

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: POWER OVER PRIDE
IN GOD'S NEW HUMANITY

A Seminar on Kingdom Principles

Matthew 5-7

Session One

Introduction and Beatitudes

Matt. 4:25-5:16

CHAPTER FIVE

(Translation by D. King)

1. *When He saw the crowd He went up onto the mountain and after He had sat down His disciples came to Him and He opened (lit. "having opened") his mouth and 2. began to teach (or "was teaching") them saying:*
3. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.*
4. *"Blessed are those who are mourning because they will be comforted.*
5. *"Blessed are those who are meek because they will inherit the earth.*
6. *"Blessed are those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness because they will be filled and satisfied.*
7. *"Blessed are those who are merciful because they will have mercy shown to them. (lit. "they will be mercied!")*
8. *"Blessed are those who are clean (pure, genuine) in their hearts (those with cleansed hearts) because they will see God.*
9. *"Blessed are those who make peace because they will be called sons of God.*
10. *"Blessed are those who are being persecuted for the sake of righteousness*
11. *because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. Blessed are you whenever they are reviling you and are persecuting you and are saying every kind of evil thing against you falsely (lying about it) for my sake. 12. Keep on rejoicing and being very extremely glad because your reward in heaven is great, for this is the way they persecuted the prophets before your time.*
13. *"You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its taste, how can it be made salty again? It is good for nothing (has no strength for anything) but to be thrown out and trampled down by men.*
14. *"You are the light of the world. A city cannot be hidden when it lies on top of a hill; 15. neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand and it lights up (shines on) everyone in the house. 16. In the same way you must let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who is in heaven."*

Foreword:

I must confess that any exposition of the Sermon on the Mount is a monumental task for someone with limited training and ability such as myself; however, in this online format I think that I can put the results of years of study and teaching into such a form as to make it useful for those who may wish to understand it better in the light of its context and purpose.

This is not intended to be a scholarly exposition with many quotes from the multitude of books which have been published on this subject; rather, it is a summary of ideas gathered from years of study,

teaching and application during 30 years of missionary service in the Middle East and Northern Africa and 28 years of service and ministry since official “retirement.”

As we study the Word together, may we all become more and more like Him who was and is the perfect embodiment of the Sermon, Jesus Christ Himself.

Introduction:

Dr. E. Stanley Jones, in his book, *The Christ of the Mount*, speaks of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:7 as describing a “new kind of humanity.” It is humanity transformed, changed and redeemed; an ideal humanity as it should be by God’s grace and power. It may be considered an illustration of the words in II Cor. 5:17, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come.*” What does that “new creation” look like? What are the characteristics of these “new creations?” What kind of people does Jesus have a right to expect us to be as those created by the new birth (John 3:3-8)? The Sermon on the Mount answers these questions. Yes, this is humanity idealized, as it should be if every believer was really born-again and filled with the Holy Spirit. This kind of person cannot be formed by the application of legal requirements, but is based on the heart’s desire to be like Jesus.

The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus especially for the Jewish people as the Messiah-King of the line of David with the right to assume David’s throne. His perfection becomes the ideal for the people of God, who “*chose us in Him before the creation of the world*” (Eph. 1:4). The Sermon on the Mount gives the principles of life as it should be lived in the kingdom of God. The central thought might be expressed as “Discipleship in God’s Kingdom” under the lordship of His ideal King. The sermon gives us insight into the kinds of disciples we should be in that spiritual kingdom.

The context of the sermon

We see from Matt. 4:23-25 and Luke 6:17-19 that great crowds of people were following Jesus, mostly so that they could be healed but also in order to see his miracles and to hear his teaching and preaching. They were gathered at a mountain (or a high hill) in Galilee. Matthew says that Jesus went up the hill to deliver the sermon; Luke says that he came down from a higher point. As I picture it, Jesus had climbed up higher, perhaps to the top, to pray all night (Luke 6:12). In the morning he came down to a more level place, perhaps near the middle of the hillside, where the people could gather in front of him while he stood a little higher up. He then called out the twelve apostles as the chosen leaders of His movement (Luke 6:13-16). They were probably seated or stood in the front row of the crowd so he

preached primarily to them, giving them as the leaders the principles of His Kingdom and allowing all the rest to benefit from hearing all He had to say.

The purpose of the sermon: -- When we speak about the purpose of the sermon there are at least four viewpoints on that subject.

