

Sermon Series: "Christian Life Skills for Every Age"—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield—5/13/2001

Title: "Be-Attitudes"

Text: Matthew 5: 1-9

Introduction: *Illus.: Unexpected Rules of the Race*

Theme: The new up-side-down life Jesus gives us for is not so much about "what we do" as it is about "who we are."

Being poor so that we can become rich

- *When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. "Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually helpless. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them. (vs. 1-3)*
- **Our lives are poorer when we are full of ourselves**
 1. **ILLUS.: MISSING WHAT MARKS YOU**
 2. *You say, 'I'm rich. I'm wealthy. I don't need anything.' Yet, you do not realize that you are miserable, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Rev. 3: 17*
- **Lasting richness comes only when we admit we are spiritually bankrupt and need Jesus, daily, to fill us up**
 1. *Jesus was rich, yet for your sake he became poor in order to make you rich through his poverty. 2 Cor. 8:9*

Being joyful in our sadness

- *Blessed are those who mourn. They will be comforted. (vs. 4)*
- **We can miss the joy of what God is giving us when we let mourning for the temporary loss consume us**
- **Mourning for the temporary loss as if we have already gained an eternal possession**
 1. *We don't want you to grieve like other people who have no hope... We believe that Jesus died and came back to life. We also believe that, through Jesus, God will bring back those who have died. 1Thess 4:13-14*

Being strong by being meek

- *Blessed are those who are gentle. They will inherit the earth. (vs. 5)*
- **ILLUS.: STRENGTH IN MEEKNESS—President Teddy Roosevelt**
- **The world promotes that we have to be tough, complete, savvy—but that makes us insecure, cynical, fearful**
- **I don't have to be strong—only Jesus needs to be** (*I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Phil 4: 13*)

Being empty to be filled up

- *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness. They will be satisfied. (vs. 6)*
- **Living in the "happiness chase" of our culture, it is hard to keep from being lured in and swallowed up**
 1. **ILLUS.: CHASING AFTER HAPPINESS**
- **True satisfaction of hunger and thirst comes when we become wise to our enduring need and Jesus thirst quencher**

Being merciful in your good times so that mercy is present in your time of need

- *Blessed are those who show mercy. They will be treated mercifully. (vs. 7)*
- **It is hard for us to give compassion and grace when those suffering seem to be so deserving of their consequence**
 1. **ILLUS.: Indifference for the Lost & Caring for the Hurting**
- **Mercy comes from a humility and appreciation** (*By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides. Mark 4:24*)
 1. **ILLUS.: JESUS' PARABLE IN LUKE 7 OF THE TWO FORGIVEN DEBTORS (100/50 DAYS WAGES)**

Being zealous about your purity to be able to have an uncluttered view of God

- *Blessed are those whose thoughts are pure. They will see God. (vs. 8)*
- **Because so much "stuff" clutters our view of God, it is a miracle that any of us sees him**
 1. *Store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moths and rust don't destroy and thieves don't break in and steal. Your heart will be where your treasure is. Matt 6: 20-21*
 2. **Often we sell out our soul, our purity, our zeal for God to acquire all the stuff and in the end lose God's eternal life**
- **A desire to see God is a desire to be with him and be like him**
 1. **ILLUS.: MOSES AND HIS REQUEST TO SEE GOD'S FACE**
 2. **When we view God through Jesus, we have a clearer view of ourselves—our weakness, our value, and our purpose**

Being a peace-maker rather than a peace-keeper

- *Blessed are those who make peace. They will be called God's children. (vs. 9)*
- **Don't just talk about forgiveness----live it!** (*"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." James 1:22*)
- **God did not just talk about making peace with us he did something about it in Jesus—as his children we will do the same**

Unexpected rules of the race

I once read a story about a bicycle race in India. The object of the race was to go the shortest distance possible within a specified time. At the start of the race, everyone cued up at the line, and when the gun sounded all the bicycles, as best they could, stayed put. Racers were disqualified if they tipped over or one of their feet touched the ground. And so they would inch forward just enough to keep the bike balanced. When the time was up and another gun sounded, the person who had gone the farthest was the loser and the person closest to the starting line was the winner. Imagine getting into that race and not understanding how the race works. When the race starts, you pedal as hard and fast as you possibly can. You're out of breath. You're sweating. You're delighted because the other racers are back there at the starting line. You're going to break the record. You think, *This is fantastic. Don't let up. Push harder and faster and longer and stronger.* At last you hear the gun that ends the race, and you are delighted because you are unquestionably the winner. Except you are unquestionably the loser because you misunderstood how the race is run.

