THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM

A Verse-by-Verse Study of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 and Luke 6



Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.

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TRINFINITY
Enterprises

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Contents

Before You Begin....1

Part One: Before the First Blessing

Chapter 1: The Crowd on the Hillside....5
Chapter 2: What Blessed Means....9
Chapter 3: Matthew and Luke Side by Side....13
Chapter 4: Who These Words Are For....17

Part Two: The Eight Blessings

Chapter 5: The Poor in Spirit....22
Chapter 6: Those Who Mourn....27
Chapter 7: The Meek....31
Chapter 8: Hungry and Thirsty for Righteousness....36
Chapter 9: The Merciful....40
Chapter 10: The Pure in Heart....44
Chapter 11: The Peacemakers....48
Chapter 12: Persecuted for Righteousness....53
Chapter 13: Blessed Are You....58

Part Three: Luke's Blessings and Woes

Chapter 14: Blessed Are You Who Are Poor....64
Chapter 15: Woe to You Who Are Rich....68

Part Four: Living the Blessed Life

Chapter 16: How the Blessings Fit Together....73
Chapter 17: Jesus, the Blessed Man....77
Chapter 18: Salt and Light....81
Chapter 19: The Blessing Still to Come....85
A Closing Word....89
Appendix A: The Beatitudes at a Glance....90
Appendix B: Roots in the Old Testament....91
Appendix C: An Eight-Week Plan for Small Groups....92
Appendix D: Words to Know....93
Appendix E: Sources and Credits....95
About This Book....96
Scripture Index....97

Before You Begin

*Blessed **are** the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.*

Matthew 5:3 (SLB)

Jesus opened His most famous sermon with a list of people nobody envies. The poor. The grieving. The meek. The hungry. The people being lied about and run out of town. And over every one of them He said the same word: blessed.

Translating the Sermon on the Mount for the Steadfast Literal Bible, the Beatitudes hit me differently. Our culture measures success by strength, status and having all the answers, and I chased that kind of success myself. Jesus turns it upside down. God's blessing rests on the humble and the broken. I wrote this study so believers can see what life in Christ's kingdom looks like.

If you had asked the crowd on that hillside to name the blessed people of their day, they would have pointed somewhere else. They would have pointed to the rich man in Jericho, the priest in his fine robes, the Roman officer with power to give orders, or the Pharisee who never seemed to break a rule. Most of us would point the same way today. We call people blessed when they have money, health, a good marriage, and a life that runs smoothly.

Jesus turned that upside down in the first few sentences He spoke. And He did not do it to be clever. He did it because He was telling the truth about how God's kingdom works. The way in is down. The way up is through empty hands. The people who know they have nothing are the people God fills.

That is what this book is about.

What You Will Find in This Book

The Beatitudes are the eight blessings at the start of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3-10, followed by a ninth blessing spoken straight to the disciples in Matthew 5:11-12. Luke gives a shorter version in Luke 6:20-23, with four blessings, and then adds four woes in Luke 6:24-26 that Matthew does not include. This book studies both passages, verse by verse and phrase by phrase.

For each blessing you will find:

1. **The verse itself**, printed in full from the Steadfast Literal Bible.
2. **A word study** in a gray box, explaining the key Greek word Jesus used, with its Strong's number so you can look it up yourself.
3. **Roots in the Old Testament.** Almost every Beatitude echoes something God had already said through Moses, David, or the prophets. Jesus was not inventing a new religion. He was showing what the old promises had been pointing to all along.
4. **What it does not mean.** Several of the Beatitudes are easy to twist. Poor in spirit does not mean low self-esteem. Meek does not mean weak. Peacemaker does not mean peace at any price. I take time to clear those up.

5. **Jesus Himself.** Every Beatitude describes Jesus before it describes anyone else. He is the one Man who lived all of them perfectly.
6. **Living it out**, in plain, practical terms, followed by **Study Questions** and a short prayer.

How the Book Is Laid Out

Part One: Before the First Blessing sets the scene. Who was listening? What does "blessed" really mean? How do Matthew's and Luke's accounts fit together? And who are these words for: the church today, the future kingdom, or both?

Part Two: The Eight Blessings gives one chapter to each Beatitude in Matthew 5:3-10, and a ninth chapter to the personal blessing of Matthew 5:11-12.

Part Three: Luke's Blessings and Woes looks at Luke 6:20-26, where Jesus speaks to "you" from the start, and where every blessing has a matching warning.

Part Four: Living the Blessed Life steps back and looks at the whole picture. How do the Beatitudes fit together? How did Jesus live them? What do they produce in a person, according to the salt and light verses that follow? And what does the future hold for the people Jesus called blessed?

At the back you will find the Beatitudes at a glance in one table, a table of their roots in the Old Testament, an eight-week plan for small groups, a list of words to know, a list of sources, and an index of every Bible verse cited, with page numbers.

How This Book Fits with My Matthew Study

If you have worked through my Matthew Bible Study, you have already met the Beatitudes in its chapter on Matthew 5. That study gives them a few paragraphs each, because it has twenty-eight chapters of Matthew to cover. This book slows down and gives each one a full chapter. What I teach here agrees with what I wrote there. The Sermon on the Mount is not a ladder we climb to earn our way into heaven. It describes the character of the people who belong to the King, and it shows every one of us how badly we need a Savior.

A Few Notes Before We Start

Scripture quotations in this book come from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). Words set in bold italics inside a quotation are words added in English to make the sentence read clearly. You will notice that the SLB says "the kingdom of the heavens" in Matthew, where many Bibles say "the kingdom of heaven." The Greek word is plural, and the SLB keeps it that way. It means the same kingdom Luke calls "the kingdom of God."

When I don't quote a passage, I give the reference so you can read it for yourself, and I hope you will. Don't take my word for anything in this book. Open your Bible and check it, the way the Bereans did in Acts 17:11.

I capitalize the pronouns that refer to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (He, Him, His, You, Your, Me, My) as a sign of reverence. Inside a Scripture quotation, I leave the capitals exactly as the translation prints them.

The Greek words in the word study boxes are written in English letters so anyone can sound them out. The Strong's numbers (such as G3107) come from James Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, which numbers every Hebrew and Greek word in the Bible. Many free Bible websites and apps let you look up a word by its Strong's number.

Last, this book is meant to be read slowly. The Beatitudes are short, but they are not light. Read one chapter, then go back and read the verse again before you move on. Let it search you. That is what Jesus meant it to do.

Part One: Before the First Blessing

Chapter 1: The Crowd on the Hillside

> *And having seen the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and when He had sat down, His disciples came to Him. And having opened His mouth, He was teaching them, saying*
>
> Matthew 5:1-2 (SLB)

Before we look at a single blessing, we need to know where Jesus was, who was listening, and what had just happened. The Beatitudes did not drop out of the sky as a list of nice sayings. They were spoken to real people on a real hillside at a particular moment in the ministry of Jesus. Knowing that moment helps us hear them the way the first listeners did.

When I preached and led Bible studies, I loved showing how Matthew connects Jesus on the mountain to Moses on Sinai. Moses brought the law down, God's standard none of us could keep. Jesus went up the mountain as the Son of God who would fulfill it for us. Seeing Jesus as greater than Moses changes how we read every Beatitude.

What Had Just Happened

Matthew 4 ends with a summary of the first months of Jesus' work in Galilee.

> *And Jesus was going around all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. And the report of Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, gripped by various diseases and torments, and those being demonized, and those being epileptic, and paralytics; and He healed them. And great crowds followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and beyond the Jordan.* (Matthew 4:23-25)

Picture who was in that crowd. The sick and their families. People in constant pain. People tormented by demons. People who could not walk and had to be carried by their friends. These were not the comfortable people of Galilee. They were the desperate ones, and they had come because they heard that Jesus could help them.

Jesus had also been preaching a short, sharp message: "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matthew 4:17). The King had come. Now the obvious question was, what does His kingdom look like, and who gets in?

The Sermon on the Mount answers that question. And Jesus starts His answer with the Beatitudes.

He Went Up on the Mountain

Matthew tells us that Jesus saw the crowds and went up on the mountain. Matthew does not name the mountain. Since at least the 300s, Christians have remembered the hills above the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, between Capernaum and Tabgha, as the place where it happened.

Outside the Bible: The Mount of Beatitudes (*Background*)

Christian pilgrims have marked this general area since at least the fourth century. A passage credited to the pilgrim Egeria, who traveled to the Holy Land about A.D. 381, describes a mountain near the place where the loaves and fish were remembered, with a cave where she was told "the Savior climbed and spoke the Beatitudes." The ruins of a small church from the late 300s sit on the lower slope of the hill.

The church visitors see today was built from 1936 to 1938, designed by the Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi. It has eight sides, one for each of the eight Beatitudes.

Nobody can prove this is the exact spot. What we can say is that the hill fits the Bible's description. It rises close to Capernaum, where Jesus lived during His Galilee ministry, and its slopes form a natural sitting area above the lake. Oddly enough, the hilltop is still below sea level, because the Sea of Galilee itself lies about 700 feet below sea level.

The setting matters more than the exact spot. Matthew is a Gospel written with the Old Testament in mind, and he wants his Jewish readers to notice something. The last time God gave His people His law, Moses went up a mountain to receive it (Exodus 19:3, 20). Now Jesus goes up a mountain and sits down to teach what life in God's kingdom looks like. Moses brought down the words of God. Jesus speaks them on His own authority. At the end of the sermon the crowds noticed the difference.

> *And it came about, when Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were astonished at His teaching; for He was teaching them as **one** having authority, and not as the scribes.*
> (Matthew 7:28-29)

He Sat Down and Opened His Mouth

Matthew says that Jesus sat down, and His disciples came to Him. In those days a teacher sat to teach, and his students gathered around him. Jesus did the same in the synagogue at Nazareth. He stood to read the scroll, and then He sat down to teach (Luke 4:16-20). When Jesus sat down on that hillside, everyone knew class was in session.

Then Matthew adds a phrase that sounds a little old-fashioned to our ears: "having opened His mouth, He was teaching them." That is a Bible way of saying that what follows is weighty and important. It is the same kind of phrase used for solemn speech elsewhere in Scripture, like Job 3:1 and Acts 8:35. Matthew is telling us to sit up and listen.

Notice too the tense of the verb. He "was teaching" them. This was not a quick word in passing. It was a long, deliberate lesson.

Who Was Listening?

Matthew says Jesus taught "them," and the nearest "them" is His disciples. But the crowds were there too, and they heard every word (Matthew 7:28). So the sermon has two audiences.

The disciples were the inner circle. Some, like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, had already left their nets to follow Him (Matthew 4:18-22). The sermon describes the kind of people they were being made into.

The crowds were the curious, the needy, and the undecided. For them the sermon was an invitation and a warning. It showed them what the kingdom is like, and it ended with a call to decide. Will you build your house on the rock or on the sand (Matthew 7:24-27)?

That means the Beatitudes speak to two kinds of readers today. If you already belong to Jesus, they describe who He is making you to be. If you are not sure where you stand with God, they show you the door, and the door is lower than you might think. The very first blessing is for people who know they have nothing to bring.

Why Jesus Started Here

Jesus could have started His sermon anywhere. He could have started with the Ten Commandments, or with a call to obey, or with a list of rules. Instead He started with blessing.

That is the way God has always worked. In Genesis 12:2-3 God called Abram and promised, "I will bless you," before He asked anything of him. At Sinai, God reminded Israel that He had carried them out of Egypt on the wings of eagles before He gave them a single commandment (Exodus 19:4-6). God's grace always comes first. Our obedience follows as a response.

The Sermon on the Mount follows the same order. Before Jesus says a word about anger, lust, prayer, money, or worry, He announces God's favor on a certain kind of person. The commands that come later in Matthew 5 to 7 are not the way to earn that blessing. They describe how blessed people live.

A Sermon That Is Hard on Purpose

Let's be honest. The Sermon on the Mount is the hardest sermon ever preached. Before it is over, Jesus will tell His listeners that anger is murder in the heart, that a lustful look is adultery, that they should love their enemies, and that they must be perfect, as their Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 44, 48).

Nobody listening that day could keep that standard, and neither can we. That is part of the point. The sermon begins with "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and a person who reads the whole sermon honestly ends up exactly there, poor in spirit, with nothing to offer God but his need. The Beatitudes are the front door, and the rest of the sermon keeps sending us back to it.

Living It Out

Before you go on to the next chapter, do what the disciples did. Come to Jesus and sit at His feet. Read Matthew 5 to 7 in one sitting. It takes about fifteen minutes. Don't stop to study it yet. Just listen to the whole thing the way the crowd heard it, and notice how you react. Where do you feel comforted? Where do you feel uneasy? Where do you feel that the standard is impossible? Keep those reactions in mind. The Beatitudes will speak to every one of them.

Study Questions

1. Read Matthew 4:23-25. What kinds of people were in the crowd that followed Jesus? Why might the Beatitudes have sounded so surprising to them?
2. Why do you think Matthew wants us to think of Moses on Mount Sinai when Jesus goes up the mountain? How is Jesus like Moses, and how is He greater?
3. The sermon had two audiences, the disciples and the crowds. Which one do you identify with right now, and why?
4. In Genesis 12 and Exodus 19, God blessed His people before He gave them commands. Why does that order matter for how we read the Sermon on the Mount?
5. After reading Matthew 5 to 7 in one sitting, which part of the sermon made you most uncomfortable? Why?

> *Lord Jesus, I want to sit at Your feet the way Your disciples did on that hillside. Open my ears to hear what You say, even when it is hard. Show me the kind of person You are making me to be, and when I see how far short I fall, keep me coming back to You. Amen.*

Chapter 2: What Blessed Means

> *LORD of armies, how blessed **is the** man who trusts in You!*
>
> Psalm 84:12 (SLB)

Every one of the Beatitudes starts with the same word. If we get that word wrong, we will get all of them wrong. So before we look at the poor in spirit or the meek, we need to slow down and ask what Jesus meant when He said "blessed."

Not a Mood

Some Bible versions translate the word as "happy." I understand why. In everyday English, "blessed" can sound stiff and churchy, and translators want readers to feel the joy in the word. But "happy" has a problem. In our language, happiness is mostly a feeling, and feelings come and go. You can be happy at breakfast and miserable by lunch.

The blessing Jesus describes does not come and go with your mood. It is a settled condition. It is the state of a person God has looked on with favor. You can be blessed in this sense while you are grieving, while you are hungry, and while people are lying about you. In fact, Jesus says you are blessed in exactly those situations.

That is why the Beatitudes sound so strange at first. "Happy are those who mourn" sounds like nonsense. "Blessed are those who mourn" is a different statement. It says that the mourner, who does not feel happy at all, is nonetheless in a good place, because God is about to comfort him.

Word Study: Blessed

makarios (mah-KAR-ee-oss), Strong's G3107. In ordinary Greek this word described a person who was fortunate or well off. The old Greek poets used it of the gods, who lived free of the troubles that plague human beings. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament that the first Christians used, makarios translates the Hebrew word **esher** (Strong's H835), which opens many psalms with "How blessed is the man." The Latin Bible translated makarios as *beati*, and our word "beatitude" comes from that Latin root. A beatitude is simply a "blessed" saying.

How Blessed Is the Man

Jesus did not invent this kind of saying. His listeners had been singing them all their lives. The book of Psalms opens with one.

> *How blessed **is** the man who has not walked in the counsel of **the** wicked, and in the way of sinners has not stood, and in the seat of mockers has not sat! But rather his delight **is** in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates by day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, which gives its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and all that he does prospers.* (Psalm 1:1-3)

Notice that the SLB says “How blessed.” The Hebrew word is really an exclamation. It is almost like saying, “Oh, the blessedness of the man who...!” It is a cry of congratulations. It points at a person and says, “Look how well off he is!”

The Psalms are full of these. “How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” (Psalm 2:12). “How blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD” (Psalm 33:12). “How blessed is the man who fears the LORD” (Psalm 112:1). And one of them sounds a lot like the Beatitudes, because it blesses the forgiven sinner.

> *How blessed **is** he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed **is** the man to whom the LORD does not count iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!* (Psalm 32:1-2)

So when Jesus stood on that hillside and began, “Blessed are...,” the crowd knew what kind of speech was coming. It was the language of the Psalms, the language of God declaring who is truly well off. What they did not expect was the list of people He was about to name.

Two Different Hebrew Words

It helps to know that the Old Testament uses two different words that English Bibles translate “bless.”

The first is **barak** (Strong’s H1288). This is the word for giving a blessing, often by speaking it. God blesses Abram in Genesis 12:2: “I will bless you.” The priests were to bless Israel with words like these:

> *“May the LORD bless you, and may He keep you; may the LORD make His face shine toward you, and may He be gracious to you; may the LORD lift up His face toward you, and may He set peace for you.”’* (Numbers 6:24-26)

The second word is **esher**, the one we just met in the Psalms. It does not describe someone giving a blessing. It describes the condition of the person who is blessed. Barak is the act. Esher is the result.

The Beatitudes use the second kind of language. Jesus is not saying, “May the poor in spirit be blessed.” He is not making a wish. He is making an announcement. He is telling us what is already true about these people from God’s point of view.

Blessed Because of God, Not Because of Circumstances

Where does this blessing come from? Not from the circumstances themselves. Being poor is not a blessing in itself. Mourning is not pleasant. Persecution hurts. Jesus is not telling us to pretend that pain is pleasure.

Look closely at the structure of each Beatitude. Every one of them has two halves. The first half names a kind of person. The second half, starting with “for,” gives the reason they are blessed.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, **for** theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.
- Blessed are those who mourn, **for** they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, **for** they will inherit the earth.

The blessing is in the second half. The poor in spirit are blessed because God gives them the kingdom. The mourners are blessed because God will comfort them. The reason is always something God does or gives.

The Beatitudes are not really about how good these people are. They are about how good God is to people like this.

Notice something else. Many of the promises are in the future tense: “they will be comforted,” “they will inherit,” “they will be filled,” “they will see God.” The first and eighth are in the present tense: “theirs is the kingdom.” The blessing has already begun, but its fullness is still ahead. We will come back to that in the last chapter of this book.

What the World Calls Blessed

Every culture has its own beatitudes, even if nobody writes them down. Ours might go something like this.

- Blessed are the confident, for they will get ahead.
- Blessed are the entertained, for they will never be bored.
- Blessed are the strong, for nobody will push them around.
- Blessed are the comfortable, for they have everything they need.
- Blessed are the popular, for everyone speaks well of them.

Solomon tried most of those. He wrote in Ecclesiastes that he did not hold back from his heart any pleasure. When he looked back on it all, he said, “everything was futility and a chasing of wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

Jesus’ list is almost the exact opposite of the world’s list. And in Luke’s account, as we will see, Jesus actually pronounces woe on the very people the world calls blessed: the rich, the well fed, the ones laughing now, and the ones everyone speaks well of (Luke 6:24-26).

Blessed Throughout the New Testament

The Beatitudes are the most famous blessings in the New Testament, but they are not the only ones. Jesus told a woman who blessed His mother, “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28). He told Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed” (John 20:29). And the book of Revelation contains seven blessings of its own, starting with “Blessed is the one who reads” (Revelation 1:3) and including “Blessed are those who have been called to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9).

Every one of those blessings has the same shape as the Beatitudes. It names a kind of person who looks ordinary or even pitiful, and it declares that God is on their side.

Living It Out

Here is a simple exercise for this week. Take a sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle. On the left side, write down what you would honestly call a blessed life, the things you find yourself wanting most. Don’t write the Sunday school answer. Write the real one. On the right side, write out Matthew 5:3-10.

Then compare the two columns. Where do they line up? Where do they pull in opposite directions? Most of us will find that our left column looks a lot more like the world's list than like Jesus' list. That is not a reason for despair. It is the starting point for the rest of this book.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between being happy and being blessed in the sense Jesus means?
2. Read Psalm 1 and Psalm 32:1-2. What kind of person do these psalms call blessed? How do they prepare us for the Beatitudes?
3. Every Beatitude gives a reason, starting with "for." Why does it matter that the reason is always something God does or gives?
4. Write your own version of the world's beatitudes. Which of them pulls on you the most?
5. Read Luke 11:27-28 and John 20:29. What do those blessings have in common with the Beatitudes?

> *Father, I confess that I often want the kind of blessing the world offers more than the kind You give. Teach me to see people, and myself, the way You see them. Help me to believe that the person You call blessed truly is well off, even when it does not look that way. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Chapter 3: Matthew and Luke Side by Side

> *And He, having lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, was saying, "Blessed **are** the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."*
>
> Luke 6:20 (SLB)

Matthew is not the only Gospel writer who records the Beatitudes. Luke gives us a shorter set in Luke 6, and he follows them with something Matthew leaves out: four woes. If you read the two passages side by side, you will notice both how much they share and how differently they sound. This chapter lays them next to each other and asks what we should make of the differences.

The Two Passages

Here is Luke's account, starting with the setting.

> *And having come down with them, He stood on a level place, and a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled by unclean spirits; and they were being healed. And all the crowd was seeking to touch Him, because power was going out from Him and was healing all. And He, having lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, was saying, "Blessed **are** the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed **are** those who hunger now, for you will be filled. Blessed **are** those who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and insult **you** and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for look, your reward **is** great in heaven; for according to these things their fathers were doing to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have your comfort in full. Woe to you who have been filled, for you will hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for according to these things their fathers were doing to the false prophets."* (Luke 6:17-26)

And here, for comparison, is Matthew's.

