

Although few people have heard of him today... in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries... Billy Sunday was a well-known evangelist. (The pastor of the church I grew-up in... George Rothery... gave his life to Christ at a Billy Sunday revival meeting in Chicago.)

Billy Sunday was known for his unique... sometimes bombastic style of preaching. He would act out skits sometimes as he preached. ... He would use slang-filled language. ... And my former pastor would often speak about Billy Sunday's unique style. (You see... Billy Sunday had been a famous professional baseball player... who gave it up to become an evangelist. He was known for his speed and ability to steal bases. So as an evangelist... he would sometimes slide across the stage as he was making a point. It was how he came to the pulpit... after he was introduced.

By the time of his death in 1935... he had preached to millions of people. And he was a forerunner of sorts to the (much more subdued) Billy Graham evangelistic crusades and campaigns that were to come in the latter twentieth century.

Billy Sunday had a large influence on American Evangelical Christianity. He was very vocal as a critic... concerning certain vices that he perceived had no place in a Christian's life. ... Two of those vices were card playing... and dancing. (Christians just don't do those things...) Sunday warned, "*I believe that cards and dancing are doing more to damn the spiritual life of the church than the bars.*" He also said, "*The dancing Christian never was a soul-winner,*" and dance is "*simply a hugging match set to music.*" Now, the twenty-first century Christian laughs at those seemingly antiquated notions. (If only our main worry were card playing!) Yet Billy Sunday

thought them significant. He considered them matters of life and death. For many years afterward... a "True Christian" was a person who passed the test of not playing cards... dancing... or going to the movies (which was a third qualification that was added later.)

And it raises the question, "Why?" Why so much worry over things so incidental? ... Well... it's simply because in his mind activities like card playing... dancing... and theater were a separation point. ... There was to be a clear line of demarcation between believers and unbelievers. These things were the line in the sand... they were the things that marked off the people of God—things that marked out holiness, godliness, and salvation. He had a certain picture of what it looks like to be a believer in Jesus... and anything outside that... revealed that a person was not part of God's Kingdom.

While we may reject Billy Sunday's picture of what it looks like to be a Christian... we may have our own picture of what it looks like to be a Christian — certain behaviors that fit... and certain ones that do not... For some it might mean that you cannot be a member of the Democratic Party... that you never drink wine with your meals... that you only read an approved version of the Bible... and that you shun all Rock and Roll music. Are tattoos and body piercing signs that a person is not part of the Kingdom of God...?

The truth is... whether it is Billy Sunday... and the folks of his day... or our own ideas... Jesus has already painted the picture for us... of what a person of the kingdom of God looks like... and everything that is not on His list... is bogus. ... It is a false standard.

Jesus gave His disciples the qualities... and it's for succeeding generations to make sure their conception of the Christian life matches the one painted by Jesus...on the Galilean hillside long, long ago. ... And it's to that portrait we now turn.

In our passage last week... we saw Jesus' announcement that the Kingdom was near (4:17). ... People would naturally be asking, "*What does this Kingdom look like?*" ... *How is it organized? ... How is it different than what we are already experiencing...?*" "*How will we be different...?*"

Jesus sat His disciples down and gave His answers to these questions. Jesus said that God's Kingdom is organized differently from worldly kingdoms. ... In the Kingdom of Heaven... wealth and power and authority are unimportant. ... Kingdom people seek different blessings and benefits... and they have different attitudes.

But before we get to those answers that Christ gave... let me ask you a very important question. ... Are your attitudes a carbon copy of the world's selfishness... pride... and lust for power... or do they reflect the humility and self-sacrifice of the Kingdom that Jesus announced?

This morning we begin the fifth chapter of Matthew. The next three chapters of Matthew take up the Sermon on the Mount. Chapter four ended with a vivid description of Jesus' ministry in Galilee actively addressing the physical maladies of those who sought him. Chapters five... six... and seven contain Jesus' longest discourse recorded in the Gospels. He describes what the Kingdom of God looks like to the large crowd that had assembled. This discourse (Matthew 5-7) is called the Sermon on the

Mount because it took place on a mountain somewhere in the region of Galilee. Our passage today will cover the first part of the sermon... a section of it known as "the beatitudes."

