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THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

A 12-WEEK STUDY



Drew Hunter

 **CROSSWAY®**

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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WEEK 2: THE BEATITUDES

AN INVITATION TO TRUE FLOURISHING

Matthew 5:1–12



The Place of the Passage

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with what we now call the “Beatitudes.” Each of these nine statements of Jesus begins with the Greek word *makarios*. The Latin translation of *makarios* is *beatus*, which means “blessed” or “happy” or “flourishing” and is why we call them the Beatitudes. These statements of blessing highlight the countercultural vision of the good life that Jesus is bringing into the world. With each statement Jesus affirms, celebrates, and encourages the way of true flourishing. These blessings communicate the characteristics of the people of his kingdom. The Beatitudes provide a concise picture of both the blessings Jesus brings with his kingdom and the characteristic qualities of those who receive these blessings.

The Big Picture

Jesus pronounces statements of blessing and affirmation on those who demonstrate the characteristics of the members of his kingdom.

Reflection and Discussion

Carefully and thoughtfully read this introductory section to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:1–12. Then use the provided questions to help you think more deeply about the text. (See *ESV Study Bible* notes on pages 1827–1828; online at www.esv.org.)

Introduction (Matt. 5:1–2)

Matthew 5 transitions us from what Jesus did (Matt. 4:23–25) to what he said: “And he opened his mouth and taught them” (5:2). Before that statement Matthew describes the setting. First, what is significant about the statement that Jesus “went up on the mountain”? (Look to Ex. 3:1–14; 19:1–20:26 for help with the answer.) Second, what is significant about the statement “he sat down”? (Look to Acts 13:14; 16:13; Heb. 1:3; and Rev. 3:21 for help.) Third, what is significant about the statement “his disciples came to him,” and how does this reveal Jesus’ original audience?

The Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–12)

Jesus makes nine statements that describe the “blessed” life. Write down nine words or descriptions of the kind of person or life that your culture generally views as “blessed.” Then write down the nine words or phrases Jesus uses to describe those whom he views as truly blessed. How do your two lists differ?

Jesus says that the “kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3, 10) belongs to those who are poor in spirit. “Kingdom of heaven” refers to the reign of God through Jesus, which has broken into the present age and will come in its fullness after he returns. Jesus is promising that those who fit the descriptions in the Beatitudes are those who truly flourish even now and especially in the consummation of the kingdom to come. How can this comfort those who embrace Jesus’ values while knowing that such values are out of step with their culture?

Jesus pronounces the first blessing over the “poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3). We know what it means to be poor in regard to wealth, but what does it mean to be poor in *spirit*? How can you tell if someone is poor in spirit? Consider Psalm 34:18; 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2.

The second beatitude is Jesus’ promise of comfort for those who mourn (Matt. 5:4). Jesus elsewhere claims to fulfill the expectations of Isaiah 61:1–3, which promises an anointed preacher who brings good news (see Luke 4:17–19). In addition to those who mourn, how does Isaiah 61:1–3 describe the people Jesus came to bless? What similarities do you see between Isaiah 61:1–3 and the Beatitudes?

Jesus says that the meek will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). Meekness means not timidity but humility. It entails intentional lowliness, gentleness, and servant-heartedness. A meek person does not flaunt his or her strength but harnesses it

for good. How would your culture define a successful person? Why would Jesus' promise to the meek surprise many people today?

What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness¹ (Matt. 5:6)? What are two or three things you do, or could start doing, to cultivate this appetite?

The "pure in heart" (v. 8) are those who are "singular"—this is what *pure* means—in their focus and loves. They rightly order their loves and put God above all. What does Jesus promise them, and why is this particularly fitting?

In the Jewish culture of Jesus' day, to call someone a "son" was a statement not only of heritage but of likeness—much like the saying, "like father, like son." Look at Jesus' blessing in verse 9 with this question in mind: What does this imply about what God is like? And then, how does that motivate us to pursue peace with people?

How do verses 10–12 encourage Christians who suffer for identifying with and living for Jesus?

Which beatitude are you most eager to cultivate in your life? What is one practical step you can take, beginning this week, to do so?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

THE SAVIOR WHO BLESSES. Jesus announces a series of statements that describe the good life—the life that truly flourishes. With each statement he affirms that his people will be blessed. This desire to bless comes from his deepest heart. God has, as the Puritan Richard Sibbes put it, a "spreading goodness." In the beginning he created this wonderful world and blessed humanity. Even after sin and death entered the world, he unfolded his plan to make his blessings flow as "far as the curse is found," as the hymnwriter Isaac Watts put it. God's just judgments are certainly seen in the world and will be experienced by unbelievers forever. Nevertheless, Jesus came to take the curse² upon himself at the cross so that he may bless all who will receive him by faith.

