

Matthew: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

The 8 Marks of a Disciple * Matthew 5:1-12

Introduction

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew 5. This morning we have the privilege of studying what are known as the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are essentially an introduction and overview of the Sermon on the Mount, what most people consider to be the greatest sermon ever preached. And I have to warn you as we begin, this is one of those messages that might sting a little bit. I say that because I got stung in preparing it. You know, sometimes studying God's Word isn't a whole lot of fun. As the Apostle James wrote, looking into the Word is like looking into a mirror. And sometimes when we look in a mirror what we find staring back at us isn't very appealing. Well, that was my experience with the Beatitudes this week, and I hope you will have the same experience today. And this is not because I want you to hurt because I hurt, but rather because it is a good kind of hurt. It is a healing hurt. It is a transforming hurt. And in the end, it is a joy-producing hurt. In fact, the Beatitudes end with Jesus encouraging us to rejoice and be glad. So, as we jump in here, understand that the Beatitudes are not simple platitudes or pithy proverbs. Rather, they are sharp surgical strikes intended to transform us for God's glory and our joy.

That said; let's take a moment to review some things from last week's message to set the stage for our study today.

First, remember the word *Beatitude* is Latin for blessed, which means "happy, fortunate, blissful."¹ However, this is not a "happy go lucky, no cares in the world" kind of happiness, but rather an inward contentedness that is not affected by circumstances.² One of the things we are going to see today is that in the Beatitudes, Jesus turns the world's pursuit of happiness completely on its head. In fact, it is pretty fair to say that Jesus' path to

¹ MacArthur, John (2001). Pg. 141. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

² Ibid, p. 142.

happiness is completely opposite of the world's. Leo Durocher, long-time manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers once famously said, "Nice guys finish last." Jesus, on the other hand, says, "Nice guys finish first." At the end of the service last week I told you that Christianity is a crutch for the weak. I did so, because that is exactly what Jesus says in the Beatitudes. Not perhaps something we want to hear, but that is what He says nonetheless. I will share more on that in a minute.

The second thing we need to remember from last week is that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is giving a portrait of discipleship. He is describing what it means to follow Him. And it is important to recognize that Jesus is not describing different types of disciples. He is not saying that some are poor in spirit, and others are meek, and still others are merciful. He is saying that disciples are all of these things.

Another way to explain this is that Jesus is describing what kingdom life is like. Take a look at the very first and the very last Beatitudes for a moment.

Verse 3:

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

And verse 10:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

These two Beatitudes are the envelope, so to speak, in which all the other Beatitudes are contained. You will note that Jesus says, "is" – the kingdom of heaven is something that a disciple has presently. However, in the other Beatitudes Jesus says, "shall" as in the future.

This helps us to bring out a very significant point. The kingdom is both a present and a future reality. Theologians like to use the phrase "already, but not yet" to explain that the kingdom is already here – it is present today –

but it's fullness will not be completely realized until Jesus returns to establish His kingdom on earth.

Let me explain it this way. The kingdom of heaven came when the King arrived. And who is the King? Jesus. That is why both John the Baptist and Jesus preached, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." Being part of the kingdom means repenting and submitting to the King's rule and reign. Anytime someone submits to Jesus as King, they enter into the kingdom. And so we can say that the kingdom is a present reality – it is here in the hearts and lives of those who are submitting to His rule and reign. However, the full experience of Jesus' rule and reign is not complete – not everyone has submitted. Not everyone is experiencing the blessings of following Him. And even His disciples are not experiencing the full, complete blessings of following Him. The entirety of those blessings is yet to come. So, we can say that as disciples we are in the kingdom, but we are still awaiting the fullness of what that kingdom will be like.

Now, one more thing before we look at the individual Beatitudes. To be honest, they all deserve a message of their own. There is at least one sermon in all eight of them. So at some point in time we will need to come back and do a series dedicated just to the Beatitudes. But for today, I am simply going to give you an overview, what you might call the big picture view of the Beatitudes. And I will do so under the heading, *The 8 Marks of a Disciple*.

1. A disciple recognizes they are spiritually bankrupt. (v. 3)

So, mark number one of a disciple is they recognize they are spiritually bankrupt. Look at verse 3:

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

Essentially what Jesus is saying in verse 3 is that a disciple recognizes they are broke. The Greek word that Matthew uses here is the strongest possible

word for poor. It means destitute, completely without any means whatsoever. It means to not have a dime to your name. However, notice that Jesus isn't specifically referring to financial poverty, but spiritual poverty. *Blessed are the spiritually bankrupt.* In other words, disciples recognize that there is nothing good within them, nothing that can merit favor with God in anyway.

