

Series: From Israel to Everyone: Disciples who Demonstrate God’s Presence (a study of Matthew).

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:3-6
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(App to get lesson/slides, ask

Last time, we learned how **upgrading our perspective activates our faith**, and specifically how the Beatitudes in *Matthew 5* do that. Simply put, they are **blessing** statements like we find in other biblical texts--the writings of Moses (cf. Deuteronomy 28), Israel’s Old Testament Psalms (cf. 1:1; 32:1-2; 84:4-12; 119:1-2) and [7 that we’ll soon study in Revelation](#). So, the Beatitudes are not an exhaustive list, and they’re also not a to-do list. The only command is in **verse 12: rejoice and be glad** which again makes them **blessing** statements--announcements that clarify who God **favors**. They question human judgment over who God has/has not **blessed**, who God is/is not with, or who God is/is not saving. The world claims, “*blessed are the wealthy/famous/carefree*”, but Christianity proposes this radical reinterpretation of life: “*The life you think is easy may be empty, and the life you view as miserable may be where God does His best work.*” Professor Jeannine K. Brown (p. 53) said “*These words begin Jesus’ announcement of blessing upon the most unlikely audience: those who are destitute, grief-stricken, oppressed, and longing for justice.*” They are wonderful news of the status reversals Jesus brought from heaven to earth and raise questions like: “*What situations make me doubt God’s presence in my life or that others could be Christians?*” This text asserts that a God- **blessed** life (one that brings true joy/happiness) is more about the condition of our hearts than our happenings. As we explore the first half today, we’ll see this...

BIG IDEA: The Beatitudes upgrade our internal perspective.

Here’s how we’ll divide and digest them...**verses 3-6** contain internal perspectives that produce the external practices in **verses 7-12**, ultimately making us more like Jesus inside and out!

Internal Perspectives (5:3-6)	External Practices (5:7-12)
Realizing Need (3)	Extending Mercy (7)
Mourning Sin (4)	Seeking Purity (8)
Restraining Power (5)	Making Peace (9)
Hungering for Righteousness (6)	Standing for Righteousness (10-12)

King Jesus made His first announcement in *verse 3: Blessed* (favored/happy) *are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. While the word *poor* evokes images of material *poverty*, this is about *poverty* in our innermost essence or *spirit*. Hebrew and Greek words for *spirit* also mean “*wind or breath*” and start in Genesis 2:7 where “*The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living being.*” So, to be *poor in spirit* is to realize God is the “*wind in our sails*” (i.e., we were not created for self-reliance). Like those in economic *poverty*, we must accept a created dependence on God and the helpers He created--not resist it, hide it or hold it against others who often seek help. After all, our King said *His kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit*. In Matthew 18 He added: “*Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Admitting our dependency and trusting like children are 2 sides of the same coin.* 1st century people gave children no status in their community, but we should! These co-worshipers are visual reminders that we all enter God’s family and remain there by simple faith, not by how much or little we memorize, comprehend and behave. Heaven’s air blows on earth to “*winnow*” (3:12) away our adult sense of self-importance until *we become poor in spirit* so we can embrace family fellowship!

King Jesus announced a 2nd internal perspective in *verse 4: Blessed* (favored/happy) *are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*. *Mourning* is a state we often prefer to avoid or move on from fast. Those who can’t, may medicate grief and sadness or mask it by busyness, avoidance, or joking around. To avoid discomfort, they will try to cheer up grievors instead of listening with compassion (cf. Romans 12:15). I wonder, “What’s your go-to coping mechanism?” Here’s the thing: Jesus willingly entered this world of rejection, sorrow and grief as God’s Suffering Servant (cf. Isaiah 53). He says God’s favor is on *those who mourn*--those with a deep sorrow over earth’s brokenness and our “*sin-chaff*” addressed in 3:12. Sort of like tinnitus, Romans 8 implies that *mourners* hear the frequency of all creation groaning for God to restore earth. Thus, Jesus’ wonderful news is that *comfort will come to mourners*. Moreover, 2 Corinthians 1 says that the *comfort* we

receive by **mourning** what God **mourns** equips us to be agents of **comfort** who bring heaven's healing hope to earth (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13).

King Jesus announced a 3rd internal perspective in **verse 5: *Blessed*** (favored/happy) ***are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*** Despite how it sounds, **meekness** is not weakness. Numbers 12:3 says Moses was "...*very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.*" In Old Testament Hebrew, **meek** implies his "*strength was under control*" in situations when we might seek our own way, retaliate, or be vengeful. In New Testament Greek, **meek** implies the gentle and humble heart Jesus modeled in Matthew 11:29. It's an ability to endure egregious evils without responding in kind and to serve others, including wrongdoers, with a gentleness that positions us for the peacemaking discussed in **verse 9**. To say, "*this isn't easy*" is an utmost understatement, but Jesus' wonderful news is that God's **blessing** (favor) is on the **meek** which means we can count on help from His Spirit. A question to ponder might be: "*In what ways could meekness bring more of heaven to our various relationships?*"

King Jesus announced one other internal perspective in **verse 6: *Blessed*** (favored/happy) ***are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*** Just as our body naturally **hungers** for food, spiritually renewed people **hunger** for **righteousness**. Glance down at what Jesus said in **verse 20: *For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*** These groups had reduced **righteousness** to personal achievement, moral correctness, and legal compliance. Far from being **poor in spirit**, they tried to impress God at the expense of others. Of course, **righteousness** does involve personal integrity but for the purpose of restoring God's peace (shalom) on earth for everyone! To embrace being **poor in spirit, mourning** and **meekness** creates a **hunger and thirst for God's right ways** on earth, not just in heaven. You see, the part we miss while boasting of going to heaven and having Christ's **righteousness** by faith (cf. Romans 4), is that it turns us into conduits who bring more of heaven to the earthly injustices we encounter here and now. And He promised that ***we shall be satisfied.*** Jesus was daring us to test drive His radical reinterpretation of life. He wants us to taste and see that His heavenly perspective is

better for life on earth and that “*The life you think is easy may be empty, and the life you view as miserable may be where God does His best work.*” Or as He put in later in Matthew 16:24-26 NLT “*If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?*” Always remember that wherever you are on your journey of trusting Christ, you need not work through anything alone. Reach out and let us help!

Sunday to Monday Connection: Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by reminding us that God’s blessing often shows up in unexpected places. He says the blessed are not the strong or self-sufficient, but those who know they need Him, who feel the weight of what’s broken, who choose gentleness, and who long for what is right. This means a blessed life isn’t about having it all together, it’s about having a heart turned toward God.

- **Question:** Where do you need to depend on God and others instead of relying on yourself?
- **Next Step:** Pay attention this week when you feel weak, burdened or needy. Instead of trying to minimize or fix things on your own, stop to recognize how God is desiring to relate with you through the help of others.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to explore what all this might mean for you, please speak with someone you know here or one of our church leaders.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. How do our human views of blessing cause our joy or faithfulness to waiver, and what does Jesus tell us here to change all that?
2. When have you ever experienced a poverty of Spirit and how could talking about that help you and others experience more of God’s kingdom on earth?
3. This lesson mentions several tactics we use to avoid or move on from mourning. What are your “go-to tactics” and why? In what ways do the Beatitudes inspire you to be different?

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.

4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- Bible Project - Gospel of the Kingdom [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Heaven and Earth [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Temple [Videos](#).
- Bible Project – Day of the Lord [Podcast episodes](#).

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Big Idea:** “Jesus begins this kingdom sermon by announcing the reality of God’s kingdom as reversal of fortune and restoration of right values and by calling his followers to live out their distinctive identity as God’s covenant people.” (Brown, 52)
- **Layout:** Recalling the passage’s design, we will be attentive to each description, and especially to the ways in which the eight are arranged and joined. In accord with literary features noted above, we may view these subjects as two sets of four. The people portrayed in verses 3–6 know their need of God, depend on him, weep before him, long for him to establish his rule, and patiently wait for him to do so. Verses 7–10 describe persons who have received the grace of God’s rule, experienced its powers and submitted to its commands. Yet all eight beatitudes remain connected to each other: the actions of 5:7 and 9 flow from the attitudes of 5:3–6; the activists stay focused on God (5:8); persecuted believers (5:10) will evidence the qualities of 5:3–6 to an exceptional degree. (Chamblin, 313)
- **Blessed:** “The phrase ‘How blessed’ would sound familiar to any educated Jew. The Hebrew word *ashrey* is common throughout the Psalms and the siddur/prayer book. The root word (*asher*) would more accurately mean ‘happy,’ not in some superficial sense in the temporal world, but in the most fulfilling reality of doing the will of God. Some of the specific beatitudes do not seem good in themselves; yet if a person fulfills God’s will in these ways, there is a blessing and even a sense of happiness that the world cannot offer.” (Kasdan, 45)
- **Big picture:** “The life of heaven—the life of the realm where God is already king—is to become the life of the world, transforming the present ‘earth’ into the place of beauty and delight that God always intended. And those who follow Jesus are to begin to live by this rule here and now. That’s the point of the Sermon on the Mount, and these ‘beatitudes’ in particular. They are a summons to live in the present in the way that will make sense in God’s promised future; because that future has arrived in the present in Jesus of Nazareth. It may seem upside down, but we are called to believe, with great daring, that it is in fact the right way up. Try it and see.” (Wright, 38)
- **Poor:** “The Hebrew term *oni* is often used to refer to material poverty; yet the Messiah challenges his disciples, who are so destitute in their own spirits. This is a foundational place to start as we seek to know the true interpretation of

