

Jesus In Proverbs

How The Beatitudes are rooted in the book of wisdom

by Sharon Stults

Introduction

During my research for this study, the first major teaching of Christ which I came across was the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, in Matthew 5. Originally, I thought this passage might be a part of the overall study. The more I read these verses, I realized how connected they were to many principles established in Proverbs. They became the study.

The major theme of the sermon on the mount is the establishment of the standards of Jesus' kingdom, very different than the kind of kingdom his listeners expected him to usher in. I love what the commentator, David Gudzik says in his introductory comments on this passage.

“It has been said if you took all the good advice for how to live ever uttered by any philosopher or psychiatrist or counselor, took out the foolishness and boiled it all down to the real essentials, you would be left with a poor imitation of this great message by Jesus. It can't be proved, but in my opinion, the Sermon on the Mount was Jesus' “standard” sermon. It was the core of His itinerant message: a simple proclamation of how God expects us to live, contrasting with common Jewish misunderstandings of that life. It may be that when Jesus preached to a new audience, He often preached this sermon or used the themes from it.”

I hope you enjoy this study as much as I did, digging out the deeper meanings of Jesus' sermon and the proverbs that may have inspired him. If we want to be more like Jesus, we'd be smart to study and memorize the same books he did. Wisdom flowed out of Jesus not simply because he was God in flesh, Wisdom incarnate, but also because the human part of him diligently studied the book of Proverbs. Solomon's proverbs flow from the teachings of his parents, his own experiences, and his knowledge of the five books of Moses. His warnings and instructions are Spirit-inspired but also very much influenced by his own life with its successes and failures.

Proverbs are not promises. Many people attempt to use them that way but that is not what God designed them to be. They are God's principles for holy living. People who follow them will not be problem free, but they will possess, wisdom, understanding, knowledge and insight to righteously navigate whatever life may bring. They will also know how to avoid behaviors and attitudes that will lead them into trouble. This is what separates wise people from fools.

A desperate, dying world needs a few less fools and a lot more wisdom bearers. My goal is to be in that second group, not the first. How about you?

**** All scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version Bible, unless otherwise noted.*

Day One- The Poor in Spirit

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” Matthew 5:3 ESV.

The Greek word here for “blessed,” is translated as happy but refers to a state of contentment that is disconnected from circumstances and events. The Greek for “poor” is the word used in ancient Greek society for the poorest of the poor. Jesus is speaking about those who are happy because they understand that on their own, they bring nothing of value to God’s table, without Christ. Without the redeeming work of the cross, left to our own devices, we are bent towards sin. Here’s what Charles Spurgeon, preacher and commentator says about this phrase, “poor in spirit.”

“This beatitude is *first* because this is where we *start* with God. “A ladder, if it is to be of any use, must have its first step near the ground, or feeble climbers will never be able to mount. It would have been a grievous discouragement to struggling faith if the first blessing had been given to the pure in heart; to that excellence the young beginner makes no claim, while to poverty of spirit he can reach without going beyond his line. *Everyone* can start here; it isn’t first blessed are the pure or the holy or the spiritual or the wonderful. Everyone can be **poor in spirit**. “Not what I have, but what I have not, is the first point of contact, between my soul and God.” (Spurgeon)

Imagine you are explaining this concept of poor in spirit to an unbeliever or brand-new believer. (You may very well be called upon soon to do so.) In your own words, explain why you think Jesus put this as the first point of his sermon and what it means today to be a person who is poor in spirit. This phrase is rankling to a culture that is “me first” oriented and regularly uses phrases like “self- care,” “me-time,” and such. To our 21st century ears, that phrase can sound like we are supposed to be down on ourselves. We know that’s not what Jesus was saying. He places tremendous value on humans, to the point of giving his life for them. Write out your paraphrase (text rewritten in your own words) and your explanation of what Jesus did mean.

Read Proverbs 29:23. According to this verse, what attitude would be the opposite of being poor in spirit? _____

What honor does Jesus indicate will be given to the lowly in spirit? Explain in words an unbeliever can understand why this such an honor.

Read Proverbs 16:18-19. What kind of “fall” do you think Solomon was referring to?

What firsthand experience do you think Solomon might have had where pride led him away from the honor God gave him and into disgrace? (You might need to do a little research if you’re not familiar with the details of his reign and his family life.)

Read Proverbs 16:5 and Proverbs 8:13. By lifting the poor in spirit as a kingdom standard, Jesus implies that honor does not come to the proud, but a fall instead. What eternal fall is Jesus trying to lead people away from by teaching the concept of a lowly spirit?

Read Philippians 2:5-8. What does this passage say about how Jesus demonstrated a lowly spirit (humility) while on earth? Can you think of any other passages that help us to see his humility in other ways besides his death?

