

# Sermon on the Mount

Message 2

## *Blessings of Jesus' Kingdom, Part 1*

Matthew 5:3-6

### ***Introduction***

How would you like to own the whole world? Think of it! Well, actually, you can't really think of it! It's too big to comprehend. All the wealth on the whole planet – gold, gems, cars, houses, islands, continents – everything! Bill Gates is a pauper by comparison. You could drive, wear, or eat anything you want, anytime you want it. Life would be one continuous vacation in the Caribbean. Wouldn't it be wonderful to own the whole world? Jesus doesn't exactly promise that, but in the Sermon on the Mount He says you can inherit the earth.

But you know, wealth doesn't make you happy – and often, extremely wealthy people get bored and frustrated. Although they have everything you can buy, they are still left with a deep dissatisfaction – a deep longing that possessions never fill. How about you? Are you fully satisfied? Do you have deep desires that linger even in good times? Even after you get an “A” on your exam, or a 4.0 for the semester, or a great car, or a wonderful girlfriend – isn't there still something missing?

We all long for satisfaction, but we never fully reach it. Everyone pursues the good life, but no one completely finds it. This is the issue Jesus touches as He begins the Sermon on the Mount – for in His Kingdom, all desires are finally met. Not completely in this world, but in the life to come. And *in* this world, we taste the satisfaction that awaits all who belong to Jesus' Kingdom. This is not wishful thinking, but a solid promise, and a true reality. Do you want to really live – live well, live fully, live the best life possible here on earth? Listen to Jesus! He will tell you how in the Sermon on the Mount.

### ***Blessed are Those...***

Last week when we began our study of the Sermon on the Mount we took some time to consider the place of this sermon in the whole book of Matthew. We saw that the Sermon on the Mount, as the first of Jesus' major teachings, lays out Jesus' vision for the Kingdom He will spend His time on earth proclaiming. Tonight we will begin looking at this vision, a little at a time. The first paragraph, verses 3-12, contains what is commonly called the Beatitudes. This English term comes from the Latin of the word which begins each verse, “Beatus”, for “Blessed”. These verses are like parables in that they are short, but packed with content. Today we will look at the first four Beatitudes.

Considering first the Beatitudes as a whole, we observe, first, that they describe the *character* of the people of Jesus' Kingdom. Clearly, they are not commands. There is nothing here for us to go out and do. They are merely descriptive. Thus the method of applying them to ourselves is to ask how much they describe us. The key question all the way through will be, do I look like a member of Jesus' Kingdom? Second, the Beatitudes are for all the disciples of Jesus. They are not just for the super-spiritual, or for a special class of saints. Everyone in Jesus' Kingdom is expected to look like this. Third, we see that *all* the Beatitudes are for all the people. There is nothing here to make us think that we are supposed to pick “your” beatitude, as if one were to specialize in mourning, one in meekness, and another in purity. They are a description of one character from eight aspects. Just as a diamond appears different from different angles, so the character of Christ's Kingdom looks different from different angles, yet is one character. In this regard it is like the *fruit* of the Spirit, which is described as a nine-sided character, but is different from the *gifts* of the Spirit which are not all given to any one of us. Fourth, the sum of all this is that all the citizens of Christ's Kingdom have renewed character, described by the Beatitudes.

The most obvious characteristic of the Beatitudes, in fact the origin of their name, is the opening

word of each, “Blessed.” “Bless” and its related words are seldom used in daily speech today. When was the last time you called someone blessed? The only common use is in saying “Bless you!” after someone sneezes. But Jesus is not responding to eight sneezes as He opens his sermon! One modern version translates this word as “Happy.” This captures part of the meaning of the Beatitudes, but leaves out most of their richness. “Blessed” has two aspects. First, it does mean “joyful,” or “happy.” The idea conveyed here is that God’s people are most fulfilled when they conform to God’s pattern. But “blessed” also means “approved.” This indicates God’s acceptance and delight in those people who conform to this character. These are the people who please Him, and to whom He gives all the riches in Christ.