> *Blessed **are** the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed **are** those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed **are** the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed **are** those who hunger and thirst **for** righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed **are** the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed **are** the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed **are** the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed **are** those who have been persecuted on account of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed are you when they insult you, and persecute **you**, and say every evil word against you, lying, on account of Me. Rejoice and exult, for your reward **is** great in the heavens; for thus they persecuted the prophets who **were** before you.* (Matthew 5:3-12)

What They Share

The two passages have a great deal in common.

- Both come near the start of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, after large crowds have gathered from all over the region because of His healings.
- Both open a longer sermon that Jesus speaks to His disciples while the crowds listen.
- Both begin with the poor and the kingdom, and both include the hungry and those who grieve.
- Both end the blessings with persecution "on account of" Jesus, and both promise a great reward in heaven, comparing the disciples to the persecuted prophets.
- Both sermons then go on to teach love for enemies, the golden rule, not judging others, a tree known by its fruit, and the two builders, one on the rock and one on sand (compare Luke 6:27-49 with Matthew 5 to 7).

Where They Differ

The differences are just as easy to see.

Matthew 5:3-12	**Luke 6:20-26**
Spoken on "the mountain" (Matthew 5:1)	Spoken on "a level place" after coming down (Luke 6:17)
Eight blessings in the third person ("theirs," "they"), then a ninth to "you"	Four blessings, all in the second person ("yours," "you")
"The poor in spirit"	"The poor"
"Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"	"Those who hunger now"
"Those who mourn"	"Those who weep now," who "will laugh"
Includes the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers	Does not include them
No woes in this passage	Four woes: the rich, the full, those laughing now, those everyone speaks well of
"The kingdom of the heavens"	"The kingdom of God"
The sermon runs three chapters (Matthew 5 to 7)	The sermon runs about thirty verses (Luke 6:20-49)

One Sermon or Two?

So were these two different sermons, or one sermon reported two ways? Good Bible teachers have taken both views.

Some hold that it is the same sermon. The order, the audience, the opening, the main teachings, and the ending are so close that it is hard to believe they are unrelated. On this view, the "level place" of Luke 6:17 could be a flat area partway up the hillside, where a crowd could gather. Luke tells us that Jesus first went up the mountain to pray all night and choose the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-16), then came down to that level place to teach. Matthew simply says He taught on the mountain. Both could be describing the same hill from different angles. Matthew, writing for Jewish readers, gives a fuller report. Luke, writing to a man named Theophilus (Luke 1:3), most likely a Gentile, gives a shorter one and leaves out material that mainly concerned Jewish questions about the Law, such as Matthew 5:17-48.

Others hold that these were two different sermons. Jesus spent about three years preaching from town to town. He said Himself, "To the other cities also I must announce the kingdom of God as good news" (Luke 4:43). Any preacher who travels like that repeats his main themes, often in slightly different words. We know Jesus did this with other teaching. Compare the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, given

in the Sermon on the Mount, with Luke 11:1-4, where Jesus teaches it again when a disciple asks, “Lord, teach us to pray.” On this view, Matthew and Luke each report a different occasion when Jesus preached on the same theme.

Here is where I land. I think either view is reasonable, and I hold it loosely. What I will not do is accept the claim, which you will sometimes hear, that the differences prove the Gospel writers made mistakes or invented the material. Two honest witnesses often report the same event in different words and pick out different details. Two reports of the same preacher on different days will naturally overlap. Either way, both accounts are the inspired Word of God, and both are true.

Why the Differences Help Us

Whether there was one sermon or two, the differences are not a problem to solve. They are a gift. Each account brings out something the other might let us miss.

Matthew’s “poor in spirit” makes sure we understand that Jesus is talking about the condition of the heart. It is possible to be financially poor and still proud, and it is possible to have money and still come to God as a beggar. Matthew’s “hunger and thirst for righteousness” makes clear what kind of hunger Jesus means.

Luke’s version keeps us from spiritualizing the Beatitudes until they mean nothing. Jesus really did care about people who were physically poor and physically hungry. His mother sang about this before He was born: “Those who hunger He has filled with good things, and those who are rich He has sent away empty” (Luke 1:53). Luke’s “now,” repeated twice, also reminds us that the present situation is not the final one. The hungry are hungry now. The laughing are laughing now. God will turn both around.

And Luke’s woes force us to look at the other side. Matthew shows us the people God favors. Luke also shows us the people who are in danger. We will give both of those their own chapters in Part Three.

Living It Out

The Gospels give us four witnesses to the life of Jesus, not one. That is God’s kindness. When you study a passage that appears in more than one Gospel, get in the habit of reading the parallel account too. Many Bibles list the parallel passages in the margin or in the section headings. Ask three questions: What is the same? What is different? What does each writer help me see that the other doesn’t?

Study Questions

1. Read Luke 6:12-20. What did Jesus do the night before He gave this sermon? Why might that matter?
2. Which differences between Matthew 5 and Luke 6 stand out to you the most?
3. What are the strongest reasons for thinking Matthew and Luke describe the same sermon? What are the strongest reasons for thinking they describe two sermons?
4. How does Matthew’s “poor in spirit” help us read Luke’s “poor”? How does Luke’s “poor” keep us honest when we read Matthew?
5. Why should differences between two Gospel accounts not shake our confidence in the Bible?

Lord, thank You for giving us more than one witness to the life and words of Jesus. Help me to read Your Word carefully and humbly, and to let every part of it shape me. Where I have tried to make Your words safer and easier than You meant them, correct me. Amen.

Chapter 4: Who These Words Are For

> *Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.*
>
> Matthew 7:24 (SLB)

Before we study the blessings one at a time, we need to settle a question that shapes how we read all of them. Who is the Sermon on the Mount for, and what is it meant to do? Christians have given several answers over the centuries. Some of them are helpful, and one of them is dangerous. Let's look at each.

Answer One: A Way to Earn Heaven

Many people, including plenty of church members, think the Sermon on the Mount is a list of things to do so that God will accept you. Be humble, be merciful, be pure, make peace, and you will get into the kingdom.

This is the dangerous answer, and the Bible rules it out. Paul says it plainly: "by works of law no flesh will be justified before Him" (Romans 3:20). We are saved "not by works which we did in righteousness, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5).

The Beatitudes themselves rule it out too. The very first one blesses the poor in spirit, the people who know they have nothing to offer God. You cannot earn a kingdom that is given only to people who admit they cannot earn it. And by the end of Matthew 5, Jesus has set the bar at "you shall be perfect, just as your Father who is in the heavens is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). If the sermon were a ladder to heaven, nobody would ever reach the top.

Answer Two: A Mirror That Shows Our Need

A second answer says that the sermon is meant to show us our sin, so that we will run to Christ for mercy. Paul says the law worked that way: "the law has become our child-guardian to Christ, so that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).

There is real truth here. The Sermon on the Mount does show us our need. When Jesus says that anger is murder in the heart and lust is adultery of the heart (Matthew 5:21-28), every honest reader is guilty. Reading the sermon should drive us to our knees.

But this cannot be the whole answer. Jesus did not preach this sermon only to make people feel guilty. He ended it by saying that the wise man is the one who hears these words "and does them" (Matthew 7:24). He expected His followers to live this way.

Answer Three: The Character of Kingdom Citizens Now

A third answer, and the one most Bible teachers hold, is that the Sermon on the Mount describes the character and conduct of people who already belong to Jesus. It is not the way into the kingdom. It is the way of life inside the kingdom.

On this view, the Beatitudes are not eight different kinds of people. They are eight sides of one kind of person, the person God has made new. When God saves someone, He does not leave them as they were. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). God promised through Ezekiel that He would give His people a new heart and put His Spirit within them, and "bring about that you walk in My statutes" (Ezekiel 36:26-27). The Beatitudes describe what that new heart looks like.

This is how I read the Sermon on the Mount, and it is how I taught it in my Matthew Bible Study. Jesus told His apostles to make disciples of all nations, "teaching them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). That surely includes this sermon, His longest block of teaching. It is for believers today.

Answer Four: The Rules of the Coming Kingdom

A fourth answer comes from some dispensational Bible teachers, who share my belief that Jesus will return before the tribulation and will later reign on the earth for a thousand years. Some of them have taught that the Sermon on the Mount mainly describes life in that future kingdom on earth, when the King is physically present. They point out that Jesus was offering the kingdom to Israel when He preached it (Matthew 4:17; 10:5-7), and that some promises in the sermon, like "the meek will inherit the earth," will only be completely fulfilled then.

There is something important in this view too. The Beatitudes do look ahead to the coming kingdom. "They will inherit the earth." "They will see God." Those promises have not yet been fully kept, and they will be kept when Jesus returns. We will look at that in the last chapter.

But I don't believe the sermon is only for the future. Its commands about prayer, fasting, giving, worry, and loving our enemies fit a world where there are still enemies, persecution, and trouble. In the coming kingdom, nobody will need to be told to rejoice when they are persecuted. The apostles who heard this sermon went on to live it out in their own lives, and the letters of the New Testament repeat its teaching for the church again and again. Peter echoes it almost word for word: "But even if you should suffer because of righteousness, you are blessed" (1 Peter 3:14).

Putting It Together

So here is how I would put it all together.

1. The Sermon on the Mount is **not a way to earn salvation.** Nobody gets into the kingdom by trying hard to be meek or pure.
2. It **shows us our need**, and it keeps doing that for as long as we read it. Every Christian who reads it honestly ends up poor in spirit again.

3. It **describes who Jesus makes His people to be**, and it tells us how to live as His people right now, by His Spirit's power.
4. It **looks forward to the coming kingdom**, when every promise in it will be fully kept and the King will reign on the earth.

Notice what I kept and what I set aside. The first answer is false, and I reject it. The second and third are both true, and they work together. The fourth is partly true: the sermon does look ahead to the coming kingdom, but it is not only for then. Many careful readers of the sermon end up somewhere close to this.

Already and Not Yet

You will often hear Bible teachers describe the kingdom of God as "already" and "not yet." That phrase is not in the Bible, but it is a useful summary of what the Bible teaches.

The kingdom is already here in one sense. God "rescued us out of the authority of the darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13). Anyone who trusts Christ belongs to His kingdom today.

But the kingdom is not yet here in its fullness. Jesus taught us to pray, "let Your kingdom come; let Your will come about, as in heaven, also on the earth" (Matthew 6:10). We still pray that prayer because the answer has not fully arrived. The day will come when the King says, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

The Beatitudes live right on that line. "Theirs is the kingdom," present tense. "They will be comforted," future tense. The blessed person has already received the kingdom and is still waiting for it to come in full. That tension will show up in every chapter that follows.

Living It Out

Here is a test of how you have been reading the Sermon on the Mount. When you read "Blessed are the merciful," is your first thought, "I need to be more merciful so that God will accept me"? Or is it, "God has been merciful to me, so I want to be like Him"? The words are the same, but the motive is completely different. The first way leads either to pride or to despair. The second leads to gratitude, and gratitude is what makes a Christian willing to change.

Study Questions

1. Why is it dangerous to treat the Sermon on the Mount as a list of things to do to earn God's acceptance?
2. Read Matthew 5:21-28. How does this passage show us our need for a Savior?
3. What does it mean that the Beatitudes describe "one kind of person" rather than eight kinds?
4. Which promises in the Beatitudes do you think have not yet been fully kept? When will they be?
5. Think about the difference between "I must be merciful so God will accept me" and "God has been merciful to me, so I want to be like Him." Which way have you tended to think?

Lord Jesus, thank You that I do not have to climb my way into Your kingdom. You brought me in by grace. Now make me into the kind of person Your sermon describes, not so that You will love me, but because You already do. And keep my eyes on the day when Your kingdom comes in full. Amen.

Part Two: The Eight Blessings

Chapter 5: The Poor in Spirit

> *Blessed **are** the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.*
>
> Matthew 5:3 (SLB)

The first Beatitude is the door to all the others. Every other blessing grows out of this one. A person who is not poor in spirit will never mourn over sin, never be meek, never hunger for righteousness. So if we want to understand the Beatitudes, we have to start here and take our time.

The Beggar's Word

Greek had two common words for a poor person. One described a man who had to work for a living and had little to spare. The other described a man who had nothing at all, who had to beg to stay alive. Jesus used the second one.

Word Study: Poor

ptochos (ptoh-KHOSS), Strong's G4434. The word comes from a root meaning to crouch or cower, and it describes a beggar, someone completely dependent on others. Luke uses the same word for Lazarus, the beggar who lay at the rich man's gate "covered with sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs" (Luke 16:20-21). Jesus also used it in the synagogue at Nazareth when He read that the Lord had anointed Him "to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18).

So "poor in spirit" does not mean "a little short." It means spiritually bankrupt. It describes a person who looks at his own soul, sees nothing there that could buy God's favor, and comes to God with empty hands, like a beggar holding out a cup.

Roots in the Old Testament

Jesus did not invent this idea. The Old Testament is full of it. The prophets and psalmists talk again and again about the humble, the lowly, and the afflicted, the people who know they cannot stand on their own and so they lean on God.

> *For thus says the High and Lifted-Up One, who dwells forever, and holy **is** His name: **In** a high and holy **place** I dwell, and with the contrite and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the crushed.* (Isaiah 57:15)

Think about how astonishing that verse is. God lives in two places. He lives "in a high and holy place," and He lives "with the contrite and lowly of spirit." He passes over the proud and the impressive and makes His home with the crushed. Isaiah says the same thing near the end of his book.

> *And all these **things** My hand has made, and all these **things** came to be, declares the LORD. And to this **one** I will look: to the afflicted and stricken of spirit, and trembling at My word.*
> (Isaiah 66:2)

David knew this from experience. After his sin with Bathsheba, he did not try to make it up to God with a big offering. He wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and crushed heart, God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). And in another psalm, “The LORD is near to the broken of heart, and the crushed of spirit He saves” (Psalm 34:18).

When Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” the people who knew their Bibles would have heard all of that in the background.

What It Does Not Mean

“Poor in spirit” is easy to misunderstand. Let me clear away a few wrong ideas.

It does not mean low self-esteem. Being poor in spirit is not the same as feeling bad about yourself, putting yourself down, or thinking you are worthless. A person can hate himself and still be full of pride. Being poor in spirit is not about how you feel about yourself. It is about seeing yourself truthfully before God.

It does not mean being financially poor. Jesus certainly cared about the poor, and Luke’s version keeps that in front of us. But money is not the point of Matthew’s wording. There are poor people who are proud and rich people who are humble before God. Abraham was rich, and he believed God and walked with Him.

It does not mean being timid or spineless. Some of the boldest people in the Bible were poor in spirit. Paul stood before kings and governors without flinching, and he also called himself the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Being bankrupt before God is what frees a person to be bold before men.

It does not mean having a weak faith. The poor in spirit actually have the strongest faith, because they have given up trusting in themselves and put all their weight on God.

What It Does Mean

Being poor in spirit means seeing three things clearly.

I see who God is. When Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, he did not feel proud of his ministry. He cried out, “Woe to me! For I am destroyed, for I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). The closer we come to God’s holiness, the smaller we look.

I see who I am. When Peter saw Jesus fill his nets with fish, he fell at His knees and said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord” (Luke 5:8). Peter was not having a bad day. He had seen the truth about himself next to Jesus. Isaiah put it bluntly: “all our righteous deeds like a garment of menstruation” (Isaiah 64:6). Even our best is stained.

I see that I need grace. This is the turning point. The poor in spirit do not just feel sorry for themselves. They turn to God and ask for what they cannot earn. That is the tax collector in Jesus’ parable.

> *And the tax collector, having stood far off, was not willing to lift up even **his** eyes to heaven, but was striking his breast, saying, ‘God, be propitious to me, the sinner!’ I say to you, this one went*

> *down to his house justified rather than that one; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.* (Luke 18:13-14)

The Pharisee in that story was not poor in spirit. He told God how good he was: "God, I thank You that I am not like the rest of men" (Luke 18:11). He fasted and tithed. He was religious and respectable. And he went home without God's approval. The tax collector had nothing to say for himself except "God, be propitious to me, the sinner!" And he went home justified.

That is the poverty Jesus blesses. It is not a feeling. It is the posture of a beggar who has stopped pretending.

Why It Comes First

Every one of the other Beatitudes depends on this one.

You cannot mourn over your sin until you see it. You cannot be meek before God and others while you still think you deserve better. You cannot hunger for righteousness if you think you already have enough of your own. You cannot show mercy freely until you know how much mercy you have been shown. The first Beatitude opens the door, and the others follow through it.

It also comes first because it is how everyone enters the kingdom. Jesus said, "unless you turn and become like the little children, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens" (Matthew 18:3). A little child does not bring God a list of achievements. A child simply receives. Paul says the same thing in different words: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; the gift is of God, not from works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

And it never stops being true. A Christian does not become poor in spirit once, at conversion, and then graduate to something better. We never stop needing grace. The older and wiser believers I have known have been the most aware of their need, not the least. Paul, after many years as an apostle, wrote that the Lord had told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." So Paul learned to boast in his weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The Promise: Theirs Is the Kingdom

Look at the reward. Not "they will get a little help." Not "God will feel sorry for them." "Theirs is the kingdom of the heavens."

That is the most generous trade imaginable. You come to God with nothing, and He gives you everything. The beggar becomes an heir. James asks, "did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5).

And notice the tense: "theirs is," not "theirs will be." The kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit right now. They are already citizens. They already have the King. The fullness is still coming, but the ownership papers are already signed.

Compare that with the church in Laodicea, which said, "I am rich, and I have become rich, and I have need of nothing." Jesus told them that they did not know they were "the wretched one and miserable and

poor and blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17). The tragedy of Laodicea is that they were poor and did not know it. The blessing of the poor in spirit is that they are poor and do know it, and so they come to Jesus to be made rich (Revelation 3:18).

Jesus, Poor in Spirit

It may seem strange to say that Jesus was poor in spirit. He had no sin to confess and no lack to admit. But in another sense He lived this Beatitude more fully than anyone. He chose to live in complete dependence on His Father. He said, "the Son is able to do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing" (John 5:19). And Paul describes the greatest act of humility in history.

> *For let this be thought in you which **was** also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in **the** form of God, did not consider being equal with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, having taken **the** form of a slave, having come to be in **the** likeness of men; and having been found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, having become obedient as far as death, even death of a cross.* (Philippians 2:5-8)

The One who owned everything "emptied Himself." He became poor so that we could become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). The door into the kingdom is low, and the King Himself stooped lowest of all to go through it.

Living It Out

How do you know if you are poor in spirit? Here are a few honest questions to ask yourself.

- When I pray, do I mostly tell God what I have done for Him, or do I mostly ask Him for what I need?
- When someone corrects me, is my first reaction to defend myself or to ask whether they are right?
- Do I quietly think I am better than certain kinds of people?
- Do I come to God's Word to learn, or mainly to find support for what I already think?
- When something goes well, who gets the credit in my heart?

None of us will pass those tests perfectly. That's the point. Every time we fail them, we are being invited back to the door, back to the posture of the tax collector. And every time we come back with empty hands, God fills them.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between being poor and being a beggar, in Greek and in real life? Why do you think Jesus chose the beggar's word?
2. Read Isaiah 57:15 and Isaiah 66:2. Where does God say He lives? What does that tell you about Him?
3. Which of the wrong ideas about being poor in spirit have you heard or believed?
4. Read Luke 18:9-14. What did the tax collector understand that the Pharisee did not?
5. Why must being poor in spirit come before all the other Beatitudes?
6. Read Revelation 3:17-18. How could a church be poor without knowing it? Could that happen to you?

God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I have nothing to bring You that could earn Your favor. Everything good in me is Your gift. Keep me from the pride that thinks I have need of nothing. Teach me to come to You every day with empty hands, and thank You that the kingdom belongs to people who do. Amen.

Chapter 6: Those Who Mourn

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

Matthew 5:4 (SLB)

Of all the Beatitudes, this one sounds the strangest. Blessed are the sad? Most of us spend a lot of energy trying not to mourn. We distract ourselves, stay busy, change the subject, and tell each other to look on the bright side. And Jesus says the mourners are the blessed ones.

He is not praising sadness for its own sake. He is saying that a certain kind of grief is the doorway to a certain kind of comfort, and that the comfort is worth the grief.

Before May 29, 2020, when I got caught in a mistake, I felt worldly grief. I was sorry about the consequences and worried about my reputation. When my wife caught my drinking and took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day, God broke through my pride with godly grief (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). That kind of sorrow led me to change direction.

The Strongest Word for Grief

Word Study: Mourn

pentheo (pen-THEH-oh), Strong's G3996. This is one of the strongest words for sorrow in the Greek language. It was used for grieving over the dead, the kind of grief you cannot hide. Jesus used it again in Luke's woes: "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep" (Luke 6:25). James uses it when he calls careless Christians to "mourn and weep" over their sin (James 4:9). Jesus also used it when He said the wedding guests cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them (Matthew 9:15). The word in the promise, "comforted," is **parakaleo** (Strong's G3870), which means to call alongside, to encourage, or to console. It is related to **parakletos**, the word Jesus used for the Holy Spirit, our "Helper" (John 14:16).

