

Happy Are the Helpful & Holy

Overcoming the Me-Attitudes – Part IV

Matthew 5:7-8

Introduction

He was born in 1897 in a tiny farming community in western Pennsylvania. One night as a teenager, seventeen years of age, while walking home from his job at a tire store, he overheard a street preacher say, “If you don’t know how to be saved . . . just call on God.”

When he got home, he climbed into the attic and called out to God for salvation.

Five years after his conversion, he took his first pastorate in West Virginia. Without any formal training, although he would be an incredible student of the word and teacher of Christian principles, he entered the ministry.

This began forty faithful years that included authoring numerous books, pastoring several churches, receiving two honorary doctorates, leading as editor a national magazine, producing countless articles with a pen that was laced with a touch of sarcasm, a good measure of wit, and a load of spiritual insight.

His name was Aiden Wilson Tozer, better known as A. W. Tozer.

His books, *The Knowledge of the Holy* and *The Pursuit of God* are now considered across denominational lines to be Christian classics.

Though loved by many, Tozer stood for the truth of the gospel. In fact, in an era in which liberalism had swept into the mainline church in the early 1900s, he wrote, “We are not diplomats, but prophets, and our message is not a compromise – it is an ultimatum.”

Tozer further challenged the average American church that grew stale over time, when he wrote,

One characteristic that marks the average church today is a lack of anticipation. When Christians meet they do not expect anything unusual to happen; consequently only the usual happens, and that usual is as predictable as the setting of the sun . . . We need today a fresh spirit of anticipation that springs out of the promises of God as we come together with childlike faith.

More than anything, A.W. Tozer had the ability to challenge the believer to dig into the word of God. He wrote, “We must not select a few favorite passages to the exclusion of others. Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian.”

He compared the Bible to a wristwatch and, with a touch of sarcasm, wrote, “If God gives you a watch, are you honoring Him by asking Him what time it is or by consulting the watch?”

I have recently finished reading again Tozer’s little book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*. For those of you who have read his books, you know that even though his most favorite books centered on theology, he had an unusual ability to challenge the Christian that believing the truth was not enough – in fact, it was dangerous unless we lived it and obeyed it.

He once reminded an audience of this truth when he said, “The devil is a better theologian than any of us, yet he remains the devil.”

On one occasion, as A. W. Tozer preached on the Beatitudes, he made the comment that if we turned the eight Beatitudes inside out, they would reflect the thinking of the American culture. And he said *that* more than fifty years ago.

It is still true is it not? Is it any surprise then that the American culture could be defined as anything but happy?

I took Tozer’s suggestion and turned the Beatitudes inside out. I then contrasted what our world says with what Jesus Christ is saying. In Matthew chapter 5:

Verse 3:

- The world says, “Happy are those who can say, ‘I’ve got it made!’”
- Jesus Christ says, “Happy are those who recognize they haven’t got a chance.”

Verse 4:

- The world says, “Happy are those who never have to cry about anything.”
- Jesus Christ says, “Happy are those who never stop crying over sin.”

Verse 5:

- The world says, “Happy are those who know how to climb the ladder.”
- Jesus Christ says, “Happy are those who voluntarily come in last.”

Verse 6:

- The world says, “Happy are those who stuff themselves with the things of life.”
- Jesus Christ says, “Happy are those who are starving for something beyond this life.”

Let us look at two more for our study today:

Verse 7:

- The world says, “Blessed are those who never need help or a handout.”
- Jesus Christ says, “Blessed are those who are ready to lend a hand.”

Verse 8:

- The world says, “Happy are those whose private perversion is never revealed.”
- Jesus Christ says, “Happy are those whose private purity is a daily resolution.”

Blessed Are the Merciful

Let us take a closer look at Matthew 5:7.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Before we find out what Christ is saying, we need to understand what He is not saying.

1. First, Jesus Christ is not saying, “If you show mercy to others, you will receive mercy from others.”

If this were so, the most merciful man to ever walk the planet would have been given mercy by the mob instead of a rugged cross.ⁱ

David showed mercy on two occasions to King Saul. Twice, David could have taken the life of this cruel, vindictive king who threw spears at him trying to pin him to the wall and who, for years, tried to hunt him down and kill him so he would not take the throne of Israel.

On one occasion, in the middle of the night, while Saul and his men were sleeping in the open, David crept up and cut a piece from Saul’s cloak when he could have cut Saul’s throat. David showed mercy and Saul only grew more vindictive.

It is possible to show mercy to people who turn their back on us; reject us; treat us badly.

So, the Lord is not saying, “If you show mercy to others, you’ll receive mercy in return.”

2. Secondly, Jesus is not saying, “If you show mercy to others, you will earn mercy from God.”

We do not earn mercy by extending mercy.ⁱⁱ

Salvation from God is not merited.

