

The Beatitudes

Introduction

Matthew 5:1-12

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and is burning with fire; You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

I once heard the story about an ole boy who called the church office on a Sunday morning looking to speak to the pastor. When the phone rang, the church secretary answered: "Genesis Church of Vero Beach. May I help you?" "I'm looking to speak to the Head Hog." "Who?" The secretary asked. "You heard me. I'm looking to speak to the Head Hog. You call him pastor." "Sir," she said, "that's no way to refer to Pastor West. Besides he just started his sermon. Besides he just started his sermon. "That's too bad," he said, "because I wanted to see if he would take my \$100,000 donation to the building fund over the phone." She responded: "hold the line, sir. I'll go get the big fat pig down from the pulpit right now."

There have been many great sermons throughout history that have changed the course of history. Martin Luther's *95 Thesis* made it possible for Protestants to say "By grace alone. Through faith alone. By Christ alone. Because of Scripture alone. To the glory of God alone." Jonathan Edwards's *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* changed the spiritual temperament in America. And Billy Graham's *The Value of a Soul* changed people all over the world, one heart and one soul at a time. But the greatest sermon in history was proclaimed on a mountain right outside the city of Capernaum by a Nazarene carpenter named Jesus. It was the Sermon on the Mount. And it features the greatest introduction of all time. We call it the Beatitudes. They are the distinguishing marks of someone who operates in life with the blessing of God.

I am an idealist. I was born an idealist. I preach as an idealist. I minister as an idealist. And I will die as an idealist. And I also happen to believe as an idealist that if God's people will begin to think long and hard about what it means to operate in life with the blessing of God, then we, ourselves, can practically be the change we want to see in the world. And I say we start today with the Beatitudes contained in Matthew 5:1-12.

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,² and he began to teach them.³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

1. Who They Are For

- **Listening for Music Lovers:** (1) When you listen to your favorite song the first couple of times, you familiarize yourself with the lyrics. But when you listen to it on repeat, you recognize the harmony, the melody and the part each instrument plays. (2) The Sermon on the Mount was designed by Jesus to work a lot like that. It's one message, with two different levels of application for the two types of listeners Jesus targets.
- **Crowds:** (1) The beatitudes begin with "now when Jesus saw the crowds." (2) Jesus spent a lot of time with the crowds, with: (a) Messages: Sermon on the Mount; Sermon on the Plain; Feeding of the 5,000, and the Feeding of the 4,000. (b) Ministry: After the Sermon on the Mount, He heals a man with leprosy. After the Sermon on the Plain, he raises a widow's son to life. After he fed 5,000, 12 baskets were left over. After the 4,000, 7 baskets left over. (c) Miracles: Jesus healed more than 10 lepers, gave sight to 8 blind people; and raised 3 people from the dead. (2) For the crowds, "blessed are the poor in spirit" means "blessed are the poor in spirit. (3) The beauty of Jesus is that when he spoke, the crowds got his point. Whether they applied it, was another story altogether.
- **Disciples:** (1) Matthew also tells us "the disciples came to him, and he began to teach (all) of them." (2) The disciples heard the same message. But in the Gospels, the disciples do something the crowds don't. Time and time again, we see them asking Jesus: "what is the meaning of this." And most of the time, Jesus told them.
- **App:** We, God's people, are his disciples. He is our teacher. We are his students. And if asking "what is the meaning this," led to a clear response on most occasions from Jesus in the disciple's world. It will equally led to a clear response from Him in yours.

2. What They Represent

- **Rocky Top:** (1) Wish that I was on ol' Rocky Top. Down in the Tennessee hills. Ain't no smoggy smoke on Rocky Top. Ain't no telephone bills. Rocky Top, you'll always be. Home sweet home to me. Good ol' Rocky Top. Rocky Top, Tennessee. (2) In the Bible, Rocky Tops are the places where God communicates clearly and definitively in a variety of different ways but for one specific reason: "thus saith the Lord."
- **About Those Mountains:** (1) Matthew tells us "when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down." Matthew calls it a "mountain" even though it was a hillside. That's important. Mountains in the Bible are places where (a) God speaks clearly and definitively. On Mt. Ararat, God told Noah: "whenever you see a rainbow in the sky, remember it's a sign of my covenant with you to never destroy the earth by flood again." On Mt. Moriah: God told Abraham: "Stop. Do not lay a hand on the boy. For now, I know that you fear me." (b) God reveals

His will to His people. On Mt. Sinai, the Lord said, “you shall have no other gods before me.” (c) God performs some of his greatest miracles: Elijah called down fire from heaven on Mt. Carmel. Jesus was transfigured on Mt. Tabor. (d) God dwells and gives victory – When David took possession of Jerusalem from the Jebusites, he called it “Mt. Zion” and built his residence there on top of the mountain.

