

The Jesus Way to Cultural Influence

The Sermon on the Mount of Jesus (Matt. 5:1-12) is perhaps the greatest exposition ever written regarding godly character and attitude. Often the 10 attributes mentioned here are overlooked because, in our performance-based culture, inward holiness is not as important as outward fruit. However, being transformed into the image and character of Christ is a prerequisite before we can walk in the ministry and power of Christ.

In regard to those like me who preach on the manifestation of the kingdom of God that can transform society, it is important for us to realize that Jesus focused on these 10 attributes before He called His followers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). Consequently, this behooves us to merge the kingdom message of societal transformation with the teachings of the pietists (some even call them mystics) who focused on individual transformation; we cannot have one without the other. (Each camp needs to bring balance to the other.) Truly, God cannot entrust us with power and influence before we have Christ-like character worked out on the inside of us.

The following are the 10 attributes needed in order to qualify for spiritual and societal leadership in God's kingdom:

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The word "poor" here is the Greek word *ptochos*, which means one who is humble in regard to his own capacities, or one who is not spiritually arrogant. Someone who is poor in spirit is a person who is totally dependent upon Jesus for their life, wisdom, sustenance and power. The poor in spirit know that

they are empty without God, that they have no righteousness on their own, and no outward show to keep propping up their identity. This is the opposite of a spiritually arrogant person who lives a life of presumption and pride and does not depend upon or consult with the Lord in regard to the direction of their life.

If we are going to be entrusted by God with real kingdom influence, we cannot be haughty, arrogant or have a proud attitude regarding material and/or ministry success; we need to live a life of daily dependence upon the Lord.

2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Those who mourn in our context could mean a person who is very sensitive to the needs, hurts and wants of others—someone who empathizes with others. Empathy gives us the capacity to feel what others feel, to see what others see, so we can adequately bring them the Word of God. Mourning has to do with grieving over the sin of others and the poor state of spirituality in the church and society. Those who mourn are broken vessels who give themselves up to much prayer and intercession until God's Spirit is poured out and brings restoration to a person or situation.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

When people are meek they are gentle, kind, considerate and humble. Those who attempt to exert top-down leadership that imposes their will and desires do not represent true kingdom leadership. Forceful, abusive, manipulative leadership is not going to be blessed by God in the long run, since many people will not endure sitting under such behavior for long.

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

God has called His people to always hunger for knowledge and wisdom that comes through continual study, conversations,

sitting under teaching, asking questions, and contemplation. We are called to be life-long students. I have seen many leaders who rarely read a book, and who have no hunger for knowledge. These same leaders have capped their leadership potential and influence. Hungering is not just for knowledge but also for the application of knowledge, which is wisdom. Wise leaders focus on bringing God's righteousness and justice to their environments and spheres of influence. Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit are the evidence of the reign of God in our midst. (Rom. 14:17)

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Those who are merciful are those who have compassion upon others and even bestow favor, love and kindness on those who do not deserve it. Once we realize how much of a sinner we are, we have a greater appreciation for the mercy God had upon us when He saved us by His grace. Those who understand God's mercy toward them are not quick to judge the motives, intentions and actions of others.

Leaders who are not merciful toward everyone cannot represent Christ's kingdom to this world, because Jesus told us to be like His Father who causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good (Matt. 5:45). The less we appreciate God's mercy toward us in Christ, the more self-righteous and less merciful we will be toward others.

6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Being pure in heart has to do with a person having no hidden agendas, motives or selfishness regarding their faith and duty toward others. When we have hidden motives, undealt with hypocrisy and sin, and self-focused agendas, it blurs the image of our true self, which in turn mars our perception of God. If we have bitterness toward someone, then we view everything they do through a lens of suspicion. To the extent that we see reality, to that extent we can get a true

revelation of God. Those leaders who are narcissistic and self-focused in their intent and actions do not have a deep revelation of their heavenly Father.

7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Peacemakers are unique in this world because they have the amazing ability to understand opposing points of view and reconcile adversaries. Peacemakers can even function as statesmen if they serve in the political arena. This is a profound passage that has vast ecclesial and societal implications, including that Christian leaders should also be able to cross religious, cultural and political lines to bring peace, so that people in secular communities can function together in harmony.

8. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Leaders in the kingdom of God must be willing to pay the price of insults, slander and negative press since the biblical worldview is so countercultural. Anti-Christian bigots will twist our life narrative, assign sinister motives to us, and never recognize the good the gospel does in this world, because doing so would refute their own arguments. God allows this to happen to those He chooses to lead as a way of testing, so they will learn to love the praise of God more than the praise of men. It is easy to serve God in a community if you are always given accolades by the world, but only a remnant of believers would be willing to take a stand for the gospel if it meant their life and/or reputation would suffer.

9. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Insults are more of a personal nature than a general persecution, which seems to be the emphasis in the previous verse. It is probably more difficult to deal with the personal

attacks, slander and insults that come on an individual level than what comes in the press from people who do not know you or have a relationship with you. Being able to humble ourselves and not repay evil for evil when we are slandered is one of the greatest tests of godly character in the Bible and a trait that is well pleasing to God. When we don't repay insult for insult, then we demonstrate that we trust God will defend us (Rom. 12:17-21).

10. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Here Jesus teaches us to practice the presence and joy of the Lord even when we have been betrayed, mistreated and slandered by others. When we walk in the joy of the Lord in adverse circumstances, then we demonstrate to God and others that our reason, motive and purpose for living is to be with Him and please Him rather than doing it for the accolades and praise of men.

Who is qualified to function as the salt and light of the world?

In conclusion, it is not an accident that Jesus teaches on these 10 beatitudes before He calls His followers to be the salt and light of the world. The clear implication is that we need to have these qualities ingrained in our hearts before we can effectively influence the world.

Notice: These 10 attributes do not focus on spiritual gifts, ability, anointing or spiritual power but on emotional maturity and a deep-rootedness in the character of Christ. Too often we in the church elevate a person because they are good looking, have charisma and/or are a great preacher, thus bypassing these attributes. Consequently, gifted people elevated to places of influence who are emotionally and spiritually immature eventually bring shame and scandal to the

kingdom of God.

May we who preach the kingdom of God and represent Christ in this world not only embrace the ministry and power of Christ but also the character of Christ. Entire chapters in Scripture have been written just on His character, which is the fruit of the Spirit. I can't think of one chapter that is dedicated just to the anointing and power of God (Matt. 5-7; 1 Cor. 13; 1 John 4; Phil. 2; compare these passages to Matt. 7:21-22). These character traits are what God values, which is why it is so hard on our flesh to be effective leaders. (I am my biggest stumbling block, not the anti-Christian bigots, not my family, not my ministry—but me.)

May God help us become more like Jesus in every way!

Joseph Mattera *is overseeing bishop of Resurrection Church, Christ Covenant Coalition, in Brooklyn, N.Y. Visit him at .*