

# Bible Studies for Life Series for October 7: Quality is Job #1

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## Quality is Job #1

- Matthew 5:1-12

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Matthew 5 begins: “Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down, his disciples came to him, and he began to teach them ... .”

The crowds eventually followed, and at the end of the sermon, we see the crowds were once again amazed at one who taught with such authority. But the primary point of the sermon was to teach the disciples. The Sermon on the Mount is not concerned so much with ethics in general, but with discipleship, with our obedience to God.

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If we understand the Sermon on the Mount as a set of rules or ideals to live by, we have missed the point. The ideals are too high, and we never could achieve them by ourselves; the demands of Jesus are just too great. This approach has caused many to dismiss the Sermon on the Mount as something completely impractical and irrelevant to daily living.

A better approach is to understand the Sermon on the Mount as the ethic of the kingdom of God. Matthew 4:17 says, "From that time on, Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'" Other than calling Peter and Andrew to follow him, the very next words Jesus utters are the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon then is Jesus' declaration of what it means, and what it looks like, to live in this world as people committed to God's kingdom.

When we understand the sermon as the ethic of the kingdom we gain a greater understanding of the word "blessed." Our society tends to understand blessing as a reward for a service rendered or a state of character we have achieved. But the word for blessing here carries with it the idea of a condition of life. The word "happy" often is substituted for "blessed," but we associate that with a state of mind more than a condition of life. Joyful might be the best word for us to use in understanding blessing. There is an abiding joy in our lives as we follow Jesus in every area of our life.

Joy is listed as one of the fruits of the Spirit and is evidence of God at work in our lives. The same is true of the beatitudes, all of the characteristics Jesus mentions are evidence of God at work in our lives. Just as we cannot pick and choose between the fruit of the Spirit, neither can we pick and choose between the beatitudes. All eight of the beatitudes serve as evidence of the work of God in our lives. They are eight qualities of the same people who are meek and merciful, poor in spirit and pure in heart, mourning and hungry, peacemakers and persecuted.

When we focus on the blessing as a result, we miss the blessing altogether. The second half of each beatitude tells us what the blessing is and why there is joy. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven and they are comforted. They inherit the earth and are filled. They are shown mercy, they see God and are called sons of God. Their heavenly reward is great.

The characteristics of the kingdom that Jesus lists in the beatitudes can't be achieved in and of our own power, they are the results of following Christ. In the same way, the blessings and joy Christ lists are gifts of God. They cannot be attained in and of ourselves, they are pure gift.

To say these characteristics and blessings are gifts does not mean that we do not pursue these gifts, it does say something about how we pursue them. The Christian life always is a life lived in the real world. One of the greatest barriers to people who are not followers of Christ are people who claim to be Christian but bear no evidence of it in the way that they live. The more we grow to be like Christ the more evident these characteristics become in our lives. We don't pursue these characteristics so we can be blessed, but because they are pleasing to God, and we already have tasted the blessing of his salvation and presence. We seek to live out these character traits because they are pleasing to God.

All of these characteristics, which are so valued in the kingdom of God, have little value in the rest of the world. Our society does not place great value on meekness, or poverty of spirit. We do not know what to do with those who mourn or those who are peacemakers. Because the value system of the kingdom stands in such stark contrast to the values of the world we open ourselves to at least misunderstanding and more likely scorn and ridicule. Jesus says to rejoice when this happens because it is due to our following him.

Jesus brings the beatitudes into a coherent whole in the last verses of this section. When Jesus says, "because of me," he gives us the reason for

applying the beatitudes to our lives now. It is because of Jesus that we work to develop those character traits that are his character traits. Exhibiting the traits Jesus lists in the beatitudes strengthens his work in our lives and in his world, and that is blessing in and of itself.

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