

The background of the cover is a dramatic sky scene. A multi-colored rainbow arches across the upper half of the frame. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of tree branches and leaves are visible on the right and bottom edges. A flock of birds is captured in flight, moving from the left towards the center of the image.

DISCIPLESHIP: FOLLOWING JESUS

The Beatitudes and The Sermon on the Mount

John H. King

DISCIPLESHIP: FOLLOWING JESUS

John H. King

*For even hereunto were you called:
because Christ also suffered for us,
leaving us an example, that
you should follow his steps. - 1 Peter 2:21*

Copyright © 2022 John H. King

All rights reserved.

Isbn: 978-1-387-79464-5

*Scripture quotations from The Authorized (King James) Version.
Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the
Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge
University Press*

Dedicated unto all who have “overcome ... by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” Revelation 12:11

Contents

Introduction.....	1
A Learner.....	3
Evil Days.....	4
A Narrow Way.....	5
Costly Grace.....	7
Forgiveness.....	9
F[o]llowship.....	10
Knowledge.....	11
Faith.....	13
Discipleship.....	14
The Call.....	16
Conviction.....	18
All Things New.....	19
Lessons in Faith.....	21
Slow Means No.....	22
Faith Or Faithfulness.....	23
What Must I Do.....	25
Observe All Things.....	27
Obedience.....	28
Risk v Calling.....	30
A Spirit of Detachment.....	31
Reasonableness.....	32
A Stronger Union.....	34
The Last First.....	35
Single-minded Obedience.....	36
The Cross.....	39
Self-denial.....	41
Loss.....	42
The Beatitudes.....	44

A Symphony of Holy Living.....	47
A Sequence of Growth.....	48
A Paradox of Faith.....	48
A Kingdom Within.....	50
A Story of Heaven.....	52
A Pure Happiness.....	58
Feelings in Gear.....	61
The Kingdom Within.....	63
Believer Happiness in a Postmodern Age.....	65
The Heart of The Matter.....	67
Destitute.....	68
A Tearful Start.....	69
Dying Ambitions.....	73
An Inspirational Feast.....	75
No Frills Service.....	77
A Pure Heart.....	79
Peace at All Cost.....	83
Happy Hunting.....	85
Living Up to the Vision.....	88
Redefining Happiness.....	89
The Disciple's Practicum.....	91
The Brother [Mt. 5:21-26].....	94
The Spouse [Mt 5:27-32].....	97
The Law [Mt. 5:38-42].....	101
The Enemy [Mt. 5:43-48].....	106
The Rest of the Sermon.....	109
Martyrdom.....	110
Hidden in Plain Sight.....	111
The Lord's Prayer.....	113

Introduction

The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakes me morning by morning, he wakes my ear to hear as the learned [Isaiah 50:4].

The following study is based in large part on “*The Cost of Discipleship*” by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Pastor Bonhoeffer’s work is insightful into the kind of instruction we would expect Christ to have given the original twelve disciples to prepare them for the work God gave them. Bonhoeffer became a martyr for Christ during the Holocaust of World War 2, a time when pure evil seemed unstoppable. We are living again in a precarious time of societal unrest, class division, and, probably most threatening, an organized, political, attack on the institution of the church.

The Bible singles out Christianity—as the name implies—as a Christ-centric way of life which now comes into conflict with a growing global opposition to both the moral principles Jesus endorsed as well as the freedom believers in Christ exercise in serving Him. From the public displays of religious devotion to God to their outspoken promotion of teachings and traditions that conflict with a society becoming more and more secular, believers are being marginalized as social outcasts and even, in some cases, criminals.

We know there is a cost to being a disciple of Christ. Daniel is walking close to the lion’s den because of his love for God. To quote Peter, “we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” [Acts 4:20]. Following Christ is the believer’s life. Christ is, according to Ezekiel and Paul,

the very breath they breathe [Ezekiel 36:27;¹ Galatians 2:20].² The believer's sole desire is to follow Christ. God's children are not militant nor do they support a political ideology or position as believers. Their trumpet call is a sole desire to herald the coming Kingdom of Heaven, both "at hand,"³ within⁴ and coming at the end of time.⁵

1. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*.

2. I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

3. Mark 1:15 "And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

4. Luke 17:21 "Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

5. Luke 21:31 "So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

A Learner

Following Christ means becoming one of His disciples. A disciple, in biblical terms, is a “learner.” Believers are Christ’s students but we learn by doing. To be a true learner of Christ, one must be more than religious, more than a church goer. We must be teachable which makes the learning experience a dynamic process of maturing in Him [Philippians 3:15;⁶ Colossians 1:28].⁷

A disciple is a “learner” in the language of the New Testament.

Isaiah 50:4 prophesied of Jesus, “The Lord God has given me the **tongue** of the **learned**, that I should know **how** to speak a **word in season** to him that is **weary**: he wakes me **morning by morning**, he wakes my ear to hear as the learned.” In the original, the word, “learned” means “one who learns,” i.e. the student who is “teachable” and not the teacher.

It is God that awakens our Savior out of sleep to begin the day’s lesson. He was being taught to counsel the “weary,” those tired and ready to quit. Jesus invented the term “little faith” perhaps for this very reason: to help His disciples and us to see better our potential for God’s glory if we simply don’t give up on ourselves [Galatians 6:9].⁸ Reference to the tongue speaks to our Lord’s ability to know what to say, “a word;” how to say it, “how to speak;” and

6. Therefore, let all of us who are mature think this way.

7. We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

8. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

when, “in season.” This is all part of the Spirit’s daily ministry [Mark 13:11]⁹ to Jesus and to us.

I would add that nothing here is a matter of academics or head knowledge; so, believers that struggle with memorization or good school grades need not be concerned. This is more an apprenticeship or internship of sorts. And Jesus never says, “Do as I say” but “Do as I do!” We follow Him. This represents an effective work of God within each believer, who in a real and spiritual sense is learning to follow Christ bringing His Word to life in their individual and collective experiences. Some day we will be totally like Him [1 John 3:2].¹⁰

Evil Days

We, too, face an unprecedented evil. These are, indeed, the “last days”¹¹ Peter and Paul, both, spoke of. No pastor could overstate the importance of a discipleship for believers. Following Jesus is not optional in times like these when the forces of spiritual darkness are advancing. Jesus must be more than Savior. He must be Lord!

Believers need to understand that there is a cost to discipleship.

9. But when they shall lead *you*, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.

10. ...we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

11. 2 Timothy 3:1 “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.”

2 Peter 3:3 “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,”

One might argue that today's churches are designed to give those in attendance a comfortable time away from the cares of this life, an opportunity to encourage one another, lift the believers' spirits from a week long despondency and a refreshing rehearsing of the promises of God. But if every service is designed this way, pastoral leadership has failed God's children who need to know there is a cost to discipleship. Believers need to find their encouragement, not alone in good worship music or sermons that lift tired feelings. We need to know truthfully all that serving Christ entails in terms of real commitment, possible suffering, and sharing Christ's burden for His Church and for the "lost." We need to *find* true encouragement, that is, in knowing that we are indeed following Christ.

A Narrow Way

When Jesus spoke of the "narrow way" [Matthew 7:14]¹² as a path walked by the few—as opposed to the road to "destruction"¹³ followed by the masses—He was alerting us to both the effort needed, the determination, to search it out, "find it," and how unpopular it was.

The preacher cannot stress enough the importance of following Christ, of letting Him disciple us, notwithstanding, the effort we must exert to finally learn what we must learn about this Christian way [Hebrews 5:8].¹⁴ Struggles, sorrows, exhaustive labor, even persecution must never deter us.

12. Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

13. spiritual ruin and death

14. Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

Temptations or the reasonableness of sin or past friendships must not lure us away.

**God's provisions and our prayers are the yoke both
Christ and we partner in.**

Bonhoeffer talks of discipleship in terms of cost because Jesus did [Luke 14:28-33].¹⁵ But the good news is that following Jesus is the easier choice, "less costly," [Matthew 11:30]¹⁶ for us as believers because it is most in line with who we are in Christ, with our new nature. Christ is in the yoke with us which means He is doing most of the pulling. We are working and living off His provision and not our own. He supplies or provides what is needed for the work. God's provisions and our prayers are the yoke in which both Christ and we partner. Paul explained, "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and "the supply¹⁷ of the Spirit of Jesus Christ [Philippians 1:19].

15. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost ... So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

16. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.

17. 2 Corinthians 9:10 "Now he that **ministers** seed to the sower both minister bread for *your* food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;" where "ministers means supplies or provides. (cp. He is Jehovah Jireh)

Costly Grace

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me [Luke 9:23].

Dietrich Bonhoeffer tells us in his work, “The Cost of Discipleship” that “...grace and discipleship are inseparable.”¹⁸ In a phrase: Grace is costly, not only because it cost God His Son’s life on Calvary [1 Corinthians 7:23]¹⁹ but because it costs us, ours, as well [Luke 9:23].²⁰ A grace that saves us but does not change us: our perspective on life, our passions, our dreams or how we live, is a cheap grace since it has accomplished nothing for which Christ gave His life to provide.

We are called to “deny ourselves and carry our cross as we follow Christ. ...and not on weekends or Sundays only but “daily” [Luke 9:23]. And what does it mean to “deny”? Its most basic meaning is “to say, ‘No!’”²¹ Oh how demanding we are of self! How soft, selfishly soft, the comfort we seek and rationalize we deserve! Have we lost the ability to say, “No!” to ourselves, to sin and comfort, for the sake of our witness and God loving others through us [1 Corinthians 9:27]?²²

18. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. “The Cost of Discipleship” (New York, NY: Touchstone Edition, 1995), page 46

19. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

20. And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

21. Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.), vol I, page 469

22. But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

One cannot talk grace without studying discipleship and that is a study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and primarily the Beatitudes.

Forgiveness

Grace might be free but it is not cheap. We have always recognized the 'e' in the acrostic to mean "expense"²³ And yet, that is not the whole story; for, in speaking of "cost" Jesus taught the parable about an unmerciful servant [Matthew 18:21-35] and his master's absolute forgiveness of this servant's debt which was not the result of risky investments or poverty but of swindle. This servant defrauded his master of what was his master's rightful possession, which is a metaphor for our unfaithfulness toward the God Who loved us. We abused through sinning the gift of life God gave us while He made us for His fellowship. But what did Jesus emphasize in this story? Not His forgiveness but the need of ours toward each other and others [Matthew 18:35].²⁴

Grace and forgiveness, derive from the same Greek word.

Grace is cheapened when we are thereby forgiven without any interest in forgiving. To forgive indeed we must forgive in deed! This incorporates a desire for reconciliation. A forgiving heart holds no bitterness or vengeance. The story of grace is a story of God creating in us forgiving hearts. [It is not strange to discover that both words, grace and forgiveness, derive from the same Greek word, Ephesians 4:32.]²⁵

23. GRACE: God's Riches At Christ's Expense

24. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

25. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

F[o]llowship

Jesus cannot become our Savior and not our Lord! The message of grace is cheapened if nothing is required of us to “come out and be separate” [2 Corinthians 6:17].²⁶ If so, if we seek to receive His love but not let it flow out to others, our experience is a stagnant religion rather than the witness of the living stream of eternal salvation Jesus spoke of [John 7:38].²⁷ Love is put in to flow out [Romans 5:5].²⁸ We are to love as He does [John 15:12].²⁹ Our thoughts may become so fixed on what He did *for* us we don't take serious what He intends to do *through* us.

Bonhoeffer calls fellowship, fellowship
--

The rich young man toward whom Jesus' heart was warmly drawn is not really the story of liquidating one's wealth for charity as it is relinquishing all personal ambition and interest for the glorious vision of following Him as one of His disciples [Luke 18:22].³⁰ Bonhoeffer calls fellowship, fellowship, and rightly so [1 Corinthians 1:9].³¹

26. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you,

27. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

28. And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

29. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

30. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

31. God *is* faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Grace, therefore, is more than forgiveness, it is God's empowering to follow in our Lord's footsteps. [Seventeen times in the Gospels we read Jesus instructing His disciples to "Follow me."] Justification is a marvelous gift of God but the same word also translates "righteousness."³² We should not claim justification if we do not live it! Grace is cheapened if it is only a declaration of righteousness without sanctification. As we rightly maintain, God's gift of grace is working on us ["from glory to glory"] transforming us into the image of Christ [2 Corinthians 3:18].³³ Justification leads to glorification [Romans 8:30].³⁴ It has to! It is cheapened if it becomes mere religious duty or devotion or a Sunday morning habit.

Knowledge

There is no biblical word for *academic* knowledge.

Grace is cheapened if we continue in sin [Romans 6:1-2].³⁵ Cheap grace is a *carte blanche* to sin and is not what God offers! As Bonhoeffer, in other words, noted, "acquired knowledge cannot be divorced from the experience in which it was acquired."³⁶ "The call to discipleship," the pastor

32. Kittel, vol II, page 202ff

33. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

34. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

35. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

36. Bonhoeffer, page 51

affirmed, “*is [the] gift of grace*”³⁷ [italics added]. There is no biblical word for *academic* knowledge.

As unexpected as it sounds (I sadly admit), “following Jesus” can be reduced to merely a doctrine or theology, what Bonhoeffer calls “an abstract Christology.”³⁸ Faith can become preserved in creed leading many churchgoers to think that if they assent mentally to the “tenets” as the church words them, they must be saved. But this is not true. Again to learn we must follow the Master and learn from being with Him. Bonhoeffer explained, “With an abstract idea it is possible to enter into a relation of formal knowledge, to become enthusiastic about it, and perhaps even to put it into practice; but it can never be followed in personal obedience.”³⁹

The story is told that a young child was once asked “What is love?” And because young children cannot articulate in words ideas such as virtue, ethics, morality, ... and, yes, love, she answered with a smile, “Love is a hug.” Not every hug is expressive of love but the point here is that children need to see the idea in action, see it expressed, see it followed, to be able to recognize any concept we, as adults, conceptualize in abstract terms. Biblical truth can be conceptualized as dogma, a purely academic education in theology but as lifeless as lines of a poem chiseled into a tomb stone. We are not asked by Jesus to follow doctrine. Doctrine can be taught, but we follow *Him*. Discipleship is a relationship with the living Christ. This makes discipleship dynamic, a life changing experience, rather than a static education in Bible verse. Said simpler, truth must be lived and followed to be learned.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid. page 59

39. Ibid.

Faith

Faith includes faithfulness. They are the same word.

Cheap grace cheapens faith because it denies that the word “faith” includes “faithfulness,” the other side of the same coin, so to speak. And faithfulness is also an ongoing experience [“from faith into faith” Romans 1:17]⁴⁰ ...into Christ according to Paul.⁴¹ Salvation is a deepening relationship with Him. Faith is faithfulness. Saving grace is God’s empowering us to follow in His steps as His disciples.

Here is where Bonhoeffer waxes eloquent and inspired. “Do we also realize that this cheap grace has turned back upon us like a boomerang?” he asked. “The price we are having to pay today,” he observed, “in the shape of the collapse of the organized church [I think not just a dwindling membership but the apparent absence of commitment to pastoral vision] is only the inevitable consequence of our policy of making grace available to all at too low cost. We gave away the Word ... wholesale.”⁴² Bonhoeffer recognized with sadness the Church’s message being made more seeker friendly than challenging, more the ideal of the proud than the reality of the humble.

40. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed **from faith to faith**: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

41. Philippians 1:29 says “into” as an activity (faithful) and not “in” as a condition (faith) For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on [into] him, but also to suffer for his sake;

42. Bonhoeffer, page 54

Discipleship

Bonhoeffer continued, “Our humanitarian sentiment made us give that which was holy to the scornful and unbelieving. We poured forth unending streams of grace. But the call to follow Jesus in the narrow way [Matthew 7:14]⁴³ was hardly ever heard.”⁴⁴ We need to relearn the relationship between grace and discipleship. Bonhoeffer concludes, “It is becoming clearer every day that the most urgent problem besetting [the] Church is this: How can we live the Christian life in the modern world?”⁴⁵

Discipleship is a life which springs from grace.

The encouraging thought is that Jesus gave us the answer in His “Sermon on the Mount” and added “it’s easy” [Matthew 11:30].⁴⁶ Jesus used the word, “Happy” [blessed] as He unfurled the scroll of such a revelation. There is a bit more to this truth than what is found in Matthew’s record but it is all good—excitingly good.

Bonhoeffer concluded, “Happy are they who, knowing that grace, can live in the world without being of it, who, by following Jesus Christ, are so assured of their heavenly citizenship that they are truly free to live their lives in this world. Happy are they who know that discipleship simply means the life which springs from grace, and that grace simply means discipleship. Happy are they who have

43. Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

44. Bonhoeffer, page 54

45. *Ibid*, page 55

46. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.

become Christians in this sense of the word. For them the word of grace has proved a fountain of mercy."⁴⁷

One cannot talk grace without studying discipleship and that is a study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and primarily the Beatitudes. Here is where we find the gateway that opens to the way that is narrow that we are called to walk.

