

**“Practicing the Beatitudes:
Eight Practices to Shape the Character of the Church (Part II)” (Matt 5:7-16)**

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“Forgiving like God”

⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

- I. Freed from the need to take revenge (God will satisfy our desire for justice), we can forgive.
 - a. Our culture misunderstands forgiveness, thinking that if you love someone, you will hold on to the need for revenge on behalf of the victim.
 - b. An eye for an eye; Aristotle’s understanding of justice (people get what they deserve).
 - c. Forgiveness is different from reconciliation
 - i. Forgiveness can be unilateral.
 - ii. Reconciliation requires all parties to participate.
 - d. Not forgiving eats away at our insides.
- II. Biblical practices of forgiveness
 - a. Matthew 18 gives a process for settling offenses within the church; also the concept of unlimited forgiveness. How many times should I forgive the one who has sinned against me?
 - b. The Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6): “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” This is the only phrase of the Lord’s Prayer with a commentary immediately following the prayer. God will not forgive us if we do not forgive others.
- III. Forgiveness provides the opportunity to break the cycle of revenge
 - a. What goes around comes around. Interrupting the cycle of revenge with forgiveness sets a new dynamic in motion.
 - b. Forgiveness releases us from hate, anger, and depression.
 - c. Forgiveness releases the hold that the enemy/antagonist has on us. The antagonist can no longer control our behavior.
 - d. Forgiving others opens us to receive God’s forgiveness.

Discussion: How can the church train in the practices of forgiveness and discipling?

“Spirituality and Discipleship”

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

- I. “Pure” also means “clean.”
 - a. “Clean-unclean” in the Torah relates to moral behavior, not just sanitation and food laws.
 - b. In Hebrew thought, the heart is the seat of the will, not of the emotions.
- II. “Seeing God” is rare in the Bible
 - a. John 20:29: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

- b. Who can see the face of God and live? Moses only gets to see God's back. Isaiah only sees God's "glory."
- c. Hagar (Gen. 16:13): Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?
- d. Matthew 11:25. God has hidden "these things" from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.

III. "Seeing God," when it happens, is reserved for those who do right, who live according to God's covenant.

- a. John 14-15: Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world? Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.
- b. 3 John 11: Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.
- c. 1 John 3:1-3: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure."
- d. Hebrews 12:14: "Make every effort to live in peace with all and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

IV. Knowing/seeing Christ and following Christ are connected.

- a. Hans Denck: "The medium is Christ, whom no one can know unless they follow him in life, and no one can follow unless they already know him."
- b. Knowing/seeing God is what we usually refer to as "spirituality." Knowing God as opposed to merely knowing about God. Being in God's presence.
- c. We cannot be in God's presence if we are acting contrary to God's commands, if we are "impure" in our intentions, hateful in our actions, sinful in our behavior. John 3:20: "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light, for fear that their deeds will be exposed."
- d. God's presence is like a "refining fire." Hebrews 12:28-29: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and with awe, for our God is a consuming fire."

Discussion: What are our action-reflection practices in the congregation? How do we teach spirituality?

"Peacemakers—Like God"

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

- I. We are called not only to be meek, or nonviolent, to avoid violence, but to take on the proactive practice of making peace—literally, to "do" peace.
- II. Biblical understandings of peacemaking
 - a. Peace as *shalom*, peace, justice, righteousness, right relationships, having enough
 - b. Loving enemies: Be perfect, therefore, as our heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:43-48
 - c. 2 Corinthians 5: ministers of reconciliation, ambassadors of the reign of God

- d. How did Jesus confront his enemies? In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus addressed Judas as “friend.” “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.
 - e. Paul: Overcome evil with good. Make peace and pursue it.
- III. Being “children of God”—like father, like son; like mother, like daughter. Not only seeing God, but being like God, taking on the character and behaviors of God.
- IV. Practice of loving enemies (and neighbors)
- a. Army basic training of 9 weeks, plus advanced training
 - b. How does the church train its members for loving enemies and reconciling enemies?

“Do Not Be Surprised”

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- I. Suffering is not “in.” How can we be blessed for persecution? Is rejoicing and being glad in persecution just burying one’s head in the sand?
- II. How did Jesus deal with suffering?
 - a. Matt. 26:39: “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” “If it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” Third time, saying the same words.
 - b. Mocked, stripped, beaten, spat on, taunted
 - c. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Psalm 22:24: God “did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.” Psalm 22:27-28: “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to Yahweh, and he rules over the nations.”
 - d. 1 Peter: who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross.
- III. The New Testament encourages Christians to “share Christ’s sufferings.”
 - a. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory [and of power], which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.
 - b. If any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.
 - c. Let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.
 - d. 1 Peter 4 assumes one is living differently from the world. And that will bring misunderstanding, even persecution.
 - e. 1 Peter 3:14: Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abused you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.
- IV. The New Testament expects Christians to rejoice in suffering.
 - a. Philippians 4:11: I have learned to be content with whatever I have.
 - b. 2 Corinthians 4:7-12: We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, ...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

- c. John 15: If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you.
- V. Suffering for Christ’s sake is caused by “the powers.”
- VI. The witness of the resurrection is that suffering, even death, are not the end.
 - a. “Your reward is in heaven.”
 - b. Beyond death God has the final victory.

*When does the congregation suffers for the sake of the kingdom of heaven?
 What does it mean to take up our cross and follow Jesus?
 Practices of the contrast community that risks suffering*

“City on a Hill”

¹³You are the salt of the earth. If the salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by people. ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

- I. The character of the missional church
 - a. Salt
 - b. Light
 - c. City on a hill
 - d. This is one of Jesus’ commissions to his disciples. Compare to Jesus’ commission in Matthew 28: Going therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing, teaching.... And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.
- II. To be salt and light is to be different from the world
 - a. Being different (being salt and light) is essential to others’ giving glory to God.
 - b. Being an alternative community, a contrast community
 - c. Impact of something very small, a minority
 - d. People don’t want to see anyone acting better than they; it puts their actions under scrutiny
- III. “City on a hill” has political implications—like the word “kingdom”
- IV. Being missional means practicing the habits of the reign of God—so that others will see and also give glory to God by doing those practices. This is the manifesto of the reign of God.

As you think of the practices of the church we have discussed this month, how can our congregation be salt and light?

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