

**“The Blessed Life”**  
**Matthew 5:1-12**

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This evening we are beginning a summer preaching series through the Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew. The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five blocks of Jesus’ teaching that Matthew presents in his account of Jesus’ life and ministry. The sermon covers ch’s 5-7, and you will have a chance to hear from several of our elders preaching through these chapters from now until the end of July. You can find the sermon schedule on the website if you would like to look ahead.

In this sermon, Jesus covers many facets of what it looks like to live as His disciples and the blessings that come to those who do. You can see there at the end of Matthew ch. 4 that Jesus’ teaching and healings and miracles had caused his fame to spread very quickly throughout the land. And great crowds were seeking him out to see him and to hear him teach and to experience his healing power.

And we are told at the beginning of ch. 5:

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them . . .

What that opening statement tells us is that the teaching we are about to hear from Jesus over these next few chapters is intended for his disciples. For His followers. For those who believe Jesus’ gospel and are committed to living their lives in obedience to Him.

And I want to say at the introduction to this series, it is important to place this teaching of Jesus in the context of Matthew’s Gospel as a whole. Matthew has made clear from the beginning of this Gospel, that the good news about Jesus is that He has come to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). And the accomplishment of that salvation of sinners is then presented to us at the end of his Gospel where he recounts the saving death of Jesus, after Jesus declares that He is “pouring out his blood for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). The Gospel then concludes with the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus as the King of all the earth.

Why is it important to remember that broader context of Matthew’s Gospel? Because it makes clear that the life of a disciple, the life of a citizen of God’s kingdom, which Jesus describes for us here in ch’s 5-7, is NOT a list of things to obey in order to earn our salvation by our own deeds. Or to earn our way into that kingdom.

Rather, it describes the kind of life that all true disciples of Jesus’ strive for and experience as the fruit of the salvation Jesus Himself provides . . . and the rewards that such a life will bring. But again, NOT “rewards” in terms of something we’ve earned. But rewards in terms of the outcome of the life of those who have been saved by Christ and now follow Him as King. This is where His salvation leads us as His disciples. So we need to make sure we keep the whole context of Matthew’s Gospel in mind as we consider this sermon.

## THE BEATITUDES

In addition to that introductory word about the sermon as a whole, let me also say a brief introductory word regarding this list of blessings that begins the Sermon on the Mount here in Matthew 5:3-12. This list is often referred to as the Beatitudes. "Beatitude" comes from the Latin word for blessing. And in this list, Jesus declares a list of blessings that are given to those who live as Jesus' disciples in these particular ways.

Now whenever you come to a list in the Bible, one of the questions you should ask is . . . how is this list organized? Is there any pattern or any significance to the order of the list? How do the different items in the list relate to one another?

In vv. 3-10, we see 8 distinct statements, describing the characteristics of a disciple and the blessings that come as a result. The final statement is then repeated and expanded on in vv. 11-12.

The first and last blessings are the same: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." These are like bookends to the list, and help us see that the list should be read as a single unit. In other words, the varied blessings in the middle of those bookends should be understood all together as the blessings that come to those who are a part of God's heavenly kingdom. Those to whom the kingdom belongs. This is what citizenship in the kingdom looks like, and this is where it leads.

Reading the beatitudes together as a single unit also clarifies what Jesus is NOT doing. Jesus is NOT describing different kinds of disciples who will receive different kinds of blessings. It's NOT like there are some disciples who mourn, and those are the ones who will be comforted. And then there are other disciples who are merciful, and those are the ones who will receive mercy. No. All of these characteristics describe every disciple of Jesus, and all of these blessings apply to every disciple of Jesus.

In terms of the order of the list, I think we see that there is a general progression in the list from beginning to end, which displays an internal logic as you move from one characteristic to the next. We shouldn't try to be too wooden here. It's not as though these characteristics are entirely discrete from one another. And it's not that as a follower of Jesus you master one characteristic, and then leave it behind for the next one. But that they are layered onto each other in a natural progression.

I heard Mark Dever say, it's NOT like each characteristic is a booster rocket, that then falls away once it has done its work, as you move on to the next. It's more like you have basic colors, and then you have fresh colors added. And those fresh ones depend upon and enhance and enrich the earlier ones. So, generally speaking, the later items in the list grow out from the earlier ones, even as the earlier ones remain in the picture. So we see a progression in the list, and what I want to do is simply walk through the list with an eye to this progression, and my hope is that with each statement it will be sort of like filling out the details of a portrait, with the result that we end with a clear picture of what a disciple of Jesus should look like.

