



# The Beatitudes: Part 1

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:1-6

**Sermon Series:** *Matthew*

**Topic:** Jesus, Sermon on the Mount, Beatitudes

Matthew 5:1-6 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> 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, saying:

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

<sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

## Introduction

In our journey through the gospel of Matthew, we come this morning to that portion that contains the greatest sermon ever preached. We come to the Sermon on the Mount. Last week we considered the whole sermon, which begins in chapter five and continues through chapter seven. I read before you the whole sermon. It took me about 16 minutes. This is almost certainly not everything that Jesus said on this occasion, but Matthew has recorded the essence of it for us, as he considered it to be most important.

This morning, we will consider the *first four beatitudes*.

## Jesus Taught His Disciples

The first two verses serve as an introduction. You will recall that this teaching was directed to Jesus' disciples.

**Matthew 5:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> 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, saying:

When Jesus' disciples saw him sit down, then they knew it was time for some teaching, so they gathered closely around him and "***Jesus taught them.***" We might say it was time for a large group discipleship class. One on one discipleship is only one expression of discipleship. on

this occasion, Jesus teaches the large group of his disciples. We must keep this in mind as we move through this teaching; this sermon (i.e. Mt. 5-7). What Jesus was saying and teaching was intended for his disciples. He knows the crowds are listening, but the teaching is for those who have begun following him. Jesus is speaking truth aimed at the ears of his disciples.

Today, we might say that this sermon is for Christians. It is for believers. It is not for non-Christians. In other words, Jesus is not here setting up a standard of the living which he expects non-followers or non-believers to live by. He is not here establishing a set of moral standards that one can embrace who is not not a follower of Jesus. If you attempt it, this will sound like nonsense.

The words Jesus is here speaking are spiritual words<sup>1</sup> and the non-Christian will hear the words in his ears, but in his heart they are received as foolishness.<sup>2</sup> The standards here described are impossible to live up to apart from a personal relationship with Jesus through receiving his Holy Spirit and depending upon his strength. This sermon is for believers in Jesus, for followers of Jesus, it's for Christians. By listening to these words, a nonbeliever may hear the voice of Jesus calling him or her to himself, but it is impossible to willingly embrace what Jesus is here teaching without the help of his Holy Spirit. Not only is it impossible to hear these words without the help of the Holy Spirit, it is also impossible to do these words without the Holy Spirit. If there is any passage of Scripture that will rid you of all confidence in your own self-righteousness, I believe it is this passage.

### What is Jesus Teaching?

But what exactly is Jesus teaching? What is this sermon? Is it a list of all that one must do in order to be received by God or is it an explanation what life looks like among those who have *already* been received by God? It is a list of requirements one must do in order to get in? Or a description of the uniform of those already in? Is this sermon an entrance exam or member training? Is it more like a job interview or the training that takes place after having already been hired? Is Jesus teaching new laws or expounding the fulfillment of the old?

Matthew has already given us a couple of hints. First, back in 4:17 just after Jesus returned from his testing in the wilderness, Matthew told us that Jesus "*began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*" The primary topic on the mind of Jesus is the kingdom of heaven. This sermon has to do with the kingdom of heaven.

Second, Matthew added, in 4:23, that Jesus went into all the synagogues in Galilee "*proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.*" You'll recall that "gospel" means "good news" and "good news" is most highly developed with Isaiah.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John 6:63.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:14.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1; cf. Nahum 1:15.

You may recall that one of the first synagogues into which Jesus went when he began preaching was his hometown synagogue in Nazareth (Lk. 4:16). On that occasion, which Luke tells us happened at the beginning of his ministry (Lk. 4:14-16), Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2, because that passage speaks about God's servant being anointed by His Holy Spirit. Jesus had just been so anointed at his baptism.<sup>4</sup>

**Isaiah 61:1-2 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor;  
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  
<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;

Jesus stopped reading just before the end of verse two. Then after reading this passage, Jesus declared, *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"* (Luke 4:21). Jesus understood the beginning of his ministry to be the fulfillment of Isaiah 61.