47. Bonhoeffer, page 56

The Call

"[he] left everything, and followed him [Luke 5:28]

Bonhoeffer says it well, "When we are called to follow Christ, we are summoned to an exclusive attachment to his person. The grace of his call burst all the bonds of legalism. It is a gracious call, a gracious commandment. It transcends the difference between the law and the gospel. Christ calls, the disciple follows, that is grace and commandment in one.

"I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy commandments" (Psalm 119:45).

Following Christ is an exclusive attachment to His person.

Churched people need to examine introspectively who or what they are following! A dear brother in Christ I knew years ago became a bit anxious about the implication in such a personal evaluation. "How can one follow Christ," he questioned, "unless they follow the church's doctrinal stance on what Jesus taught?" He felt that his spiritual stability, his sense of hope and security in Christ, his understanding of the Bible, hinged on church teaching. He was saying that when the church—through pastoral instruction and denominational creed—tells him this is holy and that is sin, the church issues a livable mandate to follow and that in following it he knows he is saved. Is following the do's and don't's of religious teaching the same as following Christ? Or is this legalism under the cloak of a codified spirituality?

Sadly, calling a faithful commitment to one's religious faith "legalism" can scare the believer who

obsequiously follows such teaching into questioning their salvation [1 Corinthians 8:11].⁴⁸ This seems too much to ask of those who have been faithful to their respective churches over the course of years.

We agree with Bonhoeffer that following Christ is “an exclusive attachment to His person.” Our faith does not rest in church teaching, so much as, it rests in our relationship with the Savior. But, for many whose commitment to Christ is fulfilled an hour each Sunday such preaching is frighteningly disconcerting. Is it possible to ease into an open-eyed discussion on living a Christ-centric life in such a time as this, postmodernism?

Through our love for Him we are seeking through a consistent prayer life along with our devotional attachment to His Holy Word through regular reading and studying, to appreciate the wondrous dynamics of this relationship. And we have found that, indeed, His sheep do hear His voice and follow [John 10:27],⁴⁹

48. And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

49. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

Conviction

As followers of Christ, we learn the difference between conscience and conviction. This is not the place for too fine a distinction between the two, but it is appropriate to mention it because following Jesus and the conviction provided by the Spirit of God are inseparably linked. When Jesus spoke of sending the Spirit in His “bodily” absence, He spoke of a two fold ministry that Spirit would have: to *reprove* or *convict* [John 16:8]⁵⁰ and that His focus would remain exclusively *Christ-centric* [John 16:14].⁵¹ Bonhoeffer, explained the Beatitude, purity in heart, as being, “not ruled by ... conscience but by the will of Jesus.”⁵²

Conscience is culturally trained; Conviction is Spirit-led

So, clearly, following Jesus is more about the Spirit’s involvement in our lives than a church education. Understandably, Bible study—under the guiding teaching of pastoral leadership—is an essential part of our Christian experience [2 Thessalonians 2:15].⁵³ But we must live what we are taught and if it cannot be implemented in our experience and lead us closer to the Savior, we need to question its value: “the just shall *live* by his faith” [Habakkuk 2:4].

50. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

51. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.

52. Bonhoeffer, page 112

53. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

Peter, in his second epistle [2 Peter 1:4-10] took us from God's promise to equip us to live for Him, starting with our faith, which he called "precious" and "common" for all believers. He led us through a knowledge of our Lord (again, not academic but experienced) to virtue, a growing relationship with our Lord, to which, in turn, we are to add temperance to character to deal with temptation, then patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Peter then teaches that this is the way to secure not just our salvation [election] but also our calling. None of this can be taught in purely academic terms. We need to follow Jesus to make sense of what Peter has written.

All Things New

"If we would follow Jesus we must take definite steps."⁵⁴ Levi must leave the receipt of custom [Mark 2:14].⁵⁵ Luke wrote, "[he] left everything, and followed him [Luke 5:28] and this is the point: Matthew was "cut off from his previous existence."⁵⁶

Following the Savior in our lives leads us on a trajectory away from so much that was important in our lives before. Levi (Matthew) is not going to get Jesus interested in making money—let alone, making it by extortion in an effort to get rich! Matthew's life would change so dramatically and drastically that sitting at the custom table cannot be incorporated into our Lord's vision for his life.

54. Bonhoeffer, page 62

55. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

56. Bonhoeffer, page 62

Following Jesus is walking away from a sinful past.

He not only left the job, he left “everything.” As we follow the Savior, we learn what “everything” involves! Paul taught, “old things are passed away; *behold*, all things are become new” [2 Corinthians 5:17] and he used the interjection “*behold*.” (Make no mistake about it, take clear and careful note: most certainly!) *all things* (not some) are *new* (not refreshed or starting over a second time as before but things will be as they were never before!)

One of the best verses to explain this is Romans 8:29, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be *conformed* to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” The word, “conformed” does not speak of superficial or cosmetic changes but of an inward change in our very nature to become like Jesus. Bonhoeffer explained, “it is not enough to give man a new philosophy or a better religion.”⁵⁷ Christ’s image is not something we strive after. We must be transformed into it [Galatians 4:19].⁵⁸

This is what following Him is all about. We don’t just act like Him; we value what He values; we love whom He loves. The Spirit works to makes Jesus’ love of His Father, ours, also. We are being “changed” from the inside out. He is now our oldest brother, which indicates an essential change in our relationship with our Lord and the Father.⁵⁹

57. Bonhoeffer, page 300

58. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

59. Perhaps, this is just a footnote but Matthew in relating his own testimony [Matthew 9:12] reminded us of how merciful the Savior! Luke left this out of his account, as did Mark)

Lessons in Faith

When Peter saw Jesus walking on the Sea coming toward them, he asked the Lord to “bid me come” [Matthew 14:28]. He wisely did not just step out of the boat, not until or unless Jesus said, “Come” ..and He did! [Matthew 14:29]. Every lesson is spiritual and every lesson is about faith; so, it must be initiated and directed by the Savior. Each step is a step of faith and enabled by grace not individual will and effort. We follow Him; He doesn’t follow us!

Following Jesus takes a faith God alone gives

Luke shared a case in which someone wanted to follow the Savior though Jesus never called him. “Lord,” he avowed, “I will follow you wherever you go” [Luke 9:57]. But this was not the voice of a faith only God can gift to us. This was an empty promise. “And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” [Luke 9:58]. Nothing more is said about it, leading us to believe that the would-be disciple lost heart—as so many had [John 6:66].⁶⁰

It takes “faith” to follow and that faith must be divinely inspired, a divine gift, as we pointed out already [2 Peter 1:1].⁶¹

A proper study of the Gospel account will reveal that everything Jesus did and said to or for His disciples was said and done to build faith. As we pointed out, “little faith” was a phrase Jesus often used not as a scolding but to point out the continuing need on their part to learn to trust Him. It is

60. From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

61. ...to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

here that the storm on the sea while Jesus slumbered is significant [Matthew 8:24-27]. We have to assume that the memory of this lesson would stay with them all their lives and continue to remind them in moments of despair that He is trustworthy. “The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy;” [Psalm 111:7].

It would seem intellectually dishonest if we were to assume He might treat us any differently. Following Him will always provide lessons in trust and faith because following Him is faithfulness on our part and faithfulness is faith in action.

Slow Means No

Luke narrated two occasions in which Jesus did call someone to follow Him but they had other concerns on their minds and hearts that would have delayed them. They were dilatory in their response. Jesus would never call us unless He meant “now” and He also knew there was no reason for delay. Delay is but a rationalized excuse that our Lord interprets as rejection—resisting His call of grace [1 Corinthians 15:10⁶² compare to 2 Corinthians 6:1].⁶³

One man, first, felt it more important to bury his dad, [Luke 9:59-60] but if he had already died, might the Savior have gone to the funeral to raise him again? We can reasonably assume this man’s dad was still living. John and James left their dad repairing fishing nets to become fishers of men without delay!

62. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

63. We then, *as workers together with him*, beseech *you* also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

Following delayed, is following denied

Another's request seemed reasonable. He wanted to just say "Goodbye" to his family [Luke 9:61-62]. Jesus wasn't opposed to "goodbyes." He visited Peter's home when his mother-in-law was ill with fever. Jesus healed her [Luke 4:38-39]. It was a good time for Peter to update the family and say his goodbyes, but this would not have been a reason to delay following the Savior.

Following Jesus should never be postponed when He calls, when the Spirit convicts; for He would never bring conviction unless He wanted you to "Come, now!"

Here is a lesson in faith often overlooked. When Jesus said, "Come" to Peter, now he must step out of the boat. His faith now requires it! The other disciples can remain secure huddling wet, shivering in the cold and their faith is not challenged, but Peter must step out. "For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" [Romans 14:23].

When the Spirit convicts of sin, it is always time to repent. Until then, we may sense no need to resist temptation, but the Spirit is most faithful in such matters. When the sinner is being drawn to the Savior by His Father, when conviction of sin pulls on the heart to repent, the sinner is encouraged to come to Christ. Now is come salvation..." [Revelation 12:10].

Faith Or Faithfulness

As already noted: Faith and faithfulness are in Biblical terms the same word. This means when God gives us faith to trust Him, He empowers us to follow Him [2 Peter 1:3].⁶⁴

64. According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness

Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes

“...faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience.”⁶⁵ Or as James said it “Faith without works [of obedience] is dead [James 2:26]. So when Peter stepped out of the boat unto the sea, it was an act of obedience in response to Jesus saying, “Come.” Following Jesus is discipleship and it is an obedient life⁶⁶ but the Lord instills the faith in us to follow [John 6:44].⁶⁷

Obedience is not a difficult task since His “burden is light” [Matthew 11:30]. “Light” is an interesting word meaning “manageable” or what is proper and reasonable in God’s wisdom. This answers to Peter’s use of the word “temperance [2 Peter 1:6] which is God’s grace enabling us to control our own desires and obediently follow our Lord.

When we affirm: only believers are faithful and only the faithful are believers, the theologian may ask, which comes first: faith or faithfulness. I refer to these truths as two sides to the same coin [Philippians 2:12-13].⁶⁸ “Grace and obedience are complementary.”⁶⁹ Paul taught, “For therein is

65. Bonhoeffer, page 64

66. This truth opposes Pelagianism which says through free will we can choose Christ. The theological doctrine of Pelagius and his followers, in particular the denial of the doctrines of original sin and predestination, and the defense of innate human goodness and free will.

67. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

68. Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.

69. Bonhoeffer, page 295

the righteousness of God revealed from faith to [on] faith, [faith at work]: as it is written, “The just shall live by faith” [Romans 1:17]. The just shall live by faithfulness.”

Francis Godet wrote, “God acting first as Judge to pardon (to declare man just) [gifting us faith], and afterwards as Spirit to quicken and sanctify [faithfulness].”⁷⁰

If we maintain that only those who obey God (those who are faithful) can be candidates for God’s gift of faith (salvation), we are teaching a salvation by works. God would be granting faith by the Law? Paul was careful to disavow such a notion [Romans 4:14].⁷¹

If we maintain that only those who believe are considered, thereby, obedient, we have cheapened grace. Making salvation dependent on faith is biblical enough but not a faith that lacks faithfulness or an obedient Christian life. Such a notion is not biblical [Romans 8:4].⁷²

What Must I Do

Obedience is an abstract idea for most congregants. How would they define “following Jesus”? How knowledgeable are they of the Beatitudes? Do they experience any opposition or ridicule or persecution for their faith in Christ or are they living peaceably and comfortably in their world because they have found a compromise that hides their Christianity?

70. Francis Godet. *“Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans”* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), page 93.

71. For if they which are of the law *be* heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

72. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Obedience begs the rich man's question: "What must I *do* to have eternal life?" [Matthew 19:16].⁷³ Not what must I believe! And then Jesus put a huge price tag on grace. The young man went away dispirited when Jesus gave him the same choice He gave Matthew: "Sell all you have and come follow me" [Matthew 19:21].

**There is no such salvation that allowed a believer to live
an unchanged life**

The young man wanted a cheap grace, a simple mental ascent to the doctrine of loving God without any practical concrete expression of it. He wanted a salvation that allowed him to live unchanged and there is no such salvation! He wanted Jesus to confirm the supposition: "he who believes is obedient." That faith alone is all God requires to declare him obedient. He wanted a faith that required no faithfulness, no further directive, no newness of life that would change his perspective on his wealth as a means to share God's love with the poor.

Following Jesus, for Peter, the fisherman, or Matthew, the tax collector or this rich young man, had to be a life changing decision, a first step into a new future, and here the preacher might give false advice. Does obedience lead to faith? Could this rich young man become a believer by simply liquidating his wealth and distributing it among the poor? Of course not [Ephesians 2:8-9].⁷⁴ Faith without works is dead and works without faith is legalism. Faith without faithfulness is dead. Faithfulness without faith is an unreachable ideal; stepping out of the boat just to sink.

73. And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

74. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it* is the gift of God: Not of works lest any man should boast.

Observe All Things

But we are still left with an abstract idea: What does it mean to *follow* Jesus? The church's attempt at an answer often reduces to a legalism or a religious duty and not a changed life. One of Jesus' last instructions sounds straight forward enough: "...observe all, whatever I did command you, and lo, I am with you..." [Matthew 28:20]. To "observe" Jesus' teachings, we need only comb the Gospels for Jesus' thoughts (in the "red letter" edition).

Learning to observe Jesus' teachings means learning to observe Him

But even here, how to give concreteness and reasonable expression to these teachings requires far more than an academic education. After having studied Jesus as much as we might, we need to walk with Him and let Him give concrete expression to these teachings in our lives. That is the second part of His instruction: "I am with you..." To learn His teachings, we must learn Him. "learn of me," He gently urges us to follow [Matthew 11:29].⁷⁵

75. I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Obedience

“Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God” [Psalm 143:10].

Moses’ request that God would not send him back into Egypt alone but would accompany him was a worthy prayer for divine support [Exodus 33:15].⁷⁶ Nor was Peter out of order—as we already noted—when he asked Jesus to tell him to step out of the boat before he would consider doing it [Matthew 14:28].⁷⁷ If there were no call from the Lord obedience in us would have no significance.

**Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths.
Psalm 25:4**

So when Jesus asked Matthew to leave his employment and, in reality, the Roman government’s favorite service, collecting taxes, Matthew needed to know in clearest terms what “follow me” meant both to Jesus and to himself. And all we need to be sure of is that God is clearly calling us.

My wife’s pastor, from years past, when God called him into the pastorate, prayed, “I must know your will. I cannot operate with any shadow of doubt in little or big decisions. I must know where you want me, what you want

76. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not *with me*, carry us not up hence.

77. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

me to do, and when."⁷⁸ "Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God" [Psalm 143:10].

What is the will of God for our lives? Some believers interpret this question in terms of service. Years ago, single women who attended a Bible College to prepare for ministry never thought God was calling them into pastoral ministry but unto the mission field. Lois Shelton became a missionary to Liberia. Here's how she explained her calling, "The Lord spoke by giving me a burden for those in heathenism. A burden which became heavier and heavier. Formerly I feared God might send me; now I feared He wouldn't. Then the burden centered on Liberia I prayed, 'Lord, I **must** help them. Please let me go.'"⁷⁹

Other believers see the calling of God in terms of His work in us instead of through us. "his purpose [in us] ... to be conformed to the image of his Son...." [Romans 8:28-29].

Both aspects of God's will are viable and both speak to a dynamic surrender of our own ambitions and interests to live a challenging life in service to our Lord. Obedience is discipleship and discipleship is costly in such terms. The ultimate price some pay is martyrdom but all believers experience opposition which makes the Christian way of life challenging for many since most of us are not militant or confrontational. We are citizens of heaven [Philippians 3:20]⁸⁰ on a pilgrimage through strange cultures that we do not participate in but must live in [John 15:16].⁸¹

78. Harry M. Snook. "God's Plan & Purpose For Your Life," (printed in the United States, 1989), page 17

79. Lois Shelton. "Tell Me" (Printed in the U.S.A. 1949), page 19

80. our citizenship is in heaven

81. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Risk v Calling

For believers, in short, life-changing decisions should not be evaluated in terms of risk but in terms of the “call of God.” Our Lord doesn’t deal in risk; as Isaiah informed us, “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it [Isaiah 55:11].” So, when Peter began to calculate risk, he began to sink [Matthew 14:30].⁸²

**Life-changing decisions should not be viewed in terms
of risk but calling**

When the Children of Israel calculated risk in their report after spying out the land, they voted not to go [Numbers 13:28-31]⁸³ This was David’s mistake when he numbered the people getting ready for war [2 Samuel 24:10]⁸⁴ even though his habit was to consult God through the prophets [1 Samuel 23:2⁸⁵ & 2 Samuel 5:23] . The teenage David had no qualms about slaying Goliath; but now, overwhelmed by the responsibility of the monarchy or just succumbing to doubt,

82. when he saw that the wind *was* boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink

83. the people *be* strong that dwell in the land, and the cities *are* walled, *and* very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. ... the men that went up ... said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they *are* stronger than we.

