*Introduction*

The day in which we live is one that has impetus, drama, and unparalleled unveiling of God’s prophetic word.

Every day, foretold prophesies are opening up before our very eyes, so much so that only those who are blind to the word of God would not see.

As Christians we are, or should be, aware of what is coming and as such we are exhorted by the writer to the Hebrews:

***HEB 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.***

He goes on to say

***HEB 10:35-37 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay”.***

As we watch this day approaching there is a great need for born again believers to live and act how Christ commanded us to.

It is with this backdrop that we come to the sermon on the mount this morning, and begin, God willing, a series on that great sermon, starting with the beatitudes and then moving on as the Spirit leads us.

In general, many look upon the beatitudes as just some nice rules to live by. They are often taken out of context and used to support a particular argument. For example some would take the matter of “Turning the other cheek” and use it to denounce all forms of war as being unchristian.

Before we get to the beginning of this great sermon we need to understand that it has to be looked at as a whole.

It has an order and sequence, nothing said here is accidental, like someone saying “Oh by the way….” The whole thing is deliberate. Propositions are put forward and from these other things flow, as we will see.

The sermon is not for unbelievers but for believers. It is all about Christian conduct and to expect a non-christian to conduct himself or herself in this way would be wrong.

The beatitudes come at the beginning, not the end, and again this is deliberate. Until we are perfectly clear about the beatitudes we should not go further into the chapter.

In order for us to get a general overview of the sermon we can divide it into areas. We may all divide it differently, and it would be wrong for me to say the way I have divided it is the right way. Personally I would divide it into two groups to start with – *general* and *particular*.

The general part being from verses 3-16 where you have a number of broad statements with regard to the Christian. Then the remainder of the sermon is concerned with particular aspects of his/her life and conduct.

Firstly the theme, and then the illustration of this theme in particular.

We could sub-divide it a little further for convenience.

V 3-10 you have the character of the Christian described, the beatitudes, which are a description of the Christian in general, then v 11-12 shows us the character of the Christian as proved by the reaction of the world to him/her.

We are told ***MT 5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.***

This is a negative view from the world which is followed by a positive view

***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.***

Your reward is in heaven

But this is still very general in its description.

In v13-16 we have an account of the relationship of the Christian to the world, a general account of how the Christian should function in society. We are to be salt and light. We should live in such a way that brings praise and glory to our heavenly Father.

From here we come to particular examples of how the Christian is to live in regard to such things as murder, adultery, divorce, retaliation, self-defence and his attitude towards his/her neighbour.

We can go on to see that Ch 6 relates to the Christian living his life in the presence of God, in active submission to Him and entirely dependent upon Him. Chapter 7 can be regarded in general as the Christian living under the judgment of God and in the fear of God.

From this general overview of this Sermon from the lips of Jesus we can draw certain things that will always characterise the Christian. Three of the most important principles are these:

1. **The Christian is a man/woman who of necessity must be concerned with keeping God’s law.**

We are not “under the law” as Christians, but we are still meant to keep the law

***ROM 8:3-4 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.***

1. **The Christian is one who lives always realizing he/she is in the presence of** God.

Everything we do should be done in the light of our relationship to God. We rae not free agents, we are children of God. Our outlook on life should be different to that of the world, everything that happens to us should be viewed from the fact that as Gods child

***RO 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.***

We are not to cut ourselves off from the world, but live in the world but not be part of it.

1. **The Christian is a man/woman who always walks in the fear of God.**

Not craven fear but reverent fear. Fear that is borne out of love.

God is not interested in our activities, like church attendance or doing good, but He judges us as one who sees the heart.

God knows our motives and our desires.

What we often see in the church today is “superficiality” and “glibness”, with many Christians living their lives in a shallow way and not wanting to be obedient to the word of God.

In the past we read of God fearing men who died at the stake for their beliefs and for the word of God. But today we see leaders in the church denying or altering the word to go with our ‘today culture’, changing things in line with modern thinking.

We must realise that God is unchanging

***HEB 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***

God does not change, His Word does not change.

***2COR 5:9-10 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.***

***1 PET4:17-19 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.***

*Conclusion*

As we consider this great sermon over the next few weeks, we must not look at it as a new set of ‘commandments’ or a set of rules or regulations that we must carry out, but rather we must look upon this as a description of what the Christian is meant to be.

We are not to apply things in a mechanical way. For example, if I mechanically took the part about

***40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.***

I would end up giving the person my entire wardrobe!

BUT... there may be circumstances that dictate that I should do just that, throw in the cloke, go the second mile.

The point is this, it’s all about general principles and attitudes that shape the Christian character in the light of Him/Her walking in obedience with God.

It is the difference between a musician playing all the notes of a song correctly, but missing the soul of the piece and its interpretation, not playing it as the writer intended.

But when a musician wraps himself in the piece and becomes absorbed with the intentions of the writer and conveys the feeling of it, the music comes to life.

God is calling us as His people to live lives that characterise his sermon, not mechanically, but with love, compassion and feeling because of our love for Him and our wanting to walk in obedience to him.

As we unpack the beatitudes be prepared to be challenged.

May God give us grace to consider this Sermon on the Mount and to remember that we are not to sit in judgment on it, but that we ourselves are under judgment, and that the building we are erecting in this world and in this life will have to face His final test and the ultimate scrutiny of the eye of the Lamb of God that once was slain.

Amen