Prayer

Lord, show me what a lowly spirit looks like for me. Reveal any place in my life where I am ensnared by pride. Help me to understand the difference between being humble and false humility.

Day Two- The Mourners

"Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted," Matthew 5:4

In this verse, Jesus is not speaking of those who are grief-stricken due to the death of a loved one. This verse is entwined with verse 3 and is instead speaking about those people who understand the depth and damage of their sin towards God. The word for "mourn" is the strongest Greek word that refers to sorrow. Those who are truly repentant and sorrowful over their sin are whom Jesus is speaking of here.

1. What does the Lord promise to those who are authentically sorrowful about their sin? _____
2. Read Proverbs 21:3. What does the Lord prefer from us instead of sacrifice?

3. Read Proverbs 3:31-33. In your own words, what is God's response to sin and trying to cover up sin?

4. Read Proverbs 15:28-29. What differences are listed here between the righteous and the wicked?

5. Read Proverbs 28:13. In this verse, what does God send to those who repent of their sins? How is this comforting?

6. Read Proverbs 14:12 and Proverbs 19:16. Again, what eternal consequence is Jesus trying to help his listeners avoid by teaching them to grieve over their sin?

7. Read Proverbs 10:29. How is God's comfort a refuge for us?

8. In your own words, based on all the verses in Proverbs about sin, sorrow and consequences, write an amplified version of Matthew 5:4 (Like the Amplified Bible) that could help a new believer understand what it means to be sorry for sin and receive God's comfort. Use as many words as you like to make your point clear and plain.

Prayer

God, create in me a tender heart that recognizes sin and repents quickly. Show me any areas of hardness in me or any strongholds Satan has erected in my mind, will or emotions. Help me understand the pain I cause you and others when I sin and to grow into repentance as a lifestyle.

Day Three- The Meek

“Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth,” Matthew 5:5.

We Americans hold a very different definition of meek than the one contained within the Greek word that Jesus used here. We equate meek with mouse-like, timid behavior, almost a complete opposite of what Jesus intended by using this word. In his commentary David Guzik says, “It is impossible to translate this ancient Greek word *praus* (**meek**) with just one English word. It has the idea of the proper balance between anger and indifference, of a powerful personality properly controlled, and of humility. In the vocabulary of the ancient Greek language, the **meek** person was not passive or easily pushed around. The main idea behind the word “**meek**” was under control, like a strong stallion that was trained to do the job instead of running wild.”

Read Proverbs 18:12. What honor does Jesus say will come to the meek?

Read Proverbs 16:32. How does this proverb describe meekness in a way that is like the definition of the Greek word that Jesus used?

Read Proverbs 15:18 and 19:11. What are some characteristics of a meek person as described in these proverbs?

Read Proverbs 25:28. Based on his word choice for meek, Jesus considers self-control one of the indicators that someone is meek and worthy of inheriting the earth. How does this proverb describe a person who lacks self-control? What do you think a life without self-control looks like?

Read Proverbs 29:11. What it is like when the kind of person described in the first part of the verse is in authority? Have you ever been under the authority of someone like this? What specifically, was challenging about being under the authority of someone who lacked self-control?

Why do you think Jesus promised the earth as an inheritance to those who are meek? Read Genesis 1:26-28. Consider God's original plan for man on earth and what happened when Adam and Eve fell from meekness to foolish arrogance. Remember, Jesus told us he came to restore what had been lost. To help you, consider this quote about Matthew 5:5 from Matthew Henry's commentary. "The meek are happy. The meek are those who quietly submit to God; who can bear insult; are silent, or return a soft answer; who, in their patience, keep possession of their own souls, when they can scarcely keep possession of anything else. These meek ones are happy, even in this world. Meekness promotes wealth, comfort, and safety, even in this world."

Prayer

God, my desire is to model the kind of meekness Jesus described in this verse, to be power under control. Show me any area of my life where I am lacking self-control or not submitting to you. Fill me with the fruit of the Holy Spirit so that my attitudes and behavior demonstrate meekness just like Jesus.

Day Four- The Hungry and Thirsty

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled,” Matthew 5:6 NIV.

What are we hungry for? Comfort and safety? Purpose? Relationships? Entertainment and fun? A steady income and a job we love? It’s not wrong to long for these things and work to obtain them. Imbalance in our spiritual walk happens when we behave as if these are the things that will make us feel happy and blessed. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus states the meaning of this beatitude in a different way. “Seek first, the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you.”

God wants his followers to crave righteousness. Think about a time when you were desperately hungry or thirsty for food or water, or both. That’s the passion expressed in the Greek words for hunger and thirst here. There’s a desperation implied. What does it look like to be desperately hungry and thirsty for righteousness?

Read Proverbs 21:21. Remembering that proverbs are not promises but guidelines, what can people who chase righteousness generally expect from life, according to this verse?