The first is that it is a perfectionist ideal for a new society. This view says that it is literalistic, absolutist, and legalistic in nature as though it were a new Christian law containing rules that must be kept in order to please God.

The second view is that it is a set of principles not to be applied literally, but to teach us to change our attitudes or “mind-set” in order that we may learn to love as God loves. It is, therefore, considered to be figurative, a spiritualized interpretation.

A third view is that the sermon is an impossible ideal driving people to despair so that they will come to the cross for forgiveness (serving the same purpose as the moral law of the Old Testament).

A fourth view considers the sermon an ideal for born-again Christians - a guide to Christian living based on spiritual principles *after* one has experienced the new birth. It shows what kind of people God has a right to expect His people, His new humanity, to become as they grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18; II Cor. 5:17).

Note.--Those who hold to the first two views make the sermon equivalent to a plan of salvation for society (the first) and for individuals (the second). Those who hold to the third view consider the sermon a preparation for evangelism only. The literal fulfillment can only come in the millennium or the kingdom age. Those who hold the fourth view (which we feel is correct) make it an ideal guide for the saved. It shows the kind of life which becomes possible when a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit and abiding in Christ (John 14:15-16:15).

Someone has summarized the sermon as “an assault on human pride with a guarantee of victory.”

Professor A. M. Hunter has characterized it as “poetical, pictorial and proverbial.”

The main points of the sermon.--

Jesus emphasizes the superior **character** of God’s new humanity (5:3-12).

Jesus emphasizes the superior **nature** of God’s new humanity (5:13-48).

Jesus teaches the inward, spiritual nature of **the worship** of God’s new humanity (6:1-18).

Jesus emphasizes the **priorities and values** of God’s new humanity (6:19-34).

Jesus applies the principle of **spiritual discernment** to God’s new humanity (7:1-12)

Jesus **contrasts** God’s new humanity **with others** (7:13-27)



These divisions correspond to the various sessions of this seminar and result in “Power over Pride.”

I. **Jesus emphasizes the superior character of God’s new humanity** (5:3-12; Luke6:20-26)

Introduction. --

The word translated as “blessed” means “happy,” or “to be congratulated,” with an element of “ought-ness.” “Ought” (in the sense of moral rightness) to be happy, blessed, congratulated because there is a moral imperative in these statements that makes it so. It indicates a state of wholeness and well-being, a state of satisfaction because of a right relationship with God and others.

1. Jesus’ method : paradoxical statements. Each statement of blessedness is contrasted with a situation or condition which seems at first glance to be anything but “blessed” but is followed immediately by a promise. For example, being *poor in spirit* does not sound like a condition of blessedness, but the promise is *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. Being *persecuted for righteousness sake* does not sound like a blessing either, but the promise is the same, *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*; however, Jesus intends for us to realize that His paradoxical statements are completely true when we understand them.

2. The divisions.--

- (1) What they are **in themselves** - their inward qualities or characteristics (5:3-6, 8)
 - (2) What they are **in their relationships with others** - their outward qualities or characteristics (5:7, 9-12)
 - (3) What they are **in the world** : their responsibilities and influence - to be salt and light. (5:13-16)
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- (1) What they are in themselves (Their inward qualities or characteristics) (5:3-6, 8; cf. Luke 6:20-21, 24-25) **Those who approach God’s ideal are:**

Humble- (The assault on pride begins.)

The pronouncement: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit."* There is some contrast here with what is recorded in Luke 6:20: ²⁰ *Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God . . ."* ²⁴ *"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort."* The emphasis in Matthew's version is on spiritual poverty while the emphasis in Luke is on physical poverty. Of course both are true. In Matthew's version the picture is of one so poor in his spirit that he begs for help because he has nothing to offer in return. We have seen this often in our years in the Middle East which seems always to be filled with those begging for money because of their dire poverty. They are usually bent over and looking down so as not to see whoever gives them help. This helps to keep the gift anonymous. If the giver was known, the recipient might feel obligated to give something in return. It is this attitude of complete shame in helplessness which brings the seeker into relationship with the giver. *"in my hand no price I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling"* (from the hymn: *Rock of Ages*, verse 2). It is only those who realize their spiritual poverty who can become truly rich in Jesus!

