

031: The Heart of the Matter

(based on Sermon #26 in the Life of Christ Series)

The most breathtaking vistas in all the land of Israel can be seen at the Sea of Galilee.

- The Sea is actually a large freshwater lake, the lowest in the world, situated about 700 ft. below sea level.
- Its pristine, bright blue water is a vivid contrast next to the mountains situated on its east and west sides.
- One of the most spectacular places from which to view the lake is known today as the Mount of Beatitudes, located near Capernaum on the northwestern shore of the Sea, the traditional site where Jesus is believed to have delivered the Sermon on the Mount.
- We read in:
- Matt. 5:1-2 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them.
- Jesus sits down on the mountainside with His disciples, those who desire to follow Him. There He teaches how they should live in light of the coming kingdom.

What is the purpose of this sermon?

- The Sermon on the Mount spans from Matt. 5-7, and outlines the qualifications for discipleship and, ultimately, inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.
- Keep in mind that Israel, as God's first-born son, was already promised in the Old Testament an inheritance in the Messianic kingdom, namely, rulership over the nations *on Earth*.
- Thus, by offering an inheritance in the *kingdom of heaven*, Jesus was offering Israel something additional if they would meet the qualifications, something greater — inheritance in the New Jerusalem that will descend from

Heaven and hover over Earth (see Rev. 21) during the Messianic era.

- It will serve as the ruling realm where Christ and His bride will co-rule.

Unfortunately, the Sermon has been misinterpreted by two groups.

- First, are those who teach that it is evangelistic, providing the means of salvation in Jesus Christ.
- This position is popularly called *Lordship Salvation*, particularly by those who oppose it.
- Ironically, while adherents of *Lordship Salvation* claim that salvation is by faith alone, they, nonetheless, insist that in order to be saved one must commit to Jesus as Lord of their life by denying self, taking up their cross, and following Him.
- They apply virtually all of the discipleship texts in the Gospels, that are intended for the sanctification of believers, to unbelievers, claiming those passages are teaching the way to be saved.
- How does this erroneous doctrine impact one's understanding of the Sermon on the Mount?

John MacArthur, for example, in his book, the Gospel According to Jesus, claims Matt. 7:13-14, "amounts to the Savior's own presentation of the way of salvation ... Here our Lord brings the Sermon on the Mount to its evangelistic climax."

- Is this not implying that keeping the principles taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is the means by which one becomes saved, at least in part?
- If so, is that not works?
- But as we shall see, the Sermon on the Mount is for those who are already believers, desiring to follow Jesus

in discipleship, with the means of discipleship described as faith-filled works. The Sermon is most definitely not to be interpreted in an evangelistic sense.

Matthew Bates, using a little different terminology essentially takes the same position in his book, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*.

- The title of the book exposes his position, that belief is not sufficient for salvation; the key is fidelity or allegiance, and that is demonstrated by how we live.
- With respect to the Sermon on the Mount, he says, “Allegiance to Jesus as king demands obedience to the deepest intentions of the law of Moses (see Matt. 5:17-48).”
- Keep in mind that Bates is proposing this is how a person is saved and, once again, works are included.
- This text has nothing to do with how unbelievers become saved.
- These Jews are already believers in an Old Testament sense, as I pointed out in the first volume in this series, *The Kingdom According to Jesus, Volume 1*.

The problem is that MacArthur and Bates, and others like them, who hold to the *Lordship Salvation* paradigm, do not understand the important distinction between the *gift* of eternal life and the *reward*.

- When one understands this dualism, the message of the Sermon on the Mount becomes clear.
- The *gift* of eternal life is bestowed by God upon those who simply believe Jesus, the Son of God, for eternal life.
- At that moment of initial belief, they become a child of God.
- But eternal life is not a ticket to Heaven.

