

February 11, 2007

SERIES: The Good News, as reported by Matthew

SERMON: **A Sermon for the Ages: Character Qualities of a Counter Cultural Christian**

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:1-12

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I thought I should clarify that when I use the title, “A Sermon for the Ages” this morning, I’m not referring to *my* sermon but rather to The Sermon on the Mount, which is the subject of my sermon today and for the next seven weeks. Jesus’ sermon, as recorded in Matthew 5-7, is probably the best-known and most often quoted of all of Jesus’ teachings, though arguably it is also the least understood and, without a doubt, the least obeyed. The reason is that every theme of this Sermon goes against the grain of our nature and of our culture.

Background of the Sermon on the Mount

The last verse of Matthew 4 tells us that due to Jesus’ miraculous healings, “Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.” When you visit the traditional site where the Sermon on the Mount is thought to have taken place—on the shores of the Sea of Galilee,—guides always take pains to tell you that the area forms a sort of natural amphitheater, where hundreds, if not thousands of people could hear Jesus preach without voice amplification.

However, Matthew makes it clear that the targeted audience was not the masses fascinated by His healings, but rather His disciples. Verse 1: “Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach *them* . . .” This may have been His first opportunity to give concentrated instruction to the Twelve. I’m not suggesting that others were not listening in, for the last verse of the sermon, Matthew 7:28, says, “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.” But the thrust of the Sermon must be determined by the audience addressed, and that primary audience is His disciples.

Thus I suggest to you that Jesus is not telling people in general how to behave; He is not offering a universal ethic applicable to all religions; He is telling His committed followers how to live lives that are blessed by God. The theme of the Sermon is that true followers of Jesus must be different—different from both the religious and the irreligious, different from both the nominal church and the secular world. Both groups are addressed. First, he contrasts the life-style expected of His followers from that exhibited by the religious elite in verse 20: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” But then He also contrasts their lifestyle with the behavior of rank pagans in 6:8: “Do not be like *them*.”

How different must we be? Very different! This Sermon is the most complete delineation anywhere in the NT of the appropriate lifestyle of a devoted follower of Jesus, and it is radically

counter-cultural, totally at variance with the lifestyle of the non-Christian world, and sadly, even with much of what we see in Christian circles.

As he teaches, Jesus sits down, assuming the posture of a rabbi. Whether these words are all spoken at one time or over a period of time is much debated and essentially irrelevant. The fact is that everything spoken is consistent with all that we know of Jesus.ⁱ

One further issue I would like to address by way of introduction is whether this Sermon is practical and applicable for our day and time. There are many who say, “no”—both conservatives and liberals. I grew up under an approach to Scripture known as classic dispensationalism, and I never heard a sermon on Matthew 5-7. My professors in seminary suggested that Jesus is here offering a morality for the millennial kingdom that is feasible only when Jesus returns to this earth. Today this may be attractive to imagine but impossible to fulfil, so they largely ignored it.

But liberals too have questioned the relevance of the Sermon for today—for very different reasons. Albert Schweitzer called it an “interim ethic,” by which is meant that Jesus was making exceptional demands for an exceptional situation. Jesus expected the end of history to arrive almost immediately, so He was essentially declaring martial law until the kingdom was established. But just as no nation can sustain martial law indefinitely, so difficult ethical demands like the ones Jesus sets forth are appropriate only for a brief time of crisis. Once His kingdom vision collapsed, the Sermon became essentially irrelevant.

Many others have tried to accommodate the Sermon to our generally low levels of moral attainment. But I suggest to you that what we really need to do is to accommodate our lifestyles to Jesus’ teaching. Please understand that I am well aware, especially after studying this Sermon for many weeks now, that its standards are absolutely unattainable by human effort alone. Anyone who claims to consistently live by the Sermon on the Mount is either totally ignorant about what it says, or he is just a liar. On the other hand, it would be a serious mistake to not even strive to meet its lofty challenges.