However, salvation from God is received. Receiving mercy from God is our present tense experience and our future tense experience.

Paul told Titus,

[Christ] saved us . . . according to His . . . mercy . . . (Titus 3:5).

In Ephesians 2:4, Paul writes that God has saved us,

. . . being rich in mercy . . .

In other words, it is impossible to be saved without the mercy of God, and salvation is an unmerited gift from God.

This is what is happening – this beatitude has more to do with our relationship with other people than with God.

I believe we could understand the Lord to be saying, “Since you are people who have and will receive the mercy of God, prove it by showing mercy to other people.”

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the distinctives of the believer is mercy.

In other words, showing mercy to others is not a condition to receiving mercy from God, it is proof that we have. Showing mercy is evidence that we have received mercy.ⁱⁱⁱ

This is the thought behind the apostle John’s question to the Christian student,

But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him [literally, has no mercy on him], how does God’s love abide in him? (I John 3:17)

We do not earn the love of God. But how can we claim to have the love of God, yet be unloving and unmerciful to others at the same time?

Jesus Christ says, “Do you want to be truly happy? Show mercy to others.”

Understand that the world of Christ did not admire mercy. The Romans admired justice, power, might. The philosophers of Christ’s day even called mercy a, “disease of the soul”.^{iv}

While in India, I was so moved by the masses of people who were considered Untouchables – the lowest caste in the Hindu culture. Children ran after us wherever we went offering cheap plastic necklaces for pennies; women begged on the street corners, as we drove by, carrying babies on their hips, their lives filled with unspeakable difficulty and sorrow.

However, they received no mercy from anyone! Their religion taught that these people had reincarnated as Untouchables because of a prior life of evil; that they were getting what they deserved.

I met a Christian woman who was going among the Untouchables and inviting elementary-aged girls from this caste to her school. She dressed them in clean uniforms and then, in a public bathroom she had cleaned, she sat them in tidy rows on the scrubbed clean floor and held school for them every week day – giving these Untouchables hope.

What would motivate anyone to show these people mercy? They would be someone who had received the mercy of God.

Mercy is tangibly demonstrated.

Mercy, one author wrote, is simply seeing a man without food and giving him food. Mercy is seeing a person begging for love and giving them love. Mercy is seeing someone lonely and giving them company. Mercy is not in feeling their need, but in meeting their need.^v

Another wrote it this way, “Mercy is giving attention to those in misery.”^{vi}

However, the world does not buy it! In Christ’s day, and in ours, happiness is having people bow to our needs.

The world would say, “When you are in control – when you have people at your mercy – that’s really living.”

Joseph was really living then! In Genesis 42, his brothers had come to Egypt in need of food and were bowed before his authority, not knowing he was their youngest brother whom they had sold into slavery.

Joseph now had his brothers at his mercy – but he showed them mercy. This was undeniable proof of God’s mercy having impacted his own heart, long before.

Do you want true happiness? Show mercy.

Do you want to be truly unhappy? Be stingy with people. Let everyone know that those people over there or down the street are getting what they deserve. Show no mercy.

While you are at it, you might study the life of Joseph Stalin – Stalin, which simply means “steel”. This Russian premier, one of the most powerful men on the planet, had millions of people at his mercy. And he showed none. Millions of people were executed by his order.

This man of steel had seven bedrooms, each of which would be closed at night as tightly as a safe. He would spend each night in a different bedroom for fear of being assassinated. Stalin feared that those he led with a steel boot might show him the same mercy. He even employed a servant full time to do nothing more than monitor and protect his teabags.

This is a happy man – he is on top of the world!

The truth is that his servant who watched the tea bags probably enjoyed his tea more than Stalin ever could.

Solomon wrote,

The merciful man [ultimately] does himself good, but the cruel man does himself harm. (Proverbs 11:17 NASB)

There is mercy in forgiveness. There is mercy when we withhold what someone deserves; when we refuse to get revenge – even when that person *is at our mercy* and we can hurt them, or humiliate them, or ignore them.

Mercy is the imitation of Christ, who in His mercy saved us.

The hymn writer put it this way:

*By God’s word at last my sin I learned;
Then I trembled at the law I’d spurned,
Till my guilty soul imploring turned to
Calvary.*

And what happened?

*Mercy there was great, and grace was free,
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty – at
Calvary.*

The one who shows the guilty mercy reveals the truth that he has received the mercy of Christ in his past, and will experience the mercy of God in his eternal future.

Happy are the helpful.

Blessed Are the Pure In Heart

Jesus Christ goes on to deliver another upside-down, backward, counterculture truth on how to put away the “me-attitudes” and discover the

Beatitudes. The word “beatitude” means, “true happiness”.

