



Blessed and Blessing

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Matthew 5:1-12

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Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount with eight beatitudes. *Beatitude*, from its Latin root, means happy or fortunate. The word Jesus uses here is blessed. Blessed—or happy—are those who follow my teaching.

This sounds promising. We want in the worst way to be happy. The one thing I hear more than any other from young parents and grandparents alike: I just want my kids to be happy.

We associate happiness with the good life. You know, having money, a big house, a decent job, and cool friends. Let me give fair warning. Jesus stands every notion of what we believe about the good life on its head.

Take the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Try reciting this beatitude to poor people. Or take the second beatitude, “Blessed are those who mourn.” No one grieving would ever place bereavement in the blessing category. Or consider the third beatitude, “Blessed are the meek.” Who are we kidding? The meek don’t inherit the earth—the strong and powerful do. The Jesus way is not, I repeat is not, the American way.

Jesus begins each beatitude with the word *blessed*. Whenever blessed appears in adjectival form, it’s pronounced as a two-syllable word. Whenever it functions as verbal form, it is spoken as a single syllable. Maybe you will say at the end of this sermon, “Your sermon blessed me.” That would be nice!

These beatitudes go together, like beads on a string. Jesus does not intend them to be isolated from each other in piecemeal fashion. Collectively, they create an immediate

impact. They represent what Jesus considers vital to the good life.

We are preaching our way through Matthew's gospel this fall. We left off in chapter four last Sunday. Jesus has been traveling the Galilean countryside, healing people and casting out demons. His ministry is attracting big crowds. In chapter 5, Jesus sees enormous crowds coming in his direction. He climbs a mountain (hence, Sermon on the *Mount*) and sits down, the customary posture of teaching in those days.

Why does Jesus stop his healing to preach a sermon? Why doesn't he keep the healing going? Why forego the action for mere talk? Jesus will not be just another miracle worker. He ushers in the Kingdom of God. He not only performs major surgery. He practices preventative medicine. You want healing? Apply these eight beatitudes to your life and you will be healed.

Now, for the beatitudes themselves. These eight beatitudes divide into two groups of four beatitudes each. In the first four beatitudes, we need something from God. In the last four beatitudes, we give something to God. We need something from God. We give something to God.

First Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). People who are poor in spirit recognize their spiritual impoverishment. Blessed are those who know their need of God.

Second Beatitude: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Mourn here does not refer to bereavement. It references those who grieve what

sin does to their relationship with God. Blessed are those who mourn their sins and grieve what they do against God.

Third Beatitude: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). Meekness does not equate to weakness. Meekness corresponds to humility. Blessed are those who humble themselves before God.

Fourth Beatitude: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Hunger and thirst are used metaphorically to express longing for God. Eugene Peterson translates this beatitude in *The Message*, “Blessed are those who have big appetites for God.

The next three beatitudes all share something in common also. They function as “help” beatitudes. We need something from God. We give something to God.

Fifth Beatitude: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Those who show mercy receive mercy in return. Mercy is what God shows undeserving people like us. One verse repeats over and over in the Old Testament: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and rich in love” (Psalm 103:12). Blessed are the mercy-full, for they will receive mercy.

Sixth Beatitude: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). Who among us is pure in heart? Paul declares in Romans, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Pure, in this instance, means single-minded. Blessed are those who are fully devoted to God.

Seventh Beatitude: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God” (Matthew 5:9). This is the only place in Scripture where the word “peacemaker” appears. Blessed are those who make peace and work for peace.

These “help” beatitudes all center on loving and serving God. Blessed are those full of mercy, full of single-minded devotion and full of peace.

This leaves the eighth and last beatitude, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). This is the only beatitude to which Jesus adds commentary. Note, also, the shift in pronoun from third person “they” to second person “you.” Jesus addresses his final words to his disciples, “Blessed are you when people revile and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven, for so people persecuted the prophets who came before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). Jesus is true to his word on this matter of persecution. His original band of 12 disciples all die a martyr’s death with the exception of John, who was banished to a deserted island.

That’s my take on Jesus’ eight beatitudes. So what difference do these beatitudes make in my life? I have two applications to suggest to you. Normally, I have three applications. Today, I have two action steps for you to take.

First application: Recognize your need for God. In these first four beatitudes, we need something from God. What we need from God is God.

We are made in such a way to need God. Since God cannot give us anything greater than Himself, He gives us Himself. We need God because that's the way we are made. We are made in such a way to need God.

Do you believe down deep that God can satisfy your deepest needs? Paul writes in Philippians, "God will supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). Do we really believe this promise? Or do we run to something else for comfort and support? Do we really trust Christ to supply all our needs?

The genius of the 12-Step Program with Alcoholics Anonymous is that it begins at a point of need. Unless people struggling with excess drinking recognize that they are powerless over alcohol and need outside help, they will never experience sobriety.

Unless we recognize our need to apologize to someone we have wronged, the relationship will not improve. Unless we recognize our need to maintain a healthy diet, we will continue to put ourselves at considerable health risk. Unless we recognize our need to wear masks and maintain social distance, we will be susceptible to contracting this virus. Unless we recognize our need for God, we will not turn to God.

You may be saying to yourself, "I don't need God all that much. I can handle life pretty much on my own." We are only one life-altering event away from recognizing our need of God. Only one life-threatening illness or threat of death. If we are created to need God, why is it so hard for us to admit our need? Only those who recognize their need turn to God.

Second application: We give something to God. We need something from God; we give something to God. It would be more accurate to say that we give on God's behalf. Love the Lord and love the people. Serve the Lord and serve the people.

We offer three things on God's behalf to other people in these beatitudes—mercy, purity, and peace. God doesn't bless us to keep these blessings to ourselves. We are blessed to be a blessing. Blessed are those who are full of God's mercy, full of devotion and full of God's peace.

Am I sharing God's mercy with people or withholding it from others? Am I single-minded or half-hearted in my devotion to Christ? Am I a peacemaker or an agitator?

This last beatitude on persecution is sobering to ponder. There are growing areas in the world today where Christians are severely persecuted for their faith. Christians pay a heavy price for following Jesus in many parts of the world. Some of them face the threat of death. This news goes largely unreported in the western press.

Why am I so reluctant to witness for Christ? The most I will experience is disapproval or rejection. My fear is not that my faith will cost me everything but that it will cost me nothing at all.

We are now in month number seven of this pandemic. It's getting harder now: harder for parents to manage work and home demands; harder for students to adapt to online learning; harder for people living alone; harder to spend this much time sequestered in our homes. We are tired of feeling

cooped up. We are tired of being careful, and tired of the stress of whether we will become infected with this virus.

My suggestion: It's simple enough for a child to comprehend yet profound in its implications. Follow after Jesus. Lean into his teachings. His offer of the good life is still on the table.

We need something from God. We need God.

We give something to God: mercy, single-minded devotion, and the things that make for peace.