Proverbs 11:18 reads like this in the New Living Translation. “Evil people get rich for the moment, but the reward of the godly will last.” Now, read the same verse in either the ESV or NIV translation. Compare the difference and results between the righteous and wicked in their sowing and reaping.

In the ESV translation Proverbs 11:19 says, “Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but he who pursues evil will die.” This is a strong warning from Solomon. How does Jesus take this same concept and teach it to his listeners using gentler language? Think about what Jesus implies about those who don’t choose to hunger and thirst after righteousness, without saying it like Solomon did.

Read Proverbs 10:6-7. In your own words, list two benefits Solomon describes for the righteous and two negative consequences that he indicates for the wicked. Don’t just parrot what your translation says. Take the time to put it into your own words.

Read Proverbs 11:4. The phrase, “the day of wrath,” refers to the time of God’s judgement when this world as we know it, will end. What value will wealth have on that day? What value will righteousness have on that day?

Read Proverbs 10:28. How do this verse and Matthew 5:6 echo each other?

Read Proverbs 2:1-9. Here, Solomon gives his take on the specifics of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. In your own words, restate what he says that process looks like.

Prayer

Lord, I confess, that too often I have passionately pursued many things much more than I have chased after righteousness. I have prized other things more dearly than your kingdom. Forgive me for doing that in the past and keep me from doing it in the future. I long to pursue righteousness first. Show me, day by day, what that looks like in my thoughts, behavior, and words.

Day Five- The Merciful

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy,” Matthew 5:7.

Why was God so merciful to King David in spite of his sins of murder and adultery? Because he showed mercy to others, particularly crazy, wicked King Saul. This is a kingdom principle that should flow naturally out of our lives once we understand and are truly repentant for the poverities of our own spirits. In his commentary on this verse, David Gudzik describes the merciful person in this way.

“The merciful one will show it to those who are weaker and poorer.

- The merciful one will always look for those who weep and mourn.
- The merciful one will be forgiving to others, and always looking to restore broken relationships.
- The merciful one will be merciful to the character of other people and choose to think the best of them whenever possible.
- The merciful one will not expect too much from others.
- The merciful one will be compassionate to those who are outwardly sinful.
- The merciful one will have a care for the souls of all men.”

Let’s look at some foundational verses on mercy from Proverbs.

Read Proverbs 28:13. What is the relationship between repentance and mercy?

Read Proverbs 21:13. How does this verse portray the results of doing the opposite of what Jesus teaches about being merciful?

Read Proverbs 11:17. Does this verse remind you of another foundational teaching of Christ’s? If so, how? (Hint: Check out Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 13)

Read Proverbs 31:8-9 and 14:20-21 and verse 31. Have you observed ways that our culture is currently unmerciful to those with little or no income? If so, jot down a few. Can you list some specific ideas of ways you can show tangible mercy to those with less than you?

Read Proverbs 12:10. Referring again to God’s original plan for Adam and Eve, sketched out in Genesis 2, speculate what role mercy would play in their dominion and rule over the animals. What do you think God’s expectations of Adam and Eve might have been in this area? What expectations do you think God has of us today with the way we treat living creatures?

Read Proverbs 3:3. What are practical ways we can carry out what Solomon suggests here concerning mercy? (kindness) What does it look like today to “write something on the tablet of your heart?”

Prayer

God, forgive me for times when I should have shown someone mercy and didn’t. Forgive me for times I judged and criticized instead of showing mercy. Help me to find the balance of holding people accountable while showing them mercy. Show me a place where I can tangibly show mercy to the poor, downtrodden and overlooked people of our society.

Day Six- The Pure in Heart

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,” Matthew 5:8.

In the Greek, the words “pure of heart,” mean straightness, honesty, and clarity. Charles Spurgeon says this about this verse.

“Christ was dealing with men’s spirits, with their inner and spiritual nature. He did this in all the Beatitudes, and this one strikes the very center of the target as he says, not ‘Blessed are the pure in language, or the pure in action,’ much less ‘Blessed are the pure in ceremonies, or in raiment, or in food;’ but ‘Blessed are the pure *in heart.*’”

Any of us can fall into the pattern of behaving right outwardly while harboring sins on the inside. Jesus is teaching that things which make our hearts impure, like greed, lying, hatred, sexual immorality, gossip, and such, will damage our intimacy with God, making it much more difficult for us to “see” him. Those with pure hearts find it much easier to be intimate with him.

Proverbs has lots to say about pure hearts and wicked ones.

Read Proverbs 16:2. Can you think of a time when your heart wasn’t quite so pure as you wanted people to think it was about someone or a circumstance? Did God call you on it? How did he expose your true motives? If you cannot think of a time like that, take a moment right now and ask God if your motives are pure concerning your relationships, job, church ministry and private life. If your motives are not in the highest service to God and others, and he reveals some self-serving tendencies in you, don’t delay repentance. Write it out here, repent of that impurity, renounce the sin, and use your authority in Christ to command any wicked spirits that attached themselves to that sin to leave now. (Demonic spirits are always attracted to impurities and darkness. They draw in closer to us when we allow unconfessed sin to linger in our lives.)

