

“The Beatitudes”
Matthew: The Way of Jesus
Downtown & Lexington
August 24, 2020

As we said last week, the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’s introduction to his new way of life. To a new way to be human. He talks about it as his kingdom. And the Sermon on the Mount is his introduction to his administration. It’s his inaugural address. He says he is bringing a new administration, a new kingdom that will replace the old kingdom, the old way of doing things.

In the section of scripture we will study today, Jesus gives some of the values and characteristics that he will teach and prioritize throughout his ministry. Let’s get right into it.

Matthew 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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.

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

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

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

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

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

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

These ideas continue to get unpacked throughout the rest of Jesus’ ministry. He will tell parables about these. He will challenge those who do not embody them. He will draw near to those who do embody them. He himself will perfectly embody them and eventually give his life as a substitute sacrifice for you and me who fall short of them. And he will send his Spirit to then empower us to live into them. This is a condensed list of the sort of community he came to create, of the types of people for whom his kingdom is especially good news.

it’s possible to do a whole sermon on each one of these. What I’d like to do today instead, is to look at them as one collected whole.

As I’m sure you noticed, the theme of Jesus’ teaching here is the blessed life. What it means to live the blessed life.

He uses that word “blessed” nine times in just these twelve verses.

-This section of scripture is often called the beatitudes because of the Latin word for blessed or happy.

-The Greek word for blessed is “makarios” which literally means “happy” (Makar is the Greek word for happy).

-It means state of well being. Corresponds to Hebrew word shalom, right relationship with God, with others, with self and with the rest of creation.

There are few different English words that could be used. We could say that Jesus is talking about happiness. How to be happy and how his kingdom changes what we otherwise tend to think of as the way

to happiness. We could say he's talking about joy, he's talking about contentment. He's talking about the good life. There are nuances to all of those English words and some people love to debate that happiness is different from joy and that's fine. For today, I want to dodge all of that and simply say that Jesus is talking about all of it. He's talking about the state of well being that you want, whatever word you use. The blessed life is the life you want. He's talking about a sense of rightness and ok-ness of life. The state of well-being that you and I both want. He's saying "because of my coming and the kingdom of God being brought to bear on the earth, this is what happiness looks like."

Let's think about it like this.

What would you say are the ingredients for a good life? If you asked a modern American that question, what do you think would be the answer? Based on how we talk and act and think, what would that answer be? The ingredients for a good life.

-I think we would say, for a good, full life, you need love. acceptance, approval, friendship, a group to belong to.

-I think we'd say you need enough money. Maybe it's being rich, maybe it's having enough money so that you don't have to worry about money. Some level of material comfort.

-The ability to do what I want, when I want. I think we'd say you need some measure of power and control. Some freedom to be able to act and live as you'd like. Can't have other people controlling you.

-I think we would say, in however many words, that you have to love yourself. Accept yourself. You need to have a positive self-view. Good self esteem.

-I think we would say that you have to assertively prioritize your own happiness. That's what I hear all the time. That nobody is going to look out for you if you don't. Sometimes you have to do what makes you happy.

-I think we would say something about needing to make a difference in the lives of others.

-We would say that romantic and sexual fulfillment is mandatory for happiness.

-And I think we would tie happiness into a certain quality of life, where overall there is health and stability and circumstances are favorable. These are the pictures I see on Instagram where someone claims to be living a blessed life...there's usually a body of water, a beverage, a group of loved ones whether family or friends. Circumstances are favorable.

In other words, if Americans put together our own list of beatitudes, it would sound more like:

Blessed are the rich, for they can do what they want.

Blessed are you when you accept yourself, for you will find inner peace.

Blessed are the sexually and romantically fulfilled, for there is no other path to joy.

Blessed are those who believe in themselves, for they will accomplish their goals.

Blessed are the influencers and people who are very put together.

Blessed are those who are rising in their careers, no matter the cost.

You know, if you look, these things tend to be what teachers and self help folks talk about and sell. How to accumulate wealth. How to be a better leader or influencer. How to make friends and influence people. How to do self-care and prioritize yourself. Be proud of who you are and where you come from and what you're capable of.

And then along comes Jesus who basically says the exact opposite of all of that.

You know, if we weren't so familiar with some of Jesus's teachings I think more people would write it off as total nonsense.

Here is what Jesus just said...

1-True happiness is not based on our circumstances. Those two are not actually linked in any meaningful way.

2-True happiness can only be found as a byproduct...of giving yourself to something more important than your own happiness.

3-True happiness can only be found when you realize you can't find it on your own.

Let's look back at a few of his statements and let me show you.

1-True Happiness is not based on our circumstances. Those two are not actually linked in any meaningful way.

