

The Gospel of Matthew

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: BEATITUDES (5:1-12)

The Sermon on the Mount is perhaps the most comprehensive message on the Christian life in all of Scripture. Here Jesus establishes the principles and practices upon which He desires us to build our life (the rock, not the sand). The setting of this sermon is on the hills of the Northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The sermon was preached after He spent the night in prayer on a mountain and came down and ordained His 12 apostles. This might be considered the organizational sermon of His newly established church. The bridegroom is providing leadership for His bride. He is redeeming her from the old life of sin and death and showing her the new way she is to walk in with Him.

Begin by reading the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety in chapters 5-7 of Matthew. What are some of your general thoughts on this message?

After reading the conclusion to the sermon in Matthew 7:24-27, what is the rock that Jesus urged His listeners to build their life upon?

Overview of the Beatitudes (5:1-12)

The word, "Beatitude" is a transliteration of the Latin word for "Blessed", the most common word found in the Beatitudes. Examine the subject matter of the Beatitudes. What types of attitudes and actions are portrayed here? Why does Jesus go to the trouble to tell us that we will be "blessed" by adorning these virtues?

THE MEANING OF BLESSED – PART 1

Blessed (makarioi)... The Greek word here (makarioi) is an adjective that means "happy" which in English etymology goes back to hap, chance, good-luck as seen in our words haply, hapless, happily, happiness. "Blessedness is, of course, an infinitely higher and better thing than mere happiness" (Weymouth). English has thus ennobled "blessed" to a higher rank than "happy."... The Greek word is as old as Homer and Pindar and was used of the Greek gods and also of men, but largely of outward prosperity. Then it is applied to the dead who died in the Lord as in Revelation 14:13... Jesus takes this word "happy" and puts it in this rich environment. "This is one of the words which have been transformed and ennobled by New Testament use; by association, as in the Beatitudes, with unusual conditions, accounted by the world miserable, or with rare and difficult" (Bruce). It is a pity that we have not kept the word "happy" to the high and holy plane where Jesus placed it. "If you know these things, happy (makarioi) are you if you do them" (John 13:17). "Happy (makarioi) are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). And Paul applies this adjective to God, "according to the gospel of the glory of the happy (makariou) God" (1 Timothy 1:11).

- A.T. Robertson's *Word Pictures of the New Testament*

THE MEANING OF BLESSED - PART 2

Both Homer and Hesiod spoke of the Greek gods as being happy (makarios) within themselves, because they were unaffected by the world of men – who were subject to poverty, disease, weakness, misfortune, and death. The fullest meaning of the term, therefore, had to do with an inward contentedness that is not affected by circumstances. That is the kind of happiness God desires for His children, a state of joy and well-being that does not depend on physical, temporary circumstances (cf. Philippians 4:11-13)... Because blessedness is fundamentally an element of the character of God, when men partake of His nature through Jesus Christ they partake of His blessedness. So it becomes clear at the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus is speaking of a reality that is only for believers.

- *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, p. 142*

Now that we have considered the meaning of the word, “blessed”, why was it so important for Jesus to establish that those who adopted the attitudes and practices listed in the Beatitudes would be blessed?

As we look at the subject of each verse in the Beatitudes (poor in spirit, mourn, gentle, hunger and thirst for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness), we notice a gradual transition from attitude to action. What does this teach us? Consider also that this is the introduction to the entire Sermon on the Mount.

- God is most concerned with matters of the _____.
- Right _____ are built upon right _____.

Finally, Jesus sat down to bring this message. In our culture, bringing a message from a sitting position is more casual than delivering the message while standing. It was different back in Israelite culture. Sitting as He began the message meant that He was assuming a position of authority. He climbed the side of the mountain and sat down. They came to Him. He was the teacher; they were the students. It probably isn't a coincidence that the Law of Moses was given on a mountain and Jesus picks a mountain to preach this pivotal sermon. We should approach this sermon with reverence and receptive hearts. These teachings were meant to become the very foundation of our life.