So Jesus is not talking about a passing sadness. He is talking about grief that goes deep.

Mourning Over Sin

What kind of mourning does Jesus mean? The context points first to mourning over sin. This Beatitude follows straight after "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The poor in spirit see their spiritual bankruptcy. Those who mourn feel it. The first is the eyes. The second is the heart.

The Bible is full of people who mourned this way.

- David, after his sin with Bathsheba: "For I myself know my transgressions, and my sin is before me continually" (Psalm 51:3).
- Isaiah, in the presence of God: "Woe to me! For I am destroyed" (Isaiah 6:5).
- Peter, after denying Jesus three times: "And having gone outside, Peter wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62).
- Paul, struggling with the sin that still clung to him: "Wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

And notice that every one of those stories ends in comfort. David was forgiven. Isaiah's lips were touched with a coal from the altar and his sin was atoned for (Isaiah 6:7). Peter was restored on the shore of Galilee (John 21:15-17). Paul's cry ended in thanks: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25).

> *Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning and the joy to gloom. Be humbled before the Lord, and He will exalt you.* (James 4:9-10)

James wrote those words to Christians who had grown careless and worldly. He was not telling them to be gloomy forever. He was telling them to take their sin seriously, because the way up is down. "Be humbled before the Lord, and He will exalt you."

Two Kinds of Grief

Not all sorrow over sin leads to comfort. Paul draws a sharp line between two kinds.

> *For the grief according to God produces repentance to salvation without regret, but the grief of the world produces death.* (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Worldly grief is sorry about the consequences. It is sorry it got caught. It is sorry the marriage fell apart or the job was lost or the reputation was damaged. Judas felt worldly grief. He regretted what he had done, but he did not turn back to God, and it ended in death (Matthew 27:3-5).

Godly grief is sorry about the sin itself, because it has wronged God. It turns toward God, not away from Him. Peter felt godly grief, and it led him back to Jesus. That is the mourning Jesus blesses.

Mourning Over a Broken World

Mourning over sin is not only about our own sin. The godly in Scripture also grieved over the sin and suffering around them.

In Ezekiel's vision, God told an angel to put a mark on the foreheads of "the men who sigh and who groan over all the abominations" being done in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 9:4). Those were the people God spared. The psalmist wrote, "Streams of water have gone down my eyes, because they have not kept Your law" (Psalm 119:136). Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and he "sat down and wept and mourned for days" (Nehemiah 1:4).

Jesus Himself wept over Jerusalem. As He came near the city and saw it, "He wept over it" (Luke 19:41), because He knew what was coming on a city that had rejected Him.

A Christian who can watch the news, see the damage sin does to families, children, and nations, and feel nothing, has missed something. We are meant to care. Mourning over the world's brokenness is a sign that God's heart is growing in us.

Mourning Over Loss

Does this Beatitude also cover ordinary grief, like the grief of losing someone we love? I believe it does, though that is not its main point.

Jesus did not scold people for grieving. When He came to the tomb of His friend Lazarus, knowing He was about to raise him, He still wept (John 11:35). Paul does not tell Christians not to grieve. He tells us not to grieve "just as also the rest who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Our grief is real, but it has a floor under it.

The God who comforts mourners over sin also comforts mourners over loss. Paul calls Him "the Father of compassions and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

What It Does Not Mean

It does not mean Christians should be gloomy. The same Jesus who blessed mourners also said His followers would have a joy no one could take away (John 16:22). The fruit of the Spirit includes joy (Galatians 5:22). Mourning over sin is the doorway, not the house we live in.

It does not mean grief earns God's favor. Tears do not pay for sin. Only the blood of Christ does that. Mourning is not a payment. It is the honest response of a heart that sees its sin and turns to God.

It does not mean wallowing. Some people get stuck in guilt and self-pity, going over and over their failures without ever believing God's forgiveness. That is not the mourning Jesus blesses, because it never reaches the comfort. When God says you are forgiven, you are allowed to believe Him.

The Promise: They Will Be Comforted

The promise is in the future tense, and it is a promise with two stages.

Comfort now. God comforts the mourner over sin with forgiveness. When we confess, He forgives (1 John 1:9). He also comforts us through the Holy Spirit, the Helper Jesus promised, and through other believers who weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

Comfort to come. The full comfort is still ahead. Isaiah said the Messiah would come "to comfort all mourners; to grant to the mourners of Zion, to give to them a headdress instead of ashes, oil of joy instead of mourning" (Isaiah 61:2-3). Jesus read the first part of that passage in Nazareth and said it was fulfilled in Him (Luke 4:18-21). The rest will be fulfilled when He returns. The last pages of the Bible show us that day.

> *And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer, nor mourning nor crying nor pain will be any longer, because the first things passed away.*
> (Revelation 21:4)

Every tear the mourners have cried over sin and loss will be wiped away by God's own hand. That is why they are blessed. Their grief has an end, and the end is joy.

Jesus, the Man of Sorrows

Isaiah described the coming Servant as "a man of pains and acquainted with sickness" (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus mourned. He wept at the grave of Lazarus. He wept over Jerusalem. In Gethsemane He said His soul was "very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38).

He never mourned over His own sin, because He had none. He mourned over ours. And He did more than weep over it. He carried it to the cross. That is why He can comfort us. “For we do not have a high priest who is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15). When you mourn, you are not mourning alone. The One who comforts you has been there.

Living It Out

Here are a few ways to let this Beatitude do its work.

- When you confess sin, slow down. Don’t rush through it as a formality. Name it honestly, and ask God to help you see it the way He sees it.
- Pray over the news. When you hear about evil in the world, turn it into prayer instead of just anger or worry.
- If you are grieving a loss, don’t hide it from God or from your church. Let others weep with you.
- When someone else is mourning, don’t hurry to fix them. Sit with them. Comfort them with the comfort you have received (2 Corinthians 1:4).
- When you have confessed a sin, believe the forgiveness. Don’t keep picking up what God has already taken away.

Study Questions

1. Why does the Beatitude about mourning come right after the Beatitude about being poor in spirit?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 7:9-10. What is the difference between godly grief and worldly grief? Can you think of an example of each?
3. Compare Judas (Matthew 27:3-5) and Peter (Luke 22:61-62). Both regretted what they did. Why did their stories end so differently?
4. What evils in the world around you grieve you? What should you do with that grief?
5. How does knowing that Jesus wept change the way you think about your own grief?
6. Read Revelation 21:4 and Isaiah 25:8. What does God promise to do for those who mourn?

> *Lord, I confess that I often take my sin lightly. Give me eyes to see it and a heart to grieve over it, not with the grief that leads to death, but with the grief that turns me back to You. When I mourn over loss, be my comfort. And keep my hope fixed on the day when You will wipe every tear away. Amen.*

Chapter 7: The Meek

> *Blessed **are** the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*
>
> Matthew 5:5 (SLB)

If there is one word in the Beatitudes that modern people misunderstand, it is “meek.” It rhymes with weak, and most people assume it means the same thing. A meek person, we think, is a doormat, someone who never stands up for anything and lets everyone walk on him. Nobody wants to be that.

But that is not what Jesus meant. The two men the Bible calls meek or gentle above all others are Moses and Jesus Himself. Moses stood up to Pharaoh, the most powerful king on earth. Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple with a whip. Neither of them was weak. So we need to find out what the word really means.

Translating the Steadfast Literal Bible made me look closely at the word for "meek". Meekness is strength under God's control, like a strong horse that answers a light touch. Learning to give God my need to control things has been one of the hardest lessons of my life. Meekness is not weakness. It is trusting God enough to lay down our pride.

Strength Under God’s Control

Word Study: Meek

praus (prah-OOSS), Strong’s G4239. The word means gentle, mild, or humble, and it describes a person whose strength is under control. It appears only four times in the New Testament: here; in Matthew 11:29, where Jesus says, “I am gentle and humble in heart”; in Matthew 21:5, where the King comes to Jerusalem “gentle and mounted on a donkey”; and in 1 Peter 3:4, which praises “the gentle and quiet spirit.” The related noun, **prautes** (Strong’s G4240), is the “gentleness” in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23).

Notice that the SLB translates the same Greek word as “meek” in Matthew 5:5 and as “gentle” in Matthew 11:29 and 21:5. Both are good translations. Together they show us the shape of the word. A meek person is gentle because he is not grasping for his own way. He has handed his rights over to God.

Here is a simple way to remember it. Meekness is not the absence of strength. It is strength that answers to God. A meek person could fight for himself, but he does not need to, because he trusts God to take care of him.

A Quote from Psalm 37

This Beatitude is almost a direct quote. Jesus is taking a line from a psalm of David that His listeners would have known well.

> *And the humble will possess **the** land, and they will take delight in **the** abundance of peace.*
> (Psalm 37:11)

Psalm 37 is a psalm about a hard question. Why do wicked people seem to do so well? They lie, cheat, and push their way to the top, and they get away with it. The psalm answers the question with patience. Read how it opens.

> *Be still before the LORD and wait longingly for Him; do not fret yourself because of **one** who makes his way prosper, because of a man who carries out plots. Refrain from anger and forsake rage; do not fret yourself, only to do evil. For evildoers will be cut off, and those who wait for the LORD, they will possess **the** land.* (Psalm 37:7-9)

That is what meekness looks like in the Old Testament. The meek person does not fret. He does not get angry and take matters into his own hands. He rests in the LORD and waits for Him. And the promise is that the wicked will be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD will possess the land.

Jesus takes that promise, "the humble will possess the land," and widens it: "the meek will inherit the earth." In the Greek Old Testament the first Christians used, the word for "land" in Psalm 37:11 is **ge**, the same word Jesus uses for "earth." The promise that once pointed to the land of Israel now reaches the whole world.

Moses, the Meekest Man

The Bible says of Moses, "the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the ground" (Numbers 12:3). Look at when that verse was written. His own sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron, had turned against him. They were criticizing his wife and questioning his authority. Moses did not defend himself. He did not lash out. He let God handle it, and God did.

Later, when Korah led a rebellion against him, Moses "fell on his face" (Numbers 16:4). His first move was not to fight but to bow before God.

Yet this is the same Moses who confronted Pharaoh again and again, who led a whole nation through the desert, and who smashed the stone tablets when he saw the golden calf. Moses was meek, but he was not weak. He fought hard for God's honor and for God's people. What he did not fight for was himself.

Jesus, Gentle and Humble in Heart

The clearest picture of meekness is Jesus.

> *Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke **is** easy, and My burden is light.* (Matthew 11:28-30)

This is one of the few times Jesus describes His own heart, and the words He chooses are "gentle and humble in heart." The almighty Son of God, who could command storms and cast out demons with a word, calls Himself gentle. That is the meekness of a King.

Look at His meekness under pressure. When the soldiers came to arrest Him in Gethsemane and Peter pulled a sword, Jesus told him to put it away. "Or do you think that I am not able now to call upon My

Father, and He will furnish Me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). He had all the power in the universe at His command, and He chose not to use it to save Himself.

Peter, who watched it happen, later wrote this about Jesus: "being reviled, did not revile in return; suffering, He did not threaten, but He kept handing Himself over to the One who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). That is meekness. He kept handing Himself over to the Father.

But meekness never made Jesus soft on sin. The same Jesus "having made a whip of cords, He drove all out of the temple" (John 2:15) because they were dishonoring His Father's house. Meekness does not mean never being angry. It means never being angry for the wrong reasons. Jesus was meek about insults to Himself and fierce about insults to God.

What It Does Not Mean

It does not mean being a doormat. Meekness is not having no opinions or no backbone. Moses and Jesus both stood up to powerful people.

It does not mean never confronting sin. Paul tells believers to restore a brother caught in sin "in a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1). Gentleness is how we confront, not a reason to stay silent.

It does not mean a shy personality. Some outgoing, strong-willed people are deeply meek, and some quiet people are proud. Meekness is about where your trust is, not about how loud you are.

It does not mean refusing to protect others. A meek man will lay down his own rights, but he will not stand by while someone weaker is harmed. Moses' first recorded act as a grown man was stepping in to protect a stranger from an abuser (Exodus 2:11-12, 17). He went about it the wrong way that first time, and it cost him forty years in the desert, but the instinct to defend the weak was right. Meekness surrenders my own rights to God, not my duty to love my neighbor.

What It Does Mean

Here are some marks of a meek person.

He does not fret. Meek people are not constantly anxious about whether they are getting their fair share. They trust God's timing.

He does not take revenge. Paul writes, "not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath; for it has been written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Meekness leaves the score-keeping to God.

He is teachable. James tells us to "receive with meekness the implanted word" (James 1:21). A meek person lets God's Word correct him without arguing back.

He answers gently. "A soft answer turns away rage" (Proverbs 15:1). Peter tells us to be ready to give a reason for our hope, "with gentleness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). We can defend the truth without being harsh.

He is gentle with the struggling. "A slave of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle toward all, able to teach, patient when wronged" (2 Timothy 2:24).

How Meekness Grows from the First Two Beatitudes

Meekness follows naturally from being poor in spirit and mourning. Once I have seen how bankrupt I am before God, and once I have grieved over my sin, I stop demanding to be treated like I deserve better. If God has been patient with me, I can be patient with others. If I know what I really deserve, I am slow to get offended when people don't treat me as important.

The poor in spirit see themselves truthfully before God. The meek treat others in light of that truth.

The Promise: They Will Inherit the Earth

This is one of the most surprising promises in the Bible. Who usually gets the earth? The conquerors. The pushy. The ones who grab. History is full of empires built by force. But Jesus says that in the end, the meek will get it.

How? Not by grabbing it. By inheriting it. An inheritance is not something you take. It is something you are given, because you belong to the family.

When will they inherit it? I believe this promise will be fulfilled to the letter when Jesus returns to reign on the earth. Daniel saw that "the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under all the heavens will be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High" (Daniel 7:27). The song of heaven in Revelation says that Jesus has made His people "kings and priests to our God, and we will reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:10). Paul asked the Corinthians, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Corinthians 6:2).

The people who refused to grab will share in the reign of the King. The ones who grabbed will lose it all. And after the thousand years, God will make a new heavens and a new earth, "in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13), and the meek will live there forever.

Living It Out

- Think of a situation where you have been fighting for your own rights or reputation. Ask God whether that is a battle you need to hand over to Him.
- The next time someone criticizes you, before you answer, ask yourself honestly, "Is there any truth in this?"
- Practice the soft answer. When a conversation starts to heat up, lower your voice instead of raising it.
- Pray Psalm 37:1-11 slowly. Notice every command in it: do not fret, trust, delight, roll your way on the LORD, be still, wait. Ask God to grow each one in you.
- Remember that meekness is not silence when someone weaker is being hurt. Stand up for others, gently and firmly.

Study Questions

1. Before reading this chapter, what did you think "meek" meant? How has your understanding changed?

2. Read Psalm 37:1-11. What does this psalm tell the meek person to do, and not to do?

3. How could Moses be called the most humble man on earth and still confront Pharaoh? What does that teach us about meekness?

4. Read Matthew 26:51-54 and 1 Peter 2:21-23. What do these passages show about the meekness of Jesus?

5. What is the difference between being meek and being a doormat?

6. Why does it make sense that the meek will inherit the earth rather than take it?

> *Lord Jesus, You are gentle and humble in heart. I confess that I often fret, push for my own way, and defend my own pride. Teach me to roll my way on You and to wait for You. Make me strong for Your honor and gentle about my own. And thank You for the day when You will give the earth to Your people, not because we grabbed it, but because we belong to You. Amen.*

Chapter 8: Hungry and Thirsty for Righteousness

> *Blessed **are** those who hunger and thirst **for** righteousness, for they will be filled.*
>
> Matthew 5:6 (SLB)

Most of us have never been truly starving. We have been hungry, the kind of hungry where lunch is late and we get a little cranky. But very few of us have gone days without food, or walked through a desert with an empty canteen. The people listening to Jesus knew those feelings far better than we do. Hunger and thirst were not figures of speech to them. They were part of life.

So when Jesus said "hunger and thirst for righteousness," He was describing a desire that is not casual. It is the kind of wanting that takes over everything else.

The Words Jesus Chose

Word Study: Hunger and thirst

peinao (pay-NAH-oh), Strong's G3983, to be hungry, and **dipsao** (dip-SAH-oh), Strong's G1372, to be thirsty. Both are present participles, which describes an ongoing condition, not a single moment. These are people who keep on hungering and keep on thirsting. The object is **dikaiosune** (dee-kye-oh-SOO-nay), Strong's G1343, "righteousness," the quality of being right with God and living right before Him. The promise, "they will be filled," uses **chortazo** (khor-TAD-zo), Strong's G5526, a word first used of feeding animals until they were full. The same word describes the five thousand after Jesus fed them, where the SLB says "they all ate and were satisfied" (Matthew 14:20).

That last word is worth noticing. Jesus is not promising a small taste. He is promising to fill the hungry the way He filled the crowd on the hillside, with baskets left over.

Roots in the Old Testament

The psalms and prophets often describe longing for God as hunger and thirst.

> *As a deer pants for channels of water, so my soul pants for You, God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when will I come and appear **before** the face of God?* (Psalm 42:1-2)

> *God, You **are** my God; I seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and weary land without water.* (Psalm 63:1)

Isaiah turned that longing into an invitation. "Oh, everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy grain and eat" (Isaiah 55:1). And he asked a question that still cuts deep: "Why do you weigh out money for what is not bread, and your toil for what is not for satisfaction?" (Isaiah 55:2). People have always tried to fill their spiritual hunger with things that cannot satisfy it.

Amos warned of a different kind of famine: "not a famine for bread, and not a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11). The worst hunger is not for food. It is for God, and the saddest thing is when people lose their appetite for Him.

Three Kinds of Righteousness

What is the righteousness these people hunger for? The Bible uses the word in three connected ways, and the hungry heart wants all three.

To be made right with God. This is the most basic hunger. A person who is poor in spirit and mourns over sin wants above all to be forgiven and accepted by God. The good news is that God gives this as a gift. Paul writes that "the righteousness of God through faith of Jesus Christ is to all and upon all who believe" (Romans 3:22). It is not a righteousness we produce. It is Christ's righteousness counted to us.

> *For He made the One who did not know sin **to be** sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Paul once had plenty of righteousness of his own, or so he thought. He was a Pharisee who kept the law with great care. But when he met Christ, he gave it all up so that he could "be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith of Christ" (Philippians 3:9).

To live right before God. Once a person is made right with God, the hunger does not go away. It changes. Now he wants to become like Jesus. He wants to be holy in how he thinks, speaks, and acts. That is why Jesus later says, "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Christians are not satisfied with being forgiven and staying the same. Paul, after many years as a believer, still wrote, "I pursue toward the goal for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

To see right done in the world. Righteousness in the Bible also includes justice. God cares about the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the stranger. The prophets cried out, "let justice roll like the waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing wadi" (Amos 5:24). Jesus scolded the Pharisees for tithing their herbs while leaving aside "the justice and the mercy and the faith" (Matthew 23:23). A person who hungers for righteousness wants to see wrongs put right, not just in his own life but in the world.

The Righteousness of the Pharisees

A few verses later in the same sermon, Jesus says something that must have shocked His listeners.

> *For I say to you that unless your righteousness abounds more than **that** of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens.* (Matthew 5:20)

The scribes and Pharisees were the most careful religious people of their day. How could anyone's righteousness be greater than theirs?

Here is the answer. Their righteousness was on the outside. They were careful about what people could see: tithing, fasting, washing, keeping the Sabbath. Jesus said they cleaned "the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence" (Matthew 23:25). Worse, they were satisfied with it. The Pharisee in Luke 18 was not hungry for righteousness. He was full of his own.

That is the great danger. You cannot be filled if you are already full. The person who thinks he has enough righteousness will never hunger for more, and so he will never receive the righteousness God gives. The righteousness that goes beyond the Pharisees starts with an empty stomach.

What It Does Not Mean

It does not mean a mild interest in religion. Jesus did not say, "Blessed are those who think righteousness is a nice idea." He described a craving.

It does not mean being self-righteous. Hungering for righteousness is the opposite of being proud of your righteousness. A hungry man is aware of what he lacks.

It does not mean we will never struggle. The hungry Christian still sins. That is part of why he is hungry. The point is the direction of his heart.

It does not mean God only fills spiritual hunger. Luke's version, "Blessed are those who hunger now" (Luke 6:21), reminds us that Jesus also cares about empty stomachs. He fed the five thousand. The early church made sure the widows were fed (Acts 6:1-3). A Christian who claims to hunger for righteousness and does nothing for the hungry has missed something.

The Promise: They Will Be Filled

Jesus promises that the hungry will be filled, and He keeps that promise in stages.

Filled now. When we come to Jesus in faith, we are given His righteousness, all of it, at once. And He gives us Himself. "I am the bread of life. The one coming to Me will certainly not hunger, and the one believing in Me will certainly not thirst at any time" (John 6:35). He told the woman at the well, "whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will certainly never thirst" (John 4:14).

Filled more and more. Strangely, the more Christ fills us, the hungrier we get for Him. That is not a contradiction. It is how spiritual appetite works. The more you taste of God, the more you want. Peter tells us to "long for the pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow" (1 Peter 2:2). A healthy believer never loses his appetite.