84. And David’s heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

85. Therefore David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines?

he sought to measure risk even though “the Lord was with him [1 Samuel 18:12, 14].

A Spirit of Detachment

“I must cultivate a spirit of inward detachment” wrote Bonhoeffer, “so that my heart is not in my possession.”⁸⁶

Jesus’ instruction to the rich young man who sought His advice on eternal life was not rash, “Go sell all and give it to the poor” [Luke 18:22]. It was necessary since God always provides when He calls. And as already noted, following the Savior is leading us away from our past, a truth with profound implications for our future happiness.⁸⁷

My wife’s pastor, when God called him into pastoral work, had two requests which seemed reasonable: “Lord, if you’re not big enough to handle the finances, please don’t ask me to beg.”⁸⁸ He asked for one more assurance: “please let Him [the Spirit] reveal the Word to me. Keep my mind closed to every voice but Thine. I sanctify it for you and the ministry.”⁸⁹ God honored his prayer as we can attest.

I must cultivate a spirit of inward detachment

But sometimes, we do hear other voices, other opinions, other friend’s advice, which can intimidate us into questioning: “Is God really asking this of me?” God was calling Pastor Snook out of the comfort of a growing cabinet making business in Boston, Massachusetts to the snowy hills

86. Bonhoeffer, page 80

87. We must later talk about the Beatitudes as a practical application of this truth.

88. Snook, page 17

89. Ibid.

of Vermont to open a church that had died of old age and where offerings would consist of bushels of potatoes and other local harvests. His business in Boston, which he hoped to fall back on for support, was legally taken from him by a former partner in that business. He and his wife and four children now had nothing to fall back on except the calling of God. And God's calling was sufficient [2 Corinthians 12:9].⁹⁰

Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with these words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" [Matthew 5:3]. This is where true calling and ministry always begins, realizing that personal possessions are not personal after all but provisions of God for what He has called us to. We must be spontaneous in our willingness to give up all and everything when God leads us, as He had Matthew, away from *our* receipt of customs.

Reasonableness

Paul wrote, "Now I ... beseech you by the meekness and **gentleness** of Christ...: [2 Corinthians 10:1] where gentleness means fairness or sweet reasonableness. So based on the Scripture we can agree with Jeremiah that God has a plan for us which should inspire great hope because He has nothing but the best in mind for us [Jeremiah 29:11]:⁹¹

God is reasonable and fair in His plans for us

How reasonable is God when He asks us to do His will? Abraham (I believe it was in a dream) received God's

90. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

91. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil

instruction to sacrifice his boy, his only son. I would find this questionable if I dreamt it. But Abraham arose in the morning and prepared for the trip to Mount Moriah with his son. You know the rest of the story [Genesis 22:1-19]. The point being that we are less likely to discredit the vision or dream but seek a more reasonable interpretation of it. This is what we have done with many of Jesus' sayings.

What was Jesus suggesting when He claimed, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" [Luke 14:26]? He could not possibly mean that following Him requires me to hate my spouse! Some will try to redefine the terms assuming the original didn't mean what we are reading, but "hate" is "hate" and a wife is a wife!

Some of us have left siblings and parents for ministry. We have left the old homestead while others live entire generations in the same home or town. And "hate" works as a word because we have literally left *all* for our Lord's sake.

But a wife and family!

Jewish thought in the Bible can refer to the "*effect*"⁹² which explains this verse best. The overall effect of putting the call of God above all else is best understood by employing the word "hate." Though there might be love in the heart, at times the sacrifice God requires of *both* spouses toward each other is in action a way of life that puts romance—and beach vacations and all that money can buy—second to His divine plan.

Jesus was not encouraging us to "feel" hate toward family. Neither did He want our passion for following Him to be diminished because of them.

92. Thorlief Bowman. *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*. (New York:W. W. Norton. Co., 1960), page 31

Commitment to the Will of God (in the heart of both spouses) necessitates sacrifice. Some missionaries put their children in school on another continent than where they are serving their Lord. It is the pain of separation and the sacrifice that requires such strong words, as Jesus enjoined, "...seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" [Matthew 6:33].

A Stronger Union

Bonhoeffer offers an explanation that might be best explained with a story. We are told that a South American pastor, with God's instruction, had his entire congregation sign over their homes to the church after which God, allegedly, instructed the pastor to allow each parishioner to use whatever was relinquished by each. They ceased to be possessive of all they had. Aside from any issue of inheritance, the only change in this exchange was one of attitude, a grateful heart that God was now sharing His resources with them. If we seek scripture for this arrangement, we might consider: "...whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." [1 Corinthians 10:31].⁹³

It isn't your Isaac, it's you

Bonhoeffer speaks of Christ's mediation—not just between God and us, but—between husband and wife; siblings and parents, etc. He illustrates with the story of Abraham offering (or intending to offer) his son, Isaac. Abraham returned from Mount Moriah with a changed heart and relationship with his son, who was now God's special gift.

93. Acts 4:32 "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."

Abraham's faith leaped forward! Bonhoeffer wrote, "now, everything has had to pass through Christ."⁹⁴

The believer becomes a follower of Christ in the midst of a society among their own "kith and kin" (Bonhoeffer) and enjoying all their own worldly wealth, but now seen as God's gift to them and they as His steward. If I read Bonhoeffer correct, like God giving Isaac back to his father, when Jesus is the center of our lives, He reunites us, He gives us back our families only now in multiples with eternal life [Mark 10:30].⁹⁵ Union becomes more in keeping with the divine vision. Christ's mediation ultimately unites us in christian love.

The Last First

After Jesus shared with His disciples the cost of following Him and after recognizing such faithfulness among His followers, promising rewards, both immediate in this life and eternal in the next, He reminded all that He reserves the right to distribute such rewards, the last, first [Mark 10:31].⁹⁶ An important point is made in the "*Expositor's Bible Commentary*⁹⁷." ...perhaps it is a warning to the disciples in view of what they said, 'we have left everything to follow you' [Mark 10:28]. They must not conceive of their discipleship in terms of rewards. Discipleship entails suffering and service, it must be entered on in terms of love and commitment to Jesus, not what one hopes to get out of

94. Bonhoeffer, page 99

95. But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

96. But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last first.

97. Frank E. Gaebelin. *Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), vol. 8, page 717*

it.” Matthew inserts the parable of the laborers here to illustrate the point [Matthew 20:1-16].

Single-minded Obedience

A verse relevant to this study is Mark 10:29 where Jesus responds to Peter’s self-commendation by assuring him, and all the disciples (and us) that we will be amply rewarded or compensated for our devotion to Him in leaving family and secular career.

Most translations of Mark 10:29 include the words: family, children, siblings and parents *but not wife*. If I read the scholars correctly, the earlier versions did not add “wife.” Nor should they have. What if the believer who is following Jesus is a woman? Then it should read “husband.” This word is far too specific to suggest it was original. Beside, how many of twelve disciples were married? And what about Mary Magdalene and the other women who served Him faithfully.

Perhaps, Jesus was addressing this matter in the presence of Peter’s spouse—maybe not. We already argued the meaning; so, it doesn’t hurt to include one’s spouse in all things personally sacrificed for Christ, but it points out the difficulty believer’s often have in accepting Jesus’ words at face value.

Undeniable, some of Jesus’ sayings are hard to understand. One seasoned veteran of the Cross told me once that he would not preach on the parables in his young ministry—only after years of maturity in the work. Consequently, we are tempted to apply the wrong meaning to something too difficult to accept on its face.

Bonhoeffer offers a homespun analogy: “If a father sends his child to bed, the boy knows at once what he has to do. But I suppose he has picked up a smattering of pseudo-

theology. In that case he would argue more or less like this: 'Father tells me to go to bed, but he really means that I am tired, and he does not want me to be tired. I can overcome my tiredness just as well if I go out and play.'"

The child knows that he will *not* pay the ultimate penalty for his waywardness if found out because dad loves him. It is in the absent of any penal judgment [Romans 8:1]⁹⁸ that we, as christians, are more likely to employ sophistry to interpret Jesus' instructions which sound "too harsh."

We know, theologically, that we have only been "declared" righteous, but God is still working on us, We still have time to be a kid because we are not yet adults, spiritually speaking [1 Corinthians 13:12]. We claim ignorance, innocence, and imperfection as allies in our actions. Whether we realize it or not, we claim a cheap grace from God which is simply not biblical! "The Christ whom the Scriptures proclaim," Bonhoeffer astutely observed, "is in every word He utters one who grants faith *to those only who obey Him*"⁹⁹ [italics added].

<p>The call of Jesus and single-minded obedience have an irrevocable significance</p>
--

Bonhoeffer provides the pseudo-argument as sarcasm: "everything depends on faith alone."¹⁰⁰ But unlike Peter (2 Peter 1:1, 11) we didn't "add to our faith." We skipped down to verse 11, "an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" .. as if, theologically we can remove the verses in between: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience,

98. *There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus

99. Bonhoeffer, page 84

100. *Ibid*, page 82

brotherly kindness, and love.... No! Faith and faithfulness are inseparable. To the degree we are unfaithful we can employ Jesus' new term: *little faith*. "It is only through actual obedience," says Bonhoeffer, "that a man can become liberated to believe."

One more thing here: obedience can never be abstract as if to suggest that going to bed and playing in the sand box are the same. Our Lord's instructions are really "concrete" and have enough specificity to give a clear and undeniable directive.

The fear, theologically, is that anything more than faith implies "works" which many Christians disavow because salvation does not require such. A dear overseer once surprised me when in his sermon he referred to God's love as *conditional*! He might have been correct but are we promoting the idea that God's love is absolute so we might live more comfortably without following our Lord's teaching as He commanded?

Obedience to the call of Jesus never lies within our own power. This is why He must call us; we don't offer our services unsolicited [Matthew 7:22-23].¹⁰¹ When He calls, He gives faith to be faithful to that call.

101. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

The Cross

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” [Matthew 16:24-25].

“And he that takes not his cross,” Jesus cautioned, “and follows after me, is not worthy of me [Matthew 10:38]. “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” [Mark 8:31].

Whatever was the Savior saying? In any sense, this is a costly commitment if we desire to follow Jesus. ..And, that being said, it makes sense to want Jesus to call us, to begin this relationship, to initiate this encounter with God, as He will then imbue us with a faith that can handle such a “costly” requirement. Perhaps, we should be thankful Jesus was the only one who ever mandated self-denial as compulsory to a life with Him.

Perhaps, we should ask, What price would we be willing to pay for the privilege of following the Savior? This book is dedicated to all those who “loved not their lives unto the death” [Revelation 12:11]. Does this include us? Would we be willing to go that far for Christ?

Or do we want a grace without a cross, without “our” cross to carry, without self-denial, a salvation that necessitates no essential change in our behavior or our relationships or anything? A “cheap” grace, Bonhoeffer labeled it, which amounts to a ticket to get us into heaven but nothing that requires heaven to get into us!

We must be willing to give anything and everything up

I mentioned only Jesus spoke of carrying our own cross. But Paul affirmed with emphasis so we would not miss it: “I die every day!” [1 Corinthians 15:31]. Is this not the same? “As it is written,” Paul testified to the Roman believers, “For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” [Romans 8:36]. And to the Philippians he confessed, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung [garbage?],¹⁰² that I may win Christ” [Philippians 3:7-8]. The word “loss” means “to forfeit,” to give up all things, for Christ.

If we are comfortably well off—maybe even rich—does that mean we can’t be believers? Of course it doesn’t mean this! When the subject came up, Jesus clarified to his disciples, “with God all things are possible” [Matthew 19:26]. God does not require us to be poor—it helps, though, because we have less to “forfeit” or “deny.” Before the poor were a government project and before poor folk were “entitled” to the same possessions the rich owned as “rights” (called equity), poverty was a more humbling condition which seemed like a natural forfeiture of worldly possessions. This doesn’t say that the poor are saved by default. No! What God asks is for us to be “poor *in spirit*” [Matthew 5:3] according to Jesus. We must be willing to give anything and everything up for the cause Jesus calls us to. This is probably why Bonhoeffer called the “Gospel” costly grace.

102. what is thrown to the dogs; also, flotsam & jetsam, “sweepings,” table crumbs, filth. Used once in the LXX (Ezekiel 4:12, 15) for lumps of manure. cp. Kittel, vol.VI, page 446

Self-denial

Bonhoeffer concluded, “To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us. Once more, all that self-denial can say is: “he leads the way, keep close to him.”¹⁰³

Martin Luther we are told admonished, “Plunge into the deep waters beyond your own comprehension.”¹⁰⁴ Let us throw caution to the wind when it comes to a commitment to Christ! Let Him—to invent a word—*reteach* us, to transform our thinking, to give us a perspective on suffering and cross-bearing that makes sense, to cause us to accept that God’s will for us is perfect, and good [Romans 12:2].

**Throw caution to the wind when it comes to a
commitment to Christ!**

Paul understood: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” [Philippians 3:10]. We begin to wonder if “suffering” is the right word. Paul seems to be almost enraptured, overjoyed, to be so privileged in following Christ. He understood the Savior’s teaching, “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord” [Matthew 10:25]. It is as if he finally became an alumnus of the great school of saints [Hebrews 11] that hold such a special place in the annals of Scripture. In fact, he confessed to the Romans, “we glory in tribulation!” [Romans 5:3]. Perhaps, this was his way of interpreting the Savior’s perspective on suffering, “for the

103. Bonhoeffer, page 88

104. *Ibid.*, page 93

joy that was set before him [Paul, also would] endure the cross, despising the shame" [Hebrews 12:2].

Whatever else we might say, this self-denial is volunteered; it is sought after. Believers—at least some—seem to cherish the opportunity to carry their cross for Christ. At least they recognize that following our Lord comes with a cross. If the cross were not there, they would be first to see Christianity as a farce, a man-made religion of no eternal value. Jesus' resurrection announced to the world that our faith is vindicated [1 Corinthians 15:14, 17, 20] but don't lose sight of the simple fact that Jesus' resurrection required His crucifixion—a cross!

Loss

It does seem that words like *suffering, death, a cross, tribulation, persecution* have taken on some glorified value, if not, a special meaning, for believers. "You are blessed," Jesus trumpeted His conclusion to spiritual poverty, where He began this discourse, "when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you [Matthew 5:11-12].

I decided to suffer the loss of all things.

The pain inflicted on a believer for his or her faith is no less painful, but, as one commentator understood Paul [Philippians 3:7]: "I decided to suffer the loss of all things."¹⁰⁵ Paul was telling Jesus, "Count me in!" Don't ask me, Lord, to count the cost! I know it costs but you, Jesus, have already

105. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), page 272

audited the profit-loss experience of a believer's life! I'm willing! I'm following!!

But I am still endeavoring to digest Paul's word "loss" here and Jesus' word "loss" in Matthew 16:25, 26.¹⁰⁶ For Paul, everything, including his former education, all the accolades for all the achievements, all the honor and privilege being a Roman citizen and a pharisee afforded him he now throws on the compost heap. And when Jesus spoke of losing one's soul, He used the same word for "perish" found in John 3:16. Deny self and gain heaven! This is a strong admonition.

When He spoke of finding our lives, He used a term meaning simply "to obtain." This isn't a metaphor on "lost and found" which some might interpret as the benefits of this life as if the Savior meant, "You will lose one thing but gain another" We do not denounce the world for some "ideal," to use Bonhoeffer's term.¹⁰⁷ We are not exchanging a lower ideal for a higher one. This would be an attempt at remaining in the world. Changing a worldly ideal for a christian one would be like changing cabins on the Titanic.

The call of Christ is a complete breach with the world. "The call of Jesus teaches us that our relation to the world has been built on an illusion."¹⁰⁸ "...your life is hid with Christ in God" [Colossians 3:3].

106. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what will it benefit someone if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his life?"

107. Bonhoeffer, page 96

108. Ibid.

The Beatitudes

Though the shadow of the cross would not fall across the place of the Skull until ... later, it was already in His heart the day He preached on "How to be Happy. - Bishop Sheen

I recall Bishop Fulton Sheen's description of the Beatitudes. It is a classic worth studying. I won't plagiarize, piggyback off, his timeless commentary but the temptation to do so is real. He wrote, "If we live the Beatitudes, as we are called to do, then you and I have also chosen the Cross."¹⁰⁹

For one, the cross we bear may easily deprive us of the family togetherness we envisioned while growing up, but now Jesus tells us we will be happier this way. Jesus knows that often, in a non-christian world, following Him makes His disciple a family outcast. As we say in the vernacular: this is their "cross to bear" and Jesus agrees [Matthew 10:35]¹¹⁰.

