

INTRODUCTION

Florida is going through a tough time during the recount. Some interesting bumper stickers have appeared on Florida cars. One of them says, “Welcome to Florida, land of the Million-Lawyer March.” Another one says, “If you don’t like the way we count, then move to one of the other 57 states.” Another one says, “This is what you get for sending Elian back to Cuba.” The capital city of Florida is now called “Tally-hassle.” Some Gore supporters wear shirts saying, “I’ve been Bushwhacked,” and some Bush supporters are sporting shirts that say, “Gore is trying to beat around the Bush!” Well, fortunately, Jesus had no trouble counting—and He didn’t beat around the bush! He was looking for twelve good men and He delivers some plain words in this passage.

Most of you have heard of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. It covers three full chapters in Matthew’s gospel account (Matthew 5-7). Today we are going to look at a similar sermon Jesus preached at a different time and location instead of a mount, He preached it on a “plain.” That’s why I’m calling it “Jesus’ Plain Sermon.” I want the word “plain” to have a double meaning. It was a message not only preached on a plain but it was plain and straightforward in its approach. First, let’s look at:

I. THE TEAM JESUS SELECTED (12-16)

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, He called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. These men were called both “disciples” and “apostles.” Do you know the difference?

A. “Disciple” means “follower”

Throughout history, great teachers have had students who followed their teachings called “disciples.” Plato and Aristotle had “disciples.” Jesus had hundreds of disciples besides the twelve. A little later, Jesus is going to send out 70 disciples. A disciple is someone who is interested enough to learn from a teacher. Later in this chapter, Jesus is going to say you really can’t claim to be a follower if you aren’t willing to *obey* Him. Throughout His three-year ministry, the number of disciples declined because of the demands Jesus made. Later He would say no person could be His disciple unless they were willing to “deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him.” So, out of this larger group of disciples, Jesus selected a special team of twelve. He “designated” them apostles.

B. “Apostle” means “One sent out”

The word “apostle” comes the Greek word, *apostelein*, meaning “to send out.” This was a special group of 12 men who were hand chosen by Jesus to go out into the world with His message. How many disciples were there? Many. How many Apostles were there? There were only 12 Apostles (capital A). Revelation 21 tells us the names of the twelve Apostles will be engraved on the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem. Of course, after Judas committed suicide, one of

the first things the early church did in Acts 1 was to “elect” a new Apostle; they chose a man named Matthias. We never read another word about Matthias. Later, Paul claimed to be an Apostle. When we get to heaven, it will be interesting to see if the name “Matthias” is there or the name “Paul.”

While there were only twelve Apostles (capital A), there is a spiritual gift of “apostle” which is the missionary gift. Missionaries are called and “sent out.” So there were twelve original Apostles but many others have had this missionary gift of apostleship (small a).

When you examine this group of twelve men, you notice none of them are famous or educated. Four were fishermen. Later in Acts, they are all called “unlearned and ignorant” men. Take heart, Jesus chose twelve ordinary men. At the beginning, most would have chosen Judas Iscariot as the one “most likely to succeed.” He was made the group’s treasurer. This was a group of different kinds of men. For instance, Simon the Zealot hated the Romans and anyone who worked for them. Matthew the tax collector who had been an employee of Rome was in the same group. Don’t get the idea these men always got along wonderfully. We see evidence they often argued and sometimes got discouraged. They were normal guys.

By most modern standards, Jesus was a human failure because He didn’t gather a crowd of thousands of followers, only twelve. 8 ½ percent of His group betrayed Him. Another 8 ½ percent denied (with expletives deleted) he even knew Jesus. On the night He was arrested, 100 percent of them ran away! And Jesus *knew* all this would happen when He called them! But still He spent time with them just loving them and teaching them and it finally paid off. Good news, folks. Jesus knows about your past failures. He even knows about your *future* failures—and still He calls you to be His disciple. Will you be a part of His team? He is still looking for ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Now, let’s look at:

II. THE TEACHING JESUS SHARED (17-26)

“He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.” (17-19)

These statements are similar to the Beatitudes in Matthew. The word “beatitude” is derived from the first word of each statement. In Latin, the word “blessed” is *beatus*. The word Jesus used is translated in Greek as *makaroi*, which is better translated “happy.” A recent poll asked thousands of Americans what they most desired and the #1 answer was, “To be happy.” When asked what they thought would make them happy the #1 answer was “I don’t know.”

