

Happy Are the Helpful and Holy

Overcoming the Me-Attitudes—Part 4

Matthew 5:7-8

Faithful, Fruitful, Insightful

He was born in 1897 in a tiny farming community in western Pennsylvania. One night, at the age of seventeen, while walking home from his job at a tire store, he overheard a street preacher say, “If you don’t know how to be saved . . . just call on God.”

When he arrived at home, he climbed into the attic and called out to God for salvation.

Five years after his conversion, he took his first pastorate in West Virginia. Without any formal training, although he would become an incredible student of the Word and teacher of Christian principles, he entered the ministry.

This was the beginning of forty faithful, fruitful years that included authoring numerous books, pastoring several churches, receiving two honorary doctorates, and heading a national magazine as editor, producing countless articles with a pen laced with a touch of sarcasm, a good measure of wit, and a load of spiritual insight.

His name was Aiden Wilson Tozer, better known as A. W. Tozer.

His books, *The Knowledge of the Holy* and *The Pursuit of God*, are now considered across denominational lines to be Christian classics.

Though loved by many, Tozer stood for the truth of the gospel. In fact, in an era in which liberalism had swept into the mainline church in the early 1900s, he wrote, “We are not diplomats, but prophets, and our message is not a compromise—it is an ultimatum.”

Tozer further challenged the average American church that had grown stale over time, when he wrote,

One characteristic that marks the average church today is a lack of anticipation. When Christians meet, they do not expect anything unusual to happen; consequently only the usual happens, and that usual is as predictable as the setting of the sun. . . . We need today a fresh spirit of anticipation that springs out of the promises of God as we come together with childlike faith.

More than anything, A.W. Tozer had the ability to challenge the believer to dig into the word of God. He wrote, “We must not select a few favorite passages to the exclusion of others. Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian.”

He compared the Bible to a wristwatch and, with a touch of sarcasm, wrote, “If God gives you a watch, are you honoring Him by asking Him what time it is or by consulting the watch?”

If you have read Tozer’s books, you know that even though his most favorite books centered on theology, he had an unusual ability to challenge the Christian with the thought that believing the truth is not enough—in fact, it is dangerous unless we live it and obey it.

He once reminded an audience of the full import of the statement when he said, “The devil is a better theologian than any of us, yet he remains the devil.”

Inside Out

On one occasion when A. W. Tozer was preaching on the Beatitudes, he made the comment that if we turned the eight Beatitudes inside out, they would reflect the thinking of the American culture. And he said *that* more than fifty years ago!

It is still true, is it not? Is it any surprise, then, that the American culture could be defined as anything *but* happy?

I took Tozer's suggestion and turned the Beatitudes inside out, contrasting what our world says with what Jesus Christ is saying in Matthew chapter 5:

Verse 3:

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

- The world: "Happy are those who can say, 'I've got it made!'"
- Jesus Christ: "Happy are those who recognize they haven't got a chance."

Verse 4:

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

- The world: "Happy are those who never have to cry about anything."
- Jesus Christ: "Happy are those who never stop crying over sin."

Verse 5:

*"Blessed are the gentle,
for they shall inherit the earth."*

- The world: "Happy are those who know how to climb the ladder."
- Jesus Christ: "Happy are those who voluntarily come in last."

Verse 6:

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

- The world: "Happy are those who stuff themselves with the things of life."
- Jesus Christ: "Happy are those who are starving for something beyond this life."

Verse 7:

*"Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall receive mercy."*

- The world: "Blessed are those who never need help or a handout."
- Jesus Christ: "Blessed are those who are ready to lend a hand."

Verse 8:

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

- The world: "Happy are those whose private perversion is never revealed."
- Jesus Christ: "Happy are those whose private purity is a daily resolution."

Blessed Are the Merciful

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

Matthew 5:7

Before we find out what Christ is saying, we need to understand what He is *not* saying.

❖ **Jesus Christ is not saying, "If you show mercy to others, you will receive mercy from others."**

If this were so, the most merciful Man to ever walk the planet would have been given mercy by the mob instead of a rugged cross.ⁱ

David showed mercy on two occasions to King Saul. Twice, David could have taken the life of this cruel, vindictive king who threw spears at him, trying to pin him to the wall and who, for years, tried to hunt him down and kill him so he would not take the throne of Israel.

On one occasion, in the middle of the night, while Saul and his men were sleeping in the open, David crept up and cut a piece from Saul's cloak when he could have cut Saul's throat. David showed mercy and Saul only grew more vindictive.

It is possible to show mercy to people who turn their back on us; reject us; treat us badly.

So, the Lord is not saying, "If you show mercy to others, you'll receive mercy in return."