Blessed are the Humble (5:3)

Each Beatitude is a directive and a promise. The first Beatitude instructs us that those who are poor in spirit are blessed because they will receive the kingdom of God. Read Mark 10:13-16 and consider why the Lord placed this Beatitude first.

THE MEANING OF POOR IN SPIRIT

The word “poor” used here literally means to crouch, cringe, or shrink away. It is used of a beggar or pauper. We see this same word used in Luke 16:20, referring to Lazarus. This goes beyond just being poor (having few resources or being underpaid). This word refers to a beggar who has nothing if they don’t receive it at the hand of someone else; that is their livelihood.

The word “spirit” literally means a current of air, breath, or breeze. It is used of the human spirit/soul, our inner attitude, or of a spiritual being like God, an angel or a demon. It is sometimes used to exclusively refer to the Spirit of God, the third person in the trinity. In this context, it refers to our inner attitude, much like the familiar passage in John 4:24.

Bringing both words together, we see a picture of a person who has a beggarly attitude. The most appropriate synonym for this phrase would be, “humble”.

To better understand the concept of being poor in spirit or humble, read Luke 18:9-14 and Isaiah 66:1-2. Further describe the true beggarly attitude that Jesus endorses.

This parable seems to be modeled upon Isaiah 57:13-16. Read this passage and discuss the similarities.

What is the blessing for those who are humble? Read Colossians 1:12-13 and Matthew 11:25-30.

Why is it that God’s kingdom consists only of the humble?

What can we do to become more humble? Read Romans 14:9-11.

Blessed are the Mourners (5:4)

The concept of mourning is familiar to us. It means to grieve, be in sorrow, or weep. It is the outward expression of inward sorrow. It is the context of this mourning though, that is sometimes elusive in this passage. We often see it associated with mourning over death or loss. Truly, Jesus can give comfort to those who mourn for these reasons. When harmonizing this passage with other Scriptures, we see that the reason for mourning that Jesus is talking about goes beyond the temporal realm into the spiritual.

What are other reasons for mourning in Scripture? Read James 4:8-10.

Are all types of mourning good? If not, what types of mourning are wrong and harmful? Read 2 Samuel 13:1-2, 18:32-19:7 and 2 Corinthians 7:10.

What is the extent of the comfort that the Lord promises those who mourn? Read John 16:20-22.

What are the benefits of mourning? We see from Scriptures that the benefits of a godly sorrow are numerous and abundant.

- Like being poor in spirit, mourning for the _____ reasons shows that we are in touch with _____, and not living in the _____ of sin. (Read Ecclesiastes 7:2-4)
- _____ mourning brings us to God while _____ tends to draw us _____ from Him. (Read Psalms 119:67 and Luke 6:25)
- The comfort brought by Christ is a “new _____”, a new _____ of God to us. (Read Psalms 40:1-3)
- Biblical mourning brings forth the fruit of _____ which _____. (Read Psalms 126:5-6 and Hebrews 12:11)
- We are able to share the _____ we receive with _____. (Read 2 Corinthians 1:4-7)

Is there danger for those who do not properly mourn? Read Ezekiel 9:4-6.

Blessed are the Meek (5:5)

Jesus quotes this Beatitude directly from Psalm 37:11, which says, “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” The meaning of the word, “meek” isn’t well understood today. It might best be described as a blending of strength, self-control, and compassion. The meek are not weak, but rather restrain their strength out of compassion for others. Though a meek individual may have much to boast of, they will not seek the applause of men. Though a meek individual may have the power to harm another for a personal injustice, they will instead seek to use their strength for the good of the other. There are two individuals in Scripture who are personally referred to as “meek”, Moses and Jesus Christ.

How do you see the quality of meekness in Moses? Read Numbers 12:3, 11:24-29, and Exodus 32:7-14.

How do you see the quality of meekness in Jesus? Read Matthew 11:29, 21:5, 20:28, 26:53, and Luke 23:34.

What is the significance of the meek inheriting the earth? Who will bestow the earth to the meek? Read Psalms 24:1-2 and Matthew 19:28-30.

