

THE BEATITUDES

Matthew 5:1-12

Introduction

1. The word “Beatitude” literally means blessedness¹ or happy; fortunate.
2. Jesus lists several beatitudes, speaking of a characteristic and a blessing that follows.
3. In view of the present distress, I believe we need to be reminded of these beatitudes that must be maintained in all circumstances, but especially in these difficult times.

**1. “Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit, For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven” (5:3)**

- a. Luke has, “Blessed are you poor...”, but Matthew makes it clear that Jesus added the qualifier “in spirit”. So Jesus is not speaking of economic deprivation², but those that are “poor in spirit”.
- b. The poor in spirit are those that feel their need of God’s help, and are aware that it can come from Him alone. It is one that recognizes that “the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man” (**Jeremiah 10:23**).

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (**Luke 18:10-14**).

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (**James 4:10**).

- c. The blessing of the poor in spirit is this: “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. “This means that persons with the attitude of the poor in spirit shall have the privilege of becoming members of the kingdom, namely by entering it by means of the new birth” (Coffman).

2. “Blessed Are They That Mourn, For They Shall Be Comforted” (5:4)

- a. This comes after Jesus had pronounced a blessing on the poor *in spirit*, and so we understand this mourning, not to be the mourning that comes after the death of a loved one, but the mourning that comes from unjust treatment, the prevalence of wickedness, persecution for the sake of righteousness, and for sorrow over sin.
- b. One could argue that the root of all the things is sin. Jesus mourned over the sin of Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (**Matthew 23:37**). The tax collector mourned over his sin: “God be merciful to me a sinner” (**Luke 18:13**). Christians too mourn over their sin: (i) Peter, being reminded of his betrayal of Jesus, “went out, and wept bitterly” (**Luke 22:62**). (ii) Paul, though forgiven of his sins, could not forget them (**Galatians 1:13**) and referred to himself as the chief of sinners (**1 Timothy 1:15**). (iii) The Corinthians felt shame when they remembered their past sins (**Romans 6:20-21**).

¹ “The word ‘beatitude’ is not found in the English Bible, but the Latin *beatitudo*, from which it is derived, occurs in the Vulgate (Jerome’s Latin Bible, 390-405 A. D.) version of Romans 4:6 where, with reference to Psalms 32:1,2, David is said to pronounce the ‘beatitude’ of the man whose transgressions are forgiven. In the Latin church *beatitudo* was used not only as an abstract term denoting blessedness, but in the secondary, concrete sense of a particular declaration of blessedness and especially of such a declaration coming from the lips of Jesus Christ. Beatitudes in this derivative meaning of the word occur frequently in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms (Psalms 32:1,2; 41:1; 65:4, etc.), and Jesus on various occasions threw His utterances into this form (Matthew 11:6; 13:16; 16:17; 24:46, with the Lukan parallels; John 13:17; 20:29). But apart from individual sayings of this type the name Beatitudes, ever since the days of Ambrose, has been attached specifically to those words of blessing with which, according to both Matthew and Luke, Jesus began that great discourse which is known as the Sermon on the Mount” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia – Beatitudes).

² Hoyt contends, “We may conclude that the word *ptochos* [poor], used by Matthew and Luke, may have referred to more than economic deprivation but never excluded it”.

- c. Those that mourn over sin “shall be comforted”. Paul says, “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation” (2 Corinthians 7:10). The one that allows godly sorrow over sin to lead him to repentance will find comfort in his restoration to God.

3. “Blessed Are The Meek, For They Shall Inherit The Earth” (5:5)

- a. The world has its definitions and the word of God has its definitions, and it is essential to look to the scriptures to properly define “religious” words. Here are some common examples: (i) **Church** (*ekklēsia*). When you ask people what comes to mind when they think of the word “church”, they describe what we might say is a typical church building. The Bible defines the word “church” as simply an assembly of people; whether secular (Acts 19:32) or religious (1 Corinthians 1:2). The reason the translators translated *ekklēsia* as “church” in some places and “assembly” in other places is so the reader would not confuse religious gatherings and secular gatherings. (ii) **Faith**. When I have asked people to define “faith”, the most common answer is, “Believing in things you can’t prove”. The Bible definition is: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). (iii) **Meek**. One person said, “Someone that’s meek is a pathetic person that let’s others walk all over them.” I suspect many view meekness in a similar way. If this is your idea of meekness and you have ever studied the life of Moses, then it may surprise you that Moses “was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3)!