Matthew 5: 4, 10-12

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

Blessed are those who mourn, so you're grieving negative circumstances.

And then he ends by saying we're blessed if people don't like us and mistreat us and say really awful things about us.

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, Mistreated because you're trying to do the right thing. for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **12** Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,

In his commentary on the book of Matthew, Frederick Dale Bruner says "First and literally the Beatitudes are Jesus' surprisingly countercultural God-bless-yous to people in God-awful situations."

Most of us tend to think that happiness is found in a set of circumstances: if this and this happen, I'll be happy.

Our English word "happiness" comes from the same root as "happening." You are happy when what you want to happen happens, and when what you want to happen doesn't happen, you are not happy.

In fact this idea comprises many of our commercials. Do you experience any lack of happiness in your spirit? Purchasing this product will solve that for you. You need this beer or that vacation.

Nearly everywhere you turn our culture attaches circumstances to happiness.

Then here's Jesus saying, for example, happy are those who mourn. Tears streaming down your cheeks, joy in your soul.

Why? How? Well, Jesus said it right there. In Jesus's kingdom, I have been made right with God, so now I have a God who comforts me.

When people misrepresent me, or speak evil of me, or reject me, or mistreat me, in Christ I can still be blessed. How so? He said it...great is your reward in heaven. The reward of having people like me is overwhelmed by the superior reward of heaven.

Many of you have experienced tragedy and loss and found Jesus to be absolutely right. This doesn't come near what some of you have gone through but when I was in college my apartment complex burned down and I lost everything I owned except for what I was wearing at the time. I'll never forget the next night being at a campus ministry during a time of worship and singing, having this moment of realization. That I had just lost everything I had ever owned but being ok because God was enough. In fact I would argue that God used that event to cause my joy to increase because I realized I could in fact be content in all circumstances through Christ who gives me strength. Like Paul says. Many of you know exactly what I'm talking about and you've experienced moments like that. You'll never be freer than when you realize

circumstances no longer have the power over you that they used to. They still matter. But they are not the determining factor in your happiness.

A Christian is somebody who can weep and still be blessed because you know a deeper joy and happiness than the circumstance you might be mourning.

So here's the question: If life didn't change at all for you from this moment forward: your situation didn't improve; your marital status didn't change; your career didn't progress; your body didn't feel any better... could you be happy?

None of the things that we think we need to be happy in life happened to Jesus... In many ways, what happened to Jesus was like some folks worst fear... never married, never had sex; never owned a home; abandoned by friends, misunderstood and maligned. Not in the majority power group. Hated by the religious powers and governmental powers. Falsely accused, fake trialed, and executed though having done nothing wrong.

Jesus lived a God-awful life and He's literally the most God-blessed human who ever walked the planet. According to Jesus, happiness is not rooted in a set of circumstances, but the result of being rightly related to God.

2-True Happiness can only be found as a byproduct.

I'll do this quickly for the sake of time. Let me just give you this category for you to reflect on later.

Happiness is a byproduct. Notice here that Jesus doesn't say "blessed are those who pursue blessedness." He doesn't say blessed are those who seek blessedness. He says blessed are those who seek...something else. Something higher, something more worthy. Righteousness, mercy, peace.

This is one of the ways that modern people are totally wrong. Just absolutely, totally wrong. How often are we faced with a decision and some well-meaning person says "well...You just have to do what makes you happy". In other words, your own happiness should be the highest pursuit. "You can't put others ahead of yourself or else they will walk all over you." "If you let others go first then they will begin to think you should go last." And a hundred other ways Jesus sees the world very differently than a modern American.

Jesus here says that the only way to find happiness, or blessedness, is to pursue other, more important, goals. He says blessed are those who mercifully put others ahead of themselves. Sacrificial service to others.

He says blessed are those who do what is right, no matter how much it will cost them or hurt them.

My guess is that some of you have found this to be true.

The times in your life where doing the right thing was much harder and costlier for you but you did it anyway...do you not look back now glad that did it? Is there not a deeper joy you've found?

The times where you've said "ok THIS is the right thing to do but if I do THAT I think it will make me happier right now"...my guess is some of your most regretted moments came from times just like that.

Your own happiness is not a high enough goal to live for and if you pursue it at all costs will actually, ironically, leave you emptier. If all you do is what's best for you, then you will never find what's best for you. If all you do is what is best for your family, then you will never find what's best for your family. Blessedness can only be found as a by-product of pursuing something more important.

3-True Happiness can only be found when you realize you can't find it on your own.

Very first statement here.

Matthew 5:3

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

Who gets the kingdom and all its blessings? The poor in spirit.

There's actually a couple of words for poor. One means needy. paycheck to paycheck.