## 1. THE POOR IN SPIRIT

So first, The Poor in Spirit. Jesus begins in verse 3:

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

This, Jesus says, is where the character of a disciple begins. This is one of the foundational characteristics of those to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs. His disciples are humble in spirit because they recognize that in and of themselves they are spiritually bankrupt. Spiritually destitute. Spiritually poor. Lacking in themselves the resources needed to live as they should before God. And so when they come to God, they come not because they have so much to offer *Him*, but because they recognize their total dependence and utter need for His grace and provision *for them*. And this is the posture of heart that the Lord Himself says we ought to come to Him and to which He will give His regard. Isaiah 66:2:

“This is the one to whom I will look:  
he who is humble and contrite in spirit  
and trembles at my word.

J.C. Ryle writes, “Humility is the very first letter in the alphabet of Christianity.”

And the early church father, Augustine, wrote in a letter to one of his students in 410 A.D., “I wish you to prepare for yourself no other way of seizing and holding the truth than that which has been prepared by [God]...in that way the first part is humility; the second, humility; the third, humility.” Humility is the foundation of the all the other Christian virtues.

The world tells you that the way to a successful, happy life is to believe that you can do or be anything you want if you will just put your mind to it; that if you will just look inside yourself, you'll find that you have what it takes to be successful and to accomplish your dreams. And, you know, that may actually seem to work in some measure for some people for some time. But eventually we are all confronted not only with our human weakness and limitations, but with our sin. With our inability to live a life that is truly pleasing to God in thought and word and deed.

And Jesus says that coming to the place of being truly humbled before God because of our own poverty of spiritual resources . . . realizing that apart from the grace of God in Christ, we have no hope in ourselves . . . is a foundational characteristic of being his disciple, and one evidence that we are in fact a citizen of God's heavenly kingdom.

## 2. THOSE WHO MOURN

Secondly, a disciples of Jesus are those who mourn. Jesus says in verse 4:

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

Jesus is NOT saying here that anyone who has ever been sad is automatically or necessarily one of his disciples. There are lots of people in the world who are sad about their circumstances and who hate and resent God. The mourning Jesus describes here is not just grief generally, due to our circumstances or our situation in life. In context of our list, it is a

mourning over the spiritual bankruptcy that Jesus began with. It is a mourning over our sin and rebellion against the Lord.

My mind immediately goes to Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18. We are told that Jesus told this parable for those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt." So in other words, for those who were not "poor in spirit" but "proud in spirit." And Jesus says,

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

<sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed . . . 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast [that is an expression of deep sorrow . . . of mourning], saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Disciples of Jesus mourn over our sin. And those who mourn in this way will be comforted. Now, this is a good place to note, that the six blessings that are promised in the middle of this list are all in the future tense. "They *will* be comforted. They *will* inherit the earth. They *will* be satisfied. An so on . . ."

The blessings promised to those who belong to God's heavenly kingdom now through faith are ultimately fulfilled in the future, when that kingdom is established in its fullness at the return of Christ. But that doesn't mean there is no experience of those blessings now in some measure. It's both/and. It's already/not yet. Now in measure, then in full.

And what Jesus says is that those who mourn over their own spiritual poverty . . . who mourn over their own sin before God . . . will be comforted. How? This is what Matthew's Gospel more broadly tells us. Comforted by the forgiveness and acceptance and reconciliation with God that Jesus provides by His death and resurrection, for those who sincerely repent from godly sorrow over their sin and trust in Christ.

This is why genuine repentance is always layered with *both* grief *and* joy. Go read the parable of the prodigal son. There is grief over our sin, but there is great joy in returning home to our generous and merciful heavenly Father.

### **3. THE MEEK**

Third, being poor in spirit, and mourning over our sin before God, should lead us to be meek in character before others. Verse 5:

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

The word "meek" is one of those words that can be a little bit difficult to define. It speaks to our posture of heart and attitude toward those around us. The world sees no difference between "meekness" and "weakness." But these are very different things.

Meekness actually flows from strength. Meekness is strength characterized by gentleness, humility, self-control and restraint. Meekness entails freedom from pride and resentment and malice. Freedom from a self-asserting dominance or personal vengeance.

We hear of the meekness of Jesus in 1 Peter 2:23: “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

It takes a remarkable kind of strength to be beaten and flogged and mocked and wrongfully condemned for doing what is good and right, and NOT to burst out in retaliation.