- b. Xenophon of Athens³ used the Greek word *praus* (meek) to describe a horse that was well controlled, i.e., it yielded to the control of its rider. The picture of the horse and rider symbolizes *strength under control*. The meek soul yields his will to the bridle of God’s will exercising restraint and self-control. Ignatius⁴ admonished, “Against their outbursts of wrath you be meek; against their proud words be humble; against their railings you direct your prayers”.

Jesus described Himself as meek:
 “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:23).

- c. Jesus says it is the meek that shall “inherit the earth”, but what does this mean? We should note that the word “inherit” connotes a gift for which one must wait, not a reward that one must earn. Well, since we know that this world will pass away and be utterly destroyed (2 Peter 3:10) it must refer to something else. The “something else”, we believe, is the new heavens and new earth: “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). This is another way of saying that the meek shall inherit the kingdom of God.

4. “Blessed Are They Which Do Hunger And Thirst After Righteousness: For They Shall Be Filled” (5:6)

- a. Wicked people do not have God in their thoughts (Psalms 10:4), and if they do hunger and thirst it is for anything other than the righteousness through the faith of Christ. Some seek spiritual fulfillment through false religions, and some seek wealth and power. It is only the poor in spirit and those that mourn that will hunger and thirst after righteousness.



- b. The poor in spirit *hunger* and *thirst* (while many understand the concept of hunger and thirst, few have actually experienced it) after righteousness because they know it far from themselves to attain it. There is a certain degree of righteousness that comes through keeping the Law of Moses, i.e., by conformity to its precepts. But an honest person soon comes to realize that he does not keep the law perfectly; especially inwardly. Paul came to realize this truth and desired to “be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9).

³ Xenophon was born around 430 BC, near the city of Athens, to Gryllus, of the deme Erchia of Athens. His father was a member of a wealthy equestrian family. Xenophon of Athens was an Athenian historian, philosopher and soldier. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenophon>.

⁴ Ignatius of Antioch (Born ? died A.D. 108) was an early Christian writer and bishop of Antioch. Ignatius wrote a series of letters. This correspondence now forms a central part of a later collection of works known to be authored by the Apostolic Fathers. He is considered to be one of the three most important of these, together with Pope Clement I and Polycarp. His letters also serve as an example of early Christian theology. Important topics they address include ecclesiology, the sacraments, and the role of bishops.

- c. Those who hunger and thirst for righteous “shall”, says Jesus, “be filled” or satisfied. Barnes comments: “Those who are perishing for want of righteousness; those who feel that they are lost sinners and strongly desire to be holy, shall be thus satisfied. Never was there a desire to be holy which God was not willing to gratify, and the gospel of Christ has made provision to satisfy all who truly desire to be holy (see Isaiah 55:1-3; 65:13; John 4:14; 6:35; 7:37-38; Psalms 17:15)”. However, we shall not be made perfect until the resurrection: “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (Psalms 17:15).

5. Blessed Are The Merciful, For They Shall Obtain Mercy (5:7)

- a. Forgiving another that has sinned against you is one expression of mercy – Jesus taught us to pray, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12), and then He added, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). Mercy is also expressed in active kindness to the destitute and to any who are in trouble, e.g., giving to the poor, visiting orphans and widows, etc.
- b. Just as we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19), so we show mercy because He first showed mercy toward us (cp. Matthew 18:21-35). The psalmist wrote, “With the merciful Thou wilt shew Thyself merciful...” (Psalms 18:25). James warns, “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (James 2:13).

“Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, **I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?** And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. **So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses**” (Matthew 18:21-35).

- c. Jesus said that the merciful shall themselves be shown mercy. Indeed, those that continued to follow Jesus experienced that mercy when they obeyed the gospel:

“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3-7).

6. Blessed Are The Pure In Heart: For They Shall See God (5:8)

- a. Speaking to the Pharisees, Jesus addressed inward purity: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matthew 23:25-26; cp. 27-28). Also Paul said, “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:29). God does not merely look upon the outward actions, but on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7), and we will be judged according to the content of hearts (1 Corinthians 4:5; Romans 2:16).

b. A pure heart results as one peruses holiness, and the Hebrew writer warns, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (**Hebrews 12:14**). If our desire is to see God, then let us pray, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (**Psalms 51:10**). If our prayer is sincere, then we will “... cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (**2 Corinthians 7:1**).

“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart” (**Psalms 73:1**).

c. The pure in heart shall see God! There is a sense in which all will see God when the Lord comes to judge the world (**Revelation 1:7**). But here it is spoken of as a special favor (**Matthew 5:8**). In his vision of heaven, John says, “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: **and they shall see his face**; and His name shall be in their foreheads” (**Revelation 22:3-4**). To see the face of one, or to be in the presence of any one, were terms among the Jews expressive of great favor. Compare John’s words: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: **but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is**” (**1 John 3:2**).