And friends, this is an absolutely foundational Bible doctrine, the fact that in our sinful nature there is absolutely nothing good, not even a little bit.

In Psalm 53, David tells us this:

God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. [3] They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. (Psalm 53:2-3 ESV)

Or as Paul says in Romans 7:

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. (Romans 7:18 ESV)

And just a chapter later in Romans 8:

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:8 ESV)

So get this, Jesus is saying that to become a disciple, to be a part of God's kingdom, you have to come to the point where your eyes are opened to the fact that, because of your sin, you are spiritually bankrupt. That even your good deeds are filthy rags. You have to accept the fact that you stand before God with absolutely nothing to lean on. Which is a great segue to what I told you at the end of last week's service.

One of the most common criticisms of Christianity is that it is a crutch for the weak. But guess what? Jesus is saying in Beatitude #1 that this is true!

Christianity is for the weak, for those who cannot stand before God on their own.

Here's the thing. We tend to think of crutches as bad things, right? But if you have a broken ankle, what do you need? If you can't stand on your own, if you are going to get from place to place, what do you need? You need a crutch. So, a crutch isn't a bad thing, it is a necessary thing. Now, we wish that we didn't need it, but we do. And that is what Jesus is saying here. That because of our sin, we are completely bankrupt. We are impoverished. We are hopeless. We are flat on our backs and we can't get up on our own.

Notice what Jesus says in Mark 2:

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17 ESV)

Now, this is hard to swallow. Perhaps you are already beginning to comprehend why I said this would hurt. Jesus is telling us that the truly blessed, those who are truly part of His kingdom, are those who die to their pride and humbly come to Him with empty hands. So, the first mark of a disciple is they recognize they are spiritually bankrupt.

2. A disciple mourns over their sin. (v. 4)

The second mark of a disciple is they mourn over their sin. Verse 4:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Now Jesus is not referring to mourning over loss, but rather mourning over our sin. As John Stott comments:

It is not the sorrow of bereavement to which Christ refers, but the sorrow of repentance.³

³ Morris, Leon (1992). Pg. 97. *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

See the progression in this. Discipleship begins by recognizing you are spiritually bankrupt, which leads to mourning over the sin that has led you to such a place.

In essence, this is what true repentance is all about. It is mourning over sin. Paul describes this perfectly in his second letter to the Corinthians:

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. [11] For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! (2 Corinthians 7:10-11 ESV)

It's important to grasp that a disciple not only recognizes they have sinned, but are also zealous to repent of that sin and make it right with those they have wronged. You see, it's possible to confess your sin, but to fail to truly be sorrowful and repentant of that sin. We see this in popular culture all the time. Take Lance Armstrong for example. After lying about his sin for years, he finally came to the point where he had to admit he had sinned; yet he still to this day has never truly mourned and repented of his sin. A disciple however, recognizes he has sinned and does whatever he needs to do to make it right.

3. A disciple is meek. (v. 5)

Now, mourning over sin naturally leads to the third mark of a disciple: meekness. Verse 5:

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

I think it is fair to say that there are few Biblical concepts that are probably more misunderstood than meekness. I mean, meekness just naturally sounds like weakness, right?

However, the Biblical idea of meekness isn't weakness, but rather strength under control. In fact, the Greek word for meek refers to a tamed wild animal.⁴

Here is what Jesus has in mind with this word; disciples are people who refuse to use their power or position to get what they want. In contrast to today's mantras of "might makes right" and "you've got to fight for what you want", disciples calmly and patiently trust in the Lord to provide and take care of them.

Let me give you a simple illustration of how this played out in my life just this past week. You know, sometimes having to study and preach messages week after week just stinks, because God has a way of regularly bringing things into your life to help you get the point.

