

2-12-17 *To be blessed:* We have just heard the third excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount. It is all built upon and flows out of the Beatitudes. St. Augustine says that the Beatitudes are “the perfect standard of the Christian life.” President Harry S. Truman says, “I do not believe there is a problem in this country or the world today which could not be settled if approached through the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.” Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. says, “Most people are willing to take the Sermon on the Mount as a flag to sail under, but few will use it as a rudder by which to steer.”

Recall how the Beatitudes begin: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek” and so forth. Jesus taught us how one virtue builds upon another; from humility to the recognition of our own weakness to submitting our strengths to God, etc. To be blessed is to be deeply satisfied in your heart. It is characterized by happiness. True happiness occurs not from the outside measure of worldly achievement or prosperity, but from the inside of one’s heart, that is, it is found by living the Beatitudes.

By living these Christo-centric virtues we can become the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” A follower of Jesus becomes a virtuous person. A virtuous person becomes a happy person. Such a one does not need to appeal other people with Christian doctrine or words, but rather it will be our good deeds that will become attractive to other people. “Do not speak of God to those who do not ask,” says St. Francis DeSales, “But live so that, sooner or later, they will ask.”

In today’s excerpt, Jesus applies his new law to the Old Testament laws regarding murder, adultery, divorce, false testimony, retaliation, and dealing with enemies. Recall, Jesus climbs the mountain like Moses, but instead of receiving the old law from God as Moses did, Jesus gives us the new law as he establishes a new kingdom. This is the overarching theme of the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus is the King who has come to establish the kingdom of God in earth. Jesus comes not to abolish but to “fulfill” the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. The Sermon on the Mount, therefore, reveals the deeper meaning of the Ten Commandments and transcends it as well. It transcends it by a way of living that exceeds the holiness accomplished by the most pious of Jews. Jesus says, “You have heard it said, but I say to you.” In other words, where the Ten Commandments are mostly a list of prohibitions, living the Beatitudes not only brings blessings into the heart of man but enables us to easily fulfill the heart of God’s Laws and teachings of the prophets as well.

In sum, the kingdom of God has arrived. Jesus teaches us to dig deep into the interior disposition of our heart; the seat of our motivations and desires; the place from which our words and actions proceed to change ourselves and indeed effect change in our world. St. Augustine, President Truman, and Oliver Wendell Holmes are a pretty diverse group of men, but they all understood that the Sermon on the Mount is transformational. As I attempted to highlight last week, there are many people we live and work with who have never heard the Sermon on the Mount. No matter where we find ourselves in life, it is never too late to learn from Jesus, embody his teachings, and to let our good deeds speak for themselves. Who knows, perhaps someone you live or work with may begin to wonder and ask what it is like to be blessed.