However, if we keep reading Isaiah 61, we will discover that there are many connections with what Jesus preached in the sermon on the mount and what is also spoken of in the remainder of Isaiah 61. For example,

- Matthew tells us that Jesus was preaching "the gospel of the kingdom" while Isaiah speaks of the preaching of "good news" (Is. 61:1).
- Isaiah speaks of this good news being given to the "poor" (Is. 61:1) while Matthew records Jesus pronouncing blessing on the poor (Mt. 5:3).
- Isaiah speaks of "comforting those who mourn" (Is. 61:2) and in the second beatitude Jesus says the same (Mt. 5:4).
- Isaiah speaks of the "year of the Lord's favor" (61:2), while Jesus begins the first eight sentences of this sermon with the word 'blessed' (Mt. 5:3,4,5, etc.).
- Isaiah speaks of the people of God receiving the wealth of the nations (61:6), while Jesus speaks of the meek "inheriting the earth" (Mt. 5:5).
- Isaiah speaks of those who have been shamed and scorned having their sorrow turned into "everlasting joy" (61:7; Mt. 5:10-11) while Jesus speaks of the joy that comes those who are persecuted for the sake of him and his kingdom.

---

<sup>4</sup> See Luke 3:21-22; Matthew 3:13-17.

- In Isaiah the people of God are called the “offspring” and “descendants” of God” (61:9) while in Matthew Jesus speaks of blessings that belong to those called the “sons of God” Mt. 5:9).

These connections indicate that Jesus had Isaiah 61 on his mind at the beginning of his ministry and during the preaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Isaiah 61 is a description of the coming kingdom of God. Jesus has begun his preaching ministry by declaring that the kingdom was at hand. It has begun to come.

This points us to the conclusion that Jesus is here explaining what residents of the kingdom of heaven look like rather than presenting a list of requirements by which one may enter the kingdom. In this sermon, Jesus is not saying “Do this and you will enter the kingdom,” but rather he is saying that those who have already entered the kingdom are the one’s who do these things and live this way. Jesus is expounding the “the attitudes of the true disciple, the one who has accepted the demands of God’s kingdom.”<sup>5</sup> The kingdom of heaven had come, but it’s fullness was yet to come. The first and last beatitude are in the present tense, while the other six are in the future tense. Thus, the sermon

“What is of supreme importance is that we must always remember that the Sermon on the Mount is a description of character and not a code of ethics or of morals. It is not to be regarded as law—a kind of new ‘Ten Commandments’ or set of rules and regulations which are to be carried out by us—but rather as a description of what we Christians are meant to be, illustrated in certain particular respects. It is as if our Lord says, ‘Because you are what you are, this is how you will ...live.’”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the sermon on the mount is a description of the character of the child of God and follower of Jesus. It is an expounding of how Christians ought to live as citizens of the kingdom of God and of His Son, Jesus. The sermon on the mount is our calling and describes the blessings of being a member of God’s kingdom.

### The Meaning of ‘Blessed’

This conclusion is further supported by considering the meaning of the word ‘blessed,’ with which Jesus begins this sermon. His very first word is “**blessed**.”

For over a thousand years (from A.D. 400 to about 1530), the *Latin Vulgate* was the most commonly used translation of the Bible, and for many it was the only version. In Latin, the first word of this sermon is *beati*, the adjectival form of the word *beātus*, and given the widespread use of the Vulgate, the beginning of this sermon became known as the beatitudes.

---

<sup>5</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 114.

<sup>6</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Second edition. (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 32.

The Greek word here translated is *makarios* and means "one who is fortunate; one who is to be congratulated."<sup>7</sup> "Usually *makarios* describes the man who is singularly favored by God and therefore in some sense 'happy'; but the word can apply to God (1 Tim 1:11; 6:15)."<sup>8</sup> This word does "not invoke a blessing, rather recognizes an existing state of happiness or good fortune." The word "affirms a quality of spirituality that is already present."<sup>9</sup>

Thus, these beatitudes are not conditional promises of future blessing based upon good behavior. They are a description of what the blessed person looks like. They should not be read as, take verse three for example, "If you are poor in spirit, then you will have the kingdom of heaven." Rather Jesus is describing "the attitudes of the true disciple, the one who has accepted the demands of God's kingdom."<sup>10</sup> He is saying, "Those who are poor in spirit are blessed, because to them already belongs is the kingdom of heaven."

