

The Sermon on the Mount

Lesson 1: The Blessed Life: The Beatitudes -- Matthew 5:1–12

Picture the scene. The morning sun is climbing over the hills above the Sea of Galilee, and the crowds are still coming. They have walked in from fishing villages and farm towns, from Decapolis and Judea and places far beyond. Some are carrying sick relatives on mats. Some are simply curious. Word has spread that a teacher from Nazareth is healing the broken and speaking as no one ever has. Jesus climbs the slope, sits down the way a rabbi sits to teach, and his disciples gather close. Then he opens his mouth, and the first words out of it are not what anyone expects.

He does not begin with a warning or a rulebook. He begins with a blessing. Nine times he says the word, and every time he aims it at exactly the kind of person the world has written off. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the persecuted. To ears trained by the world, this sounds backward. We hand our blessings to the strong, the comfortable, the self-assured. Jesus hands his to the empty-handed and the broken-hearted, and in doing so he turns the whole order of things upside down.

Here is what we have to understand before we go a step further. The Beatitudes are not a ladder of achievements we climb to earn God's favor. They are a portrait. They describe the character that grows in a person who has been brought near to God and welcomed into his kingdom. They are a picture of what it looks like when the life of heaven begins to take root in an ordinary human heart. And the people Jesus is describing are not a special elite. They are people like us, people who have come to the end of themselves and found that the kingdom of God was waiting there all along.

So this is where our study begins, on a hillside, with a Teacher who calls the wrong people happy. Before you read another line, let the strangeness of it land on you. Jesus is about to tell you that the path to the deepest joy a human being can know runs straight through the places you have spent your whole life trying to avoid: your weakness, your grief, your hunger, your willingness to be wronged for his sake. The blessed life is not the life you would have designed. It is something far better, and it is offered to you here.

Group Discussion: Jesus calls nine kinds of people “blessed,” and almost every one of them is a person the world would consider unfortunate. Why do you think Jesus opens his greatest sermon this way, and what does it reveal about the kind of kingdom he came to establish?

Personal Reflection: Look honestly at the list of people Jesus calls blessed: the poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek, the hungry for righteousness. Which of these feels least like “blessing” to you right now, and what might that reveal about where your heart is still measuring life by the world's scale?

Read Matthew 5:1-12

Study Questions

1. Jesus begins by calling the “poor in spirit” blessed and says “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 3). What does it mean to be poor in spirit, and why is this the doorway into the kingdom rather than something that disqualifies a person from it?
2. Being poor in spirit means coming to God with empty hands, owning that you bring nothing to bargain with. Where in your life are you still trying to come to God on the strength of your own goodness, your record, or your usefulness, rather than as one who simply needs mercy?
3. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (v. 4). What kind of mourning is Jesus describing here, and how does godly sorrow over sin differ from mere regret or self-pity?
4. Think about how you typically respond when you become aware of your own sin. Do you tend to brush past it, excuse it, or sink into shame, and what would it look like instead to mourn sin in a way that drives you toward the comfort God offers?
5. Jesus says the meek “shall inherit the earth” (v. 5) and that those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” will “be satisfied” (v. 6). How do meekness and a hunger for righteousness describe the inner life of someone who truly belongs to Christ’s kingdom?

6. Hunger and thirst are cravings that return every day and demand to be satisfied. Be honest about your own appetites. What do you find yourself hungering for most, and what would have to change for a hunger to be right with God to become that strong in you?

7. Jesus blesses the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers, and says the pure in heart “shall see God” (v. 7–9). How do these three qualities flow out of a heart that has been changed by God, and what do they show us about the character of God himself?

8. Mercy, purity, and peacemaking are not feelings, they are things we do toward real people. Name one relationship in your life right now where God may be calling you to extend mercy, guard your heart’s purity, or actively make peace rather than keep your distance.

9. Jesus ends by pronouncing blessing on those “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” and says “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 10–12). He speaks of the kingdom as a present reality that already belongs to his people. How does this passage teach us that the kingdom of God is something we enter and live in now, under the reign of Christ, rather than only a future reward we wait for?

10. Look back over all nine Beatitudes as a single portrait of the blessed life. Where is Jesus most clearly putting his finger on your heart through this passage, and what is one specific way you sense him inviting you to let his kingdom reshape you this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 61:1–3, the promise that God anoints his servant to bring good news to the poor and comfort to those who mourn; Psalm 37:1–11, the meek who wait on the Lord and inherit the land; Luke 6:20–26, Luke’s version of the blessings paired with sobering woes; Daniel 2:44, the kingdom God sets up that shall never be destroyed; James 4:6–10, the call to humble ourselves before God so that he may lift us up.