

Living In the Kingdom, Part 3

Matthew 5:7-9; Ephesians 5:1-2; 1 John 3:1-3

Slide 1

According to Webster's Dictionary, "*character*" is one of the attributes that make up and distinguish an individual. Character is the strength of moral fiber.

A.W. Tozer described "character" as "*the excellence of moral beings.*" As the excellence of gold is its purity and the excellence of art is its beauty, so the excellence of man and woman is their character.

People of character are noted for their honesty, ethics, and charity. Descriptions such as a man of principle or a woman of integrity are affirmations of character.

When there's a lack of character, there's moral deficiency. People lacking character tend to behave dishonestly, unethically, and immorally.

A person's character is the sum of their disposition, thoughts, intentions, desires, and actions. Character is gauged by general tendencies, not based on a few isolated actions.

It's the Lord's purpose to develop character within us. Proverbs 17:3 says, "*The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart.*"

Kingdom character is the result of the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification. It's a consistent manifestation of Jesus in a person's life.

God's pleased when His children grow in Kingdom Character. 1 Chronicles 29:17a, "*I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity.*"

This is part three of the series “Living in the Kingdom.” So far, we’ve examined what Jesus said about those who are poor in spirit; those who mourn; those who are meek; and those who thirst and hunger for righteousness.

When we integrate these beatitudes into our lives, they show others that there’s been a change in our lives. They demonstrate character traits all Christians should have..

If we’re not seeing these traits in the lives of those claiming to be Christians, then we must ask ourselves if their profession of faith is really true.

So, let’s look at three more beatitudes which we should incorporate into our lives.

Slide 2

Matthew 5:7, *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*

When someone intentionally harms or wrongs us, we have a desire for justice; swift, immediate justice. And, if we’re truly honest, the justice we desire exceeds the actual wrong done to us.

However, when we’re the ones in the wrong, we don’t want justice, we want mercy. But, to receive mercy from God, we must first be willing to give it.

We can’t go to God seeking mercy when we’ve sinned against Him and refused to give mercy to those who ask it from us. Jesus said that those who are merciful will receive mercy.

Webster’s dictionary defines mercy as *“refraining from harming offenders or enemies; a disposition to forgive.”*

To better understand what Jesus was saying in verse 7, let's examine the Greek words for "merciful" and "mercy." The Greek for "merciful" is *eleemon* which, when used as an adjective, means someone who's actively compassionate.

There's a difference between someone who's filled with mercy and never shows it and someone who's filled with mercy and actively gives and demonstrates it.

The person who proactively shows mercy, when facing situations where others would demand justice, is the one Jesus was referencing in this verse.

When we choose to be merciful, instead of demanding justice or revenge, we open the door for God to show us mercy when we least deserve it.

The Greek word for mercy is *eleeo*. It means to have compassion or mercy. When it's used as a verb it means, "*to feel sympathy with the misery of another.*"

When we stand before God, we desire mercy not justice. We're guilty and deserve the punishment that we receive. However, because we've been merciful to others, God shows mercy to us.

He has compassion on us when we least deserve it because we've shown that same compassion to others.

Do you remember the parable of the servant who owed his master a debt that he couldn't repay? It's found in Matthew 18:23-35.

In this parable, a servant owed his master a lot of money which, when it was time to pay his debt, he couldn't because he was broke. His master showed him mercy and forgave all his debt.

But that same servant had a fellow-servant who owed him money. When that servant couldn't pay him back, he had him thrown into prison.

When the master heard what had happened, he sent for that servant, called him wicked for his actions, and delivered him to the tormentors.

If you want mercy and forgiveness from God, you'd better be willing to do the same.

Many don't understand this concept and continue to treat those who've offended them as guilty parties deserving to be punished.

The trueness of being merciful comes when we have mercy on an offender without them requesting it.

This is what the Greek word for merciful refers to – *“someone who proactively demonstrates compassion.”* As you might imagine, this mixes with how the world operates like oil mixes with water.

Last week we learned that being meek wasn't a sign of weakness, but strength. Well, the same applies to being merciful. Being merciful is about strength, not weakness.

You see, the world teaches us that we should be strong without feeling. We should exercise our strength by crucifying our enemies and making sure everyone knows that they shouldn't cross us.

The world teaches us that there's no room for weakness; especially for those who're leaders.