Filled completely. One day the hunger will be fully satisfied. In heaven, John saw God's people from every nation, and was told, "They will not hunger anymore, nor will they thirst anymore" (Revelation 7:16). Peter tells us we look for "new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). Every wrong will be put right. Every believer will be made perfectly holy. "When He is revealed, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Jesus, Hungry for His Father's Will

Jesus knew physical hunger. After forty days of fasting in the wilderness, "He was hungry" (Matthew 4:2). And when Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread, He answered, "Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word coming out through the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Later, when His disciples urged Him to eat, He said, "My food is that I may do the will of Him who sent Me, and may finish His work" (John 4:34). That was His hunger. He wanted His Father's will done more than He wanted bread. And on the cross He said, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28), as He finished the work that would make sinners righteous.

Living It Out

How is your appetite? Here are some honest questions.

- What do I find myself craving most these days? Comfort? Approval? Entertainment? Is God anywhere near the top of the list?
- Do I come to God's Word hungry, or do I read it, when I read it at all, like a chore?
- When I see injustice, do I care? Do I pray about it? Do I do anything?
- Is there a sin I have stopped fighting because I have gotten comfortable with it?

If your appetite for God is weak, here is the good news. Appetite grows by eating. Start small. Read a psalm every day this week. Pray it back to God. Ask Him to make you hungry. That is a prayer He loves to answer.

Study Questions

1. Why do you think Jesus used hunger and thirst, rather than just "desire," to describe the longing for righteousness?
2. Read Psalm 42:1-2 and Psalm 63:1. How does David describe his longing for God? Have you ever felt that way?
3. Explain the three kinds of righteousness in this chapter. Which one do you hunger for most? Which one do you tend to forget?
4. Why couldn't the Pharisees be filled? What does that warn us about?
5. Read John 6:35 and John 4:13-14. How does Jesus satisfy our hunger and thirst?
6. What practical step could you take this week to grow your appetite for God?

> *Lord Jesus, You are the bread of life and the living water. I confess that I often try to fill my soul with things that are not bread. Make me hungry for You. Make me thirsty for Your righteousness, in my own heart and in the world around me. Fill me now, and keep me hungry until the day You fill me completely. Amen.*

Chapter 9: The Merciful

> *Blessed **are** the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*
>
> Matthew 5:7 (SLB)

The first four Beatitudes are mostly about how we stand before God. We see our poverty, we mourn over our sin, we bow to God's will, and we hunger for His righteousness. With the fifth Beatitude, the focus turns outward. Now Jesus begins describing how the blessed person treats other people. And the first thing He names is mercy.

That order matters. People who have been emptied, broken, humbled, and filled by God become merciful. They do not have to work themselves up to it. It grows out of what has happened to them.

What Mercy Is

Word Study: Merciful

eleemon (el-eh-AY-mone), Strong's G1655, merciful or compassionate. It appears only twice in the New Testament, here and in Hebrews 2:17, where Jesus is called "a merciful and faithful high priest." The promise, "they will receive mercy," uses the verb **eleeo** (Strong's G1653), the word blind men and beggars cried out to Jesus: "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" (Matthew 9:27). Behind it stands the great Hebrew word **chesed** (Strong's H2617), which the SLB usually translates "steadfast love": God's loyal, faithful kindness to His people.

Mercy and grace are close cousins, but they are not quite the same. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. Mercy is not getting what you do deserve, and it also means compassion toward those who are hurting. Mercy looks at someone who is guilty and chooses to forgive. Mercy looks at someone who is suffering and chooses to help. It does both.

The Merciful God

Mercy is not something we invent. It is a family resemblance. God is merciful first.

When Moses asked to see God's glory, God passed by and proclaimed His own name.

> *And the LORD passed by before his face, and He proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great in steadfast love and faithfulness,"* (Exodus 34:6)

That is how God describes Himself: compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, great in steadfast love. Jeremiah, writing in the ruins of Jerusalem, held on to that same truth.

> *The steadfast loves of the LORD, for we are not finished, for His compassions do not come to an end. **They are** new in the mornings; great **is** Your faithfulness.* (Lamentations 3:22-23)

And Paul, describing how God saved us, starts with mercy: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even us, being dead in the trespasses, He made alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4-5). He saved us “according to His mercy” (Titus 3:5).

Every Christian is a person who has received mercy. That is the starting point for this Beatitude.

Mercy, Not Sacrifice

Twice in Matthew, Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea to religious people who had missed the point. “But having gone, learn what it is: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). He said it again when the Pharisees condemned His disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:7).

The Pharisees were careful about religious rules. They kept the sacrifices, the tithes, and the Sabbath. But they looked down on tax collectors and sinners, and they had no compassion for people in need. Jesus told them they had missed what God cared about most. Hosea’s original words were, “For steadfast love I desire, and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). God would rather see mercy than a perfectly kept ritual.

This is a warning for religious people in every age, including us. It is possible to be very correct and very cold.

Two Sides of Mercy

Mercy in the Bible shows up in two main ways.

Forgiving those who wrong us. Jesus put this right into the prayer He taught: “And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Then He added, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15).

Peter once asked how many times he had to forgive his brother. Seven times? Jesus said seventy times seven, and then told the story of a slave who was forgiven a debt so huge he could never have repaid it in a lifetime. That same slave went out, found a fellow slave who owed him a small amount, and choked him, demanding payment. When the king heard, he said, “Was it not necessary for you also to have mercy on your fellow slave, as I also had mercy on you?” (Matthew 18:33).

Helping those who are hurting. The other side of mercy is compassion in action. When a lawyer asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, who stopped for a beaten stranger, bound up his wounds, and paid for his care. Then Jesus asked which of the three travelers became a neighbor to the man. The lawyer answered, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go, and you do likewise” (Luke 10:37).

Mercy that only feels sorry is not mercy. The priest and the Levite may have felt something when they saw the wounded man. They still passed by on the other side.

Does This Mean We Earn God's Mercy?

Some people read this Beatitude, and Jesus' words in Matthew 6:14-15, and conclude that we earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others. That cannot be right. The first Beatitude has already told us that we come to God with empty hands. Nobody earns mercy. If you could earn it, it would not be mercy.

So what does Jesus mean? He means that receiving mercy and showing mercy go together. They cannot be separated. A person who has truly received God's mercy will become merciful. A person who refuses to show mercy, who holds grudges and nurses bitterness and will not forgive, shows that he has never really understood what God has forgiven him.

James says it bluntly: "For the judgment will be merciless to the one who has not shown mercy; and mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). That is not salvation by works. It is a warning that a heart with no mercy in it has not been touched by God's mercy.

Think of the unforgiving slave in Jesus' story. The problem was not that he failed to earn his forgiveness. He had already been forgiven. The problem was that the forgiveness never reached his heart. It never changed him.

What It Does Not Mean

It does not mean pretending sin is not sin. Mercy forgives wrong. It does not call wrong right. Jesus showed mercy to the man at the pool of Bethesda who had been sick for thirty-eight years, and afterward He told him, "sin no more, so that something worse may not happen to you" (John 5:14).

It does not mean removing every consequence. You can forgive a person who stole from you and still report the theft. You can forgive an abuser and still keep yourself and your children safe. Forgiving means giving up revenge and handing justice to God. It does not always mean pretending nothing happened.

It does not mean being a soft touch for every scheme. Mercy is wise. Jude tells us to "have mercy, making a distinction" (Jude 1:22). Sometimes the most merciful thing is to say no.

It does not mean waiting until you feel like it. Forgiveness is first a decision, and the feelings often follow later. You may need to forgive the same hurt many times as it comes back to mind.

Jesus, the Merciful High Priest

Jesus is mercy in human flesh. Again and again the Gospels say He was moved with compassion. When He saw the crowds, "He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and thrown down, like sheep not having a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Blind men cried, "Have mercy on us," and He healed them. Lepers called to Him, and He touched them.

And on the cross, His mercy reached its peak. While soldiers gambled for His clothes, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). He forgave while the nails were still in His hands.

Now He serves as our "merciful and faithful high priest" (Hebrews 2:17). He has not stopped being merciful. Every time we come to Him, we find mercy waiting.

The Promise: They Will Receive Mercy

Mercy flows in a circle. We receive it from God. We show it to others. And we receive more of it.

We receive mercy now, every day. "His compassions do not come to an end. They are new in the mornings" (Lamentations 3:22-23). But Jesus also points ahead to the day of judgment. Paul prayed for his friend Onesiphorus, who had cared for him in prison: "May the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord in that day" (2 Timothy 1:18). In Matthew 25, the King welcomes those who fed the hungry and visited the sick and those in prison, saying, "to the extent that you did it to one of these My brothers, the least ones, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40).

On that day, nobody will plead their own record. We will all need mercy. And the merciful will find that the Lord has been keeping His promise all along.

Living It Out

- Is there someone you have not forgiven? Name them before God. Ask Him to help you let go of your right to get even.
- Think of the debt God has forgiven you. Write down a few of the specific sins He has covered. Then look at the hurt someone else has done to you in that light.
- Look for one person this week who is hurting, and do something practical for them: a meal, a visit, a phone call, a ride.
- Watch your words about people who have failed. Do you talk about them with mercy or with contempt?
- When you pray the Lord's Prayer, slow down at "as we also forgive our debtors." Mean it.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between mercy and grace? Why do we need both?
2. Read Exodus 34:6 and Lamentations 3:22-23. What do these verses tell you about God's character?
3. Why did Jesus quote "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" to the Pharisees? Where might that warning apply to you?
4. Read Matthew 18:21-35. What went wrong with the forgiven slave? What does this story teach about mercy?
5. Does this Beatitude teach that we earn God's mercy by showing mercy? Explain.
6. What is the difference between forgiving someone and removing every consequence of what they did?

> *Father, You have been rich in mercy to me. You forgave a debt I could never pay. Forgive me for the times I have held on to bitterness and kept a record of wrongs. Make me merciful as You are merciful. Open my eyes to the hurting people around me, and give me the courage to stop and help. Amen.*

Chapter 10: The Pure in Heart

> *Blessed **are** the pure in heart, for they will see God.*
>
> Matthew 5:8 (SLB)

This Beatitude holds the greatest promise in the whole list. The poor in spirit receive a kingdom, the meek inherit the earth, and the merciful receive mercy. But the pure in heart "will see God." There is nothing higher than that. Everything else God gives us is a gift. This promise is God Himself.

And this Beatitude also sets what may be the hardest standard. Pure in heart? Most of us are honest enough to know our hearts are anything but pure.

Clean on the Inside

Word Study: Pure in heart

katharos (kah-thah-ROSS), Strong's G2513, clean, pure, free from mixture. It was used for clean water, for pure gold with no other metal mixed in, and for things that were ceremonially clean under the Law. The English word "catharsis" comes from the same root. **Kardia** (kar-DEE-ah), Strong's G2588, "heart," means much more than our feelings. In the Bible the heart is the center of the whole person, where we think, choose, and love. The same pair of words appears in Paul's goal for Timothy's teaching: "love out of a pure heart" (1 Timothy 1:5).

Notice the two ideas in "katharos." It means clean, the opposite of dirty. And it means unmixed, the opposite of divided. Both meanings matter for this Beatitude. A pure heart is a clean heart, and it is also an undivided heart.

Roots in the Old Testament

Jesus' listeners would have heard an echo of a psalm sung by pilgrims on their way up to the temple.

> *Who will go up on the mountain of the LORD? And who will stand in the place of His holiness? **He who is** innocent of hands and pure of heart, who has not lifted up My soul to falsehood and has not sworn to deceit. He will lift up a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This **is** the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face, Jacob. Selah.*
> (Psalm 24:3-6)

"Who will go up on the mountain of the LORD?" The answer is the one who is "innocent of hands and pure of heart." Clean hands are clean actions. A pure heart is a clean inner life. And the reward is the same one Jesus promises, to come into God's presence and "seek Your face."

Another psalm opens, "Surely God is good to Israel, to the pure of heart" (Psalm 73:1). And after his great sin, David knew that only God could do the cleaning: "Create for me a pure heart, God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). The word "create" there is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 1:1, **bara** (Strong's H1254). David knew he needed a miracle, not a little self-improvement.

Inside, Not Just Outside

The Pharisees put enormous effort into being clean. They washed their hands in a special way before meals. They washed cups and pots and dishes. They avoided touching anything that would make them ceremonially unclean. But Jesus said they had it backwards.

> *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of them may also become clean.*
> (Matthew 23:25-26)

What makes a person unclean is not what goes into his mouth but what comes out of his heart. "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19). The problem is not on the outside. It is at the center.

This is exactly what the rest of the Sermon on the Mount goes on to show. You have not murdered anyone, but have you been angry? You have not committed adultery, but have you looked with lust (Matthew 5:21-28)? You give, pray, and fast, but do you do it so people will see you (Matthew 6:1-18)? Jesus keeps pressing past the outside to the heart.

When God chose David to be king, He told Samuel, "for man sees according to the eyes, and the LORD sees according to the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). God has always cared most about what we keep hidden.

An Undivided Heart

The second meaning of "pure" is unmixed. A pure heart is single-minded toward God. It is not trying to love God and something else equally.

Later in the same sermon Jesus says, "No one is able to serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). James calls the person who wavers "a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8), and he tells such people to "purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8). David prayed, "unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11).

Many of us know what a divided heart feels like. We want God, and we also want our sin. We want to follow Jesus, and we also want to keep a few rooms of our lives locked where He is not allowed. The pure in heart are not people who never struggle. They are people who have given God the keys to every room, and who keep giving them back when they catch themselves taking them again.

How Does a Heart Become Pure?

Here is where this Beatitude can crush us. "The heart is deceitful more than everything, and it is incurable; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). If seeing God depends on a pure heart, and our hearts are not pure, who can see God?

The answer is that God does the purifying.

God cleanses the heart through faith. At the council in Jerusalem, Peter said that God gave the Holy Spirit to Gentiles just as He had to Jews, "having purified their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). When we trust

Christ, His blood cleans what we could never clean. “How much more will the blood of the Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14).

God gives a new heart. Through Ezekiel, God promised, “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you” (Ezekiel 36:26). This is what Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus that a person must be “born from above” (John 3:3). God does not just scrub the old heart. He gives a new one.

God keeps on cleaning. After we are saved, God keeps purifying us as we walk with Him. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). And we take part in that work. “By what will a youth keep his path pure? By keeping it according to Your word” (Psalm 119:9). Paul told Timothy to “flee youthful desires, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).

John links this ongoing purifying to our hope of seeing Jesus: “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). The person who expects to see God someday wants to get ready now.

What It Does Not Mean

It does not mean sinless perfection in this life. John, who wrote about purifying ourselves, also wrote, “If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). Pure in heart describes the direction and the loyalty of the heart, cleansed by Christ and set on God, not a heart that never stumbles.

It does not mean outward rule-keeping. That was the Pharisees’ mistake. You can avoid every outward sin and still have a heart full of pride, envy, and lust.

It does not mean being naive. A pure heart is not an ignorant one. Jesus told His disciples to be “shrewd as the serpents and innocent as the doves” (Matthew 10:16). Purity is not knowing nothing about evil. It is refusing to love it.

The Promise: They Will See God

Can anyone see God? God told Moses, “You are not able to see My face, for man shall not see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20). John says, “No one has ever seen God” (John 1:18). And yet Jesus promises that the pure in heart will see Him. How?

We see God in Jesus. John’s verse goes on: “the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known” (John 1:18). When Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus said, “The one who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Every person who has come to know Jesus has, in a real sense, already begun to see God.

We see God at work. A pure heart sees God’s hand in life where others see only chance. “All things indeed are pure to the pure” (Titus 1:15). The clearer the heart, the clearer the view.

We will see God face to face. This is the full promise. Job believed it in the middle of his suffering: "from my flesh I will see God, whom I, I will see for myself, and my eyes will see, and not a stranger" (Job 19:26-27). John says that when Jesus appears, "we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). And the last chapter of the Bible says of God's servants in the new Jerusalem, "they will see His face" (Revelation 22:4).

That is the greatest promise in Scripture. Not streets of gold. Not rest from pain, wonderful as that will be. We will see His face.

Jesus, the Pure in Heart

Jesus is the only person who ever had a perfectly pure heart from birth to death. He was "tempted in all things according to likeness, without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). His heart was never divided. He said, "I always do the things pleasing to Him" (John 8:29). And because His heart was perfectly pure, He saw the Father perfectly. He said nobody knows the Father except the Son (Matthew 11:27).

The good news is that He came to give us what He had. Paul says that as we look at His glory, "we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18). We become pure by looking at the Pure One.

Living It Out

- Ask God to search your heart. Pray Psalm 139:23-24 and give Him time to answer.
- Is there a "locked room" in your life, an area you have not let God into? Name it, and hand Him the key.
- Guard what goes into your mind. Paul's list is a good filter: "whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are righteous, whatever things are pure" (Philippians 4:8). What would change if you applied it to your screens?
- Watch your motives as well as your actions. Before you do something good, ask, "Who am I doing this for?"
- Spend time each day simply looking at Jesus in the Gospels. Purity grows by looking at Him more than by staring at our sin.

Study Questions

1. What are the two meanings of "pure" in this Beatitude? Why do both matter?
2. Read Psalm 24:3-6. How does this psalm prepare us for Jesus' words?
3. Why did Jesus say the Pharisees cleaned only "the outside of the cup"? How can we fall into the same trap?
4. Read Jeremiah 17:9 and Ezekiel 36:26. If our hearts are that bad, how can anyone become pure in heart?
5. In what ways can we "see God" now? What will it mean to see Him face to face?
6. Read 1 John 3:2-3. How should the hope of seeing Jesus affect how we live today?

> *Search me, God, and know my heart. Create in me a pure heart, and unite my heart to fear Your name. Wash me through the blood of Jesus, and keep me clean as I walk with You. Thank You that one day I will see Your face. Make me ready for that day. Amen.*

Chapter 11: The Peacemakers

> *Blessed **are** the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*
>
> Matthew 5:9 (SLB)

Everybody says they want peace. Beauty pageant contestants wish for world peace. Politicians promise it. Families long for it at holiday dinners. But Jesus did not bless the people who want peace. He blessed the people who make it. There is a big difference between a peace lover and a peacemaker. The first enjoys peace when it shows up. The second goes out and does the hard work of building it.

Making Peace

Word Study: Peacemakers

eirenopoios (ay-ray-noh-poy-OSS), Strong's G1518, a peacemaker. The word joins **eirene**, "peace" (Strong's G1515), with **poieo**, "to make" or "to do." This is the only place the noun appears in the New Testament. Its verb form shows up in Colossians 1:20, where God reconciled all things to Himself through Christ, "having made peace through the blood of His cross." Behind "peace" stands the Hebrew **shalom** (Strong's H7965), which means far more than the absence of fighting. Shalom is wholeness, well-being, and everything being right between God, people, and the world.

That last point matters. When the Bible talks about peace, it does not just mean that people have stopped shooting at each other. It means that things have been put right. A cease-fire is not shalom. A husband and wife who have stopped yelling but no longer speak do not have shalom. Real peace is restored relationship.

The God of Peace

Like mercy, peacemaking starts with God. The Bible calls Him "the God of peace" (Romans 16:20). And the Messiah He promised was called "Prince of Peace."

> *For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us; and the dominion is on His shoulder; and **one** has called His name Wonder, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of the dominion and of peace **there will be** no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness from now and until forever. The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this.* (Isaiah 9:6-7)

When Jesus was born, the angels sang, "Glory in the highest to God, and on earth peace, among men good will!" (Luke 2:14). Jesus came to make peace. And the deepest peace He made is peace between sinners and a holy God.

> *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1)

We were not at peace with God. We were His enemies (Romans 5:10). God did not wait for us to make the first move. He made it, at the cost of His Son's blood. That is the model for every peacemaker. Peace is costly, and somebody has to go first.

Three Kinds of Peacemaking

Peacemakers work in three directions.

Making peace between people and God. This is the most important kind, and it is the work of the gospel. Paul says God "gave to us the ministry of reconciliation," and he describes Christians as ambassadors.

> *And all things **are** from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling **the** world to Himself, not reckoning their trespasses to them, and having placed in us the word of reconciliation. Therefore on behalf of Christ we are ambassadors, as though God were urging through us; we implore **you** on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God.* (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

When you tell someone about Jesus, you are doing the work of a peacemaker. Isaiah said, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who makes peace heard" (Isaiah 52:7), and Paul applies that verse to those who preach the gospel (Romans 10:15). No peace is more important than peace with God, because every other kind of peace depends on it. "There is no peace, says the LORD, for the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22).

Making peace between people. Jesus takes this so seriously that, a few verses later in the sermon, He tells us to interrupt our worship to go and fix a broken relationship.

> *Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go away; first be reconciled to your brother, and then, having come, offer your gift.* (Matthew 5:23-24)

Notice that Jesus does not say, "If you have something against your brother." He says, "if your brother has something against you." The peacemaker does not wait for the other person to come to him. He goes first, even when he is the one who has been wronged, and certainly when he is the one who did the wrong.

Paul did this kind of work too. When two women in the church at Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche, were at odds, he urged them by name "to think the same thing in the Lord," and he asked a trusted friend to help them (Philippians 4:2-3). A peacemaker steps into the middle of a quarrel, carefully and humbly, to help people come back together.