- In a previous study, I defined eternal life as “the provision of Jesus within believers as the means by which they can live righteously and thereby qualify for age-lasting (millennial) inheritance.”
- Those believers who faithfully draw upon His provision for abundant life now (see Gal. 2:20) and consequently live righteously, confessing Christ before men, will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ with an inheritance of co-rulership with Jesus in His coming kingdom.
- This is known as the *reward* of eternal life.
- By not distinguishing between the dual aspects of eternal life — the *gift* and the *reward* — Bible teachers and commentators become quite confused and often resort to teaching works as the requirement for salvation (regeneration), thus the *Lordship Salvation* dilemma, which has grown quite popular.
- But this is only one erroneous interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount.

At the other extreme are some dispensationalists who understand that salvation is truly by faith alone, but they insist, nevertheless, that the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to New Testament, church-age believers.

- They claim it is entirely Jewish in its application.
- In so doing, they also interpret the Sermon erroneously, albeit in a different manner.
- For example, Lewis Sperry Chafer, following in the footsteps of his mentor, C.I. Scofield, concluded that the era before the cross was characterized by “pure law,” as will be the coming millennial era.
- Consequently, the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to believers of the church age, but applied exclusively in the past to Old Testament Jews and

will apply again in the future to Jews in the millennial kingdom.

- He referred to the Sermon as the “Manifesto of the King.” Scofield called it “the divine constitution for the righteous government of the earth,” referring to the Millennium.

Chafer went so far as to assert regarding the Beatitudes:

- “These blessings are won through merit. This is in sharp contrast to the blessings in the exalted position of the Christian to which he instantly attains through Christ at the moment he believes.”
- Chafer continues in his book to meticulously explain the Beatitudes, emphasizing that they are already inherently the possession of believers of the church age, because of their position in Christ.
- In other words, he assumes that Old Testament Jews had to attain these blessings through merit, whereas New Testament Christians essentially need do nothing, for these blessings have already been graciously bestowed on us.
- Chafer is correct in saying that the Beatitudes are won through merit.
- Further, he is correct in teaching that keeping the principles in the Sermon on the Mount will not result in salvation (regeneration).
- But Chafer and Scofield, and other dispensationalists who hold to the same position, seem to be misunderstanding three important truths.

First, believers do not “instantly attain” the blessings of the Beatitudes from the point of their salvation.

- Those blessings are, indeed, earned — promised to those who choose to behave in the manner indicated.

- Many of God’s children are not poor in spirit or meek or merciful, nor are they peacemakers.
- They certainly don’t suffer for righteousness’ sake.
- But because they possess eternal life, they have the *provision* to live righteously.
- Those who ignore the provision and live for self will not be rewarded with the blessings of the Beatitudes.
- But those who choose to live the abundant life, by depending on the Lord, will, indeed, be rewarded with the blessings indicated at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Second, those who see a Jewish-only interpretation for the Sermon on the Mount, on the basis that it is “pure law,” fail to recognize Christ’s teaching in Luke 16:

- Luke 16:16 The law and the prophets were until John (i.e., John the Baptist) Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.
- Most dispensationalists say the dispensation of law ended at the cross.
- But Jesus said it ended with John, the forerunner of Messiah.
- With John’s preaching a new era began.
- Jesus began to offer kingdom inheritance to Israel, summarizing the qualifications in His “inaugural address” to the nation, which is the Sermon on the Mount.
- Thus, the Sermon is not “pure law.”
- It is heart preparation for the kingdom.
- Those who live in this manner will inherit a place in the New Jerusalem.

Third, because national Israel rejected Christ’s offer, He took it away from Israel and began offering it to “a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matt. 21:43).

- The word *nation* is *ethnos* in Greek and refers to people groups other than Jews.
- In the context of the New Testament, this is a reference to the predominantly Gentile church of Jesus Christ.
- Some commentators prefer to say that the kingdom offer was taken from that present generation of Jews and will be given to a future generation of Jews, likely the one alive at the time of Christ's second coming.
- However, this cannot be, for the word *ethnos* in Matt. 21:43 does not mean "generation" and is consistently interpreted in the New Testament as "nations" or "Gentiles." Thus, this alternate view cannot be taken seriously.
- Jesus is offering the same *kingdom of heaven* inheritance to believers of the church age while Israel is temporarily set aside.

The promises to Israel will ultimately be fulfilled, but not until after the Tribulation, when Israel repents and turns to the Messiah.

