

**Text:** Matthew 5:1-12

**Title:** The Sermon on the Mount, Part 1

**Truth:** God bestows blessings on the righteous.

**Date/Location:** Wednesday April 21, 2021 at DBTS

## Introduction

Thanks for the invite to the chapel, glad to be here with you. Praying for you as you work through COVID illness of various staff and students here and at the church. Describe our general approach of proactive closure from time to time, recommendation for at-risk individuals to stay home. It is light-hearted saying that we did not learn pandemics (like we learned homiletics) in our seminary curriculum; yet we did, for we remember 2 Timothy 4:2, to preach the word and be ready in season and out. We might think it is an 'out of season' season right now, but God has ordained it for His purposes, and there are opportunities to minister that we must seize!

What happens in this pulpit is supposed to be an exemplar of how you should proclaim the Word in your own ministries. Ryan reminded me of that when he gave me my assignment to deliver an expository message. As such, it is a little daunting that I am responsible to be part of the preaching series here this semester. But it is critically important. The Church today needs expository preaching—and desperately so. Hopefully all of you will take part in filling that need.

But what is an expository message? I understand it to mean that I am to **explain** the meaning of a text of Scripture and then **apply** it to us in a relevant way. It helps me to take the definition of expository preaching one step further, and that is this: I must **explain** and **apply** the text in such a way and with the goal that you **understand** and **obey** it. This helps focus the teaching so that it hits a particular target and is not just aimless conveyance of information. Explaining should lead to understanding, and with application should lead to obedience.

This approach is well grounded by what Jesus told us in the Great Commission:

διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν

The **teaching** part corresponds to the **explaining** of expository preaching and your **understanding**; the **observing** part corresponds to the **applying** part of exposition and your **obeying**. We want to preach information *and* impact. We bring meaning and message together, not merely the mechanics of studying a text.

The sermon on the mount is the most famous sermon ever preached. Liberal churches use it repeatedly to teach on basic morality; those opposed to war use it to teach pacifism; the world knows 7:12 as the golden rule. Conservative Christians find much that is rich for us to live by, but the Sermon presents a standard of divine righteousness that drives us to the cross of Christ.

## I. Matthew's Gospel and the Sermon, 5:1-7:29

The purpose of Matthew's gospel, as with the other synoptics, is to present the facts about the person and work of Christ. In so doing, the writers call their readers to faith first, and then to training in godliness as followers of Christ. This definitely applies to us!

A. High-level outline of the Sermon:

1. Blessings pronounced on disciples..... 5:1-12
2. Disciples as salt and light..... 5:13-16
3. Jesus comes to fulfill the Law of Moses ..... 5:17-20
4. Jesus explains the true intent of the Law..... 5:21-48
5. Proper way to give, pray, and fast..... 6:1-18
6. Serving one master..... 6:19-24
7. Do not be anxious but put God's kingdom first6:25-34
8. Do not hyper-critically judge others..... 7:1-6
9. Ask God for what you need ..... 7:7-11
10. Golden rule ..... 7:12
11. Two ways to live: Four illustrations..... 7:13-27
12. Jesus taught with authority..... 7:28-29

B. The Sermon is the first lengthy address by our Lord recorded in Matthew. But it is not the last. Here are the others:

1. Sermon on the Mount (5-7)
2. Commissioning of the Disciples (10)

3. Kingdom parables (13)
4. Offenses and forgiveness (18)
5. The Second Coming (24-25)

Each section ends with a phrase like this: “When Jesus had ended these sayings...”

### C. The Text, 5:1-12 (ESV)

Jesus did not hurry through these statements. He let them sink in.

You need to let them sink in too. Ask yourself if the characteristics are true descriptions of your own life. Ask yourself what God wants to do with your character considering what we read here.

