

One Sunday as a family drove home from church, a little girl turned to her mother and said, “Mommy, there’s something about the pastor’s message this morning that I don’t understand.” The mother said, “Oh? What is it?” The little girl replied, “Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. He said God is so big that He could hold the whole world in His hand. **Is that true?**” The mother answered, “Yes, that’s true, honey.” “But Mommy, he also said that God comes to live inside of us when we believe in Jesus. **Is that true, too?**” Again, the mother assured the little girl that what the pastor had said was true. With a puzzled look on her face, the little girl then asked, “**If God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn’t He show through?**”

Well, she hit the nail on the head. **Isn’t that the goal?** In our lives, in our attitudes, in our actions – **God showing through us?** That’s what Jesus wanted to see as He encouraged people to know God – to live God’s way – in God’s kingdom. It’s God’s desire to live His life in us, to change us, so that He shows Himself through us.

This morning as we continue through the **Gospel of Matthew**, we are going to start working our way through the *Sermon on the Mount* – the Lord’s first recorded sermon, which goes from **Chapter 5** thru **Chapter 7** – a very radical, mind-blowing, jaw-dropping message where Jesus will answer the questions which were surely on the minds of people.

If you recall, both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed “**Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**” and as you might imagine, there would be questions, such as: “**Where is this kingdom?**” “**How does one get in?**” “**Am I good enough?**” And for the legalistic types, “**What do I got to do?**”

So, Jesus has a message for these people, and it begins with what we call the “*Beatitudes*” – or said another way, “*the attitudes that ought to be*” referring to one’s character.

Now, before we get into these *Beatitudes*, I need to set this up. Back in **Exodus**, Moses went up on a mountain – Mount Sinai and he came down with the Law for the Israelites – for God’s covenant people. This Law was given to a people who had been in bondage, under the thumb of the Egyptians, but now they were a free people and they needed to function as a nation with standards, with God’s standards – standards that were a reflection of God’s divine nature and character declaring from His point of view – in simple terms, what is right and what is wrong.

These were God's moral standards, His moral Law, and it's important to point out that what occurred on Mount Sinai was not the invention of God's moral standards – for people were already given a conscience by God. People instinctively knew what was right and what was wrong – it was implanted in their hearts and minds, so on Mount Sinai, we don't have the invention of God's moral standards, but rather we have the formal declaration of them.

Unfortunately, over time, these moral standards – God's Law was misinterpreted and misapplied by His people who focused solely on the letter of the Law and completely disregarded the spirit behind it. They turned it into an external thing – just going through the motions, giving no thought to the change of *character* and the change in *conduct* that was to flow from it. They were very religious – doing all kinds of religious stuff, but their hearts were far from God, but in Matthew's gospel, Jesus begins to put the heart back into God's moral standards, so that people would truly change – first in *character* and then in *conduct*, and in turn experience the blessings of God.

Now, speaking of blessings – as we get into these *Beatitudes*, we will see the word “*blessed*” mentioned over and over again. In the Greek, the word is “*makarios*” and it's a difficult word to translate. Some translate it as “*happy*” but that doesn't quite capture it because happiness is generally connected to what's happening. This word seems different. It goes below the surface, and it describes an *inner satisfaction* or better yet an *inner contentment* no matter the *outer circumstances*. It goes deeper, and the source of this contentment is the realization of God's approval. Therefore, blessed – content is the one who is the recipient of God's gracious approval.

I will remind you of this several times this morning, so with all that said, if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 5** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

**When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.**

Jesus goes up on the mountain or a hill – it's the same Greek word and He sits down – which in those days was the customary position that a teacher took when speaking to pupils. From an elevated place from which to speak from, Jesus sits down and thousands of people with all kinds of different backgrounds and beliefs, different experiences, different struggles – young and old, rich and poor, free and slave, religious and rebellious hike up the hill to learn about this kingdom – how to enter in, and how to live in it.

So, starting with **verse 2**, the Sermon on the Mount begins, and we are told:

<sup>2</sup> **He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,** <sup>3</sup> **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

Now, I could be wrong, but I think this is the first time that God has directly spoken to the masses since Mount Sinai. If you recall back in **Exodus**, all the people prepared themselves to hear directly from God, and three days later, God descended from heaven onto Mount Sinai in an awesome display of power and majesty. The mountain violently quaked, there was flashes of lightning and booming thunder, fire and smoke, and there was the sound of a very loud and long trumpet blast.