❖ **Jesus is not saying, "If you show mercy to others, you will earn mercy from God."**

We do not earn mercy by extending mercy.ⁱⁱ

Salvation from God is not merited. However, salvation from God is received. Receiving mercy from God is our present tense experience and our future tense experience.

Paul told Titus,

*[Christ] saved us . . .
according to His . . . mercy. . . .*

Titus 3:5

In Ephesians 2:4, Paul writes that God has saved us, . . . *being rich in mercy* . . .

In other words, it is impossible to be saved without the mercy of God, and salvation is an unmerited gift from God.

This is what is happening: This beatitude has more to do with our relationship with other people than with God.

I believe we could understand the Lord to be saying, “Since you are people who have and will receive the mercy of God, prove it by showing mercy to other people.”

The Quality of Mercy

One of the distinctives of the believer is mercy.

In other words, showing mercy to others is not a condition to receiving mercy from God—it is proof that we have received it. Showing mercy is evidence that we have received mercy.ⁱⁱⁱ

This is the thought behind the Apostle John’s question to the Christian student:

But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him [literally, has no mercy on him], how does

God’s love abide in him?

I John 3:17

We do not earn the love of God. But how can we claim to have the love of God and yet be unloving and unmerciful to others at the same time?

Jesus Christ says, “Do you want to be truly happy? Show mercy to others.”

Understand that the world of Christ did not admire mercy. The Romans admired justice, power, might. The philosophers of Christ’s day even called mercy a “disease of the soul”.^{iv}

While in India I was so moved by the masses of people who were considered Untouchables—the lowest caste in the Hindu culture. Children ran after us wherever we went, offering cheap plastic

necklaces for pennies; women, carrying babies on their hips, begged on the street corners as we drove by, their lives filled with unspeakable difficulty and sorrow.

Still, they received no mercy from anyone! Their religion taught that these people had been reincarnated as Untouchables because of a prior life of evil—they were getting what they deserved.

I met a Christian woman who was going among the Untouchables and inviting elementary-aged girls from this caste to her school. She dressed them in clean uniforms and then, in a public bathroom that she had cleaned herself, sat them in tidy rows on the scrubbed floor and taught them every week-day, giving those Untouchables hope.

What would motivate anyone to show these people mercy? That person would have to be someone who had received the mercy of God herself.

Mercy is tangibly demonstrated.

Mercy, one author wrote, is simply seeing a man without food and giving him food. Mercy is seeing people begging for love and giving them love. Mercy is seeing someone lonely and giving her company. Mercy is not in feeling their need, but in meeting their need.^v

Another wrote it this way, “Mercy is giving attention to those in misery.”^{vi}

But the world doesn’t buy that! In Christ’s day and in ours, happiness is having people bow to our needs.

The Blessing of Mercy

The world would say, “When you are in control—when you have people at your mercy—that’s really living.”

Well, Joseph must have been really living! In Genesis 42, his brothers had come to Egypt in need of food and had bowed before his authority, not knowing he was their youngest brother whom they had sold into slavery.

Joseph now had his brothers at *his* mercy—but he showed *them* mercy. This was undeniable proof of God’s mercy having impacted his own heart long before this meeting.

Do you want true happiness? Show mercy.

There is mercy in forgiveness. There is mercy when we withhold that which someone justly deserves; when we refuse to take revenge—even

when that person is *at our mercy* and we can hurt them, or humiliate them, or ignore them.

Mercy is the imitation of Christ, who in His mercy saved us.

The hymn writer put it this way:

*By God's Word at last my sin I learned;
Then I trembled at the law I'd spurned,
Till my guilty soul imploring turned
to Calvary.*

And what happened?

*Mercy there was great, and grace was free,
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty
—at Calvary.*

The one who shows mercy to the guilty reveals the truth that he has received the mercy of Christ in his past, and will experience the mercy of God in his eternal future.

Happy are the helpful.

The Absence of Mercy

Do you want to be truly *unhappy*? Be merciless—let everyone know that those people in that group, or down the street, or in that country are getting what they deserve.

Joseph Stalin [Stalin-meaning *steel*] was a former Russian premier—one of the most powerful men on the planet; he executed millions and had millions more at his mercy. And he showed *none*.

This man of steel had seven bedrooms, each of which would be closed at night as tightly as a safe. He spent each night in a different bedroom for fear of being assassinated. Stalin's greatest fear was that those he led with a steel boot might show him the same lack of mercy. He even employed a full-time servant to do nothing more than monitor and protect his teabags.

This is a happy man? You'd think so—he was on top of the world—yet the truth is that his servant who watched the tea bags probably enjoyed his tea more than Stalin ever could!