In other words, we are not told in the Sermon on the Mount, 'Live like this and you will become Christian'; rather we are told, 'Because you are Christian live like this.' This is how Christians ought to live; this is how Christians are meant to live.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Jesus is here preaching the gospel of the kingdom. The good news is that the kingdom of heaven is filled with blessing. The kingdoms of heaven is a place filled with wonderful blessings upon blessings. Jesus knows all about this kingdom. He knows it well. He is describing the kingdom and the kind of person who lives in it.

## An Outline

Jesus will now begin the sermon with a list the general characteristics of those who live in this kingdom and the benefits that accrue to them. Chapter five (5:1-16) is the character of the Christian, the world's response to her, and her response to the world.

Then in 5:17-48 Jesus gives particular examples of how Christian character (i.e. the citizen of the kingdom of heaven) is demonstrated in the world. You could think of them as case studies. Jesus begins by describing his own purpose regarding the law then he describes the way that those who follow him are to respond to and think about the law, citing examples of the Christian's response to anger, lust, divorce, swearing, retaliation, and one's enemies. Chapter six is what the Christian life looks like when one remembers that all of life is lived out under the watchful eye of God the Father. The amazing fact in this section is that Jesus

---

<sup>7</sup> France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, 114.

<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 131.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 68.

<sup>10</sup> France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 114.

<sup>11</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Second edition. (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 20.

primarily describes the Father as the Rewarder. In this chapter, Jesus is teaching the Christian how to maximize heavenly reward from the Father.

Chapter **seven** has to do with various other aspects of the character of the people of the kingdom of God, such as how they are to judge, pray, treat one another, discern false teachers, and to prepare for eternity.

## The First Beatitude

Now let's consider the first blessing.

**Matthew 5:3** (ESV) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The favor of God's blessing is upon "**the poor in spirit.**" We have seen this word, 'poor,' already in Isaiah 61:1 ("*...the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...*"). The word 'poor' does not mean economic poverty, but rather spiritual poverty. It refers to one who understands he has nothing of any spiritual value to offer God and thus, he stands in total need of God's grace. The word 'poor' does not refer to outward possession, but rather to inward disposition. It is sometimes translated as 'humble.'

**Isaiah 66:2** (ESV) ... this is the one to whom I will look:  
he who is **humble** and contrite in spirit  
and trembles at my word.

The 'poor in spirit' are those who are not spiritually arrogant. They are not haughty or self-confident because they understand the consequences of their own sin and spiritual failure. They know who they are and they know who God is. God is holy and they are not. Thus, the "poor in spirit" have no righteousness of their own. They understand that there is nothing they can do to save themselves. They are convinced of their inability to earn their own salvation. Rather they must completely trust in the gracious generosity of God who "*justifies the ungodly who has faith in him.*"<sup>12</sup> God is the one who does this, not man. God gives the gracious gift of justification and the poor in spirit know this. Thus, they respond to God in reverent humility.

They are like the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) who went to the temple to pray, but was so ashamed of his sin that he "*stood far off*" and would not even lift his head to pray. Rather, he "*beat his chest, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'*"<sup>13</sup> Jesus said this man went down to his house justified. Such as these are blessed, because "**theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**"

Notice once again that Jesus begins his sermon thinking about the kingdom of heaven. He will also end the beatitudes on this notion (5:10-11). Jesus is describing life in the kingdom.

---

<sup>12</sup> Romans 4:5.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 18:13.

Notice also the use of the present tense. "*Theirs IS the kingdom of heaven.*" To those who are poor in spirit already belongs the kingdom. It is theirs today. Jesus says to those who have no faith in their own righteousness (i.e. spiritual poverty), but complete faith in God's grace, "*yours is the kingdom of heaven.*"

## The Second Beatitude

Now for the second blessing.

