

New Attitudes for the New Year

Matt. 5:1-12

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I'm pretty sure that by now, all of you have heard about what took place at our nation's capital. For the past few days, the images on TV shows what happened and this is what all the news stations are talking about right now.

Well, you didn't come to worship this morning to hear what happened and I don't have any new information to shed light on the event - I have more questions than I have answers and I am just as shocked as all of you are.

10 days ago, when this New Year began, I was hoping that the year 2021 would start off quietly and uneventful. That all the political bickering and the social unrest would settle down, that the spread of the coronavirus would slow down, that vaccines would be readily available and we would start to see some kind of "normal" begin to return.

That people would be able to go back to work; that students would be able to go back to school; that restaurants would be able to serve people inside their restaurants and, of courses, that churches would be able open their sanctuaries and welcome worshipers again. I have to keep thinking and believing that all of these things will take place sooner or later and they will. But until then, how are we going to get there?

Again, I don't have all the answers and I don't have a crystal ball, but one thing that has helped me get through every day, get through every week, and get through every hardship has been **having the right attitude**.

There's a great quote by Chuck Swindoll, (a Christian pastor and author.)

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude to me is more important than facts. It's more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It's more important than appearances, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past, we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do, is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what

happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you, we are in charge of our attitudes."

What a great quote!

"I am convinced that life is 10% of what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it."

That 90% that Chuck Swindoll is talking about is attitude.

Attitude makes a world of difference. Having the right attitude, the proper attitude, a hopeful attitude, a Kingdom attitude makes a world of difference.

Here's an example of a wrong attitude.

There was this time when Jesus just finished giving a lesson and it was almost dinner time. And so one of the disciples said to Him, *"Send the people away so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."* But Jesus replied: *"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."* Then one of the disciples answered, *"We have only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish but how far will they go among so many?"*

That's the wrong attitude.

Another time, there was the young father who brought his son to Jesus, hoping Jesus could cure him and cast out a demon. But when Jesus asked the father about the little boy's condition, the father answered His questions and then he said: *"If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."*

Unhealthy attitudes are often characterized by a lack of faith and a lack of hope. Compare those examples, with that famous verse from Phil 4:13 *"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength!"*

So this morning we are talking about attitude.

"I am convinced that life is 10% of what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it."

I'm starting a new sermon series this morning that focuses on new attitudes for a brand new year, and I'm starting this series by looking at Jesus' inaugural sermon - also known as the Sermon on the Mt.

Now when [Jesus] saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn,

for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons and daughters of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

In most of our Bibles, the heading above chapter 5 reads: "The Beatitudes." This wasn't the title of the sermon but a description of our passage, and the eight "blessings" that I just read to you were known as the "Beatitudes."

Question: Does anyone know why they are called the Beatitudes?

I'm kind of embarrassed that I had to look up the answer myself and what I found out was that they are called "the Beatitudes" because in Latin, the word "blessed" is the word "beati." So, when Jesus said: "*Blessed are you,*" in the Latin translation of the Bible, that phrase is rendered, "*Beati sund.*" (I'm pretty sure you were hoping for a better answer than that one.)

How about this.

Someone once said: "*They are called the be-attitudes because these are the "attitudes" that God wants us to be.*" Or to say it another way: "These are the 'how-to-be' attitudes." (I like that answer much better than the Latin one don't you ?)

These are the "how-to-be" attitudes that God wants us to be!

Now the "Sermon on the Mount" was Jesus' very 1st sermon recorded in our Bible. I'm sure He preached many more sermons than this one, but this was the very 1st sermon recorded in our Bible, and as far as sermons go, this wasn't a "long" sermon, with just over 2,200 words that would take the avg person 5-10 minutes to read.

In comparison, some of the sermons that I've been preaching lately have gone over 25 minutes, which some people say is waaaaaaay toooo long, and so I'm going to try and be more like Jesus this year and preach shorter sermons!

Well, the thing about sermons is that reading a sermon on paper and hearing a sermon being preached is a completely different matter. Even if the content is the same, even if the author is the same, when you hear a sermon being preached vs. reading a sermon transcript - it's different.

That's why I wish I was there when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, because I would have loved to hear His tone, to see His body language and see how the people reacted when Jesus said different things. (Those things don't come across when you read a sermon transcript.)

And being a preacher myself, I would have loved to know if Jesus preached from a manuscript or if He preached off the top of His head!

(note: if you've ever joined our zoom worship service, you wouldn't know it, but beneath the bottom of the screen, I have all my sermon notes right in front of me. In fact, every single sermon I've preached at St. Marks - I have used sermon notes)

So I always wondered, "*How did Jesus preach?*" My guess is that whether Jesus wrote a manuscript of a few notes on a piece of paper, He knew exactly what to say. Jesus probably looked out at the crowds that day and looked out at all the people, and just by the look on their faces, He knew what was on their hearts and knew what weighed them down.

