



Lesson 2 – Not What You Were Expecting

Matthew 5:3-12

I once heard a children’s evangelist share a humorous personal illustration. After a meeting where he had preached, he was doing a game or having a giveaway and was swarmed by children. He thought at one point he overheard a mother say to her child, “Be a servant.” Impressed by what he thought was great parenting, he asked the mother when things had cleared out a little, “Excuse me, did you just say to your child back there, ‘Be a servant’?” “Oh no,” she responded, “I told him ‘Be assertive.’”

We live in a world that tells us to be assertive. To demand our rights. To refuse to let others take advantage of us. That we will only be happy if we demand what we want and get it. Jesus begins his greatest sermon with a radically different view. He said that to be blessed, you must be willing to flip the virtues of the world on their head.

What is some of the lingo the world uses to glorify attitudes that are opposite what Jesus here promotes?

How does the world try to make selfishness look virtuous?

What Does It Mean to Be Blessed?

The word “blessed” is a word many of us have heard growing up. Like many Bible words, most people have a general idea what it means, but might struggle to define carefully. It is closely related to an Old Testament idea of being “blessed.”

In the Old Testament, there are actually two words translated “blessed.” One word is *barach*, and it normally has the idea of a good wish toward someone. It can be used of God blessing man (Numbers 6:24), man blessing God (Psalm 103:1-2, 20-22), or man blessing man (Genesis 27:23). This is the more common word, being used 327 times in Old Testament!

But there is another Hebrew word with a different meaning that is also translated “bless.” This is the word *ashre*, and it is this word that Jesus is pointing to. This word has the idea of “how fortunate this person is,” or as we might say, “Man, they’re lucky!” (see, for example, 1 Kings 10:8 or Deuteronomy 33:29). This is a much rarer word, only showing up 44 times in the Old Testament! Most of these are in Psalms and describe those who are fortunate because they have received great spiritual blessings from the Lord (Psalm 1:1; 32:1; 34:8; 119:2; Proverbs 3:13). Often, this word emphasizes the good things that come as a result of our choices in life.

How do we square the role of human responsibility (the choices I make) with the fact that God is a freely giving God when considering our position in life?

Why do you think Christ starts his sermon with these blessings?

The Blessings

We come at last to this section itself. These verses are often called the Beatitudes (the Latin word for “blessings”). Christ uses a very methodical formula. “Blessed are _____; because _____.” In our study, we will take time to meditate on each of these individually.

Poor in spirit... theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is not here saying that being poor is inherently better than being rich. He’s talking about being poor *in spirit*.

What about the typical attitude of a poor person is Christ here commending? What other passages in Scripture teach this same principle?

Mourn... they will be comforted.

People debate whether the mourning here is about sin specifically or just about mourning more generally. Probably both are in mind. Our own sin and the loss we feel in a sin cursed world should impact us deeply, to the point of mourning. When that happens, we will be comforted.

How and when will such people be comforted?

Meek... they shall inherit the earth.

As has often been said, meekness is not weakness. Meekness is strength under control, like a powerful Clydesdale being guided by a 10 year old girl.

The world doesn't think of meek people as the ones who get ahead. How is it that meek people will one day inherit the earth?

Where else do we see this type of thinking in Jesus' ministry?

Hunger and thirst for righteousness... they will be satisfied.

Jesus here leaves us with a challenge: those who want righteousness badly enough will get it. Righteousness here probably refers to both individual righteousness as well as more broadly speaking, that people would live rightly by God's standards?

How would you describe the attitude of the common person to righteousness?

How is it that people will be satisfied?

Merciful... they will receive mercy.

What does it mean to be merciful? Often we think of mercy as being not giving something bad they deserve. That's true, but it also includes a more general idea of compassion. It means having pity towards those who are in need and acting in a way to help them, whether by forgiving their wrongs or giving them help.

Why does God's mercy depend on our mercy?

Pure in heart... they will see God.

Probably referencing Psalm 24:3-4, Jesus states that only those who have a pure heart, with undivided loyalty and obedience to God, will have the privilege of seeing God. This probably points ultimately to Christ's future kingdom, although it is true to a degree today as well.

How will a failure to be pure in heart keep us from ultimately seeing God? How will it keep us from seeing Him now?

Peacemakers... they will be called sons of God.

Those who address conflicts with other and seek to maintain harmonious relationships will be called sons of God. The idea of a son here probably carries the idea of privilege and inheritance as well as relationship. Believers will inherit the earth, belong to the kingdom, and rule it as sons of God.

Why is it hard to be a peacemaker? What are some ways that you can be a peacemaker with the people in your life?

Those who are persecuted... theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This last beatitude is perhaps the most surprising. "Blessed are the persecuted"? Why would any think that a persecuted person is blessed, or fortunate? But Christ doubles down. He repeats this blessing and says that we should be happy and glad about our position in life!

How does the hope of the kingdom of heaven change how a person goes through persecution?

Why do we not typically rejoice when persecuted?

In this introduction to his sermon, Jesus describes the type of people he is looking for, the type of people who are fortunate because they will one day be part of his epic kingdom. And it's not exactly what most people would be expecting.

Describe in a single sentence the kind of person that Jesus says is a blessed person. _____

What does this list of characteristics teach you about the nature of God? _____

All of us should take this list to heart. We should spend time thinking about how we are doing and how we stack up to the high ideal Christ sets before us. We should try to live this way with our families, coworkers, and friends. And we must be realize that while there will be some blessing today, we are living for the coming kingdom!