Jesus is revealing our level of happiness in life is directly connected to our attitude toward life. We can call these the beatitudes, because they are “Attitudes that ought to be!” One of the differences between these beatitudes and those in Matthew is Jesus was addressing these statements to directly to certain people, instead of saying, “Blessed are the poor,” He is going to

say, “Blessed are *you* who are poor.” Let’s read them and then learn what they mean for us today.

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 men 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 fathers treated the prophets” (20-23) Now, Jesus gives four positive attitudes and then beginning in verse 24, He mentions four “woes” directly corresponding to these positive attitudes. See if you can connect the lines together: “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 all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.” (24-26). Do you see the parallels? Jesus ends the positive section by talking about how the true prophets had been treated and then He concludes the negative section by talking about how false prophets were treated. Let’s look at the divine attitudes to adopt and then we will compare them to the four dangerous attitudes to avoid.

Remember last week I told you the New Testament only contains two laws (Love God, love your neighbor), but it is full of spiritual principles? A principle is a practical concept directing your life toward godliness. This message by Jesus is full of principles, some good, others bad. First, let’s examine the positive principle in verse 20:

Divine attitude: Declaring spiritual bankruptcy produces fullness

Jesus says, “Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God.” In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Jesus’ statement applies to both spiritual and material poverty. He is saying you don’t have to be rich to be happy. Our culture equates happiness with riches. There is an attitude in America that your level of happiness is directly proportional to your net worth. America’s motto is: “money can’t buy happiness—but it sure allows you to choose your misery.”

There are people listening to me today who have plenty of money, but you aren’t truly happy. I know widows on a fixed income who know the joy of the Lord. Your bank statement does not determine happiness.

Happiness can only come when you understand you are spiritually bankrupt without the grace and mercy of God. It’s hard for us to admit it, but we must declare that, in ourselves, we aren’t worth very much. You say, “But I thought I was worth a lot to God.” You are, but that says more about the character of God and His mercy than it does about you.

Sometimes we think we are doing God a big favor because we are one of His followers. You must admit “God doesn’t love me because I’m important . . . I’m important because God loves me.” See the difference? To admit that outside the grace and mercy of God you aren’t worth much is being poor in spirit.

How much do you think a 40-year-old army shirt would be worth? If someone tried to sell you an old army shirt that had never been washed how much would you be willing to pay? A quarter? A dollar? Well, several months ago a person paid \$35,000 for an old sweaty army shirt, because the name “PRESLEY” was stitched above the pocket. It was the army shirt Elvis wore when he was inducted into the army and because Elvis wore the shirt, the value increased (in the minds of some Elvis people). Our value and worth is increased only because we are deeply loved and cherished by our Heavenly Father, without Him, we are worthless!

Now, skip over on your outline and let’s compare that to first woe. In verse 24, Jesus reveals the corresponding dangerous attitude to avoid:

Dangerous attitude: Confidence in wealth leads to disappointment

Jesus said, “Woe to you who are rich for you have already received your comfort.” Jesus was talking about the dangerous attitude that occurs when a person puts their confidence in their material wealth or in what they consider to be their own spiritual value in their eyes. Many people have placed their confidence in their own intelligence, or their own ability to make money. Jesus said any satisfaction you get from that kind of attitude only last during this lifetime, you might be comforted now but for eternity you will be disappointed.

Let me ask you today: Where is your confidence? Is it in the stock market? Is it in your job? Is it in your bank account, your retirement fund? Is your security in Social Security? After the first few days of confusion after the Presidential election, I was troubled and disappointed. But over the past few weeks as I have prayed about it and have read the scriptures, I have come to the place where I am smiling; I actually am enjoying it! Why? Because I think God is teaching us an object lesson. Since we are the leading world superpower, and such a prosperous nation, I think we have developed a national pride bordering on international arrogance. We have put so much confidence and hope in our political system, that when suddenly the rug gets pulled out from under our feet, Americans freak out. I think God is gently reminding us the only place we can put our confidence and security is the Lord God Almighty. I think He is trying to tell us to look at what is written on every currency bill and coin—and start believing it: In God we trust.

Jesus has two personal encounters illustrating these two principles. Let’s take the negative one first. In a few chapters we are going to be introduced to a sharp, young, wealthy leader. He came to Jesus and asked to follow Him. Jesus knew this young man was putting his confidence in his wealth, so Jesus said, “Go, sell all you have and give it to the poor, and then come and follow me.” The young man turned and walked away from Jesus, because he was very wealthy. Then Jesus said, “How hard it is for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (Luke 18:24) The man’s problem was not that he was rich; his wealth had become his god and he was putting his confidence in his riches.

