

“A Generic Message?”

There are some who would suggest that Christ's Sermon on the Mount is common and ordinary. They maintain that the things Jesus proclaims in the Sermon on the Mount are held by all religions and are in essence, nothing special. John Stott's response to this assertion is worth considering: *“[There are those] who glibly assert that the Sermon on the Mount expresses ethical standards which are self-evidently true, common to all religions, and easy to follow.... The most charitable reaction to such people is to assume that they have never read the Sermon they dismiss as commonplace.”* Christ's sermon is far from a generic distillation of self-evident niceties. It is cutting, startling and counter-intuitive. D. A. Carson gives a more appropriate preview: *“The more I read these three chapters...the more I am both drawn to them and shamed by them. Their brilliant light draws me like a moth to a spotlight; but the light is so bright it sears and burns. No room is left for forms of piety which are nothing more than veneer and sham.”* Brace yourself for the second set of culture inverting, soul disclosing declarations we call the Beatitudes.

Monday – Responding When Offended

“Mercy always deals with what we see of pain, misery and distress, these are the results of sin; and (grace) always deals with the sin and guilt itself. One extends relief, the other pardon; the one cures, heals, helps, the other cleanses and reinstates.” Richard Lenski

1. Please read Matthew 5:7 and 18:21-35. Throughout the teachings of Jesus, receiving mercy tends to be connected with extending mercy. Why do you think Jesus is so insistent on this point?
2. How is this beatitude related to the “poor in spirit” beatitude(v. 3)? How is it similar/distinct?
3. In what ways did Christ live out this beatitude?

Digging Deeper – It is human nature to grant ourselves more “slack” than those around us. What does this verse suggest about this tendency?

Tuesday – Clarity of Perspective

“The pure in heart have a child-like simplicity....” Dietrich Bonhoeffer – The Cost of Discipleship

1. Please read Matthew 5:8. The pure in heart are also poor in spirit (aware of their own spiritual poverty and need for help). How is it possible to be both pure in heart and poor in spirit?
2. How does the passage suggest that our ability to see/perceive God and his ways is connected to the state of our heart?
3. In what ways do we see God? Read some of Paul's thoughts on the subject, Ephesians 1:15-23 (focusing on verse 18).

Wednesday – Stopping Violence

“Yet there is nothing in the context to argue that... Jesus is restricting himself to gospel peacemaking. Rather, the disciple of Jesus Christ must be a peacemaker in the broadest sense of the term.” D.A. Carson

1. Please read Matthew 5:1-12, paying special attention to verse 9. How do you think a peacemaker is different than a peaceful person, someone who desires peace or even a peace keeper?
2. Was Jesus a peacemaker? Why or why not? Should we pursue peace at any cost?

Digging Deeper – What might it look like for you to be a peacemaker in your home? church? workplace?

Thursday – Suffering for Righteousness

“This does not refer to the righteousness of God, but to suffering in a just cause.... It is important that Jesus gives his blessing not merely to suffering incurred directly for the confession of his name but to suffering in any just cause.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer – The Cost of Discipleship

“People hate to be disturbed, even for the better.” E. Stanley Jones

Please read Matthew 5:1-12, re-read verse 10

1. Can you remember a time when you felt poorly treated for a just action? What are some just causes that the church has suffered for in history past? Is the church in America today suffering for any just cause?
2. Why do you think people find Jesus Christ and his gospel so offensive?

Digging Deeper – More Christians died for their faith in the 20th century than any century prior. Today there are thousands of Christians around our world who are suffering because they have chosen to claim faith in Christ. For a first hand look at persecution taking place today, go to www.persecution.com. Pray for our brothers and sisters around the world who are persecuted for their faith today.

Friday – Life on the Rock

1. Please read Matthew 5:1-12. How do these eight beatitudes relate to and intersect with one another?
2. In our **Life on the Rock** series, we have said that these beatitudes are signs of life. They are evidence of God's work in our lives. Which of these eight are most valued by our contemporary culture? Which are least valued?
3. Look for a moment at the blessings that Jesus promises to beatitude people. These blessings have both a present and future aspect to them. How have you experienced these blessings thus far in your life? Which ones seem more, “future” to you?

For the Weekend: Which of these Beatitudes do you think best describes you? Which do you think least describes you? Which ones do you sense God bringing to life in you?