The world teaches us that we should be strong; stand firm; and when we're crossed, take immediate action to deter anyone else from crossing us in the future.

This is why you get advice like, *“If I was you and they did that to me, I’d do such and such.”*

Seldom do they say, *“I’d show them mercy and forgive them.”* Come to think of it, I don’t remember anyone ever saying that. We generally don’t recommend having mercy on anyone.

We demand justice because we’ve been wronged, and someone should compensate us for our being wronged.

There’s true strength that rests within those who’re merciful that the world doesn’t understand. It takes a strong person to forgive and wipe the slate clean when the other person doesn’t deserve it.

But the person who’s merciful understands that it’s not about the other person, it’s about them and their relationship with God.

Ephesians 5:1-2, *“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

Paul encouraged us to be imitators of God just like children are imitators of their parents. The Greek word translated as imitators is *mimetes* (me-ma-taase). It means *“a follower as in a continuous sense.”*

In other words, it means that our lives should imitate God’s life “all the time” not just when we feel like it based on the circumstances. What we became during our conversion is what we must diligently continue to seek.

Children often imitate their parents. They try to walk like us, dress like us, and sometimes, to our dismay, talk like us. Paul even said we should be like children who imitate their parents.

But he was talking about our heavenly parent. We should imitate our father, God, by walking in love just as Christ loved us.

God is a God of mercy and when we begin to imitate Him, we'll become children of mercy. This isn't a one-time act, either but a way of continuous living.

It should become a part of who we are at our core. *"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."*

Slide 3

Matthew 5:8, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."*

Some of you might be thinking that this is no big deal since all of us will see God one day.

But some of us will be shouting and praising Him, while some others will only see Him that one time because they're destined to spend an eternity in hell.

Yes, we'll see God on the Day of Judgment; but the *"pure in heart"* see God today, spiritually.

Now, there's been a lot written about the *"heart"* of man. The word, heart, has two meaning. The first is the physical organ that's the core or key component of our internal system, it keeps us alive,

We can't live without the heart doing its job of pumping blood throughout our bodies every minute of every day.

And, just as our physical heart is the core of our physical bodies; the *"other"* heart is the core of who we are.

When you see the word *"heart"* used in the Bible, it often means the center of one's being, including the mind, will, and emotions. This is what song and poem writers talk about in their writings.

When someone says their heart was broken; they're not talking about the physical organ, but that part of them that encompasses who they are.

This part of us is so crucial to our lives that Solomon wrote in Proverbs 17:22, "*A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.*"

In this proverb, he was saying that our hearts, not the physical organ, but the core of who we are, is as good as medicine when it's happy or joyful. Likewise, when it's not, it can kill us.

Someone dying from a broken heart is not uncommon. The news has carried stories of spouses who have died because they lost their husband or wife due to COVID. This is what Solomon was referencing.

It's interesting that Jesus placed this character trait in the order that He did. I don't believe it's by accident or happenstance, either.

You see, there's no way any of us can become "*pure in heart*" if we don't first become "*poor in spirit.*"

But it's impossible to become pure in heart if we haven't learned to mourn the sins of the world versus participating in them.

It's impossible to become pure in heart if we're not willing to be meek; if we're not thirsting and hungering for righteousness; or unwilling to show mercy.

Jesus said that the pure in heart will see God. That word "*pure,*" in the Greek, means clean.

A person, whose heart has been cleaned, sees the good in people and acts without hidden agendas. They don't stand in judgment. They're always willing to help someone in need.

The way they think and how they feel spiritually and emotionally is linked to God, not the resources of this world.

This concept of being "*pure in heart*" conflicts with the world. The world operates on a standard of deception. We're trained to deceive and expect to be deceived.

Do you ever wonder why you have to teach your children to tell the truth. Did you ever wonder who taught them to lie?

Let me tell you. No one taught them to lie because they were born that way! We all were!!!

This world, in which we operate, is centered on deception masked as truth. We can find it in almost every place we look. It exists in our homes; in our jobs; in our churches; schools; you name it and it's there.

Why do you think businesses have code of ethics posters or ethics training? If people are involved, then sooner or later deception will raise its ugly head.

If we, as disciples of Jesus, aren't careful, we can easily live in this world according to this standard. We'll find ourselves justifying our deception for the "better good."

But, when deception is involved, there's no better good, even if it gets us out of a tough situation.