### ***The Poor in Spirit***

Moving now to the individual Beatitudes, we begin with “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Now, “poor in spirit” is also a term unfamiliar to us. Most people will think this refers to those who are poor *spirits*, people who are depressed, and who make the rest of us depressed. We think of this as a reference to our emotional state. But this is far from the right understanding. This verse is dealing with our *spiritual* condition, not our emotional state. This beatitude is talking about those who are spiritually impoverished, in other words, those who have nothing to offer God. They recognize they are helpless before God and subject to His anger for their sin. These are those who, like the tax collector in Luke 18 (10-14), cry out to God, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

This is better understood by looking at its opposite, the self confident individual. He is the one who trusts his own abilities and accomplishments. He is proud of his spiritual achievements, and is like the Pharisee in Luke 18 (11-12) who said, I am not like other people. I fast, I pay tithes, I avoid fornication, I do not cheat on my Engineering 1 exam, I call home once a week, I go to church most Sundays.... This is the Rich in Spirit. And these *do not* enter the Kingdom. How can this be? How is it that those who do what is right do not enter God’s Kingdom, but the scoundrels do? Does God delight in wickedness, that He should choose the wicked to join Him? No, the problem is that the issue is not in outward acts, but the condition of the heart. Both men were sinners. Neither was perfect. But while the Pharisee was outwardly better, his proud heart kept him from repenting of his sin and turning to Jesus. Meanwhile, the tax collector saw his spiritual poverty and cried out for mercy. Those who are like the tax collector *do* enter the Kingdom.

This is a critical beatitude. All the others hinge on this, for unless you are *in* the Kingdom, it is pointless to discuss how to *behave* in it. This is the heart of the matter. Do you recognize your sin? Do you ask God for mercy? Or do you trust your good life to get you through? When you die and face God, what will you say when He asks you why you should be allowed into heaven? Will you list all the good things you did? How will you respond when He replies with an evil act for every good act? Only those who admit they do not belong, but ask for mercy will be admitted. This beatitude teaches us that only those who recognize their sinfulness and ask for mercy will enter God’s Kingdom. Does this describe you?

### ***Those who Mourn***

The second beatitude, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,” at first glance seems to go in a different direction. Surely this refers simply to our emotions, doesn’t it? What do you think, does God comfort every person who suffers hardship, regardless of the cause of his suffering? What about Goliath’s family and friends? Surely they mourned when David killed him, yet God’s enemies have no reason to expect God to comfort them. What about the Babylonians? They rejoiced when they captured Judah, but then God sent the Persians to destroy them as a punishment for their wickedness. Should God have comforted such wicked people after He punished them? No, the rest of scripture does not fit with a view of this beatitude that has God comforting every mourner. Rather, I take the view of Reverend John Stott, who sees this also as a reference to our spiritual condition. This is not the sorrow of bereavement, but of repentance.

The contrast is with those who are happy – those who are devoted to the pursuit of happiness, the good life, the American dream. Put in modern terms, these are those who are pursuing self-fulfilment. To these God says, “Woe to you who laugh now...” (Luke 6) you may find pleasure temporarily, but you will never find true and eternal happiness. True and eternal happiness, i.e., blessedness, is found by those who are spiritually poor and mourn their sin. They see sin in their own lives, and weep. They see sin in the lives of others, and weep. They see the effects of sin, and weep. These are the ones who will be comforted by God, for they have the heart of God. They see their spiritual poverty and mourn their sin. They repent and come to Christ. These are the ones who enter God’s Kingdom and are comforted.

### ***The Meek***

On an entirely different note, the third beatitude tells us how to inherit the earth. How many of you thought that to enter heaven you had to give up this earth? Not so! It tells us right here that the members of the Kingdom will inherit the earth. There is a problem, though. We inherit the earth by becoming meek. Now who ever heard of a meek person getting ahead? It is common knowledge, acquired when you are about 6 months old, that the way to get what you want is to assert yourself. You must look out for *Number One*, insist on your rights, pursue your dreams, etc. And doesn’t it work? Isn’t *Reader’s Digest* full of stories about people who barged ahead and accomplished great things? There are whole seminars – expensive seminars – on how to get your own way. There are books on how to get a raise, how to manipulate your boss, how to catch a husband or wife. Burger King commands us to “Do It Your Way!” We are constantly bombarded with the message that we must assert ourselves or we will be walked on by the rest of the world.

Cutting right against the grain is Jesus, who says that the meek shall inherit the earth, implying that those who are not meek will not inherit it. Part of our difficulty here is understanding what is meant by “meek.” We tend to think of meek people as spineless, thoughtless, gutless wonders – wimps and sissies who are afraid of everyone else. This is not what Jesus means by meek. Consider this. Moses was one of the most commanding figures of the Old Testament, but he is called the meekest man on the earth. (Num. 12:3) Meekness really means someone who has an accurate view of himself and seeks to help others before himself. Meekness is the quality behind Philippians 2:3-4. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones said it best: “The man who is truly meek is the one who is truly *amazed* that God and man *think* of him as well as they do and *treat* him as well as they do.” A man who is meek is strong enough to let others have their way when there is no moral issue at stake. He puts others first.