Jesus knew that people were struggling with their faith. He knew that people were struggling with their walk with God and He knew that what was "going on" out in the world, (the current events in Rome and the struggles of everyday life) was written on the faces of the people who showed up that day, and so Jesus started His sermon, by talking about the beatitudes.

Why was that? Well, Jesus wanted people to think differently. Differently about themselves. Differently about God and differently about the world. He wanted them to think differently - not because He was going to change the situation, but because he wanted to change people's hearts. He wanted to change people's mindsets and how they saw the world, He wanted to change people's attitudes and how they interpreted events, and so, He started the Sermon on the Mt by talking about what it means to be "blessed."

According to Jesus- being "blessed" wasn't about being endowed with a lot of material possessions. It also wasn't about having the kind of life where everything went your way, but seeing your life thru the lens of the kingdom of God, and once you start to see

the world thru a pair of “spiritual glasses” your life will look different and your attitude will be different too!

For the rest of this sermon, I’d like to quickly run thru our passage and try to find an “attitude” for each of the beatitudes.

#1. POOR IN SPIRIT.

The very first “beatitude” is told in Matt. 5:3 when Jesus said: ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”***

When Jesus said this first beatitude, He wasn’t talking about being “poor” as in having no money. He wasn’t talking about not having a job or not having an income, but rather, Jesus was talking about a spiritual attitude.

“Blessed are those who know it’s not about them but all about God.”

Listen to the MSG translation of this particular beatitude. *“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you, there is more of God and his rule.”*

Less of you and more of God. There’s a wonderful attitude in there.

Do any of you remember of our member’s by the name of Elizabeth Forehand? Lis was the wife of Roy Forehand who passed away a few years ago. I had the chance to visit with Roy and Liz one time and if you know anything about Liz it’s that it’s very hard to get her to talk about herself.

During the visit at their home I would ask her a question, but no matter what the question was, she would answer very quickly and then turn the tables and bring the conversation back on me. It took me a few minutes to realize what she was doing, and so I would answer the question very quickly and then turn the table back on her!

Those of you who knew Elizabeth Forehand, knew she wasn’t about herself, and I suppose that’s why people enjoyed her company, because she put the spotlight on others.

Being “poor in spirit” means not putting the spotlight on yourself, but always putting the spotlight on God. Less of you and more of God! This is what John the Baptist demonstrated when he said: *“I must decrease - He must increase!”* It’s a humble

attitude, that's for sure. It's also selfless and not focused on the self and focused on others.

#2 THOSE WHO MOURN

The 2nd beatitude is told in vs 4, when Jesus said: ***"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."***

Listen to how the MSG translation renders this attitude: *You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you."*

Someone once said: "Sympathy is when I feel sorry FOR you, but empathy is when I feel sorry WITH you." There's a very subtle difference, but with empathy, there's a closer connection with the other person.

The attitude behind this "beatitude" is a sense of "ownership" and "togetherness!" What does that look like? Here's an example.

Sometimes at our church, there will be an issue, a problem, or a difficult challenge. And when that happens, some people will say to me: *"Pastor, what are **YOU** going to do about it?"* Other people, however, will say: *"Pastor, what are **WE** going to do about it?"*

Just one little word change makes all the difference, and that tells me everything about that person's attitude. *"What are **WE** going to do about it?"* *"What can **WE** do to fix it?"* That's what I love about St. Mark's! There's a team spirit, a sense of community, and a close knit family.

When someone goes through a hardship - we go through it together. When someone faces a challenge - we go through it together. When someone passes away, we mourn together. We don't just send sympathy cards, but then we reach out and walk together with that person.

Their grief - is our grief.
Their loss - is our loss.

3 THE MEEK

The 3rd beatitude is told in vs 5, when Jesus said: ***“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”***

This beatitude is a little harder to understand because it uses a word that we don't often use today, and that is the word: “meek.”

Doesn't really sound like a positive word does it? In fact, if you used the word to describe someone, well I wouldn't know if you were saying something “good”, or saying something “bad.”

But listen to the MSG translation:

“You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourself the proud owners of everything that can't be bought.”

When Jesus looked out at the crowds that day, I wonder if He saw anything different than what He would see today. And what I mean by that is people who are trying to get ahead, people trying to get to the front of line and people trying to grab as much as they can - even if it's at the cost of others.

You know, sometimes I make the mistake of thinking that if someone has more than I do, well than, I'm not doing enough. Or, if someone has a bigger house than I do, than I'm not working hard enough. And if someone is more happier than me - I must be doing something wrong, and as for meekness? Well, that's for someone else.

But there's a different side to meekness that we often overlook, and it's knowing that all the material possessions in the world, all the gadgets in our closet, all the cars in our garage and all the money in the bank, cannot compare with have Jesus Christ, and that God has provided for us more than we need.