The idea of inheriting the earth appears to be consistent with God’s commitment to grant the earth to the descendants of Abraham. Read Romans 4:13 and discuss the passage.

Read Numbers 20:7-12. How would you describe Moses' actions? What did this cost him? How does this correlate with this Beatitude?

Blessed are the Spiritually Hungry (5:6)

In his commentary on Matthew, John MacArthur speaks of this beatitude and says, “The strongest and deepest impulses in the natural realm are used to represent the depth of desire the called of God and redeemed have for righteousness.”

It is natural for men to crave food, especially when they are truly hungry. This desire motivates men to go to great lengths to obtain sustenance. So should our desire be for the righteousness of God. Jesus promises that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled. What does it mean to hunger, thirst, and be filled?

Hunger – Read the context of Matthew 4:2, and 12:1-3. This goes beyond a growling stomach to a deep craving and need for food (to be famished).

Thirst – See the similar context in Psalms 42:1-2. Again, this thirst surpasses wanting to have your lips moistened, but implies a deep need for water.

Filled – This word means to gorge by supplying food in abundance. It supplies beyond need to the point of excess.

Jesus teaches us to seek righteousness. What righteousness are we seeking? Read Isaiah 64:6, Romans 3:10, John 6:35, and Philippians 3:9.

A key to living out this passage in real life is to develop a spiritual hunger for the things of the Lord. How do we grow in this area?

1. Have a taste for _____. Read Psalms 34:8 and 42:1-2.

Christianity goes beyond a set of doctrines and principles. It is centered on a person. He is a person with whom we may have a relationship. This relationship does not exist in theory but experientially. We are exhorted to taste and see that the Lord is good. This is why an experiential salvation is necessary for godliness. It is this taste that draws us back to the Lord.

2. Become dissatisfied with the _____. Read Psalms 63:1-2. Why did the psalmist say he lived in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water?

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A great illustration of this principle is the Parable of the Prodigal Son in 15th chapter of Luke. The prodigal had to hit rock bottom before his eyes were spiritually opened to see that even a servant in his father's house was better off than he. John Darby said, "To be hungry is not enough; I must be really starving to know what is in God's heart toward me. When the prodigal was hungry, he went to feed on the husks, but when he was starving, he turned to his father."

Many saints are still sitting in the mire with the hogs and don't realize that life could be better. They think the only thing available to them are husks and forget the table of their Father's house. Like the prodigal son, when we are truly hungry, we will come without conditions. Proverbs 27:7 says, "The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." To the soul hungry for God, even His discipline and reproof are joyous.

To what degree has God promised to fill those who crave righteousness? Read Psalm 23:1,5.

Two great examples of this principle in action are the Apostle Paul and Moses. Read Philippians 3:9-14 and 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. What was Paul's attitude about righteousness? Was he filled?

Read Exodus 33:11-19 and discuss Moses. How did he hunger and thirst after God. Was he filled?

Consider this lesson. Does your hunger for the Lord pass beyond the pew? In his commentary on Matthew, John MacArthur said, "A hungry man does not have to be begged to eat". I hope we all are hungry!

Blessed are the Merciful (5:7)

The prior attitudes endorsed by the Sermon on the Mount, with the exception of meekness, deal largely with our attitude before God. This beatitude, however, turns our attention to our interaction with men. We find though that our interaction with men plays a large role in how the Lord interacts with us.

What is mercy? Read Psalms 86:15-16.

What is the motivation behind Biblical mercy? Read Lam. 3:21-23, Psalm 145:8, and Matthew 14:14.

One of the challenges we face when contemplating whether or how to show mercy is how our mercy will be received and used by the recipient. For example, should we give money to someone who has a history of making bad choices with money or may use it for evil purposes? Should we stand by someone who is heading down the wrong path in life? Where does mercy cross the line and become enabling? Read Romans 2:1-6 and Galatians 6:1-2.

What does mercy require of the recipient? Read Matthew 5:43-48 and 1 Peter 2:9-10.