Anyways, last Sunday evening I took my car to an unnamed local place of business to get an oil change, and I arrived exactly 16 minutes before closing time. And I knew it was close but I figured it wouldn't be a problem to do an oil change in 16 minutes. But when I stepped in the door the guys in the shop, with no other cars they were working on, said that they were closing up and didn't have time to do it. Now, you need to remember this is Sunday evening, which I have told you before is not the best time of the week for me spiritually, right? And so, my natural response was, well I am going to take care of this. There is no way they are going to treat me like this. And so I drove around to the front of the store and went in (you probably know what store I am talking about at this point), fully intent on finding a manager and making sure I got even. But of course, as I drove around the Spirit began to work and reminded me of the Beatitudes. And so as I wrestled with what to do I walked around the store and finally decided that I shouldn't say a thing. And that, in a very imperfect way, is what meekness is about. It is not asserting our rights; it is about being ok with people doing us wrong and responding in humility. Now, by the way,

⁴ Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

since in my heart I was angry, it doesn't really count as meekness, but at least it was a start.

A much better example of meekness is Jesus Himself, particularly as He hung on the cross. With all the power and might of heaven accessible to Him at a single word, He refused to assert His rights as the Son of God and humbly took the scorn of those who considered Him powerless. And so while meekness may not at first seem as a desirable trait, we must remember that we are never more like Jesus than when we display this characteristic.

4. A disciple hungers and thirsts for righteousness. (v. 6)

The fourth mark of a disciple is found in verse 6:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

A disciple hungers and thirsts for righteousness. And we have to see this Beatitude in connection with those that have come before, particularly the first two. As a disciple recognizes and mourns over their sin, they come to the realization that the thing they need the most is righteousness – a righteousness that only God can provide.

Let me ask you to consider this morning the greatest need of mankind. What is our greatest need? It is to be right with God. The Bible is clear that because of our sin every one of us is born separated from God, and as a result face eternity in hell. Therefore our greatest need isn't more education, better healthcare, an improved economy, or even healthier self-esteem. Our greatest need is to be made right with God so we can enjoy a relationship with Him forever.

The problem, however, is that we have no way on our own to obtain this righteousness. We need an answer to our problem that is outside of ourselves. We need a Savior. Ultimately, we need 2 Corinthians 5:21:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

Here in the Beatitudes, Jesus says that a disciple is someone who recognizes they have no righteousness of their own and therefore longs for the righteousness that only God can provide. They understand they need God's righteousness or they will die.

And so I want to ask you pointedly today. Have you given up your own righteousness for the righteousness that only Christ can provide? Have you given up attempting to earn God's favor by what you do? Have you stopped clinging to your good works and simply trusted in what Christ has done? That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

You know, there is an old proverb, found in many world religions, that says God helps those who help themselves. And it sounds pretty good doesn't it? Well, that is completely the opposite of what Jesus says here in the Beatitudes. God actually helps those who cannot help themselves - and admit that this is the case.

5. A disciple is merciful. (v. 7)

Now, this leads us to the fifth mark of a disciple, and with it we begin to see a transition in the Beatitudes. The first four Beatitudes are known as the passive or need Beatitudes, because they describe a disciple as someone who is receiving something. Disciples are poor, so they need to be made rich. Disciples mourn, so they need to be comforted. Disciples are powerless, so they need someone to stand for them. Disciples lack righteousness, so they need to be given it. However, when we come to the fifth, sixth and seventh Beatitudes, we move into what are known as the active or help Beatitudes. In these three Beatitudes we see that a disciple is someone who has been filled by God to go out and help others. Those who were once empty have been filled by God in order that they might minister

to those who are as they once were. And these active Beatitudes begin with mercy. Take a look at verse 7:

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

So, the fifth mark of a disciple is mercy. And to explain how we should practice mercy, let me take you to Ephesians 4 for just a moment. In verse 32 Paul writes:

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32 ESV)

We are called to treat others the way that God has treated us. God has shown us mercy, and therefore we should show mercy to one another.

The way of the world, of course, is to treat others the way that they have treated us. Right? If someone does us wrong, we are going to make sure we get even. You know, you have to stand up for yourself. You have to fight for your rights. But Jesus says that a disciple treats others as God has treated them. And I really believe this is the key truth in regards to how we are called to interact with one another. When we think about how God would have us relate to others, whether believers or unbelievers, friend or foe, we should always ask, "how has God treated me?" and then seek to treat others the same way.

Now, I am not saying this is easy. Quite the opposite. It is completely counter-cultural and counter-our flesh. But it is the way of following Jesus.

Perhaps another way of coming at it would be helpful. Ask yourself, "what if God treated me the way that I want to treat this person?"

