

The Beatitudes  
(Matthew 5:3-10)

Turn to Matthew 5. Picture Jesus sitting on a hillside, with his disciples sitting around him, and a much larger crowd behind the disciples. The Sermon on the Mount answered a question that Peter and Andrew and James and John must have had:

“What have we gotten ourselves into? We left our boats and nets to follow Jesus, but what does that mean? What does it mean that we follow Jesus?” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus answering that question.

And for us it answers a similar question. Jesus is not walking around on our streets anymore, asking people to come follow him. But God's Spirit has called *us* and brought *us* to the Lord, and we also want to follow the Lord.

Our question is, "how can I be a follower of Jesus when he is not here to get up and follow?" The Sermon on the Mount answers that for us. Jesus still calls us today to be disciples, to follow him, *and this is how we do it*. Want to follow Jesus? *Live this way*.

Eight Beatitudes, One kind of person, One Blessing.

As we read the beatitudes, don't think of eight different good behaviors with a separate blessing for each behavior or attitude. These are eight descriptions of one kind of person, a follower, the kind of person God is using Jesus to bless and help.

The poor in spirit, the ones who mourn, the merciful, the pure in heart, and so on, are all different ways of talking about any person who follows Jesus.

And they are not eight different rewards, either, but only one: the kingdom of heaven. John the Baptist preached that "the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Mt 3:2), and Jesus preached the same: "the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Mt 4:7). The kingdom of heaven is at the center of what Jesus preached.

The first and last of the eight end with *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. These blessings in between are really just different ways describing only one blessing, the kingdom of heaven.

The other blessings, like being comforted, receiving mercy, inheriting the earth, seeing God, all just tell us more about having the kingdom. Each blessing just fills out the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed” means Good News from God.

Just a few verses before this, we read in Matt 4:23, *Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom*. The good news of the kingdom, the gospel of the kingdom. Remember what we read last week, from Isa 40 and 52 and 61, that God would come and do a great work to comfort and restore his people. Jesus preached that.

What we call the beatitudes are Jesus preaching the good news of the kingdom. These are exactly the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus preached.

*Good news from God for the poor in spirit, yours is the kingdom of heaven.*  
*Good news from God for those who mourn, you will be comforted.*  
*Good news from God for the meek, you will inherit the earth.*  
*Good news from God for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will be filled.*  
*Good news from God for the merciful, you will be shown mercy.*  
*Good news from God for the pure in heart, you will see God.*  
*Good news from God for the peacemakers, you will be called children of God.*  
*Good news from God for those who are persecuted because of righteousness,*  
*yours is the kingdom of heaven.*

For people who want God, this really is good news. This is the Real Good News. Jesus announced that God is going to help miserable people, God is going to put his great love *into action*. Good things are coming from God, things that will make a big difference in real lives.

Several beatitudes describe people who cannot help themselves. The poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness but cannot make it happen. Lost, miserable, helpless. Good news from God for people like that. But the people who take this help, who receive the kingdom, also treat other helpless people the same way. Part of the deal.

The kingdom is both present and future. Always remember that. The kingdom is ours now, but there's also a lot of it still to come. God is active now, and he has a huge blessing for us that we cannot imagine that are part of kingdom future. So the good news takes some time, people.

When God decided to rescue Israel from Egypt, and called Moses at the burning bush, it took a while before Israel actually got out of Egypt. At first their lives got worse, because Pharaoh made them work even harder than before.

And after that came the ten plagues. So life was tense for them after Moses came but before they got out of Egypt. And they had some troubles in the wilderness. Still, it was all a very real plan of God to make their lives a lot better. The beatitudes are like that.

The plan is already entirely in place, as real as it will ever be. But it takes a while until God's plan comes to harvest. The beatitudes describe how people live and act now, how people stand before God now, because they love God and want his kingdom. But, what is the kingdom? What does that mean?

Kingdom of heaven = salvation, eternal life.

The kingdom of heaven is much like how we understand "salvation" or "eternal life."

