

our eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith the writer continues.

A couple from Bakersfield, CA purchased a new boat, but they were having serious problems. No matter how hard they tried, they couldn't get the boat going. It was sluggish no matter which way they turned or how much power was applied. After an hour of trying to make it go, they putted to a nearby marina, hoping someone could tell them what was wrong. A thorough check on the topside of the boat revealed everything was in perfect working condition. The engine ran fine, the out drive went up and down, and the propeller was the correct size and pitch. Then, one of the marina guys jumped in the water to check underneath. He came up choking with laughter. Under the boat, still strapped securely in place, was the trailer!

Now that sounds ridiculous, but maybe not as ridiculous we can sound when we sing Amazing Grace, or I will go where you want me to go, or I want nothing this world has to offer, just give me Jesus and then live distracted by all that entangles and hinders. Blessed are the one who know there is one purpose in life and that is to know God more and more every day.

The final set of beatitudes we might say reminds us what is important in light of eternity. First, others are important. God loves all people and so others are important. Blessed are the Peacemakers. The term peace is more than just absence of trouble, it is the highest good for another. To be a peacemaker is to seek the highest good for another. So we must remember that peace loving and peace making are two different matters. Now to be sure we must love peace to be peacemakers. But loving peace, will not peace make? Avoidance is not the answer. We can love peace and avoid situations and avoid confrontations and simply store up conflict. However, if we live as peacemakers we will learn loving confrontations in a way to bring peace.

Now some of Christians today think that this beatitude says blessed are the instigators. They live for conflict and seek it. This picture here is of the person who reluctantly enters into conflict and always with the highest good of the other in mind. They don't enter conflict to have their own way or to make their point. They do so in loving way to help another understand God's love and purpose in their lives.

Jesus finishes the beatitudes with two very similar sayings. Blessed are you when you are persecuted and then blessed are you when you are insulted when people say false things about you and all kinds of evil things against you, because great is your reward in heaven.

Jesus closes by reminding us to keep eternity in mind. He reminds us that in this world we will have trouble. There will be those who insult us, make up lies about us and persecute us when we choose to live Kingdom lives, but even in those moments we can be happy. Not because we are persecuted, but because it is for Jesus' sake. Jesus reminds us that our reward is not here, but is yet to come. Ultimately the kingdom of this earth will give way to the kingdom of heaven.

When Chuck Yeager was breaking the sound barrier he learned something odd. As he got close to the place of breaking through, his controls did not work normally. In fact, in some cases it was making the opposite motion with the controls that gave him control and the steadiness to break through to something new.

Jesus punched a hole in the sky that day when he said blessed are they who.... He described a world that was upside down or upside right. He described people who lived under a different control, than the control of this world. His little-by-little, word-by-word pierced the sky to show us that there was another way to live. It was a place where we knew we were dependent on God. It was a world where this life had a new purpose and a world where we remember that this world is temporary and we live with our eyes fixed on eternity. When we realize that this life is true right now, then we break through to a new way of living and if you listen closely there is a cosmic boom...to a new way of living.



¹Max Lucado, "The Applause of Heaven".

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Punching Holes In the Sky

Matthew 5:1-12

TRINITY PULPIT

It was in the desert on October 14, 1947, when the first sonic boom was heard on the earth. Chuck Yeager, an airplane mechanic who became a war pilot and hero, was helping to test the X1 rocket planes in Mojave Desert. The X1 had been designed for the purpose of breaking the sound barrier for the first time, but the issue was who would fly the plane. At first Bell, the aircraft manufacture, had a civilian pilot in mind, but he wanted too much money. So Chuck Yeager, who had been in the desert testing other planes for the Air Force, agreed to test pilot the X1 aircraft at his current standard salary. Captain Yeager had several trials with the X1 getting close to Mach 1, but in every case there were issues. There was the loss of control of the plane and then there were several moments when it seemed the plane would break apart. There were many who believed back then, that to break through the sound barrier would be a disaster. Some thought that going Mach 1 would be like hitting a brick wall and the plane would be destroyed. Yet the tests continued and on October 14, 1947, Chuck Yeager did something no one had ever done before. He took a plane past Mach 1 and discovered that on the other side of the sound barrier was smooth flying. This moment is one of the most important moments in the history of flight and ushered in what we now know as modern aviation. It was said, by one of his biographers, on that day Chuck Yeager "punched a hole in the sky."

