

## The Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5-7

**Intro:** Someone asked me this week if Babylon will be rebuilt before Jesus returns? I replied, “*You’re living in it.*”

Part of your righteous anger, appropriate disgust and sincere depression about what is transpiring in America today; the way politicians treat each other, the way protesters act toward non-protestors, the cancel culture, etc., is because you were made to breathe clean air and not the rancid, polluted air being exhaled around you.

While we are concentrating on a global, physical pandemic, a more radical, dangerous and devastating pandemic is also occurring, one from which no mask or hand-sanitizer can protect you – a rising culture of shame propagated primarily through the Internet on social media. It is affecting every generation.

It is into that same kind of world – of Roman power and Jewish hypocrisy – that Jesus was born. And, in the midst of it, he stood on a hillside and declared his policies for a new world.

This is the first preaching ministry of Jesus. Up to this point, John is the only person to preach in Matthew’s Gospel. But John has been arrested and Jesus begins his preaching ministry on the Mount of Beatitudes.

Someone once criticized C. S. Lewis for “not caring for the Sermon on the Mount.” He replied,

*“As to ‘caring for’ the Sermon on the Mount, if ‘caring for’ here means ‘liking’ or enjoying, I suppose no one ‘cares for’ it. Who can like being knocked flat on his face by a sledge hammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of a man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure.” [God in the Dock, pp. 181-82].*

In other words, if you can read this, be unmoved by it and not come out on the other side of it changed, you are dead in sins or don’t understand it.

### **First: The Biblical Context**

God created humans with glory and honor

**Psalm 8:3-6** - *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup> what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? <sup>5</sup> Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup> You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet*

They were created as co-regents with God who were naked and yet unashamed (Gen 2:25).

But, sin shamed them and rightly so. They “lost face” before God and hid from him before they were banished from his presence.

In response, they created a generation of people whose ambition was to make a name for themselves.

**Genesis 11:4** - *Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves*

Ever since Eden, we have been driven to humanly devised mechanisms that attempt to recover our ‘glory,’ an honor that only God can restore. We do it, primarily by acting like Romans, and shaming others in an effort to honor ourselves.

*“If I can keep the spotlight on your sin, my sin will remain hidden in the dark.”*

## **Second: The Hillside Context**

### **Picture – Map of Sea of Galilee**

The Sermon on the Mount was preached on the Northwestern side of the Sea of Galilee between Capernaum and Gennesaret. It was a desert area where dissidents, pirates and bandits ruled.

*The Romans established and maintained their empire through conquest, subjugation, and intimidation. It was, in other words, peace through war, and security via domination. The Romans invaded and enslaved; they moved the conquered in and out; they formed new colonies and refounded old cities as their own colonies. They imposed taxes and tributes to maintain the empire...and its peace among the subjugated. And they had a deterrent to make sure that those who might threaten the peace understood the consequences: crucifixion.” — Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters, 19.*

The area around the Mount of Transfiguration is where rebel leaders hid out and recruited others to join their revolution. They were intent on a political and social revolution. They promised an economic reversal akin to the French revolution’s ideology that “Every man shall be a king.”

It’s in that context that Jesus came and said, “You want a revolution? Rebel against yourself. You want to change the world. Change yourself. You want the world to be right? Get right yourself. Before you set off to fix the world. Fix you.” (Humans are like eternal teenagers).

John 18:36 – (Jesus to Pilate) – *My kingdom is not of this world.*

Romans 14:17 - *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

In effect, the Sermon on the Mount told those who were trying to overthrow the Romans that they were fighting the wrong battle, an unwinnable war that would only result in more confusion, division and bloodshed.

### Third: The Social Context

Jesus lived in an Honor-Shame culture. It's the world some people are trying to create today. It is the same black-and-white world in which people are trying to create today.

