

#blessed

Week 3: Grace > Justice

Pastor Dillon Groves

Eric Lomax was a British soldier serving in Japan during World War II. The British camp was overtaken, and those who survived were taken as prisoners in February 1942, then transported 1200 miles away to work on the 'death railway.'

While working on the railway, Lomax and his comrades continued to fight against Japan by bartering with local traders to construct a radio, which they then used to provide intel to Allied camps throughout Japan.

Their fight was short-lived, however. In August of 1943 the radio was discovered, so Lomax and four of his closest friends were taken for more intensive torture and interrogation. It got worse for Lomax as he was eventually locked in a 5ft cage where he would periodically be taken by a larger man and a smaller interpreter, named Nagase Takashi. Through his memoirs, Lomax talked about hating the interpreter for his consistent taunting, "Lomax, you will tell us, or you will be killed shortly." He never confessed to any of their demands and he wasn't executed. Eventually Lomax was transferred to Bangkok for a Japanese court martial where he spent the remaining duration of the war. It was still brutal, but he survived it.

Decades passed, and Lomax had continued to harden his heart and temper his hatred for the Japanese. Lomax began to deal with his burdens and talked through his experiences at a foundation for torture victims and began keeping tabs on his Takashi. In 1993, Lomax met with his former tormenter on the bridge over the river Kwai, where Takashi asked for forgiveness. They talked further through the years and even became friends. When visiting with Takashi at his home in Japan, Lomax formally forgave his tormentor. Lomax released his memoirs in his book "The Railway Man," with the final sentence declaring, "Sometime the hating has to stop."

That's a ridiculous story, isn't it? Lomax had every right to hate Takashi. This was a man who tortured Lomax, who taunted him, and kept him in a cage like an animal. Yet Lomax found it within himself to forgive Takashi.

Why? I don't think it's because Lomax thought Takashi to be innocent. I'd like to believe Lomax understood the harm bitterness and hatred would bring about in his own heart.

I think the same can be true for all of us in our world today. Everybody has experienced pain to some degree. Hopefully not as intense as torture and being kept as a prisoner of war, but we've all been judged unfairly, scrutinized unjustly, and treated inhumanely by somebody else at some point. In those moments, it's natural to want to get revenge or to let the people who've hurt us know exactly how we feel about them. Yet in the introduction to his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus portrays a ridiculous, topsy-turvy view of grace.

Read Matthew 5:7-12 and see for yourself..

- *7 **Blessed** are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*
- *8 **Blessed** are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*
- *9 **Blessed** are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*
- *10 **Blessed** are those who are persecuted b/c of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- *11 **Blessed** are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you b/c of me. 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.*

Our world tells us we have to get ahead - we have to one-up each other. Yet Jesus' teachings show a strong desire to transform the way we perceive our world.

I believe **the Beatitudes serve as a REFLECTION of Jesus' character.**

Mercy is pretty easy for us to understand. We've all been shown some form of mercy by God even though we don't deserve any grace or mercy.

Jesus promised the pure would see God. Through purity we gain access to God. Purity allows you to see the unseen and hear the inaudible.

To the peacemakers, Jesus promised glorious recognition as "sons of God." Throughout Scripture, we see individuals described as someone's son. To be recognized as God's Son is the highest honors a person can know.

Peacemakers receive this special honor because they participate in the same mission as Christ by sharing the gospel with those who are lost. The apostle Paul declared that the saints of God are ambassadors who possess the ministry of reconciliation. I love the description of the peacemakers as those "who builds bridges with wood from an old, rugged cross."

The final unlikely character who receives sacred delight is the persecuted follower of Christ. They receive a "great reward" in the kingdom. Persecuted believers are rewarded in the Kingdom, not delivered from difficulty in this life.

We often confuse blessing and reward. Divine rewards come later, while we experience blessings on earth.

Telling you about these final Beatitudes is good and all, but I think another famous story from Jesus' ministry provides a clear example of how to live out the Beatitudes.