John Stott observes, “Only a belief in the necessity and the possibility of a new birth can keep us from reading the Sermon on the Mount with either foolish optimism or hopeless despair.”ⁱⁱ But a new birth is possible! Through the miracle of regeneration and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we can make significant progress toward living in obedience to the lifestyle Jesus describes.

With that as a very brief introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, it is time to consider the profound opening words Jesus offers to His disciples, known as the Beatitudes, which is Latin for the key word found over and over, “blessed.” Listen to Matthew 5:3-12:

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

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.’

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

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

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

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Overview of the Beatitudes

The people described. The key point I wish to make about the people Jesus is describing is that these are not eight separate and distinct categories of disciples, some of whom are poor in spirit, some who mourn, some who are meek, etc. Even less is He describing a spiritual elite who are heads and shoulders above the common run-of-the-mill Christian. (In other words, He is not describing apostles or monks or nuns or pastors). The Beatitudes are Christ’s description of what every Christian ought to be like. Each of these qualities are to characterize each of His followers. Unlike the gifts of the Spirit, which are distributed differently to different members of the church, these particular Christian graces should be exhibited in all of us.

The qualities commended are, unfortunately, susceptible of serious and frequent misinterpretation. There are many today who think Jesus’ principal priority was rectifying the social and economic inequalities that plague vast numbers in the Third World, and some in our own country. Their view is called Liberation Theology, and some form of it has virtually taken over many liberal seminaries. The linch-pin of Liberation Theologians is the view that Jesus came to liberate minorities from their disadvantages, and one of their favorite texts is the Beattitudes. Redistribution of wealth and alleviating human suffering, then, is seen as Jesus’ answer to man’s greatest need.

But Jesus is not here describing anyone’s economic, social, or psychological status, but rather their spiritual status. There is no question that He had great compassion on the poor. He spent the vast majority of His time with the disadvantaged, and He often encouraged His followers to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. But that is clearly *not* the point in His teaching here. The poor and hungry are not primarily those living in poverty. Nor are the mourners primarily those suffering from grief over misfortune. Nor are the persecuted to be identified with minorities, whether ethnic groups, or homosexuals, or women who have hit a glass ceiling.

Rather the poor are the *poor in spirit*, the hungry are those who hunger *for righteousness*, the sorrowful are those who are *sorry for sin*, and the persecuted are those rejected *because of their faith in Jesus*.ⁱⁱⁱ

The blessings promised. Each person who exhibits these qualities mentioned is pronounced “blessed” in a way that is appropriate to the particular quality commended. The term “blessed,” by the way, has always been a difficult one to translate and grasp. Many

scholars have employed the word “happy,” but that is not altogether satisfactory. Happiness in our culture is a subjective state, whereas Jesus is making an objective judgment about these people. He is declaring not what they feel like, but what God thinks of them and therefore what they actually *are*. They are, in short, approved by God and content in God. And while these blessings—like enjoying the kingdom of heaven, being comforted, being filled, seeing God—will only be fully experienced in heaven, there are nevertheless profound applications to our lives here on earth. In other words, we get to preview these blessings as we begin to live out these qualities.

Let me suggest one more truth about the Beatitudes as a whole. I believe they paint a portrait of Jesus Himself.

The portrait painted. There is not a single characteristic shared here that He did not exhibit perfectly. He was poor in spirit, He mourned over sin, He was meeker than Moses, He hungered and thirsted for righteousness, He was merciful and pure in heart, He was a peacemaker, and He was persecuted because of righteousness as no one before or since. Jesus not only taught us these truths; He modeled them. The call to be a counter-cultural Christian is the call to be like Jesus Himself.

Character of the Counter Cultural Christian

Now this morning it’s our privilege to briefly examine each of these character qualities that God wants to produce in our lives. It’s almost a crime to try to do this in 20 minutes, for entire books have been written on these 12 verses. But there is value in the big picture, as well as in the details, and this morning we will be focusing on the big picture.^{iv} We’re going to consider three forms of neediness, one pivotal trait, and then four forms of active righteousness, as well as the blessings that God says result from each. So let’s begin with three forms of neediness: the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek.

