

Lesson 2: The Beatitudes: Preparing the Heart for Jesus' Message

Lesson Theme: The Sermon on the Mount is the announcement of the imminent appearance of the Kingdom of God. The Beatitudes are a pronouncement of God's blessings on all the people who appear to **not** have God's favor – the poor in spirit, the ones that mourn, the meek, and the ones who hunger and thirst after righteousness. These lessons spoken to his followers in his presence on that day are applicable to Christians living in 2022, We need to be reminded that these are characteristics that Kingdom people in every age and every culture should embrace.

Text: Matthew 5:1-6 NIV

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them. He said:

**³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**

**⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**

**⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.**

The Sermon

The Sermon on the Mount is the announcement of the imminent appearance of the kingdom of God. The 'kingdom' Jesus is announcing and describing is 'not of this world' (John 18) but a new world – a new creation – and until that kingdom/reign comes to final completion (I Cor. 15:24), it will be in conflict with Satan and all his allies.

Those who follow Jesus as His allies, will become enemies of the satanic 'world' that shows itself in the universal culture of alienated humankind and they will experience His kind of opposition and suffering (they will be baptized with his baptism and drink the cup He will drink . . . Matt 20).

Those who experience suffering from the satanic world in Jesus' name are blessed. That kind of blessing comes only to those who are faithful to their Lord. Those who compromise with the satanic world in order to have 'life' lose LIFE.

The Audience

The people present on the mountain are already followers of Jesus and are among the ones who will soon usher in this new Kingdom. In addition to helping them understand this new way, he wants them to be encouraged despite their circumstances, as well as the situations they will soon face as Kingdom people.

Jim McGuiggan writes: Jesus is introducing a new nation into an 'old world.' In [this sermon] Jesus is announcing the arrival of a new world and how the citizens of it will view their place in it. The ethics of the new world are the same as the ethics of the old Mosaic world (Matt 22, Mark 12 and Romans 13:8 ff and Gal. 5) where Paul following Christ calls Christians to 'fulfill the Law.'

They (including himself) are still living under the Law and the Prophets and he assures them that he is not abolishing them, but fulfilling them.

The blessings are a pronouncement of God's blessings on all the people who appear to **not** have God's favor – the poor in spirit, the ones that mourn, the meek, and the ones who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Their response to hearing the message of Jesus is beautifully stated in The Message, Matt.7:28, **"They had never heard teaching like this."** His timing is perfect and his teaching on that day is timely for that audience and is also to be embraced today.

The Place

He chose a place the country, on elevated ground, away from the noise of busyness of the city, away from the temple and synagogue, to where ordinary people – his followers – could hear clearly and feel the peace and intimacy they needed for this message. They were living in troubled times and they would be living their new lives by going against prevailing cultures – both the Jewish culture they are being called from and the larger Roman culture in which they were living.

Having a crowd around Jesus was not unusual.

4²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴ News

about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. ²⁵ Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,^[g] Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them.

Discussion:

- What does the location (mountainside) and Jesus' bodily posture (sat down) suggest to or about his disciples?

He said:

³ **"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Discussion:

- What is the meaning of the word "Blessed?"

Being blessed places one in a position for receiving God's favor, or provisions.

The beginning words of the Beatitudes are not commands, but an offering of blessings, with a promise to be fulfilled in the days to come – "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Discussion:

- What are your thoughts on using the word "happy?"

Amy-Jill Levine states: Preparing the Latin translation of the New Testament in the fourth century, St. Jerome translated the Greek with *beati*, which has the connotation not only of "blessed" but also of "happy" and even "rich."
Sermon on the Mount P. 5

Amy-Jill Levine writes, "**Poor in Spirit**" is in part a synonym for the people who have enough humility that they do not operate from a sense of pride; the poor in spirit are those who recognize that they are both the beneficiaries of the help of others and part of a system in which they are to pay it forward and help whom they can. Sermon on the Mount P. 8

John Stott provides this assessment of what it means to be "**poor in spirit**": To be 'poor in spirit' (v.3) is to acknowledge our spiritual poverty, our bankruptcy before God. The Message of the Sermon on the Mount, P. 39

Discussion:

- **Who are the poor in spirit?**
- **Why is it important to become poor in spirit to inherit the kingdom of heaven?**
- **Would the audience to whom he is speaking understand this concept as spiritual or physical poverty? Why?**
- **What is “the kingdom of heaven”?**
- **How does this blessing and promise fit the concept of building one’s “house on the rock” (7:24)**

Randy Harris states that [**poor in spirit**] refers back to a Hebrew word: the *anawim*. The enemies of Israel took into exile only those who were useful. The ones left behind were not useful. They were the *anawim*. The pathetic. The pitiful. The worthless. It was the first word out of his mouth as he spoke to the people – likely mostly were the *anawim* – and he just offered them the kingdom of heaven. Can you imagine how this made them feel?

Living Jesus, P. 30

From John R. W. Stott’s book regarding the meek: The Greek adjective *praüs* means ‘gentle’, ‘humble’, ‘considerate’, ‘courteous’, and therefore exercising the self-control without which these qualities would be impossible.

To be “**poor in spirit**” is to acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy before God. For we are sinners, under the holy wrath of God, and deserving nothing but his judgment. We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, nothing with which to buy the favor of heaven.