Disciples of Jesus are also characterized by meekness. But this meekness does NOT flow from our own strength, but from our humble assessment of ourselves and our utter confidence and trust in the Lord and His strength and His promises and His faithfulness to those promises. We are able to be meek toward others because we entrust ourselves to Him. And so we don't have to get our way by being controlling or aggressive or quarrelsome or harsh. We don't press our advantage because of our intellect or our finances or our physical strength or our social standing. We are freed to humbly, gently, peacefully serve others, even when they don't respond like we want or things don't go the way we would choose, because we are entrusting ourselves, and others, to the Lord.

And what does the Lord promise to those who live meekly by our trust in Him? Nothing less than inheriting the earth. When the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever (Rev 11:15). It is not the proud and self-asserting that will inherit that kingdom by their own strength or righteousness. It is, according to God's promise, the meek.

#### **4. THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Fourth, a disciple of Jesus is marked by a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Verse 6:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they shall be satisfied.

Notice Jesus does NOT say that his disciples are fully righteous in themselves. But they do hunger and thirst for righteousness. This is the positive counterpart to our mourning over our sin. We don't mourn over our sin simply because we don't like the consequences that our sin brings into our lives. We mourn over our sin because we are not pleasing to God. And yet we long to be so. We deeply desire to be righteous.

The imagery of hungering and thirsting are vivid ways of expressing this deep desire. And Jesus' words here provide an opportunity to examine our lives and our desires: What do you hunger for? What do you thirst for? Certainly at one level we all have many desires. Food. Money. Sex. Power. Status. Relationships.

But if someone were to look in on your life, what would they say are the governing desires of your life? The things that, at the deepest level, when push comes to shove, motivate your decisions and your priorities, the way you use your time and resources, the way you spend

your energy? What are those things that if you could obtain them, you are convinced that your heart would be satisfied?

Jesus says that *His* disciples mourn for their sins and hunger and thirst for righteousness. To live a life that is pleasing to God in every way. This is also a good opportunity to be reminded that we need the Lord, both to give us this desire, and to satisfy it. Romans 8:3-4:

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

God Himself has done what the law, weakened by our sinful flesh, could not do. This is again one of those blessings that we experience in measure now as Christians, as He sends His Spirit to dwell within us, but which will ultimately be satisfied when we see Christ face-to-face, and are made fully like him in righteousness.

## 5. THE MERCIFUL

Jesus continues to fill out the portrait. And the fifth characteristic he adds is mercy. A disciple of Jesus is merciful. Verse 7:

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

I hope you can see how this characteristic naturally flows from what has come before. Those who recognize their own spiritual poverty. Those who mourn over their own sin. Those who recognize how much they need the forgiveness and mercy of the Lord themselves, are going to be much more inclined to show mercy to others.

This calls to mind another parable of Jesus, which Jesus tells later in Matt 18: the parable of the unforgiving servant. Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven [sound familiar?] may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants." So a servant is brought to the king who owes him ten thousand talents. A single talent was about 20 years of wages for a laborer. And this servant owes ten thousand. What's the point? The point is there is no possible way that this servant could ever repay his debt. Not in thousands of lifetimes. And yet when the servant appeals to the king for mercy, his debt is forgiven.

But then that same servant goes out from the king's presence and meets a fellow servant who owes him a debt that is equivalent to just a few months of wages. Just the smallest fraction of what he himself had owed the king. The man begins to strangle his fellow servant, and when the servant asks for mercy, he has him thrown into prison. And when the king hears of it, he calls this unforgiving servant back, and condemns him to prison, until he pays the full amount of an unpayable debt.

And Jesus declares, "So also will my heavenly Father do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. NOT because we somehow earn God's mercy by showing mercy to others. But because those who have genuinely

experienced the immeasurable forgiveness that God offers to us in Christ . . . will be moved to show mercy and forgiveness to those whose offenses against us are far less than our own against the Lord. And that fruit of mercy demonstrates the reality of our discipleship. The reality of our citizenship in the heavenly kingdom. Which means when the king returns, we will receive His mercy.

Does that mean that disciples of Jesus never struggle to forgive or to show mercy in this life? No. We are in process. We are not yet made perfect. But we do fight against our sinful flesh and our desire to take vengeance, and strive to genuinely forgive those who have sinned against us from the heart, trusting that God will be faithful, both to carry out His justice and to demonstrate His mercy in His perfect wisdom. So we don't have to take it into our own hands, and we are freed to show mercy.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

## 6. THE PURE IN HEART

Sixth, disciples of Jesus are pure in heart. Verse 8:

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

Here perhaps most of all, we are reminded of the already, but not yet nature of these characteristics and of these rewards. Blessed are the pure in heart. Who can read such a statement and not tremble before the God who sees and knows everything about us, even the innermost workings of our hearts?