Missing what marks you

Angi had just graduated from the university and started teaching in an area college. One day, she went to a nearby restaurant for lunch. The man who seated her asked, "Are you a teacher?" Surprised, Angi replied, "Why yes, I am." She enjoyed a warm feeling throughout the meal; she looked like a teacher! As she was leaving the restaurant, she asked the man, "How did you know I was a teacher?" "You have chalk dust on your seat," he replied.

Strength in Meekness

President Theodore Roosevelt adopted as his pet proverb, "Speak softly and carry a big stick." By that he meant that if the U.S. had a strong military, it could work its will among the nations of the world. In 1901, Roosevelt elaborated on his philosophy: "If a man continually blusters,... a big stick will not save him from trouble; and neither will speaking softly avail, if back of the softness there does not lie strength, power." When Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," he was not speaking of armies and foreign policy, but some principles are the same. The meek Christian does not need to bluster, as if his or her own self-confidence could win the day. Whether we're contesting a point, responding to criticism, or speaking of the hope within, we can do so in meekness, with quiet confidence. For in "back of the softness," within us, lies the strength and power of God.

Chasing after happiness

In New York City, there are eight million cats and eleven million dogs. New York City is basically just concrete and steel, so when you have a pet in New York City and it dies, you can't just go out in the back yard and bury it. The city authorities decided that for \$50 they would dispose of your deceased pet for you. One lady was enterprising. She thought, *I can render a service to people in the city and save them money.* She placed an ad in the newspaper that said, "When your pet dies, I will come and take care of the carcass for you for \$25." This lady would go to the local Salvation Army and buy an old suitcase for two dollars. Then when someone would call about his or her pet, she would go to the home and put the deceased pet in the suitcase. She would then take a ride on the subway, where there are thieves. She would set the suitcase down, and she would act like she wasn't watching. A thief would come by and steal her suitcase. She'd look up and say, "Wait. Stop. Thief." My guess is the people who stole those suitcases got a real surprise when they got home. A lot of us are like those New York thieves. We're chasing after happiness, and we grab what we think will give us happiness; however, when we get it, it doesn't quite deliver.

Indifference for the lost

The following is a dialogue from the once-popular sitcom, *Seinfeld*, between Elaine and her boyfriend. Elaine asks, "Do you believe in God?" "Yes," her boyfriend replies. Elaine asks, "Is it a problem that I'm not religious?" "Not for me," her boyfriend answers. "How's that?" she asks. Her boyfriend says, "I'm not the one going to hell."

Caring for the hurting

Patricia L. Miller, a former hospital staff person, writes: While at work in the emergency room, I learned to stop crying at the pain around me. Each day it seemed I was becoming insensitive to people and their real needs. Five years of emergency room exposure had taken its toll. Then God intervened. I was taking information for registering a young woman who had overdosed on drugs and had attempted suicide. Her mother sat before me as I typed the information into the computer. The mother was unkempt and bleary eyed. She had been awakened in the middle of the night by the police to come to the hospital. She could only speak to me in a whisper. *Hurry up*, I said to myself, as she slowly gave me the information. My impatience was raw as I finished the report and jumped to the machine to copy the medical cards. That's when God stopped me—at the copy machine. He spoke to my heart so clearly: *You didn't even look at her.* He repeated it, gently: *You didn't even look at her.* I felt his grief for her and for her daughter, and I bowed my head. I'm sorry, Lord. I am so sorry. I sat down in front of the distraught woman and covered her hands with mine. I looked into her eyes with all the love that God could flood through me and said, "I care. Don't give up." She wept and wept. She poured her heart out to me about the years of dealing with a rebellious daughter as a single mom. Finally, she looked up and thanked me. Me...the cold-hearted one with no feelings. My attitude changed that night. My Jesus came right into the workplace in spite of rules that tried to keep him out. He came in to set me free to care again. He gave himself to that woman through me. My God, who so loved the world, broke that self-imposed barrier around my heart. Now he could reach out, not only to me in my pain, but to a lost and hurting woman.