

MATTHEW 5:1-12 – BE Attitudes

GOSPEL IN THE TEXT

Nearly 140 years ago (1884-1885), CFW Walther lectured at the Seminary on the “Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel.” Since that time, we, as Lutheran Christians, have always taken great care in making that proper distinction. But, in the text that confronts us today, that distinction is not entirely clear. It could be viewed as either Law or as Gospel. One thing we do know is that this text describes the Attitudes that we are empowered by Christ to BE.

Our task for today is to concentrate on opportunities for Gospel in this text. Our task is not to settle - let alone enter into - the familiar controversy whether the Beatitudes it contains are Law or Gospel. One approach that will help us to realize the Gospel potential of this text is to view the Beatitudes more as statements of **fact**, rather than as challenges for our life today. For example, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit*” - this is the condition that exists already for those who have a living connection with Christ by faith – Experiencing Christ! The Beatitudes are addressed to people already followers of Jesus (as we see in v. 1). Even if viewed as Law, the Beatitudes must be considered NOT as prerequisites or conditions for Christian discipleship – being followers of Jesus, but rather as descriptions of God's **expectations** of those who are already saved – How we are to **BE** in our daily lives.

BE ATTITUDES

Given that perspective, look at the Gospel blessings this text enumerates. Three times it mentions the gift of heaven (vv. 3, 10, 12), and in verse 8 it singles out the greatest joy of heaven, the fact that we shall see God. Heaven's other blessings are described as experiencing comfort (v. 4), as being filled with righteousness (v. 6), as enjoying mercy (v. 7), and as experiencing sonship under God (v. 9).

Although heaven and all that goes with it are our greatest Gospel blessings (“*great is your reward*,” [v. 12]). God's gifts are NOT limited to the hereafter: The meek “*shall inherit the earth*” (v. 5). And the blessings of heaven - mentioned just a moment ago - (comfort, righteousness, mercy, and sonship) are blessings we enjoy to a degree in this life already. Think, for example, of how we sinners have already been filled with righteousness - the righteousness of Christ that God has credited to us. (Luther’s “Happy Exchange”). Although we look forward to being filled with actual behavioral righteousness in heaven, as far as God is concerned, we already are filled with that righteousness on account of Christ's saving acts.

BONUS GOSPEL VIA GOSPEL HANDLE

The description of Jesus in verse 1, "*He went up on the mountain,*" is something that we could consider a bonus for our discussion today. The observation merely describes the locale from which Jesus delivered the sermon that follows.

Yet how **prophetic!** In a short time, Jesus would once more *go up on the mountain* where He would suffer death and hell in our place and for our eternal salvation. The Scriptures call that mountain Calvary or Golgotha. The Christian church has always referred to the site of Jesus' crucifixion as Mt. Calvary, or Mt. Golgotha.

Last week, we talked about Jesus' calling us to repentance. Here's your 'Quote for the Day': "To repent is to alter one's way of looking at life; it is to take God's point of view instead of one's own." So, maybe connecting the two mountains, the one in our text for today and the other in the Passion Narrative, will help us better realize the Gospel potential of the Beatitudes. From an eternal perspective, history unfurls from the future to the present to the past... Thus, the Sermon on the Mount must be seen by us from the perspective of the crucifixion on the mount...

- If seen as Law, all the challenges of our text are empowered by the event on the cross.
- If seen as Gospel, all the blessings of our text, and HOW we are to **BE**, are facilitated by Jesus' death and damnation on the cross.

Ultimately, we know that, with Jesus' Resurrection, we have the promise and blessings of our own resurrection – even in the life we live today. A new life given to us through our Baptism! And we believe that, as He ascended and reigns over all creation, the blessedness won for us by Christ will continue to be showered upon us, empowering us to **BE** a blessing to others and help them to Experience Christ.

That is the BE Attitude we should all take from today's Gospel.

So, in your prayers this past week, did you listen when you prayed, asking God, "How Can I Help ...?" How Can I Help My Community, My family, My Coworkers, etc. Experience Christ?" Were you given any ideas as to how God is asking you to BE?

Feel free to share those with others today, and bounce some ideas off one another.

In Jesus' Name. AMEN.