalf of the Gospel. He calls you to mourn and cry for the things that break the heart of God. And He calls you, the meek, the one the world will never know, to be doing His work here on this earth. That was Beatitudes Part I back on Boy Scout Sunday. There have been a couple of special Sundays in between (last week was Transfiguration Sunday, for instance), but here we are again, on the First Sunday in Lent, letting the Beatitudes of Jesus connect with us.

So last time Jesus called you and me to be poor, and crying and meek. And now this week: Now when Jesus calls you, He calls you to hunger and thirst for justice. People, this country still has a race problem. It's nothing new. At Presbytery Meeting a couple of weeks ago, Alan Thames, the Presbytery Exec was telling about his Grandmother, an old money Alabama lady, who told him and his brothers that school integration would be the end of it all. It would kill democracy in this land. Just couldn't happen. But justice must march on.

Justice. It calls for the church to see, to feel, to *know* that one group or other is trodden upon, maybe not by overt acts of oppression, but by the very system we've built around us. Justice calls you and me to break into that cycle of poverty and frustration and division and violence in redeeming, uplifting ways.

Clarence Jordan, founder and director of Koinonia Farms in Southern Georgia, tells of going to a little red dirt Baptist church in South Georgia, a place of extreme racism, and he got up to speak, and the congregation was mixed, about 50/50, black and white. Jordan asked the preacher how this congregation got this way. "What way?" the preacher asked. "Integrated..Did it come from the Supreme Court ruling of 1954?" "What's the Supreme Court got to do with Christians?" (Good question.) "No. when I started here, the pulpit was empty,

and they couldn't get a preacher no way. So I said I'll be your preacher.. Well, I got up in the pulpit and opened the bible, and it fell open to Galatians: 'In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male or female, Sythian nor barbarian, but in Christ Jesus you are all one.' And I talked about how Jesus made everybody one.

When the service was over, the Deacons, they called me in the back room, and they told me they didn't want to hear that kind of preaching." "Well, what did you do?" Jordan asked. "I fired them Deacons!"

The Good News is, God is going to change His world. You didn't become a member of this church, you weren't baptized, to go to heaven. You were saved, you were redeemed, you were brought back from an old bankrupt way of doing things, you became a member with the body of Christ's people, not to go to heaven when you die. You were saved and brought together with this group of people, in order that He might use you to bring about justice in His world.

Where there is oppression and inequity, moral, physical, coercive, educational, economic oppression and rampant grinding into the dirt, you and I constitute the group of God's people who are called to do something about it. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice and righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful. In the Lord's Prayer we say, "Forgive us our sins in the same way as we have forgiven those who sin against us." "Forgive us the same way we forgive others." And the way you and I forgive others has to be the way Jesus forgives.

Occasionally I get a person or couple who want counselling. Sometimes, for instance, the wife would start in on what the problem was, and then when she took a breath, her husband would launch in: "You're only hearing half the story," and then away he goes for twenty minutes on his complaints. But occasionally . . . very occasionally, not very often, a couple would come in, and the wife would

begin by saying, "It's all my fault." And then the husband would say, "No, it's not. It's all MY fault."

Now listen. It's always the innocent one who says 'It's all my fault.' You say, "That's strange." Not at all. Only innocent people know how to ask for forgiveness. The guilty need it but they can't. It is the nature of sin to harden the sinner against asking for the forgiveness that they need. Then how can a reconciliation be made? Simple. The innocent must assume the guilt of the guilty.

Are you asking me, Pastor, that when somebody hurts me, when somebody breaks my heart, when somebody walks all over me, you're telling me that I should go to that person and ask them to forgive ME? As if the sin was mine? Are you asking me to take the guilt to myself when it really wasn't my fault?

You got it. And if you and I can't handle that, we don't understand what happened 2,000 years ago on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem. 'He who knew no sin became sin for us.' The sinner stands before the cross, and Jesus says, "It's all my fault." Well, he doesn't exactly say 'It's all my fault.' But Jesus does say, 'The sin is mine.' And He takes your sin and mine upon Himself. And our sin is nailed on to that cross forever.

Praise the Lord! Blessed are the merciful in the same way that Jesus was merciful. The gift of Jesus Christ, the gift of becoming His is that He makes you and me into merciful people after the measure of His own mercy. (Amen!)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. At Seminary, where folks are preparing for a lifetime of being God's leaders, you wouldn't expect impurity. But there was foul language, sexual looseness, and bitter pettiness of one person against the other . . . until it all mounted up, and a friend of mine said in exasperation, "Whatever became of 'whatsoever things are pure and lovely and decent and of good report?'"

I feel a tug at my soul, a kind of responsibility, to talk about moral purity when giving ourselves to the Lord, except that “blessed art thou who is pure in heart” has an even more pointed meaning, if that can be. The word Pure, very often was used of milk or wine which is unadulterated with water, or of metal which has in it not even a tinge of alloy. So then the basic meaning of pure in heart, as opposed to pure in morals . . . pure in heart meant unmixed, unadulterated, unalloyed, *willing one thing* with every ounce of your energy.

A performer called Blondin, the greatest tightrope walker of all times, strung a tightrope across Niagra Falls, and made his way precariously from the American to the Canadian side. And a great crowd of thousands of people cheered and yelled.

Blondin said, “I am Blondin, do you believe that I can carry a person back across the falls on my shoulders?” And they all shouted, “Yes, we believe! We believe!” “Then who will that person be?” And the great crowd fell silent. But one man came forward, and he got on Blondin’s shoulders, and Blondin inched his way back to the American side.

The point of that story is that ten thousand people said, “We believe,” but only one really did believe. And today, here, a congregation of Christians say, “We believe,” but you and I don’t really believe, do we, until; we take our life and say, “Jesus, it’s all yours.” Total surrender.

If you believe you do well. But the Bible says that even Satan believes. Jesus says, “I was hungry, did you feed me? Naked, did you clothe me? A stranger, did you take me in? A prisoner, did you visit me?” Jesus wants to know to what degree you and I give ourselves to the work of the Kingdom. How pure, how committed, how surrendered is your heart?

Tony Campolo, whom I mentioned the last time we looked at the Beatitudes, was preaching at a mission conference, and the people at the mission booth were disappointed that not very many people were volunteering to

become missionaries. "I don't know why that is," Campolo said. "You can't get any jobs in America. But I know where they need teachers, where they need nurses, where they need agriculturalists, where they need people to move in the name of Jesus and to love people by serving them and working with them with the idea of creating the kind of world God wants them to have.

Campolo continues and challenges us, "I don't know why you want to continue to live in this social order when you could be so important to Jesus. You could be significant for the Kingdom. How do you say 'NO' to significance in order to have a house in suburbia and two cars in the garage and all that jazz?" Makes you think about what pure in heart entails, doesn't it? But blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are they who really have committed their lives to Jesus.

And blessed are those who are so committed that they are even persecuted for their righteousness sake.

Amen , Lord. Let it be me.