- <sup>1</sup> Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
- <sup>3</sup> "**Blessed** are the poor in spirit, **for** theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- <sup>4</sup> "**Blessed** are those who mourn, **for** they shall be comforted.
- <sup>5</sup> "**Blessed** are the meek, **for** they shall inherit the earth.
- <sup>6</sup> "**Blessed** are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, **for** they shall be satisfied.
- <sup>7</sup> "**Blessed** are the merciful, **for** they shall receive mercy.
- <sup>8</sup> "**Blessed** are the pure in heart, **for** they shall see God.
- <sup>9</sup> "**Blessed** are the peacemakers, **for** they shall be called sons of God.
- <sup>10</sup> "**Blessed** are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, **for** theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, **for** your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

## II. Preliminary Issues

The Sermon also presents special application issues for us as teachers of the Word. How to teach it—and even whether to do so!

A. **The spirituality of the Sermon.** The recipients of the beatitudes or “blessings” are those who possess certain *spiritual* conditions, *not physical* conditions. This is critical to understand from the outset. For example, the text says, “blessed are the poor *in spirit*” not “blessed are the *poor*.” Mourning and meekness are similar spiritual conditions. “Hunger and thirst” are for righteousness, not food. Likewise, merciful, pure, peacemakers, and those persecuted all emphasize moral or ethical concerns, not physical ones. Of course persecution is a physical concern, but the issue that brings the persecution is *righteousness*.

Noticing this fact is a simple matter of reading the entire context and not stopping halfway through the verse to make it say what you want it to say rather than what it says, or make it to fit the current trending topics. If you went the social-gospel route, you would make mince-meat of the Sermon and it would mean something entirely different than what the Divine Preacher intended.

Both hungry and satisfied, rich and poor, grieving and happy people can experience the blessings declared here by Christ.

B. There is another pitfall in reading the passage, and that is thinking that we must by our own **moral reformation** “become” the qualities that are listed, and only *then* will we get the blessing from God. “If I do not exhibit meekness, I am not going to earn the kingdom of heaven!” That is a self-centered, effort-based approach which is contrary to the grace of the gospel. Like the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), these traits come as a multi-faceted package, but they are not self-generated. You do not make the fruit of the Spirit, though you actively participate in its manifestation.

In contrast to a works-focused mindset, we should read the passage with a God-centered mindset. The virtues listed here are self-reduction virtues, not self-magnification virtues. This self-reduction comes to us when we recognize that we need God and the forgiveness of Christ Jesus. It comes to use when we recognize we are unable, apart from God, to show any of these virtues truly. As it is, God works in us the virtues as we seek them from Him.

The Sermon starts out by teaching us the right humble attitude of God's people—who recognize they are poor sinners (Matt. 5:3-6). It continues by giving the impossibly high standard of perfection in the real intention of the Law as well as the statement that we are to be perfect as is our Father in Heaven (Matt. 5:48).

Of course, your energetic and thoughtful participation is required in this endeavor—God uses that among other things to produce this kind of character in you. Trust God to do that work in you (Phil. 1:6).

Lloyd-Jones reminds us that our Lord is not talking about rules to be applied mechanically with absurd outcomes. It is a description of character, how we are to be as Christians, and I would add, as repentant people. The Sermon must be read in the context of the preaching of Jesus and John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2 and 4:17.

- C. **The place of the Sermon in Christian teaching.** There is a debate about how relevant this sermon is for the Christian church today.
1. Dispensationalists of a certain flavor omit it from their teaching nearly altogether. They suggest it is for the Kingdom age or exclusively for Jewish believers, which is strictly future. It is the constitution of the Messiah's kingdom, and since we are not *in* the kingdom now, it is not for us. Or, perhaps better, since we exist in the "parenthetical" age of the church, it is no more relevant to us than the Law of Moses.
  2. Most Christian theologians believe the Sermon is 100% relevant for Christians. It is "church" truth since the church has always existed.
  3. Some preach it because it makes, they think, good fodder for moralistic preaching by which you can encourage people to get along nicely with one another.
  4. Many simply do not know what to think of the Sermon. It is situated in a transitional period between the Jewish Law and the Jewish + Gentile Church. It has things in it which seem impossible to fully obey in this age. They are hesitant because they see teaching on the Law and Kingdom in it, which are not technically in the church.

5. I understand the Sermon to be fully applicable to the Christian today. This is not because the church pre-exists the Sermon or is introduced in the Sermon; nor because the Sermon makes for good preaching on morality. Two reasons:

First, repentance was Jesus' message and John's before Him (3:2, 4:17). This is central to the saving gospel message in every age irrespective of ethnic background. Namely, we are called to repent from dead works and exercise faith toward God (Heb. 6:1); or, in Paul's words, to repent toward God and exercise faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). The Sermon on the Mount shows us what repentance before God looks like—particularly by internal measures like many of the beatitudes, and also by external metrics like how we do charitable deeds and prayer and fasting and the like.

Second, all church saints are presently citizens-in-waiting of the kingdom in which they will be full participants in the future. Our citizenship in the future kingdom dictates our conduct today be fitting as such citizens (Romans 14:17, for example). The Sermon's morality is an expression of God's desire for His children. In other words, this sermon is an expression of King Jesus about how He wishes His subjects to behave. We are His subjects now, even though we await the coming of His kingdom in the future. The sermon is part of Scripture and is profitable for us as kingdom citizens—so that we would know its teaching and be improved by it.

Lloyd-Jones again: if you find yourself arguing with it, either there is something wrong with you, or with your interpretation!

D. The **timing of the blessings**. The blessing of each virtue is the end outcome that is listed (kingdom of heaven, comfort, filled, etc.). The nine-fold repetition of the explanatory “*hoti*” clause (for) makes this plain.

There is another part of the blessing: the state of existing in the virtue itself right now. In other words, it is not only what you will *get* that is the blessing. It is what you have *become* by faith that is part of the blessing. The text presents the blessing as *now*, not just *later*. Future gifts as well as present virtues have an impact today

in the life of the Christian. Jesus says, “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit” and “theirs IS the kingdom of Heaven,” not “Blessed WILL BE the poor in spirit.” Of course, the linking verb is missing in most of the verses, and some do specify the blessing will be future, like “shall be comforted.” But in 5:11 the verb is explicit, and it is a present tense.

This is far different than the prosperity gospel kind of blessing. This blessing is in a dimension altogether different than what that doctrinal system supposes. But it is similar in this regard: it includes blessing now. Who among us as followers of Christ would be able to say that our life is void of the blessing of God in every measure? Not a one, I should think! The principle is still true from **Psalm 5:12** – The Lord blesses the righteous man and surround him with favor as a shield. **Psalm 1** – Blessed is the man that does not walk in ungodliness but delights in God’s word. **Proverbs 10:6** – Blessings are on the head of the righteous.

E. The **nature of the blessings**. What is a blessing? Words like *contentment* and *happiness* come to mind. Often this is read as “Happy is the person who is poor in spirit.” But the word *happy* has been so watered down in modern English that it does not accurately convey the idea. Everyone wants to be happy today, but that can be such a fleeting emotion that depends on circumstances and the hour of the day. People demand that they themselves be happy, and that is the measure of what is right or wrong in their life. According to the Bible, the more important issue is that God is happy.

The Friberg *Analytical Greek Lexicon* defines blessedness as someone who has ***transcendent happiness***.

***Fortunate*** has too much of a “luck” idea in it. I prefer ***privileged*** or ***favored***, with the nuance that the favor or privilege or ***blessing*** comes from God. Such people are specially advantaged. They have a high standing with God.

The idea of blessing connects with the concepts of blessing and *shalom* in the Old Testament, such as in Psalm 1:1 and Numbers 6:26. These refer to the state of a person who is spiritually well, whole, in a good relationship with God, one who fears God but also

knows the love of God. In ideal conditions, such as in the future kingdom and to a more limited extent the era of the Mosaic Law when Israel obeyed God, the peace encompasses physical blessing as well as spiritual.

This means that true spiritual contentment, satisfaction, and deep-seated joy and happiness comes from pursuing the things of God, not the materialism or pleasures of the world. The world's happiness is nowhere near the Christian's blessedness!

### III. The Setting of the Sermon

A. Jesus saw the crowds that were following (4:25). They were massive. Thousands of people wanted to hear what this new preacher had to say. He was working tremendous miracles that indicated that He was someone very special.

I used to think that this event was spontaneous, with no human planning required. As I studied the text, I began to doubt that assumption. It seems more likely that there was *some* planning that went into this. Jesus thought ahead about what he was going to do for God. So for instance, where would be a good place to hold meetings that would accommodate so many people? How to lead the huge crowds to the that place?

B. The posture chosen by Jesus was to sit, and that is often said to be the normal posture of a teacher. Yet Jesus *stood up* to read the Scripture in the Nazareth Synagogue (Luke 4:16-20). Thus, I would not assign any special importance to the seated position. Perhaps it was practical for the location and length of the teaching session.

The standing position behind a pulpit has been used since the ancient church. The pulpit or platform was a central place of teaching, even in the synagogue prior to the church. It is hard to imagine sitting to teach a large crowd. The mountain afforded an elevated place for Jesus to be seen and heard easily by the crowd, despite the sitting posture. The mountain was Jesus's synagogue meeting place.

C. The disciples "came to Him." That is what real disciples do. They know that it is critical to hear the voice of the Lord. They want to



know what He has to say (John 10:27). Real disciples keep coming to Jesus; others go away (John 6:66-67).

- D. The traditional location of the Mount of Beatitudes is overlooking the Sea of Galilee, but there is no deep significance to this fact.
- E. The Lord taught the disciples. The need for such instruction is never-ending, and frankly it is more today than it has been in the last several generations in our land. This is not to say that the West was ever thoroughly Christianized, but literacy of the Bible has been much higher in the relatively recent past than it is now. There is a level of Bible poverty or Bible illiteracy that should just be intolerable to us who are aspiring to be ministers of the Word. We have a lot of work to do. Jesus provides us with the model—when we open our mouth, we teach.

**Transition/Application:** With this in mind, carefully think about how you would process each of these statements as if you were one of the crowd gathered on the Mount of Beatitudes overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

#### **IV. Eight Character Traits of Godly People**

Jesus speaks of eight virtues and pronounces a blessing from God on a person of faith who exhibits them. Note that: these are manifestations of faith in God and in Christ. These are general descriptions; later in the Sermon Christ will give more specifics. Here, He teaches that the one...

- A. Who is poor in spirit, v. 3. Think of the opposite—rich in spirit. It sounds like someone who has a high view of one's self, pride, arrogance, haughtiness, self-sufficiency, perhaps atheistic, self-autonomous. Such a person believes in themselves, in their own goodness, in their own capacity. Entirely opposite is...
  - 1. Someone who is poor in spirit recognizes that they are lowly before God, they need God, they are humble, esteeming others as better than self (Phil. 2:3), oriented toward serving others (Mark 10:45). Without God, they know they are in a hopeless condition. They live responsibly but recognize that any favor they have comes from God. This trait is not something focused on how we measure up to other people; it is a trait that is

concerned with how we stand in relationship to God. Before God, we had better be poor in spirit, because the reality is that we are. The poor in spirit do not look inward to develop poverty in spirit; they look heavenward and by constant exposure to the things of God we will naturally recognize our poverty.

2. Such humility is not without reward. It is not pointless. To such people belong the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:14). They will enter the kingdom and “possess” it. And they will fully enjoy its blessings.

Connecting the dots with Jesus’s teaching to Nicodemus, we see that these poor in spirit people are born again. They have believed in Christ. Thus they can see/enter the kingdom of God. Being truly poor in spirit before God *is* theologically the expression of being born from above.

B. Who mourns, v. 4. The opposite is found in 1 Cor. 5:2. There, church people were proud about maintaining fellowship with a man who was an openly immoral person. Instead, they should have mourned over the sin that was done in their midst.

1. To mourn means to have godly sorrow over sin (2 Cor. 7:9-10). It means to be vexed by sin in self (first and mainly) and in society. It means that we repent of our sin and despise it. We look at ourselves and mourn over what we have done and the reasons internally why we did those things. On a wider scale, it means being one of those who ask the question, “How long, O Lord, until righteousness is poured out like a flood, until justice flows like a mighty river, until the earth is full of the love of God?” It means being like Jesus who wept at the grave of a friend and was grieved over the human condition He observed. Such mourners are blessed. Paradoxical? Indeed, to worldly eyes. But to us who are saved, it is a rich blessing to know your true state and how God has cared for you.
2. Presently, as well as at the end of their mourning, such blessed ones will be comforted. Knowledge that we individually are forgiven and rescued from sin’s dread consequence brings comfort. We oscillate between mourning over sin and rejoicing

over forgiveness. Blessed are those who so mourn, for their comfort will be the knowledge of forgiveness.

In the future, the Kingdom of Christ as well as the heavenly state will bring that kind of comfort to those who decry their own sin and the wages of it, and those who are troubled by the sin of their societies. Corporately, society will be put in an upright condition. In the kingdom, it will be forced into that mold. In Heaven, all will be willing participants in the righteousness of God! But there is no true comfort, however, for the wicked.

C. Who is meek, v. 5. This is another self-deprecating character trait.

1. It is those who are gentle, humble, considerate, and meek that will inherit the earth. The meek one is contrasted against the wicked in Psalm 37:10 and 12. A very rich or powerful person could be meek—not too impressed with him or herself.

Meek is not weak. It is not passive. It is not uncertain, out of control, no aims, goals, etc. You can be meek and be certain, confident, in control (in a self-controlled manner), have goals, plans, etc. Meekness is not that you permit everyone to walk all over you. To be meek is a quality of a righteous person describing how he sees himself and his relations to others.

2. The present blessing for the meek is to know that they are like Christ, that they are reflecting the character of Jesus in this life. The knowledge that God has delivered them from sin drives meekness and that is a favored state of things.

The future blessing for the meek is that they will inherit the earth. This is drawn from Psalm 37:11. (I reject the translation in NET of *oppressed* in this Psalm—too much social justice going on with it and the term is commonly translated as meek or humble.<sup>1</sup>) The land in view there is the land where Israel lived, part of the entire earth made by God. Those who obeyed God would live long in that land (Exodus 20:12). The same principle applies to all who are by faith gentle in their conduct. They will

---

<sup>1</sup> For an alternative viewpoint, see [http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1015-87582016000200008](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1015-87582016000200008)

inherit the “land” of the kingdom of Christ. The translators have done perfectly well to render the word as *earth* because that is what it means. Gentile meek will not inherit the land of Israel as a future generation of Jews will; but they will be part of the kingdom of heaven on earth. In effect, this blessing is the same as 5:3’s blessing of the kingdom of heaven.

We do not get any idea from this that the poor in spirit get *heaven* and the meek get the *earth*, as if there are two levels of people with two different destinations. That is a made-up distinction with no support whatsoever in Scripture. The meek and the poor in spirit are all part of the same crowd who receive the same basic inheritance.

#### D. Who desires righteousness, v. 6.

1. The figure of speech of hungering and thirsting for righteousness is perfect. Picture yourself as very thirsty or starved—I mean really starved—and you need nourishment to feel yourself again and to be strengthened. We should desire the attribute of righteousness with that kind of intensity. That is, we should long for right standing with God, moral rectitude in life, holy behavior, pious conduct.

This righteousness is not only imputed righteousness—it is practical righteousness as well. The believer wants to be right before God in Christ, and right before God in practice. The fact that it is sought out and desired indicates that the person knows it comes from elsewhere, not within himself. Just like food comes from outside, so righteousness does too. You must take it in to “be” it.

When you are in this mindset or *modus operandi*, you will be far less enamored with sin and temptation.

*I thirsted in the barren land of sin and shame,  
And nothing satisfying there I found;  
But to the blessed cross of Christ one day I came,  
Where springs of living water did abound.*

2. The blessing is that those who thus seek shall be filled. See Matthew 7:7. It is a future provision, but I believe again the

blessing is multi-faceted. To have a mindset of desiring righteousness is *itself* a favor from God. And, in God's ongoing provision of moral rectitude, there is a deep blessing as well. Just like you cannot eat once and be done with eating ever after that, so hungering for righteousness and being filled goes on over the course of one's entire life. Being pleasantly full after a meal is a blessing, just like finding your conduct to be becoming more like Christ. Psalm 42:1-2, 63:1; Isa. 55:1; John 6:35, 7:37; Rev. 21:6, 17.

E. Who is merciful, v. 7.

1. The merciful are those concerned about people in need, sympathetic, compassionate. Heavenly wisdom is that which demonstrates mercy (James 3:17).
2. The blessing upon the merciful ones is that they will themselves obtain mercy. That is what we all need desperately, because sinners do not deserve the blessing of God—only the curse and punishment due for failing God's righteousness. Judgment is without mercy to those who have shown no mercy (James 2:13), but mercy is extended to those who have shown mercy. We in our sin stand in need of mercy in a similar way that someone who is in physical need requires mercy appropriate to their case. Believers have received a great measure of mercy and continue to do so on an ongoing basis, but far more is yet to come for the Christian.

F. Who is pure in heart, v. 8.

1. What is pure in heart? To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure because their minds and consciences are defiled (Titus 1:15). The pure in heart are those who are clean, who are free from guilty activity, guilty intentions and hopes and desires. They are those who have pure desires. Perfectly? Impossible. Noticeable and growing? Certainly.
2. The blessing for the pure in heart is that such people will see God. No one has seen God in His unveiled glory (John 1:18, 1 John 4:12). But Rev. 22:4 teaches that the people of God *will* see

the face of God—once they are purified and made completely righteous. They will walk not only by faith, but also by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). God is good to those who are pure in heart (Psalm 73:10).

#### G. Who is a peacemaker, v. 9.

1. These ones try to reconcile people who are having difficulties between themselves. Evangelists who bring peace between God and His enemies through the gospel are of this sort. Pastors who help reconcile family members and church members are in this tribe as well. They must teach the warring parties how forgiveness works, and why they need to exhibit it. They must show what love is and how to exercise it.
2. The blessing of being a peacemaker is that such people will be called sons of God. Again, do not read this as “if I make enough peace then I will become a child of God.” The blessing is that you will be declared openly to be what you are—a child of God by faith in Christ. Being called a son of God indicates that you have taken on the characteristics of who God is. In this case, those who make peace are like God in that way because God is a peacemaker. He works to reconcile us to Himself and thus shows us how to be reconciled to one another.

That statement is a bit anachronistic, I will admit, because Jesus did not say “by faith in Christ,” but in the present era, that is how people come to God and come to be a person who is a peacemaker and have all these other attributes.

#### H. Who is persecuted for God, v. 10-12.

1. Being lightly opposed for the sake of the gospel can hardly be called persecution. It is active, hard persecution that Jesus is talking about. It is not just people who say “no” to the gospel or even argue against it, but who revile you and call you evil and try to harm you and close your church and put you in jail and make you pay fines and things like that.
2. Those who suffer under the oppression of such persecutors, like the poor in spirit, will inherit the kingdom of heaven, which is one and the same as the kingdom of God. Those who have been

persecuted will receive more than the equivalent of everything back and more. The affliction of persecution will appear to be light in view of the glory that they will receive. This way, these ones can rejoice and be glad now because they have a great reward in heaven. Again, this is paradoxical: how can we rejoice when under the pressure of persecution? The apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ.

There is no doubt that God has a special place in his heart, so to speak, for those who have endured such trouble from evildoers. They will be rewarded richly.

## **Conclusion**

The world says, “blessed are those who are confident, bold, wealthy, powerful, fulfilled, following their hearts, “good.” No so the Lord Jesus.

The eight traits of character proclaimed by Jesus are descriptions of what a person looks like when he “repents for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” When a person comes into a right relationship with the king, he is blessed in the ways we read about in verses 3-12. At the same time, these traits are checkpoints for us to see if we are living responsibly before the Lord in manifesting the character traits that He seeks to develop in us. Like the letters from James or 1 John, these become tests of a living, genuine faith.

MAP