The good bishop's comparison is between true holiness and a world that argues it down as unreasonable and nonsensical. To take the Beatitudes seriously to heart is to understand how we, as believers, should live with a Christlike holiness. The Beatitudes empower us to speak with our lives the gospel message that distinguishes us from everything worldly. The Beatitudes are the key to interpreting Scripture because they speak of the Cross. They

109. I recommend reading in Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's "Life of Christ," the Beatitudes. cp. <https://www.ewtn.com/library/PROLIFE/BO18.TXT> [Provided courtesy of: The Catholic Resource Network Trinity Communications 703-791-4336]

110. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

are, themselves, a pastoral hermeneutic that is the scriptwriter for every sermon and the voice of all biblical counsel.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen added, “The Beatitudes cannot be taken alone: they are not ideals; they are hard facts and realities inseparable from the Cross of Calvary. What He [Jesus] taught was self-crucifixion.”¹¹¹

**The Beatitudes are the key to interpreting Scripture
because they speak of the Cross**

In a thousand sermons and homilies we have not begun to uncover the secrets contained here for living a holy life. The way of holiness is locked away in these verses—even though Jesus gave us the key, “*follow me*” (John 12:26¹¹²)

Is this an indictment on the modern church in our civilized world? It behooves each pastor to introduce these dynamic principles on what it means to bear our cross daily for Him, Who loved us enough to bear His Cross for us. ... even at the risk of losing a few dissidents.

The Beatitudes profile the believer we have already been describing. In a real sense, we have spoken of these “beautiful attitudes” already because in Jesus’ mountain sermon He organized His thoughts on what kind of *follower* He was asking His disciples to become. The new idea offered here is the message that all the believer’s happiness is now invested in this kind of discipleship. But this should be something we would guess at, even if our Lord had not been so direct.

We have chosen a cross instead of a deserted island of self-made happiness. Choosing privation, ridicule, being a

111. Ibid.

112. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

social outcast, and yes, all the pain a cruel and sinful world can inflict, for the sake of following our Lord in service, is the better path for us because it is the clearest expression of who we are as Believers.

A Symphony of Holy Living

Quoting D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones from a sermon on *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, “The Lord Jesus Christ died to enable us to live the Sermon on the Mount.¹¹³ He died. “That he might ... purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” [Titus 2:14]. “This is how Christians ought to live; this is how Christians are meant to live.”¹¹⁴

I take some liberty in pointing out that a purified life and a “pure heart,” [Matthew 5:8] though different terms, belong together. God wants us to be purely pure, totally and forever, washed clean and separated unto Him as His own. For this to happen we must follow Him in living *all* the Beatitudes. It is in this context what Jesus said makes complete sense to believers while the world rejects it in disgust. To appreciate the particulars of Jesus sermon, we must appreciate His overview in Matthew 5:3-12.

Jesus died to enable us to live the Sermon on the Mount

“The Sermon on the Mount ...is like a great musical composition,” Brother Lloyd-Jones explained through this analogy, “a symphony. ...the whole is greater than a collection of the parts. ... It is futile to [argue] any [particular injunction in the Sermon on the Mount unless [we have] ... accepted and ...indeed conformed to, ...*living*, the Beatitudes”¹¹⁵ [*italics added*]. Living the Beatitudes is a symphonic composition of holiness, of a sanctified life that is

113. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000 reprinted, Kindle Edition), vol 1, Introduction

114. *Ibid.*

115. *Ibid.*

a far more powerful witness to our world than mere words or organized evangelistic campaigns.

A Sequence of Growth

We must study the Beatitudes in order. We must allow their inspiration to saturate our thoughts, our words, and our way of life, learning that we can only understand Jesus' teaching on "mourning" if we are poor in Spirit, and only these believers can correctly appreciate what being "meek" is all about. "There is a kind of logical sequence in this Sermon," Brother Lloyd-Jones observed, "... a spiritual order... Certain postulates are laid down, and on the basis of those, certain other things follow."

Learn to humbly depend totally on Him. Learn to mourn to be meek; learn to be a peacemaker if you are to rejoice in the persistent ridicule of others.

There is value in prayerfully studying lists in the Bible, like the Fruit of the Spirit or the Pneumatika in Corinthians. And especially the Beatitudes, outlined by Jesus, Himself, must be understood in order and not as a randomly chosen set of ideas incomplete or introductory to some greater Biblical theme.

A Paradox of Faith

The Beatitudes are a paradox of Christian life because God is recreating us into a follower of the Savior whose sole reason for coming incarnate was to die for sin in order to give us life. We are then asked to carry a cross and to do it humbly and meekly, to die as regards this world in order to bear

witness to what *God* can do in our weakness [2 Corinthians 12:10].¹¹⁶ The paradox is a happiness based grief (prayer for the lost); a joy that even anticipates persecution and can glorify God in any trial [Romans 5:3];¹¹⁷ a spirit of poverty that knows contentment regardless of the circumstance [Philippians 4:11].¹¹⁸

Happy, the Product of Love

And we thought Isaiah had it rough when God asked him to be a sign in Israel [Isaiah 20:3].¹¹⁹ Or Ezekiel with whom God shared the truth behind the Exile [Ezekiel 3:14]¹²⁰ and chose him to be the divine mouthpiece [Ezekiel 3:17]¹²¹ after years of silence [Ezekiel 3:26]¹²² and the death of his wife [Ezekiel 24:15]. Jeremiah was thrown in a waterless well [Jeremiah 38:6].¹²³ In fact, when Jesus spoke of our being persecuted,

116. when I am weak, then am I strong

117. we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation ... [ultimately emboldens God's love in and through us].

118. I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content.

119. And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years *for* a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia;

120. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.

121. Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.

122. And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they *are* a rebellious house.

123. Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that *was* in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon *there was* no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire.

He compared it to the prophets' calling and witness [Matthew 5:12].¹²⁴

The image of such a life as the Beatitudes portrayed is the negative, a picture of sorrow, which reveals a pure happiness when the light of the Son is seen through it. Only a believer who lives the Beatitudes—or who is learning to live them—knows what this means. The world has no idea [1 Corinthians 2:14].¹²⁵

The Beatitudes are a profile in a happiness produced of a love for God and others. Dr. Len Evans, who pastored in Niles, Ohio during the Charismatic awakening in the mid 1970's, wrote, "intuitively I knew the magnetic healing power of such a love, the joyous freedom, and living perceptual excitement."¹²⁶

A Kingdom Within

"'Son of David' is an important designation in Matthew."¹²⁷ 54 times in 26 verses Matthew references the Kingdom of Heaven. In 22 references to King David, Jesus is called his "son" in 14. In 8 verses, Matthew recalled Jesus speaking of the Kingdom of Heaven in parables. It was like a mustard seed planted in a field [Matthew 13:31]; leaven kneaded into 3 measures of meal [Matthew 13:33]; a treasure found buried in a field worth liquidating every asset to buy [Matthew 13:44]; a merchant seeking goodly pearls [Matthew 13:45]; a fisherman's net filled with all kinds of sea-life [Matthew

124. for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you

125. But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

126. Len Evans, *Love, Love, Love: How One Man Found Out What Really Matters* (Plainfield, NJ.: Logos International, 1978) page 120

127. Gaebelien, vol 8. page 62

13:47]; a homeowner who owns a house filled with the most expensive artifacts, some of them antiques [Matthew 13:52]; this same man owned a vineyard as well and he employed many to tend it [Matthew 20:1]; and a king who held an elaborate wedding feast for his son [Matthew 22:2].

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He speaks of the Kingdom nine times causing Matthew to conclude that this had to be the overarching theme of Jesus' teachings. Isaiah prophesied, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" [Isaiah 9:7].

A Kingdom of Heaven is Within

Gabriel called this good news [Luke 1:19, 26] adding "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end [Luke 1:32-33]. Jesus, Himself, twice in Matthew's record, spoke of it as "the Gospel" [Matthew 4:23; 9:35]. It is our message [Matthew 24:14].¹²⁸

To read Matthew without discussing the Kingdom would be negligent, irresponsibly negligent. We will be citizens there [Philippians 3:20].¹²⁹ But we would be misinforming to call this a theocracy following the Old Testament pattern, for King Jesus is the *antitype* of Old

128. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

129. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

Testament History; He is the fulfillment of that Theocracy,¹³⁰ a government now written upon the heart of every citizen [Jeremiahs 31:33].¹³¹ As one pastor intuited, “Jesus didn’t die and was resurrected so much to get us into heaven as to get heaven into us.”

At least allow our imaginations to wander joyously through the possibilities that could await us in Glory, even though such dreams are but a weak representation of what heaven is really all about [Isaiah 64:4].¹³² But we do have something to study based on the Beatitudes, because it is impossible to imagine a heaven without them profiling every citizen of such a kingdom.

A Story of Heaven

What might heaven be like? As believers we imagine the most welcoming atmosphere of love and in the interest of putting “meat on the bones” we embellish the story with thoughts of meeting Christian friends and family who have preceded us there, of being back in youthful form with perfect health, and, of course, being in a place where evil cannot survive. The best part of it all is meeting the resurrected Jesus. In this regard, it is worth our time to study the Beatitudes not just as a way of life for believers in this world, but as descriptive of the life to come. We know this because the first Beatitude and the last are promised to those

130. John Peter Lange, *The gospel According to Matthew* (U.S.A: Seventh Printing, 1980), vol 8, page 39

131. But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

132. For since the beginning of the world *men* have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, *what* he hath prepared for him that waits for him.

who live this message following the Savior: “Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” [Matthew 5:3 & 10].

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was correct concluding, “When Christians are finally perfect, they will all manifest all these characteristics fully; but here in this world, and in time, there is a variation to be seen.”¹³³

I wish now I had recorded a relaxed talk I gave one Sunday in a home for assisted living to a small group of elderly believers from a spattering of different protestant faiths. None of these differences matter anymore at this stage of life; it is as if we have passed into a quiet phase which has hushed all of yesterday’s doctrinal debates that once separated us from one another. Perhaps, that part of memory is no longer firing the synopses of the hippocampus of the brain—and I, for one, am thankful to God if that is how He created us.

Once Upon An Eternity

I wish now I had recorded my talk on an overview of the Beatitudes to them; for, they knew what I was saying. It was as if I saw the approval in their eyes, or if they disapproved, I kept seeking that approval knowing that therein lay the real meaning to what I wanted to say. (We don’t give the saints in the chairs enough credit for their part in a great sermon.) This story begins with our Lord’s promise: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” [Luke 12:32].

Imagine a kingdom ruled by a benevolent king who has chosen to treat all his subjects equally [Galatians 3:28]¹³⁴

133. D.M.Lloyd-Jones, Introduction

134. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

as family and friend [Romans 8:23]¹³⁵ rather than servants [John 15:15].¹³⁶ They are not slaves for they willingly serve their master. They are all members of His household [Ephesians 2:19].¹³⁷

We might consider them servants in the sense that they serve each other, they submit to each other in order that this service might be real and not mechanical. But there is no rule, no law, no ethic, that decides who does what [Galatians 5:22-23].¹³⁸ They simply care for one another and respond to that concern without reservation or fear of rejection.

What is further remarkable, their needs are overcompensated for by the abundant generosity of the king [Romans 8:32],¹³⁹ so, service to one another takes on more a need for fellowship, togetherness, belonging, ... love, than a need for natural provisions. There is no money and no market; there is no audit or record keeping for purposes of equity. None is needed.

There is no division among them. There is no class or race distinctions, but we might imagine that because God is a God of infinite variety, they will all retain the outward features that have made each unique. They will be given glorified bodies, immortal and incorruptible and each a

135. we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption

136. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his lord does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

137. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

138. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

139. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

personality that tells all of heaven, “*This is me. I am here!*” But they will all be holy, purely holy [1 John 3:2].¹⁴⁰

They serve their king with a spontaneous personal interest. Even before he asks, they know His will and desires. His requests of them are always in their interest as theirs are in His; so, His kingdom has no word for selfishness, no word for pride. In fact, because of this special relationship between Him and them—and for that matter, among all of them—there is no deception, no trickery, no lies, no arguing or fighting or cursing [Zephaniah 3:13].¹⁴¹ It is such a relationship that an entirely new vocabulary is required to describe it [2 Corinthians 12:4].¹⁴² Let me explain further.

The kingdom is built on one overriding principle: a humble dependence solely on the king [Matthew 5:3].¹⁴³ No one, as a result, is possessive of things they are privileged to enjoy. In fact the concept of ownership is a strange one since no one claims anything as their own [Acts 4:32].¹⁴⁴ There is no greed, no want at all [Psalm 23:1].¹⁴⁵ It is as if each member of this kingdom has such a heart to share they recognize what they have is immediately shareable. What makes this work, it seems, is because no one seeks a personal advantage. In our present world white picket fences, “welcome mats,” drawn curtains, property deeds, among other things are nothing more than a border between people

140. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

141. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid.

142. unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

143. Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

144. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

145. The Lord is my Shepherd; I will not be in need.

who live there and others who must not trespass. None of this has meaning in the kingdom of the King of which I speak because everyone has their needs met exclusively by the king.

I had to ask, Is there any sadness or sorrow here? And the answer surprised me: Not in terms of pain or hurt, no tears [Revelation 21:4]¹⁴⁶ —but there is caring [Matthew 5:4]¹⁴⁷ and a kind-of empathy, everyone knows how to be spontaneously caring. The servants in His kingdom continue to care about one another, for there is no abusive talk or bullying or ridiculing or belittling. There is no confrontation or adversarial behavior, no competition. And one might ask how could anyone live like that? Well, there is individualism. Citizens recognize each other because personality differences are real but are welcome. There is no need to develop discipline or teach duty or responsible behavior [Isaiah 35:8].¹⁴⁸ (In fact, I saw no children there. They were all grown.)

Humble people care and caring people tend to seek to please rather than confront. I think the Bible word is meekness or gentleness [Matthew 5:5].¹⁴⁹ (Close enough.)

Since the King has provided a kingdom in which servants can live this way, Each servant, as a result, desires to please their king and that means pleasing each other. If there were one place where growth is suggested, it would be here: they are always hungry to know Him more and to

146. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

147. Blessed *are* those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

148. And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it *shall be* for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*.

149. Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

serve Him more by serving one another more [Matthew 5:6].¹⁵⁰

What makes this work is a kind of love for one another which—as we already noted—is not selfish. For want of a better word, we say they are a merciful people [Matthew 5:7],¹⁵¹ a people in community who seek the comfort of others over themselves. It somehow works in His kingdom. What makes this work is best described by a biblical phrase: *pure of heart* [Matthew 5:8].¹⁵² They have no self-interest, no deception, no ulterior or personal motive in all they do for one another. Their heart, their love, is pure. It is not alloyed with any kind of greed. His servants are transparently honest.

Needless to say, this kingdom is a kingdom at peace [Matthew 5:9].¹⁵³ In fact every member of the kingdom (not some) are called peacemakers, not in the sense of policing, (there are no courts, no divorce, no war) but of living in peace [Micah 4:4].¹⁵⁴

And joy! Oh, such an untouchable, unchangeable, undying joy! [Matthew 5:12]¹⁵⁵ All this sounds so banal, almost boring for a human nature that is always itching for a fight. But His servants are not aching for a fight. Their joy and happiness cannot be described simply in terms of such selfish behavior. It is, as the apostle once said, unspeakable

150. Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

151. Blessed *are* the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

152. Blessed *are* the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

153. Blessed *are* the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

154. they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make *them* afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken *it*.

155. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad

and full of glory [1 Peter 1:8].¹⁵⁶ Perhaps this joy is the fuel that ignites their passion and love. Or is it love that brings such happiness.

A Pure Happiness

Some would interpret Jesus' words to mean that our happiness as such awaits us when this life rolls over into the next, that Jesus is admitting following Him postpones any such joyous celebration of love, but is that what the Beatitudes really mean? Jesus asked them to herald the coming kingdom, this their sole message [Matthew 10:7],¹⁵⁷ and this kingdom starts *within* them! How can we only await such happiness when God sets up His eternal kingdom but not experience happiness as regards the kingdom which is within?

Is there a sense in which each "blessing" associated with each Beatitude is something we can experience here and now? Does not our Lord, through the Spirit's ministry, comfort us now when we mourn? When Paul asked the Philippians to be "likeminded" as Jesus [Philippians 2:2] he was speaking of how consoling, comforting, loving, and merciful our fellowship [follow-ship] with Him should be. One can easily read into Paul a description of the nine Beatitudes: *If there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies fulfill my joy... [Philippians 2:1-2].