When you read the beatitudes and the complete Sermon on the Mount... you should not walk away thinking, "*I must turn the other cheek in order to be accepted by God. I must love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me in order to be accepted by God. I must follow the Golden Rule perfectly in order to be accepted by God.*"

(PLEASE HEAR ME - LOUD AND CLEAR!!!) ... We are not accepted by God because of anything that we do. We are accepted by God completely and totally because of a perfect Savior who has died a bloody death in our place... and who has risen again in victory. ...Yes... we pray for our enemies... we love those who persecute us... and we follow the Golden Rule. ... But we do these things not in order to earn acceptance before our God... but *because* we have acceptance by God and He has given us a new heart.

If you are a Christ-follower... as a member of the Kingdom of God... the truths we are about to study are about you. This will be your description. And as we study them... you are encouraged to allow the Holy Spirit to bring more and more of it out... so that these qualities will be your character.

This... ladies and gentlemen... is the long-awaited kingdom. ... It is absolutely critical for our understanding the next few chapters in Matthew

(the Sermon on the Mount) — to know there is indeed a new kingdom... a new people... and this is that description.

It was God's intention all along... not just to give laws and commandments to His people... but to create a new people... who have new hearts... new affections... new desires... and new attitudes. ... This newness is what Isaiah... Jeremiah... Ezekiel... Daniel... and the rest of the prophets were anticipating. They looked forward to a new and greater deliverance from sin's penalty and power — the new Kingdom of God. Oh! Let's not cheapen it by painting our own picture of what a person of the kingdom looks like!

During the course of our study... over the next few weeks... we must not think the standard too high... as if we can't truly love from the heart... or resist our lusts and temptations. ... We cannot throw in the towel on praying like Jesus... giving freely of our resources... or loving our enemies (which is perhaps the most difficult of all these descriptions.) All of this is the description of every Christ-follower by the grace and power of God... and needs to be fanned into flames.

The Pharisees taught that righteousness was an external thing... a matter of obeying rules and regulations. ... Righteousness (they taught) could be measured by praying... giving... fasting... etc. But the Beatitudes (which we will study today) pictures righteousness as an internal thing... It is more of a character... that flows from a new heart... within God's Kingdom people.

Structurally, each of the beatitudes is composed of a statement of *who* is blessed (“blessed are the poor in spirit,” etc.) followed by a statement of *why* the person is blessed (“for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”). First the character of the blessed person is highlighted... and then the promise of God to that person is explained.

The qualities of God’s Kingdom people are explained in two sets of four... in the Beatitudes. The first four qualities describe a Kingdom person’s relationship to God... and the second four describe a Kingdom person’s relationship to other people. ... A Kingdom person relates to God by admitting their spiritual poverty... mourning over their sin... and humbly seeking spiritual fullness. (We will see this in verses 3-6). Then... a Kingdom person relates to others... mercifully... and purely... and as peacemakers... even though Kingdom people will be persecuted for their righteous behavior. (All of this will be brought out in verses 7-12).

The beatitudes are full of words that seem to contradict each other. But God's way of living usually contradicts the world's. A Kingdom person is ready to say and do what seems strange to the world. ... You must be willing to give... when others take... to love when others hate... to help when others abuse... to rest in the assurance that what God says is true... this world is not all that there is... and our compensation is coming!

Matthew 5:1-3

The word "blessed," which introduces each beatitude, is a translation of the Greek word “makarios”... which literally means "happy." ... The opening of

the Sermon on the Mount is called “beatitudes” because of the Latin word “beatus”... which also means “blessed, happy.”

But Jesus was not speaking of some superficial human emotion... that comes and goes. Rather... Jesus was speaking of that divinely bestowed... and settled sense of wellbeing... that saturates the heart of kingdom people because they are living in a relationship with the King.

At the beginning of the beatitudes we read, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The first description of Kingdom people is genuine humility. They have the sense of utter spiritual destitution... that is awakened by the Holy Spirit... when kingdom people see their nothingness before God. Isaiah cried, "*Woe unto them,*" when he poured the passion of conviction on Israel (Isaiah 5:8-23)... but when he found himself in the presence of a holy God he cried, "*Woe is me*" (6:1-5). ... A sense of God's presence deals instantly with the haughty spirit that is so much admired by the world.

The world's system tells us that the rich and powerful... the aggressive and arrogant are the ones who achieve power... position... and prestige in this world. ... But the kingdom of heaven does not follow this faulty line of reasoning. ... "Poor in spirit" is the opposite of the world's attitudes of self-praise and self-assertion.

Those who are part of the Kingdom realize their spiritual poverty before the throne of heaven. They realize that they have nothing spiritually... and yet... by God's grace alone... they are the only ones who really have anything.