Three forms of neediness and the blessings that result:

1. The poor in spirit. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” As we have already noted, Jesus is talking here about spiritual poverty, not physical poverty.^v To be “poor in spirit” is the opposite of being rich in pride; it is to acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy before God, to be absolutely humble before Him. It is to admit that we brought nothing into this world, we will take nothing out, and we have nothing with which to bargain with God.

We are sinners who stand under the holy wrath of God, and we deserve nothing but eternal condemnation. Max Lucado calls the poor in Spirit “beggars in God’s soup kitchen.” Their cupboards are bare. Their pockets are empty. Their options are gone. They have long since stopped demanding justice; they are pleading for mercy. They don’t brag; they beg.^{vi}

The blessing offered to those who acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy is this: “yours is the

kingdom of God.” Eternal life is available to all who cast themselves on the grace and mercy of God, and *only* to them. Friend, if you try to earn your way to Heaven, if you think you deserve it because of your personal spiritual assets, if you’re leaning on anything other than the grace of God in Jesus Christ, you are lost and you will not see the kingdom of God.^{vii}

You may be wondering, then, in what sense was Jesus poor in spirit? He certainly wasn’t spiritually bankrupt! No, but He humbled Himself anyway, and that makes His poverty of spirit even more remarkable. *We* have good reason to humble ourselves before God, because we are dead in trespasses and sins, but Jesus, though perfect and holy, chose to humble Himself by becoming one of us. The 53rd chapter of Isaiah goes to lengths to portray that fact:

*“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him,
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not”* (Isaiah 53, 2, 3).

Jesus was, indeed, poor in spirit.

2. Those who mourn. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” At first glance, Jesus seems to be putting a premium on sadness. But when we ask, “What kind of sorrow brings ultimate comfort?”, I think the answer is not primarily the sorrow of a lost loved one or the sadness of a lost fortune. Rather it is sorrow for sin. Stott writes, “I fear that we evangelical Christians, by making much of grace, sometimes thereby make light of sin. There is not enough sorrow for sin among us.”^{viii} We should, first of all, experience grief over personal sin. If we understood the holiness of God as we should, there would be more tears over our own lack of conformity to it. Paul expressed such an attitude in Romans 7:4: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

But there should be tears as well over the sins of society. The Psalmist wrote, “Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.” (Ps.119:136). Jesus wept over the sins of the city of Jerusalem. Paul cried over the false teachers of his day who were enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18). When we see the unspeakable cruelty of partial-birth abortion, the devastating effects of drug addiction in our teens, the awful sexual abuse of children, the proliferation of pornography and promiscuity, the insatiable appetite of the gambling industry, the indiscriminate murder of innocents by terrorists (in the name of God, no less), it all piles onto the consciousness of the sensitive believer and reduces him to tears.

The blessing promised to those who mourn is that they *will* be comforted. One day in a new heaven and new earth God Himself will wipe away every tear from the eyes of those who once mourned over sin. But comfort is possible also in this life, as those who are truly contrite over sin revel in the forgiveness that God offers. I think of David, who mourned over his sin with Bathsheba but then experienced the forgiveness of God. In Psalm 32:1,2 he writes, “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him.” Then a few verses later he speaks of the “songs of

deliverance” God gave him. There is comfort, even joy, available for the one who mourns over sin.

But there is also comfort available for those who mourn for spouses who have deserted them, for parents in gut-wrenching grief over the death of a child, for people in the sunset years who have lost their health and are facing terminal illness. God loves you and will not abandon you. Do not grieve as those who have no hope; mourn as Jesus mourned over the fallenness of this world, and then trust yourself into the loving arms of your heavenly Father.