The description: “the poor in spirit”
The promise: “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

**⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**

John Stott states: It is plain from the context that those here promised comfort are not primarily those who mourn the loss of a loved one, but those who mourn the loss of their innocence, their righteousness, their self-respect. It is not the sorrow of bereavement to which Christ refers, but the sorrow of repentance. P. 40, 41

In Charles Talbert commentary on Matthew, he points us to Isaiah 61:2-3 “to comfort all who mourn” [in reference] to the returned exiles who are facing abundant troubles that grieve them greatly. They are those who need God’s help, who lament that the kingdom has not come and God’s will is not yet done (cf. Ezek 9:4). He equates comfort and salvation; he associates comfort with healing (Isa. 57:18); he associates comfort with pardon for iniquity redemption (Isa 4-:1-2); and equates comfort and redemption (Jer. 31: 13). To be comforted, then, is to experience God’s salvation. This is the promise to those grieve over the brokenness of this world. P.76, 77

There are many things to mourn over – disappointment and one’s own sinfulness and that of the world, and the loss of a loved one. Who among mankind cannot quickly identify with that numbness? We long to be comforted in either situation! What an amazing promise.

Discussion:

- **Is there a purpose in the sequence of the description of these first four beatitudes? (poor in spirit -> mourn -> meek -> hunger and thirst for righteousness)**
- **How does it look when one mourns over sinfulness in self and sinfulness in the world?**
- **Which comes more easily?**
- **How have you personally be comforted at the loss of a loved one?**
- **How does this blessing and promise fit the concept of building one’s “house on the rock” (7:24)**

**The description: “those who mourn”
The promise: “they shall be comforted.”**

**⁵Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**

You're blessed when you are content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

Matt. 5:5 MSG

C.S. Lewis: "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less."

Philip Yancey: "The proof of spiritual maturity is not how pure you are but an awareness of your impurity. That very awareness opens the door to grace."

Stott quoting Dr. Lloyd-Jones: 'The man who is truly **meek** is the one who is truly amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do. He points out that it is comparatively easy to be honest with ourselves before God and acknowledge ourselves to be sinners in his sight. [Lloyd Jones] goes on 'but how much more difficult it is to allow other people to say things like that about me! I instinctively resent it. We all of us prefer to condemn ourselves than to allow somebody else to condemn us.' I myself am quite happy to recite the general confession in church and call myself a miserable sinner... let somebody else come up to me after church and call me a miserable sinner and I want to punch him on the nose. In other words, I am not prepared to allow other people to think or speak of me what I have just acknowledge before God that I am.' P. 43

Discussion:

- **Define "humility" and "meekness"**
- **How might a true evaluation of oneself lead to "meekness"**
- **What can having a humble and gentle spirit toward others affect both the giver and receiver?**
- **What is the meaning of the promise, "they will inherit the earth"?**
- **How does this blessing and promise fit the concept of building one's "house on the rock" (7:24)**

From Psalm 37: v.9 "those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land: v 11 "the meek will inherit the land"; v 21 "those the Lord blesses will inherit the land"; v 29 "the righteous will inherit the land."

The description: "the meek"
The promise: "they will inherit the earth."

**⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.**

From John R. W. Stott: "Looking back we can see that the first four beatitudes reveal a spiritual progression of relentless logic. Each step leads to the next and presupposes the one that has gone before. To begin with, we are to be 'poor in spirit', acknowledging our complete and utter bankruptcy before God. Next we are to 'mourn' over the cause of it, our sins, yes, and our sin too – the corruption of our fallen nature, and the reign of sin and death in the world. Thirdly, we are to be 'meek' humble and gentle towards others, allowing our spiritual poverty (admitted and bewailed) to condition our behavior to them as well as to God. And fourthly we are to '**hunger and thirst for righteousness**'. For what is the use of confession and lamenting our sin, of acknowledging the truth about ourselves to both God and men, if we leave it there? Confession of sin must lead to hunger for righteousness." P. 46

Discussion:

- **What has Jesus said so far that might cause his audience (and us) to hunger and thirst after righteousness?**
- **What can one do to cultivate a healthy, hearty spiritual appetite?**
- **Do you believe the promise, 'they will be filled'?**
- **Define "righteousness."**
- **How does this blessing and promise fit the concept of building one's "house on the rock" (7:24)**

**The description: "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"
The promise: "they will be filled."**

Additional discussion questions that might go with several of the lessons:

- **How would the today's world write the beatitudes?**
- **What do we think leads to real God blessedness?**
- **What is the difference between self-pity and grieving over sins?**
- **How did Jesus meet the condition of any of the beatitudes? [grieving over what, being meek, making peace]**
- **What is the difference between hunger which can't be satisfied and that which can? Consider the woman at the well.**
- **Above all else, what do the blessings – in spite of circumstances – tell us about the nature of God? ' As he continues to speak to the crowd, how does he identify the nature of God?**

For Further Reading:

Harris, Randy with Greg Taylor. *Living Jesus: Doing what Jesus Says in the Sermon on the Mount*. Leafwood Publishers, 2012.

Levine, Amy-Jill. *Sermon on the Mount: A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven*. Abingdon Press, 2020.

Stott, John R.W. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, 1978.

Talbert, Charles H. *Commentaries on The New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010.