Isaiah says in 57:15, *For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'*

On the other hand there is also blessing in physical poverty. Jesus warned that those who are wealthy have a difficult time entering the kingdom of heaven like the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-25) who felt that he had kept God's commandments, but went away sad when Jesus asked him to sell all his valuable material goods and give the proceeds to the poor and come follow Him. Those who are wealthy tend to depend on their wealth to solve all their problems, but it doesn't work. They may be comfortable now, like the rich man in Luke 16:19, but when he died he found himself in hell and not in heaven. The rich fool in Luke 12:13-21 is called a fool because he made no preparation for eternal life after his earthly life was finished. As someone has observed, "You never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer!" Earthly poverty is helpful in turning people toward their need for spiritual life and blessing both now, when their situation is desperate, and in eternity.

Perhaps the best example of this is in Luke 18:9-14: ⁹ *To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men -- robbers, evildoers, adulterers -- or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' ¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a*

distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The promise: "because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them." Only the humble can enter God's kingdom. This is the emphasis in Matt. 7:13-14: "¹³Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow (difficult) the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

When anyone approaches the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the entrance is a very small door cut into a very large original door. Only the small door is open. To enter, each person must bend over and crouch down in order to pass through it. It is called "the needle's eye" by many, but it is a good picture of the humility necessary to enter God's kingdom.

Luke (6:20) uses the emphatic pronoun: "yours is the kingdom of God." "Yours" meaning those who are humble/poor enough not to rely on themselves to gain favor with God.

Repentant.- (The assault on pride continues.)

The pronouncement: "Blessed are those who mourn." Where is the blessing in that? Mourning for one's sins is good preparation for repentance. This kind of mourning is deep and troubling as in the case of one who has lost a loved one. This is a good companion to humility. When we are truly "poor in spirit" and realize our severe poverty of spirit it should lead us to mourning over the condition of our hearts. In Luke 6:21b Jesus says: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh, and in 25b He says: ²⁵ Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep." There seems to be a reference here to Isaiah 61:2-4 some of which He quotes in Luke 4:18-19: "¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor . . . to comfort all who mourn, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion -- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. It is an expression of grief over one's true spiritual condition.

But this kind of severe mourning may also be caused by circumstances. Believers in Jesus in many parts of the world face terrible persecution. Sometimes it is caused by war, sometimes by religious fanatics; sometimes suffering comes from disease. There are many causes for mourning, especially from the loss of loved ones from violence or illness. Many people mourn because of fear and the uncertainty of the future and especially death. Where is the blessing in such suffering? God does not comfort us

because of our suffering, but *within* our suffering. He is present with us in our suffering and mourning and grief as He was at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:33-36).

The promise: *“because they will be comforted.”* The comfort comes in the presence of God, the Comforter, especially the Holy Spirit. John 14 & 16 emphasize this truth. Jesus predicted that He would go away, but also that He would not leave them as orphans (John 14:18) but would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to be with them. (See also Rev. 7:17, 21:3-4, 22:3-50 where God comforts His people by removing everything which might produce sadness and mourning.) In another example Peter denied the Lord and wept bitter tears, mourning because of his guilt. (Matt. 26:75 & parallels in Mk. 14:75 & Luke 22:62). Then we find that Jesus comforted him, forgave him and restored him as we read in Jn. 21:15-18.



Disciplined. (The assault on pride continued.)

The pronouncement: *“Blessed are the meek.”* Meekness is not weakness. The word is now used to refer to a rather spineless person, a wimp; but it was used in classical Greek of a wild horse which had been tamed and disciplined under the control of its master.

In the Old Testament Moses is called the meekest/humblest man on the earth (Num. 12:3) but in chapters 16 and 17 it is obvious that no one “ran over” him. Korah, Dathan and Abiram thought they could, but the earth opened up and swallowed them alive! He was defended by God. Jesus is described as meek in Mt. 11:29. If we are meek, it is because we are under the discipline of Jesus, our Master, who defends us. We *act* rather than *react* to circumstances, when we are under His control. In Gal. 5:23 Paul lists meekness as one of the nine segments of the fruit of the Spirit.

The promise: *“because they will inherit the earth”* This is a quote from Ps. 37:11; (see also Ps. 25:12-13; 37:9, 22, 29, 34; Mt. 25:34-36.) They will inherit from their heavenly Father all that is due them as children of God (Rom. 8:16-23; I Peter 1:3-4). It is a privilege to

inherit anything from our parents when they are no longer with us. When we become God's children through faith in Jesus (John 1:12) we are promised the earth as a part of our inheritance from Him along with eternal life and a heavenly home (John 14:1-6).