**Matthew 5:4 (ESV)** "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

This, too, we have seen in Isaiah 61:2. God will "*comfort those who mourn.*" He will wipe away the ashes of mourning from off of their foreheads and he will anoint them with the "oil of gladness."<sup>14</sup> If Isaiah is the context in the mind of Jesus as he was preaching, then the mourning includes at least three reasons for mourning; those who are brokenhearted, oppressed by others, and because of sin (both their own and the sin of others). The truth seems to be that those who are in the kingdom of heaven are not immune from mourning and most certainly will be comforted by the Lord in the various seasons of suffering that they experience.

In Is. 61 the broken-heartedness seems to result from separation from loved ones through attack of an enemy (or perhaps by death). These will be comforted.

There, in Is. 61, the mourning also has to do with the brokenness that abides in this world because of the consequences of sin, from wherever source it may come, whether it be us or others. We hear echoes of this in James.

**James 4:8-10 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Neither James nor Jesus is preaching that Christians should simply go about mopey and sad all the time as if God never intends for his people to be joyful. However, what is being commended is genuine, deep, broken-heartedness over the sin that still lingers in our lives and clings so closely to us. The people in the kingdom of God ought never to accept sin as tolerable. Sin is never celebrated in the kingdom of heaven. It is always mourned, grieved over, repented of, and confessed. God does not wink his eye and sweep sin under the rug. It must be dealt with. It must be confessed. It must be mourned and then turned away from.

---

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 61:3.

Christian, when is the last time you have mourned over your sin. It's easy to mourn over the sins of others and call them out, but when have you last mourned over your own sin and called yourself out? When have you last confessed your sin and mourned over the pain it caused, both in your own life and in the lives of those around you?

Yes, mourn, but as you mourn for your sin, know this too, "***you shall be comforted.***" The structure of this passive language, "***they shall be comforted,***" is an Semitic idiom which means, God will do it.<sup>15</sup> There is no doubt. This is an example of a "divine passive,"<sup>16</sup> which is a soft way of expressing certainty that God will act. In fact, the Good News Bible translates this verse as, "Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them!" The comfort to come is certain. God will comfort all in his kingdom those who mourn

## The Third Beatitude

Now we consider the third blessing of those in the kingdom of heaven.

**Matthew 5:5 (ESV)** "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

How strangely blessed are the meek! He does not say, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the kingdom of heaven." He says they are blessed because "***they shall inherit the earth.***" This is not what one expects. However, Jesus has already announced that eternal and spiritual blessings belong to those in the kingdom of God, but now he also teaches that temporal and physical blessings are also included in the plan. God intends to bless his children with the goodness of the earth as well as the goodness of heaven.

The meek are usually run over very quickly in this world. The meek are those from whom the strong take things. How is it then that Jesus is upholding the meek as the one who already received the blessing? And here Jesus is saying that the meek are blessed because they "shall inherit the earth!"

Who are the meek? And what earth or land is he talking about? It seems most likely that Jesus is summarizing three verses from Psalm 37.

**Psalms 37:9-11 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> For the evildoers shall be cut off,  
but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.  
<sup>10</sup> In just a little while, the wicked will be no more;  
though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.  
<sup>11</sup> But the meek shall inherit the land  
and delight themselves in abundant peace.

---

<sup>15</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, 115.

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*, 70.



Those who are meek in this passage are contrasted with the wicked. Thus, the meek are the opposite of the wicked. To be meek are portrayed as those who are righteous. The wicked will be cut off, but the meek are willing to wait for their inheritance. The meek do not rush to grab, or take the shortcuts pointed out by the devil. Thus, the meek are also patient. They are not self-promoting or self-confident. They are able to wait. This means they are also people of self-control and they turn away from false flattery.

Meek does not mean weak or cowardly. Moses is referred to in Scripture as *"the meekest man on earth"* (Num. 12:3). Moses was neither weak nor cowardly. Paul referred to Jesus as a meek man.<sup>17</sup> Jesus was not weak or cowardly. I have heard meekness defined as "strength under control." That is helpful. Meekness entails self-control, calmness, and gentleness.