I don't think there was a sonic boom the day Jesus gathered the multitude on the side of the mountain and began to teach. There was no theophany recorded. There wasn't a voice from heaven, or an earthquake or smoke or any other heavenly signs. It was just words from an itinerant preacher. Yet, these words were so different and so powerful they were known as the greatest sermon ever offered. As Jesus began his words, everyone knew that this was going to be different. Everyone began to understand that the teaching and mission of Jesus was something unique.

With one line after another, Jesus pierced the veil between heaven and earth. With one declaration after another Jesus revealed to us the values and purpose of the Kingdom of God. That day Jesus punched a hole in the sky, so we might know the very nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus reminds us later in this sermon, that we should pray that the kingdom of heaven should be revealed on earth as it is in heaven.

There are many ways to approach the beatitudes. Many of us have heard sermons and lessons on the beatitudes and they are so rich that we could spend the whole hour just on one. However today, I want to give more of an overview of the beatitudes. If we look at them, we notice that they fit nicely in a category of three.

Before we begin, let's consider the term blessed. The term literally means happy or to be enlarged or extended. The concept is that those who participate in the kingdom of heaven are blessed. That is, God has extended his favor upon our lives. We are in a fortunate position because God is enlarging our lives, our thinking and our purpose. In this way, we are happy. The happiness and blessedness described here is not the kind of happiness one might receive with consumption. It is not a happiness that comes and goes with an action. It is the blessed happiness that comes by us knowing that God is giving to us his very presence, as we live as God intends and we participate in what God is doing. It is the blessed happiness of being a part of the Kingdom of God.

The first three beatitudes have to do with our own self-image. It has to do with how we see ourselves in relation to God. 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.

The first thing we notice is that this blessing

is about the Kingdom of Heaven and the earth. Jesus was punching a hole in the sky, so we might realize that the distance between heaven and earth was not a great distance after all. We could experience heavenly living right here and now.

Jesus said we are happy when we are poor in spirit. What does it mean to be poor in spirit? This has to do with our approach to God. It is the realization that we have nothing and God is everything. It is the understanding that when we stand before God, we do so not as equals where we demand of God but we stand as creature to creator who is dependent on the gracious love of God.

Jesus tells a parable about the Day of Judgment and there are those who stand before God and declare "Did we not prophesy in your name, did we not drive out demons in your name, did we not perform miracles?" Yet, Jesus will say depart from me I never knew you. Here is a picture of the individual who never understands that it is not about what we might do, but what God has done in Christ.

I like the way Max Lucado puts this in his book "The Applause of Heaven."

You don't impress NASA with a paper airplane. You don't boast about your crayon sketches in the presence of Picasso. You don't claim equality with Einstein because you can write H₂O. You don't brag about your goodness in the presence of the Perfect. God does not save us because of what we have done. Only a puny god could be bought with tithes. Only an egotistical god could be bought with our pain. Only a temperamental god could be satisfied by sacrifices. Only a heartless god could sell salvation to the highest bidder. Only a great God does for his children what they can't do for themselves.¹

The first beatitude is about our attitude toward God. We declare our spiritual bankruptcy. We do not demand of God, but we seek mercy. The joy that comes from this beatitude is the joy of emptiness that releases us from the burden of wondering our whole life, am I good enough? No, we are not. Once we can admit that and know we stand by grace we are truly free. That is a happy place.

The second beatitude is mourning. However, it is not about mourning over the pain of our lives. Keep the beatitude in perspective. The mourning that is mentioned is the mourning over our sinfulness and the sin of this world that so destroys God's intentions. Here is the realization of the world in which we live. We realize that we are in need of God spiritually

through our poor spirit and we realize that our condition is that of sinfulness and we not only mourn our sinfulness, we mourn the sinfulness of our world.

This week, I got into a Facebook discussion with a stranger around the topic of the actions of God in the Old Testament. He continued to push the thought of a God who would destroy seemingly innocent to prove his point. It is true that God's character in the Old Testament is sometimes hard to understand in the light of the character of God, as revealed fully in Jesus. Why would God act in such ways? There is only one answer to that question that makes any sense and there it is...the power of sin. When sin entered the world through our choice, the consequences are so great that it has to be dealt with and ultimately it was dealt with in the most incredible way and that was through the death of Jesus.

Let's admit it, we just don't think sin is that bad. We toy with it. We live with it. We resign ourselves to it. We sometimes even pursue it with gusto. Yet, Paul would say we must die to it. Paul would lament and mourn his inability to do what he wanted to do and to keep on doing the very thing he did not want to do. Paul had it right when he came to the conclusion that "what a wretched man am I." That is what it means to mourn.

There are times I put my head in my hands and lament the sin that destroys. We should mourn families torn apart, lives that are lost, and the emptiness that so many experience.