- 1 – Family defines everything – Identity is defined by the group you belong to.
- 2 – Social capital fixes everything – Life is a constant quest to develop and manage relationships.
- 3 – Aggression restores honor – If you can't win the argument, beat the person physically, emotionally, etc.

*In Roman society, honor was based primarily on such things as wealth, education, rhetorical skill, family pedigree, and political connections. These were the culture's 'status-indicators.' In this context, 'self-esteem' would be conceived of as a ridiculous oxymoron, the only esteem one has is bestowed by the self but by the group...*

Michael Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*, 13.

Most people in Jesus's world were just trying to survive and had no wealth, social or political power. They lived in shame and disgrace.

The world worked top-down and it looked like this:



To the people Jesus loved, honor and acceptability was determined by economic, social or political capital (wealth), which was defined by the Greek word, *dokeo*, “to be recognized” (Grk. *δοκεω*).

This verb is the root of the Greek noun *doxa* (Grk. *δοξα*), often translated as “glory.” Jesus came to restore the honor of God’s image through his glory.

ILL – Think about the people with whom Jesus surrounded himself –

He did not operate within the honor/shame boundaries dictated by the Roman or Jewish culture. In fact, he sought out those outside of his traditional social group.

Mark 2:16b-17 - *Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”* <sup>17</sup> *And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

The people to whom Jesus spoke were in the 85%. They had no honor and lived in shame.

#### **Fourth: The Sermon as Response to Honor and Shame**

What Jesus did more than anything else was to demonstrate the honor everyday people possess by being created in God’s image and made part of his kingdom.

A more biblical understanding of our identity outside of Christ – framed by guilt, fear, and shame, should stimulate a more profound and comprehensive gratefulness for the work of Christ on the cross and our mission to the world.

It is what made Christianity so attractive to Jesus’s world. God was, in Jesus, restoring people to the fulness of God’s image; one of honor, dignity, worth, value and purpose.

- a) God called Abraham to a life of honor—a large family, a great name, blessings, and divine protection from dishonor (Gen 12:1-3).

These covenantal promises extend to Israel. A nation of despised slaves became God’s treasured possession set ‘*in praise, fame, and honor high above all the nations*’ (Deut 26:19).

In other words, Israel demonstrated exactly what Jesus was doing on earth.

And now, you are chosen to mediate God’s glory/honor to all nations.

- b) God’s Son, Jesus, left the glory of heaven to bring God’s saving honor to his people.

Jesus testified to God's true honor by breaking bread with outsiders, sinners, healing outcasts, and shaming shamers by their own honor/shame system.

On the cross—a symbol of grand shame—he bore our shame and restored honor.

John 17:22 - *The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*

**Romans 8:18-21** - *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

Romans 10:11-13 - *For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." <sup>12</sup>For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. <sup>13</sup>For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Hebrews 2:10-12 - *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. <sup>11</sup>For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.<sup>[b]</sup> That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, <sup>12</sup>saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."*

#### **Fifth: The "Hinge" Word**

(If the whole sermon was only this point, it would be enough for one day)

"Blessed" = "makarios" =

a) Happy

**John 20:20** - *Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*

b) Honored

**1 Timothy 6:15** - *he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,*

c) Congratulations

**Deuteronomy 33:29** - *Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD*

I would like to apply all three definitions to the "blessed"s of the Sermon on the Mount.

*"Congratulations! It is an honor to be in God's kingdom where you will be happy."*

There are two keys:

- Anyone can be 'blessed' in doing these things. It does not require monetary, social or political capital.
- The 'blessing' comes in the giving **and** receiving of the blessing.

When we bless, we are blessed (by God) and when someone blesses us, we are blessed (by them). It is a win-win, life.

### **Sixth: Our Application**

Too many of us make the Sermon on the Mount all about us. In other words, our first interpretation is, *"This is how I can be blessed."* But are the Beatitudes really focused on us....or others and how we treat them (like God is treating us)?