Yes, in heaven, in the coming kingdom, all this happiness will overflow the cup, but in this life [2

156. Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

157. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Corinthians 5:5),¹⁵⁸ believers get to experience the *arrabon*, which Thayer calls, “both a foretaste and a pledge of future blessing.”¹⁵⁹ In the Beatitudes happiness is both awaiting us and should be ours now as well!

And what about the word “Blessed”? We might dig deeply into a study of words like, joy, blessing, and happiness, in both Old and New Testaments, but let me take the shortcut found in the “*Theology Dictionary of the Old Testament*.”

Regarding the return of the Israelites from Babylonian exile, we read, “[The] evidence will hardly allow one to deny a connection between [happiness] and the ... Second Temple. It was probably the pilgrimage and the return ... [that] makes the believers “happy,” thus explaining the [word].”¹⁶⁰ After seventy years, the grandchildren of the original exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall and the Temple. Some of older men accompanied them and when the foundation to the Second Temple was complete, they wept for joy [Ezra 3:12-13].¹⁶¹

Happiness is following Christ

We can appreciate David’s acclamation, “Blessed is the man [Oh, *happy the man*] whom You chose, and cause to approach

158. Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a down payment.

159. Thayer, page 75.

160. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al. *Theology Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing, 1979), page 446

161. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

unto You, that he may dwell in Your courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, even of Your holy temple" [Psalm 65:4]. Many have experienced such a moment of sheer elation over something long awaited with great anticipation (like a soldier returning from the war or the announcement of the conception of that first grandchild).

When our Lord returns, Paul told the Thessalonians, "He will descend with a shout" [1 Thessalonians 4:16]. For want of a better word since eternity has begun, it is [time] for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. ["with the voice of the archangel" Paul wrote] Gabriel turns to John who is recording this and instructs him "Write this down! Blessed [Oh! *How happy* the children of God] ...which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

If not at a wedding of a loved one who found the perfect match, what about the birth of a child? "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy *is* [Oh! *How happy*] the man that has his quiver full of them...." [Psalm 127:4-5].

What is happiness? You tell me. A study of the Psalmist's idea of happiness is a worthwhile study [Psalm 33:12]¹⁶² which leads us to understand that there is a purer pleasure in some experiences that thrill the heart, push worry aside, and cause our feelings to dance!

Perhaps, we better ask: which would you prefer, a happiness that lasts for the moment until changing circumstances cause it to dissipate like cotton candy, like an ephemeral mist against the morning sun. Or let us follow Jesus and find our happiness in the pure pleasure of getting to know Him and experience His love!

One thing, though, Professor R. C. Trench, lecturing on the importance of the study of language in the history of thought, remarked, "...words often contain a witness for great

162. Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the LORD; *and* the people *whom* he hath chosen for his own inheritance.

*moral truths—God having impressed such a seal of truth upon language, that men are continually uttering deeper things than they know...*¹⁶³

Feelings in Gear

The group we are members in as believers? We are the children of God which is something we should value above any induction into any other society. “If you can’t get happy about being saved [as a believer],” Jimmy Swaggart, the evangelist remarked, “your happiness is out of gear.” We are indeed blessed! We indeed should be happy.

Happiness is a feeling and feelings should not be driving. They are passengers. A search for happiness will never be successful because happiness is incidental to right decisions and wise choices. For the believer, happiness comes because we are following Christ.

When we seek happiness for itself, we are really seeking the pleasure of the moment. Pleasure is exhausted in the happening. And an appetite for pleasure, confused as a search for happiness, may lead to an addiction—chasing our own tail.

Feelings are “in-the-moment” creatures (and this is not unknown by the tempter). And we tend not to think beyond them at consequences. This is a problem a good conscience and good life-decisions can help us with. For believers, a solid prayer life and Bible reading should help us see warning signs when we are tempted to rush into the moment without praying things through.

For the believer, following the sermon on the mount as Matthew outlined our Savior’s teaching, works to engender a happiness, not sought for itself but as a by-

163. Richard Trench. *On the Study of the Words Lectures* (New York: W.. Widdleton, publisher. Unknown), 56.

product of service to God, that is satisfying and makes praise and worship genuine and real. (The word “glad” in Matthew 5:12, ¹⁶⁴means to leap on the inside with joy.)

There are eternal benefits attached to each Beatitude—to be sure: theirs is the kingdom of heaven; they shall see God and be comforted and shown mercy, etc. But looking forward to these promises is not the source of happiness. Spiritual poverty and the rest of the beautiful attitudes profile the follower of Jesus and their happiness.

Lord, grant us to be believers who see our happiness as the product of our piety and service to You. Amen.

164. Be happy about it! Be very glad!

The Kingdom Within

While speaking to a group of octogenarians, I enjoy talking about the Beatitudes in terms of the Kingdom which is to come [~~Luke 12:32~~],¹⁶⁵ but to subsequent generations, the

165. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

166. nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.

167. I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

168. D.M.Lloyd-Jones, Introduction

169. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

<p style="text-align: center;">A Study in The Beautiful Attitudes, Character not Conduct</p>

These attitudes come as a package—all or nothing, which shouldn't sound strange to us, knowing God [James 2:10].¹⁶⁹All believers are meant to live them all.

It is reasonable to, therefore, conclude that “each one

[of the Beatitudes] implies the others"¹⁷⁰ and they are all collectively, therefore, "a disposition that is produced by grace."¹⁷¹

172. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

173. Gaebelein, vol 10. page 338

174. Ibid.

Believer Happiness in a Postmodern Age

I wrote a small booklet a couple years ago on what following Jesus is all about. This present work becomes my third pass through Jesus' timely instruction on following Him. I retired that work in lieu of this current one. That former publication was written initially as a day-dream of mine: to pastor such a congregation. I brought forward the fondest memories I had over the years of various congregants who exemplified each Beatitude. Even though I focused on one Beatitude with each testimony, it is correct to say all the Beatitudes will always be on display where one is in a believer's life.

The Beatitudes speak to an inner spiritual character, a life being transformed into the image of Christ [2 Corinthians 3:18]¹⁷² which suggests to me an ongoing work of the Lord within a believer's life. "The glory is displayed not outwardly on the face, but inwardly in the character."¹⁷³ The Expositor's Bible Commentary explains this as a "progressive transformation of the Christian's character" by

175. D.M.Lloyd-Jones, Introduction

the Spirit.”¹⁷⁴

The Beatitudes speak to an inner spiritual character, a life being transformed into the image of Christ.

Metaphorically speaking, some may find themselves looking at the mountain top from the valley below. It seems such a difficult climb and yet the Beatitudes are a description of life at its peak. The Beatitudes displayed within a believer’s life are the work of grace. None would disagree. We can affirm with Dr. Lloyd-Jones, “The Lord Jesus Christ died to enable us to live the Sermon on the Mount,”¹⁷⁵ This much we know.

Our prayer should be, Lord make me:

1. More conscious of Your provision and less self-reliant, (Mt 5:3)
2. More prayerful and less critical (Mt 5:4)
3. More of a servant’s heart and less feeling entitled (Mt 5:5)
4. More wanting to be Your instrument and less getting my own way, (Mt 5:6)
5. More wanting to help others and less self-serving,

176. 3 “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him

4 God blesses those who mourn,

5 God blesses those who are meek,

6 God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,

7 God blesses those who are merciful,

8 God blesses those whose hearts are pure,

9 God blesses those who work for peace,

10 God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,

11 “God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. **12** Be happy about it! Be very glad! ... And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

(Mt 5:7)

6. More truthful and less self-deceived (Mt 5:8)
7. More reconciled and united and less divisive and partisan, (Mt 5:9)
8. More courageous to witness and less fearful and intimidated, (Mt 5:10)
9. More like Jesus and less worldly (Mt 5:11)
10. More joyful and less of a grumbler and complainer (Mt 5:12)¹⁷⁶

(See, not so crazy.)

The Heart of The Matter

Although there are places in the Sacred text where the choice of words are less demanding, especially in ongoing narrative, here in the opening salvo of the Sermon on the Mount it is most likely that Jesus was careful to detail those characteristics that once developed, spiritually, equip His followers to face the world they must minister in.

The Good News must be represented—as only good news can be—with an undying hope, an enduring peace, an unconquerable love, an unquestioning faith, and an unquenchable joy.

177. Matthew 6:19-20 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20** But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

178. James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

The ultimate test of a disciple's commitment and dedication to the Lord is their ability to represent the Good News—as only good news can be represented—with an undying hope, an enduring peace, an unconquerable love, an unquestioning faith, and an unquenchable joy. But reaching this level of commitment is a journey into the Beatitudes.

Destitute

This is real Christianity. There is no greater testimony or witness. Life has become a spiritual not material journey. God commissions us to have a heart that treasures heavenly things over what can be accumulated in this life.¹⁷⁷ We are living our lives in the light of eternity.

Sadly, much of a christian's interpretation of happiness, in our civilized world, may still reason we are entitled to a thousand blessings and advantages from God as a product of our faith. We see blessings in material terms or natural terms or as something acquired in this life, not as an eternal asset.¹⁷⁸ Our sight is fixed downward, like chickens in the barnyard, only on the moment, only on our immediate need. To follow Jesus we need to raise our sights higher.

There are desperate times and times when critical need takes us to the edge and as we cry unto the Lord He does hear us. But those who have a true spirit of poverty don't cry "unfair." Even when life is good, we affirm our total dependence on Him!

Poverty is destitution. Poverty of spirit is sensing our total need of God. And this has implications for our attitude and our prayer life.

179. My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not stumbled.

180. The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him;

181. .J. P. Lange, vol. 8. page 102

As believers we need to forget about what's fair or unfair. If God is overseeing our lives and directing our footsteps (Psalms 17:5;¹⁷⁹ 37:23)¹⁸⁰ to feel entitled or to assume faith should provide what we decide in our distress is appropriate tosses the word *unfair* in God's face.

Poverty of spirit is, therefore, a giving spirit rather than a desire to accumulate blessings. Poor in spirit is a willingness to accept one's own need to meet another's first. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity [2 Corinthians 8:2]. The Poor in Spirit do not grow anxious about their "treasures on earth" [Matthew 6:19]. The poor in Spirit don't need to worry about provisions. God provides daily [Matthew 6:11]. Their hearts maintain a Kingdom consciousness [Matthew 6:33].

Poverty of spirit is a worldview, a way of seeing life—if I can be so bold to say—*through God's eyes*. "Mourning" takes on a different meaning and value to these believers.

A Tearful Start

Scholarship defines mourning: A grief that so possesses one's

182. Jesus wept

183. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

184. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

185. My sacrifice, O God, is[a] a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

186. Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the Lord. "These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.

entire being that it cannot be hid. Mourning is an activity of the heart—to be sure. “This state of mind is explained by the poverty in spirit from which it springs.”¹⁸¹ John Peter Lange tells us.

Lord, give us those who mourn for the lost—not just who shout praises at the thought of the final judgment. Give us hearts that cry for others, that help carry the divine burden for Your creation. Amen

Now that I have that out, let’s look more closely at this “blessing.”

Grief cannot be hid, we really mean to say, “should not be hid.” Persons who live with unresolved bitterness and those who see themselves boastfully above tears, will suppress grief to their own psychological harm. The poor in spirit know how and when to allow the tears to flow. (John 11:35)¹⁸² They know the value of expressed grief.

Those who mourn are not professional mourners nor are they living a mournful life. They are burden bearers who know that grief must be expressed, not hidden or suppressed, who know the value of tears. (Acts 20:31;¹⁸³ 2 Corinthians 2:4)¹⁸⁴

When the scripture calls them blessed, it is a blessing in mourning, not a blessing that is anticipated once the tears cease. The blessing is not eschatological or referring to when God will wipe the tears away. There is an immediate value in being able to express tears, healing tears, tears that come with pray, tears that begin to release us from burdens otherwise too heavy to bear, tears that move the heart of God. (Psalms 51:17;¹⁸⁵ Isaiah 66:2)¹⁸⁶

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit

187. Take up a lament concerning the princes of Israel

188. Verse 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

himself intercedes for us through wordless groans [Romans 8:26].

There is a blessing when one is expressing *God's* heart. Mourning in this sense is foundational to any calling. Without knowing the heart of God, we only know the mechanics of ministry. (Ezekiel 19:1)¹⁸⁷ In a civilized world, ministry has become more—to use C.M.Ward's phrase from the "Revival Time" broadcast from years gone by—"too much administrated, too little led." Following a divine vision is following a divine burden, something Ezekiel's prophetic work could not make clearer. We want a more direct voice in the decision process and we want reason and logic more than faith to energize the vision. But God's way has always led through a valley of sorrow, as the Psalmist reminds us (Psalms 23)¹⁸⁸ because this world is a sorrowful place since Adam and Eve left Eden and it is impossible to intellectualize pain. ...nor should we.

These are Christians who know how to carry God's burden with Him, who know how to pray, who are at liberty to cry, who know that grief is inevitable and the healing process begins when we learn that mourning is a part of it. These are Christians for whom praying is not just words but tears as well, not just a public display but at times burdens which cannot be uttered, not the mechanics of chosen phrases or just rote repetition but real heart. Their poverty of spirit is in tune with God's great heart of love. They prioritize a time to pray together for the needs of others and for whom "*pray without ceasing*" (I Thessalonians 5:17) is not a riddle but a way of life.

Why mourn when the age of science has replaced the dark ages of ignorance? Before there was science, there was 189. Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

manual of His creative genius. And God never proposed that science replace prayer because the reasons for prayer, for God wanting to commune with us and share His heart, remain undiscoverable by the laws of science. The burden remains for the poor in spirit to mourn the lost of Eden until the seraphim lower their flaming swords and God once again opens the way for our return. We call it a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1),¹⁸⁹ and until then our happiness as believers will remain the benefit of a prayer life that mourning has called us to.

Our tears become a living, healing stream
To cleanse our hearts of what He disapproves,
To free our faith of what things falsely seem,
To learn the special way His Spirit moves.

God always hears our agony of soul
He cares; for, broken hearts He will restore.
Our tears bear witness God will make us whole—
The language of our tears and nothing more.

Sometimes our tears are not our own but His;
The burden of our Lord we gladly share.
What's hidden from our view but clearly is—
Our silent tears embracing Him in prayer.

190. Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the The New Testament* (London) 1880. p. 153.

191. *ibid.*

192. *ibid.*

193. I Peter 3:4

Dying Ambitions

Knowingly or not, a believer's desire through prayer to empathize with God—impassioned about the very things that are on His great heart—is the first sign of meekness. But there is another quality that needs the spotlight first: humility, because there is no meekness without humility.

Meekness in scripture presumes a humility that scholarship teaches "is an acknowledgment not merely of sinfulness but of creatureliness, of absolute dependence, of having nothing, but receiving all things of God."¹⁹⁰ And adds, "it is only the humble heart which is also the meek"¹⁹¹

These 2 terms, humility and meekness, are not just words and I might venture to say, they are not words whose meanings come easy to us. They join a treasury of Bible terms that, as we learn: "Revelation has given ... a depth, a richness, a fulness of significance which they were very far from possessing before."¹⁹²

Meekness is a gentle spirit, to be sure. Wives are enjoined to converse with their non-believing husbands in a gentler tone as the expression of a quiet spirit, an inner calmness, a heart at rest, in the knowledge that God alone can draw them to Himself. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.¹⁹³

But we must dig deeper: If humility betokens a total

194. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

195. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

196. But I will leave within you the meek and humble. The remnant of Israel will trust in the name of the Lord.

197. Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the The New Testament* (London) 1880. p. 153.

dependence on God, meekness is the passion to be all that, a disposition to rely absolutely on God's wisdom and strength. (Ephesians. 4:2;¹⁹⁴ Colossians 3:12;¹⁹⁵ cf. Zephaniah. 3:12)¹⁹⁶ . The meek are resigned to follow Christ. It is in their spiritual DNA to do so, to submit to His voice and leading. We are, after all, the sheep of *His* pasture.

“[meekness]... is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercises of it are first and chiefly towards God (Matt. 11:29; James 1:21). It is that temper of spirit in which we accept his dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting;¹⁹⁷

There is in meekness an intentional desire to follow Christ. The one possessing it proceeds with spontaneous abandonment to His will. It becomes a natural interest of the meek to serve the higher cause of God, either through insight into His Word, or simply by the peaceful acceptance of who they are becoming in Christ. They are in love with Him and want to follow.

Sadly, many christians show a wild side to their nature, a militancy which they justify as an apologetic defense of the gospel. The Gospel is empowered to represent itself, simply in the sharing of it. One thing is sure: wild is not meek.

May we be among those whose poverty of spirit and mourning for the lost reflect a gentler conviction that does not feel the work of God needs swords and battle cries. Believers who do not boast of victories against other believers, who do not think that love must be hard and uncompromising. May we be people of God that can forgive offense with such spontaneity and immediacy that our acceptance of one another is unassailable and our unity

198. John 6:63, 68 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. ... Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

indisputable.