Making peace in our own hearts and homes. A peacemaker is also someone who refuses to be the source of strife. "A man of rage stirs up strife, and one long of anger quiets a dispute" (Proverbs 15:18). Among the things the LORD hates is "one sending out contentions between brothers" (Proverbs 6:19). Some people seem to bring trouble with them wherever they go. A peacemaker brings calm. He lets "the peace of God rule" in his heart (Colossians 3:15), and it overflows to the people around him.

Abram and Lot

One of the best pictures of a peacemaker in the Old Testament is Abram. His herdsmen and his nephew Lot's herdsmen were fighting over grazing land. Abram was the older man, the head of the family, and the one God had given the land to. He had every right to demand the best. Instead, he said this.

> *And Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we **are** men, brothers. Is not all the land before you? Please separate from me. If the left, then I will go right; and if the right, then I will go left."*
> (Genesis 13:8-9)

Abram gave up his rights for the sake of peace. He let Lot choose first, and Lot chose the well-watered plain. Abram trusted God to take care of him, and God did. That is what a peacemaker looks like. He cares more about the relationship than about winning.

What It Does Not Mean

It does not mean peace at any price. Jesus Himself said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). The gospel divides people. Some will love it and some will hate it, sometimes in the same family. A peacemaker never buys peace by giving up the truth.

It does not mean ignoring sin. The false prophets in Jeremiah's day "healed the fracture of My people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' and there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14). Covering a wound with a bandage while the infection spreads is not peacemaking. Real peace sometimes requires hard conversations about what went wrong.

It does not mean avoiding conflict. Some people call themselves peacemakers when they are really peace-fakers. They avoid every hard conversation and smile while resentment builds underneath. That is not peace. Peacemaking often means walking toward a conflict, not away from it.

It does not mean every relationship can be fixed. Paul says, "if possible, so far as it is from you, being at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18). Notice "if possible" and "so far as it is from you." You can only control your side. Even Paul and Barnabas once had "a sharp disagreement, so that they were separated from one another" (Acts 15:39). Later Paul spoke warmly of Mark, the very man they had argued over (2 Timothy 4:11). Sometimes peace takes years.

The Promise: They Will Be Called Sons of God

In Jesus' day, the phrase "son of" often meant "someone who is like." A "son of peace" was a peaceful person (Luke 10:6). To be called a son of God means to be recognized as someone who resembles God, someone who carries the family likeness.

God is the great Peacemaker. When His children make peace, they look like their Father. Jesus says the same thing later in the chapter. We are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in the heavens" (Matthew 5:45).

Who does the calling? Ultimately, God does. He calls peacemakers His sons. But often other people notice too. When a believer steps into a quarrel and brings healing, people see something of God in him.

We become sons of God by faith in Christ: "you are all sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). Peacemaking does not make us God's children. It shows that we are. And John adds a word of wonder: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we may be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).

One day the whole world will know peace. When the Prince of Peace reigns on David's throne, nations "will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and they will not learn war again" (Isaiah 2:4). The peacemakers will finally see the world they have been working toward.

Jesus, the Peacemaker

Jesus did not just talk about peace. He made it, at the cost of His own life. "For He Himself is our peace, who made both one and broke down the middle wall of the barrier" (Ephesians 2:14). He made peace between Jews and Gentiles, who had been divided for centuries. He made peace between sinners and God, "having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20).

On the night before He died, He gave His disciples a gift: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). And when He rose from the dead and appeared to them, the first words out of His mouth were "Peace to you." Then He added, "even as the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21). He made peace, and then He sent His people out to carry it.

Living It Out

- Is there someone who has something against you? Don't wait for them. Go to them this week, humbly, and ask how you can make it right.
- Think of someone in your life who does not have peace with God. Pray for them by name, and look for a chance to share the good news.
- Watch your tongue. Are you passing along gossip that drives people apart? Stop it with you.
- When you see two people at odds, ask God whether you are meant to help. If so, go carefully, listen to both sides, and point them to Christ.
- In your home, be the first to apologize, even when you are only partly at fault.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between a peace lover and a peacemaker? Which one are you more often?
2. What does the Hebrew word shalom add to our understanding of peace?
3. Read Romans 5:1, 10. How did God make peace with us? What does that teach us about making peace with others?
4. Read Matthew 5:23-24. Why does Jesus tell us to go first, even when the other person has something against us?
5. What is the difference between a peacemaker and a "peace-faker"? How can you tell them apart?

6. Read Genesis 13:5-12. What did Abram give up to make peace? What did he gain?

Prince of Peace, thank You for making peace between me and God through Your blood. Make me a peacemaker. Give me courage to go first when there is a broken relationship. Keep my tongue from stirring up strife. Send me to carry the good news of peace with God to the people around me. Let people see in me the family likeness of my Father. Amen.

Chapter 12: Persecuted for Righteousness

> *Blessed **are** those who have been persecuted on account of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.*
>
> Matthew 5:10 (SLB)

The first seven Beatitudes describe a beautiful kind of person: humble, broken over sin, gentle, hungry for God, merciful, pure, and making peace. You might expect the world to love people like that. Jesus says the opposite. The eighth Beatitude tells us what happens when people like that live in a world that rejected its King. They get persecuted.

That is not a sign that something has gone wrong. Jesus says it is a sign of blessing.

Looking back, most of my hard times were the result of my own bad choices, not persecution. Peter makes that distinction in 1 Peter 4:15-16. Knowing the difference keeps us humble when we are wrong and bold when we stand for Jesus.

Hunted Down

Word Study: Persecuted

dioko (dee-OH-ko), Strong's G1377. The word means to pursue, chase, or hunt down. It can be used in a good sense, as when Paul says, "I pursue toward the goal" (Philippians 3:14) and Hebrews says, "Pursue peace with all" (Hebrews 12:14). Here it is used in its hostile sense, to harass or chase someone in order to harm them. In Matthew 5:10 it is a perfect passive participle, "those who have been persecuted," describing people who have been through it and still carry the marks.

It is worth noticing that the very same word is used for pursuing peace and for persecution. The world pursues the righteous. The righteous pursue peace. Those two things often happen at once.

On Account of Righteousness

Jesus is careful about which persecuted people He blesses. Not everyone who suffers is suffering for righteousness. Some people are disliked because they are rude, harsh, or foolish. Some are opposed because they picked a fight they did not need to pick. That is not what Jesus is talking about.

Peter makes the same distinction.

> *For this **is** favor, if because of conscience toward God someone endures griefs, suffering unjustly. For what credit **is it** if, when you sin and are beaten, you endure? But if, when you do good and suffer, you endure, this **is** favor before God.* (1 Peter 2:19-20)

And again, "For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler in other people's matters; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this respect" (1 Peter 4:15-16).

So here is a question every Christian who feels opposed should ask honestly: Am I being opposed because I am living for God, or because I am being difficult? If people dislike me because I am arrogant, preachy, or unkind, that is not persecution. It is a call to repent. But if people oppose me because I will not lie for them, cheat with them, laugh at what God hates, or keep quiet about Jesus, then I am in the company Jesus calls blessed.

Why the Righteous Are Persecuted

Why would the world persecute people who are merciful and make peace? Jesus explained it to His disciples on the night before He died.

> *If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before you. If you were of the world, the world would love **its** own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word which I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.* (John 15:18-20)

The world hated Jesus first. He was the most loving, honest, pure, and gentle man who ever lived, and they crucified Him. If the world treated the Master that way, it will not treat His servants much better.

Righteous people make unrighteous people uncomfortable. A pure life exposes impure ones, even without saying a word. Jesus said that people love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil, and they will not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed (John 3:19-20). When a Christian lives right, the light shines, and some people hate the light.

Paul put it simply: "And indeed all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Not "might be." Will be. It is one of the most certain promises in the Bible, and one we rarely claim.

Persecution in Scripture

The Bible is full of people who suffered for doing right.

- **Abel** was killed by his brother because his offering pleased God and Cain's did not (Genesis 4:3-8; 1 John 3:12).
- **Moses** chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to have the temporary enjoyment of sin" (Hebrews 11:25).
- **Jeremiah** was beaten, put in stocks, and thrown into a muddy cistern for preaching God's word (Jeremiah 20:2; 38:6).
- **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** told the king, "And if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not serving your god" (Daniel 3:18).
- **Daniel** kept praying three times a day by his open window after it became illegal (Daniel 6:10).
- **Peter and John** were jailed and told to stop preaching. They answered, "we are not able not to speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).
- **Stephen** was stoned to death, praying, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60).
- **Paul** was whipped five times, beaten with rods three times, stoned once, and shipwrecked three times (2 Corinthians 11:24-25).

Hebrews 11 sums up many others: “They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they were tested, they died by slaughter of the sword... of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:37-38).

Persecution Today

For many of us in America, persecution has mostly meant being mocked, left out, passed over, or called names. That is real, and Jesus includes it in the next verse: “Blessed are you when they insult you” (Matthew 5:11). It should not be brushed off.

But we should also remember that in many parts of the world today, Christians are beaten, jailed, driven from their homes, and killed for their faith. When we read this Beatitude, we should pray for them. Hebrews tells us to “Remember the prisoners as bound with them” (Hebrews 13:3). The persecuted church is our family.

And we should not assume it could never happen to us. Jesus warned that a time is coming when His followers would be hated by all the nations on account of His name (Matthew 24:9). As I read the Bible, that verse looks ahead mainly to the tribulation, the seven years of trouble before Jesus returns to reign. I believe the church will be taken up to meet the Lord before that time begins, because Jesus promised to keep His people “from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole inhabited world” (Revelation 3:10), and because “God did not appoint us for wrath” (1 Thessalonians 5:9). But being kept from God’s wrath is not the same as being kept from the world’s hatred. Christians have been persecuted in every century since Pentecost, and Jesus never promised that ours would be different.

What It Does Not Mean

It does not mean we should seek out suffering. An early Christian account of the death of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, in the A.D. 150s, tells of a man named Quintus who rushed forward to turn himself in and then lost his nerve. The writers said they did not praise people who handed themselves over, because the gospel does not teach that. Jesus Himself told His disciples, “whenever they persecute you in this city, flee into the other” (Matthew 10:23). We do not need to invite persecution. We only need to stay faithful when it comes.

It does not mean every criticism is persecution. Christians are sometimes too quick to call any disagreement an attack. When people challenge our views, we should listen, answer with gentleness, and check whether they have a point.

It does not mean we should hate those who persecute us. A few verses later Jesus says, “love your enemies, bless those cursing you, do good to those hating you, and pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you” (Matthew 5:44). Stephen prayed for the men throwing the stones.

It does not mean suffering earns salvation. We are saved by grace through faith, not by suffering. But God does see and reward faithfulness, as we will see in the next chapter.

The Promise: Theirs Is the Kingdom

The eighth Beatitude ends with exactly the same promise as the first: "theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." That is no accident. The Beatitudes begin and end with the kingdom, like bookends. Everything in between belongs inside them.

It also tells us something about the persecuted. The world takes things away from them: reputation, jobs, friends, possessions, freedom, sometimes life. The Hebrew Christians "accepted with joy the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you have in yourselves a better and abiding possession in the heavens" (Hebrews 10:34). You can lose everything the world gives and still own the kingdom. Nobody can take that away.

Notice the tense again. "Theirs is," present tense. Even while they are being hunted, the kingdom is theirs. The persecutor may hold the sword, but the persecuted holds the kingdom.

Jesus, the Persecuted One

Jesus was persecuted from the cradle to the cross. Herod tried to kill Him as a baby (Matthew 2:13-16). The people of His own hometown tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:28-30). The religious leaders plotted against Him, accused Him of working for Satan, and finally handed Him over to be crucified. He was mocked, spit on, beaten, and nailed to a cross.

And why? For righteousness. Pilate himself said, "I find no cause in Him" (John 18:38). He was persecuted not for doing wrong but for being perfectly right.

Even after He rose, He took the persecution of His people personally. When Saul was hunting down Christians, the risen Jesus stopped him on the road to Damascus and said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). Not "My followers." Me. When His people suffer, He suffers with them.

Living It Out

- Ask yourself honestly: If I am opposed, is it for righteousness, or for something I need to repent of?
- Is there an area where you have been keeping quiet about your faith to avoid trouble? Ask God for courage.
- Pray this week for persecuted Christians around the world. Many ministries publish lists of countries and specific prayer needs.
- Think of someone who has opposed or mocked you because of your faith. Pray for them by name, and look for a way to do them good.
- Read Hebrews 11 and let the stories of the faithful strengthen you.

Study Questions

1. Why does Jesus say "on account of righteousness"? Why does that phrase matter so much?
2. Read 1 Peter 2:19-20 and 4:15-16. How can you tell the difference between suffering for righteousness and suffering for your own faults?
3. Read John 15:18-20. Why does the world hate those who follow Jesus?

4. Which person in the list of Bible examples encourages you most? Why?

5. What is the difference between being kept from God's wrath and being kept from the world's hatred?

6. The first and eighth Beatitudes share the same promise. What do you think Jesus wanted us to see by that?

Lord Jesus, You were hated without a cause, and You told us the world would treat us the same way. Give me courage to live for You openly, and humility to examine myself honestly when I am opposed. Strengthen my brothers and sisters who are suffering for Your name today. Teach me to love and pray for those who mistreat me. And thank You that no one can take Your kingdom from me. Amen.

Chapter 13: Blessed Are You

> *Blessed are you when they insult you, and persecute **you**, and say every evil word against you, lying, on account of Me. Rejoice and exult, for your reward **is** great in the heavens; for thus they persecuted the prophets who **were** before you.*
>
> Matthew 5:11-12 (SLB)

Up to this point, every Beatitude has been in the third person. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom.” “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Jesus has been describing a kind of person. Now, suddenly, He turns and looks His disciples in the eye. “Blessed are you.”

This last blessing expands the eighth one. It takes the general truth about persecution and makes it personal. And it adds two things the earlier Beatitudes do not have: a command, and a reason that reaches back through the whole history of God’s people.

From They to You

Some teachers count nine Beatitudes in Matthew 5, and some count eight, treating verses 11 and 12 as an expansion of verse 10. Both ways of counting are common. What matters is the change of voice. Jesus moves from a description to a direct address. He is no longer just teaching about blessed people. He is telling these particular people that they are about to be insulted, persecuted, and lied about, and that they are blessed when it happens.

Think of the men sitting in front of Him. Peter would be jailed and, according to early church tradition, crucified. James the brother of John would be killed by Herod’s sword (Acts 12:2). John would be exiled to the island of Patmos “because of the word of God and because of the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:9). Jesus was not describing someone else. He was describing their future.

Three Kinds of Mistreatment

Jesus names three things that will happen.

They will insult you. The word means to taunt, scold, or heap abuse on someone. It is the same Greek word Matthew uses for the robbers crucified with Jesus, who “were reviling Him” (Matthew 27:44). Insults are often the first form persecution takes, and for many Christians they are the main form.

They will persecute you. This is the same word as in verse 10, to hunt down or harass. It moves from words to actions.

They will say every evil word against you, lying. This is slander. People will spread false stories. In the early centuries, rumors spread that Christians were cannibals because they spoke of eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, and that they were atheists because they would not worship the Roman gods. The Christian writer Athenagoras answered both of those charges in a defense he wrote to the

emperor about A.D. 177. The Roman historian Tacitus described Christians as a group "hated for their abominations." Jesus told His disciples ahead of time that this would happen.

Outside the Bible: Tacitus on the Christians of Rome (*Text confirmed*)
Tacitus, a Roman senator and historian, wrote his *Annals* around A.D. 116. Describing the great fire of Rome in A.D. 64, he says that the emperor Nero blamed a group "hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace," and had them put to death with terrible cruelty (Annals 15.44, in the Church and Brodribb translation). Tacitus was no friend of the Christians. That is what makes his report valuable. It shows that within about thirty years of Jesus' death, His followers in Rome were already hated, slandered, and killed for His name, just as He said.

Two Key Words: Lying and On Account of Me

Two small phrases in verse 11 make all the difference.

"Lying." The blessing is for those who are falsely accused. If what people say about us is true, it is not persecution. It is correction, and the right response is to repent, not to rejoice. Peter said the same: "For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten, you endure?" (1 Peter 2:20). We should always check ourselves first.

"On account of Me." In verse 10 Jesus said "on account of righteousness." Now He says "on account of Me." He puts Himself in the place of righteousness. Think about how remarkable that is. No prophet ever said, "Blessed are you when you suffer for me." Moses never said it. Elijah never said it. Only God has the right to ask people to suffer for His sake. When Jesus says "on account of Me," He is quietly claiming to be God.

Luke's version says "on account of the Son of Man" (Luke 6:22), using the title Jesus most often used for Himself, a title that comes from Daniel's vision of the One who receives an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14).

The Command: Rejoice and Exult

Now comes the most surprising part. Jesus does not say "endure it" or "put up with it." He says, "Rejoice and exult." Luke's version is even stronger: "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy" (Luke 6:23).

This is not a call to pretend persecution feels good. It is a call to see it from God's point of view. And the apostles did exactly that. After they were flogged by the Jewish council and ordered to stop speaking in Jesus' name, "they were departing from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to be dishonored for His name" (Acts 5:41). Paul and Silas, beaten and locked in stocks in a Philippian jail, were "praying" and "singing hymns to God" at midnight (Acts 16:25).

How could they do that? Jesus gives two reasons.

Reason One: Your Reward Is Great

"For your reward is great in the heavens." Jesus is not embarrassed to talk about rewards. He brings them up again and again. Give in secret, and "your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matthew 6:4). Even "a cup of cold water" given in His name "will by no means lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42). "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20).

We need to be careful here. Rewards are not salvation. Salvation is a free gift. But the Bible teaches that saved people will be rewarded for faithful service.

> *For it is necessary for all of us to be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive back the things* ***done*** *through the body, according to what he did, whether good or evil.* (2 Corinthians 5:10)

As I understand the Bible, this judgment seat of Christ is not about whether a believer goes to heaven. That was settled at the cross. It is about rewards. Paul describes it as a fire that tests each believer's work. Work built with gold, silver, and precious stones will last, and the builder "will receive a reward." Work built with wood, hay, and straw will burn up, and the builder "will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). I believe this judgment takes place after Jesus calls His church up to be with Him, before He returns to the earth to reign.

The New Testament mentions several crowns: "the crown of righteousness" for "all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8), "the crown of life" for those who endure trial and are faithful to death (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10), and "the unfading crown of glory" for faithful shepherds (1 Peter 5:4). Whatever these crowns are exactly, they are real, and Jesus wants us to look forward to them.

Paul put suffering and reward side by side: "For the momentary lightness of our affliction is producing for us, excessively to excess, an eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Light and momentary on one side. Eternal and weighty on the other. That is why we can rejoice.

Reason Two: You Are in Good Company

"For thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Jesus places His disciples in a long line of faithful people. The prophets were not honored in their own day. They were mocked, beaten, jailed, and killed. Jesus later grieved over this: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one killing the prophets and stoning those sent to her!" (Matthew 23:37).

When you suffer for Jesus, you are not strange or alone. You are standing with Elijah, hunted by Jezebel. With Jeremiah, sinking in the mud of a cistern. With Daniel in the lions' den. With Stephen under the stones. Hebrews calls them "so great a cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1). You have joined the family.

What It Does Not Mean

It does not mean we are blessed when we bring trouble on ourselves. The word "lying" rules that out.

It does not mean we should never defend ourselves. Paul defended himself in court several times and used his Roman citizenship to stop an unlawful beating (Acts 22:25). Rejoicing in persecution does not mean we cannot ask for justice.

It does not mean we serve God for the reward alone. We serve Him because we love Him. But Hebrews says that a person who comes to God "must believe that He is, and that He becomes a rewarder to those who earnestly seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Believing God rewards faithfulness is part of faith, not a lack of it.

Jesus, Insulted and Lied About

Jesus experienced every part of this blessing. He was insulted: they called Him a glutton and a drunkard (Matthew 11:19), and they mocked Him on the cross. He was persecuted from town to town. And He was lied about. At His trial, the chief priests "were seeking false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death" (Matthew 26:59).

And He rejoiced in what lay beyond it. Hebrews says He, "for the joy lying before Him endured the cross, having despised the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). He was looking at the reward: His Father's glory, His people saved, and His place at the right hand of the throne. He lived this Beatitude first, and He calls us to follow.

Living It Out

- If you are being criticized right now, sort it honestly. Is any of it true? If so, repent. If it is false and it is because of Jesus, thank God.
- Memorize Matthew 5:11-12 so that it is ready when you need it.
- Read Acts 5:17-42. Notice how the apostles responded to threats and beatings.
- Think about the rewards the New Testament promises. How would living with eternity in view change one decision you face this week?
- Encourage a believer you know who is being mocked or opposed for their faith. Remind them they are in good company.

Study Questions

1. Why do you think Jesus switched from "they" to "you" in Matthew 5:11?
2. Why are the words "lying" and "on account of Me" so important in this verse?
3. What does "on account of Me" tell us about who Jesus claimed to be?
4. Read Acts 5:40-42. How could the apostles rejoice after being flogged?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. What will the judgment seat of Christ be like for believers?
6. Which prophet or faithful believer from the Bible encourages you most when you face opposition? Why?