Even an atheist could have learned from Shakespeare that “. . . we do pray [plead] for mercy; and that same prayer doth teach us all to render the deeds of mercy.” How much better to have the wisdom of God to advise us, for Solomon wrote,

The merciful man [ultimately] does himself good,

but the cruel man does himself harm.

Proverbs 11:17

Blessed Are the Pure In Heart

Mercy is an external activity but *purity* is an internal quality. Jesus Christ delivers another upside-down, backward, countercultural truth on how to put away the “Me-attitudes” and discover the Beatitudes

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

Matthew 5:8

Happy are the holy—blessed are the pure in heart.

When we study the Scriptures, we discover the fact that there is *positional* purity and *practical* purity. Positional purity is the work of God *for Christians* and practical purity is the work of Christians *for God*.

Positional Purity

Positional purity is another term for justification. We are justified—declared pure and righteous by the work of God for us at salvation.

Paul wrote in Romans 3:23-24,

*. . . for all have sinned and fall short
of the glory of God,
and are justified [declared pure before God]
by his grace as a gift, through the redemption
that is in Christ Jesus,*

Positional purity is the easy side of the equation because God has accomplished all the work of redemption.

Practical Purity

When the Bible speaks about the heart, it means the center of the personality. In the Bible, the heart is the mind, the emotions, and the will; the heart refers then to what makes you who you are.^{vii}

Jesus Christ said,

*. . . out of the abundance of the heart
the mouth speaks.*

Matthew 12:34b

Solomon wrote,

... as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he.
Proverbs 23:7

Notice that the emphasis is not on our hands but our hearts. Our hands are related to mercy; our hearts are related to purity.

Practical purity is the hard part. This is our responsibility. This is who we are and what we do for God.

Personal Purity

So the happy are those who diligently and passionately desire purity in their hearts—purity in mind/thought, purity in emotion/feelings, and purity in will/decision making.

Purity is from the word *katharos*, which refers to *integrity*. It is akin to the Latin word *castus*, which gives us our English word *chaste*.

Again in Matthew 5:8, the promise is:

... they shall see God.

The tense of this verb is a future continuous tense. One author paraphrased this text to read, “Happy are those who pursue purity [in their mind, emotions, and will], because they will continually be seeing God for themselves.”^{viii}

Warren Wiersbe said it this way, “Spiritual sight leads to spiritual insight.”^{ix}

Thoreau was once asked if he wanted to read the newspaper, and he responded that he had read one already. I like this perspective better: John Wesley said that he read the newspaper to see what God was doing in His world.^x

The best way to see the hand of God at work in your own life, the lives of others, and in the life of your world is through a heart that you continually ask God to cleanse, like David who prayed,

Create in me a clean heart, O God . . .
Psalm 51:10

Helen Keller was asked, “Isn’t it terrible to be blind?” She responded, “Better to be blind and see with your heart, than to have two good eyes and see nothing.”^{xi}

Blessed are those who see with their hearts . . .
and those with pure [clean] hearts see the most!

Walking Carefully in the Parade of the Ages

The amazing Hubble telescope, orbiting 360 miles above Earth’s surface, travels at the speed of five miles per second, completing one full orbit every 96 minutes. It can peer into space seven billion light years away.

Before it was launched, numerous delays caused the lens to be stored for seven years in a sterile cell in the Lockheed facility in Sunnyvale, California. The cost was a staggering eight million dollars a month.

That’s a lot of rent money—one billion, four hundred seventy-two million dollars . . . and no cents!

I found it fascinating that scientists certainly understood the best way to see the heavens is through a *clean* lens.

Believers who cultivate a pure heart see the activity of the God of Heaven through a clean lens.

A. W. Tozer said it this way, “You can see God from anywhere if your [heart] is set to love and obey Him.”

He wrote these convicting words: “It will cost something to walk [carefully] slowly in the parade of the ages, while excited men rush about, confusing motion with progress; but [walking slowly, carefully] will pay off in the long run.”

This is another way of saying, “Don’t listen to what the world says about happiness—listen to what Jesus Christ says.”

Happy are the merciful; they will receive mercy in return.

Happy are the pure in heart; they will see God.

These twin attributes walk hand in hand down parallel paths that eventually converge, leading to true happiness.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/13/2008 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ John MacArthur, *Kingdom Living Here and Now* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 105.

ⁱⁱ Warren Wiersbe, *Live Like a King* (Moody Press, 1976), p. 105.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Crossway Books, 2001), p. 48.
- ^{iv} Wiersbe, p. 95.
- ^v MacArthur, p. 109.
- ^{vi} Hughes, p. 46.
- ^{vii} James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Baker Books, 1972), p. 46.
- ^{viii} MacArthur, p. 133.
- ^{ix} Wiersbe, p. 122.
- ^x *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- ^{xi} Hughes, p. 56.