The other word means totally destitute. There is no paycheck. It is the strongest word for poverty. It means the poorest of the poor, the lowly, the marginalized.

onomatopoeia: you know, where the word sounds like what it indicates. Ptochos. sound like Spit. It meant the outcast of society. The despised.

These are the kinds of poor Jesus is talking about. Those despised for how weak they are.

Means not just that you fail but that you feel your failure. Not just that you lack but that you feel your lack. You deeply understand that you lack the resources in yourself to face life's challenges.

Jesus says there's a blessing that comes with realizing this about yourself.

Great things happen in a person's life when they realize they don't have what it takes and turn to God for help.

Allow me to give you an overly simplistic illustration.

Last week I was building Legos with my youngest son Graham. He is 2. And there were two pieces stuck together that he wanted to be separated. So he said, "I do it! I do it!" He fumbles with it for what felt like an hour while I watched thinking "this would take me 2 seconds." Finally, Graham realizes he's not gonna be able to do it and cries "I not do it!" And he had the saddest little face. And then I watched him look at the lego, then look at me. Look at the lego and look at me again. It was like something clicked in his mind. It was like he realized I was there and more capable than him. "Daddy do it!" with a big smile. I happily grabbed it and took it apart immediately.

Sometimes you and I are like a 2-year-old sitting beside the almighty sovereign of the universe, trying to do something in our own strength when he's ready and waiting to move on our behalf.

Now, one of the many ways that illustration falls short is that my job as Graham's dad is to help him learn to do things for himself. My goal is move him to where he no longer needs my fatherly help and I become his friend. God does not intend for you to eventually stop needing him and move out of his house. Our position before him is a continual need and his desire for us is continual help by his Spirit.

The kingdom of the world doesn't value poverty of spirit. We value being strong and proud. We value believing in yourself. "You're stronger than you think. Your voice is important. Your opinion matters. Rise up. When are these colonies going to rise up?" You have to love yourself. Accept yourself. If you don't love yourself then you can't love others. So long as you believe that your greatness comes from within, you can accomplish any dreams you have.

In order to belong to the kingdom of God, you first have to be poor in spirit. To be poor in spirit means to say, "My problems are beyond me. I cannot save myself. I need help! I'm not competent to deal with my own problems." This is the number one, requirement for entering the kingdom of God.

You cannot come to Jesus as if he's a self-help enrichment course. "I can do it, Jesus can help."

If you are thinking "my life is lacking a bit in deep friendships so let me see if Jesus can help." It's not going to work. If you're thinking "I basically like my life but I do sense some slight inner emptiness and maybe religion or spirituality could be what I'm missing. I want my kids to have some moral foundations

so we're at church for them, while they are young." Listen, I get it. I'm not mad at you. I'm just being honest with you that it's not going to work. That's not how Jesus operates. He's not going to do that for you. Jesus doesn't simply help. He saves. He redeems. He transforms. He delivers from one kingdom to another altogether different kingdom. He ushers in a reversal of the world's values. He flips everything on its head.

If you're thinking "I've gotta get in church or get right with God... so he will fix my circumstances... so he will give me a spouse... job... ease, comfort, etc." You're missing the whole point. He wants to give you Himself in a way that you can handle not having any of those things.

You can apply this principle across the broad spectrum of the Christian life, also.

Those who feel capable on their own as parents will not experience the power of God in their parenting.

Those who feel capable in their ministries... ..their relationships, their careers...

It is when we depend on God, and not on ourselves, for provision, wisdom, power, and guidance that we access his power. God only fills empty hands.

This principle has been one of the keys to the success rate of Alcoholics Anonymous and other support groups like it.

The first step, in all of those successful addiction programs is, "We admit we are powerless over our problems." I did my best. I tried. And I've come to the end of my ability. I don't have what it takes. Digging deep and believing in myself wasn't enough. I need outside help.

Some of us, our biggest problem is that we're good enough at life to convince ourselves we aren't desperate for God's help.

We're middle class in spirit. Not poor in spirit. We need God's help when catastrophe hits. Same as we need financial assistance only in a pandemic. Otherwise we're fine. The truth is when everything is fine, when you have power, when you have wealth, when you are comfortable or whatever... you often don't sense any sort of need of God's abiding presence.

We love to talk about God accepting us just as we are. You know, that's only maybe true. It might be true that God accepts you as you are and it might not be true that God accepts you as you are. We should be more precise so that we can be more helpful. If you are proud, self-righteous, think you are God's gift to the world, if you think you are omniscient and need no help, if you think you've got what it takes to make it through life just fine thank you very much...it's really important that I be honest with you that God does not accept you as you are. You are too full and he only accepts empty people. He cannot fill full hands, he only fills empty hands.