The parable of the Good Samaritan may best illustrate this point. Read Luke 10:25-37. What did the Samaritan have in common with the injured man? What did he require of him? How far does the definition of “neighbor” expand?

Does mercy consist of feeling alone? Read Matthew 15:32, 20:34, Mark 6:34, Hebrews 10:34, and 1 John 3:17-18.

Do we need mercy? If so, why, and in what context? Read Psalms 6:2, 9:13, 31:9, 51:1.

What happens when we shut off the flow of compassion and mercy in our life? Read James 2:13, Daniel 4:27, and 1 Peter 3:7.

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The parable of the indebted servant is an excellent illustration of how withholding mercy will affect us. Read Matthew 18:21-35.

Does God's promise of mercy for those who are merciful make the receipt of God's mercy a work, something that we earn? Read Psalm 41:1-4 and Romans 9:13-16.

To what extent does God desire mercy to be a part of our life? Read Micah 6:8 and Ephesians 4:28-5:1.

Hebrews 6:10 – "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

Blessed are the Pure in Heart (5:8)

Each beatitude seems to challenge us in new ways. This one is no exception. To have a pure heart before God should be the great goal of our life. No man will see God or please Him for that matter without a pure heart. We would do well to give great attention to this teaching and its application.

What does it mean to be pure?

What is the heart in the context of this passage? Read Proverbs 4:23.

Why does Jesus focus on the heart? Read 1 Sam. 16:7, Matt. 12:34-35, Matt. 15:18-19.

Is it natural to have a pure heart? Read Genesis 6:5, Psalm 58:3, Jeremiah 17:9.

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A parallel passage that further correlating purity and spiritual awareness is found later in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:19-24. Read this passage and answer the following questions.

What is tied to our treasure?

What is the consequence of having a treasure located outside the gates of heaven?

How does this passage relate to Matthew 5:8?

Jesus speaks in the positive voice in the Beatitudes. He promises blessing to those who are characterized by specific godly qualities. A negative promise is also implied. Read Hebrews 12:14 and Revelation 3:14-19. What happens to those who do not have a pure heart?

How does a pure heart affect our life tangibly? Read 1 Chronicles 29:17-19 and Matthew 23:25-28.

How can our hearts be cleansed? Read Psalm 119:9-11, 33-40, and John 15:3.

A great illustration of a heart set in the right direction is David. God considered him to be a man after his own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). Read the following psalms written by David. What do we learn about his heart? Read Psalms 19:14, 26:2, 27:8, and 51:6, 10.

Does a pure heart limit or liberate us? Read Titus 1:15-16.

1 Timothy 1:5 – “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:”

Blessed are the Peacemakers (5:9)

Among all the beatitudes, this particular passage is probably the most frequently misunderstood. The word, “peacemaker” is usually applied in a very broad sense that completely misses the point. In fact, it is often misused in a dangerous way. The Bible sternly warns us against declaring peace where there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:11-17). Our desire is to understand God’s intention and apply this truth to our life that we might be known as His children.

What is peace?

What is a peacemaker?

The best way to understand the meaning of this passage is to look at it in its entirety and at the surrounding passages. What blessing is promised to peacemakers and what does this mean? Read Luke 6:35, Ephesians 5:1-2 and 1 Peter 1:14-16.

To inherit this blessing, what principle must we apply to correctly interpret “peacemaker”?

How does God the Father and His Son work as peacemakers? Read Luke 2:13-14, Ephesians 2:11-17, Colossians 1:20, and Romans 5:1.

In our culture, peacemakers are seen as mediators who can broker a compromise between two or more parties. A compromise is considered a “middle way” between two extremes, an accommodation in which both sides make concessions. Politics is often called the art of compromise. Some say, “nobody will get everything he wants; we all must compromise.” To what degree does God compromise in His work as a peacemaker? Read Matthew 5:10-12, 10:34-37, and John 7:40-52.

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From the example of Jesus, the “Prince of Peace” I want to offer two maxims that will apply to our work as peacemakers for the Lord.