In Matthew's story of the rich young ruler, in Matthew 19, these different phrases are used interchangeably: "inherit eternal life" (vv16, 28), "enter life" (v17), "enter the kingdom of heaven" (v23), "enter the kingdom of God" (19:24), and "be saved" (v25). So receiving the kingdom, and receiving salvation, and receiving eternal life, are much the same thing.

Let's start. First beatitude is Matthew 5:3.

(1) *Good news from God for the poor in spirit, yours is the kingdom of heaven.*

In Matthew 9 Jesus says, *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.* The poor in spirit are those who have nothing to offer God, and we know it. We are helpless before God, and we know that and we come to God like that. That's such an important place to start.

These people can have the kingdom. This is present. Jesus does not say "they will inherit the kingdom" or "will enter the kingdom," but "theirs is the kingdom." It's ours now.

We only use the word "kingdom" in the Bible, and in fairy tales. *Kingdom* was like our word for "nation" or "country" or "government." Heaven's nation has come close, heaven's country, heaven's government. It puts a different flavour on things, doesn't it. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we're waiting for a champion from there, the Lord Jesus Christ (Php 3).

So for *kingdom* we should use a different word for like "nation" or "government," so we understand that what God is starting through Jesus competes with much of what we see around us. Our world is *not* like the beatitudes. God is now actively building his realm, his domain. And we his people, in our lives with each other, with his Spirit in our midst, are his kingdom outposts.

Good news from God for you who are the poor in spirit, yours is the kingdom of heaven. Good news for the losers who want God, you are in God's nation. Good news for the helpless sinners who want God. He's got a kingdom for us, welcome to God's kingdom.

(2) *Good news from God for you who mourn, you will be comforted.*

This comes directly from Isaiah 61, which we covered last week. Those who mourn, in Isaiah 61, are not just anyone who is sad. They mourn because they are suffering for their sins, and they know they are sinners, and they mourn before God.

They are sad because they are poor in spirit, they have been punished for their sin, and they are helpless before God. God has decided to comfort people like that, and restore them. He's coming to make it right. Before God, we are poor, and before God, we mourn. God comforts us by bringing us into *his* kingdom, *his* empire, *his* domain, *his* family.

(3) *Good news from God for you who are meek, you will inherit the earth.*

This line is a direct quote from Ps 37:11. Ps 37 opens, *Don't fret because of evil people. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do it, be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.* This is what "meek" is.

*Refrain from anger, and turn from wrath,* it says in v8. That's who the meek are. In Ps 37:10 it says, *A little while, and the wicked will be no more;* and then in v11 it says, *but the meek will inherit the earth.* That's the line Jesus quotes in this third blessing. The meek inherit the earth.

So the meek are those whose lives are oppressed by evil people, but they put themselves in God's hands. The opposite of the wicked. They are the people who trust in God and do good instead of getting angry and getting even. God will take away the wicked, and give the earth to the meek.

So this includes having a temperament that's always gentle, all those who cannot find it in themselves to fight for their rights. You will inherit the earth, says the Lord. What a thing!

It also means those who want to angrily punish the evil people, but instead of doing evil, we turn away and choose to stand before God, in submission to God. We trust in him, and wait on him to fix what's wrong, and make the world a right place.

This is hard to do, and it is not popular in our circles. Our heroes are strong, they put up with it a bit, then they get even. But Jesus was gentle like this. He said he was meek and lowly of heart.

*(4) Good news from God for you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will be filled.*

The meek person turns away from anger and wrath, and does not fret about wicked people. The meek person decides to wait on God, and trust in God. But that means that the meek person wants God to make things right! “God, I’m waiting for you to make things *right!*” So this will include calling out to God for justice. That’s hungering for God to make things right.

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is also wanting God to help us, wanting God to make us right. Just a little later in this Sermon (5:20), Jesus says that unless our righteousness goes beyond that of the Pharisees and law teachers, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. So righteousness here includes our own sinfulness. We want to be righteous, and are not.

The good news is that God helps people be righteous. Those who hunger and thirst to be right with God, right before God, will be filled. God will fill us, satisfy us. We are hungry to be righteous, and we can't do it. Good News! God will feed and satisfy us.