Assembled with Moses before the mountain, all the people trembled in fear as they heard the voice of God proclaiming His moral standards – His Commandments.

Yes, before the Commandments were written in stone, they were first given to all the people by the voice of God. This had a huge impact on the people – in fact, it terrified them so much, that the people went to Moses and said *“We can’t handle that again”* and they asked that God not speak with them directly – instead Moses would be their messenger, and from that point on, God would speak to His people through His prophets.

But here, unbeknownst to anyone, God is once again speaking directly to the masses – Jesus is in their midst, and He sits down before them, and says,

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

So, this is foundational when it comes to the kingdom of God, it’s the starting place, because to enter into His kingdom requires that you first realize you are outside the kingdom and cannot get in on your own.

Jesus begins here by explaining that to be **blessed** by God, one must first recognize they are flat broke when it comes to establishing their own righteousness.

Spiritually speaking, **the poor in spirit** got nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing to bring to the table except for filthy rags. They realize they got nothing to offer to God – they can’t contribute anything, they will never be good enough, never deserve and never earn their way into the kingdom.

Blessed by God – content, is the one who recognizes they are spiritually *destitute*, and therefore, totally *dependent* upon the grace of God.

For the person who is blessed in this way, there's no room for pride and self-righteousness – for in truth, they realize they are *helpless* and *hopeless* in their sin – they cannot trust themselves, they cannot save themselves, and for those who come to that brutal realization, Jesus says, **theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Sadly, many will not know this blessing of which Jesus speaks because sadly, many will not acknowledge how spiritually destitute they really are, and as a consequence, they will never see Jesus for who He truly is – their only Savior, and the kingdom of heaven will not be theirs.

Jesus continues, and in **verse 4**, He says,

**“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”**

**This seems like a paradox, doesn't it?** On its own, it's somewhat confusing – it's like saying “*happy are those who are sad*” but when connected to the first Beatitude – and it should be connected, they are all connected, they are actually progressive in nature, then it makes sense. So, let me tie these together while I explain it.

Blessed – content, are those who recognize they are spiritually destitute apart from God – who see their sin the way God sees their sin, who grieves over the weight of it – blessed are those who are truly sorrowful over the condition of their heart – who have come to that place of *dependence* and here – *repentance* – for its then that God's forgiveness brings comfort.

There's a great picture of this in the **Gospel of John** and you know the story. One day, while Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts, some of the self-righteous religious leaders brought in a woman before Him and they said to Jesus, “*This woman was caught in the act of adultery. Moses commanded us to stone her. Now what do you say?*”

Of course, this was intended as a trap for Jesus – to accuse Him of breaking the Law, but instead of stepping into their trap, Jesus stooped down and began writing something in the sand – don't know what it was, and then He said, “*Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*”

Stooping down again, Jesus returned to writing on the ground, and one by one, they all walked away until Jesus and the woman were left alone. Then Jesus asked the woman, “*Where are your accusers? Didn't any of them condemn you?*”

“No one, Lord,” the woman answered. This woman had been *caught*. I picture her *cringing* in shame, *cowering* on the ground before Jesus, and if you think about it, Jesus was the only one who could have legitimately thrown a stone at her, but instead He gave her *comfort* and said, “*I do not condemn you either. Go, from now on and sin no more.*”

In her guilt, in the shame of her sin against God, in repentance, she found forgiveness. **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”**

Now, Jesus is just getting warmed up, and this is what He says next in **verse 5**,

**“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”**

I was raised in West Texas, and I went to my fair share of rodeos, watching these amazingly fast, and agile, and powerful horses – obviously well-trained, meeting the rigorous demands of their riders.

The Greeks had a word for the behavior of these very powerful yet well-trained horses, and the word is “*praus*” – *strength under control*, and this word was translated in English as “*meek*.” The old English often used the term “*meeking a horse*” – we might say “*breaking a horse*” which meant to harness the power of a horse, from a state of wild independence to one of loyalty so the horse could be used as the master intended.