1. True peace will never require _____ sacrifice.
2. True peace may require great _____ sacrifice.

I believe it is important to take a moment and step back to see the landscape before we go further.
Answer the following questions:

What are the situations most prevalent in our society today that need peace?

What is the source of this strife?

To what degree does the work of God as a peacemaker address these issues?

With what parties are we as peacemakers charged with making peace? Scripturally, there appear to be many situations into which we may work as peacemakers.

- We are to seek peace between _____ and _____. Read Romans 10:15, 2 Corinthians 5:20, and Ephesians 6:15
- We are to seek to live peacefully with _____ men. Read Romans 12:18.
- We are to seek to _____ and _____ peace within the _____. Read Romans 14:17-19, 1 Corinthians 6:6-8, and Ephesians 4:1-3.

To conclude this beatitude, we must ask, how do I become a peacemaker? The work of peacemaking is really the culmination of godly attitudes working in our heart. Read the following passages and list the virtues that good peacemakers must possess.

- Philippians 2:1-3 –
- James 3:13-18 –
- James 1:19-20 –
- Hebrews 12:14-15 –
- 2 Timothy 2:24-25 –

Blessed are the Persecuted (5:10-12)

Each of the Beatitudes challenges us by redefining the term, “blessed” or happy in our vocabulary. None may be quite as radical as this beatitude. We are taught here that those who are persecuted are blessed. This may cause us recoil both mentally and physically. Nevertheless, God’s Word is sure and we see several examples in Scripture of those who found strength to not only endure but even to rejoice in the midst of persecution.

What is the context of the persecution Jesus speaks of? Read Matthew 10:16-25 and 1 Peter 3:12-17.

The persecution we are warned of here is serious. To what degree will persecution be a part of the Christian experience? Will this be a constant struggle, intermittent, or rare? Read 2 Timothy 3:10-13 and 1 Peter 4:12-16.

It is important to be clear that suffering is not to be sought as an end, neither is it a sought-after means. Suffering is sometimes a necessary byproduct of living in accordance with the law of Christ without compromise. The Lord may use our suffering as a means of achieving His ends, but it is something that He must orchestrate. Throughout history, misguided men have purposely put themselves in harm’s way or even participated in self-flagellation thinking that this in some way made them a partaker of Christ’s sufferings. This is contrary to God’s will. Read the following passages and discuss the principles we learn about the timing of persecution from them.

Luke 4:28-30, John 8:58-59, 11:53-54 –

Matthew 10:14-17, Acts 13:50-52, 18:6-11 –

Matthew 10:18-20, 26:45-46, 2 Timothy 4:6-8 –

Acts 5:41 –

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Fear of oppression and a lack of faith in God's promise preempt much good work of the kingdom that will prove costly to us. Read Matthew 26:31-35, 26:69-75, Luke 9:26, 22:31-32, John 19:38-42, Acts 15:36-39, 2 Timothy 4:11 and answer the questions below.

How common is it for God's people to fear persecution? Do authentic Christians ever fail here?

Are true Christians comfortable to remain in this state?

This beatitude speaks of three types of suffering experienced by Christians at the hands of evil men. They are (1) reviling, (2), persecution, and (3) speaking all manner of evil against you falsely. Define each of these terms below and discuss examples from Scripture, history, and contemporary situations that demonstrating these very trials prophesied by Christ.

Reviling –

What are scriptural examples of the righteous being reviled? Read Matthew 27:39-44, John 9:26-34.

Historically, Christians have been reviled for their social status, education, convictions, and devout practices. Sometimes, the very name of Christian groups and sects was given to them by their enemies, for example, "Anabaptist" means re-baptizer and was given as a name to Christians who would re-baptize adults and children after their conversion, even though they were baptized by the Catholic Church as infants. A wonderful piece of early Christian literature, called The Octavius of Minicus Felix, written in the 2nd century AD, contains a discourse between a Christian man and an unbeliever who levels the common ridicules and false accusations of the day against him. Octavius, the Christian, responds to each accusation with the truth. Read the Charge of "Poor and Lower Class" in the adaptation of this piece of literature included with this lesson.