May we cherish peace over all other virtues. May we practice “*a soft answer turns away wrath*” (Proverbs 15:1) especially among fellow believers. ...foremost realizing that in prayer victory is achieved. May we with focused and unreserved intent follow our Savior even in the hard decisions: to carry a cross or turn the other cheek or go the extra mile or sell all first, because it is the natural thing to do, because it is the christian thing to do, because it is the only thing to do.¹⁹⁸

There is an old hymn, now long forgotten. Rumor has it was written by a young man who died soon after he penned it: “The Vision.” It was found in an old Assembly of God Hymnal. The chorus captures the meek heart best:

Take me, Master, break me, use me. I am leaning on Thy breast. All ambitions fast are dying; from their pain now give me rest.

An Inspirational Feast

“Righteousness” is a term of relationship: doing “right” by one another. I have to include *fairness, sweet reasonableness, compassion, love*. If it is a passion to know the Word of God, it is a passion to practice it in relation to others.

These are persons passionate about learning, but it’s not about studying the Bible as an intellectual exercise or being schooled in theology. These are persons in a hurry to be like Christ, to follow Him. They hunger and thirst to be righteous; they desire to live the Word of God. And it makes sense to find these persons described here because they are, indeed, the meek.

Lord, may I walk, like Enoch walked,

That You would merit praise,
A holy walk, impassioned heart,
To follow in Your ways,

It is one thing to theologize over the Word of God and still another to apply it to life. It is one thing to debate the message with people whose beliefs differ from our own and still another, together with them, to discover the Bible as a life changing message.

Hunger and thirst means wanting to take in more than give out. These words describe someone who is doing the listening far more than the talking.

We must allow ourselves to see the Word from this perspective as instructions for living, to find meaning to life as we hunger together, as we ask our Lord the questions through our dialog and await the move of His Spirit through group sharing for a scriptural reply.

Lord, bring to an end theological discussions that disrupt harmony. May our Bible studies become spiritual support groups. Give us a fellowship that answers a joint passion to apply God's Word to life's situations and watch it present solutions. Amen.

I tire of people who already know what I need before I do. I want to be with people who allow me room to discover for myself how God's Word answers my quest to be closer to my Lord and closer to His people. I want to be part of a fellowship whose faith feeds mine and I, theirs, as we reread and restudy and rehearse the message.

I want to be a part of a group that would never think of arguing down the Word or explaining it away as

199. Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death

something culturally out of date or unscientific or part of an ignorant past. Together we see the relevance of God's instructions and commands. We see learning in biblical history. We see today in an ancient record.

I want to be part of a group that has no theology to feature, no denomination to promote. I want to be in a group that will take a chance at a possibility that we do not know yet all that is to be known, that we need to stay hungry and thirsty. I want to share with a people who are open to new interpretations of truth, open to change, open to hard lessons, and open to challenges. I want to be with people who are open to being wrong and open to correction.

I want to be in a group where we all recognize from the start that we are all at different places in the journey and our Lord alone is leading. It is a group that does not criticize or analyze one another's shortfalls, mistakes, or missteps.

I want to be with people who are sensing their own spiritual poverty and are carrying a burden to get back to full, Eden-level, fellowship with God. These are persons predisposed to follow, which is what meekness is, wherever He leads and are now desperate—nothing is more important to them than—to learn Christ and to be like Him.¹⁹⁹

No Frills Service

These are a giving folk. They don't give advice. They don't seek to be in charge. What they give is of themselves. They

200. Jesus would heal the sick, as an example. Matthew 20:30 Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

201. Romans 9:15-16 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

want to share the love of Christ in tangible ways.

The force of the New Testament word for *mercy* is the *act* of showing it. It is more than compassion or a feeling of pity. Showing mercy in Jesus' day included alms giving with the Savior's caution that it be done anonymously not for public recognition—if we want the act entered in the Divine record or chronicled with angelic applause. (Matthew 6:1-4) These believers do not need this advice; it comes naturally to them. They find a way to assuage the suffering of others.²⁰⁰

Mercy is another word for *grace*.²⁰¹ In our Old Testament, as a matter of fact, the word *grace* leaned too far toward showing favor and could be seen as a quid-pro-quo; so, the prophets and later writers replaced the Old Testament word for *grace* with the word *mercy*. It is that big a word!

It isn't possible to hunger for righteousness, to desire to live the Word and to be like Christ without wanting in the next moment to show mercy! Mercy, in the Biblical sense, *is* a righteous act—is *the* righteous act. Think of Jesus' life and ministry which climaxed in that final breathe on Golgotha with the supreme act of mercy. I don't need to tell you other than to point out the next size in an enlarging Christian heart of love is mercy in action.

May we be a people quick to share our resources—not just money—with those less fortunate and in need. We must put such a value on giving that we fail to see the benefit in enlarging our own borders, of spending time or

202. Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

energy on personal comfort—beyond what is reasonable for life and safety. May we prioritize others, may we empathize and weep with those who weep—oh, to be His hand extended! Make me an instrument, Lord, of Your mercy. It's as simple and straightforward as that! May we resolve to take no ownership of things we know belong to God. Lord, may we abhor greed and repulse hoarding what can be distributed to others in need of those things. Make us a people who cannot imagine a “blessing” or being happy in the acquiring of things, a people whose individual and collective happiness hinges on giving to others as God's Word enjoins them.

A Pure Heart

Luke 6:20-26²⁰² is said to be a second account of this sermon on the mount but with some marked differences. Luke's record is more naturalistic. He does not speak of the poor in spirit, just the poor. And those who hunger, they do not hunger after righteousness; they simply hunger. Reference to a pure heart is missing from Luke's account. What are we to make of this?

Matthew was there that day; so, perhaps, his recollection is more complete. And maybe Luke's source is interpreting Jesus' words in a more temporal setting—this should remind us of Jesus' warning to his disciples to beware the leaven of the pharisees. They thought He was talking about bread not doctrine. Is it possible Luke's account is how

203. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

204. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

205. Kittel, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol III, Pg 425

Jesus began His comments and Matthew saw them in a spiritual sense? Possibly Jesus' mentioning the poor led to a discussion of being poor *in spirit*. It opened the door for the Savior to reveal the spiritual side of a follower's life. And now Jesus mentions *purity of heart*.

Purity of heart, by scholarly reckoning refers to moral purity. If this is saying that our happiness as believers is directly related to our living free from sin—and that rings true—it is more logical than instructive, more future than now (I John 3:2)²⁰³ since we are not there yet.

I am asking: is a pure heart possible in this life?

Jesus' thoughts seem to be future (eschatological). In this life we are poor and persecuted and hungry (well, some of us) but our happiness is on the way. Christ is bringing it with Him. This sounds a reasonable interpretation but I have been maintaining—and I am not alone—that our happiness can be found *in* the poverty and *in* the hunger and even *in* the persecution. (Acts 16:25)²⁰⁴

It is not simply poverty but poverty *of spirit*. It is not hunger for food but hunger for *righteousness* we seek which holds the secret to a believer's happiness. All this should be happening in *this* life for reasons, I hope, I delineated. With a *pure heart* we have arrived at a secret to our happiness as followers of Jesus that might be overlooked if we conclude that our happiness is only future on Christ's return. Purity of heart necessarily does follow being merciful. It is explained in this context.

206. Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,

207. "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

208. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

According to the scholars: “It [a pure heart] consists of full and unreserved self-offering to God”²⁰⁵ Pure in heart is pure in motive. It is a transparent altruism. A pure heart is a pure conscience without ulterior interests or hidden intentions. And to be this pure, they must be doing what they’re doing “as unto the Lord,”²⁰⁶ The merciful are not giving to others for personal recognition or praise. There is a sense in which their gifts are not primarily to the beneficiary of their benevolence; they are giving of themselves and resources *to God*. (Matthew 25:40)²⁰⁷ Jesus is taking us 1 step beyond the natural expression of alms giving. He is uncovering the hidden reality that for His followers no act of mercy is just an isolated act of kindness. It is always done *to*—not just for—Him and that is how it is a pure, unselfish, “*separated-unto-God*” act of the *heart*. It has to be said or done from the heart, not through duty or coercion. (But you knew that.)

It follows, therefore, that in talking about giving to the needy Jesus should indelibly impress upon His followers that no expression of christian love goes unnoticed and unrewarded if it is done unto Him, if it is the outward sign of who we are becoming in Him, if it is “Christ in us” (Colossians 1:27)²⁰⁸.

Lord help us perceive the hidden reality behind everything we do and say. It is Jesus to and for whom we are saying or doing it. May we see that the spoils of Egypt were taken for God’s service, the Tabernacle, and not as personal gain. Israel’s contributing their gold and silver to overlay an altar or build a Menorah, was the most sensible and reasonable thing they could do. It made sense at last why

209. Luke 16:12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?

210. 2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

211. Romans 14:8

they carried such things in a wilderness. These things were for Him! They gave to the Lord.

Lord, help us see the New Testament, the new covenant, the christian, application of this truth. Make us followers of You who know with an unshakeable conviction that what we possess (even our ability to love) is not ours but Your property held in trust.²⁰⁹ May we be a people who know that giving to others is giving back to the Lord with interest what He has invested in us. Teach us, Lord, the secret of happily focusing on Jesus as the recipient of our love, He who loves us in return. May we rest in the truth that we are giving to You who has given us all things necessary to live for You.²¹⁰ We realize that we are not asked to love others but to let Christ love others through us. Amen.

If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.²¹¹

212. I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

213. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

214. Kittel, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol II, Pg 419

215. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

216. and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

217. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,

218. Kittel, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol II, Pg 419

Peace at All Cost

Believers who see their blessing in terms of every opportunity to give of themselves in service to God, are believers who know the value of reconciliation, forgiveness, unity, and making peace. There is no part of Christ or His mission that calls for dividing God's people into opposing liturgical or doctrinal camps. To prove this statement wrong, one must find 1 scripture that supports disunity. But the New Testament is replete with references on unity. [John 17:23;²¹²Ephesians 4:3]²¹³ instead. Peacemakers are called "*sons of God*" because, as scholarship explains: "*they are like Him.*"²¹⁴

The word *peacemaker* (not just peacekeepers) is only found here in this Beatitude, recalled by Matthew, and nowhere else in our New Testament. And although *peace making* is not used here as a euphemism for personal evangelism—that would be a ministry of reconciliation [2 Corinthians 5:18]²¹⁵—Paul used the term to describe Jesus' ministry [Colossians 1:19²¹⁶; Ephesians 2:14-15]²¹⁷ which we herald when we evangelize. We have so few verses for such an important truth, but do we need anymore emphasis?

"*The reference,*" says scholarship, "*is to those who disinterestedly come between two contending parties and try to make peace.*"²¹⁸ This is an amazing statement I do not recollect ever preached. And I think this sad.

So far: if I am interpreting correctly what Matthew recalls about Jesus' sermon on the mount:

1. *Poor in spirit*: True happiness begins when a believer realizes how destitute they are without God. They realize that this life is a passage way to the next and

all things have a spiritual significance.

2. *Those who mourn:* They have taken to heart God's concerns and burdens realizing that carrying these is true communion with Him.
3. *The meek:* They find themselves more and more desirous of giving God His way in their lives.
4. *Who hunger and thirst to be righteous:* They are passionate about living and experiencing God's Word in relation with others.
5. *Who are merciful:* They find themselves growing closer to the Savior's heart toward all need: physical as well as spiritual.
6. *Who are pure in heart:* Which leads to the revelation that anything they do in God's will for others, they are really doing for Jesus.
7. *Who are peacemakers:* They realize that Jesus' prayer for oneness among them is now their prayer which releases the power of the Gospel in their lives for effective witness.

Peace becomes an indelible principle printed on each heart, where reconciliation with each other when necessary is prioritized over every other concern, where revival means true repentance and unity is diamond hard and uncrackable by all the demons of hell. Peacemakers know with clarity of conviction how Satan devises wedges of doctrine and ritual between believers and our love for unity is far too strong for him. Peacemakers cannot be coerced or lead or deceived or

219. Isaiah 54:17 no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD.

220. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

221. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

driven or made in any other way to go to war against any other lover of Jesus. No weapon formed, means *no* weapon²¹⁹: no word, no dogma, no denominational position, no disagreement, no argument, no belligerence will be sufficient to even suggest disunity. Our hearts ... chained together by the strongest, unbreakable, bond of christian love. And Jesus' prayer is answered: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" [John 17:21].

Happy Hunting

The word *persecuted* means actually to be *hunted* — like a deer on the first Monday after Thanksgiving in the woods of Pennsylvania. It doesn't imply being ridiculed or belittled but speaks of the *pursuit* by those who are relentless in their quest to destroy our ministry and silence our message.

And we should be happy about this!?

222. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

223. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

224. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

225. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

Absolutely, but on a higher level of enthusiasm that sees another reality at work behind this scene. In verse 12 we are encouraged to “jump for joy” but we will get there when we get there. Here, let us see what is really happening on a spiritual plain above the faltering plans of those who would put out our fire by pouring oil on it. [Acts 8:4]²²⁰

It is the peacemaker that is being pursued—a critical point to make up front. God’s peacemakers are “in” the world but not “of” it [John 15:19].²²¹ Peace has given the peacemaker a different worldview, a different perspective on their circumstances that reveals the true and unseen battle [Ephesians 6:12;²²² John 16:33]²²³ that is on a spiritual level in a spiritual realm.

We must be aware that the first person a peacemaker has made peace with is *themselves* and that peace stems from their peace with God [John 14:27].²²⁴ Peacemakers don’t blame themselves or past sins for their “woes.” They do not see persecution as a result of a thousand mistakes. They *know* they are forgiven. They are at rest, at peace, within their world, within themselves, and with the people of God. And this peace is foundational. Without peace, their woes are painfully magnified. Persecution would increase the stress level and not give them a sense of God’s blessing in it.

Without peace among God’s people, they are all alone. But there is strength in numbers, in fellowship, in unity and faith is made stronger. Persecution supports this

226. But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

227. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

228. fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

unity because God's people tend to circle the wagons [called prayer: Acts 4:29]²²⁵ when they share a common threat to their peace. When the stress of the pursuit is elevated, believers at peace will have a song in the night like Paul and Silas had in a prison cell—and at midnight. [Acts 13:50-52²²⁶; 16:25]²²⁷ Being blessed or happy takes on new meaning.

Because God's grace is God's grace, persecuted believers are brought to a deeper conviction about the Truth they hold in trust. The spiritual message was once a confusing sermon note and hard to believe in a cacophony of materialistic and hedonistic worldly voices. Now, through persecutions, Christ's instructions make more sense because now they are learning the "*fellowship of His sufferings*" [Philippians 3:10]. God's people when persecuted can see beyond the trial [Hebrews 12:2].²²⁸ And those worldly noises begin to fade into unimportance, no longer a temptation to discard the cross they bear.

What believers in a "free" society need to see is that the society is not as free as the word suggests. The world is the world and persecution comes in many shapes and sizes. Believers live among non-believers who can and have redefined the norms of the societies they share. Issues arise that inflame the difference between them, so that, in one form or another, believers find themselves under verbal, if not physical, attack for what they believe. And because society is evolving, the children and grandchildren are affected in ways the older generations never were.

Persecution is real, but so is the blessing! We should be believers whose hearts are at peace with God's will for our lives, who as a result, when persecuted, do not fight fire with fire but with silent prayer and a powerful witness. ... believers who are not influenced by social pressures, who are

229. In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

230. The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master.

immune to cultural changes that would compromise our message or commitment to God's Word. ...believers who have been through hard times and whose faith has not only survived but flourished, who have learned to sing God's praises and worship Him through adversity. ...joining the small band of David's warriors—only, men and women who know how to fight spiritual battles in prayer.a people that know how to hold each other's arms up—in a spiritual sense—while the battle rages, who cannot be tempted to retreat into socially comfortable and acceptable lives, just because the armor of God seems heavier or the opposition frightening or the battle too long.

Living Up to the Vision

Persecution is not the only attack on our vision. We are falsely ridiculed as well—as was Jesus [Matthew 27:44].²²⁹ While on the cross, His enemies accused Him of false claims and not living up to his promises. The word *revile* means they *cast it in his teeth*. The constant stress of the hunt has been elevated now to verbal assaults and we are to count this a blessing!?

Well, yes. As long as they hear the gospel message and as long as this assault is due to following Jesus. (Matthew 10:24)²³⁰ An assault on us, the servants of Christ is an assault on our Lord, Himself.

