

#204 “The Beatitudes”

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Matthew 5:3-12 is commonly referred to as “The Beatitudes.” Jesus does teach on some attitudes and character qualities that we should wish to possess and cultivate, and these we should study carefully. But there is a bigger picture concept that He is trying to convey to His disciples, to the crowds, and to all who would read His words. He is setting up a stark contrast between those who are blessed and those who are not. The Greek word translated “blessed” is *makarios*. It can also be found in seven passages in Revelation (1:3, 14:13, 16:14, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 14). For example, Revelation 1:3 says we will be blessed if we read the book of Revelation and heed its words. Revelation 19:9 says, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” *Makarios* is also used as an adjective to describe God Himself in 1 Timothy 1:11 and 6:15. In Acts 26:2 it is rendered “fortunate” in the NASB, and in Romans 14:22 it is rendered “happy.” Taking all of these facts together, we recognize that Jesus began the sermon on the mount teaching about how we can imitate God Who is blessed, how we can find satisfaction and happiness, and, most significantly, what it takes to inherit eternal life.

First, Jesus said that those who would be blessed needed to first be poor in spirit (v. 3). These would inherit the kingdom of heaven. The knee-jerk reaction of the crowd then just as it would be from people today is that Jesus misspoke. They would have expected Him to say something along the lines of the rich being the ones who would be happy and fortunate. Yet Jesus challenged the prevailing wisdom, and He added another nuance, mentioning that it was the poor in spirit who would enter heaven. Being poor doesn’t make a person more holy than a wealthy person, but a person who is poor in spirit is one who grasps and acknowledges his own need for a Savior and for forgiveness. The poor in spirit are humble enough to admit their deficiencies and emptiness before God so that He can fill them and grant them the riches of heaven. A person rich in spirit, by contrast, would be arrogant, self-sufficient, and refusing to surrender to the Lord. To be poor in spirit, we must acknowledge our own emptiness and need for Jesus before we can be filled with eternal blessing.

Second, Jesus said that those who mourn are also those who are blessed and happy (v. 4). That had to make a lot of people confused, for it sounded like a blatant contradiction. In order to be happy, Jesus said, we need to mourn. Those who mourn, then, will find heavenly comfort. This teaching again is directly opposed to what the world tells us even today. The world says that if we want to be happy we need to eat, drink, and be merry and get all that we can out of this life today. But Jesus said that those who abandon the endless pleasure seeking and instead mourn the ravaging effects of sin in the world will be those who are ready to receive Christ and the comfort He alone provides. The world is a brutal place because of sin, and those who mourn are those who acknowledge both what is ailing the world and what alone can bring the cure.

Third, Jesus said that the gentle will be blessed and inherit the earth (v. 5). As it is today, the model image of success and power is the conqueror, the strong man, the one who carries out vengeance, and the one who subdues. But Jesus said that the person who is gentle is the one who will truly be blessed. While military men seek to conquer the world by force, Jesus did not come to do that. Rather, His message was not of how to gain power and prestige but how to find peace with God. It was a gentle message from a gentle Savior Who will one day rule the earth. If we want to inherit a new heaven and earth with Him, we need to learn gentleness now as we preach a message of reconciliation rather than earthly dominion.

Fourth, Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be blessed and satisfied (v. 6). The world caters to all kinds of hungers and thirsts, trying to make a profit in countless ways by exploiting our various longings. God cares about our needs for food, water, shelter, etc., but He wants us to realize that our most important need is God Himself. Satisfaction is found only in knowing Him (John 10:10, Psalm 16:11). His spring of eternal life will never run dry, and we can drink from it and never thirst again (John 4:14, 6:35). Sadly, the person who longs to be righteous is rare indeed. Righteousness and holiness is not a message that sells, but it is a message that satisfies.

Fifth, Jesus said that the merciful will be blessed because they will receive mercy (v. 7). Jesus' ongoing message here is that blessing is more than just what we can receive in this life, but it is something that has eternal implications. Those who recognize their need for mercy in the next life are those who are sensitive about evil and interested in what is good in this life. As they receive mercy from Christ as they repent and believe in Him, they will also be those who show mercy to others. The world understands giving somebody a second chance, but it does not understand that, left to ourselves, we will never be holy no matter how many chances we get. We need the mercy of God, and this is Jesus' bold message to the crowds.

Sixth, Jesus says that those who are pure in heart will be blessed in that they shall see God (v. 8). Blessing wouldn't really be blessing if it only helped us get the most out of this life. Blessing is really blessing because it guarantees our inheritance with God in heaven. We will see Jesus face to face and be in God's very presence. But this is only for the pure in heart, something none of us on our own can achieve. By faith in Christ, He will sanctify our hearts and purify our souls so that on the basis of His shed blood we will stand pure and clean before God. This is the message of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of blessing.

Seventh, Jesus said that peacemakers will be blessed and called sons of God (v. 9). Adoption into God's family is central to the gospel message, and those who love peace and who seek peace will by faith find the Prince of Peace. Only through Jesus will there ever be perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3). Those who wish to see peace advance on earth must also long to preach the gospel, for apart from Jesus there can be no real and lasting justice-filled peace (Micah 5:5). As children of God, we are called not to vengeance and wrath, but to peace (Colossians 3:15).

Lastly, Jesus said that those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness will be blessed and will enter the kingdom of heaven (v. 10-12). They might lose everything in this life doing right for Jesus' sake and for His name, but all of God's riches in eternity are theirs forever. Jesus doubly-emphasized this message by saying again that when we suffer and are insulted due to loving Jesus that we should rejoice and be glad, for we are blessed. But, as with all of the "beatitudes," blessing is more than just a feeling or state of being. It is attached at the core to the eternal. Jesus said that those who suffer on account of Him will have a great reward in heaven. How easy it is to forget this and to lose sight of this! One of the greatest privileges a child of God can endure is to be mocked, harmed, and insulted because of loving Jesus. If we obey and love Jesus and therefore receive persecution, we have much to look forward to.

The "beatitudes" is all about showing us that true blessing transcends this life and that it is rooted directly and permanently in the next. Happiness will decay into hopelessness unless it is grounded in holiness and love for a Holy God. Let us not forget that being persecuted is also a "beatitude," and it is something all true believers can expect (2 Timothy 3:12). There is indeed a great difference between the righteous and the unrighteous, the world's wisdom and God's wisdom, and temporal blessing versus eternal blessing. Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount boldly evangelistic, drawing clear lines in the sand because He wasn't trying to woo the masses but to rather reach those who had ears to hear. May we never understate or sugarcoat the gospel, for through it alone can we find eternal blessing.