

## VOICE OF HOPE

# Jesus' Final Beatitude

**M**atthew 5 contains the Beatitudes, which in olden times were called the “Blesseds.” “Beatitude” is Latin for “Blessed”, and we’re all familiar with the Beatitudes: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;”* *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted;”* *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,”* and so on. But since the New Testament was not written in Latin, we need to look at the Greek. Our English word “Blessed” comes from the Greek *makarios*, meaning “happy,” and in the Beatitudes Jesus used the word “happy” nine times. *“Happy are the poor in spirit;”* *“Happy are those who mourn;”* *“Happy are the meek,”* and we’re all familiar with the Beatitudes. But one Beatitude we may not be familiar with is the one found in Revelation 22:14, *“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.”*

That’s the way the King James and the New King James Versions read, but how many times have you picked up a modern version that says, *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life?”* It seems like a big leap to go from *“do His commandments”*

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to “*wash their robes.*” But in the Greek it is only a change of three letters in the first word, one letter in the second word, and two letters in the third word, and the two phrases side by side look almost identical. In fact they look so similar that one commentator attributes this change to a careless scribe who mistook one letter for another. But after studying Bible Translation for twenty-five years, I’m not so certain. I believe we have a corrupt reading here, and I believe it was done on purpose.

The King James and New King James are based on the Byzantine, or Textus Receptus. Most of the other translations are based on the Alexandrian, or Modern Critical Text. The translations that contain this corrupt reading come from the Alexandrian Text, and the schools in Alexandria were the first to allow and propagate a liberal theology which was influenced by Greek philosophy. Neil Lightfoot, in his book, *How We Got The Bible*, wrote, “*The Alexandrian Text is a corruption of the fuller Byzantine Text, resulting from accidental omissions and some deliberate editorial work.*” And many liberal commentators who have rejected the Byzantine Text have done so because of its emphasis on “*keeping the commandments.*” They believe that obedience to the commandments is Old Testament legalism, and does not belong in the New Testament.

So let’s look at what the New Testament says about the commandments. In Matthew 5:17,18 Jesus said, “*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled.*”

In Matthew 19; Mark 10; and Luke 18 the Rich Young Ruler asks, “*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” And Jesus answers, “*You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.*” Here Jesus is directly quoting the Ten Commandments. In John 14:15 Jesus said, “*If*

*you love Me, keep My commandments.*” And verse 21 says, *“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”* The Ten Commandments Law is mentioned more than 30 times in the New Testament.

Someone says, *“But Paul never mentioned the Ten Commandments.”* The person who says that has never read Romans 13:9 where Paul directly quotes from the Ten Commandments, and in Romans 3:31 he asks, *“Do we make the Law void through faith?”* And then he answers, *“God forbid, we establish the Law.”*

As Christians we do not keep the commandments in order to be saved. Salvation comes by faith and faith alone through the blood of Jesus Christ. Rather, we keep the commandments because we are saved. Keeping God’s commandments is a by-product of loving Him.

All of the early protestant reformers had a common saying, *“We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone,”* meaning that salvation and obedience are twins that go hand in hand. So clearly, the Ten Commandments belong in the New Testament, and Jesus was not kidding when He said, *“Not a jot or tittle will pass from the Law as long as heaven and earth exist.”*

John wrote Revelation, so let’s see what else he said about the commandments. 1 John 2:3 says, *“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”* 1 John 3:22 says, *“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”* 1 John 5:2 says, *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not*

burdensome.” Revelation 12:17 says, “*And the dragon was angry with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*” Revelation 14:12 says, “*Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.*”

And this brings us back to our text in Revelation 22:14, “*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.*” Do you see the natural progression running all the way through the New Testament? Clearly the commandment theme runs uninterrupted right to the end of the Bible. So why would some like to see this changed on the last page of the Bible? One Evangelical summed up the sentiments of many when he wrote, “*‘Do His commandments’ carries us back to the old Law, and has no more hopeful sound in it than the thunder of Sinai. If this were indeed Christ’s last words to us, it would be a most sad instance of His ‘building again the things He had destroyed.’*” Clearly this writer believes the Ten Commandments ended at the cross, and then to have them mentioned again on the last page of the Bible was too much for him. This same writer calls the King James Version the corrupt reading. But remember what Neil Lightfoot wrote, “*The Alexandrian Text is a corruption of the fuller Byzantine Text, resulting from accidental omissions and some deliberate editorial work.*”

So what about “*wash their robes?*” Is that in the Bible? Yes it is. The theology of “washing their robes” is not wrong. What makes it wrong here in verse 14 is its attempt to alter and soften the grand theme of the Bible. Revelation 6:11 tells us that “white robes” were given by God to the souls under the altar. Revelation 7:9 talks about a great multitude clothed in “white robes.” In Revelation 7:13 one of the Elders asks, “*Who are these arrayed in white robes?*” And then in the next verse he

answers, “*These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*” These verses are the only place where you will find the phrase, “washed their robes.” And so to interrupt the grand theme of the rest of the Bible, to me, is wrong, even though the theology may be correct.