What isn't obvious is that verbal abuse as a consequence of our witness in the Gospel message is intrinsic to a believer's happiness. It isn't the ridicule, sarcasm, contumely, mockery, derision or insolence, poking fun at our faith, that makes us happy. It is seeing the advancement of the gospel on which our happiness hinges. We need to settle the matter in our understanding that in a postmodern world we are going to be laughed at. Our message seems unscientific, a fantastic piece of insane hope,

when we claim Jesus is alive again after a cruel death for our sins. Secular minds have built a worldview based on evolution and science that leaves no room for miracles. Our Bible is picked apart by scholarly minds that have called the scriptural narrative a myth and our theology a compartmentalized ideology to support our religious ritual but with no bases in reality. And we are not educated enough—most of God’s people—to debate these matters.

May we be believers whose faith is unmoved by the gainsayers. ...a group of believers who live the gospel message, who wear the condemnation of modern society as a badge of courage and honor, and whose commitment to following Christ is not a compartmentalized or ritualized belief but a way of life.

—~~At an installation~~ service for a young pastor, the 231. Matthew 25:21

in like manner, must hold tightly to the Truth. We do not evolve. The gospel message will always be relevant above culture without socializing away its power. Our outreach is a practical expression of who we are and what really drives our priorities. True christian witness has not lost its dynamic influence and its ability to impress the world. What worries the postmodernists: just maybe, there is something to this christian thing and it is not just ritual.

Redefining Happiness

Persecution and verbal assaults invite us to be alumni in good standing in a very special “graduating” class. Among us are Paul, Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, all the prophets and apostles. ..and, of course, Jesus.

Think about it this way: We are proud social creatures that need group identity and we have picked the group we

wish to be invited into.

Persecuted and martyred saints are members of the most prestigious roll ever assembled. And when I, for one, read about the “cloud of witnesses” the writer to the Hebrews listed (Hebrews 12) I want to associate with them; I want to relate to them; I dream of my membership in that society. Such a membership would make me the happiest!

I want to hear Jesus say, *“Well done, my good and faithful servant.”*²³¹

The Disciple's Practicum

The Beatitudes are not an ideal; they represent the heart of every disciple. *The Story of Heaven* was presented earlier in this work to suggest that Heaven will become the ultimate fulfillment of the Beatitudes in us: “we shall be like him;” [1 John 3:2]. Said another way: there can be no place for us in His heaven until His heaven is also in us, “the kingdom of God is within you” [Luke 17:21].

Jesus summed all this up with a comparison that His disciples could appreciate: “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” [Matthew 5:20]. Righteousness is living right by God, but God has made us part of a community, a fellowship, of those who follow the Savior. So, one cannot talk righteousness without talking relationship. The detailed outlined of this the Savior broke down into a discussion of relationships: how we treat a brother [Matthew 5:21-26], a spouse [Matthew 5:27-32], even the “law” [Matthew 5:38-42] and ultimately our enemies [Matthew 5:43-48]. And all relationships are necessarily built on “truth.”

I wrote in my work, *Calvary*. “Calvary transforms our

232. John H. King, *Calvary*, (Lulu Publishing Co., 2021, page 205

233. Bonhoeffer, page 136

234. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people...

235. One of our sons spent a few days camping out with his friends without a change of clothes. The “filth” that was on those clothes reminded me of the stench from a stagnant pool of water. This might best describe how “detestable” I found those garments which his mother dealt with... not me! [Job 9:31]

way of thinking about this life, about priorities and what is important, about suffering, about our relationships: with our enemies (Matthew 5:44), and friends (3 John 1:5), our family (Romans 8:15) and above all, God (1 Peter 2:9). Jesus redefined for those who follow Him what is reasonable (Matthew 19:21) and what brings happiness (Matthew 5:3-12). He took us from the world and placed us inside a community of like-minded believers (1 John 1:3, 7).²³²

Jesus was never content to define a disciple by his actions but by the condition of his heart.

The remaining words of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is a ~~practicum~~ [the supervised practical application of previously 236. Bonhoeffer, page 138

God's Word are built on "Truth" As Bonhoeffer ably summed up Matthew 5:33-37 about swearing an oath, "...the oath must go, since it is a protection for the lie."²³³

As already pointed out, a pure heart is a heart not alloyed with any lies. Paul spoke of the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" [1 Corinthians 5:8]. We cannot overemphasize or overstate the fact that God "hates" lies. They cannot get into His heaven and they must be purged from the heart of the believer in an absolute and total sense [Titus 2:14].²³⁴

Listed in Proverbs 6:17 among the seven things God finds detestable²³⁵ is "a lying tongue." There is no way to clean this up. Heaven can be defined as a place of pure truth, openness, honesty, transparency, no deception, no lies. Satan, who is the father of all lies [John 8:44] is banned from entrance both in God's heaven and our hearts. The heart of all the Beatitudes is "truthfulness" upon which all the others depend. Bonhoeffer concludes, "the commandment of

complete truthfulness is really only another name for the totality of discipleship."²³⁶

It is on the tree of this simple fact we now can hang all the other points Jesus made on the mount in His sermon because here Jesus exposes the reality of our relationships, what they are and what they must be, as followers of Christ. It is in this way, John can affirm, "If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? [1 John 4:20].

Stated simply: Jesus was never content to define a disciple by his actions but by the condition of his heart.

237. I have called a few politicians these things and that is why I study the Bible instead of listening to the news media. But in my defense I said such things in the heat of the moment but found myself wishing (and even praying) the best for them when they agreed with me.

238. Gaebelin, vol 8, page 149

The Brother [Mt. 5:21-26]

A murderous heart speaks violence and not love. This attitude has nothing in common with the Beatitudes or a follower of Christ. Jesus could not make the point clearer, but does it happen in stages? Anger without a cause [Matthew 5:22] followed by denouncing a brother as a nobody, a life empty of meaning and purpose, and lastly, a fool (Greek: a moron) without learning or intellect and useless.²³⁷

Is the use of the word "brother" speaking of a brother-in-Christ, another believer? Or is Jesus using a general term meaning anyone and everyone? The Expositor's Bible interprets, "this suggests that the Christian habit of calling one another "brother" goes back to Jesus instruction, possibly part and parcel of his training them to address God as Father."²³⁸

I won't hold you to this definition for a simple reason: If we have an outgoing, caring, Beatitude kind of attitude towards fellow believers, how do we turn this off while talking about a non-believer? We have only one heart. It is either pure or not. We care about others and are prepared to pray for them and let the light of Christ shine through our lives ...or no. There is no off and on switch ... or, their ought not be. If we can so easily distinguish between someone we befriend, even on the belief that they are as we, Christian, and then, speak hatefully about another, we need to, at least, become self-aware and, for conscience sake, ask how love and hate, light and darkness, can exist together in the same heart.

Either our witness is spontaneous or mechanical, either flowing from love or orchestrated; either organic or

239. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

organized. "Out of the heart the mouth speaks" [Luke 6:45] and the Beatitudes open a window into that heart. There is no academic study, no college degree program, or course, on the Beatitudes that can put in the head what God has to put in the heart. If there were such "training," it would speak to a justification or salvation by works and not faith. The Beatitudes profile the followers of Christ, His disciples and these Beatitudes are empowered by *grace* not will.

It is interesting that most versions of the Bible in Matthew 5:22, talking about being angry with a brother (or sister) disciple, do *not* include the words "without just cause." This seems comparable to reading a description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:5: "love is not *easily* provoked. The word "easily" is not there in the Greek text. Somehow it sounds more reasonable to say "love can be provoked but not easily" or "we can be provoked to anger but only if our cause is just." Yet neither represents what the Bible really says.

I understand that efforts are occasionally made to make what appears too harsh a statement more palatable and reasonable sounding. And might the word "to be angry" mean "to be provoked to wrath" which suggests the "brother" incited such violence? This is where it all starts with the question, "who threw the first punch?" Jesus won't let this drop. It must be resolved.

If they end up in court, anyone claiming to be Jesus' follower will stain their witness since Jesus would never condone such behavior nor would we ever hear of Him being so litigious [Matthew 12:19].²³⁹ We must as followers represent our Lord, as the Expositor's noted, "The picture is ..one of ... gentleness and humility ["meek and lowly in

240. Gaebelein, vol 8, page 286

241. Fritzsche, Commentary on Romans, ii., p. 304; cf. Rückert, Magazin f. Exegese u. Theologie des N. T., p. 27ff. cp. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3404/nkjv/tr/0-1/>

heart“, Matthew 11:29] and a presentation of His messiahship which is neither arrogant nor brash.”²⁴⁰

**By this shall all men know that we are His disciples ...
love**

But, you argue, He called pharisees names, hypocrites, whited sepulchers. Yes, but that was exposing truth and not spoken in an enraged spirit of self-defense.

Such anger can lead to using deletable expletives like “Raca!” (We can say this here because we are not directing such a pejorative at anyone.) Raca is a local word in Jesus’ day similar to the Old Testament word for “worthless.” Such a public outcry against another is defamatory and this could end up in court. If a simple verbal fight is a mark on one’s witness, how much more would this become if we are dragged before a judge.

But things can deteriorate quickly from here. Some have reached into their hearts and found the derogatory, “fool!” Now if you are British, you are probably wondering, “What’s the big deal?” “The Orientals, in accordance with their greater excitability,” informs Christian Fritzsche, “are accustomed both to feel and to profess love and hate where we Occidentals, with our cooler temperament, feel and express nothing more than interest in, or disregard and indifference to a thing”²⁴¹ To call someone a fool—and no doubt in the public square because we tend not to show discretion in such times—it is, according to the Greek word, calling them imprudent, godless, incapable of forethought, without learning, and so forth. Jesus cannot see such

242. And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

verbalized, selfish and personalized, outrage belonging to a follower of His. If we have such an emotional outburst and wield the sword of the tongue, don't be surprised that Jesus agrees with His half brother, James, that it is set on fire of Gehenna, and that is where the real danger lies [James 3:6.]²⁴² Say what you will about Gehenna but Jesus selected this word for this topic about the Beatitudes and in His sermon here. It is not something He would speak lightly about!

Jesus summed this all up for us: "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary delivers you to the judge, and the judge delivers you to the officer, and you are cast into prison. Verily I say unto you, You shall by no means come out thence, till you have paid the uttermost farthing." [Matthew 5:25].

How else can we simplify all this? "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one to another" [John 13:35].

The Spouse [Mt 5:27-32]

The Lord revealed through Malachi, "... I hate divorce!" says the LORD, the God of Israel. 'To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,' says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. 'So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife'" [Malachi 2:16].

The Greek Scholars in Alexandria, Egypt, interpreted this to mean "If you hate your wife and put her away [divorce her], says the Lord God of Israel, then ungodliness covers your thoughts. Take heed to your spirit...."

The translation I knew from my first Bible: "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hates putting away:

243. whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

for *one* covers violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.”

Spousal faithfulness and devotion is a serious matter with God. If a couple feel their marriage is in jeopardy and they want to reconcile, take it to the Lord. He’s on your side as a couple! All translations correctly recognize Him as the Omnipotent One, the leader of the Armies of Heaven, which makes Him a powerful ally! Apparently, a marriage in distress is in God’s plan and purpose worth fighting for!

The Hebrew has an interesting play on words. The phrase “to deal treacherously” means to wear a garment covering over one’s real motives and thoughts. This includes a self-deception when, as Jesus pointed out, this man has his eyes on another not his wife [Matthew 5:28].²⁴³ In fact, the Hebrew is alive with this metaphor of covering over [true feelings and thoughts] because at the same time this man’s wife has been wearing the covering of his violence toward her. Emotional violence and abuse can be worse than physical.

But a man may argue, “You don’t know the woman I am married to.” Self-justification in wrong doing reads like a string of bromides: “we have nothing in common; we fight all the time; she is insensitive to my needs but I’m suppose to care about hers; she accuses me of not listening, not caring ... so frustrating. I can’t take much more!” And then there is the “other woman” Jesus spoke of which this man speaks admiringly, “You should meet her, pastor. She understands me; We work together; so, she seems to know without explanation what is important to me. ...And have you seen her!! She is a “looker.” I’m sorry, God can’t mean that I have

244. Evans, page 99

245. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

no right to some happiness." Oh my! "Happiness" is the right word. Happiness is what following Jesus, living the Beatitudes, is all about. Any believer who fails to see this must talk to the Lord about it; for, it is in their best interest to do so.

Dr. Lenny Evans wrote *"Love, Love, Love"* as a testimony to what God shared with him in his effort to become more spiritual, closer to the Lord. He wrote, "Could it be that all God really wanted from me was for me so to love Bette? [His wife]. It seemed utterly and ridiculously simple and frankly not theological enough. Truth is innately simple but was not this too simplistic? No countering arguments appeared out of the text. Everything I read seems to suggest that God wanted me to love my wife and my children in the same way and to the same degree that he had loved me."²⁴⁴

We live in a postmodern world where divorce is common—even in the pews and even in the pulpit! We now have social acceptance for gay relationships as well as single parenting, casual relations (I trust you know what this means). No one, it seems, any more comes into marriage a "virgin" (dare I say it). Society has endorse polyamorous relations and so much more that not even the Bible talks about! We live in a world that has failed to appreciate the relationship God made sacred, hallowed, on creation week: one man and one woman in a henotic relationship [the two shall be one]. It is this relationship that describes in a humble but meaningful way the relationship between Christ and us [Ephesians 5:31-32].²⁴⁵

Where does this put God's feelings in Malachi? How should we understand Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount? The Lord, through the prophet, tells a man to "guard his spirit." Just a few verses earlier, God gave this warning, "lay it to heart" [Malachi 2:2], but it has been, perhaps, in the immediate interest of many, under the strong influence of such compelling thoughts and feelings, to "spin" God's

words. But, Rumpelstiltskin, the hay of a man's unfaithfulness cannot be spun into the gold of God's Word. Such a man is simply not being truthful with himself as well as with his spouse, And truth in its purest form, God's Word, is a prerequisite for a follower of Christ.

To bring the point home, Jesus suggested amputating the right hand or gouging out the right eye to defuse such a temptation [Matthew 5:29-30]. That ought to do it! However, why the "hand"? I understand the "eye" and if it were me [and it is *not*] my left eye is practically useless to me. I read and see out of my right one; so, yes, that should do it for pornography [again ... *not me!*]. But why the right "hand"? Scholarship interprets the Savior to be referring to what a man sees and *does*.

Happy is the man who loves his wife

Don't lose sight [no pun intended] of what Jesus is talking about: following Him as one of His disciples! And again, purity of *heart* [Matthew 5:8] is an absolute requirement. We are to be holy as His Father is and no deception is allowed—that's absolute!

But now I must comfort so many men who might become concerned reading this. And I must dissuade so many woman who are enjoying what I am saying but shouldn't be [Matthew 5:4]. What part of the Beatitudes does *not* apply here? Poverty of spirit in a marriage means a mutual submission and love [Matthew 5:3]. A broken Christian marriage is a burden for God we should share in ..in prayer [Matthew 5:4]. If we are hungry to be righteous [Matthew 5:5], our hearts will learn from God's Word and

246. an eye for an eye

247. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

“being merciful” [Matthew 5:6] means we are not seeking to abuse or hurt through self-justification and fault-finding. Aren’t we all glad that God didn’t kick us when we were down? Make peace! [Matthew 5:9] and see if God can recover the joy you knew when first you met. Man! Your wife was the woman of whom you once spoke so admiringly.

Okay ...I’m done.

The Law [Mt. 5:38-42]

There were two scriptures that suggested that for God, and therefore, for Jesus, the Biblical term, *vengeance*, carries more the idea of “a fair judgment” instead of “getting even” [lex taliones].²⁴⁶ In Leviticus 26:25 our Lord spoke of avenging His covenant with Israel, which Jesus understood to mean that the Covenant would be “fulfilled” in His death [Matthew 5:17].²⁴⁷ On Calvary God “judged” sin.

When the Lord talked in Leviticus 26:25, of executing “*the vengeance of the covenant*” little doubt He knew that to keep His word according to the covenant He would have to indict a nation now guilty of breaking their word, breaking covenant. This has to be what Jesus meant in Matthew 5:17 in fulfilling the Law and not abolishing it. To discard or nullify the covenant He made through Moses, which included the commandments, would mean not to honor His own Word and God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19). To bring about a New covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33) He had to first honor the Old one by recompensing

248. cp. Kittel, vol II, page 174

249. Ibid. page 443

250. New International Version

disobedience—someone had to make payment for sin. Scholars call this a punishment and because it is God's decision, He recompenses the sins of the world accordingly, and He did that through His Son on the Cross.

Vengeance with God is another word for judgment. To the Roman believers Paul asked, "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)? God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?" [Romans 3:5-6]. Scholarship admits with some intellectual reluctance that in Leviticus 26:25 the use of the word judgment, according to the Greek translation [the LXX] best translates "vengeance" here.²⁴⁸ On this word the Theological Dictionary says, "vengeance is replaced by [a] judicial process."²⁴⁹ The problem for us, occidentals, is that we see vengeance as a vigilantism, something outside law and not the exercise of law. But a covenantal God is acting within covenantal agreement. Sin must be "avenged" which Jesus did at Calvary.