The other illustration from the life of Jesus illustrates the positive attitude of being “poor in spirit.” In Matthew 15, a Canaanite woman confronts Jesus. This foreigner begged Jesus to come heal her daughter. At first, Jesus didn’t even answer her, but because she kept on crying and begging, He finally makes what most people think is a very un-Christ like statement. He says to

this woman, “I was sent only for the lost sheep of Israel.” (Meaning: “I didn’t come to help you because you aren’t a Jew). Then Jesus says something even stranger. He says, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” (Matthew 15:26) Now, did you catch that? Jesus is implying this woman is a dog! Now how would you react in such a situation? Most of us would have been so offended; we would have stomped off to the nearest ACLU office and would have sued Jesus for public slander!

But Jesus made those two statements with a twinkle in His eye, because, unlike the disciples, He knew what kind of woman she really was, a woman poor in spirit. Now if someone called you a “dog” how would you respond? In true humility this is what the woman said to Jesus, “you are right, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table.” (Matthew 15:27) Jesus used a word for dog meaning a little house pet, an affectionate word like “puppy.” In her reply, the woman used a word for a mongrel mutt. She was saying, “Even mangy stray dogs often get the crumbs that fall from the master’s table.” At her reply, Jesus said, “Woman, you have great faith, your daughter is healed.”

This woman was so poor in spirit she was willing to admit she was nothing but a mangy dog without the grace, mercy, and power of Jesus. That ought to be our own attitude as well. Our only hope is to declare our personal spiritual bankruptcy and throw ourselves onto the mercy of God. The next Divine attitude is:

Divine attitude: Admitting spiritual hunger leads to satisfaction

Jesus said in verse 21, “Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.” In the Sermon on the Mount, He says, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” Jesus was talking about possessing a deep spiritual desire for righteousness. People are hungry for the wrong things; that’s why they aren’t truly happy. People are hungry for happiness, for pleasure, for success, fame, or money. Jesus said the only way to be truly happy was to hunger for righteousness.

Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Let’s compare physical hunger with spiritual hunger. How would you describe a truly hungry person? That person is (1) single minded. If I were physically hungry, getting food would be the only thing on my mind. Being fed would be the driving force in my life. When you are truly hungry for righteousness, it becomes the driving passion of your life. A hungry person is (2) easy to please. If I was really famished and someone offered me a slice of bread, I wouldn’t complain that the crust hasn’t been cut off, or that it’s the wrong kind of bread; I would eat it gladly. In other words, a hungry person is not picky. If I go without food for an entire week, and you serve me a peanut butter sandwich, I’m not going to say, “don’t you have a ham sandwich?” Or “I don’t really like the color of this china, besides it’s not my favorite brand of peanut butter.” No, I’m going to eat it. A hungry man is a humble man. A person who is truly hungry for righteousness will not be picky, or a faultfinder, they won’t be a complainer; they will be humble in accepting whatever God gives them. Finally, a hungry person is an (3) active person. In other words, a hungry person is seeking food - and they will beg, borrow, or steal to get it. If I were hungry I would be actively seeking a meal. If you gave me a piece of bread, you wouldn’t have to open my mouth, place it on my tongue and massage my throat so I would swallow it. I would actively seek it and eat it; a person who hungers and

thirsts for righteousness actively seeks the face of God. Too many people come to church and sit with a “do not disturb” sign around their necks rather than actively seeking the life of righteousness.

Now, skip down to verse 24 to see the negative side of this attitude. Jesus said, “Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.” Remember, Jesus isn’t referring primarily to satisfying your physical hunger; it wouldn’t make sense in that case. It is a natural urge for us to be well fed. I believe Jesus is talking about the attitude that doesn’t hunger and thirst for righteousness. The dangerous attitude can be summarized as

Dangerous attitude: Self-satisfaction produces complacency

Have you ever had a good meal, and you push away from the table and say, “Ah, I’m full?” At that moment you aren’t hungry; you are satisfied. I believe Jesus is warning about an attitude in which a person is so “self-satisfied” they no longer possess a voracious hunger and thirst for righteousness. This attitude says, “I’ve learned enough, I’ve grown enough, I’ve served enough, there is no more for me to grow.” This produces a dangerous condition of spiritual complacency and apathy. When a truly hungry man sees a plate of delicious food, he gets excited. A self-satisfied person doesn’t get excited about any spiritual blessings. Their motto is “been there, done that, boring.”