3. The meek. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” The greatest prophet in the OT and the greatest Apostle in the NT are both described as meek, as is Jesus, but neither Moses nor Paul, nor Christ Himself, was weak or effeminate in the least. Each was a man’s man. There may be a tendency in men to be rough and insensitive, discourteous and brutish; in fact, that’s the typical way men are portrayed in the media today, as you saw in some of the Super Bowl commercials. But those are all bogus characteristics of manhood. Real men are gentle, humble, considerate, and self-controlled. Meekness is power under control.

The blessing God offers to the meek is that they “will inherit the earth.” Does that surprise you? Our culture wants you to think that “meek” people get nowhere because ambitious people ignore them or run roughshod over them. And that may be true in the short term, but definitely not in the long term. The proud and the haughty, like T.O. or Dennis Rodman or Donald Trump or Rosie O’Donnell– get a lot more press than the meek, but whether in the world of sports or politics or business or even church, the meek eventually inherit far more than the proud. at least in respect to those things that really count–family, friendship, reputation, respect.

What a blessing it was to see Tony Dungy stand before the cameras after the Super Bowl victory last Sunday and give all the glory to God. Here is a man who is probably the meekest NFL coach in history–he never yells and he never curses. I read that at the beginning of each season he quietly addresses his team and says, “Listen carefully, because this is as loud as you’re ever going to hear me talk.” For anyone who is a Bears fan, their coach, Lovie Smith, is of similar character.

Now in the middle of the Beatitudes we find a pivotal trait that seems to be the epitome, not only of the Beatitudes but possibly of the entire Sermon on the Mount: hunger and thirst for righteousness. We will be focusing on righteousness and what it entails next Lord’s Day; today we just introduce it.

The pivotal trait: hunger and thirst for righteousness and the blessing that results:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” The hunger of which Christ speaks is not physical hunger, and the thirst is not for water, but it is a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Righteousness is right living, the kind of character and conduct which pleases God. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day pursued a kind of righteousness, but their righteousness was an external conformity to rules. They made sure they were clean on the

outside. But here Jesus demands inner righteousness—of heart, mind and motive.

The truly righteous have an insatiable appetite for the things of God. In Psalm 42:1-2 David says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” The truly righteous search the Scriptures and pour their hearts out to God in prayer. I think we make a mistake, however, if we think of true righteousness as a purely private matter dealing only with our relationship to God. It includes social righteousness as well. You can’t read the prophets without seeing that God is concerned with civil rights, with legal justice, and with integrity in business. Those who hunger for righteousness will also speak out for these things in our society.

Jesus promises a blessing on those who hunger for righteousness: “they will be filled.” In Ps. 107:9 we are told that God “satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.” The satisfaction we experience when our lives are characterized by right living is unparalleled—there’s no insomnia because of a guilty conscience, no stewing over relationship conflicts we have caused, no fear that some lie we have told will come back to haunt us. But of course the satisfaction is never complete or final in this life. There will come a day of judgment when righteousness will triumph and wrong will be overthrown, and then there will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells in completeness. Then there will be hunger no more.

Following the introduction of this pivotal trait of righteousness, Jesus offers four forms of active righteousness, i.e. ways in which our hunger and thirst for righteousness play out in relationships.

Four forms of active righteousness and the blessings that result:

1. The merciful. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” Mercy is compassion for people in need—whether from pain, misery, disaster, or distress. The classic example is the good Samaritan, who showed mercy to the poor traveler who was assaulted while on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. Of course, mercy is not the natural tendency of the human heart. We prefer to insulate ourselves against the pain and tragedy around us in order to protect ourselves emotionally. But, says Jesus, those who show mercy find it. It’s the opposite of a vicious cycle—it’s a mercy cycle. He is merciful to us by saving us through Christ; in obedience and gratitude we are merciful to others; and God in faithfulness gives us even more mercy.

2. The pure in heart. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” I believe Jesus is talking here about the one who has an undivided heart, the single-minded person. “Pure in heart” is another term for sincerity and integrity. In his relations with both God and man, the one who is pure in heart is free from falsehood and transparent in both thought and motive. Yet how often we are tempted to wear a mask, to play a role. Some people weave around them such a tissue of lies that they can no longer distinguish reality from make-believe.