- That being said, the Sermon on the Mount is for those who are already believers, who desire to be faithful disciples of Jesus and inherit a place of reward in His coming kingdom, whether Jew or Gentile.
- By carrying out what Jesus teaches in the Sermon, they will qualify.
- Once believers understand this simple hermeneutic (principle of interpretation), they will grasp the heart of Christ's message and discover that the Sermon on the Mount is applicable, not merely to first century Jews, but to twenty-first century believers.
- Having discussed the purpose of the Sermon and its intended audience, we come now to the glorious Beatitudes, which I will read.

- Matt. 5:3-12
- 3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- 5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.
- 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
- 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
- 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 11 Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.
- 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

According to Strong, the Greek word translated *blessed* means "supremely blest; by extension, fortunate, well off."

- The Latin noun *beatitudo* means "happiness," thus these verses are commonly called the Beatitudes.
- You will be truly happy and blessed when you live according to these principles.
- The Holman Bible Dictionary entry for *Beatitudes* says:
- "*Happy*," however, may not be the best rendering since it has been spiritually devalued in modern usage. The idea is that of a fortunate, blissful state based not on worldly circumstances but on divine conditions.

What Jesus is teaching in the Beatitudes is that you will be blessed in the age to come if you live in this manner, for you will be an inheritor of magnificent rewards.

- Undoubtedly, the one who lives in this manner will also be blessed spiritually in the present age.
- What a tragedy it would be for a child of God to refuse to live in this manner and thereby forfeit the millennial bliss God has promised for those who meet the conditions.
- Yet many Christians are on the pathway of self-destruction rather than millennial bliss.
- By using the word “destruction” I am certainly not referring to Hell, but loss of reward, which could be as serious as being consigned to the darkness outside, the relative darkness outside the abundantly bright kingdom of the heavens.
- That would be a tragedy indeed!
- Oh, that we might live out Christ’s expectations for us in the Beatitudes!

Incidentally, the lifestyle outlined in the Beatitudes can never be merely simulated in one’s life or merely imitated of our own strength.

- They are genuine character qualities produced by the Spirit of God in the life of a believer and exhibited only to the extent that Jesus is allowed to live His life through His children.
- The Beatitudes, we could say, are the graces of the Christ-life.
- You have no ability of yourself to live in this manner.
- But Jesus lived in this manner!
- The glorious truth is that you have the Spirit of Christ living within, and He enables those who cooperate with Him to live in this victorious, overcoming manner.

- Those who spurn His divine enablement will fall and fail continuously, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble
- What, then, are the qualifications for being blessed with millennial rewards?

1. Poverty of spirit. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- To be poor is to be impoverished, not owning anything.
- Jesus is not calling saints to impoverish themselves *materially*.
- Rather, He is calling saints to impoverish themselves *spiritually*.
- Those who are poor in spirit are empty of self, recognizing they have no inherent worth or self-sufficiency.
- Their constant need is Jesus, and on Him alone they depend.
- Poverty of spirit is the opposite of the Laodicean attitude: “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17a).

Ironically, those who think they have something to offer God are actually bankrupt and don’t realize it — and do not realize that they are, in reality, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev. 3:17b).

- The poor in spirit, on the other hand, are rich in faith and, because of that, will be rewarded in the kingdom to come.
- James 2:5 Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?
- Jesus’ audience would have rightly equated the word *kingdom* with Christ’s Messianic kingdom.

- We refer to it as the Millennial kingdom, a literal period of one thousand years during which Christ will reign from heaven over Earth along with his bride.
- The phrase “kingdom of heaven” (in v. 3) is literally to be translated “kingdom of the heavens.”
- It refers to the ruling realm of the coming Messianic kingdom, the headquarters, if you will, where Christ will dwell and rule.
- Those who are poor in spirit will be qualified to inherit the heavenly realm of the kingdom — v. 3 promises, “theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.”
- They will be the inheritors, the bride, the co-rulers with Jesus.
- The second qualification for inheriting the kingdom is:

2. Mourfulness. Blessed are those who mourn: for they shall be comforted.

- Does this mean that believers must go around in life long-faced and lacking joy?
- On the contrary, mournfulness is agony over one’s deplorable spiritual condition, crying out, as Isaiah, “Woe is me! For I am undone” (Isa. 6:5).
- If poverty of spirit is the intellectual understanding that one is destitute without God, then mournfulness is the emotional reality that accompanies it.
- In one word, it is brokenness before God.
- What does God do for broken people?
- He comforts them, filling them with Jesus, putting the pieces of life back together.
- He brings meaning to life, not just in this life but also in the life to come.