Now, I’m not talking about being “satisfied in Jesus.” We rest in a state of eternal satisfaction with Jesus, who He is and how He relates to us. But we should never become satisfied in who we are; there must always be a constant hunger for more righteousness.

These contrasting attitudes can be illustrated by a story Jesus told in Luke 18. He talked about two men who went to church. One was a sinful tax collector, and the other was a self-righteous Pharisee. The Pharisee is a perfect picture of the first two negative warnings. He has confidence in his own goodness, and he is self-satisfied. In church, the Pharisee stood up and Jesus said he “prayed about himself.” That is, he even used prayer to talk about how good he was. In his prayer he bragged about the fact that he fasted twice a week, gave a tenth of his income to God, and thanked God he wasn’t like other sinners. On the other hand, the tax collector was so humbled by his sin he couldn’t even lift up his face, he could only beat on his chest in pain and cry out, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” Jesus said the tax collector went home justified, not the Pharisee.

With which one of the two do you more closely identify? Are you hungry for God? Are you single minded in your passion for righteousness? Or is your spiritual life full of dryness, dullness, and complacency?

In the third beatitude Jesus says, “Blessed are you weep now, for you will laugh.” (vs. 21) Here’s the Divine attitude:

Divine attitude: Expressing your pain can lead to laughter

Let’s go immediately to verse 25 to contrast that with the dangerous attitude. Jesus said almost the opposite. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.” Look at the flip side, the

Dangerous attitude: Inappropriate laughter kills true joy

Jesus was not condemning the use of laughter. He has plenty to say about living a life of joy. In fact in only two verses He is going to say, “Rejoice and leap for joy.” Remember, the word blessed means “happy.” This almost sounds like a paradox: “The way to happiness is to mourn.” Sadly, some people have taken it that way and have decided to live lives void of laughter and everything is doom, gloom, and despair—and it makes them feel holy.

I believe Jesus is referring to a certain kind of sorrow. 2 Corinthians 7:10 tells us there is a godly sorrow leading to repentance. Jesus is talking about a realization of our sin that produces sorrow in our lives. When you fully realize you are spiritually bankrupt, worth nothing without the grace and mercy of God, it will cause you sorrow but that sorrow is wasted if it doesn’t produce repentance in your life.

Do you know what made Jesus cry? Sin. Not His sin, because He was sinless. In Luke 19, Jesus approached the city of Jerusalem. He knew they did not recognize Him as the Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel and the Bible says Jesus burst into tears. When the Bible says Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, it uses a word meaning Jesus wept silently and a tear trickled down His cheek. But in Luke 19, the word means Jesus’ body was racked with loud sobs. The unbelief and sin of those people made the Son of God mourn and weep—that’s what Jesus is talking about.

Do you know the one thing that grieves my heart more than anything else? My own sinfulness. I know I’m saved and all my sin has been put under the blood of Jesus. But sometimes sins creep into my life and I have to get on my knees before God and confess them and repent of them. I don’t have to pray to be saved again—but to maintain my intimacy and fellowship with Jesus. Every Sunday before I preach I get on my face and ask the Holy Spirit to convict me of any unconfessed sin in my life. I am ashamed at my carelessness, my prayerlessness, and the hardness that sometimes creeps into my heart. I often weep over my spiritual laziness and sin. But then, there is the fullness of joy that comes from knowing He is faithful and just to forgive me and to cleanse me of all unrighteousness.

In verse 25, Jesus is warning against inappropriate laughter. Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes there is a time to laugh and a time to cry. A spiritually mature person knows when to laugh and when to cry. Remember, when Abraham told Sarah she was going to have a son in her old age? She laughed. It was the wrong time to laugh. God told them to name their little boy Isaac, which means “laughter.” Every time Sarah called Isaac to come in for supper she was reminded of the time when she didn’t really trust God.