Torah. Our own spirit must be devoid of any pride or self-merit. Interestingly, a similar phrase (oniye ha-ruach) was used in the Dead Sea Scrolls to describe the character of this first-century sect living in the Judean desert. If we are to even begin our search for Messiah's kingdom, we must humbly realize our need for God. Those who look at themselves as so impoverished will participate in the Kingdom of Heaven." (Kasdan, 45)

- **Mourning:** "Unfortunately, Israel has a long history of mourning, as it has endured many times of trials and attacks from enemies. The crowds on this mountain would easily relate to the concept expressed in the Hebrew term *aval*, which is a common response to the tragedies of life. The promise of Yeshua here is similar to that of the prophet Isaiah, who promised Israel the oil of gladness instead of mourning (Isa. 61:3)." (Kasdan, 45-46)
- **Meekness:** "The domineering, the aggressive, the harsh, and the tyrannical are often those who attempt to dominate the earth and establish their own little kingdoms. But Jesus says that it is the 'gentle' who will inherit the earth, harking back to the psalmist who encourages those who have been treated harshly by evildoers (Ps. 37:9, 11). This shifts the focus from individual personal qualities ('poor in spirit,' 'those who mourn') to interpersonal attributes ('the gentle'), to people who do not assert themselves over others in order to advance their own causes. This does not imply weakness, however, for this same term is applied to Jesus, who describes himself as 'gentle and humble in heart' (11:29; cf. 21:5). Jesus was not afraid to confront the religious leaders when necessary or to rebuke his own disciples for self-centeredness. He will be strong enough to face the most torturous death possible as he endured the cross... It takes tremendous strength to bring others into God's will, but when that strength is coupled with a selfless non-assertiveness, it produces a gentle person who can patiently endure much to bring about God's purposes for his people." (Wilkins, 207)
- **Righteousness:** "The ultimate source of this kind of righteousness is God himself (cf. Ps. 42:1-2; 63:1). His enablement is the only satisfaction for those who long for his standard of righteousness written in his law (119:10-11, 20, etc.). Although the teachers of the law and the Pharisees focus on attaining righteousness through studying and interpreting the law, their efforts result in self-righteousness, which will not enable them to enter the kingdom of heaven (cf. 5:20). But for those who deeply long for God's multifaceted righteousness, they will be filled. That divine satisfaction will come in a final sense in God's future reign, but it will be experienced in the present by those who respond to Jesus' invitation to kingdom life and enter into a relationship with him as he fills their deepest personal hunger and thirst for righteousness (cf. 12:1-8; 26:26-29; John 4:13-15; 6:35ff.)." (Wilkins, 208)
- **Perspectives:** "Literally dozens of interpretations have resulted, which may be summarized under the following headings: (1) Entrance requirements to the kingdom. This approach to the SM acknowledges the radical nature of the kingdom of God that Jesus announces, but it confuses the results of participating in kingdom life with the means of obtaining kingdom life. Jesus' followers will actualize these ethical and moral ideals, not as a means of

entering the kingdom but as an outgrowth of the kingdom life that will be theirs through the empowering of the Spirit. (2) An impossible ideal. While the SM does indeed articulate an ideal that is impossible for fallen humans to attain, it is an ideal that disciples will strive to live out under the grace of God and the power of the Spirit in their everyday world (see 5:48). Jesus not only gives the ideal of the kingdom in the SM, but his description of life in the kingdom includes the enablement to attain the ideal. (3) An example for another age. [This includes two views that] find principles within the SM that present-day believers must heed, but the primary application is for another age. However, if we understand the inauguration of the kingdom by Jesus to be a combination of the ‘already-not yet,’ then we do not have to go for an either-or extreme that both of these (future) approaches take. (4) An optional elitism. This view was suggested by the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, who claimed that there were two levels in Jesus’ teaching. One level was for the average Christian (generally the ‘laity’), while the higher level was for those who were seeking a higher level of righteousness (especially the clergy and various priestly/monastic orders). [Yes, it’s] a high calling, but it is a light yoke of obligation for all Christians.” (Wilkins, 195-197)

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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