Notice Matthew 5:8.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Happy are the holy – blessed are the pure in heart.

When we study the scriptures, we discover the fact that there is positional purity and practical purity. Positional purity is the work of God *for Christians* and practical purity is the work of Christians *for God*.

Positional purity is another term for justification. We are justified – declared pure and righteous by the work of God for us at salvation.

Paul wrote in Romans 3:23-24,

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

and are justified [declared pure before God] by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Positional purity is the easy part, on our side of the equation, because God has accomplished all the work of redemption.

Practical purity is the hard part. This is our responsibility. This is what we are and do for God.

Notice that the emphasis is not on our hands but our hearts. Our hands are related to mercy; our hearts are related to purity.

Mercy is an external activity. Purity is an internal quality.

By the way, when the Bible talks about the heart, it is talking about the center of the personality. In the Bible, the heart is the mind, the emotions, and the will; the heart refers then to what makes you who you are.^{vii}

Jesus Christ said,

. . . out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (Matthew 12:34b)

Solomon wrote,

. . . as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he. (Proverbs 23:7 NKJV)

So the happy are those who diligently and passionately desire purity in their hearts – purity in mind/thought, purity in emotion or feelings, and purity in will or decision making.

Purity is from the word “katharos,” which refers to “integrity”. It is akin to the Latin word “castus,” which gives us our English word “chaste”.

Notice, again in Matthew 5:8, the promise,

. . . they shall see God.

The tense of this verb is a future continuous tense. One author paraphrased this text to read, “Happy are those who pursue purity [in their mind emotions and will], because they will continually be seeing God for themselves.”^{viii}

In other words, they will see, like no other, the hand of God in creation – in circumstances; in culture.

God is at work – and the pure in heart see it.

Warren Wiersbe said it this way, “Spiritual sight leads to spiritual insight.”^{ix}

Thoreau was once asked if he wanted to read the newspaper, and he responded that he had read one once already. I like this perspective better – John Wesley once said that he read the newspaper to see what God was doing in His world.^x

Can you look at your world this way?

The best way to see the hand of God at work in your own life and in the lives of others and in the life of your world is through a heart that you continually ask God to cleanse, like David who prayed,

Create in me a clean heart, O God . . . (Psalm 51:10)

This is another way of saying, “Lord I want to see You at work in every possible way!”

Helen Keller was once asked, “Isn’t it terrible to be blind?” To which she responded, “Better to be blind and see with your heart, than to have two good eyes and see nothing.”^{xi}

Blessed are those who can see with their hearts – and those with pure hearts see the most!

Conclusion

Before the Hubble space telescope was launched, it had experienced a number of delays. This amazing telescope that orbits the earth 360 miles up is racing around our globe once every 97 minutes. It can peer into space 7 billion light years away.

However, there was trouble early on, before the Hubble was launched, and the delay lasted seven years. The lens had been manufactured, but needed to be protected while everything else was completed. A place was found where the lens could be stored – a sterile, clean cell in the Lockheed facility in Sunnyvale, California, at the cost of eight million dollars a month.

You thought you paid a lot for rent!

I found it fascinating that scientists certainly understood the best way to see the heavens is through a clean lens.

Believers who pursue a pure heart see the activity of the God of heaven most clearly.

A. W. Tozer said it this way, “You can see God from anywhere if your [heart] is set to love and obey Him.”

Tozer lived what he preached. He was both helpful and holy.

He and his wife, plus their seven children, never owned a family vehicle, but used public transportation when they needed to go somewhere. Tozer gave most of his money away to those in need.

He wrote these convicting words to us all, “It will cost something to walk [carefully] slowly in the parade of the ages, while excited men of time rush about confusing motion with progress; but [to walk slowly, carefully] will pay off in the long run.”

This is another way of saying, “Don’t listen to what the world says about happiness – listen to what Jesus Christ says.”

Ladies and gentlemen, the Christian is someone who has given Jesus Christ the last word.

Show mercy and pursue purity – this is the path to true happiness.

ⁱ John MacArthur, Kingdom Living Here and Now (Moody Press, 1980), p. 105.

ⁱⁱ Warren Wiersbe, Live Like a King (Moody Press, 1976), p. 105.

ⁱⁱⁱ R. Kent Hughes, The Sermon on the Mount (Crossway Books, 2001), p. 48.

^{iv} Wiersbe, p. 95.

^v MacArthur, p. 109.

^{vi} Hughes, p. 46.

^{vii} James Montgomery Boice, The Sermon on the Mount (Baker Books, 1972), p. 46.

^{viii} MacArthur, p. 133.

^{ix} Wiersbe, p. 122.

^x Ibid., p. 121.

^{xi} Hughes, p. 56.