Additionally, Psalm 37 describes the meek as those who neither worry about nor are envious of wicked people (v.1). They do not become anxious over what wicked people do. They "trust in the Lord and do good" (v.3). They "are still before the Lord" (v.7), which is the opposite of anxious and agitated. Finally, they "refrain from anger" (v.8). They don't get upset easily and they do not rant and rave.

People like this are blessed because they are trusting in the Lord and gladly and calmly receive from him what he gives them without ever fussing, fighting, and striving to get what they can for themselves. They are patient. They wait for the Lord to give them what they need, and Jesus says these Christians are blessed because they will "inherit the earth."

## The Fourth Beatitude

Finally, we'll consider the fourth blessing.

**Matthew 5:6 (ESV)** "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

The blessings of God fall upon those who *"hunger and thirst for righteousness."* Jesus uses a physical metaphor to describe a spiritual truth. This means those who sincerely and earnestly desire to be righteous. They deeply love righteousness and yearn for it like they yearn for food and water.

We almost never suffer deep hunger or thirst. We live in a place of abundance. But the audience to whom Jesus was speaking would have known what deprivation was like. The point is that those who are truly blessed by God are those who intensely desire righteousness as much as starving man yearns to dip his tongue in water and fill his empty stomach with food.

---

<sup>17</sup> 2 Cor. 10:1.

I remember a time when my friends and I had were on a camping trip in the summer. We were out on a day hike and our canteens were empty. The air was hot and humid and we could find no water. We had been hiking up a mountain and thought we'd find water along the way, but we didn't. We made it to the top and then started our way down. We had been hiking for five or six hours when we saw our first sighting of water. It was simply a tiny dripping of water that seeped out between two giant slabs of rock. Through the path of the slowly dripping water, moisten moss had grown. It was slimy and unpleasant looking, but I was we were all so thirsty we found ourselves standing there staring at it. Suddenly we all realized what each other was doing. We were all consider is it worth licking? In the end, we were not that bad off, but we were close that is the thirstiest I've ever been.

Do you/we desire righteousness like that? Are we ever caught stopping and thinking how we might embrace the slightest expression of righteousness? Or do we spend more time thinking about how close to evil we can get without getting burned? Do we stop and ponder how to gain more righteousness or do we plan more for how to cozy up to sin? Are we content to dabble in righteousness and hope we don't get into too deep.

Jesus says that those who deeply thirst for righteousness will *"shall be satisfied."* They will see that for which they yearn. They will taste that for which they thirst. They will be filled with that for which they hunger most.

## Conclusion

There are massive blessings currently possessed by Christians. There are massive blessings yet to be possess by Christians. A Christian is one who follows Jesus. A Christian understands he has no righteousness of his own by which he can commend himself to God. A Christians knows she needs God's grace in order to inherit salvation. And a Christian trusts that God will give that saving grace to the one who knows both her own spiritual poverty and Christ's spiritual riches. Jesus will generously give this grace to any who will go to Him and ask for it. *"Blessed is the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

A Christian is one who mourns over his sin and the sin of those around him. A Christian is one who is brokenhearted over his own transgression and so he confesses his sin to his Savior, repents of his sin, and asks forgiveness. Jesus says, *"Blessed are those who so mourn, for they shall be comforted."*

A Christian is one who trusts in and waits upon the Lord. She is patient and kind, gentle yet courageous. She is strong, yet self-controlled. She is not arrogant and she turns away from all self-promotion. A Christian looks to God first to all needs met, and He always provides what is needed. Jesus says, *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."*

A Christian is one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. A Christian is motivated by righteousness. A believer possesses a deep and strong desire to do and delight in that which

is good and right and true. A Christian pursues these things like a hungry man pursues food. A Christian thirsts for righteousness and pursues things that are righteous. A Christians looks away from and lets go of that which is unrighteous and never seeks satisfaction in unrighteous things. Jesus says, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*"

Are you poor in spirit?

Do you mourn?

Are you meek?

Are you hungry and thirsty for righteousness?

Are you in the kingdom? Then this ought to describe you. If these qualities are in you and are growing, then you will never cease to be fruitful and productive and *blessed!*

If you are not yet in the kingdom, then don't leave today without first talking to one of the members of the prayer team or elders or deacons or me?