Psalm 34:18 (ESV)

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

“Poor in Spirit” does not mean to be "poor spirited" (in other words to have no backbone at all!) And neither is it a false humility that says, "I am not worth anything, I can't do anything!" ... rather... it is honesty with ourselves: we know ourselves, accept ourselves, and try to be ourselves to the glory of God.

Matthew 5:4

I like the way one commentator expressed it: Blessed are the *Pressed in Soul*.

This beatitude is a paradox to human reasoning. Mankind does not think of joy for mourning, but that is what the beatitude says—happy ("*blessed*") are those that mourn. Many spiritual things are indeed a paradox to human reasoning.

While the first beatitude has to do with what we are in our spirits when the Holy Spirit begins His work... and leaves us stripped and humbled in the presence of God... the second one has to do with what we are in our souls... once our spiritual nakedness and bankruptcy is revealed. ... We are plunged into sorrow for sin. ... The sorrow is for our sin and the sin we see all around... It is over sin that breaks God's heart.

It means genuine, not artificial, mourning. It is godly sorrow over one's sin and also the sin of society. ... This mourning relates to the first beatitude in that the first beatitude acknowledges one's sin... while this beatitude

grieves over it. ... The first beatitude recognizes one's sin; the second shows remorse over it.

Kingdom people mourn over sin and despise it. They see sin the way God sees it and they seek to treat it the way God does. ... Those who cover sin... or defend sin... and have never mourned over their sin... may not be kingdom people.

Matthew 5:5

Kingdom people are Patient in Strife.

The third beatitude indicates that there is a blessing in store for those who are patient in relation to their circumstances: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

"Meekness is not weakness"—so goes the evangelical cliché. But true meekness is an unassuming humility that rests in God (Ps 37:7) and renounces self-effort to relieve oneself from oppression and to achieve one's wants and needs. ... To be meek means to be gentle... patient... not given to anger or resentment.

Meekness is a quality not much admired by the world. The world thinks that a meek man is spiritless... spineless... and servile. The world's culture teaches that there is power in war and domination. That is the only way to exert one's superiority over one's fellow creatures. When a person is beaten down by adversity... the natural reaction is to become angry and strike out in a vain effort to correct the offense. However... Jesus taught that the citizen of the kingdom of heaven does not have this as their

primary reaction. Instead... being filled with confidence in the faithfulness of the King... they can rest... while they are in stressful circumstances... recognizing that the King has their welfare in mind.

How do you become meek? Our Lord was meek and lowly, and we are told that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, temperance, and meekness. ... (LISTEN) ... Only the Spirit of God can break you and make you meek. ... If you could produce meekness by your own effort... you would be proud of yourself... wouldn't you? ... And out goes your meekness! ... Meekness is not produced by self-effort... but by Spirit effort. ... Only the Holy Spirit can produce meekness in the heart of a yielded Christian.

Matthew 5:6

The fourth beatitude tells us that Kingdom people aim at being righteous. They "hunger and thirst after righteousness." ... A person who is desperately hungry or thirsty can think of nothing else. Hunger and thirst are the most basic and demanding drives of our physical nature. No one can ignore them for long. Happy is the man who has an equally strong desire to be like God.

This text is talking about desire. This is not a desire for fame or fortune or the satisfying of a fleshy appetite... but it is a spiritual desire. A desire to be holy.

What are your strongest desires...? Do you want the approval of others... significance...? to be well-liked...? Are you after ease and comfort...? Increased security...? Is what drives you day-in and day-out the pursuit of

an easy or more enjoyable life... through things... better health... stronger relationships...? ... What are your strongest interests... that occupy most of your thinking...? ... Is “*That I might be a more righteous person!*” anywhere close to the top...?

If you are a kingdom person that desire exists... but what is the fergency of the desire? Can it be described as a “*Hunger and thirst.*”

Matthew 5:7

Now we have come to the second grouping of qualities that belong to a kingdom person (The way that they treat others.) The fifth, sixth, and seventh beatitudes deal with how we act when facing cruelty... corruption... and conflict.

When facing cruelty... injustice... injury... and wrong... Kingdom people offer mercy. Justice was the heart and soul of the law... but mercy is the heart and soul of the new kingdom.

The citizen of the kingdom of heaven has received mercy from the King and has not suffered the punishment he or she clearly deserves. The kingdom citizen simply reflects the mercy he or she has received and treats others with the same mercy. When one is at peace with the King, he or she is also at peace with others, walking in the light of the King's mercy.