Those who are not mournful and broken before the Lord will, in the millennial kingdom, dwell outside the palace of the

king, away from the brightness of His presence, in a realm of relative darkness, consciously regretting having lived for self in this life.

- In contrast, the mournful will be comforted in His Paradise, basking in His presence.
- Think of Lazarus as opposed to the rich man.
- Those in New Jerusalem, the city of reward, will enjoy the beauty of His holiness, serving as one of His loyal subjects.
- The third qualification for inheriting the kingdom is:

3. Meekness. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

- Our human tendency is to equate meekness with weakness, but that is a mistake.
- Meekness is humility and gentleness.
- Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth (Numb. 12:3), but Moses was anything but weak.
- One of the common definitions of meekness is strength under control.
- Meekness has two aspects.
- First, it is recognizing that you are no better than others.
- All are on level playing field with God.

Second, meekness is the gentle treatment of others, knowing you can trust God to judge evildoers and work in other believers as He works in us.

- Meekness is the refusal to take matters into our own hands.
- Think of Jesus, Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Pet. 2:23).

- Our Savior was meek and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29), and He will produce the same spirit in us when we let the Spirit take control.
- God views a meek and quiet spirit of great price (1 Pet. 3:4).
- Thus, he promises to reward those who are meek by letting them inherit the millennial earth.
- In the minds of Christ's Jewish audience, the reference to inheriting the earth would have fostered images reminiscent of possessing the promised land, which, for the New Testament saint, is a picture of victory in the present life as well as inheritance in Christ's coming kingdom.
- This is a promise of rulership over Earth for those who are meek.
- The fourth qualification for inheriting the kingdom is:

4. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they shall be filled.

- Matt. 6:33 Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.
- Hungering and thirsting are cravings that long for fulfillment.
- The spiritual parallel is vivid.
- Every disciple of Jesus Christ should desire to be righteous, to be perfect, just as the Father in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48), to be filled with the fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1:11).
- Solomon summed it up at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man (Eccl. 12:13).

Those who appropriate the righteousness of Christ, by depending on the Holy Spirit, will find the enablement to live righteously.

- The promise Jesus makes to those who long to live righteously is that they will be filled.
- The word *filled* means to be satisfied in abundance.
- The idea is abundant spiritual life now for those who live obediently, as well as abundant life in the millennial world to come.
- No such promise is made to those who persist in carnal behavior.
- On the contrary, they are warned that persistence in sinning will result in *not* inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5).
- The fifth qualification for inheriting the kingdom is:

5. Showing mercy. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

- Mercy is deliberate withholding of justice.
- It is *not* giving someone what they actually deserve.
- God is an inexhaustible wellspring of mercy, for His mercy endures forever.
- He showers upon all men His great mercy, for the purpose of leading men to repentance (Rom. 2:4).
- In like manner, we are instructed, as children of God, to be merciful toward others.
- In Matt. 18:23-35 Jesus likened the kingdom of heaven to a gracious and merciful king who forgave one of his servants an impossible debt.
- However, that same servant refused to show mercy and grant forgiveness to someone who owed him a tiny debt.
- He cruelly consigned the man to prison.
- In the end the king was angry with his servant and showed him no mercy.

- The parable illustrates the truth that disciples who are merciful toward others will be treated mercifully at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
- In other words, the implication is that those who show mercy in this life will inherit the kingdom in the next.
- The sixth qualification for inheriting the kingdom is:

6. Purity of heart. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

- The word *pure* in this verse simply means “clean” or, literally, “single-minded — single-focused — not having a split or divided loyalty.”
- In the Scriptures the heart typically represents the soul of man, the thoughts and feelings.
- Thus, to be pure in heart is to be clean and untainted, singularly-focused in thoughts and feelings, mainly the motives.
- This particular beatitude assures that the righteousness sought after in v. 6 is not merely outward, but also inward righteousness.