The blessing promised is that the pure in heart will see God for who He is. Maybe only they

want to see Him. In an anonymous article in Leadership magazine in 1982 a pastor who struggled mightily with sexual lust wrote the following:

Most of our arguments for purity are negative arguments: Be pure, or you will feel guilty, or your marriage will fail, or you will be punished. But the Beatitudes clearly indicate a positive argument that fits neatly with the Bible's pattern in describing sins. Sins are not a list of petty irritations drawn up for the sake of a jealous God. They are, rather, a description of the impediments to spiritual growth. We are the ones who suffer if we sin, by forfeiting the development of character and Christlikeness that would have resulted if we had not sinned.

The thought hit me like a bell rung in a dark, silent hall. So far, none of the scary, negative arguments against lust had succeeded in keeping me from it. Fear and guilt simply did not give me resolve; they added self-hatred to my problems. But here was a description of what I was missing by continuing to harbor lust: I was limiting my own intimacy with God. The love he offers is so transcendent and possessing that it requires our faculties to be purified and cleansed before we can possibly contain it. Could he, in fact, substitute another thirst and another hunger for the one I had never filled? Would Living Water somehow quench lust? That was the gamble of faith.

3. The peacemakers. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” The sequence of moving from pure in heart to peacemaker is natural, because one of the most common causes of conflict among people is deceit and hypocrisy. In order for reconciliation to occur there must, above all else, be truthfulness. Every Christian is called to be a peacemaker. Again and again Scripture tells us to pursue peace, strive for peace, and so far as it depends on us, “live peaceably with all men.” Our commitment to Christ may produce conflict in an antagonistic world, but we should not seek conflict or be responsible for it through our attitudes or behavior.

The blessing for peacemakers is that “they will be called sons of God,” for they are just seeking to do what their Father has done. There is a Christian organization called Peacemakers, dedicated to helping people resolve their differences in a biblical way. Three times in the past four years I have had the opportunity to observe Peacemakers in action resolving conflicts within God’s family—very powerful and moving experiences that I believe will continue to bear fruit for a long time. We are planning to bring a Peacemaker Conference to our church in early November so that all of us can have the benefit of learning about biblical peacemaking. I encourage you to plan now attend.

4. Those persecuted because of righteousness. “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” You will also notice that verses 11 and 12 of our text elaborate on this last beatitude. “Blessed are you when people insult you persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” If any of the Beatitudes is completely and totally contradictory to human tendencies, it is this one.

It causes me to stop to ask myself, “What is my natural response to those who offend me or treat me with a lack of respect?” When I was a boy my response was to fight. I ruined many pairs of jeans fighting on the playground of Lockwood School in Webster Groves. Eventually I quit using my fists (probably because I ended up on the short end of the stick too often) and became skilled at using words to fight with. I even earned a graduate degree in logic so I could use words more skillfully.

When I became a pastor I soon realized that dissecting people with words is counterproductive to church growth. So for a while my defense mechanism of choice came to be withdrawal. If someone treated me wrongly, I would just avoid them. But Jesus says that we are not to retaliate like an unbeliever, nor to sulk like a child, nor to lick our wounds in self-pity like a dog, nor just to grin and bear it like a Stoic.^{ix}

How then are we to respond when we are persecuted for something we believe we did right? We are to actually rejoice and be glad. How is that possible? Well, it’s not, *unless* the mistreatment we experience is really because of our relationship with Christ. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that often people treat us with disdain just because we are jerks. They insult us because we are behaving like wild-eyed fanatics, or they reject us because we’re not pleasant to be around. That’s not what Jesus is talking about. The Apostle Peter writes, “By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evil doer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers *as a Christian*, let him not feel ashamed, but in that Name let him glorify God.” (1 Peter 4:14-16).