These first three Beatitudes might seem to point to a poor self-image: helplessness and poverty, mourning and weeping, giving up our rights, as opposed to self-confidence, happiness, and assertiveness. Do they seem depressing? Is this a recipe for misery? Will they consign us to life-long therapy? No! For they are the entrance to blessedness – to Christ’s Kingdom. One reason we find this so difficult to understand and accept is that we have bought the idea that we need a good self-image, when the Bible actually teaches that good self-image is a big part of our problem. In Philippians 3 Paul relates to us His strong self-image: proper initiation into God’s people (circumcision), belonging to the right nation (Israel), possessing a proper genealogy (a Hebrew); strictly keeping the Law (a Pharisee), zealous (persecuting the church) – perfect in every way! But when Paul saw Christ, what He had to offer, and what he could gain from Christ, he abandoned all claim to his strengths. The characteristics which once contributed to a strong self-image Paul rejected, even considering them a loss, a debt, a liability. He considered his own good deeds like manure. Instead, he focused on Christ and *His* good deeds, particularly His death for our sins.

The problem with self-image is the *self* part. Sin permeates our whole lives and contaminates everything we do. There is no way to escape the deadly effects of sin. Only when we throw out our good

deeds and trust in Christ can we be saved. Instead of bragging about what we did, we brag about what Christ did. Our goal becomes, not to “Be all you can be,” but to be like Christ. We don’t need a good *self*-image, we need a good *Christ*-image. What gives me confidence is not my abilities and accomplishments, but Christ’s abilities and accomplishments. Self-image is deadly, but to become more like Christ is to enter His Kingdom. Then He will use all our abilities and accomplishments to bring glory to Himself.

### ***The Spiritually Hungry***

The fourth beatitude, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled,” is a call to whole-hearted commitment. Its opposite is people who are balanced, who take a little religion in modest doses, but do not let it push out other aspects of life. They find church satisfying when they can make it to the service, and the Bible soothing. Christ was a wonderful person who is the model for how we all ought to treat each other – but there is more to life than religion. Now, this last statement is definitely true, especially if the religion is the safe, soothing experience we have just been describing. The problem with a balanced approach to religion, is that it is unsatisfying. Like the lite beers which are less filling, lite religion does not satisfy. It leaves us with a gnawing hunger in our souls. It is one of those paradoxes that those who pursue satisfaction are never satisfied, but those with a deep hunger and thirst, are. Jesus is describing robust Christianity, a mature approach to God that will not accept childish religion.

Blessed are those who are not satisfied by doing a few good deeds, by treating most people better, by seeing their roommate begin praying, by seeing the crime rate drop ten per cent or drug use decline. For these people this is but the beginning. We long for *all* our deeds to be pure, for *all* men to worship God daily, for all crime to cease and all evil to perish from the earth. Impossible dreams? Am I hallucinating? Does Jesus want *everyone* to go about with hopeless expectations? No, for Jesus promises that those things which you call hopeless expectations *will* come to pass. There *will* come a day when God’s Kingdom will triumph. All sin and misery, all hatred and hostility, all wickedness will pass away, and the unquenchable desire of those who seek righteousness will be fully satisfied. Meanwhile, God gives, in increasing measure, that deep satisfaction we all long for.

How? In the face of hurt, and want; unmet needs and unfulfilled expectations – how can I say that God satisfies? On the authority of His Word. God says it right here. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” *How* God gives us a measure of satisfaction in the midst of profound need is a mystery. What is not a mystery is the truth, the absolute reliability of God’s word. This is the only completely reliable explanation of this mystery. But we can say more. Part of the explanation is that as we adopt, more and more, God’s desires, we get closer to Him – and closeness to God is the secret to the good life. God supremely longs for righteousness, and He is supremely distressed by ungodliness. As we enter into His longings, we become more like Him and we become closer to Him – and there is real peace in God. Finally, I can say God satisfies because I have experienced it. I am here tonight to testify that this Sermon works in my life and in the lives of all the saints who lived by it.

There *will* come a day when God’s Kingdom will triumph. Will you rejoice to see it? Will you be part of the winning side? Can you say you are satisfied in Christ? In the midst of ongoing pain and frustration, are you experiencing the satisfaction of a close relationship with God? You can answer these questions now by asking, “How well do I measure up to the Beatitudes?” Do you see your sin, repent and turn to Jesus? Do you desire righteousness more than self-fulfilment? If so, take heart. The gospel says that your desires will be fulfilled – partly now, and perfectly in eternity.. But if this does not describe you, the gospel calls you to turn now. Turn from the futile pursuit of worldly pleasure and seek Christ. If this is not your heart, ask him to give you the heart of the Kingdom. The only way to enter is in poverty, so all we can do is ask. And Christ promises that He will not turn away any who come to Him.

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