Lord Jesus, You were insulted, persecuted, and lied about, and You endured the cross for the joy set before You. When people mock or oppose me because I belong to You, help me to rejoice instead of growing bitter. Keep me honest enough to repent when the criticism is true. And keep my eyes on the reward You have promised and on the great company of the faithful who went before me. Amen.

Part Three: Luke’s Blessings and Woes

Chapter 14: Blessed Are You Who Are Poor

> *And He, having lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, was saying, "Blessed **are** the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed **are** those who hunger now, for you will be filled. Blessed **are** those who weep now, for you will laugh."*
>
> Luke 6:20-21 (SLB)

Matthew gave us eight blessings, mostly in the third person, with a ninth spoken straight to the disciples. Luke gives us four, and every one of them is spoken directly to "you." Luke also adds a little word twice that changes how the whole passage feels: "now." This chapter looks at Luke's four blessings and what they add to what we have already learned from Matthew.

Looking at His Disciples

Luke sets the scene carefully. Jesus had spent the whole night on the mountain in prayer, and in the morning He chose the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-16). Then He came down with them to a level place, where a huge crowd was waiting. People had come from Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon, "to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases." Power was going out from Him and healing them all (Luke 6:17-19).

Then Luke says, "having lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, was saying" (Luke 6:20). Picture it. The crowd is pressing in. People are being healed. And Jesus raises His eyes and looks at the men He has just chosen, and at the larger group of disciples around them. These were people who had left fishing boats, tax booths, and family businesses to follow Him. Many of them really were poor, hungry, and looked down on. Jesus looks at them and says, "Blessed are you."

Blessed Are the Poor

Luke's first blessing has no "in spirit." It is simply "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

Does that mean that every poor person is blessed just for being poor? No. Poverty itself is not a virtue, and the Bible never treats it as one. But in Luke's Gospel, "the poor" usually means more than people without money. It means the humble poor who trust in God because they have nowhere else to turn. That idea runs through the whole Old Testament. "I will leave in your midst a people afflicted and poor, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD" (Zephaniah 3:12).

Luke is the Gospel that pays the most attention to the poor. Jesus was born to a family too poor to offer a lamb, laid in a manger because there was no room in the lodging place (Luke 2:7, 24; compare Leviticus 12:8). In His first sermon He announced that He had been anointed "to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18). He told a host to invite "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" to his dinner, people who could not repay him (Luke 14:13). He praised a poor widow who gave two small coins, saying she had given more than all the rich (Luke 21:1-4). He told the story of Lazarus the beggar, carried by angels to Abraham's side, while the rich man who ignored him ended in torment (Luke 16:19-31).

Luke wants us to see that God really does care about poor people, and that the kingdom often finds a warmer welcome among them than among the rich. James saw the same thing: "did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" (James 2:5).

So which is it? Matthew says "poor in spirit," and Luke says "poor." The answer is that they belong together. Physical poverty often teaches spiritual poverty. People who have nothing in this world are often quicker to see that they have nothing to offer God. And people who have plenty are often slower to see it. That is why Jesus said it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom (Luke 18:24). Matthew tells us what the poverty is that God blesses. Luke reminds us where it is most often found.

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger Now

"Blessed are those who hunger now, for you will be filled" (Luke 6:21). Matthew adds "and thirst for righteousness." Luke leaves it as plain hunger.

Again, both are true. Jesus fed hungry crowds, and He told us to feed the hungry. Mary sang that God "has filled with good things" those who hunger (Luke 1:53). Isaiah saw a day when God's servants would eat while His enemies went hungry (Isaiah 65:13).

And the little word "now" changes everything. The disciples are hungry now. But "now" is not forever. The present situation is not the final one. Jesus is telling them that the way things are today is not the way things will be. God will reverse it.

Blessed Are Those Who Weep Now

"Blessed are those who weep now, for you will laugh." Matthew says "mourn" and "comforted." Luke says "weep" and "laugh."

That promise of laughter is wonderful. It is not the mocking laughter of the world. It is the laughter of people who have been rescued. When God brought His people back from exile, the psalmist wrote, "Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with a shout of joy" (Psalm 126:2). When God gave Sarah a son in her old age, she said, "God has made laughter for me" (Genesis 21:6). Joy will have the last word.

Jesus told His disciples the same thing the night before He died. "You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be grieved, but your grief will become joy" (John 16:20). Within three days they found out what He meant.

Blessed When Men Hate You

Luke's fourth blessing matches Matthew's ninth.

> *Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and insult **you** and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for look, your reward **is** great in heaven; for according to these things their fathers were doing to the prophets.* (Luke 6:22-23)

Luke names four kinds of mistreatment. Men will hate you. They will exclude you, which may mean being shut out of the synagogue, the center of Jewish community life (John 9:22). They will insult you. And they will "cast out your name as evil," treating the very name of Christian as something shameful.

And again Jesus says, "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy." Luke uses a word for leaping that he also uses for the baby John leaping in his mother's womb when Mary arrived (Luke 1:41, 44). It is a picture of joy that cannot sit still.

Why Luke Says "You"

Matthew's Beatitudes describe a kind of person, so that we can ask ourselves, "Am I like that?" Luke's Beatitudes speak to a group of real people, so that we hear Jesus speaking to us. Both are needed.

There is something tender in Luke's version. Jesus is not standing at a distance describing types of people. He is looking into the faces of His followers. He sees their empty pockets, their growling stomachs, their tears, and the scorn they face. And He tells them that God sees it too, that they are not forgotten, and that their story will end in joy.

If you are a follower of Jesus and you are poor, hungry, grieving, or rejected right now, Luke 6:20-23 is His word to you. He has lifted up His eyes and looked at you.

The Great Reversal

Luke's Beatitudes are part of a theme that runs all through his Gospel. Scholars sometimes call it the great reversal. God turns things upside down. The proud are brought low and the humble lifted up. Mary sang about it before Jesus was born.

> *He has brought down rulers from thrones and has exalted **the** lowly. **Those** who hunger He has filled with good **things**, and **those** who are rich He has sent away empty.* (Luke 1:52-53)

Jesus said it in many ways: "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14). "And look, there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last" (Luke 13:30). Abraham told the rich man in torment, "you received your good things in your lifetime, and Lazarus likewise the bad things; but now he is comforted, and you are in anguish" (Luke 16:25).

That reversal has already begun in Jesus. But its fullness is still ahead. Notice that three of Luke's four promises are in the future tense: "you will be filled," "you will laugh," "your reward is great in heaven." The reversal will be complete when the King returns.

Living It Out

- If you are going through a time of real need, read Luke 6:20-23 as Jesus' words spoken straight to you. Thank Him that He sees.
- If you are comfortable, ask how God might want you to share with those who are not. Luke 14:12-14 is a good place to start.
- Think about the word "now." What in your life is a "now" situation that God has promised to change?

- Look at the people your church tends to overlook. Who are the poor, the hungry, and the weeping in your community? How could you welcome them?

Study Questions

1. Read Luke 6:17-20. Describe the scene. Why do you think Jesus looked at His disciples when He spoke these words?
2. How do Matthew's "poor in spirit" and Luke's "poor" fit together?
3. Find three other places in Luke's Gospel where Jesus shows special care for the poor. What do they have in common?
4. What does the word "now" add to Luke's blessings?
5. Read Luke 1:46-55. How does Mary's song prepare us for the Beatitudes in Luke 6?
6. Is there a "now" in your life that you need to trust God to reverse? What promise can you hold on to?

> *Lord Jesus, thank You that You see the poor, the hungry, the grieving, and the rejected, and that You call them blessed. When I am in need, help me to hear You speaking to me. When I have plenty, make me generous and humble. Thank You that the way things are now is not the way they will always be, and that You will fill the hungry and turn weeping into laughter. Amen.*

Chapter 15: Woe to You Who Are Rich

> *But woe to you who are rich, for you have your comfort in full. Woe to you who have been filled, for you will hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for according to these things their fathers were doing to the false prophets.*
>
> Luke 6:24-26 (SLB)

Most people who love the Beatitudes have never memorized the woes. That is understandable. They are not comfortable to read. But Jesus spoke them in the same breath as the blessings, and Luke put them right next to each other on purpose. If we only hear the blessings, we only hear half of what Jesus said.

Each woe is the mirror image of a blessing.

Blessing (Luke 6:20-23)	**Woe (Luke 6:24-26)**
Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.	Woe to you who are rich, for you have your comfort in full.
Blessed are those who hunger now, for you will be filled.	Woe to you who have been filled, for you will hunger.
Blessed are those who weep now, for you will laugh.	Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.
Blessed are you when men hate you... for according to these things their fathers were doing to the prophets.	Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for according to these things their fathers were doing to the false prophets.

What a Woe Is

Word Study: Woe

ouai (oo-EYE), Strong's G3759. This is a cry of grief and warning, almost like a groan: "Alas!" It is not a curse, and it is not Jesus wishing harm on anyone. It is the cry of someone who sees disaster coming on a person who does not see it himself. The prophets used the same kind of cry. Isaiah said, "Woe to me! For I am destroyed" (Isaiah 6:5), and he spoke six woes on the sins of Judah in Isaiah 5:8-23.

That matters for how we read these verses. Jesus is not gloating over the rich. He is grieving over them. A woe is a warning sign put up by someone who loves you enough to tell you the bridge is out.

Woe to the Rich

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have your comfort in full."

The word for "have in full" was a business word. It was written on receipts to mean "paid in full." Jesus used the same word in the Sermon on the Mount about people who give so others will see them: "they have their reward in full" (Matthew 6:2). The idea is that the rich have already received all the comfort they are going to get. They wanted comfort in this life, and they got it. The account is closed. There is nothing more coming.

Is Jesus condemning everyone who has money? No. Abraham, Job, and David were wealthy men who loved God. Joseph of Arimathea was rich, and he gave his own tomb for the body of Jesus (Matthew 27:57-60). Zacchaeus was rich, and when he met Jesus he gave half of his possessions to the poor, and Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).

The woe is for the rich who have made their wealth their comfort. They trust in it. They find their security in it. They feel no need for God. Jesus told a parable about a man like that. His land produced so much that he planned to tear down his barns and build bigger ones, and then say to his soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; rest, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, "Fool! This night they are demanding your soul from you" (Luke 12:19-20). Then Jesus added, "So is the one who treasures up for himself and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

Paul gives the rich a better way.

> *Charge those who are rich in the present age not to be high-minded nor to have set **their** hope on **the** uncertainty of riches, but in the living God, who provides us all things richly for enjoyment, to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, ready to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may lay hold of eternal life.*
> (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

By the standards of history and most of the world today, almost every reader of this book is rich. We have food in the refrigerator, a roof over our heads, and more clothes than we need. This woe is for us to hear. The question is not how much we have. It is where our comfort is.

Woe to the Full

"Woe to you who have been filled, for you will hunger."

These are people who are satisfied with life as it is. They have plenty to eat, and they feel no deeper hunger. They are not hungry for God, for righteousness, or for anything beyond what this world offers.

The danger here is the opposite of the fourth Beatitude. The person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness will be filled. The person who is already full of himself, his comforts, and this world will one day find himself empty. Jesus said to the church in Laodicea, "you say, 'I am rich, and I have become rich, and I have need of nothing,'" and He told them they were really "poor and blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17).

A full stomach is a blessing from God. A full heart that has no room for God is a disaster.

Woe to Those Who Laugh Now

"Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep."

Jesus is not against laughter. God made laughter, and the Bible says there is "a time to laugh" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Jesus Himself went to weddings and parties. The woe is not for laughter itself but for a certain kind of laughing.

It is the laughter of people who refuse to take anything seriously. They laugh at sin. They laugh at God. They laugh their way past death, judgment, and the needs of the people around them. They never stop long enough to mourn, so they never come to the comfort that mourning leads to. James spoke to people like that: "let your laughter be turned to mourning and the joy to gloom. Be humbled before the Lord, and He will exalt you" (James 4:9-10).

The world's entertainment is built on keeping us laughing so we never have to think. Jesus warns that the laughter will not last.

Woe When All Speak Well of You

"Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for according to these things their fathers were doing to the false prophets."

This is the most surprising woe of all. Most of us want everyone to like us. We work hard at it. Jesus says that if everyone speaks well of you, something may be wrong.

Why? Because a faithful follower of Jesus will always say some things that some people do not want to hear. The true prophets were rejected because they told the truth. The false prophets were popular because they told people what they wanted to hear. Jeremiah complained that the prophets of his day said "Peace, peace," when there was no peace (Jeremiah 6:14). Paul warned that a time would come when people "will not endure sound teaching, but according to their own desires they will heap up teachers for themselves, being tickled in the hearing" (2 Timothy 4:3).

This woe is a warning for every preacher, teacher, and Christian who wants to be liked. If you never say anything that costs you, you may not be saying everything Jesus said.

This does not mean we should try to be disliked. Paul said church leaders must have "a good testimony from those outside" (1 Timothy 3:7). We should be the kindest, most honest, most generous people in our neighborhoods. But when it comes to the truth of the gospel, we cannot buy approval by trimming the message.

Why the Woes Are a Kindness

It would have been easy for Jesus to give the blessings and leave out the woes. Most preachers would. But Jesus loved His listeners too much for that.

A doctor who tells you only good news is not a good doctor. A friend who never warns you about danger is not much of a friend. The woes are Jesus' love telling the truth. He wants the rich to find a better treasure, the full to find a deeper hunger, the laughing to find a real joy, and the popular to find the courage to be faithful.

And notice who is speaking. This is the same Jesus who would later weep over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). The woes are not cold. They are spoken with tears.

The Great Reversal, Both Ways

In the last chapter we saw the great reversal from the bottom up: the poor, hungry, and weeping are lifted. The woes show it from the top down. The rich, full, and laughing will be brought low, unless they turn.

That reversal is not just a nice idea. It is coming. Abraham said to the rich man in torment, "you received your good things in your lifetime, and Lazarus likewise the bad things; but now he is comforted, and you are in anguish" (Luke 16:25). James warned the rich who cheated their workers, "weep, wailing over your miseries that are coming upon you" (James 5:1).

The good news is that no one has to stay on the wrong side of the line. Zacchaeus crossed it in a single afternoon. The same Jesus who spoke the woes also said, "for the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which has been lost" (Luke 19:10).

Living It Out

- Ask yourself honestly: Where do I find my comfort? If my money were gone tomorrow, would my peace go with it?
- Is there any way in which I am "full" and no longer hungry for God? What has taken His place?
- Think about what you laugh at. Is any of it something God grieves over?
- Is there a truth you have been afraid to say because you want people to like you? Ask God for courage and gentleness.
- Read Luke 19:1-10 and let Zacchaeus remind you that it is never too late to turn.

Study Questions

1. Why do you think most Christians know the Beatitudes but not the woes?
2. What is a woe? How is it different from a curse?
3. Read Luke 12:13-21. What was the rich fool's real problem? How can we avoid his mistake?
4. Does Jesus condemn everyone who has money? Give examples from the Bible to support your answer.
5. Why is it dangerous when "all men speak well of you"? How do we balance this with being a good witness to outsiders?
6. Read Luke 19:1-10. How does the story of Zacchaeus show that the woes are not the end of the story?

> *Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me enough to warn me. Search me for any place where I have found my comfort in money, my satisfaction in this world, my joy in what grieves You, or my safety in the approval of people. Turn my heart back to You. Make me rich toward God, hungry for righteousness, joyful in the right things, and faithful to Your truth, whatever it costs. Amen.*

Part Four: Living the Blessed Life

Chapter 16: How the Blessings Fit Together

> *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of **the** Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from **the** Lord, **the** Spirit.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 3:18 (SLB)

We have looked at each Beatitude one at a time. Now it is time to step back and look at all of them together. The Beatitudes are not a random list of eight good qualities, the way you might jot down a grocery list. They have a shape. They follow an order. And when you see the shape, each one makes more sense.

Read the Beatitudes as a chain, and hungering and thirsting for righteousness is the link I have to guard most. When life gets busy, I put God on the back burner and focus on my tasks instead of Him. Starting again at the beginning, admitting my need for Him, resets the rest.

One Person, Not Eight

The first thing to notice is that Jesus is not describing eight different kinds of Christians. He is not saying that some believers are called to be meek, while others are called to be merciful, and a few especially spiritual ones get to be pure in heart. All eight describe every true follower of Jesus.

That is different from spiritual gifts. Paul says the Holy Spirit gives different gifts to different believers. Not everyone is a teacher or a prophet (1 Corinthians 12:29-30). But the Beatitudes are not gifts. They are more like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Every Christian is meant to bear all of that fruit, because it is the character of Christ growing in us. The Beatitudes are the same. They are eight sides of one face, and the face is the face of Jesus.

Of course, no Christian shows all eight perfectly. Some are stronger in one and weaker in another. But a person who shows none of them at all should ask whether he really knows Christ.

Bookends: The Kingdom

The first and eighth Beatitudes end with the same promise, “theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.” Bible writers often used this kind of bookend to mark a section. Everything between the two bookends belongs together. It is as if Jesus is saying, “Here is the whole picture of a kingdom person, from the first step to the last.”

And the promises in between all describe parts of that one kingdom: comfort, the earth, being filled, mercy, seeing God, being called God’s sons. The kingdom is not one prize among others. It is the whole package, and the other promises are what the kingdom includes.

Two Groups of Four

Many Bible teachers have noticed that the eight Beatitudes fall naturally into two groups of four.

The first four look toward God. They describe the believer's need and longing. The poor in spirit see their emptiness. The mourners grieve over it. The meek bow to God's will instead of fighting for their own. And the hungry long to be filled with His righteousness. These four describe a person who is coming to God empty-handed.

The second four look toward others. They describe what God's filling produces. The merciful show others the mercy they have received. The pure in heart live with integrity before God and people. The peacemakers work to bring others to peace with God and with each other. And the persecuted are the ones who live this way in a world that does not like it. These four describe a person who has been filled and is now overflowing.

In the middle stands the fourth Beatitude, the turning point: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." The first three empty us. The fourth fills us. The last four flow out of that filling.

Looking toward God (emptied)	Looking toward others (filled and overflowing)
1. The poor in spirit	5. The merciful
2. Those who mourn	6. The pure in heart
3. The meek	7. The peacemakers
4. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness	8. Those persecuted for righteousness

Matching Pairs

If you set the two groups side by side, as in the table above, you can see that the Beatitudes in each row seem to belong together.

Poor in spirit and merciful. The person who knows he is spiritually bankrupt and has received God's mercy becomes merciful to others. The beggar who was fed shares his bread.

Mourning and pure in heart. The person who grieves over the sin in his heart is the one who longs for that heart to be clean. Mourning over sin leads to purity of heart.

Meek and peacemakers. The person who has stopped fighting for his own rights is free to bring peace between others. You cannot make peace while you are still demanding your own way.

Hungry for righteousness and persecuted for righteousness. The word "righteousness" appears in both. The person who hungers for righteousness will live it out, and living it out will bring opposition.

I don't want to press these pairings too hard. Jesus did not label them, and the Beatitudes can be connected in other ways too. But seeing them this way helps us remember that each blessing grows from the ones before it.

A Ladder, or a Chain

Another way to see the Beatitudes is as a chain, where each link hooks into the next.

1. I see that I have nothing to offer God, and I come to Him empty-handed. (**Poor in spirit**)
2. I grieve over the sin I see in myself and the world. (**Mourning**)
3. I stop demanding my own way and trust God. (**Meek**)
4. I long for God to make me right and to make me like Him. (**Hungry for righteousness**)
5. God fills me, and I begin to show others the mercy I have received. (**Merciful**)
6. My heart grows cleaner and more undivided toward God. (**Pure in heart**)
7. I start working to bring others to peace with God and with each other. (**Peacemaker**)
8. The world notices, and some of it pushes back. (**Persecuted**)

Reading them this way shows why we cannot skip ahead. Many people want to be peacemakers or merciful without first becoming poor in spirit. But mercy that does not come from having received mercy turns into pride. Peacemaking that does not come from meekness turns into control. The order matters.

And yet the chain is not something we climb once and finish. It is more like a circle. Every time we are persecuted, we are driven back to God, poor in spirit again. Every new step of growth shows us more sin to mourn. The Christian life goes around this circle again and again, and each time around, God makes us a little more like His Son.

The Beatitudes and the Rest of the Sermon

The Beatitudes are the doorway into the whole Sermon on the Mount. Many of the themes in them come back later in the sermon.

- The **meek** who do not fight for their rights (5:5) return when Jesus teaches about turning the other cheek and going the extra mile (5:38-42).
- The **hungry for righteousness** (5:6) return when Jesus says our righteousness must go beyond that of the Pharisees (5:20), and when He tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (6:33).
- The **merciful** (5:7) return in the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors" (6:12-15).
- The **pure in heart** (5:8) return when Jesus speaks of anger and lust in the heart (5:21-30), of giving and praying in secret (6:1-18), and of the single eye and serving one master (6:22-24).
- The **peacemakers** (5:9) return when Jesus tells us to be reconciled to a brother before offering a gift (5:23-26) and to love our enemies (5:43-48).
- The **persecuted** (5:10-12) return when Jesus tells us to pray for those who persecute us (5:44).

