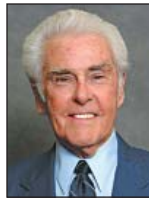


## Distinct in my character

Our text for today's lesson focuses on what are called the Beatitudes of Jesus. Each beatitude begins



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with the translation of the Greek word *makarioi* for blessed. It has the meaning of "happiness" and describes what Jesus intends for those who become disciples of his word.

Archibald M. Hunter, in his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, indicates that the "Beatitudes of Jesus describe the character of the men who, living under God's Fatherly rule, made manifest in Jesus, enjoy that happiness even here and now, though its perfection belongs to the heavenly world" (*The Pattern for Life*, p. 30).

Everybody wants to be happy, but we have different ideas of what will make us happy. Generally we look to people, things and circumstances to provide our happiness. Jesus completely redefined the issue, calling us to a blessed life. Far greater than sporadic happiness, the blessed life Jesus described is grounded in our character and relationship with God.

**God blesses our dependence on him (Matthew 5:3-6).** The first of the Beatitudes is "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It can be noted that verse 10 ends with the same refrain. Those who are poor in spirit acknowledge God's authority and gladly accept God's rule. This characteristic is the opposite of human pride and self-sufficiency, which the Bible sees as the source of sin. These are the kind of people who will inherit "the kingdom of God."

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Mourning for the dead is a prominent virtue that includes weeping but, in Jewish ritual life, often utilized hired

mourners. When Jesus went to Jairus' house to heal his daughter, he saw "the flute players and the noisy crowd" of mourners around the house (Luke 8:51). This beatitude acknowledges sorrow for loss, but also promises fulfillment of joy in the comfort that will come. Those who have losses will be made strong by God's presence.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Several authors have used the breaking of a horse to saddle as illustrative of meekness. The trainer of the horse gradually leads the horse away from behavior that magnifies its strength but resists its master. With the guidance of the master, the horse retains its strength but becomes meek enough for the rider to easily mount it. The meek of the New Testament are not weaklings but they have yielded their selfhood and strength to God for his purposes.

Psalm 37:11 also speaks of the meek inheriting the earth, but the dream of the Jews was for an actual possession of the land. In Matthew it appears to be a more descriptive term of possessing God's blessings.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." Righteousness has many meanings in the New Testament but a logical one is that it "describes the activity of God whenever he vindicates the right. This meaning fits excellently here" (Hunter, p. 34). The basic intent of this quest is to receive God's gift of righteousness because the seeker is hurrying to receive it. They will be filled in response to their intensity of seeking it.

**God blesses our ministry toward others (Matthew 5:7-9).** Jesus changes the direction of the beatitudes from personal growth to emphasizing our ministry toward others.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they

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Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12

will be shown mercy." Luke, in his gospel, intensifies it, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). "As Jesus construes it, mercy is always active; it is kindness in action, pity that clothes itself in gracious deeds" (Hunter, p. 34). We do not earn mercy, it is God's response to our desire to be merciful.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." "The heart stood for the whole inner self, mind as well as feeling. Purity of ... is the concentration of the whole self on God" (Frank Stagg, *Matthew, The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, p. 105). The Jewish faith called for ritual cleansing; Jesus called for spiritual cleansing.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Sons of God." Peacemaking includes but is not limited to military persons. It is active involvement in peace between persons and peace with God. "Peace makers, who are about God's work in the world, are recognized as belonging to God and shall be called Sons of God" (Sleigh Ann Powers, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 70).

**God blesses our joy in the endurance of persecution and suffering (Matthew 5:10-12).** When people create such persecution, "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven." Is it wrong to introduce reward into these character traits of believers? Hunter provides a decent answer when he writes, "The rewards offered by Jesus to the righteous are simply the inevitable issue of goodness in a world ruled by a good God" (p. 39). It is not a bribe; it is a loving response to loving behavior

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*John Howell is academic dean emeritus at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.*