Let's talk a little about what mercy is. ... Mercy shows benevolence without regard to merit... but in regard to need. ... If something is given because of merit... it is not of mercy. ... Mercy involves more than an attitude... it also involves action.

Because mercy shows kindness when there is no merit... mercy may not always be easy to show. Too often we base our conduct upon merit—"he doesn't deserve that" is what we hear more than mercy.

Matthew 5:8

Making a heart pure calls for a greater miracle than cleansing a leper or raising the dead.

Purity of heart amounts to internal integrity that transparently manifests itself in outward behavior. Matthew presents certain Pharisees as models of an external... rule-oriented purity that Jesus rejected and condemned because it masked inner corruption. ... Kingdom people possess an inner piety and purity that surpasses mere externally acceptable behavior. ... They have experienced the power of the Kingdom... which purifies from the inside out.

If we want purity of conduct... we must first have purity of heart. The inside must be right... if the outside is to be right. The chief problem in the world is heart trouble—not the physical heart, but the spiritual heart. Yet, governments pay no attention to this problem... which is why they solve few problems.

This beatitude says you may not be what you think you are... but you are what you think. We are the product of our thoughts. And you cannot separate your thoughts from your heart. David knew the impure heart was his problem when he prayed, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God*" (Psalm 51:10).

Matthew 5:9

The world is filled with those who will fight with every fiber of their being to establish their space and position. Get in their way and you will be rudely challenged to move or face the consequences. The way of the sin nature is to stand and hold one's territory at any cost. In a vain attempt to make peace, the world attempts to negotiate a workable truce between adversarial parties.

However, contrary to the ways of this world order, Jesus reveals that His kingdom subjects are already peacemakers... impacting the circumstances of those around them... by inviting them to experience the peace that only the King imparts to his subjects.

Matthew 5:10-12

The Lord Jesus was a realist. He knew that His program would be unpopular. ... He knew it would lead to His own death and to bitter hostility toward His followers. ... What the Lord foretold was hostility... hatred... and bitter persecution for His people. ... So... instead of being astonished at the world's reaction to the gospel... and its hatred of God's people... we are to expect it.

When persecution comes to a kingdom person... they rejoice! "Great is your reward in heaven," Jesus declared. Jesus told the people that this persecution for living in an obedient relationship with the Father indicates they truly belong to the kingdom of heaven.

The Lord will one day triumph in the arena of His rejection. All appearances to the contrary... nonetheless His persecuted people will come into their own, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

It is **not** easy to be a kingdom person. Kingdom people are different from the world and have different attitudes.

But how do we become kingdom people...? How can anyone be poor in spirit? How can anyone live with contentment in mourning? How can anyone live a life in the spirit of gentleness in the face of the world's cruelty? With the press of everyday concerns, how does anyone have the time to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Most of all, how can anyone be truly and thoroughly pure in his or her thoughts?

Jesus has outlined behavior that is absolutely foreign to the human experience. There seems to be no way that anyone can achieve such an unattainable level of being a person of the kingdom.

The only way ... is found in the opening declaration of Jesus' message: "Turn to God and change the way you think and act... because the kingdom of heaven is near!" ... Repent! Repentance involves a complete change of thinking... and we are talking a total 180 degrees. Invite Christ to take complete control of your life... with His radical ways. ... Then submit yourself to the Holy Spirit to make this kind of change... from the inside out.

People of God's Kingdom have a new heart that has an outlook that is radically different from the world. The world praises pride... not humility. ... The world endorses sin... especially if you "get away with it." ... The world

is at war with God... while God is seeking to reconcile His enemies and make them His children.

The character traits of Kingdom rule are chiefly: #1. humility toward God and #2. mercy toward people. ... I have been saying throughout this message that by God's grace... these traits are present (in principle) in the lives of His people. ... Yet God's people must cultivate these traits so they are consistently present in reality.

Do you believe that you are able to recognize anyone who is Spiritually mature...? Here is your measuring stick! ... Do you want to know where you stand spiritually...? ... Here is your measuring stick!

Stop looking at externals... whether it is card playing... dancing... going to the movies... having tattoos... church leadership or involvement... having a certain political affiliation... smoking... or talking like a Christian.

Evaluate others (and more important) YOURSELF by the measurement of the beatitudes. Use the picture that Jesus paints for us. And don't compare yourself with others. "*Well I must be doing OK... because I'm not as bad as...*" No! Here is your standard!

What do you (using the power and grace of God) need to have burn brighter... or fan into flames...? ... Confess your lack... as sin. ... You have been believing the world has it right... (not God.) ... Repent... Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.