Jesus repeatedly says "I'm not here for people who think they don't need me. "I didn't come to call the righteous but the sick."

But when we come to Jesus empty-handed...we get him! That's what makes sense of all of this.

- When we're poor in spirit, Jesus comes near.
- When you mourn, Jesus comforts us.
- when we thirst for righteousness, Jesus supplies it.
- When you are pure in heart, God doesn't stand against you.
- When you make peace, God is a party to it.
- When you are persecuted, when you are spoken ill of, when you are *mistreated*, Jesus is with you.

At his right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Matthew 5:9

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

This isn't a personality type. Peacekeeping is not what we're called to because sin means there isn't peace to keep! We have to make it.

Peacemaking is different from...what for it...peace faking.

Peacemakers. Doesn't mean avoid conflict. Means you actively seek peace. Someone who isn't okay with drama and personal pettiness and grudges. Someone who steps into the mess and seeks reconciliation. Someone who has a tough conversation so there can be resolution.

The person in your family who says “We don't talk about that” isn't the peacemaker. Sometimes peacemaking looks like walking in and saying, ok, enough. She's mad at you for this, He's mad at you for that. What are we gonna do about it? That one's the peacemaker. We tend to think that we shouldn't rock the boat when sometimes that's what peacemaking requires.

I know people who shut down and go radio silent when there is any sort of conflict in a relationship. You just stop hearing from them and that's how you know something is wrong. Or even they run away entirely.

Sometimes conflict is the only possible path to greater intimacy and depth. So if you always run from conflict you could be robbing yourself of deeper relationships. Certainly don't deceive yourself into thinking you're obeying Jesus while doing that. People will sometimes stew on anger and bitterness for years thinking they are honoring Jesus by not actually dealing with it.

Matthew 5:5

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

Meek means quiet, gentle, submissive. Easily imposed upon. Others get their way around you. You often don't speak up. You don't press your advantage.

Meekness? I'm terrible at this and I get mad at my wife for being this way. Her coworkers are aggressive and so they get what they want when it comes to vacation days. I'm like “stand up for yourself.” You want me to go to your job and talk to them? It's not to be a peacemaker, it's to get my way. How many of our stories are about the meek kid who finally stands up for himself? Don't be a doormat. Jesus says the meek inherit the earth.

But God's people are meek here. The meek here don't rule. But they will in Jesus' kingdom.

Am I meek? Do you have to have power? Do you have to be in charge? Do you have to have a say? Do you have to win? Do you have to prove to everyone that you are right? Or strong? Or brave? Or smart? Do you care a lot about what's “right” and what's “fair” when it has something to do with your own position or comfort? Do others win? Do others get their way?

Gentleness or meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation.

Meekness means I don't try to force things to happen either through control or power or manipulation. God protects me, so I don't have to be so self-protective.

And you know, there are people who really struggle to simply say no or to say I wouldn't prefer to do that. They aren't totally sure where they end and others begin. And they need to learn how to say "I can't" and they need to learn to admit their limits. That's absolutely an issue. My concern is that I almost only hear about that. I only hear us talking about boundaries and not letting people take advantage of us and standing up for ourselves and finding our voice. And I rarely hear people talking about choosing to sacrificially serve in such a way that they lose and others win.

All of our stories are about the meek kid who finally learns to stick up for himself. Nice guys finish last. It's a dog-eat-dog world. The meek here don't rule. But they will in God's kingdom.

So Jesus doesn't just teach it, but he lives it.

This list perfectly describes Jesus. He was the one who has the true riches to rags story. He left heaven in order to lose everything on our behalf. He was so moved by sin and brokenness in the world. By injustice and pain that he joined us in it. And takes all of our mourning to the garden and the cross. He was the ultimate example of meekness. Allowing small, weak, arrogant, mortals nail him to a cross. He hungered and thirsted for righteousness not just for himself, but for his people and made a way to give his righteousness to us through his death and resurrection. He was ultimately merciful - He owed us nothing but destruction. Nothing but pain for our rebellion and high treason, but chose rather to step in and bind us up, heal our wounds, and take our punishment. He is the true pure in heart who was sinless and never lost sight of his devotion to his father and the mission he came to accomplish. He is the ultimate peacemaker who reconciled God and man by his own blood. He is the one truly persecuted for righteousness' sake. Not only because of his righteousness, but for the sake of righteousness - to grant his righteousness to all those who would believe. The earth and the kingdom belong to Jesus.

And because of him and his love and his mercy and his peacemaking, we can be invited in. We can have him accomplish this on our behalf as we place faith in him. He gives us his righteousness. We stand before God clothed by Jesus. All of this is true for us because of him. We are blessed.

And Jesus is not content to simply accomplish *for us* he also will not rest until he accomplishes it *in us*.