The rest of the sermon fills in what the Beatitudes look like in daily life.

Living It Out

Here is an exercise. Look at the eight Beatitudes and ask yourself which one is strongest in your life right now and which one is weakest. Then ask a trusted friend or your spouse the same question about you. Their answer may be more accurate than yours.

For your weakest one, look back at the Beatitudes that come before it in the chain. Often the problem with a later Beatitude is a weakness in an earlier one. If you struggle to show mercy, the root may be that you have not fully grasped your own need for mercy. If you struggle to make peace, the root may be a lack of meekness. Go back to the earlier link and ask God to strengthen it.

Study Questions

1. Why is it important that all eight Beatitudes describe every Christian, not just some?
2. What is the significance of the first and eighth Beatitudes ending with the same promise?
3. Explain the two groups of four. Why is the fourth Beatitude a turning point?
4. Which of the matching pairs makes the most sense to you? Why?
5. Why is it dangerous to try to practice the later Beatitudes without the earlier ones?
6. Which Beatitude is strongest in your life right now? Which is weakest? What earlier link might need strengthening?

> *Lord, thank You for showing me what a person in Your kingdom looks like. I see how far I am from it. Empty me of my pride, break my heart over sin, teach me to trust You, and fill me with Your righteousness. Then let Your mercy, purity, and peace overflow from me to others. Keep taking me around this circle until I look like Jesus. Amen.*

Chapter 17: Jesus, the Blessed Man

> *looking to the founder and perfecter of the faith, Jesus, who for the joy lying before Him endured **the** cross, having despised **the** shame, and sat down at **the** right hand of the throne of God.*
>
> Hebrews 12:2 (SLB)

Psalm 1 begins, "How blessed is the man." For centuries, readers have looked for the man that psalm describes, the one who never walks in the counsel of the wicked, whose delight is in God's law, who is like a tree that never withers. They found Him in Jesus. He is the only Man who ever fully matched that description.

The same is true of the Beatitudes. Before they describe us, they describe Him. Every chapter in Part Two has ended with a section about Jesus. This chapter pulls those together, because the most important thing to understand about the Beatitudes is that they are a portrait of Christ.

Why This Matters

If the Beatitudes were only a list of qualities we are supposed to develop, they would crush us. We would read them, see how far we fall short, and either give up or pretend. But if they are first a portrait of Jesus, everything changes.

It means the Beatitudes are not a set of abstract ideals. They have been lived out in a real human life, in real places, under real pressure. Jesus showed what they look like.

It means we are not left alone to produce them. Paul says that God's purpose is for His people "to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). The Beatitudes describe that image. As the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus, He makes us more like the Beatitudes.

And it means we know where to look. We do not become meek by staring at the word "meek." We become meek by looking at Jesus. "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Each Blessing in the Life of Jesus

Let me walk through the eight one more time, this time with our eyes on Him.

Poor in spirit. Jesus never had to confess sin, but He lived in complete dependence on His Father. "The Son is able to do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing" (John 5:19). He "emptied Himself, having taken the form of a slave" (Philippians 2:7). He was born in a stable, laid in a manger, and in His adult life He said, "the Son of Man does not have a place where He may lay His head" (Luke 9:58). "For your sake He became poor, being rich, so that you by His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Mourning. He was "a man of pains and acquainted with sickness" (Isaiah 53:3). He wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). In Gethsemane His soul was "very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38). He did not mourn over His own sin, because He had none. He mourned over ours, and then He carried it.

Meek. He described His own heart as "gentle and humble" (Matthew 11:29). He rode into Jerusalem "gentle and mounted on a donkey" (Matthew 21:5). He could have called more than twelve legions of angels, and He did not (Matthew 26:53). "Being reviled, did not revile in return; suffering, He did not threaten" (1 Peter 2:23). Isaiah had foreseen it: "like the lamb that is brought to the slaughter, and like a ewe that before her shearers is mute, and He did not open His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

Hungry and thirsty for righteousness. His food was to do the will of the One who sent Him (John 4:34). As a boy of twelve He was found in the temple, and He told His worried parents that He must be "in the things of My Father" (Luke 2:49). At the start of His ministry He was baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). His whole life was one long hunger for His Father's will. "Not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Merciful. Over and over the Gospels say He was moved with compassion. He touched lepers. He healed the blind men who cried, "Have mercy on us." He forgave sins. He ate with tax collectors. And on the cross He prayed for the men who crucified Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). He promised a dying thief, "today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Pure in heart. He was "tempted in all things according to likeness, without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). His heart was never divided. "I always do the things pleasing to Him" (John 8:29). He saw the Father perfectly, because no one knows the Father except the Son (Matthew 11:27).

Peacemaker. He is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). "He Himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). He made peace between sinners and God "through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20), and between Jews and Gentiles, breaking down "the middle wall of the barrier." He left His disciples His own peace (John 14:27), and His first words to them after He rose were "Peace to you" (John 20:19).

Persecuted for righteousness. Herod tried to kill Him as a baby. His hometown tried to throw Him off a cliff. The religious leaders plotted against Him, slandered Him, and finally handed Him over to be crucified. Pilate found no cause in Him, and crucified Him anyway. He was insulted, persecuted, and lied about, and "for the joy lying before Him" He "endured the cross, having despised the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

The Blessed One Who Became a Curse

Here is the most amazing thing about Jesus and the Beatitudes. He is the only person who ever deserved every blessing in them. And He chose to take the curse instead.

Paul writes, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). On the cross, the One who was perfectly pure in heart was treated as if He were the worst of sinners. "He made the One who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Think of what that means for the Beatitudes. Every blessing in them is something we did not earn. We are not naturally poor in spirit, meek, merciful, or pure. Jesus was. And on the cross He traded places with us. He took what we deserved so that we could receive what He deserved.

That is why the Beatitudes are good news and not just good advice. The kingdom, the comfort, the inheritance, the filling, the mercy, the vision of God, the name of sons: all of it comes to us as a gift, because Jesus earned it and then gave it away.

Following the Blessed Man

Jesus did not only live the Beatitudes for us. He calls us to follow Him in them.

> *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross, and let him follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life on account of Me will find it."* (Matthew 16:24-25)

The way of the Beatitudes is the way of the cross. It goes down before it goes up. It looks like losing before it turns out to be winning. Jesus walked that road first, and He did not stay in the grave. He rose. And He promises that everyone who follows Him on that road will rise with Him.

Paul knew this. "I have been crucified with Christ; and I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). The Beatitudes are not a set of rules we keep by our own strength. They are the life of Christ, lived out in us by His Spirit.

Living It Out

- Read through one Gospel this month, slowly, with the Beatitudes beside you. Every time you see Jesus living one of them, make a note.
- When you find yourself failing at one of the Beatitudes, don't just try harder. Go and look at Jesus living it. Ask Him to live it in you.
- Thank Jesus today, in specific words, for taking the curse you deserved so that you could receive the blessings He deserved.

Study Questions

1. Why is it important to see the Beatitudes as a portrait of Jesus before we see them as a description of ourselves?
2. Which of the eight Beatitudes do you find most moving to see in the life of Jesus? Why?
3. Read Philippians 2:5-11. How does this passage show Jesus living the Beatitudes?
4. Read Galatians 3:13 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. How did Jesus "trade places" with us?
5. What is the difference between the Beatitudes being good news and being good advice?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. According to this verse, how do we become more like Jesus?

Lord Jesus, You are the blessed Man. You were poor in spirit, You mourned, You were meek, You hungered for Your Father's will, You showed mercy, You were pure in heart, You made peace, and You were persecuted for righteousness. And then You took my curse so that I could have Your blessing. Thank You. Let me look at You until I begin to look like You. Live Your life in me. Amen.

Chapter 18: Salt and Light

> *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt becomes tasteless, with what will it be salted? It is no longer strong for anything, except to be thrown out and to be trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city lying on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under the basket, but on the lampstand, and it shines for all who **are** in the house. Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who **is** in the heavens.*
>
> Matthew 5:13-16 (SLB)

Right after the Beatitudes, without a break, Jesus says two of the most famous sentences He ever spoke: "You are the salt of the earth" and "You are the light of the world." These verses are not a new subject. They are the answer to a question the Beatitudes raise. If Christians are poor in spirit, meek, merciful, and persecuted, what good are they to the world? It might sound like they are weak people who will be pushed aside.

Jesus says the opposite. People like that are exactly what the world needs most. They are its salt and its light.

For five straight years I helped lead youth mission trips to Baja, Mexico. We went to build, to serve alongside the local church and to live out our faith in practical ways. Watching teenagers step out of their comfort zones brought Matthew 5:13-16 to life for me. Changed hearts are meant to be visible.

You Are

Notice the first two words: "You are." Jesus does not say, "Try to become salt," or "You should be light." He says you already are. The same people He has just called poor, mourning, meek, and persecuted, He now calls salt and light. This is not a goal to reach. It is a description of who they are because they belong to Him.

And notice the word "you" is emphatic in Greek. It is as if Jesus says, "You, and only you, are the salt of the earth." Not the Roman government. Not the religious leaders. Not the philosophers. The little band of disciples sitting on a hillside in Galilee.

The Salt of the Earth

In the ancient world, salt was precious. It did several jobs.

Salt preserves. With no refrigerators, people rubbed salt into meat and fish to keep them from rotting. Christians are meant to slow the decay of the world around them. Wherever people who live the Beatitudes are present, honesty, mercy, purity, and peace hold back the spread of corruption.

Salt adds flavor. Job asked, "Is tasteless food eaten without salt?" (Job 6:6). Paul told the Colossians, "Let your word be always in grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6). Christians are meant to make life better, to bring wisdom and grace into conversations and communities.

Salt was used in God's covenant and worship. Every grain offering had to be seasoned with salt. "You shall not let the salt of the covenant of your God cease from on your grain offering" (Leviticus 2:13). Salt was a sign of a lasting, faithful bond. God even called His permanent promise to the priests "a covenant of salt forever" (Numbers 18:19).

Salt can heal. When the water at Jericho was bad, Elisha threw salt into the spring, and God healed the waters (2 Kings 2:19-22). Christians who live the Beatitudes bring God's healing into a broken world.

When Salt Loses Its Taste

Then Jesus gives a warning. "But if the salt becomes tasteless, with what will it be salted? It is no longer strong for anything, except to be thrown out and to be trampled by men."

Strictly speaking, pure salt cannot lose its saltiness. But the salt people used in Jesus' day often came from the area around the Dead Sea, and it was mixed with other minerals. If moisture dissolved the salt out of it, what was left looked like salt but did nothing. It was only good for throwing on the path.

Christians can lose their saltiness the same way. They don't stop calling themselves Christians. They still look the part. But they have mixed so much of the world into their lives that the difference is gone. They are no longer poor in spirit, no longer mourning over sin, no longer hungry for righteousness. They blend in. And salt that blends in is useless.

Notice what makes salt effective: it has to be different from what it touches, and it has to touch it. Salt kept in the shaker does nothing. Salt that has lost its flavor does nothing. The Beatitudes keep us different. Love for our neighbors keeps us in contact.

The Light of the World

Jesus then switches pictures. "You are the light of the world."

This is a stunning thing to say. In the Old Testament, God promised that His Servant would be "a light of the nations" (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). Later in John's Gospel, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Here He tells His followers that they are the light of the world. That is not a contradiction. Jesus is the source of the light. We are like the moon, which has no light of its own but shines with the light of the sun. "For it is God who said for light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Light does two things. It shows the way, and it exposes what is hidden. Christians do both. By our lives and our words we point people to God. And just by being different, we show up the darkness around us. That is part of why the persecuted in verse 10 are persecuted. "Men loved the darkness rather than the Light; for their works were evil" (John 3:19).

A City on a Mountain

"A city lying on a mountain cannot be hidden." Many towns in Galilee were built on hilltops for safety. At night, the lamps of those towns could be seen for miles. Jesus may have been able to point to one as He spoke.

The church is meant to be like that. Not a secret society hidden away from the world, but a visible community whose life together shines. When Christians love one another, forgive each other, care for the poor, and live with integrity, the world notices.

A Lamp Under a Basket

"Nor do they light a lamp and put it under the basket, but on the lampstand, and it shines for all who are in the house."

A typical home in Galilee was a single room. One small clay oil lamp on a stand could light the whole house. Nobody would light a lamp and then put a basket over it. That would be ridiculous.

But that is what Christians do when they hide their faith. We go to church on Sunday, and then we keep quiet about Jesus the rest of the week. We blend in at work, at school, and in the neighborhood so that nobody would ever guess we belong to Him. Jesus says that is as foolish as hiding a lamp under a basket. The whole point of light is to be seen.

So That They May Glorify Your Father

Jesus ends with a command and a purpose. "Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who is in the heavens."

The goal is not that people will praise us. In the next chapter of the same sermon, Jesus warns against doing good works "in order to be seen by them" (Matthew 6:1). Isn't that a contradiction? Not at all. The difference is who gets the glory. In Matthew 6, the hypocrites want people to praise them. In Matthew 5, the disciples let their light shine so that people will praise God.

Peter says the same: "keeping your conduct among the Gentiles good, so that in that in which they slander you as evildoers, they may, observing your good works, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12). Notice that even when people slander us, our good works can still point them to God.

The Beatitudes Are the Salt and Light

How do we become salt and light? Not by trying to be impressive. By living the Beatitudes. The salt is the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, and the hungry. The light is the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. The very qualities the world sees as weakness are what make Christians salt and light.

A humble person in a proud workplace is salt. A merciful person in a bitter family is light. A pure person in a corrupt business is salt. A peacemaker in a divided church is light. You don't have to be famous, wealthy, or powerful to make a difference. You have to be what Jesus has already said you are.

Living It Out

- Where in your life have you been "salt in the shaker," keeping your faith to yourself? Where could you get out of the shaker this week?
- Is there any area where you have blended in so much that nobody could tell you follow Jesus?
- Think of one good work you could do this week that would point someone to God and not to you.

- Pray for your church to be a city on a hill in your community. What could your church do together that would shine?

Study Questions

1. Why do you think Jesus put the salt and light sayings right after the Beatitudes?
2. List the uses of salt in the ancient world. Which one do you think Jesus most had in mind? Why?
3. How can a Christian lose his saltiness? What keeps us "salty"?
4. Read John 8:12 and Matthew 5:14. How can both Jesus and His followers be the light of the world?
5. How can we reconcile "let your light shine before men" (5:16) with "beware not to do your charity before men in order to be seen by them" (6:1)?
6. Which of the Beatitudes do you think makes a Christian most noticeable to the world around you?

> *Lord Jesus, You have said that I am the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Forgive me for the times I have blended in or hidden my light. Keep me different from the world, and keep me close enough to it to make a difference. Let my life point people to my Father, not to me. Shine through me today. Amen.*

Chapter 19: The Blessing Still to Come

> *And **there** will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His slaves will serve Him. And they will see His face, and His name **will be** on their foreheads.*
>
> Revelation 22:3-4 (SLB)

All through this book we have noticed that the Beatitudes look forward. “They will be comforted.” “They will inherit the earth.” “They will be filled.” “They will see God.” Even Luke’s version keeps saying “now,” as in “those who hunger now,” because the present is not the end. The Beatitudes are promises with a future, and the future is bright.

This last chapter looks at that future. When will the poor in spirit receive the kingdom in full? When will the meek inherit the earth? When will the pure in heart see God face to face? The Bible gives us answers, and they are some of the most hopeful words in Scripture.

How I Read the Future

Before I lay this out, I want to be clear about where I stand. I hold what is called the pre-tribulation view. I believe the Bible teaches that Jesus will come for His church first, calling believers up to meet Him in the air. After that, there will be seven years of tribulation on the earth. At the end of those years, Jesus will return in glory with His people, defeat His enemies, and reign on the earth for a thousand years. After that comes the final judgment and the new heavens and new earth.

Many Bible-believing Christians understand the order of these events differently. Some believe the church will go through the tribulation. Some read the thousand years as a picture of Christ’s reign now. I respect them, and I don’t make any of this a test of fellowship. But I want to tell you plainly how I read it, and why the Beatitudes fit it so well.

Stage One: Caught Up to Meet Him

The next event on God’s calendar, as I understand it, is the Rapture, when Jesus comes for His church.

> *because the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with **the** voice of an archangel and with **the** trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are living, who remain, will be caught away together with them in **the** clouds to meet the Lord in **the** air; and so we will always be with **the** Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)

Jesus promised this on the night before He died: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you also may be” (John 14:2-3). Paul says it will happen “in an instant, in the blink of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

For those who mourn, this is the beginning of comfort. Paul ends that passage with "Therefore encourage one another with these words." The believers we have buried will rise first, and we will be together with them and with the Lord.

Stage Two: The Reward

After the church is caught up, I believe every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). We looked at this in Chapter 13. It is not a trial to decide whether we are saved. It is a review of our lives to give rewards.

This is where Jesus keeps His promise in Matthew 5:12: "your reward is great in the heavens." Every insult endured for His name, every lie told about us because we follow Him, every act of mercy, every effort to make peace, every hidden prayer will be seen and rewarded. Jesus said, "And look, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to each one as his work will be" (Revelation 22:12).

Stage Three: The King Returns

Meanwhile, on the earth, the tribulation will run its course, a time of judgment unlike anything the world has seen. Then Jesus will return, not secretly, but in glory.

> *And I saw heaven opened, and look, a white horse, and the One sitting on it **is** called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.* (Revelation 19:11)

Zechariah saw the day when "His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives" (Zechariah 14:4), and "the LORD will be King over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9). The meek King who once rode into Jerusalem on a donkey will come back on a white horse.

Stage Four: The Meek Inherit the Earth

Then comes the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. This is where I believe several of the Beatitudes come true in a way they never have before.

The meek will inherit the earth. Jesus' people will reign with Him. "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4). Jesus told the Twelve that "in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). The people who refused to grab power in this life will be given a share in the King's rule.

The peacemakers will see peace. Isaiah describes that day: nations "will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and they will not learn war again" (Isaiah 2:4). Even creation will be at peace: "the wolf will sojourn with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat" (Isaiah 11:6). "For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

Those who hunger for righteousness will see it. The Prince of Peace will rule "on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness" (Isaiah 9:7).

The injustice that the righteous have grieved over will finally be put right on the earth where it happened.

Stage Five: All Things New

After the thousand years and the final judgment, God will make everything new. This is the last and greatest fulfillment of the Beatitudes.

> *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no longer. And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of heaven, saying, "Look, the tabernacle of God* ***is*** *with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them, their God."* (Revelation 21:1-3)

Those who mourn will be comforted, completely. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer, nor mourning nor crying nor pain will be any longer, because the first things passed away" (Revelation 21:4). Notice the word "mourning." The very thing Jesus blessed will be gone forever, replaced by the comfort He promised.

Those who hunger will be filled, completely. "They will not hunger anymore, nor will they thirst anymore" (Revelation 7:16). We will live in "new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). Righteousness will not just visit. It will live there.

The pure in heart will see God. This is the summit. "And they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:4). Moses was told no man could see God's face and live. In the new creation, every one of God's people will see it, and live forever.

The sons of God will be revealed. Paul says all creation is waiting for this: "the eager expectation of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19). The peacemakers, who were called sons of God, will be seen for who they are.

The poor in spirit and the persecuted will own the kingdom. The first and eighth Beatitudes said, "theirs is the kingdom." In the end, the kingdom will fill everything. The beggars and the hunted will be heirs of a new creation, and "they will reign to the ages of the ages" (Revelation 22:5).

What Eye Has Not Seen

Even all of this is only a glimpse. Paul quotes Isaiah to say, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not come up into the heart of man, things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Whatever we imagine, it will be better.

David put it in one line: "fullness of joys is with Your presence; pleasant things are at Your right hand forever" (Psalm 16:11). That is the end of the Beatitudes. Not just happiness, but fullness of joy, in God's presence, forever.

Why the Future Changes Today

Some people think that thinking about the future makes Christians lazy. The Bible says the opposite. Hope changes how we live now.

John wrote, “everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). If I really believe I will see Jesus face to face, I will want to be ready. If I believe the meek will inherit the earth, I will stop grabbing. If I believe my reward is great in heaven, I can rejoice when I am insulted. If I believe God will wipe away every tear, I can mourn without despair.

That is why Jesus tied every Beatitude to a promise. The promises are what make the Beatitudes livable. Nobody can be poor in spirit, meek, and persecuted for long without a reason. Jesus gives us the best reason there is: the King is coming, and His kingdom belongs to people like this.

Living It Out

- Read Revelation 21 and 22 this week. Each time you see a promise that matches one of the Beatitudes, write it down.
- Think about a hard situation you are facing now. Which promise of the Beatitudes speaks to it? Hold on to it.
- Ask yourself: If Jesus came for His church today, would I be glad? What would I want to change before then?
- Encourage someone who is grieving with 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Study Questions

1. Why do you think so many of the Beatitudes have promises in the future tense?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. How does this passage comfort those who mourn?
3. Which Beatitudes do you think will be fulfilled during the thousand-year reign of Christ? Why?
4. Read Revelation 21:1-5 and 22:1-5. List every promise you find that matches one of the Beatitudes.
5. Why is seeing God’s face the greatest promise of all?
6. How should the hope of the future change the way you live this week?

