

EIGHT QUALITIES OF SOLID CHRISTIAN CHARACTER - Matthew 5:1-12

Later on in Matthew's gospel, Jesus said this - "**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. [26] You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean**" (Matthew 23:25-26). In keeping with His own words, Jesus begins His most famous sermon focusing on the *inward character* of His disciples. The only measurement of spiritual vitality is *transformed character*. The change Jesus makes in a life is not merely one of outward behavior and religious observance. Those are the *fruits* of the new birth, not the *source*.

This is a sermon for *disciples*. These are not the kinds of changes we can produce on our own, and, even if we could produce them for a time, they would boost our own pride, rather than glorify God. Also, notice how Jesus pronounces a blessing with each Christ-like character trait that grows in our lives. Each beatitude finishes with more promise than we would have imagined. What looks like the way down is really the way up. The constant battle for the Christian is to *unlearn the world's system* and allow the *words and power of Jesus their proper place*.

- 1) **GOD ONLY ENTERS HEARTS WHEN ROOM IS MADE FOR HIM** - 3 - "**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**" James, the brother of Jesus, states the same truth in a negative form when he says *God resists the proud*. We need to exercise caution when approaching spiritual life from the postmodern stance of unabashed self-fulfillment. The Scriptures teach God makes His approach into our heart when He witnesses our brokenness and humility:

Isaiah 57:15 - "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Isaiah 66:1-2 - "Thus says the Lord: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? [2] All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."

The point of these texts and Jesus' beatitude *isn't* that we are all broken and needy before Almighty God. That's obvious, and the Scriptures waste little time making that point. The point of these texts is our need to *assess* ourselves as needy, poor in spirit, and broken. A *poor spirit* cleans the soul for God's arrival.

- 2) **GOD IS MOVED BY A SPIRIT OF REPENTANCE** - 4 - "**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**" This is not the sorrow of this world. Jesus wasn't talking about *self-pity* or *despair*. He was talking about an accurate assessment of human sin, both in *ourselves* and in *others*. He was calling for a deep sorrow for the way sin grieves God and damages so many lives. Obviously, this is the root of *intercession* and *outreach* to this fallen world. Also, this keeps my own heart tender to the first pains and chains of sins that would otherwise be treated too lightly to be shunned with passion.

Psalm 119:136 - "My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law."

In our own quest for holiness, it is this kind of mourning that leads to confession, forgiveness, transformation and a renewal of the joy of the Lord. In the long run, it brings the deepest kind of comfort and strength - **2 Corinthians 7:9-11** - "**As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. [10] For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. [11] For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.**"

- 3) **IN MY DEALINGS WITH OTHERS, I'M TO HAVE AN ACCURATE REMEMBRANCE OF MY OWN FALLENNESS** - 5 - "**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**" Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones says, "*Meekness denotes a humble and gentle attitude to others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves.*" Paul talks about the same thing in **Galatians 6:1-2** - "**Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. [2] Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**"

Perhaps meekness is best defined by its opposite spirit - a spirit that always has to *retaliate* - to *prove itself right* - to *precipitate confrontation over every issue*.

- 4) **SPIRITUAL SUPPLY IS DETERMINED BY SPIRITUAL HUNGER** - 6 - "**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**" Perhaps this, in Jesus' mind, is the *primary condition* when it comes to being filled with righteousness of God. I simply must want Him more than anything else. **Matthew 6:33** is a restatement of this same truth. God promises nothing to the casual seeker.

Hunger is the word Jesus used. Hunger is more than wishing. Hunger is desire that's become focused to the point of driving the one who is hungry. It is desire, yes, but desire that has consumed its subject. The best picture for the kind of desire Jesus is talking about is the way your stomach feels about food if it hasn't eaten for two or three days.

- 5) **MERCY COMES TO THOSE WHO SHOW IT** - 7 - "**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.**" Behold strong truth. Discipleship isn't measured by a love for *receiving* mercy. *Everyone* loves receiving mercy. Jesus calls us to love *extending* mercy with the same passion we have for *receiving* it. Jesus says we have to constantly realign our fallen thinking. Giving and receiving mercy are forever locked together. See **Matthew 18:21-25**. The reward of being merciful is we receive more mercy into our lives - both from *God* (**Matthew 6:12-14**) and from *man* (**Luke 6:30-38**).

- 6) **GOD COMES TO PEOPLE WHO WALK IN THE LIGHT** - 8 - "**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**" We know God is a Spirit and can't be seen with our eyes. Jesus is talking about seeing God in the sense of *knowing Him personally - experiencing Him firsthand - and seeing the effects of His presence in our daily life*.

Notice the emphasis on purity of *heart*. It's not enough merely to *appear* pure to others. Jesus doesn't measure our lives by what we are like when with our peers. My life at the office must be as clean as in the sanctuary. See **Psalm 24:4-5**.

- 7) **REAL DISCIPLES HEAL DISCORD RATHER THAN CAUSE IT** - 9 - "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**" Almost everybody *loves* peace. Jesus said real disciples would do something much more difficult. They would *make* peace. You *keep* peace with friends. You *make* peace with enemies. That always has a high cost. It will mean *bearing the wrongs of others, taking the rap for things I didn't do (Isn't that what the cross of Jesus was all about?), putting myself in second (or third) place*. Jesus said His true disciples would value peace over their own convenience or pride. See also **1 Corinthians 7:15, 1 Peter 3:11, Hebrews 12:4, Romans**

12:18.

- 8) **REAL DISCIPLES KNOW THAT PERSECUTION THAT COMES FROM FAITHFULNESS TO JESUS IS MORE BENEFICIAL FOR THE KINGDOM IN THE LONG RUN THAN PERSONAL PLEASURE - 10-12 - "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

It's interesting that Jesus gives more space to this than to any other beatitude. He didn't want us to misunderstand what serving Him would entail in the real world. He didn't want us to miss where some of the greatest blessings would lie - ***under the surface*** of trial and persecution. He's encouraging us to stay in for the long haul.