We can't walk in this world with a pure heart if we allow the world's standard of interaction, that is deception, be the basis for how we interact with others or deception being the foundation for which we get out of trouble.

1 John 3:1-3: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 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. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure."

John's desire was that we recognize that we're children of God. But he also wanted us to know because of that we won't be recognized by the world.

These beatitudes conflict with the standard by which the world chooses to operate. The world only recognizes us as its own if we're living by its standards.

However, when we begin to live according to God's standard, living in His kingdom, the world won't recognize us because the world doesn't recognize God.

John states that everyone who has hope for their future will begin to purify themselves because God is pure. Now, I won't stand before you and tell you that purifying your heart is easy.

It's amazing how much negative, corrupt and destroying "stuff" attaches itself to our hearts as we grow up in this world.

When we accept Christ as our Savior, He cleanses us, but sometimes we can still see the stain even though Christ has wiped it clean.

This is like when you wear your favorite shirt or blouse and spill something on it. You wash it and do the best you can to get the stain out.

Yet, when you wear it, you can still see faint signs of the stain even though no one else does. You can see it because you know where to look.

You concentrate on that one area and when you do, you find it every time. Yet, when everyone else looks, they take in the whole shirt so it's easy for them not to see the stain because they're not looking for it.

When Jesus cleanses our hearts, we become clean. But, because we've lived in filth for so long, we can still see stains that others can't regardless that Jesus cleaned us.

We must get to the point of understanding that although the memory of the stain is there, we've been cleansed and therefore we don't have to allow that memory to recreate that stain in our lives over and over again.

This is the process that we go through in purifying our hearts. We recognize the sin, then see the blood of Jesus covering it, and finally, our freedom of it.

When we're able to do this, we're able to look at others through the same blood covered mercy and grace that was applied to us.

Slide 4

Matthew 5:9, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*"

My father liked westerns, especially those with John Wayne. In almost every western there was a sheriff who was known as the keeper of the peace.

This was the person who had to be good with a gun or he wouldn't last. This type of peacemaker wasn't what Jesus was referring.

In the third "*Back to the Future*" movie, Doc Brown was sent to the past by accident. He ended up in the old west and Marty had to save him.

Challenged to a gun fight, a gun maker offered Marty a pistol called the Colt Peacemaker to use. This Colt Peacemaker, while effective in helping to keep the peace, wasn't what Jesus was referring to, either.

The "peacemaker" Jesus was talking about was someone who wasn't just "peaceable," but active bringers and keepers of the peace. Jesus was referring to us when we accepted Him as our personal Savior.

This conflicts with the world's standard because we're taught to seek our own peace without concern for the chaos happening in the world.

We're taught to be inner focused while Jesus stated that those who're actively focused on bringing peace to others will be known as the sons and daughters of God because they're imitating their Father.

Those who actively promote peace reflect the character of their heavenly Father and are called "*sons of God.*"

Romans 12:18-21: *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'*"

Being at peace with everyone, especially our enemies, is difficult to do, but a must for the sons and daughters of God.

The world teaches us that we should do unto our enemies as they do unto us, or before they have an opportunity to do anything to us.

We're taught, to ensure that we're protected from our enemies, that we must stay away from them. It's easy to be at peace with someone you never talk to or go around.

But we're asked to be at peace with all men and to walk before everyone with a spirit of being a peacemaker.

This doesn't mean that we're to let ourselves be open to abuse; but it does mean that we're not the ones seeking revenge.

We're to walk uprightly before God and if there's any revenge to be gotten, He's the one Who'll do it. That's why the way to truly overcome evil is with good even though it's difficult to do.

Slide 5

Conclusion

Paul reminds us that, when we're nice to our enemies, our niceness is like heaping burning coals on top of their heads.

They don't understand it and that, in and of itself, will eat at them because of what they did to us.

Conversely when we respond to them in the same way they treated us, then it justifies their actions. They feel good about what they've done and what they're planning to do.

But peacemakers are blessed and will be called the sons or daughters of God.

That's why, as Christians, we're not merely to bear the offenses and repay them with love, we're to actively try to instill the peace of God, which passes understanding, into all the struggles of this world.

So, when you become a "peacemaker," you'll find that this grace completes the other six listed before it.

The only way we can show Christ to a dying world is through love and peace.