Near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened.” And then he says that all again another way: “everyone who asks receives, everyone who seeks finds, to everyone who knocks the door is opened.” What do you think Jesus is talking about? Big screen TV? An iPhone 55?

No, of course not. This is the sermon on the mount, Jesus is teaching us the kind of righteousness that God cares about. Having trouble with that kind of righteousness? Ask for it! Having trouble being meek? Seek it from God! Having trouble being merciful? Knock on God’s door. Good news for you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will be satisfied.

But, people, like most other things, don’t expect God to be in a hurry just because you and I are. He usually thinks he’s got time for this. Hunger and thirst for God to make everything right – you will be filled.

And remember the Lord's prayer, also this Sermon: forgive us our sins. The followers of Jesus need forgiveness from God, and that is a daily prayer. Those who inherit the kingdom need forgiveness every day, and they need to forgive others every day.

*(5) Good news from God for the merciful, you will be shown mercy.*

Remember that all eight describe a disciple, the person God came to bless.

We are helpless before God, either to be righteous or to make our lives better, so we are merciful to others. We need mercy, so we are merciful. Because we are poor in spirit, and because we mourn the mess we are in, when others do wrong to us we are generous with them.

We give to others what God gave to us. God's kingdom is merciful. God does not punish our sins, but kindly forgives us. So we are meek, we do not get even when others sin against us. By our mercy toward the sins of others, we bring God's mercy down on our sins.

But there is another side to this. We usually think of God's mercy toward us as forgiveness of sins. That is true. But in Psalms, God's mercy is often help and rescue, not forgiveness.

Ps 9 - "Lord, see how my enemies persecute me! Have mercy, and lift me up from the gates of death." Ps 28 - "Here my cry for mercy as I call to you for help." Ps 40 - "Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord; may your love and faithfulness always protect me." Ps 57 - "Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed." God is merciful to us when he kindly takes care of us, and rescues us.

That's exactly what these beatitudes are, God kindly coming to rescue the poor in spirit, and those who mourn. He offers his kingdom to spiritual beggars. We're glad God has good news for us, as we should be. And we will be merciful to others, we'll be good news for others.

*(6) Good news from God for the pure in heart, you will see God.*

Pure in heart means genuine before God. People that truly want to seek God and love him and serve him. There is much of that in this church. "Pure in heart" probably has in mind Ps 24. *Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol, or swear by a false god.*

There are people around, sometimes in the church, who do not care about God himself. They like the atmosphere, they like the people, maybe something else. But there's little energy for God. That's not pure in heart. God likes it when people want him.

Avoid too much self-examination here. Don't overthink "pure in heart." Some Christian teachings want us to chase down every bad thought and desire, and different psychological studies can also muddy the water here. People in Bible times did not know about those Christian teachings, or those psychological studies.

We either for the living God, or we are not. Two times, Ps 26 says "deliver me Lord, for I lead a blameless life." We could never tell God that *we* have a blameless life, not because we are worse than the people that psalm was written for, but because certain Christian teachings, and our habit of introspection, have taken away the joy of the Lord.

"Pure in heart" just means those who want God and they know it, they want to serve him and be faithful to him, they want him. God can see when we have that. And guess what? We will see God. We will get God. It says in Revelation 22, we will see his face. *Good news from God for the pure in heart, you'll see God.* Don't overthink this one. Rather, enjoy it.

*Good news from God for the peacemakers, you will be called children of God.*

Later in this chapter, Jesus will say that if our brother or sister has something against us, we should go to them, and make it right with them. That's making peace.

A little farther, still in this chapter, he calls us to love our enemies, and pray for those who persecute us, *that we may be children of our Father in heaven* (5:44-45). That's making peace.

Jesus does *not* mean making peace by helping other enemies make peace with each other. Peacemakers are *not* peace negotiators. That's good too, but not what Jesus speaks about. Rather, peacemakers are those who have *their own* offended brother or sister, or *their own* enemies, and they treat *their own enemies* peacefully, they reconcile with *their own* enemies.