Jesus emphasizes the importance of inward righteousness later in the chapter.

- Referring to the seventh commandment — You shall not commit adultery — to which one could be in *outward* conformity, Jesus adds, “Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).
- Purity of heart (thoughts/feelings) must also accompany outward righteousness.
- Those who are pure in heart are promised to see God.
- Like all the Beatitudes, this promise seems to guarantee present spiritual possession as well as actual future

kingdom possession, in the sense of millennial inheritance.

- Sadly, some will not see Christ in the kingdom, for they will be removed from His presence.
- The seventh qualification for inheriting the kingdom is:

7. Peacemaking. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.

- Jesus assured our peace with God through His death on Calvary, by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. (Col. 1:20).
- As believers in fellowship with God, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).
- As sons of God, we have a duty to promulgate peace in the world by encouraging folks to reconcile with God through Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-21).
- Indeed, we are His ambassadors of peace!
- Of course, it should also be characteristic of propagators of peace that they live peaceably with all men.

One of the tragedies of the Christian church is that so many believers are at odds with one another or with their own family members!

- This is not living peaceably with everyone.
- What is the reward promised to those who are living peaceably?
- They will be called the *sons* of God.
- Certainly, you are already God’s child by way of your relationship to Christ, but God will publicly proclaim that you are His *son*.
- The Gr. word is *huios*, meaning *mature* son, one who is worthy of the inheritance of the firstborn.

- The Father is not ashamed of peacemakers, He is eager to refer to them as mature sons
- Heb. 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:
- The eighth qualification for inheriting the kingdom is:

8. Enduring persecution. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- Those who willingly suffer for Jesus in this life will be honored in the next.
- Indeed, if you have the privilege of suffering for Jesus in some way, rejoice! And be exceeding glad!
- Jesus emphasizes the reward twice.
- In v. 10 He promises, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and in v. 12, "great is your reward in heaven."
- God places a high value on those who endure suffering, including verbal suffering.
- Notice v. 11 says, "when they revile you ... and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake."

Take comfort in knowing others were persecuted in times past for their stand for the Lord also, chiefly, the prophets.

- We know the apostles also suffered greatly, and so have many other saints throughout the centuries.
- Read *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* to learn the details.
- Incidentally, this is not suffering because of your own sin.
- Some Christians bemoan their sufferings as if they were trials from the Lord.
- In reality, their sufferings are the consequences of their own sinful actions.
- That is not suffering for Jesus!
- The condition here is suffering for the sake of *righteousness*.

- The apostle Paul emphasized the same truth.
- 2 Tim. 2:12 If we endure (in suffering), we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

This verse teaches that those who endure persecution will inherit the kingdom, and will rule with Jesus.

- Those who melt under pressure will not inherit the kingdom.
- Christ will deny them the privilege.
- Paul indicates the same in Rom. 8 where he identifies all saints as heirs of God but only suffering saints as co-heirs with Christ.
- Rom. 8:16-17 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

The condition for being a co-heir with Christ and sharing in His glorification is suffering for Him.

- There is only one prerequisite for being present in the kingdom: believing on Jesus for eternal life.
- However, there are several qualifications for inheriting the kingdom, that is, taking full possession of it as a reward and being granted the privilege of dwelling in New Jerusalem.
- Jesus gives eight qualifications in the Beatitudes which begin the Sermon on the Mount.
- How are you measuring up?
- Oh, how critical that we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, for that is how we glorify God.
- If you choose to cling to this world, focusing on your own possessions, enjoyment, pleasure, advancement, honor,

acclaim, expectations, and accomplishments, then you will lose out in the age to come.

- The apostle Paul said, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ” (Phil. 3:7).
- The prospect of reward is being offered to you, the ball is in your court.
- What will you do with Christ’s offer?
- Will your motto be, “Take the world but give me Jesus?”
- There is much at stake!
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS!