

## **A Christian's Character**

*Matthew 5<sup>1-12</sup>*

The Sermon on the Mount begins by defining who are the members of the new Kingdom – the humble, the heavyhearted, the gentle, the righteous, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted, the maligned. At a stroke Jesus sets these over against all the self-righteous people who regarded themselves as the cream of the godly society. We have but to recall the poor and outcast people to whom Jesus constantly ministered if we wish to see these descriptions fleshed out. They were, after all, the little stones which John the Baptist said God could raise up into the true children of Abraham (Mt. 3<sup>9</sup>).

1. What kind of people do we normally consider to be fortunate, happy or blessed?
2. **Read Matthew 5:1-12.** Compare our normal or typical description of the fortunate or happy with those whom Jesus lists as blessed (vv.1-12).
3. To be “poor in spirit” (v.3) is to acknowledge our spiritual poverty and bankruptcy before God. Why is this an indispensable condition for receiving the kingdom of God?

It's not easy for us to admit our spiritual poverty before God. Why is this so difficult?

4. Do the poor in spirit feel the need to mourn? If so, why?
5. How do you think those who mourn will be comforted (v.4)?
6. The meek person in Scripture is generous in his estimate of others, slow to take offense, able to bear reproach, consistently acting above mere self-interest. How does a true estimate of ourselves (vv.3-4) lead to meekness (v.5)?

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

7. Has Jesus said anything so far (vv.3-5) that would prompt us to hunger and thirst for righteousness (v.6)?

Read Isaiah 46:13; 51:5,6,8; 61:10. What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness according to these verses?

8. Jesus says that those who show mercy will be shown mercy (v.7). Why do you think our treatment of others will affect God's treatment of us?
9. The “pure in heart” seem to refer to freedom from falsehood in our relationships with God and others. Why is it so difficult to live this way?

Why would the promise of “seeing” God be reserved for the pure in heart?

10. What's so appropriate about calling “peacemakers” sons of God (v.9)?

How is being a peacemaker different from settling for “peace at any price”?

11. Although we might make valiant efforts at peacemaking, what does Jesus say we will experience (vv.10-12)?

Why should this prompt us to rejoice?

12. The Beatitudes stand the world's notion of happiness on its head. Why does the world call miserable those whom Jesus calls blessed?
13. C.S. Lewis was once criticized for not caring for the Sermon on the Mount. He replied, "As to 'caring for' the Sermon on the Mount, if 'caring for' here means 'liking' or 'enjoying', I suppose no one 'cares for' it. Who can like being knocked flat on his face by a sledge hammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of a man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure."

How have the beatitudes challenged you to be different?

14. Concerning our response to the Beatitudes, image this scenario: Jesus took his disciples up the mountain and, gathering them around him, he taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek...Blessed are they that mourn,...Blessed are the merciful,...Blessed are they that thirst for justice,...Blessed are you when you suffer,...Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in heaven."

Then Simon Peter said: "Are we supposed to know this?"

And Andrew said: "Do we have to right this down?"

And James said: "I don't have any paper."

And Bartholomew said: "Do we have to turn this in?"

And John said: "The other disciples didn't have to learn this!"

And Matthew said: "May I go to the rest room?"

And Judas said: What does this have to do with real life?"

And Jesus wept.

(Source unknown)

---

**Prayer:** "Lord I need to remember what it is to be blessed, fortunate and happy. It is not necessarily well off. Nor are being in mourning, being persecuted, or being maligned in themselves signs of well-being. Instead, to be blessed is to be in Christ, to be in the kingdom, regardless of the state of my external affairs. It is to be ours in faithfulness despite what happens to us in the world. Therefore, we can mourn and say, 'Yet how fortunate I am,' or we can be ill used and think, 'There is still room for happiness.' Let the truth of this insight sustain me through this day and the next. In the name of Jesus, who died for what he taught. Amen."