- **About This Mountain:** (1) Here, on this mountain in the Galilee, just ride outside the city of Capernaum, all of those things that happened on those mountains combined are wrapped up in this one event and in this one Jesus, who is going to deliver a message with an introduction about what it means to be blessed by God not while standing up as Elijah did on Mt Carmel. But while sitting down. (2) On this mountain, the Mountain of Beatitudes, Jesus speaks clearly and definitively: “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. He reveals His will to His people. The beatitudes are the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says, “you have heard it said, but now I say to you!” He can do that because He is 2nd member of the Trinity. He performs some of his greatest miracles – No microphone. No speakers. His voice ricochets off the hills and he delivers the most influential, most discussed, and most important sermon in human history. That’s a miracle. He dwells and gives victory: “theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” “they will be comforted,” “they will inherit the earth,” “they will be filled,” “they will be shown mercy,” “they will see God,” “they will be called children of God,” “theirs is the kingdom of God,” “great is your reward in heaven.”
- **App:** Today, God is on the mountain, where he has been for the last 2,000 years, telling us what is true of heaven through the beatitudes. Because he wants what is true of heaven true in you. He desires you bear the marks of someone operating in the blessings of God.

3. What They Are About

- **Doctor Jargon:** (1) There are some doctor’s office that ought to give you a medical dictionary. Derrick, I’ve got bad news: “you’ve got a bad case of vasovagal syncope. It’s perhaps the worst case we’ve ever seen in the history of our medical practice.” “What’s the treatment?” “What medications do I need to take?” “Do I need to get a second opinion?” “What is vasovagal syncope?” “It means that you are prone to faint at the sight of blood.” And the whole time, you are thinking “laymen’s terms at first would have been better.” (2) In laymen’s terms, the beatitudes are the qualities that define the people of the Kingdom of God. They are “be” qualities.” They are qualities of those who operate in his blessing.
- **The Number of Them is Important:** (1) Some say there are 8 beatitudes. But there 9 “blessed” statements, the last of which was tailored specifically to the disciples. The number 9 in the Bible appears in 49 different narratives and denotes the ideas of completeness, finality, and transformation. Jesus died at the 9th hour of the day. His death was complete, finished, and final. And we are transformed by it. There are 9 fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. It’s a complete picture of what God’s abiding presence looks like in you and me. It’s transformative. 2) Equally, the beatitudes paint a complete picture of what the Kingdom of God is about in our lives.
- **Their Arrangement is Important:** In the beatitudes, each one flows from the others that went before it and propels you toward the next. The first three deal with a need: if you know what it means to be poor in spirit because you know you don’t have what it takes to live out God’s commands, then you will know what it means to mourn because your sins are great. And if you know what it means to mourn because your sins are great, you’ll know it means to be meek and humbled by God. The fourth deals with the fruit those needs produce: Those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, and those who are meek and have been humbled will then have no other choice but to hunger and thirst for righteousness. And they will be satisfied. Five through nine deal with qualities that define those hunger and thirst for righteousness: If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will be merciful because you know God has shown you great mercy. You will be pure heart because his mercy has made you value what matters spiritually. If you are pure in heart, you will sow peace where there is discord. When you do that, you will be persecuted because such actions are foreign to the human condition of retribution and getting even. When you are persecuted, you will experience people saying all kinds of evil against you because of Jesus.
- **Their Application is Important:** “the fact is, the beatitudes are so in contrast to human nature that we can’t be like them without supernatural help” – Steve Simms, *The Joy of Early Christianity*. You can’t manifest these qualities on your own any more than the world can. We need help.

4. Why They Matter

- **The Statement Never Uttered By a Carpenter:** (1) “I don’t need to pay attention in Geometry Class because I’ll never use this.” (2) Geometry matters a great deal in carpentry. The beatitudes matter a great deal for Christians. As a matter of fact, I’m inclined to think that if you don’t think about these things every day, you need to ask yourself what kind of Jesus you have created in your own image.
- **They Matter Because:** They denote the distinguishing marks of a person who lives under the blessing of God.
- **How We Know They Denote Distinguishing Marks of a Person Who Lives Under the Blessing of God:** One word that occurs nine times in the passage. “Blessed.” (1) Blessed means happy. It means fulfilled. It means complete. It means righteous. It means favored by him. It means one how operates with his approval. (2) Jesus uses this word emphatically each time. That’s very important because it means “they and only they.” You should read the beatitudes like that: “Happy, fulfilled, complete, righteous, blessed, favored are they and only they who are poor in spirit, for to them and only to them is the kingdom of heaven.”
- **App:** “Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven.” My prayer for you today is that you will see the Beatitudes are the answers to your prayers. They are the way God manifests his kingdom on earth in me and in you. May we “be like” the people of the Kingdom Jesus describes on the Mt. of Beatitudes. May we operate with his blessing.