So, when Jesus said “*Blessed are the gentle*” or depending on your translation – “*Blessed are the meek*” – which I like better – it’s the same Greek word “*praus*” – Jesus is describing a person who is humbly submitted to God, and in context, following the progressive flow of these Beatitudes, Jesus is speaking about those people who recognize they are spiritually destitute apart from God, who grieve over the weight of their sin leading to repentance, and following the flow, they have begun the *process* of giving up their independence, giving up their agendas and ambitions, giving up their goals and plans, giving up their control – and humbly yielding to the will of their Master – and to these people, Jesus said “**they shall inherit the earth**” – meaning, they will have a place in the coming promised kingdom.

Now, Jesus is far from over, and in **verse 6** He says to the people,

**“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”**

When thinking of hunger and thirst, my mind naturally goes to food and water. Now in our modern world, when we are hungry, we just open the refrigerator or the cupboard, and when we are thirsty, we simply turn on a faucet, but here – speaking to those on the hill, when Jesus speaks of hunger and thirst, He’s painting a picture of desperation, of being parched and starving – something those who were listening would be very familiar with, and I want you to consider the order here.

First, you recognize you are spiritually destitute apart from God, you grieve over your sin against God, and then you find yourself humbly yielding to the will of God. Now that you are empty, you find yourself hungering and thirsting for the things of God.

Warren Wiersbe says *“I am personally convinced the reason many people are not filled is because they have not been emptied. They are still full of themselves. Pride must go before you find yourself hungering and thirsting for righteousness.”*

He continues and says, *“My wife fixes me excellent meals, but if I stop off and score a couple of burgers before I head home (as I have been known to do on occasion), even though there’s a wonderful meal spread on the table, I don’t have an appetite for it because I’m full of burgers and shakes.*

*Some people have lost their appetite for the Word of God. They no longer desire to worship; they no longer crave rightness. They are no longer meek, or mourning, or poor in spirit because they are full of the burgers and shakes of self-importance. When you empty yourself of self, happy are you because you’re going to hunger once more for righteousness.”*

You know, we live in a world where people are hungering and thirsting for all the wrong things, and for the Christian this prompts some soul-searching questions.

**What is it that you desire more than anything else? What is it that you must have – it drives your life – it consumes your thoughts? Is it money or possessions? Pleasure? Comfort? Fame? Power and authority?**

Christians are hungering for many things, but blessed are those in the kingdom who want to *be* what they *see* in their King – who want to be like Jesus, and nothing else will satisfy them.

*Okay, I want to show you a picture. It's the picture of a South American fish called "Four Eyes" because it knows how to make the best of two worlds. This fish has large bulging eyes with an air lens on the upper half and a water lens on the lower half, and as it cruises along the surface of the water, it's able to look at the world above and the world below.*

In a sense, we must be like this little fish. As we go through life, we need to look upward to heaven and also look around us. Looking up enables us to focus on the righteousness of God, and looking around helps us see the needs of others. I bring this up because in this next verse, Jesus shifts a bit to our relationship with those around us. In **verse 7**, He says,

**“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”**

Those in the kingdom who are emptied of themselves, understand that they are the objects of the King's mercy, and as such, it's only fitting that their hearts reflect the heart of their merciful King. What they have received in abundance, they need to give to those around them – and it's the kind of mercy that goes beyond feeling sorry for someone – it actually does something about it.

*A high school basketball player's mom passed away on the day before a game. He made it to the game, his coach invited him to sit on the bench, but he wanted to play – he felt like he needed to.*

*Since he arrived late, putting him in the game was a technical foul and the other team would shoot two free throws. Knowing the situation, the other team refused to shoot, but the officials persisted.*

*The coach asked for a volunteer to shoot the shots and the captain raised his hand. His first shot went about two feet, his second one was even shorter than that.*

*The other team showed mercy to this player by sharing his suffering with an act of kindness.*

The merciful are those whose hearts are moved for those in need, having a desire to step in and assist in relieving their pain. This kind of mercy goes beyond feeling – yes, it may start that way, but it doesn't stop there – it does something to help. Those who give mercy to others, are like the King, who gives mercy to them – and just so you know, we can't outgive the King.

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