This again builds on the earlier blessings. We offended God, and yet he gave us the kingdom. He came peacefully to us. God came to us while we were enemies, and he reconciled with us. So we are merciful to those who wrong us, we are meek when there are wicked people around, and we treat our own enemies courteously and kindly, and in that way *make peace*.

*Good news from God for the peacemakers, you will be called children of God.*

*Good news for you who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
yours is the kingdom of heaven.*

The kingdom of God that Jesus brings is God's new nation, God's domain. When we become citizens of God's new nation, we sometimes clash with the world we live in. It is hard to believe that following the Sermon on the Mount could get us in trouble, but in fact it can.

We don't have persecution in the way that other countries of the world have it. We do have it though. In Canadian society, to be a whole-hearted servant of the God of the Bible, to love and trust that God with all our might, and call Jesus our Lord, is at least foolish and mistaken. In some cases it makes you a threat to peaceful society, dangerous to the good of society.

In the ninth beatitude, which we're not looking at, Jesus calls insults a part of persecution, and that can certainly happen to those who are determined to follow Jesus.

Employment can get disciples in trouble, too. Sometimes at different jobs, people need to lie, or steal, or cheat in some way. I have heard enough stories like this over the years from believers in respectable Canadian jobs. Competitive sports can also go against the beatitudes.

So, taking all these blessings as describing the true child of the kingdom, this last one means that we want God enough to follow these even when it gets us in trouble. It means that we believe that Jesus is the Promised Announcer of the kingdom, and we leave all to follow him.

These beatitudes all together show what kind of people inherit the kingdom, and what we've said "yes" to when we decided to follow Jesus.

And to the crowds behind the disciples, who were listening, it was an open invitation to believe that Jesus really was bringing God's rescue to troubled desperate people, and for them to join him. They also are invited to be poor in spirit, and merciful. He still says "*Follow me*."

### *Summary*

1, Take all the beatitudes to describe the same person. Jesus invites us to be a beatitude person. And take all the blessings to mean "yours is the kingdom."

All the blessings are just different sides to entering the kingdom, being saved, inheriting eternal life. The beatitudes all describe a follower of Christ receiving the good news, the one central kindness from God - we receive the kingdom of God.

2, These beatitudes are not just a quaint introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. These beatitudes form the core of the whole Sermon on the Mount. The rest of this Sermon does not go in a different direction, it rather builds on this foundation. The beatitudes are the foundation and core of the whole Sermon on the Mount.

3, The beatitudes are the gospel, the good news. When we receive Christ, and give our lives to him, when we repent, and believe the message about Christ, this is where he takes us: Good news from God for the poor in spirit, good news from God for those who mourn, good news from God for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

But these cannot be separated from our response. Good news from God for the merciful, good news from God for the meek, good news from God for those who make peace with their offended sister or brother. Accepting the good news and receiving the kingdom means we will act toward people as God is acting toward us.

The beatitudes, all together, are the good news. The beatitudes are also the narrow gate to life, and the steep path. It is not easy. But remember, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled, and remember that God is entirely prepared to forgive our sins every day. It never occurred to him it would be any other way.

*Good news from God for the poor in spirit, yours is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Good news from God for those who mourn, you will be comforted.*

*Good news from God for the meek, you will inherit the earth.*

*Good news from God for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will be filled.*

*Good news from God for the merciful, you will be shown mercy.*

*Good news from God for the pure in heart, you will see God.*

*Good news from God for the peacemakers, you will be called children of God.*

*Good news from God for those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
yours is the kingdom of heaven. Amen.*

PRAYER: O God, such good news. There is hope for the poor in spirit, for the spiritual beggars. What we really want is you, God. What we really want is you. I assume receiving the kingdom means what we really get is you. We want to see you, to have you, we want you to have us. And this is the good news path to you that you have given us. It is the path for spiritual beggars. We want it. I've been on this path a long time, and so have most of those praying along with me. I don't impress myself very much. I'd like to start over every day. God, we want to live this way. We want you, and you're telling us we can have you. So, God, we're in. With your Spirit, build these all into our minds and souls and words and actions. Because we want you. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.