Is this only future or is there a present application? Actually, it is those who are disciplined who control the earth now. Rome lost its power as an empire when it lost its discipline in personal, moral and government matters and was no longer able to function as a united people. Internal corruption, moral degeneration and external invasion doomed the empire. The same factors are at work in our own nation and throughout the world today. The outcome seems inevitable.

Zealous.

The pronouncement: *"Blessed are those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness"* (Cf. 6:33 and Luke 6:21 and 25). They have good spiritual appetites. They are zealous for the things of God (heavenly treasure as in 6:19-20). In athletics, one of the most necessary qualities of every individual or member of the team is "hunger!" Each one must *want* or *hunger* to win. Each one must be zealous for the victory. Successful people have to be hungry and thirsty to achieve their goals or their desires. Spiritual blessing comes to those who are hungry like a newborn baby who cries at two o'clock in the morning and will not be silenced until he or she is fed and satisfied or like those hiking in a desert who have drunk all their water and feel that they are literally dying of thirst. Do we have this kind of hunger for God and His Word and His will?

The promise: *"because they will be filled and satisfied."* The word "filled" means to be filled to the brim; their hunger and thirst has disappeared. They will receive what they long for - the righteousness of God. Here are four possible aspects of the meaning of righteousness:

Forensic righteousness. -- We are declared righteous ("not guilty") because we have accepted Christ's death for us and have met God's conditions of repentance and faith. It is a judicial term.

Imputed righteousness. -- God imputes Christ's righteousness to us. He deposits it to our account. This is a banking term.

Vital righteousness. -- The practice of right living. This is a practical term.

Relational righteousness. -- The basis of all the others resulting from a close relationship with a righteous, holy God. It is a relational, psychological, spiritual term.

Devoted.

The pronouncement: *“Blessed are those who are pure in heart.”* “Pure” means “unadulterated,” or “undiluted.” The focus is on a heart devoted to God completely.

Verses on purity of heart

Matt. 6:22 *The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!* Purity of heart requires clear spiritual vision. This verse uses the symbol of the eye to illustrate the necessity of spiritual light and understanding. A similar thought is expressed in John 1:4-5, *“In him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”* The word “understood” means literally, “grasped.” The meaning can be construed either physically (darkness cannot take away or overcome light) or mentally (darkness, representing evil, cannot prevent good, nor can it understand it or grasp it mentally).

Luke 11:34 has a similar focus: *Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. 35 See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. 36 Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.* Being “pure in heart” requires clear, unclouded vision.

Matt. 15:18 *But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.'* 19 *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'* Our hearts express themselves according to the quality of what is in them. We wish that our hearts and minds were always clean and pure, but . . . *when I want to do good, evil is right there with me* (Rom. 7:21).

Matt. 23:25 *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. 27 Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.* Jesus rebuked the spiritual leaders of His day because their hearts were unclean, impure, and unacceptable to

God. Externally they looked good, but internally, their hearts were filled with all sorts of pride and evil attitudes.

Ps. 24:3 *Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. 5 He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior.* The psalmist understood the value of a pure heart especially in relation to our fellowship with God.

Phil. 4:8 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.* These are some of the elements of a pure heart and the light about which Jesus spoke.

Matt. 12:43 (Luke 11:24-26) *When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. 44 Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. 45 Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.* An empty heart is not a good heart. When it is empty it is open to many evils. The way to have a pure heart is to fill it with God's Holy Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, and all those good things which Paul lists in Phil. 4:8.

The promise: "because they will see God." They will have clear spiritual vision. Only those who are cleansed, those who are devoted to Him alone, can ever really "see" (understand) God. (Cf. John 3:3 & 5)

- (2) **What they are in their relationships with others** (Their outward qualities or characteristics. 5:7, 9-12) **God's new humanity is:**

Compassionate (Forgiving).--

The pronouncement: "*Blessed are the merciful.*" Mercy is a frequent theme in both the Old and the New Testaments. Our God is a God of both mercy and grace. In the Old Testament (Hosea 1:6) God instructed Hosea to name his daughter "*no-mercy*" to signify that He would have no mercy on His rebellious people, Israel, but later He declared He would have mercy on them (2:23). Peter, in his first epistle, picks up this thought in 2:10 "¹⁰*Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*" God is also a God of righteous wrath and anger against sin and evil in all its forms; but His preference is for grace and mercy (James 2:12-13 : ¹²*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,* ¹³*because*

judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!) God delights to show mercy when His people show mercy. The story Jesus tells in Matt. 18:23-35 emphasizes the same truth as does the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) and the words of Jesus in Matt. 25:31-46 concerning those who are blessed at the judgment because they showed mercy to those in need.

