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The Beatitudes Are for Today

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The Beatitudes Are for Today

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PREFACE

There is perhaps no other passage of the Scriptures so deeply spiritual, so fundamentally doctrinal, so correspondingly practical, and therefore so profoundly meaningful, as the great pronouncements of our Lord Jesus Christ entitled "The Beatitudes." These verses in Matthew 5:1-16 set forth, in a manner unsurpassed, *the inner state of mind and heart* which is the indispensable absolute of true Christian discipleship. They also delineate the *outward manifestation of character and conduct* which are the evidence and witness of that genuine discipleship. No true believer can come to this passage and spend time in it—reading, pondering, meditating, laying its truth to heart, desiring its blessedness to be established not only within, but also outwardly in daily life—and *come away the same*.

The Greek texts of Nestle, Souter, and Westcott and Hort, and the Hebrew Old Testament text of Rudolph Kittel have been used in the exposition. Reference has also been made to the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament and to parts of the photographic facsimile edition of the Codex Alexandrinus of the New Testament. For the English reading, the King James Version in the new Scofield edition of 1967 has been used throughout.

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INTRODUCTION

The Sermon on the Mount has long been a center of controversy. Modernism teaches that salvation depends upon keeping this sermon, and makes it the sum and substance of the Gospel. It is regarded by others as Law, and not as Gospel, and Jesus is said to be here expounding the true sense of the Law over against the distorted expositions and interpretations of the Jewish scribes and rabbis. There are some who consider it to be a constitution intended only for the subjects of the Kingdom during the Millennial Age, and which cannot be applied to Christians today. Still others recognize the spiritual truth in the Sermon on the Mount, but hold its high precepts to be impossible of attainment in the present age. We do not deliberately seek argument over this great passage of Holy Scripture, but we must strongly advocate its application to the true church today. Believers should not be deprived of its blessedness, for it is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness in our day, and its truth is particularly important and relevant for the days in which we live.

We do not find basic, fundamental Law here, for Law cannot produce the state of blessedness set forth in the first part of Matthew 5. Still, it is true that, as Rudolph Stier wrote, "It deepens into a spiritual and strict interpretation of the letter of the Law, and requires on the ground of the promised grace the righteousness of God for the kingdom of God."¹ This section is basic and necessary to all that follows in Matthew 5, 6, 7, for

¹*Words of the Lord Jesus* (Philadelphia: Smith, English and Company, 1859), p. 94.

Christ characterizes His hearers in 5:1-16 as true disciples, and the entire discourse is addressed to them. Contrast is drawn between Law and Gospel by the Lord Himself: "Ye have heard that it has been said . . . but I say unto you. . . ." The connective "but" is *de*, not *alla*, for the milder note of contrast is in keeping with the fact that the Law has its place in the divine economy and is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. This manner of speech appears seven times in the body of Matthew 5. *Seven* is the number of Holy Scripture for divine perfection found in our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Law is the pedagogue which brings us to Him (Gal. 3:23-25).

The body of the Sermon on the Mount deals with the life of Christ's true disciples, and concerns Law only as a rule by which these disciples are to conduct themselves and show that they are true disciples. While the extended passage does indeed present the divine constitution for the government of our Lord Jesus Christ over the earth during the coming Kingdom period, it certainly is not without meaning and significance for His true disciples today. Here we have the framework and structure for the new life and experience entered by means of regeneration. It gives the outline, or model, of the new life of the saved, the shape into which it is to be molded. To those who prate over salvation resting in "living the Sermon on the Mount," we say simply that the cross is required to transform each of the grand precepts in this great discourse into living experience.

Stier's comment on the arrangement of the Sermon is splendid and very much to the point:

We have absolute and special promise, as the origin and foundation of all, in the Benedictions (v. 3-12); then on the ground of their assurance (ye are! ye have!) the evidence and manifestation of that new life and light is demanded (vs. 13-16); finally, there is here also a warning, which in its emphatic restriction and rejection, points forward already to the test at the end of all (vs. 17-20). Even this last rigorous test indeed is still under the high note of promise:—I am come to fulfill!²

²Op. cit., p. 96.

F. B. Meyer calls the Sermon on the Mount "The Directory of the Devout Life," the key to which is found in Matthew 5:1-16. Lenski remarks that it speaks of "the works of Christ's true disciples, which they are to do in the power of the faith." We agree with the words of these great expositors and accept the passage as one which sets forth the state of believers now, an index to the spiritual state in which they are to abide, and a description of the spiritual life they are to live. Christians are surely meant to drink deeply of the truth in these verses and to realize the Sermon's exquisite ideals. They are the "good works" of Matthew 5:16, the evidences of character, qualities of godliness and holiness which testify to the presence of Christ within.³ They are those marks of true discipleship which our Lord Jesus Christ desires to see in His own, those for which He alone is sufficient.

³Every one of these Beatitudes may be found in essence, if not in exact terminology, in the two great lists of Christian fruits and virtues, as set forth by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23, and by Peter in II Peter 1:5-7. See these passages.