And yet this is a reality in measure for those who are his disciples. Or as Jesus says it in John 3, those who are born again by the Holy Spirit. Those who are given new spiritual life do not simply conform to a few external religious rites or practices. They are made new from the inside out, so that they genuinely love and obey God from the heart. And progressively so until the day that we see Jesus as He is, and therefore are made fully like Him (1 John 3:2).

When Jesus confronted the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of his day, he said this in Matthew 23:

<sup>25</sup> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. . .

<sup>27</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. <sup>28</sup> So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

And so Jesus will say just a little later in the sermon on the mount, in Matt 5:20: "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Those who maintain an external, hypocritical show of righteousness, while being fully devoted to sin in their hearts, will not enter the kingdom of heaven. And therefore will not see God.

But those who turn from their sin now to behold the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (not physically, but through the proclamation of the gospel), we come to see Him now for who He truly is with the eyes of faith. And we come to love Him supremely from the heart, with an undivided loyalty. And those who see and love Jesus by faith now, will see Him . . . will see God . . . in the fullness of His heavenly glory in eternity.

## 7. THE PEACEMAKERS

Seventh, disciples of Jesus are peacemakers. Verse 9:

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

Why will peacemakers be called sons of God? It's because their lives display the characteristics of their heavenly father. God Himself is the supreme peacemaker. Colossians 1:19-20:

For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

God makes peace between Himself and the sinful people He redeems in Christ by satisfying His just punishment against our sin and restoring us to a relationship of peace with Him. And He makes peace between people, as His gospel unites us to one another in Christ.

Ephesians 2:14:

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

At the heart of our peacemaking will be the proclamation of this gospel that makes peace between God and sinners, and peace between sinners with one another. We are called both to proclaim and to live out that gospel as disciples of Christ and citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And as such we will not delight in division or bitterness or strife or conflict for its own sake. Rather, we will delight to make peace whenever and wherever it is possible. And as Don Carson writes, those who are "meek and poor in spirit, loving righteousness yet merciful, are especially equipped for peacemaking," and so reflect the character of their heavenly father (*Matthew*, 135).

## 8. THE PERSECUTED

Finally, disciples of Jesus are blessed when they are persecuted.

Verses 10-12:

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

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Now just as the mourning that Jesus spoke of in verse 4 was not just any kind of mourning, but a mourning over sin. So also the persecution that Jesus speaks of is not just any persecution. People of all different beliefs and practices are persecuted all around the world. But Jesus speaks here of being persecuted “for righteousness’ sake.” He speaks of being reviled and persecuted and slandered “on his account.” In other words, this hostility and mistreatment is coming for believing and following and identifying with Christ. For proclaiming the truth of His gospel and living as His disciple.

There are certainly times when we suffer because we have done something wrong. But Jesus says here there are times when we will suffer for doing and believing and speaking what is right and true. Jesus says this in John 15:18-20:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

How can Jesus say that you are blessed when the world persecutes you for righteousness’ sake? It’s because that hostility from the world is an evidence that you are not of the world. But that Christ has chosen you out of the world, and that you are already a citizen of His heavenly kingdom. And you have a great reward coming, which this world can never take from you.

## **CONCLUSION**

Poor in spirit. Mourning for sin. Meek before others. Longing for righteousness. Merciful. Pure in heart. Peacemakers. And persecuted for righteousness and for the sake of Christ. This is what a true disciple of Jesus and citizen of the kingdom of heaven looks like.

If you hear that portrait and think . . . I know that I fall short of that picture . . . let me conclude with three reminders:

1. Remember that Jesus’ teaching comes to us as a part of the whole Gospel of Matthew. Christ came to save His people from their sins. And He accomplished that salvation by His own perfect righteousness, sacrificial death, and resurrection as Lord. His salvation is what makes it possible for anyone to be His disciple.
2. Remember the first characteristic of a disciple: It begins with those who are poor in spirit. Who recognize that in ourselves we are spiritually bankrupt, and only by the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit can we become what Christ describes here.
3. Remember that these marks of a disciple will characterize us now in measure, but only fully in Christ’s eternal kingdom that is to come. Minus the persecution, which will be perfectly absent! So if you recognize in your life even the beginnings of these characteristics . . . be encouraged. And ask the Lord to keep conforming you to the image of Christ by the power of His Spirit. And when Christ returns, you will experience the perfect fulfillment of His comfort, His inheritance, His satisfaction, His mercy, His presence, His peace, and His everlasting joy.