It’s only when we suffer because of our walk with Christ that rejoicing is possible. That’s what the Apostles did in Acts 5:41, when after being flogged for preaching Christ, they left the Sanhedrin, “rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”^x And what is the blessing for those who suffer because of Christ? Jesus says, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Then He adds, “Great is your reward in heaven.” We may lose everything on earth for His sake, but we shall inherit it all back in heaven.

Conclusion: Friends, what we see in this amazing passage of Scripture is such a reversal of human values that it actually turns everything topsy-turvy. The world says, “Assert yourself, stand up for yourself, be proud of yourself, elevate yourself, defend yourself, avenge yourself, serve yourself.”^{xi} But God

*exalts the humble and abases the proud,
calls the first last and the last first,
ascribes greatness to the servant,
sends the rich away empty-handed
and declares the meek to be his heirs.*

Jesus congratulates those whom the world pities and calls the world’s rejects “blessed.”^{xii}

There is no question but that the culture of the world and the counter-culture of Christ are at loggerheads with each other. But do not reject His teaching just because it sounds strange to your ears. Do not reject it because it is difficult to practice. Do not reject it because so few are

obedient to it, even in the Church. Trust God when He tells you how beautiful a life can be that conforms perfectly to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, a life that follows the pattern of our Savior.

In closing may I challenge you to focus on one of these character qualities this week and ask God to work it into your life through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit?

i. While there are many ways to outline the Sermon, which takes up three full chapters, I find it difficult to improve upon John Stott's approach:

- A Christian's character (5:3-12)
- A Christian's influence (5:13-16)
- A Christian's righteousness (5:17-48)
- A Christian's devotion (6:1-18)
- A Christian's ambition (6:19-34)
- A Christian's relationships (7:1-20)
- A Christian's commitment (7:21-27)

See John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture*. This was a very useful book in preparing this sermon, and I borrowed heavily from his insights.

ii. Stott, 29.

iii. This is evident, not only from a careful look at the words of the sermon, but also from the totality of Jesus' teaching. Consistently throughout His ministry he rejected every effort to reduce his message to one that was essentially political or economic. He said bluntly to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." And He said to His enemies, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." That is not to say Jesus was ever indifferent to physical poverty and hunger. But His primary focus was always on spiritual needs, not physical, on eternal ones, not temporal.

iv. I have borrowed the structure I am using largely from Dan Doriani, pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in St. Louis and former professor at Covenant Theological Seminary.

v. But I think it would be a mistake to conclude that there is no relationship whatever between the economically poor and the poor in spirit. Jesus spent much of His ministry time with publicans, prostitutes, the handicapped, and other societal rejects. And a disproportionate number of His converts were from the lower classes. The reason is that such people generally found it easier to admit their spiritual bankruptcy. When they heard the Good News their response was characterized by utter dependence on God. Remember the publican who beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner"? Rich Pharisees never spoke such words. Listen to the black spirituals and you see the same deep longing for God.

vi. Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven*, 33

vii. The Rich Young Ruler who came to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to get eternal life?"

Jesus told him to keep the commandments, which he then claimed he was doing. But when Jesus told him to sell all his possessions and give to the poor, he went away sad. Lucado writes, . . . *the rich young ruler thought heaven was just a payment away. It only made sense. You work hard, you pay your dues, and “zap”—your account is credited as paid in full. Jesus says, “No way.” What you want costs far more than what you can pay. You don’t need a system, you need a Savior. You don’t need a resume, you need a Redeemer. (The Applause of Heaven, 31)*

6. Stott, 42.

ix. Stott, 52.

x. Every Christian should expect opposition. It happened to the prophets, Jesus says, so why should we expect to be exempt?

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: “No servant is greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. (John 15:18-20)

Paul adds that “*everyone* who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus *will* be persecuted.” (1 Thes. 3:3). That has some interesting implications, doesn’t it? If everything is going peachy, and all of our unsaved friends speak well of us, then maybe we need to take a good hard look at whether we are even identified as one of His disciples.

xi. John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 134.

xii. Stott, 56.