Why do some object to the phrase, “*keep His commandments?*” Because to them obedience smacks of works, and to them that is wrong. And this is where I need to emphasize again, I do not believe that anyone is saved by “keeping the commandments.” I do not believe that anyone has ever been saved by “keeping the commandments.” Rather, obedience is a love response for the gift of salvation.

“*We do not earn salvation by our obedience; for salvation is the free gift of God, to be received by faith. But obedience is the fruit of faith.*” (Steps to Christ, page 61) Remember the motto of the early reformers, “*We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone,*” which is another way of saying the same thing James said when he wrote, “*faith without works is dead.*” (James 2:20)

“*Some say there is a contradiction in the New Testament about the relation between faith and works. Paul asserts that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law (Romans 3:28), while James seems to say a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:24). Are works essential to salvation, or not? The apostles seem to disagree. We can resolve this apparent conflict by taking note of the author’s concern in each passage. It is clear that the apostles have two different issues in mind in the passages referred to. Paul’s question is the basis of salvation. Is salvation a human achievement or a divine gift? James concern is the effects of salvation. What sort*

*of behavior does salvation produce? Accordingly, the points they make are also different. Paul insists that works do not provide a basis for our salvation, and James asserts that salvation will lead to responsible, ethical behavior. Both apostles are concerned with the misuse of the Law. For Paul, the problem is legalism, using the Law as a means of salvation. But for James, the problem is antinomianism, the practice of disregarding the Law, feeling that how we live is irrelevant to our ultimate salvation. In light of these considerations, there is really no conflict between the two apostles on the question of faith and works.”*

*(Reign of God, pp. 272-273)*

Here is another place where I do not agree with some of my Christian friends. I do not believe in “Once saved, always saved.” I believe that just as you came to Christ through free will, you can turn your back on Christ through the same free will, and walk away from Him. I believe that just as your name was entered into the Book of Life, your name can be blotted out of the Book of Life. Revelation 3:5 says, “*He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*” If our name could not be removed from the Book of Life through apostasy, Revelation 3:5 would be meaningless. So in reality, Christ saves us and then asks us in return to be obedient to Him.

Some who believe in “Once saved, always saved” believe obedience is optional. But I say there has to be a place for obedience, or the Bible means nothing. There has to be a place for overcoming, or the Bible means nothing. There has to be a place for a trusting obedient walk with God, or the Bible means nothing. If it were an effortless religion, Paul’s statement in Philippians 2:12, “*work out your own salvation with*

*fear and trembling*” would mean nothing. The book *Steps to Christ*, page 61 says, “*The so-called faith in Christ which professes to release men from the obligation of obedience to God, is not faith, but presumption.*”

Tell me, who would say “washing their robes” takes less effort than “keeping the commandments?” One could say they both imply effort. But rather than saying that, I would like to say, “*they both imply cooperation.*” Jesus justifies us, and then we cooperate with Him as He sanctifies us.

The first Beatitude Jesus spoke from the mountain was, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” The last Beatitude He speaks from Revelation is, “*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life.*” Where is the Tree of Life?—in the kingdom of heaven! So the first Beatitude sees its fulfillment on the last page of Revelation.

Look at the text again. Revelation 22:14 says, “*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.*” Here we see the last page of Revelation bending around and touching the first page of Genesis. The history of man begins in Genesis with the Garden and the Tree of Life. Chapter 2 tells of a river flowing past the tree out of the Garden. And then sin happened, and an angel came and blocked the way to the Tree of Life. But then we turn to the last page of Revelation, and the Bible ends with the Garden open and the Tree of Life accessible to all who trust and obey God.

I want to close with a simple reading of Scripture. Revelation 22:1-5 says, “*And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for*

*the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”*

**Sermon preached by Pastor Barber at Central Church**