A verse that came late to the party was 2 Corinthians 7:11 where Paul commended the Corinthians for dealing decisively with the sin of incest within their church. He was, the NIV²⁵⁰ comments, joyous. There was a lot of feeling that went into his approbation, "...what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what *revenge!*"

The Amplified reads, "...what longing [for righteousness and justice], what passion [to do what is right], what readiness to punish [those who sin and those who tolerate sin]"

Perhaps, unintentionally but under inspiration, Paul

251. The New Living Translation

252. I am not suggesting we defund our beloved police departments. When a society leave God, they are the only alternative solution.

253. And I will give them one heart, ... And I will make an everlasting covenant with them

also gave God's vengeance a context in this verse, 2 Corinthians 7:11, when he put it in the neighborhood of words (using the NLT)²⁵¹ like: earnestness, concern to clear or vindicate oneself, indignation (a passion to deal decisively with all sin), alarm, longing, and zeal—all pointing to a "readiness to *punish* wrong," or to make things right.

To apply Paul's commendation to God, let me use his words about the Savior: "Behold, [*Jesus*] you were in pain for God's Work. What sense of urgency you exhibited, what an apologetic, what indignation for what is right to do, what respect of God's will, what passion and zeal and vindication of God's Word [vengeance]. In every way without sin you presented yourself Your Father's Servant at Calvary."

If we use this to interpret Leviticus 26:25 God vowed in conversing with Moses to make things right between Himself and His people and not by tossing the Covenant to the curb. He would keep His word in fulfilling the Old Covenant in judgment and then replace it with a New one, written on the hearts of His people.

"Dearly beloved," Paul admonished, "avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" [Romans 12:19]. Only God knows how to bring an end to sin. A thousand social workers and police officers are not the answer on our city streets to bring an end to violence.²⁵² Calvary is the answer! This easily agrees with Jesus, "You have heard ...an eye for an eye, ...but I say, 'resist not evil'" [Matthew 5:38].

With a disciple of Jesus, the new Covenant, which is the final one (an everlasting covenant), is a matter of heart not law [Jeremiah 32:39-40].²⁵³ With His followers the law of Christ written on the heart by which God rules in the

254. J. P. Lange, vol 8, page 118

255. Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect

Kingdom of Heaven is not litigious.

Being “compelled” to go one mile we are enjoined to be willing to go further. This might be understood in the legal sense of a government official requisitioning your service to deliver an official message somewhere. But, for a disciple of Christ, it doesn’t have to be so limited in meaning. “The word is used here in a more general sense, referring to a traveler who exacts under the stress of necessity.”²⁵⁴

And if there is any doubt that Jesus is not restricting His comments to some legal matter, He adds, “If anyone asks you to lend them some money let him borrow from you [the word implies ‘at interest’]. Don’t turn away [let him owe you]” [Matthew 5:42]. This doesn’t sound so bad; in fact, it sounds like a good business proposition ...unless they don’t pay you back. And if I know anything about a disciple’s heart, repayment is not a necessary part of the deal. Jesus already has a response on His lips, “For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors [Matthew had been one] do the same?” [Matthew 5:46].

But what if they don’t repay the loan! Do we take them to small claims court? No! That is vengeful and we now leave the judgment, not to a jurist, but, to God.

And here is where we must live in this world as His followers. Followers of His must be like Him as He is like the Father [Mathew 5:48].²⁵⁵

The cross is the only power in the world which proves that suffering love can avenge and vanquish evil.

256. Bonhoeffer, page 143

257. Ibid. page 144

258. Ibid. page 145

Many believers will now think this too harsh because people even without real need will take advantage of us once the word is out that we have something we are willing to give away. We feel a smidgeon of self-defense in a legal setting, a contract or signed IOU, something, is a wise option. Even the reformers maintained there has to be a difference between a transaction that is personal or one that is enacted in an official capacity, maybe as a church officer. "It is obvious," Bonhoeffer admitted, "defenselessness only invites aggression."²⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer added, "There may of course be a legitimate place for such an ideal in the inner life of the Christian community, but in the outside world such an ideal appears to wear the blinkers of perfectionism, and to take no account of sin."²⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer's thought is this: Jesus is the one who vanquished evil through suffering. It looked as though evil had triumphed on the cross, but the real victory belong to Him. It is the cross we also carry as His followers, disciples, that justifies a heart that is non-violent, non-litigious. If we partake of His sufferings, we will also partake of His victories! Jesus is about ready to tell us to "love our enemies" which goes even further.

Yes, at times, we might be judged foolish by an eavesdropping world that saw someone abscond with our goodness, and like the 9 lepers who didn't return to thank Jesus for their healing, they revel in ungratefulness. As Bonhoeffer finally avowed, "The cross is the only power in the world which proves that suffering love can avenge and vanquish evil."²⁵⁸

259. If you greet your brethren only How is what you do extraordinary?

260. God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The Enemy [Mt. 5:43-48]

What makes a disciple of Christ different from others? They should be, and are, “extraordinary” Jesus asserted [Matthew 5:47].²⁵⁹ We are ambassador’s of His love to His creation, a world of souls for whom He died. How can we represent that love unless it is the driving force behind what we do and say? When it comes to loving enemies, I must let the apostles speak for me:

“Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not” [Romans 12:14].

“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men” [Romans 12:17].

Be like your Heavenly Father.

“Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” [Romans 12:20-21].

“When we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it [1 Corinthians 4:12].

“...not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing [1 Peter 3:9].

This is the gospel in action and it is powerful, indeed. And lest we missed the point: This is God’s love, not ours, but it flows out from us, as Paul explained [Romans 5:5].²⁶⁰ Reminds me of the testimony of one dear sister in Christ

261. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

262. Bonhoeffer, page 151

263. Ibid.

whose husband was less than loving toward her until he, too, found the Savior. In the meantime, she confessed, she served him “as unto the Lord” [Ephesians 5:22].²⁶¹ What she didn’t say, at the time, and perhaps didn’t even know, was this was the Lord, by His Spirit, loving him through her, enabling her by her faith to live her scriptural commitment to the Savior she was following.

Love and hate are engaged in mortal combat in our world, and we must prepare for this by living the Beatitudes and allowing the new heart our Lord gave us to rule our thoughts and feelings and actions. Bonhoeffer was properly referring to his day against Hitlerian tyranny but he sounds unnervingly current: “the time is coming when the confession of the living God will encourage not only the hatred and the fury of the world, for on the whole it has come to that already, but complete ostracism from ‘human society,’ as they call it. The Christians will be hounded [persecution] from place to place, subjected to physical assault, maltreatment and death of every kind.”²⁶²

I was told we would escape the great tribulation via the rapture! Yes, that is, we will not partake of God’s wrath, but this is man’s wrath. I like what Bonhoeffer is prophesying here: “Soon the time will come when we shall pray, not as isolated individuals, but as a corporate body, a congregation, a Church: we shall pray in multitudes (albeit in relatively small multitudes)...”²⁶³ We should be doing this now, practicing our faith in real ways; for, faith needs to be exercised like a spiritual muscle, lest it atrophy into a latent fear of an evil we have no reason to fear.

Bonhoeffer, in closing this fifth chapter of Matthew, waxed eloquent in review of all 48 verses. His word “extraordinary” used in verse 47 translated in the NIV as “doing more than others” became a trumpet blast for him. Because Jesus’ disciples are extraordinary, He expects far more of them than is considered reasonable by society’s standards. I think it safe to suggest the word “spiritual” here

or what pertains to the Holy Spirit's work in us: "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" [Romans 8:4].

The Rest of the Sermon

So much of what Jesus says in Matthew 6-7 has already been said somehow, somewhere, in an honest discussion of the Beatitudes; so, to avoid making this work a lengthy commentary on Jesus' words, we must depend on the works of others to go into depth on these chapters. But we will make a few comments.

First and foremost, yes, Jesus was different in how He approached life. We must resist the impulse to massage the language of His Sermon to mitigate the severity of His words or make Him sound socially more reasonable. Keep in mind that a postmodern world does not endorse a worldview that endorses suffering as an eternal benefit. Discipleship does.

264. The first possible reference to a "martyr" is a reference to a Shrine in the 3rd century.

Martyrdom

The noun “martyr” according to the dictionary means: a person who is killed because of their religion; the verb means to kill (someone) because of their beliefs.

I think the death of a believer (who by default is a witness for Jesus) is in the New Testament not so much of a deal (as we make it with our English word, “martyr”). The translation of the Greek word is always “witness.”²⁶⁴

The sting of death is gone [1 Corinthians 15:55] and in fact we don’t “really” die: “whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” Jesus spoke comfortingly [John 11:26]. 1 John 3:14 adds, “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters.”

A martyr is a witness for Jesus

The Biblical emphasis is on our witness never the glorious moment we escape this world for the courts of Heaven. We might add, that if you are a faithful witness for our Lord and continue to be so no matter the opposition to your faith, you are numbered among the “martyrs” in Hebrews 11.

I don’t believe there is any such biblical term as “martyrdom, as we understand the term, because in the Bible, the emphasis is on our witness. So, the phrase “the martyrs of Jesus” [Revelation 17:6] is more correctly translated: “who were witnesses for Jesus.” Following the Savior means identifying with Him in all the circumstances of life. It means allowing His interests to eclipse ours, His wisdom to out debate our understanding. It means perceiving life through His eyes and, most importantly, letting Him love others through us, letting our lives bear witness to His presence with us. That’s what the Beatitudes

have been all about.

Hidden in Plain Sight

Some memories seem to offer more than what was obvious at the time. We were riding north on the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike heading toward Wilkes-Barre and Scranton, enjoying an evening drive—probably, at the time, heading home toward Massachusetts. We had left the Lehigh Valley and were skirting the low hills of the Pocono Mountains when the city lights of Wilkes-Barre and then Scranton at night were straight ahead, nestled restfully in the foothills of one of the most beautiful places on earth in early Autumn.

It was then the verse came to mind, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” [Matthew 5:14]. If anyone had asked me, “Where is Scranton, PA.?” I would have simply said, “Head north on the Turnpike—You can’t miss it.” And the truth here is we, as disciples of Jesus Christ, cannot be hid, either. We are visible to all. Our lives, for good or ill, speak loudly.

I was surprised after four years of high school to read under my name in our yearbook, “No man was ever great except by divine inspiration.” The loudest thing I ever did was bring my Bible with me to school one year because Davey Wilkerson, the founder of Teen Challenge, shamed me into it one Sunday night. In school I was not outspoken and apparently in a quiet, unassuming way, students knew something about me I didn’t know about myself. And after graduation, I attended the State University for two years. One day riding the bus, I sat next to a former high school classmate, who turned to me and asked, “John, I thought you

265. Bonhoeffer, page 297

266. Isaiah 64:4, Our righteousness is as filthy rags.

were going to be a minister. Aren't you?" I never recall sharing that tidbit with anyone—not even myself!

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden!

But not long after Jesus taught this truth, He added about prayer, "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place" [Matthew 6:6].

How is it that we cannot be hidden if we are in fact hiding? We are keeping secrets with God from our world. We are not sounding the ram's horn, making the world look up and take notice of us, wearing our [here's a word] phylacteries, "to be seen" [Matthew 23:5].

I used to spend hours in prayer for my classmates. No boast here. God forbid. I was a kid who half the time didn't have a clue what I was all about, but this was my life my sophomore year on in high school. We are hid, but *Christ* in us *is not!*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer raised an interesting point, "God alone knows our good works, all we know is His good works."²⁶⁵ Our good works are hidden from us, lest we boast of our spirituality or our righteousness.²⁶⁶ "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ... 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me [Matthew 25:37, 40].

Even before I knew there were Beatitudes, a divine plan, for following the Savior through life, I was seeking God

267. John Stott. *Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Connect, 2000), page 34

268. Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

for the pure enjoyment of seeking Him! But I tell you this only to say with some well placed emphasis that this truth about our lives being hidden in plain sight is all about living the Beatitudes. And this becomes a very adult thing once we mature enough in Christ to realize this dynamic of our Christian walk. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" [Galatians 2:20].

The Lord's Prayer

Bishop Vincent Donovan was a Catholic missionary to the Masai in Tanzania. He admitted that the only prayer he ever taught them to say was "Our Lord's Prayer," a prayer we are all familiar with. After that, they were on their own talking to God. What is it about this prayer that it has become the centerpiece of every conversation on the subject of prayer? John Stott in his *Sermon on the Mount* study guide called it "A Pattern for Dynamic Prayer."²⁶⁷

I want to add only that it is replete with references to the Beatitudes. In fact, if one lives the Beatitudes, they need not recite this prayer because their prayer life will be this prayer! References to the Kingdom in this prayer and in the Beatitudes clearly link the two together as one. "Lord, may your Kingdom rule be in us and may Your rule be here on earth as it is in Heaven [Revelation 21:1]"²⁶⁸

The Beatitudes are all about our Lord's leadership. If we are not living them, the Lord is not leading us!

"Give us this day our daily bread" is a disciple's heart recognizing the extend of their poverty and dependence on

269. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

the Lord's provisions. "He commanded [His followers]," says Matthew, "to take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts" [Matthew 6:8]. One of my college teachers used to circle the globe regularly teaching on various mission's fields, When he began, he questioned whether this was what God wanted for him, voicing to the Lord his concern, among other things, the cost of the plane fare. The Lord spoke to his heart—he used to say, as sharp as a razor and as clear as a bell—"when you go on your own, you pay for your ticket; when I send you, I'll pay it." A fund was created to finance this ministry. (This was before "Go Fund Me" and the internet.). My college teacher didn't say how the money "came in." You already know the rest of the story: the money was there. Many such testimonies establish the absolute reliability of God's unquestioned faithfulness toward His disciples.

"Forgive us, Lord, as we forgive others" is the very quintessential expression of mercy. We knew that when He forgave us, as the follower of Jesus, we now live a life that is spontaneously merciful. In fact, if we have become forgivers, mercy flows from our hearts in every other expression of our witness [Matthew 6:15].²⁶⁹

"Lead us not into temptation" far from being puzzling because we know He would never do this, this prayer is always on our hearts: "Lord, I want to follow you; lead me!! But I ask you would help me when my faith is weak, when I must learn a deeper trust and I falter in fear. My faith is little but, Lord, you are everything to me." The Beatitudes are all about our Lord's leadership. If we are not living them, the Lord is not leading us!

"Deliver us from evil" recognizes that persecution is real and is poised to steal our peace and joy, if we let it but this is our prayer, Jesus is also praying for us, "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me" [John 17:11].

The "Lord's Prayer" recognizes God's supremacy in our lives as His followers. His "is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" [Matthew 6:13].

An Epilogue

There is much more encapsulated in this timeless message from Jesus to His followers that has been and will continue being studied. We will be forever unpacking more of its meaning to us, but what we do know, we must live! “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine,” Jesus spoke encouragingly, “and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. “...everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them,” He warned, “will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand” [Matthew 7:24, 26].

In the early days of pastoring down at the New Jersey shore I accepted a partnership with another painter, working with other contractors on new homes near the beach. I learned that many of these homes were “upside down,” that is, the living room and kitchen were on the second floor; the bedrooms on the first floor. Before they were built, pillars, like telephone poles, were driven into the sand until the builder reached solid ground and on these pillars the house was erected. The reason should be obvious to us, to keep the structure safe when the storms came. In Southern New Jersey the perfect storm was when an east wind blew with hurricane force during high tide. You never knew what you would see pushed along by the rapid flowing water down main street. We wanted these new homes to be sustainable.

Drive the pillars of a dependence on Him deep into the sand

The storm is coming that will fail the faith of the weak who

have built their future hopes on political ideologies or a trust in science alone, or social engineering to rescue a culture collapsing in on itself. This storm is beginning to blow.

For those who think that they will serve Him faithfully then, but there is no real need until then, be informed that following the Lord is learning to trust Him, developing a closeness in relationship. I fear that if we live our lives independent of His leadership, our faith will be too weak to survive. Like any lesson that requires living it to be learned, there may not be any last minute opportunity to identify Jesus' footprints in the sand.

I wish my reader would take serious Jesus' warning that only on the rock of His teachings, the Beatitudes, is a life safe! Drive the pillars of a dependence on Him deep, Cultivate a passion to serve Him. Develop a prayer life. Get in the habit of talking to God. Godliness has been defined as living life with one eye on God. Learn to care about others more than yourself, living God's truth and making peace.

When the storm wind blows fiercely about us and persecution is no longer just a theological concept, and our faith and happiness, very much depends on following Him, we will be doing just that.