This is more than being “happy” - this is being “content” which is such a wonderful attitude!

#4 HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Then there's the 4th beatitude when Jesus said: ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled."***

"Hunger and thirst" What do you think of when I say those two words: "Hunger and Thirst?" (Maybe you're thinking about lunch!)

It's an interesting choice of words that Jesus decided to use in vs 6. Maybe as Jesus was preaching, people were opening up their knapsacks and taking out something to eat, and so He connected their "appetite" with an "appetite for God" and in particular, for God's righteousness!

To "hunger and thirst" for righteousness has to do with "doing right by God." It's not about "food and drink" but about "faith and action." It's about asking ourselves: *"How would God think?" "What would God do?"*

#5 Mercy

Jesus said the 5th beatitude was this: ***"Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy."***

The MSG translation said it this way: *"You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being care-full, you'll find yourself cared-for."*

Now this "beatitude" has to do with showing mercy, but what I like about this beatitude (and the attitude behind it) is that instead of waiting around for people to show mercy to us, we should take the first step and show mercy to them.

This "beatitude" takes the initiative and this attitude is a "go getter" attitude.

It doesn't sit around and wait for an apology, it takes the first step and extends an olive branch. It doesn't wait to lend a hand, it doesn't wait to be asked to volunteer, it takes the initiative and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and takes a step of faith, even if that's uncomfortable.

#6 PURE IN HEART

The 6th beatitude goes like this: ***“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”***

There is a really great attitude in beatitude #6. It is an attitude and an ability to see through the eyes of God.

Here’s a quick little test to know if you have a “pure heart.” When you see someone, pan-handling on the side of the road or begging asking for money, what is your first thought?

Is your first thought, *“Hmmm, if I give that person \$10, they’re just going to use it to buy drugs.”* Or is your first thought, something like, *“I wonder what happened to him, and what I can do to help?”* (I have to confess, sometimes I think the first way.)

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God....”

They’ll see God in all people, they’ll see the best in all people and they’ll look for the good in all people.

One day, Jesus was walking through a town called Jericho, when he saw a short little man sitting up in a tree. When Jesus saw the man, He stopped and started talking to the man, but when others noticed this, they said: *“How can you talk to him? He’s a sinner, the worst kind of sinner!”*

Clearly, they were trying to tell Jesus - *“He’s not one of us!”* But you know Jesus said? Jesus said: *That’s not what I see. What I see is the son of Abraham”* which was Jesus’ way of saying - *“Zacchaeus is one of us.”*

To be “pure in heart” is to see others and be able to see the good in them.

To be “pure in heart” is to look at a situation and see God in that situation.

It’s when - *“you get your inside world, your mind and your heart – put right. Then you can see God – in the outside world.”* (The MSG translation.)

#7 Peacemakers

The 7th Beatitude reads: ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons and daughters of God.”***

There’s a lot of images from this past week about what happened in Washington DC. There’s also a lot of finger pointing and a lot of blame going around. Who is at fault. Who is to blame. Who is responsible.

Well, when things finally quieted down on Wednesday night, (well after midnight) one person, a representative from N.J. by the name of Andy Kim, instead of pointing fingers, he decided to grab a trash bag and quietly started cleaning up.

Here’s a picture of Representative Kim, kneeling in the rotunda - picking up trash and broken items left behind by the rioters.

He said: *“It really broke my heart and I just felt compelled to do something – what else could I do?”*



The MSG translation says:

“You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.”

#8 PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The last beatitude says: ***“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”***

And to this Jesus added: ***“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”***

There's a phrase that I recently heard for the first time. I wish I had heard it a lot sooner - it's the phrase: *"Good trouble."*

The person who came up with that phrase was actually another representative, by the name of John Lewis - who recently died last July.



I don't know much about John Lewis, about his career or his politics - so I'm not pushing any view, but one thing I heard about him, was that he marched with M.L.K. Jr, and he was the one who said the phrase: *"Get in good trouble."*

Is there such a thing as "good trouble?" I know there's such a thing as "bad trouble" but what is "good trouble?" Well, it's the kind of thing that gets you in trouble for doing something right.

Jesus got into "good trouble" all the time.

He got in trouble with the Pharisees because He decided to show mercy instead of cast judgement. He got into trouble with religious leaders because He hung out with sinners. Jesus got into "good trouble" because he didn't ignore the poor and the lame and the misfits, and so they persecuted Him, put Him on trial and condemned Him to death.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

I've gone a little longer than I normally do - thanks for being patient with me. I'd like to close by sharing a verse from Phil. 2:5 which says: *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."*

As we start a brand new year, I pray for all of us – that we would have a brand new attitude, and as we go into this week, our attitudes would become more and more like Jesus Christ's.