The promise: “because they will have mercy shown to them.” (Literally, “they will be mercied.”). “What goes around comes around.” Jesus will emphasize this again in Matt. 7: 1-2 & 12. When we show mercy to others, even though they may not deserve it, we find that others are more inclined to show mercy to us when we need it even though we may not deserve it.

Reconciling.--

The pronouncement. – *“Blessed are the peacemakers.”* There is a huge need for peacemakers in our world in every age and even today. The selfish and greedy and sinful nature of mankind is such that at one time God destroyed the whole world and everyone in it except Noah and his family because He saw that *every inclination of the thoughts of (their) hearts was only evil all the time* (Gen. 6:5). These evil, greedy, proud, selfish and sinful thoughts disrupted people’s fellowship with Him and also with each other. Peacemakers are needed to reconcile enemies to each other! One dear friend and colleague during our years of missionary service in Lebanon is pushing hard for the development of a Department of Peace in our government to be of equal status with our Department of Defense to work at cabinet level to promote peace among nations and to avoid war whenever possible! We agree with her! The world needs peacemakers desperately, and so do communities and families and neighbors!

Peacemaking requires humility and unselfishness and willingness to compromise and submit to one another. The assault on pride continues. Jesus will give us His recommendations to accomplish this goal in Matt. 5:43-48. Paul emphasizes it in II Cor. 5:17-20.

The promise. -- *because they will be called sons of God. “Like Father, like son.”* Reconciliation is so much a characteristic of God that those who are engaged in such a ministry give evidence that they are sons of their heavenly Father.

Patient -- (happy, content) in the face of persecution.--

The pronouncement. – *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.”* This beatitude is so radically paradoxical that Jesus enlarges and comments on it in vss. 11-12 and

makes it more personal by putting it in the second person. Verse 11 expands the thought: ¹¹ *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.* Luke describes this persecution, ²² *Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man* and in verse 26, *Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.* We are not blessed when we seek persecution, but when we are persecuted for the sake of our faithfulness to live as Christ-followers (“because of Me/the Son of man”). Christians, of all kinds (and there are now many kinds), are now being persecuted more viciously than in previous times in history. It is said that more Christians have died for their faith in the last one hundred years than in all the other centuries since Jesus’ ascension to heaven. The aim of the persecution seems to be to eliminate Christians from this world either as rivals to their religions or because Christian moral standards make them uncomfortable (which it seems is what made the Sanhedrin condemn Jesus).

The promise -- *because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.* (Just as it does to the humble - vs. 3.) Verse 12 expands this thought: ¹² *Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* And Luke adds: ²³ *Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.*

No, we are not to seek persecution in order to enjoy the blessing, but thousands of believers who have been faithful in following the Lord and have been persecuted for it have experienced that blessing in the midst of their suffering. As Peter says, ¹² *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.* ¹³ *But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.* ¹⁴ *If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.* ¹⁵ *If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.* ¹⁶ *However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.* (I Peter 4:12-16).

- (2) **What they are in the world.**-- Their responsibilities and influence - to be salt and light.
- ¹³ *You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its taste, how can it be made salty again? It is good for nothing (has no strength for anything) but to be thrown out and trampled down by men. You are the light of the world. A city cannot be hidden*

when it lies on top of a hill; 15. neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand and it lights up (shines on) everyone in the house. 16. In the same way you must let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who is in heaven (5:13-16).



As salt.— Christ-followers are to give good taste to life. We use salt in our food mainly to give it taste. As salt in our culture and in our world we are to make it “taste” better. Our presence and life-style should bless others and make life more pleasant for them.

As salty Christ-followers we are also to cleanse (as a wound), our culture, our society, our world by eliminating corruption. When I visited Ethiopia a few years ago I met with a Christian pastor/leader. He told me that Africa would never become a world power because of tribalism, poverty and moral/political corruption. This is not just a problem for Africa. It is a problem all over the world and especially where Christ and the Bible are not affirmed and followed.