Look at Luke 5:18-26...

18 Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 19 When they could not find a way to do this b/c of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?' 24 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

There are great things to point out in this passage, so look through piece by piece.

Verses 18 & 19 - Already clues us to see the character of these men who were carrying the paralyzed man. Jesus was a phenomenon to the people all throughout Galilee at the time, which made it difficult for people to talk with him one-on-one, so when Jesus comes into their village, these guys had to be thinking, *MAN! This is our chance to see Jesus - we've gotta go!* So they start on their way, when they come across the paralyzed man. They wouldn't have been scrutinized if they'd ignored him. But they saw him, took pity, and acted on his behalf.

For historical context, this man would've been extremely limited in his resources and probably in his emotional and social health, too. Most paralyzed people in that day would've been left to the side of the alley, with begging being their only option to survive, so this guy was used to looking for mercy from others to survive. Yet these guys realized something about themselves and realized whatever they might have had to give the man, it would never be enough, so instead of dropping a few coins in his direction, they picked him up and took him with them! Can you imagine this if you're in the paralyzed man's position?

This should cause us to ask ourselves a question: **How *DESPERATE* are we to bring others to Christ?** These guys were willing to do whatever it takes, regardless of the likely persecution they faced, no matter how inconvenient it was, they were getting that man to Jesus.

Verse 20 & 21 - I'm sure the paralyzed man had some faith of his own - especially if these guys were crazy enough to dig a hole through somebody's roof and get him in front of this dude named Jesus. Yet Luke writes that it was the collective faith of all of them, when he forgives their sins.

Verse 22-25 - Right off the bat, we've got to watch what we think. I'll be the first to admit I don't always have the most godly, pastoral thoughts initially when I encounter criticism or when I find my faith being tested, but in those moments I have to remind myself that **being a child of God is just as much a *RESPONSIBILITY* as it is a *GIFT*.**

The next few verses should bring us all to a place of amazement and worship, as we can all look back at the life and the circumstances Jesus brought us out of before coming into a relationship w/ Him.

Jesus is ecstatic to forgive sin, AND I believe he is just as excited to liberate us from broken situations like health issues or addictions. He doesn't always do that, but he is always willing to forgive us.

Maybe that's you and you feel trapped in some sin - Jesus can forgive you AND get you out of it. Maybe you're feeling paralyzed with pressure to be strong around your family even though things are especially tough right now - Jesus can carry you AND your burdens. Even if he doesn't change your circumstances, isn't he still worth praising?

Verse 26 - The last thing I want to point out from this passage is that the men who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus are never mentioned again. The point here is that **giving grace is not about how good YOU look.**

Grace is about God. When we make things less about us and more about what God can do in people's lives, people will be filled with awe and people will say, "We have seen remarkable things today!"

My heart's desire is to see that in each of you. I'm praying that God would bring a revival like's He never brought before to Spartanburg County. Whether I have anything to do with it or not doesn't make a difference to me, I just want more people to experience God's Kingdom RIGHT HERE AND RIGHT NOW - TODAY.

Application:

- Celebrate some growth in somebody's life this week and pray for them.
- Gauge yourself off the beatitudes from this week and ask yourself if you're merciful, if your heart is pure (IOW, if your intentions are in the right place), if you're attempting to make peace with others, or if your faith is bringing any criticism. If it is, are you comfortable with being uncomfortable?
- As you're doing your holiday shopping, please take a list of the Angel Gift Shoppe for Middle Tyger Community. The person who buys it will most likely never know it was you who bought it first, but that's okay. It's not about us, but it's about God's grace and the blessings he wants to give to people who feel far from him.

Takeaways:

- The Beatitudes serve as a *REFLECTION* of Jesus' character.
- How *DESPERATE* are we to bring others to Christ?
- Being a child of God is just as a *RESPONSIBILITY* as it is a *GIFT*.
- Giving grace is not about how good *YOU* look.