COMFORT FOR SINNERS AND SUFFERERS. Jesus blesses those who mourn with the promise of comfort. No matter how deep and piercing our pain, God's comfort penetrates deeper still. All who mourn and look to God will receive the comfort only he can give (2 Cor. 1:3–4). Many of us grieve the loss of family

or dear friends. We mourn our own sin and its damaging effects. We grieve the injustices in this world. Jesus is not aloof from any of this; he sees it all and promises to bring eternal comfort to his people.

Whole-Bible Connections

MOUNTAINS. Mountains are a significant theme in the Bible. Eden was a mountain sanctuary, Noah’s ark rested on a mountain, God covenanted with Israel at Mount Sinai, David reigned from Mount Zion (which was also where Solomon built the temple), and Isaiah promised that God would serve a great eschatological feast for all nations on a mountain (Isa. 25:6). Mountains were also the locations of Jesus’ miraculous feedings, his radiant transfiguration,³ and the great commission to his disciples. Mountains are symbolic connection-places between heaven and earth; they are places of significance and revelation. Jesus highlighted the historical significance of his teaching by ascending a mountain to deliver the message that is the subject of our study.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. The primary blessing Jesus pronounces in the Beatitudes is the “kingdom of heaven.” This term sums up the great blessings Jesus is bringing into the world, all of which lead ultimately to the renewal of the whole creation. We first see God’s kingdom in Eden, where God’s people enjoy his presence and reflect his rule. When sin entered the world, humanity was sent away from his presence and no longer reflected his rule. Yet God began unfolding his plan to reestablish his kingdom in the world. A major step in this plan was Israel’s kingdom and the Davidic king who ruled over them. As historically wonderful as this was, the prophets demonstrated that this was a symbolic picture anticipating a greater kingdom to come; the prophets foresaw a new creation in which God’s people would once again enjoy his presence. Jesus arrived and proclaimed the good news of this kingdom’s arrival in the middle of history. The kingdom has already dawned, and we await its full consummation after Jesus’ return.

COMFORT. God’s message throughout the Bible is that he loves to bring comfort to sinners and sufferers through Jesus. After Israel had rejected God for centuries and then experienced exile from their land, God announced the promise of his coming kingdom with these words: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (Isa. 40:1). God promised to send an anointed preacher to “comfort all who mourn” (Isa. 61:2). Centuries later a man named Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). When Jesus was born, Simeon took him in his arms and rejoiced that the Comforter had come. Jesus bore on the cross the discomfort of eternal judgment, he sent his Spirit as our Comforter, and he will return to end all mourning as God will wipe every tear from our eyes (Rev. 21:4).

Theological Soundings

ESCHATOLOGICAL BLESSING. Jesus promises that his people will (“they shall,” used six times in the Beatitudes) experience the blessings of the kingdom of heaven: inheriting the earth, being comforted, seeing God, and so forth. These are “eschatological,”⁴ or end-time, blessings. They will be experienced fully in the age to come, the time of the resurrection and the new creation. Even though we wait for the consummation of these blessings in the future, we experience them even now since Jesus has launched his kingdom in this present age.

THE PERSECUTED CHURCH. One of the sad realities of this age is that, as Jesus’ people live in faith and love, they will experience persecution (Matt. 5:10–12). Jesus taught Christians to expect the same mistreatment the prophets experienced (v. 12). This means that throughout history we can expect Jesus’ church to be a persecuted church. Jesus never taught his people to expect perfect health, cultural acceptance, or abundant wealth in this age. He taught us to expect persecution, not prosperity. Even so, his persecuted people are truly blessed, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Personal Implications

Reflect on how to apply what you have learned in this text to your everyday life. Make notes below on personal implications of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole. Also write down what you have learned that can lead you to praise God, repent of sin, trust his gracious promises, and live in obedience to him.

1. Gospel Glimpses

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2. Whole-Bible Connections

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3. Theological Soundings

4. Matthew 5:1–12

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment to pray and ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Matthew 5:1–12. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.

Definitions

¹ **Righteousness** – The quality of being morally right and without sin—one of God's distinctive attributes. God imputes righteousness to (i.e., he justifies) those who trust in Jesus Christ. "Unrighteousness" describes the absence of righteousness, or behavior contrary to righteousness.

² **The curse** – In response to Adam and Eve's rebellion against him, God cursed Satan, humanity, and the entire creation (Gen. 3:14–19). Yet God also promised to bring blessing back to the world, thus reversing the curse and restoring the original blessing of creation (Gen. 3:15; 12:1–3). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, these promises have begun to be fulfilled. The ultimate fulfillment of these promises is still to come.

³ **Transfiguration** – An event in the life of Jesus Christ in which his physical appearance was transfigured, that is, changed to reflect his heavenly glory (see Matt. 17:1–13).

⁴ **Eschatology** – Study of the events that will occur in the "last days," including a time of tribulation, the return of Christ, the resurrection of humanity, divine judgment, the casting into hell of unrepentant sinners, and the everlasting joy in the new creation for those who trust Jesus. Eschatology, as the word is now used, also has to do with how these end-time realities have broken into the world with the reign of Christ, which began with his first coming.