“The pure in heart see God in His revelation, and one day shall see the fullness of His glory” (Kyle Pope).

7. Blessed Are The Peacemakers: For They Shall Be Called The Children Of God (5:9)

a. A peacemaker is not merely one that strives to live peaceably with all men (**Romans 12:18**), but, as the word suggests, those who *make* peace. Clarke comments, “A peace-maker is a man who, being endowed with a generous public spirit, labors for the public good, and feels his own interest promoted in promoting that of others: therefore, instead of fanning the fire of strife, he uses his influence and wisdom to reconcile the contending parties, adjust their differences, and restore them to a state of unity”.

Coffman lists three ways in which God's children can serve as peacemakers: (1) Through spiritual instruction, they can bring peace to hearts that are troubled. (2) They can bring peace to their fellow men who are at strife between or among themselves. (3) They can bring men, through preaching God's word, or teaching it, to become reconciled to God, which is the greatest of all the achievements of the peacemaker.

b. Jesus is the “prince of peace”, and it was through Him that God reconciled all things to Himself, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross (**Colossians 1:19-20**). All men are found to be in a state of hostility to God and each other, thus the Gospel is called the Gospel of peace (**Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15**), because it tends to reconcile men to God and to each other. **There is no greater way to be a peacemaker than to preach the gospel of peace.**

c. Jesus said that peacemakers “shall be called the children of God”. Clark says, “Hence our Lord here terms peace-makers the children of God: for as He is the Father of peace, those who promote it are reputed His children”. Barnes explains: “Those who resemble God, or who manifest a spirit like his.” Consider, Jesus said of the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do” (**John 8:44**). We might say of peacemakers, “You are of your Father in heaven, and the desires of your Father you want to do”.

8. Blessed Are They Which Are Persecuted For Righteousness' Sake: For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven. Blessed Are Ye, When Men Shall Revile You, And Persecute You, And Shall Say All Manner Of Evil Against You Falsely, For My Sake. Rejoice, And Be Exceeding Glad: For Great Is Your Reward In Heaven: For So Persecuted They The Prophets Which Were Before You (5:10-12).

a. There are two final circumstances by which one may count himself blessed: (i) Persecution **for righteousness' sake** and (ii) Persecution **for Jesus' sake**. One might be persecuted for doing wrong or reviled for following an evil person, and in such cases there is no blessing from God. We can apply Peter’s words: “For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?” (**1 Peter 2:20**).

b. Being persecuted for doing what’s right is not pleasant, and being reviled because you are a follower of Christ is not right – yet, in such a world as this, it is inevitable. Paul writes: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (**2 Timothy 3:12**).

- c. A Christian's reaction to persecution is joy! This is not because persecution is a pleasant thing, but because (i) it produces patience (**James 1:2-3**) and (ii) "For great is your reward in heaven". To my mind, the greatest reward is expressed by John: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (**1 John 3:2**).

Conclusion

People have always pursued happiness, but the vast majority are miserable in spite of their constant pursuit. This is because they are searching for it in the wrong way in the wrong place. People tend to think that material wealth, social status and worldly wisdom will bring the happiness they seek. While there might be some happiness to be gained in such things, it is not a happiness that endures.

Jesus announces that true happiness is found in His kingdom. He opens the Sermon on the Mount with a series of largely paradoxical statements that are commonly referred to as the beatitudes (**Matthew 5:3-12**). These assertions begin with the word *blessed*, a word translated by many as happy, but this is not the "happy" that is used to describe the common feeling of momentary delight derived from eating one's favorite snack or having just purchased a new pair of trainers. Rather, the word refers to a deeper, abiding joy that one experiences as a result of making these attitudes one's own. The fact is, we commonly consider our happiness dependent upon what happens to us, but the blessedness or happiness of which Jesus speaks is not determined by circumstance nor affected by the vicissitudes⁵ of life. It is a self-contained joy that transcends circumstance existing in spite of the difficulties, oppressions and troubles we face.

"Jesus' discourse upon a Galilean mountainside is in reality no mere sermon. It is more approximates a manifesto of the kingdom of God. There is more to Jesus' teaching than this, but here we feel the very heartbeat of kingdom truth, and we will neglect it at our peril" (Paul Earnhart).

Sources:

"The Sermon On The Mount – The Beatitudes" by Chris Dawson

Truth Commentaries – Matthew by Kyle Pope

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⁵ "A change of circumstances or fortune, typically one that is unwelcome or unpleasant. 'her husband's sharp vicissitudes of fortune'".