I think this is also the way we ought to view the sin of others. What we normally do is we become angry toward others whose sin is unacceptable to us. We have our own sins, but we have accepted them. Certain sins of others we just cannot tolerate like our sins. So we become angry with others. We categorize them, point our fingers, raise our voices, and spew our hatred. Not so of those who mourn. The only ones Jesus pointed his finger at and called to judgment were the ones who would not mourn their own sin, while they hated the sin of other. What did Jesus do with those who were being destroyed by their sin? He wept and he was moved with compassion. We are told that Jesus was moved with compassion when he saw the people for they were harassed like sheep without shepherd. In other words, he did not see them as enemies but as those who were broken in need of a savior. Jesus knew the powerful destruction that sin can be in our lives.

I once served with a pastor who was preaching a sermon on our sinfulness. After he had made a statement about our sinfulness, one of the deacons in the church cried "amen". The pastor stopped dead in his tracks

and responded back to the deacon "don't say amen! Amen means so be it. No, say God have mercy."

Blessed are those who mourn the sinfulness that destroys us. We will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek for theirs is they will inherit the earth. Meekness is not weakness. It really comes from the idea of gentleness. This is the concept of power under control. Meekness in the Bible has to do with a relationship with another. It is about how we view our relationship with God with others. Meekness is an inward strength that causes us not to demand our way, make our own way, or insist on my way. It is to stand before God with a silent confidence.

Here is the picture from the first set of beatitudes. It is the blessedness that comes from seeing ourselves as we really are before God. We stand before God, dependent on God's grace. We stand before God and mourn our sinfulness that destroys what God intends. We stand before God with a silent confidence that what God has done in Christ for us is enough. We do not need to make our own way. Jesus had already made the way. We are blessed.

JESUS CLOSES BY REMINDING US TO KEEP ETERNITY IN MIND. HE REMINDS US THAT IN THIS WORLD WE WILL HAVE TROUBLE. THERE WILL BE THOSE WHO INSULT US, MAKE UP LIES ABOUT US AND PERSECUTE US WHEN WE CHOOSE TO LIVE KINGDOM LIVES, BUT EVEN IN THOSE MOMENTS WE CAN BE HAPPY. NOT BECAUSE WE ARE PERSECUTED, BUT BECAUSE IT IS FOR JESUS' SAKE.

The second set of beatitudes is about purposeful living. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are those who show mercy, and blessed are those who are pure in heart. These have to do with living a purposeful life in the Kingdom of God.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. William Barclay helps us with this beatitude by reminding us that in Jesus' day, the people knew what it meant to hunger and thirst. Most of us have never known true hunger or thirst. We might be hungry and we might get thirsty, but the terms here have more weight. These actions are seen as those who are hungering and thirsting like they will die without it. If they do not eat and drink, there is a real possibility they will not exist. Jesus, using these terms, says blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Another interesting part of this beatitude is the grammar behind righteousness. Normally when a person would say I am hungry for bread, the term means some bread not the whole loaf. If someone

said I am thirsty for some water, they meant a glass of water not the whole well. Yet, when Jesus said hunger and thirst for righteousness he used a term that meant blessed and happy are those who want the whole thing. There is a picture of a person that desires God with all of their heart to the point they are never satisfied with just a little religion or a little bit of God. In their heart they want more and more knowledge and experiences with God.

C.S. Lewis would write:

"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Blessed are those who show mercy. How does this fit in purpose? It fits in the concept of purpose because our purposeful life is not only our relationship with God, but with others. The word here means more than just compassion or feeling sorry. The term actually means

"sympathy", which comes from two words. The first word means together and the second means to suffer. So, sympathy or mercy means to suffer together. It is the concept to climb right into the middle of another's suffering and pain. It is not just to walk in another's shoes, but also to walk in their shoes while they are still in them. Just like we hunger and thirst for more of God, we also desire to be as one with others. Why is this important? This is the example of Jesus. This is exactly what God did in Jesus. He not only felt sorry for us and had compassion upon us, but Jesus came and right into our world and suffered with us. Blessed is the one who has a purposeful life of seeking after God and walking with others.

Blessed are the pure in heart. The term pure means purity without alloy, mixture or additive. The concept of pure in heart means to be wholly devoted. The word means to be single minded. It is to live life with the purpose of the Kingdom of God to the point we let go of that which would hold us back or cause us not to be focused on the Kingdom. Hebrews tells us to lay aside the sins that so easily entangle us and that which hinders us and run the race set before us. Fix