

You're Happy If...

Week 20 ~ Notes for July 17th

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Background

Subject	Matt	Luke
The Sermon on the Mount (1)	4:23-5:20	6:20-23

"The Sermon on the Mount is the supreme jewel in the crown of Jesus' teaching" says the introduction to Matthew 5 in [Michael Green's commentary](#).

"The Sermon of the Mount has a unique fascination. It seems to present the quintessence of the teachings of Jesus. It makes goodness attractive. It shames our shabby performance. It engenders dreams of a better world" says John Stott, who then goes on to quote a sermon delivered by John Donne in 1629, "All the articles of our religion, all the canons of our church, all the injunctions of our princes, all the homilies of our fathers, all the body of divinity, is in these three chapters, in this one Sermon on the Mount."

Phew!

Such is the importance of these chapters (and the complementary story in Luke) that we will be spending the next four weeks doing our best to tease out its message.

Discussion

Next to John 3:16, and maybe Genesis 1, this section of scripture is perhaps the best known to the secular world. It's been expertly parodied by Monty Python ('blessed are the *cheesemakers*?!'). It is considered by some to be nothing more than Hallmark greeting card cod-philosophy ('be nice'), and by yet others to be a work of great poetry.

But to us professing Christians - what are we to make of it?

Context

Jesus goes up a mountain to talk to his disciples. Crowds gather.

- Who shows up?
- Why is it important that those particular groups show up? What does this tell us about Christ's message?

"Moses went up Mount Sinai to get the law from God to give to the people of Israel. And now Moses' great successor ascends a mountain to receive from his Father and transmit to his

disciples the law of the kingdom. We have a new law for a new people given on a new mountain by a new Moses. That is the context of the Sermon." *Green, p76*

Content

Read the section of the Sermon on the Mount commonly known as the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12). Much space in the commentaries is given over to the translation of the repeated phrase rendered in the NIV as 'Blessed are...'. Other translations have it as 'Happy are' and still others as 'God's favour is on'. All three would seem to be linguistically valid. But all three have subtly different overtones. Which is your preference?

We'll spend some time looking at each of the 8 statements. Read them and note your reactions. Do you think there's something important in the order in which the statements are made?

1. poor in spirit
2. those who mourn
3. meek
4. hunger and thirst
5. merciful
6. pure in heart
7. peacemakers
8. persecuted

Jesus then gives two characteristics of the blessed life that should be seen in us (vv 13-14), 'salt' and 'light'. Both images have something to say about Christian involvement in society. Are these verses explicit instructions for us to be deeply involved in the world in which we live?

Verses 17 and 18 - "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." - are the source of much discussion and disagreement amongst Christians. What do you think Jesus meant?

As you think on vv17-18 and as we discuss in our study time we may well find ourselves in need of Beatitudes #3, #5 and #7! But, as we all know, our understanding of these verses will inform our attitudes to 'law' and 'grace' and even to the person of Jesus himself.

Verse 19 is a stern injunction not to set aside 'one of the least of these commands' and not to come up with any alternative 'commands'. Who do you think is being addressed in this verse? The Pharisees? The Adventists? The Pope? Christians in general? You? How do you interpret this verse and to whom do you apply it?

We close out our discussion with verse 20 where Jesus makes another scathing attack on the Pharisees and the teachers. Christ's objections to the religious leaders of his day decidedly outweigh his objections to Herod, the Romans, or any other 'force' in the lives of his audience. Again, how do you interpret this verse and to whom do you apply it in the 21st century?