For each of these verses, write out the positives of a clean heart and the negative outcomes for impure hearts.

Proverbs 14:30

Proverbs 15:13-14

Proverbs 14:14,22

Proverbs 17:22

Proverbs 21:8

Proverbs 15:26

Proverbs 4:23-27

Prayer

Father, my prayer is the same as King David. "Create in a me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10) Continue to show me when I drift from serving you and others to serving myself first. Expose impurities in my heart and draw me into closer relationship with you.

Day Seven- The Peacemakers

“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God,” Matthew 5:9

One of our highest callings as children of God is to act as peacemakers between God and those who are lost around us. Reconciliation was the heart of Jesus’ ministry. Everything he did pointed to a loving God who wanted restored relationship with humans and was willing to go the extra mile to do that. When we carry that message of reconciliation to people of the world, we are acting as peacemakers whether our listeners choose to receive God’s offer of peace or not. When our lives are lived in service to God as peacemakers, we look like Jesus, like sons and daughters of God.

Read Proverbs 16:7. Do you think it’s possible to maintain peaceful relationships with people who are antagonistic towards God? Why or why not?

Read Proverbs 12:20. Sometimes acting as a peacemaker (not to be confused with *peacekeeper*, who merely goes along with anything and everything) can be challenging. What does this verse indicate might be a byproduct of the work of peacemaking? _____

Read Proverbs 17:1.

What should be a quality that the unsaved see in the dynamics of a child of God’s relationships with friends and family? How does seeing this quality attract lost people to Jesus?

Read Proverbs 3:13-18. Relying on our own understanding will make us come up short in the peacemaking department. What do these verses suggest we need for this important ministry?

Prayer

Father, you have called me to the ministry of reconciliation, to be a peacemaker. Forgive me for times I’ve given up on contentious, difficult people. Lord, help me to discern the difference between peacemaking and peacekeeping. Use me and my relationships to show the unsaved what it looks like to live with others in peace.

Day Eight- The Persecuted Righteous

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you,” Matthew 5:10-12.

Don't expect the world to throw confetti for you and drape garlands around your neck as you demonstrate the qualities of believers who live out the Beatitudes. Lost people belong to Satan and Satan will never celebrate a child of God unless they sin. Yes, I have lost friends and neighbors who are charming, lovely people, until they run into one of God's boundaries in my life. The laws and precepts that are guidance and protection for us are like brick walls to them. For example, during my husband's graduate school years, we worked as wait staff at an upscale Chicago restaurant. One day several of the professional waiters and waitresses had a sit down with us. They had discovered we were reporting our income, including tips, from our hours at the restaurant. They tried to browbeat and shame us into stopping that as they feared that the IRS would recognize that all of them were lying about their income.

Before this encounter, we got along great with the other staff. After we refused to budge, at least half of them treated began to be rude and unkind to us. When we choose righteousness as a lifestyle, the unrighteous will only tolerate or celebrate it as long as it benefits them. They like us being hard workers, good students, reliable neighbors, etc. But when our righteousness infringes on their ability to sin, it becomes a problem. One waitress lied about us repeatedly, telling the hostess we couldn't handle large tables and such, as part of her revenge. This is a micro persecution. As I write this, there are Christians brothers and sisters in the Afghanistan of August 2021, most likely facing their last days on earth as malevolent forces seek to purge the country of Christianity.

You may be facing persecution right now for standing firm on matters where God has spoken to you and directed you in a specific way. You may have lost your job and income, family, and friends. Fasten tightly onto Christ's promise here that your heavenly rewards will be greater than your trials here. What does Proverbs say about the plight of the righteous here in a fallen world?

Read Proverbs 2:7-8 and list the benefits of living righteously.

Read Proverbs 18:10 then in your own words, (so even an unbeliever can understand) explain what it means that God is a “strong tower” for the righteous.

Read Proverbs 4:18-19. Describe the benefit here for the righteous and the consequences for the wicked. Please put your answer in your own words.

Proverbs 10 contrasts the righteous and the wicked several times. Read the chapter and then list the blessings and benefits God has in mind for the righteous. Again, don't just copy the words from your Bible translation. Restate them in your own words. This process will help you remember these principles much better than simply repeating the verses.

Prayer

Lord, please strengthen me that I may bear up under any persecution that is coming at me now or may come in the days ahead. Help me to remain Christlike, humble, patient kind and self-controlled when those around me are behaving badly. Teach me when to speak and when to be silent. Show me when to stand and fight and speak out against wrongs and injustice and when to keep it strictly in my prayer closet.