Before we look at it, remember, Jesus wasn't asking people with honor to honor others. He was asking shamed people to honor others. He was asking the bottom 85% to love each other and the top 15% with His love. He was asking people with natural prejudices and reasonable dislikes, to 'bless' those who did not 'bless' them, who, in fact, in many cases, had stolen their blessing.

- V 3 – Give someone else honor
- V 4 – Share comfort with someone
- V 5 – Let someone else be proud of their work, life, etc
- V 6 – Let others pursue the material world
- V 7 – Show someone mercy
- V 8– Be pure in your motives and relationships
- V 9 – Make peace with a troublemaker
- V 10 – Be willing to be persecuted. Be silent. Don't defend yourself.

Point: None of these characteristics were promoted by the Romans or sought by the Jews.

- V 3 – I'm going to be better than you
- V 4 – You're never going to hurt me
- V 5 – I'm better than you at everything
- V 6 - I'm a Christian but my values are just like yours
- V 7 – I'm going to kick you while you're down
- V 8 – I've lost my sincerity. I'm a hypocrite.
- V 9 – I'm going to treat you just like you treat me... only worse
- V 10 – You won't persecute me. I'll get you.

Vs 13-16 - This is how you are 'salt' and 'light' – preserve relational health and point the way to healing

- Vs 17-20 – It's really a matter of the heart
- Vs 21-48 – the old way vs the new way - *"You've heard it said, but I say to you..."*

Do you see? Do you see? The really honorable people don't have to dishonor others. The really strong people don't take advantage of the weak. The people who know they are right don't have to prove others wrong. The people who are right with God don't steal honor, glory, strength, kindness or hope from others.

But....and this is important, we can only give what we have received. - **GOSPEL**

When Peter tried to keep Jesus from the cross, he unknowingly tried to turn the kingdom upside down and make it all about Jesus and the disciples. But Jesus wouldn't let him do it. This first section of the Sermon on the Mount is not about me. It's about others.

How did Jesus treat people? With blessing. This is what he calls us to in the Sermon on the Mount.

### **Conclusion:**

The Gospel answers Eden's shame with the good news, not of what we have, can or will do – that's bad news - but of what Jesus had done. It answers Job's plight.

**Job 10:15** - *If I am guilty, woe to me. If I am in the right, I cannot lift up my head, for I am filled with disgrace*

The Sermon on the Mount makes us vehicles of God's grace to restore the glory and honor of the original creation.

*"As to 'caring for' the Sermon on the Mount, if 'caring for' here means 'liking' or enjoying, I suppose no one 'cares for' it. Who can like being knocked flat on his face by a sledge hammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of a man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure." [God in the Dock, pp. 181-82].*

So let me ask you, *"Do you, congratulate, honor, make happy, bless, your world?"* And if, not, what are you going to do about that?

### **Community Groups:**

1 – How are you doing?

2 – Where are you finding happiness?

- 3 – What aspects of life are most challenging to you right now?
- 4 – How might a shame culture more negatively affect our culture than Covid-19?
- 5 – Read C.S. Lewis’s comment on the Beatitudes. Why did he define it as a ‘sledge hammer?’
- 6 – What does it mean to be made ‘in the image of God?’
- 7 – How does God’s image give us honor, dignity, value and purpose?
- 8 – How does the world steal these qualities from human beings?
- 9 – Can you think of a time when someone tried to rob you of those qualities?
- 10 – Will you share a time when you robbed someone else of the worth, dignity, value of God’s image in them?
- 11 – What are American ‘status indicators?’
- 12 – How do these things coincide with God’s kingdom and how do they clash with it?
- 13 – Look at the ‘top-down’ chart. In what group are most of your family, friends, relationships?
- 14 – What could you do to create a balanced relationship chart among all classes, etc of your world?
- 15 – How does God choosing Israel, prefigure Jesus’s ministry?
- 16 – What intentional steps can you take to regularly ‘bless’ Christians and nonChristians around you?
- 17 – Who will hold you accountable to this effort?