> *Lord Jesus, You are coming again. Thank You for the hope that holds up every one of Your blessings. Comfort me with the promise of Your return. Keep me faithful until You come for me. Let me live today like someone who will see Your face. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

A Closing Word

> *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the **one** coming to Me I will certainly not cast out.*
>
> John 6:37 (SLB)

We started this book on a hillside in Galilee, with a crowd of sick, poor, and desperate people pressing in to see Jesus. He sat down, opened His mouth, and said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens."

I want to end there too, because that first Beatitude is the door, and I don't want anyone to finish this book standing outside it.

You may have read every chapter and felt a growing sense that you don't measure up. You are not meek enough, merciful enough, or pure enough. You don't hunger for righteousness the way you should. If so, I have good news for you. That feeling is not a sign that the door is closed. It is the key that opens it. Jesus did not bless the people who have it all together. He blessed the people who know they don't.

Here is the whole gospel in a few lines. God is holy, and we are not. "For all sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Our sin earns death: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Jesus, the only truly blessed Man, took our curse on the cross and rose again from the dead. And now He offers His righteousness, His kingdom, and His blessing as a free gift to anyone who will come to Him with empty hands.

> *that if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of **the** dead, you will be saved; for with **the** heart it is believed for righteousness, and with **the** mouth it is confessed for salvation.* (Romans 10:9-10)

"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). Not everyone who earns it. Everyone who calls.

If you have never done that, you can do it now, in your own words. Tell God you know you are a sinner and cannot save yourself. Tell Him you believe Jesus died for your sins and rose again. Ask Him to forgive you and to make you His. Jesus has promised, "the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37).

If you have done that, and you belong to Jesus already, then I hope this book has helped you see what He is making you into. You will not get there all at once. None of us has. But the One who began a good work in you "will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Keep coming back to the first Beatitude. Keep coming with empty hands. And keep your eyes on the day when you will see His face.

Blessed are you.

Appendix A: The Beatitudes at a Glance

This table gathers the eight Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-10, the personal blessing of Matthew 5:11-12, and the four blessings and four woes of Luke 6:20-26 in one place, with the key Greek word and the chapter where each is studied.

Blessing	Key Greek word	Promise	Chapter
Blessed are the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3)	ptochos (G4434)	Theirs is the kingdom of the heavens	5
Blessed are those who mourn (Matthew 5:4)	pentheo (G3996)	They will be comforted	6
Blessed are the meek (Matthew 5:5)	praus (G4239)	They will inherit the earth	7
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6)	peinao, dipsao (G3983, G1372)	They will be filled	8
Blessed are the merciful (Matthew 5:7)	eleemon (G1655)	They will receive mercy	9
Blessed are the pure in heart (Matthew 5:8)	katharos (G2513)	They will see God	10
Blessed are the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9)	eirenopoios (G1518)	They will be called sons of God	11
Blessed are those persecuted on account of righteousness (Matthew 5:10)	dioko (G1377)	Theirs is the kingdom of the heavens	12
Blessed are you when they insult you (Matthew 5:11-12)	oneidizo, dioko	Your reward is great in the heavens	13
Blessed are the poor (Luke 6:20)	ptochos (G4434)	Yours is the kingdom of God	14
Blessed are those who hunger now (Luke 6:21)	peinao (G3983)	You will be filled	14
Blessed are those who weep now (Luke 6:21)	klaio	You will laugh	14
Blessed are you when men hate you (Luke 6:22-23)	miseo	Your reward is great in heaven	14
Woe to you who are rich (Luke 6:24)	ouai (G3759)	You have your comfort in full	15
Woe to you who have been filled (Luke 6:25)	ouai	You will hunger	15
Woe to you who laugh now (Luke 6:25)	ouai	You will mourn and weep	15
Woe to you when all men speak well of you (Luke 6:26)	ouai	So their fathers did to the false prophets	15

Appendix B: Roots in the Old Testament

Almost every Beatitude echoes a passage Jesus' listeners already knew. This table lists the main Old Testament passages behind each one. Read them alongside the chapter for that Beatitude.

Beatitude	Old Testament passages
Blessed (the word itself)	Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 32:1-2; Psalm 84:12
The poor in spirit	Isaiah 57:15; Isaiah 66:2; Psalm 34:18; Psalm 51:17; Zephaniah 3:12
Those who mourn	Isaiah 61:1-3; Psalm 126:5-6; Ezekiel 9:4; Isaiah 25:8
The meek	Psalm 37:1-11; Numbers 12:3; Zechariah 9:9
Hunger and thirst for righteousness	Psalm 42:1-2; Psalm 63:1; Isaiah 55:1-2; Amos 8:11
The merciful	Exodus 34:6; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8; Lamentations 3:22-23
The pure in heart	Psalm 24:3-6; Psalm 51:10; Psalm 73:1; 1 Samuel 16:7
The peacemakers	Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 52:7; Isaiah 2:4; Genesis 13:8-9
The persecuted	Jeremiah 20:2; Jeremiah 38:6; Daniel 3:16-18; Daniel 6:10
Salt and light	Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19; 2 Kings 2:19-22; Isaiah 42:6; Isaiah 49:6

Appendix C: An Eight-Week Plan for Small Groups

This book has nineteen chapters, which is more than most groups can cover one at a time. Here is a plan that fits the book into eight weekly meetings. Each week, group members read the chapters listed before they meet. When the group gathers, read the Bible passage aloud, then pick four or five of the study questions from the chapters to discuss. Close by praying the prayer at the end of one of the chapters together.

Week	Read before the meeting	Passage to read aloud
1	Before You Begin; Chapters 1-4	Matthew 4:23-5:2; Luke 6:12-20
2	Chapters 5-6	Matthew 5:3-4; Luke 18:9-14
3	Chapters 7-8	Matthew 5:5-6; Psalm 37:1-11
4	Chapters 9-10	Matthew 5:7-8; Matthew 18:21-35
5	Chapters 11-13	Matthew 5:9-12; Acts 5:17-42
6	Chapters 14-15	Luke 6:20-26; Luke 12:13-21
7	Chapters 16-17	Philippians 2:1-11
8	Chapters 18-19; A Closing Word	Matthew 5:13-16; Revelation 21:1-7

A leader does not need to be a Bible teacher to lead this study. The leader's job is to keep the group in the Bible, keep the conversation moving, make sure everyone who wants to speak gets a chance, and keep the discussion personal and practical. If a question comes up that nobody can answer, write it down and look into it together during the week.

Appendix D: Words to Know

Beatitude. A "blessed" saying. The word comes from the Latin *beatus*, "blessed," used in the Latin Bible's translation of Matthew 5.

Blessed. In the Beatitudes, the condition of a person whom God has favored, whatever their circumstances (Chapter 2). Greek *makarios*, Hebrew *esher*.

Chesed. Hebrew for God's loyal, faithful love. The SLB usually translates it "steadfast love" (Chapter 9).

Dispensational. A way of reading the Bible that sees distinct stages in God's dealings with people and keeps God's promises to Israel distinct from the church. Most pre-tribulation teachers are dispensational (Chapter 4).

Gentile. Anyone who is not Jewish.

Judgment seat of Christ. The time when believers' lives are reviewed for rewards, not for salvation (2 Corinthians 5:10; Chapter 13).

Kingdom of the heavens. Matthew's name for the kingdom of God. The SLB keeps the Greek plural (Before You Begin).

Millennium. The thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth after His return (Revelation 20:4-6; Chapter 19).

Pharisees. A Jewish religious party in Jesus' day known for strict keeping of the law and of their own traditions.

Pre-tribulation. The view that Jesus will take His church to Himself in the Rapture before the seven years of tribulation begin (Chapter 19).

Rapture. The moment when Jesus calls His church up to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Reconciliation. Bringing two parties who were at odds back into peace with each other, especially sinners with God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Righteousness. Being right with God and living right before Him. It is first a gift through faith in Christ, and then a way of life (Chapter 8).

Scribes. Experts in the Law of Moses who copied, taught, and explained it.

Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 to 7. The title comes from Augustine's book on it, written in Latin as *De sermone Domini in monte*.

Sermon on the Plain. A common name for Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:17-49, given on "a level place" (Chapter 3).

Shalom. Hebrew for peace, wholeness, and well-being (Chapter 11).

SLB. Steadfast Literal Bible, the translation quoted throughout this book.

Strong's number. A number assigned to each Hebrew (H) and Greek (G) word in the Bible by James Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

Tribulation. The seven-year period of judgment on the earth before Christ returns to reign.

Woe. A cry of grief and warning over coming disaster (Chapter 15).

Appendix E: Sources and Credits

All Scripture quotations are from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). Words the translators supplied to make the English read smoothly are printed in bold italics.

Strong's numbers follow James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1890), which is in the public domain. Greek and Hebrew word meanings are given in my own words from standard lexicons.

Other sources mentioned in this book:

- Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44, translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (1876), for Nero's persecution of the Christians in Rome (Chapter 13).
- The pilgrim Egeria, as quoted in standard histories of the Mount of Beatitudes, and published descriptions of the Byzantine church ruins and the modern Church of the Beatitudes built 1936 to 1938 (Chapter 1).
- *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, chapter 4, for the story of Quintus (Chapter 12).
- Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* (about A.D. 177), for the charges made against early Christians (Chapter 13).
- Augustine, *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount* (*De sermone Domini in monte*), for the name of the sermon (Appendix D).

Where the book refers to the views of other Bible teachers, it describes them in my own words rather than quoting them.

About This Book

Theirs Is the Kingdom is a verse-by-verse study of the Beatitudes, the blessings Jesus spoke at the start of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3-12 and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:20-26.

Jesus began His most famous sermon by calling the poor, the grieving, the meek, and the persecuted blessed. This book takes each of those blessings one at a time. It explains the key Greek word behind each one, traces its roots in the Old Testament, clears away common misunderstandings, shows how Jesus Himself lived it, and gives practical ways to live it out today.

It also sets Matthew's account beside Luke's, looks closely at the four woes that only Luke records, shows how the eight blessings fit together as one portrait of a kingdom person, and explains the salt and light sayings that follow. The final chapter looks ahead to the day when every promise in the Beatitudes will be kept in full, from a pre-tribulation view.

Every chapter ends with study questions and a short prayer. The back of the book has the Beatitudes at a glance, a table of their Old Testament roots, an eight-week plan for small groups, a glossary, and a Scripture index.

All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible, which is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.

Scripture Index

This index lists every Bible passage that is named with its book somewhere in the text, with the pages where it appears.

Genesis 1:1 (44); 4:3-8 (54); 12:2 (10); 12:2-3 (7); 13:5-12 (52); 13:8-9 (50, 91); 21:6 (65)

Exodus 2:11-12 (33); 2:17 (33); 19:3 (6); 19:4-6 (7); 19:20 (6); 33:20 (46); 34:6 (40, 43, 91)

Leviticus 2:13 (81, 91); 12:8 (64)

Numbers 6:24-26 (10); 12:3 (32, 91); 16:4 (32); 18:19 (82, 91)

1 Samuel 16:7 (45, 91)

2 Kings 2:19-22 (82, 91)

Nehemiah 1:4 (28)

Job 3:1 (6); 6:6 (81); 19:26-27 (47)

Psalms 1:1-3 (9, 91); 2:12 (10); 16:11 (87); 24:3-6 (44, 47, 91); 32:1-2 (10, 12, 91); 33:12 (10); 34:18 (23, 91); 37:1-11 (34, 91, 92); 37:7-9 (32); 37:11 (31, 32); 42:1-2 (36, 39, 91); 51:3 (27); 51:10 (44, 91); 51:17 (23, 91); 63:1 (36, 39, 91); 73:1 (44, 91); 84:12 (9, 91); 86:11 (45); 112:1 (10); 119:9 (46); 119:136 (28); 126:2 (65); 126:5-6 (91); 139:23-24 (47)

Proverbs 6:19 (49); 15:1 (33); 15:18 (49)

Ecclesiastes 2:11 (11); 3:4 (69)

Isaiah 2:4 (51, 86, 91); 5:8-23 (68); 6:5 (23, 27, 68); 6:7 (27); 9:6 (78); 9:6-7 (48, 91); 9:7 (86); 11:6 (86); 11:9 (86); 25:8 (30, 91); 42:6 (82, 91); 48:22 (49); 49:6 (82, 91); 52:7 (49, 91); 53:3 (29, 78); 53:7 (78); 55:1 (36); 55:1-2 (91); 55:2 (36); 57:15 (22, 25, 91); 61:1-3 (91); 61:2-3 (29); 64:6 (23); 65:13 (65); 66:2 (22, 25, 91)

Jeremiah 6:14 (50, 70); 17:9 (45, 47); 20:2 (54, 91); 38:6 (54, 91)

Lamentations 3:22-23 (40, 43, 91)

Ezekiel 9:4 (28, 91); 36:26 (46, 47); 36:26-27 (18)

Daniel 3:16-18 (91); 3:18 (54); 6:10 (54, 91); 7:13-14 (59); 7:27 (34)

Hosea 6:6 (41, 91)

Amos 5:24 (37); 8:11 (36, 91)

Micah 6:8 (91)

Zephaniah 3:12 (64, 91)

Zechariah 9:9 (91); 14:4 (86); 14:9 (86)

Matthew 2:13-16 (56); 3:15 (78); 4:2 (38); 4:4 (38); 4:17 (5, 18); 4:18-22 (6); 4:23-5:2 (92); 4:23-25 (5, 7); 5:1 (14); 5:1-2 (5); 5:3 (1, 22, 90); 5:3-4 (92); 5:3-10 (1, 2, 11, 90); 5:3-12 (13, 14, 96); 5:4 (27, 90); 5:5 (31, 90); 5:5-6 (92); 5:6 (36, 90); 5:7 (40, 90); 5:7-8 (92); 5:8 (44, 90); 5:9 (48, 90); 5:9-12 (92); 5:10 (53, 90); 5:11 (55, 61); 5:11-12 (1, 2, 58, 61, 90); 5:12 (86); 5:13-16 (81, 92); 5:14 (84); 5:17-48 (14); 5:20 (37); 5:21-22 (7); 5:21-28 (17, 19, 45); 5:23-24 (49, 51); 5:27-28 (7); 5:44 (7, 55); 5:45 (50); 5:48 (7, 17); 6:1 (83); 6:1-18 (45); 6:2 (68); 6:4 (60); 6:9-13 (14); 6:10 (19); 6:12 (41); 6:14-15 (41, 42); 6:20 (60); 6:24 (45); 6:33 (37); 7:24 (17); 7:24-27 (6); 7:28 (6); 7:28-29 (6); 9:13 (41); 9:15 (27); 9:27 (40); 9:36 (42); 10:5-7 (18); 10:16 (46); 10:23 (55); 10:34 (50); 10:42 (60); 11:19 (61); 11:27 (47, 78); 11:28-30 (32); 11:29 (31, 78); 12:7 (41); 14:20 (36); 15:19 (45); 16:24-25 (79); 18:3 (24); 18:21-35 (43, 92); 18:33 (41); 19:28 (86); 21:5 (31, 78); 23:23 (37); 23:25 (37); 23:25-26 (45); 23:37 (60); 24:9 (55); 25:34 (19); 25:40 (43); 26:38 (29, 78); 26:51-54 (35); 26:53 (32, 78); 26:59 (61); 27:3-5 (28, 30); 27:44 (58); 27:57-60 (69); 28:20 (18)

Luke 1:3 (14); 1:41 (66); 1:44 (66); 1:46-55 (67); 1:52-53 (66); 1:53 (15, 65); 2:7 (64); 2:14 (48); 2:24 (64); 2:49 (78); 4:16-20 (6); 4:18 (22, 64); 4:18-21 (29); 4:28-30 (56); 4:43 (14); 5:8 (23); 6:12-16 (14, 64); 6:12-20 (15, 92); 6:17 (14); 6:17-26 (13); 6:17-19 (64); 6:17-20 (67); 6:17-49 (93); 6:20 (13, 64, 90); 6:20-23 (1, 66, 68); 6:20-26 (2, 14, 90, 92, 96); 6:20-49 (14); 6:20-21 (64); 6:21 (38, 65, 90); 6:22 (59); 6:22-23 (65, 90); 6:23 (59); 6:24 (90); 6:24-26 (1, 11, 68); 6:25 (27, 90); 6:26 (90); 6:27-49 (14); 9:58 (77); 10:6 (50); 10:37 (41); 11:1-4 (15); 11:27-28 (12); 11:28 (11); 12:13-21 (71, 92); 12:19-20 (69); 12:21 (69); 13:30 (66); 14:12-14 (66); 14:13 (64); 16:19-31 (64); 16:20-21 (22); 16:25 (66, 71); 18:9-14 (25, 92); 18:11 (24); 18:13-14 (24); 18:14 (66); 18:24 (65); 19:1-10 (71); 19:9 (69); 19:10 (71); 19:41 (28, 70, 78); 21:1-4 (64); 22:42 (78); 22:61-62 (30); 22:62 (27); 23:34 (42, 78); 23:43 (78)

John 1:18 (46); 2:15 (33); 3:3 (46); 3:19 (82); 3:19-20 (54); 4:13-14 (39); 4:14 (38); 4:34 (38, 78); 5:14 (42); 5:19 (25, 77); 6:35 (38, 39); 6:37 (89); 8:12 (82, 84); 8:29 (47, 78); 9:22 (66); 11:35 (28, 78); 14:2-3 (85); 14:9 (46); 14:16 (27); 14:27 (51, 78); 15:18-20 (54, 56); 16:20 (65); 16:22 (29); 18:38 (56); 19:28 (38); 20:19 (78); 20:21 (51); 20:29 (11, 12); 21:15-17 (27)

Acts 4:20 (54); 5:17-42 (61, 92); 5:40-42 (61); 5:41 (59); 6:1-3 (38); 7:60 (54); 8:35 (6); 9:4 (56); 12:2 (58); 15:9 (45); 15:39 (50); 16:25 (59); 17:11 (2); 22:25 (61)

Romans 3:20 (17); 3:22 (37); 3:23 (89); 5:1 (48, 51); 5:10 (49, 51); 6:23 (89); 7:24 (27); 7:25 (27); 8:19 (87); 8:29 (77); 10:9-10 (89); 10:13 (89); 10:15 (49); 12:15 (29); 12:18 (50); 12:19 (33); 16:20 (48)

1 Corinthians 2:9 (87); 3:12-15 (60, 61); 6:2 (34); 12:29-30 (73); 15:52 (85)

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (29); 1:4 (30); 3:18 (47, 73, 77, 79); 4:6 (82); 4:17 (60); 5:10 (60, 61, 86, 93); 5:17 (18); 5:18-20 (49, 93); 5:21 (37, 78, 79); 7:9-10 (30); 7:10 (28); 8:9 (25, 77); 11:24-25 (54); 12:9 (24)

Galatians 2:20 (79); 3:13 (78, 79); 3:24 (17); 3:26 (51); 5:22 (29); 5:22-23 (73); 5:23 (31); 6:1 (33)

Ephesians 2:4-5 (41); 2:8-9 (24); 2:14 (51, 78)

Philippians 1:6 (89); 2:1-11 (92); 2:5-8 (25); 2:5-11 (79); 2:7 (77); 3:9 (37); 3:14 (37, 53); 4:2-3 (49); 4:8 (47)

Colossians 1:13 (19); 1:20 (48, 51, 78); 3:15 (49); 4:6 (81)

1 Thessalonians 4:13 (28); 4:13-18 (88); 4:16-18 (85); 4:16-17 (93); 5:9 (55)

1 Timothy 1:5 (44); 1:15 (23); 3:7 (70); 6:17-19 (69)

2 Timothy 1:18 (43); 2:22 (46); 2:24 (33); 3:12 (54); 4:3 (70); 4:8 (60); 4:11 (50)

Titus 1:15 (46); 3:5 (17, 41)

Hebrews 2:17 (40, 43); 4:15 (29, 47, 78); 9:14 (46); 10:34 (56); 11:6 (61); 11:25 (54); 11:37-38 (54); 12:1 (60); 12:2 (61, 77, 78); 12:14 (53); 13:3 (55)

James 1:8 (45); 1:12 (60); 1:21 (33); 2:5 (24, 65); 2:13 (42); 4:8 (45); 4:9 (27); 4:9-10 (28, 70); 5:1 (71)

1 Peter 2:2 (38); 2:12 (83); 2:19-20 (53, 56); 2:20 (59); 2:21-23 (35); 2:23 (33, 78); 3:4 (31); 3:14 (18); 3:15 (33); 4:15-16 (53); 5:4 (60)

2 Peter 3:13 (34, 38, 87)

1 John 1:8 (46); 1:9 (29, 46); 3:1 (51); 3:2 (38, 47); 3:2-3 (47); 3:3 (46, 88); 3:12 (54)

Jude 1:22 (42)

Revelation 1:3 (11); 1:9 (58); 2:10 (60); 3:10 (55); 3:17 (25, 69); 3:17-18 (25); 3:18 (25); 5:10 (34); 7:16 (38, 87); 19:9 (11); 19:11 (86); 20:4 (86); 20:4-6 (93); 21:1-3 (87); 21:1-5 (88); 21:1-7 (92); 21:4 (29, 30, 87); 22:3-4 (85); 22:4 (47, 87); 22:5 (87); 22:12 (86)