What are some examples of current day "hate speech" leveled against Christians?

Persecution –

What are scriptural examples of the righteous being persecuted? Read Matthew 23:34-36, Acts 7:51-53, 59, 8:1, and 12:2-3.

Throughout the past 2000 years, thousands of Christians were persecuted and even gave their life for the sake of the gospel. One of the most persecuted groups of Christians was the Anabaptists. Roman Catholics and Protestants alike tortured, abused, and even murdered Anabaptists to try and stop the movement. They were persecuted primarily because they questioned many of the main Catholic and early Protestant beliefs. They believed in baptism after conversion rather than infant baptism. They also rejected the mixture of religion and politics. King Ferdinand of Spain declared drowning (called the third baptism) "the best antidote to Anabaptism". The Tudor regime of England, even those that were Protestant, persecuted Anabaptists as they were considered too radical and therefore a danger to religious stability.

MODERN DAY PERSECUTION

One of the most famous martyrs of 20th century America was Jim Elliott, an evangelist who arrived in Ecuador on February 21, 1952, with the purpose of evangelizing Ecuador's Aucas Indians. He first devoted himself to learning Spanish and working with the Quichua Indians, in preparation to reach the violent Huaorani Indian tribe which were known at the time as the Aucas.

He and four other missionaries, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, Pete Fleming, and their pilot, Nate Saint, made contact from their airplane with the Huaorani Indians using a loudspeaker and a basket to pass down gifts. After several months, the men decided to build a base a short distance from the Indian village, along the Curaray River. There they were approached one time by a small group of Huaorani Indians and even gave an airplane ride to one curious Huaorani whom they called "George" (his real name was Naenkiwi). Encouraged by these friendly encounters, they began plans to visit the Huaorani, without knowing that George had lied to the others about the missionaries' intentions. Their plans were preempted by the arrival of a larger group of 10 Huaorani warriors, who killed Elliot and his four companions on January 8, 1956. Elliot's body was found downstream, along with those of the other men, except that of Ed McCully. Jim Elliott's journal entry for October 28, 1949, expresses his belief that missions work was more important than his life. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

- Taken in part from the wikipedia.org article on Jim Elliott, July 20, 2010

Say all manner of evil against you falsely –

The third classification of difficulties Jesus predicts for Christians is borne out in Scripture. Jesus was personally acquainted with the reality of false accusation. In some ways, this may be the most difficult to endure because it is both a lie and completely antithetical to what we are trying to be in this world. In his commentary on Matthew, John MacArthur says, “Because they bring righteousness and truth wherever they go, peacemakers are frequently accused of being troublemakers and disturbers of the peace – as Ahab accused Elijah of being (1 Kings 18:17) and the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of being (Luke 23:2, 5).”¹ Read Matthew 11:16-19 and 26:59-62 and discuss how both Jesus and John the Baptist were falsely accused.

Examples of false accusations are found in the Octavius of Minicus Felix discussed earlier in this lesson. Read the charges of “Cannibalism” and “Gross Immorality” leveled against the Christians of that day.

Today in America, we are increasingly seeing this form of oppression leveled against Christians. We are hearing their voices becoming stronger and the possibility of retaliatory action against practicing Christians is becoming more and more likely. Below are a few of the more prominent charges:

- Being labeled as _____, narrow-minded, and _____
- Accused of practicing _____ for speaking out against sin
- Called _____ for religiously educating our children based on God’s Word

We are ending much as we began. The poor in spirit were promised the kingdom. Likewise, the persecuted and offered the same reward. Perhaps this unity is a lesson in itself, further demonstrating that these beatitudes are tied together and are progressive, beginning with humility and ending with enduring persecution. All of these attitudes and actions of godliness lead us uniformly toward one great goal, to know the Lord in His fullness and enjoy His great bounty. May God bless us with growth in these attributes, assurance of His presence, and the manifestation of His glory.

¹ Matthew 1-7, p. 217, John MacArthur.