Salt is also used to preserve (as meat). When my wife was growing up it was customary in those days on the farm to kill a hog as soon as the weather was cold enough to freeze so that the fresh meat would not spoil while it was being worked on and stored. Then, in order to preserve it for months, even into warmer weather, the meat was packed in barrels with salt between the layers so that it would not spoil or become corrupt but could be safely cooked and eaten months later. Do our lives keep our community safe from corruption so that we can live together in love and peace and harmony?

One of the worst forms of corruption around the world is the giving and taking of bribes. Both bribery and extortion are means to control people. Bribery pays the taker to do something he should not do. Extortion pays the recipient to do something he ought to do without payment. These two actions are often accompanied by deceit in an attempt to accomplish a selfish goal without legitimately working for it or earning it. All of these things destroy trust and therefore destroy businesses and companies and treaties and agreements.

Another characteristic of salt is that it creates thirst. As Christ-followers in this sinful world, do we produce in others a thirst for the presence and power of God? Do others want to be like us because we are like Jesus? If we live as salt in this world, that should happen.

Then again, one other characteristic of salt is that it loses itself in whatever it is mixed with. What about us? Do we lose ourselves in the lives of others, our neighbors and friends?

Jesus asks, *, but if the salt has lost its taste, how can it be made salty again? It is good for nothing (has no strength for anything) but to be thrown out and trampled down by men (v 13)*. In the first century salt was dug out of the ground (mined) or harvested from evaporated sea water. It was seldom pure, but if it did not contain too much dirt it could be used in the ways described above; however, when it got too dirty, it was only good for paving pathways. Now, we know that salt can be purified and therein is a spiritual lesson for us. Dirt and salt can be mixed with water. The salt will dissolve but the dirt will settle to the bottom of the container. The liquid can be drawn off and heated until the water evaporates and the crystals of salt form in the day air. If we are the salt of the earth and we become contaminated with the dirt of this sinful world, what can we do? We can fall to our knees in repentance and let the water of the Holy Spirit wash away the dirt as we confess our sins to Him and claim His forgiveness (I John 1:9). Then we can bask in the light and heat of the Holy Spirit until His nature (pure salt) is re-formed in us!

As light.— Christ's followers are to overcome darkness. Darkness is really the absence of light. Darkness can never overcome light but light always overcomes darkness. We are hardly ever in total darkness on the surface of the earth, but have you ever been in a cave when the lights were all turned off? We have, and we can never forget the totality of that darkness! In scripture darkness is often used as a symbol of evil and light as a symbol of goodness and righteousness. (We will come to this in Matt. 6:22 & 23 and we see it often in the writings of the Apostle John.)

Darkness can never put out a light. When we traveled after dark across the plains of west Texas we could see the lights of numerous towns around us even though they were many, many miles away! So Jesus tells us, *In the same way you must let your light shine before men so that they may see your good*

works and may glorify your Father who is in heaven. (5:16). This is the purpose for which He has put His light into our hearts, so we can share it with others.

Another characteristic of light is that it reveals things as they really are. Without light we cannot see and reality is distorted. Our other senses may give some idea of the nature of our world, but our sense of sight reveals so much more of the truths of reality. Of course some truths are not visible with our physical eyes, like love and truth and beauty. For understanding these we need mental and emotional and spiritual light.

Light also produces growth. Without light nothing will grow! If we are filled with God's light, not only will we grow, but we will help others to grow. This is especially true in the spiritual realm. God's light, revealed in His Word, causes us to grow and to mature and to bear fruit and to reproduce! When we share the seed of the Word of God it takes root in others and helps them to grow and mature as they follow its teaching.

As believers in Jesus one of our purposes is to reflect the glory of God. Jesus made this clear in Matt. 5:16: *you must let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who is in heaven.* As the moon reflects the light of the sun, even though it has no light source in itself, so we are to reflect the Light of the Son of God, His goodness and righteousness, in all that we do.

Another characteristic of light is that its purpose is to reveal reality about everything else, but not itself. In fact it is dangerous to look at the sun! We can analyze it and study it with proper protection for our eyes, but it is not there to attract us to look at it, but at what it reveals.

The qualities of salt and light represent qualities of being - of essential nature - from which the qualities described in the beatitudes come, or grow.

The characteristics of believers are that they are becoming humble, repentant, disciplined, zealous, devoted, forgiving, reconciling, and happy in spite of persecution *based on* their inner qualities of being "salt" and "light."

The superior character of God's New Humanity is seen in their power over pride as revealed in the characteristics within themselves, in relationships with others, and in our relationships with our world.