

The Beatitudes

In Matthew 5-7, (and Luke 6, 11, 12), we read of a sermon Yeshua gave one day on a mountain in Galilee. It is sometimes called “The Sermon on the Mount” or “The Beatitudes”. It sounds a little arrogant, but I find that amongst Christians this sermon is almost always misunderstood. See what you think after you read this.

The most important fact is that this was a sermon to Jews at the beginning of Yeshua’s ministry. It was a sermon to Jews under the Law, who greatly respected and admired their leaders, especially the Pharisees who had at least an external appearance and reputation for being very holy and righteous men.

Yeshua was turning their understanding on it’s head. Yeshua didn’t think they were holy at all. To Jews who thought that obeying the law like the Pharisees did would earn you entry to the Kingdom of God, Yeshua was saying that unless your righteousness went beyond that of the Pharisees then you didn’t stand a chance.

The Law said you should not murder. No problem, we pretty much all got that one covered. But Yeshua said that even though that is where God drew the line when he gave the Law to Moses, his standard was in fact way above that. That God would even consider it a big enough sin to bar you from entry to Heaven if you had just been angry with your brother and called him a fool. Nobody has got that one covered!

And of course, they all agreed that adultery was bad. But Yeshua said, that God’s standard is so high that even if you look at a beautiful woman and just think lustful thoughts, you’re OUT. Uh-oh.

God allowed Jews to get divorced, but that also wasn’t his standard either.

The list goes on...

Basically Yeshua is giving them the bad news side of the gospel. No matter how good you guys think you have been. Or how good you think the Pharisees have been. You have all fallen short of God’s standard and none of you has enough righteousness to earn your way into Heaven.

Yeshua is not saying here that Christians have to tighten up the rules of the Law and live under a new “Super Law”. In fact this conclusion is quite inconsistent with clear teaching in other parts of the New Testament. He is simply showing them that nobody will be justified by obeying the Law because even if you look like you have kept it on the outside, on the inside you are still rotten and corrupt and you fall short.

Yeshua also told them the good news side of the gospel. Sort of. He told them that he had come to fulfil the Law. Personally. But he didn’t tell them that he would then die as a sacrifice for them to completely wash away their sin. A sacrifice which would enable them to obtain the righteousness that they desperately needed. A righteousness that they didn’t work for. A righteousness that would get them into Heaven. He left that part out until much later in his ministry.

So, the beatitudes is not a super strict re-giving of the law intended for Christians. It is a basic gospel message intended to clear up misunderstanding amongst the Jews and set the stage for the greatest gift in history.