

# The Sermon on the Mount

## Session 1 – The Beatitudes, Part 1 (Matthew 5:1-6)

English hymn-writer, William Cowper (1731-1800) encourages us to look for blessings in unexpected places:

*You fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds you so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.*

How would you define the word “blessed”? Who do you consider to be blessed or fortunate?

**READ Matthew 5:1-12**, as Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with what is commonly referred to as the Beatitudes.

This week we will only be looking at the first half of the Beatitudes (verses 1-6). The first four Beatitudes deal with our attitude toward God, and then there is a shift to our attitude toward others. As we saw last week, the greatest commandment is to love God, dealing with the first half of the Beatitudes. The second great commandment is to love others, which is what we find in the second half. (The Ten Commandments has the same two sections!)

As Jesus begins to teach, He sits down. This was the position of a teacher who had something important to say.

1. How does our normal description of the blessed or fortunate person compare with those Jesus considers blessed? The Beatitudes each begin with the word “blessed” (some versions use the word “happy”). This is a declaration not of what people feel like, but what God thinks of them and that they are indeed blessed. In the Beatitudes, Jesus contradicts what most of the people of the day thought about the Kingdom of God, which included political supremacy.
2. To be “poor in spirit” is to acknowledge our spiritual poverty, our “bankruptcy” before God. Why is it so difficult for us to admit our spiritual poverty? Why is this an indispensable condition for receiving the kingdom of heaven? (Compare that to those who are proudly self-sufficient.) Notice that Jesus says, “theirs IS the kingdom of heaven” – it is in the present tense. What do you think that means?
3. Why would those who are poor in spirit feel a need to mourn? (What is being mourned?) This strong Greek word suggests an anguish of soul. Here is an interesting paradox! It is as if Jesus is saying, “Happy are those who are unhappy”! The context indicates that it is not primarily those who mourn the loss of a loved one, but those who mourn the loss of their innocence, their righteousness or self-respect. It is the sorrow of repentance.
4. This beatitude also reminds us of what God can do with our mourning: First, God would want to teach us. Poet Robert Browning Hamilton put it this way:

“I walked a mile with Pleasure; She chatted all the way;  
But left me none the wiser For all she had to say.  
I walked a mile with Sorrow; And ne’er a word said she;  
But, oh! The things I learned from her, When Sorrow walked with me.”

This is what James (1:2-4) was talking about when he wrote, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

Secondly, throughout Scripture, God’s children are encouraged to mourn – be sorry for – their sins. Psalm 51:17 says, *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* And 2 Corinthians 7:10 reminds us that *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret...”*

5. Those who mourn feel sorrow not only for their own sin, but also for the sin they see around them. What have you heard in the news recently that causes you to mourn? How do you think those who mourn will be comforted?

Those who mourn their own sinfulness receive comfort in the forgiveness of God. According to **Isaiah 61:1-3**, the Messiah was to be “the Comforter” who would “bind up the brokenhearted.” We still mourn the effects of sin in our world. It is only in final glory that Christ’s comfort will be complete. **Read Revelation 7:17**

6. How would a true estimate of ourselves (vv. 3-4) lead us to be “meek” – to have a humble and gentle attitude to others (v. 5)?

Meekness is not the same as weakness. The Greek adjective means gentle, humble, considerate and courteous. It is the self-control that is a part of the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). This is what Proverbs 16:32 (NLT) is taking about, *“It is better to be patient than powerful; it is better to have self-control than to conquer a city.”*

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says: “Meekness is essentially a true view of oneself, expressing itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others... The one who is truly meek is the one who is truly amazed that God and others can think of them as well as they do and treat them as well as they do.”

From the world’s point of view, why is it surprising that the meek will inherit the earth?

The meek, although they may be deprived and disenfranchised by humanity, yet because they know what it is to live and reign with Christ, can enjoy and even “possess” the earth, which belongs to Christ. And one day, this will be “the new heaven and earth.”

In 2 Corinthians 6:10, the Apostle Paul says that he is *“...sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”*

7. Hunger and thirst were much greater realities in the time of Jesus. The majority of people lived “hand to mouth”, and getting enough to eat, and finding good water were daily struggles, so the statement about hungering and thirsting would have resonated with Jesus’ hearers.

This would have also sounded familiar to Jesus’ hearers who knew the Hebrew Scriptures, such as Psalm 42:1-2

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.*

*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

And Psalm 63:1

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you;*

*my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you,*

*in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

What has Jesus said so far that might lead us to hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Biblical righteousness has three aspects: legal, moral and social.

Legal righteousness is justification – a right relationship with God

Moral righteousness is a righteousness of character and conduct which pleases God.

Social righteousness is justice, integrity in business, honor among all.

What might it look like to hunger and thirst for each of these?

Jesus promises that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. What can you do to cultivate a healthy, hearty spiritual appetite? (See also Psalm 107:9; Luke 1:53; Romans 10:3)

Martin Luther commented on this verse: “The command to you is not to crawl into a corner or into the desert, but to run out, if that is where you have been, and to offer your hands and your feet and your whole body, and to wager everything you have and can do.” What is required is “a hunger and thirst for righteousness that can never be curbed or stopped or sated, one that looks for nothing and cares for nothing except the accomplishment and maintenance of the right, despising everything that hinders this end. If you cannot make the world completely pious, then do what you can.”

8. How can or should the Beatitudes change you? Read through the first four beatitudes again and note how you could/should respond to each one.

*Jesus said, "I have told you these things,  
so that in Me you may have peace.  
In this world you will have trouble.  
But take heart! I have overcome the world."  
John 16:33*