It’s also inappropriate to laugh at sin. That’s the prevailing attitude in America. Everything is a joke. Our prophets have become the late night talk show hosts because they can make a joke out of anything. Most of you know there is a relatively small group of people called the “media elite” who plan and produce most of what we see and hear on television. Many surveys have shown

these media moguls have moral positions far to the left of mainstream America. Few of them attend religious services. They have proclaimed they use media to promote their moral positions. In other words, if you can produce a television show where everyone laughs at two homosexuals living together; it softens the blow, and changes the attitudes of many who don’t know or care what the Bible says about it. They will produce a movie portraying anyone who opposes abortion as a hard-hearted woman-hater. While they are at it, they will portray Bible believing Christians as homophobic Neanderthals. Do you catch the drift? If they can get America to laugh at sin, soon it won’t be called sin anymore. These media moguls have succeeded. The point has arrived in America when Christian morality has been replaced by any morality as long as there is tolerance. Bible-believing Christians are now seen as intolerant bigots. But that’s okay because Jesus predicted that is exactly what would happen. He addresses it in the verse 22.

In the fourth beatitude, Jesus said, “Blessed are you when men 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.” Wow, I like that! Here is the Divine attitude to adopt:

Divine attitude: Enduring persecution produces joy

Jesus promised those who followed His teaching would be excluded and rejected but that’s okay, because they rejected Him. One of the most powerful desires we have is to be accepted in a crowd; it’s especially tough on teenagers. They want to be a part of the “cool crowd.” They want to have someone to sit with in the school cafeteria; they want a crowd they can hang out with. That’s normal. However, there is a real danger in living the kind of life that is always seeking to win the approval of man. Jesus warned against that in verse 26 when He said, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you.” Here’s the negative principle, the dangerous attitude to avoid:

Dangerous attitude: Living for the praise of people is a wasted life

Now, of course, Jesus is not teaching you should live such an obnoxious kind of lifestyle that you make people hate you. His next line in His sermon on the plain says, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.” It all boils down to this question: Are you trying to please God or people in this life? If you live only to please other people, chances are you will displease God. However, if your driving goal is to please God, most people will not accept you because they do not accept God’s Word.

To me the greatest thing Jesus said in this entire sermon is found in the middle part of verse 23 when He said, “great is your reward in heaven.” Our popular culture lives by this concept: “You only live life one time, so make the most of this life—get all you can—experience all you can, because when you die, that’s the end.”

We know better. We understand there really is an afterlife. There is an eternity that is much more important than just the here-and-now. The 75 or 80 years you live this life is but a brief hiccup compared with the length and breadth of eternity. James writes, “What is your life? It is but a mist that appears for a little while and vanishes away.” (James 4:14). Tomorrow morning when

you walk outside, and breath, you’ll see a little cloud of water vapor - and then, poof! It’s gone. The Bible says compared to eternity, that’s how long our life really is.

CONCLUSION

In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus is giving us some plain principles. These principles don’t tell us *how* to become a Christian, they tell us how to live once we have decided to follow Jesus. He is telling us how to live a blessed, happy fulfilled life. He is warning away from the attitudes that destroy our lives; which set are you following?

The main distinction between people today is that some are working hard only for the rewards of this world. But they are only temporary. You can’t take any of them with you. Others are living for the rewards of heaven—and they are permanent! Someone once gave me a framed needle-point reading, “Working for the Lord doesn’t pay much, but the retirement benefits are out of this world!”

Heaven is a real place, and there will be rewards for those who follow Jesus. A few months ago an ad appeared in a major newspaper in the Real Estate Section. It made a lot of people stop and think. The ad had a headline reading, “FREE–BEAUTIFUL HOMES TO BE GIVEN AWAY IN A PERFECT CITY! Equipped with 100% pure water, No Electricity Bills, Perpetual Lighting, Permanent Pavement, Nothing Undesirable, Everything New, Perfect Health, Only the Best People as Neighbors, Beautiful Music, Free Transportation; Secure a contract Today for your Heavenly Home. Call John 14:2-3 “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

Have you made arrangements for your home in heaven?

OUTLINE

I. THE TEAM JESUS SELECTED (12-16)

- A. “Disciple” means “Follower”
- B. “Apostle” means “One sent out”

II. THE TEACHING JESUS SHARED (17-26)

A. Divine attitudes to adopt:

1. Declaring spiritual bankruptcy produces fullness (20)
2. Admitting spiritual hunger leads to satisfaction (21)
3. Expressing your pain can lead to laughter (21)
4. Enduring persecution produces joy (22-23)

B. Dangerous attitudes to avoid:

1. Confidence in wealth leads to disappointment (24)
2. Self-satisfaction produces complacency (25)
3. Inappropriate laughter kills true joy (25)
4. Living for the praise of man is a wasted life (26)



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes