

A Manifesto of Counterculture

Several years ago a satirical "newspaper" carried the following mock story:

In a historic reversal of its nearly 2,000-year-old pro-meek stance, the...Church announced Tuesday that it is permanently rescinding the traditional "blessed" status of the world's meek..."Twenty centuries should have been more than enough time for them to inherit the earth"(a representative said)...In an effort to move away from its traditional meek core demographic and attract more upscale worshipers...officials announced...it shall henceforth be as easy for a rich man to enter Heaven as it is for a camel to pass through a heated three-car garage. (The Onion 32:23)

This sort of satire dramatically illustrates John Stott's suggestion that the Sermon on the Mount serves as a "manifesto of counter culture." It departs so radically from established norms of human social valuation that it may even seem absurd to external commentators. But a careful listener will be undone by a gentle subversive voice reordering reality, questioning intentions and inverting values at every step. Welcome to **Life on the Rock**.

Monday – Not Just Good Advice

"(The sermon on the Mount) is an announcement, not a philosophical analysis of the world. It's about something that's starting to happen, not about a general truth of life. It is gospel: good news, not good advice."

Tom Wright – Matthew for Everyone

Please read Matthew chapters 5-7. Try to read slowly and deliberately imagining what it would be like to be there listening to Jesus speak. Pay attention for major themes.

1. What do you think are the major themes of this sermon?
2. Re-examine 5:3-12. How do these verses serve as an introduction to the major themes of the sermon?

Tuesday – Running a Deficit of Spiritual Resources

"The poor in spirit in the sense of this beatitude are those who recognize that they are completely and utterly destitute in the realm of the spirit. They recognize their lack of spiritual resources and therefore their complete dependence on God."

Leon Morris – Commentary on Matthew

1. Please read Matthew 5:1-6. Why do you think that Jesus begins the entire sermon by stating that those who lack spiritual resources are blessed and that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them?

Text Insight – Matthew uses the term "kingdom of heaven" in the same contexts that the other gospel writers use the phrase "kingdom of God": the past, present and future realm of all that submits to the rule of God. Or as Tom Wright says: "God's space, where full reality exists close by our ordinary ('earthly') reality and interlocking with it."

2. Why might the realm of God's rule (i.e. "the kingdom of heaven") belong to those who are "poor in spirit"?
3. How do you think you might cultivate the kind of poverty of spirit that Jesus is esteeming?

Wednesday– A Time to Mourn

"(Those that mourn) see that for all the jollity on board, the ship is beginning to sink...The disciple-community does not shake off sorrow as though it were no concern of its own, but willingly bears it."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Cost of Discipleship

1. Please read Matthew 5:4.

Text Insight - This may be the most counter cultural beatitude of them all. The broken state of our world requires the meek, the poor in spirit who hunger for righteousness, to respond with action-oriented sadness toward the godlessness and injustice of our culture...and of ourselves.

2. Please read the following verses about these Bible mourners: Habakkuk 1:2-4; Isa 6:1-5; Jer 8:18-9:2; Luke 19:41-46; John 11:32-36. What do they mourn?
3. How might this beatitude help us know how to approach those experiencing sorrow? Do you know someone who needs you to mourn with them this week?

Thursday– Deferential Strength

"Self-assertion is never a Christian virtue; rather, it is Christian to be busy in lowly service and refuse to engage in conduct that merely advances one's personal aims."

Leon Morris - Commentary on Matthew

1. Please read Matthew 5:1-12, Linger over verse 5. What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word 'meek'?
2. Some have defined meekness as "intentional choices contrary to self interest." In light of this understanding of the word "meek," why might it be fair to say that beatitude meekness is actually a mark of strength?

Worth Considering – As you consider the current state of the American church, where do you see us more involved in seeking our own self interest rather than being 'busy in lowly service'? Is there something we should do (or you can do) to buck this trend?

Friday – Intensity of Desire

"The pursuit of righteousness is often parodied as some sort of obsolete Victorian prudishness, or narrow-minded vehement legalism. The pursuit of righteousness is not popular even among Christians. Many today are prepared to seek other things: spiritual maturity, real happiness, the Spirit's power, effective witnessing skills...But how many hunger and thirst for righteousness?" D. A. Carson – Sermon on the Mount

1. Please read Matthew 5:1-12, focusing once again on verse 6. Can you remember a time when you were particularly hungry or thirsty?
2. Does this verse say that beatitude people actually achieve righteousness? Who is the active agent in their acquisition of this desire?

Putting it into Action - What do you desire intensely? Ask God to deepen your hunger and thirst for righteousness.