Of course, a common response is, well I have never done what that person did to me. And you are right. You have done worse. You have rebelled against the God of the universe, which resulted in His Son being hung on a

tree. As Martin Luther once said, "We all carry about in our pockets His very nails."⁵

And you know, all of these Beatitudes are important, but I find this one to have special significance. I mean, how different would our interaction with others be if we were to treat them the way that God has treated us? What a difference it would make in our church, in our families, in our lives, and in our communities. Have mercy as God has had mercy on you.

6. A disciple is single-minded in devotion to God. (v. 8)

Ok, moving on. A sixth mark of a disciple is they are single-minded in their devotion to God. Verse 8:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

In order to understand this Beatitude, you have to grasp what the terms purity and heart are referring to. By the heart, Jesus is referring to the center of our being. Normally when we consider the heart we think of it as a physical organ or the center of our emotions. However, in Scripture the heart refers to our entire inner state, including not only the emotions but also the mind and will.

The term purity on the other hand, means single. It means unmixed singleness as opposed to duplicity.⁶

James 4:8 describes this well:

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:8 ESV)

In other words, the way we draw near to God is by being single-minded, not double-minded, in our devotion to Him.

⁵ Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

⁶ Ibid

By the way, purity of heart is a recurring theme in the Old Testament, particularly in relation to idolatry. The people of Israel were continually being lead away from God by Pagan idols. For example, note what Psalm 24 says:

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? [4] He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. (Psalm 24:3-4 ESV)

And today we face the same battle that the children of Israel faced. There are many idols clamoring for our worship. There are many false deities that tempt distract us from fully following Jesus. But being a disciple means being single-minded in devotion to Him.

Now, just like all of the other Beatitudes, this issue is going to come up again in the Sermon on the Mount. And it is going to come up big time. So, we will talk more about this later, but one thing to consider is the idols that distract us from following Jesus single-mindedly. What are they for you? Money? Sex? Career? Children? Success? Whatever they are, note from verse 8 what you lose when you chase idols. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* Our idols keep us from seeing God! And as Frederick Bruner says, nothing is more important.⁷

7. A disciple is a peacemaker. (v. 9)

All right, on to the seventh mark of a disciple. Verse 9 tells us that a disciple is a peacemaker.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

⁷ Frederick Dale Bruner. Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12 (p. 176). Kindle Edition.

Now, note that it doesn't say blessed are the *peacekeepers* or the *peaceful*, but rather blessed are the *peacemakers*. This is an active characteristic of a disciple, not a passive one.

The Biblical concept of peace is much richer than how we think of peace today. For us peace normally refers to the absence of conflict – either internally or externally. However, the Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*, which means all-around communal well-being. Biblical peace embraces everything and everyone – both internally and externally. Practically speaking, this means that disciples are reconcilers. They actively seek to reconcile people to God, others, and themselves. A passage that illustrates this beautifully is 2 Corinthians 5:17-20:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. [18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:17-20 ESV)

To be a disciple means to be a peacemaker. And don't you agree that there is a desperate need in our world for peacemakers? Not just peacekeepers. Not just peaceful people, but peacemakers. People who actively work for reconciliation. Listen, we have enough peace breakers. The world is full of them. What we need are peacemakers, people who because they are reconciled to God help others to become reconciled to Him as well.

Ok, we are almost done. Just stick with me for one more.

8. Disciples are persecuted for following Jesus. (v. 10)

The 8th mark of a disciple is they are persecuted for following Jesus. Verses 10-12:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12 ESV)

Here the Beatitudes take somewhat of an unexpected turn. While the first four are passive, and the next three active, this final one is both passive and active. Jesus is saying the end result of passively being filled by God and actively overflowing in ministry to others is persecution.

And while we cringe at the thought of this, the uniform testimony of the Bible is that disciples can expect to be persecuted for following Jesus. Here are some examples:

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. (Psalm 34:19 ESV)

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12 ESV)

For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. [21] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:20-21 ESV)

This is a hard one. As if the other ones aren't. But this Beatitude says to be a disciple means to experience persecution. Now I don't know about you, but I have to be honest that I don't personally experience a great deal of persecution. And so as I think about this Beatitude I am challenged to consider if I am really following Jesus as I should. Is it possible that I am not being as bold in speaking the truth as I should be? Is it possible that I am not going to the hard places I need to go? Big questions that we all need to

ask. That said, I think we need to be ready for the persecution that is undoubtedly on its way. Recent events in our country show pretty clearly that in the coming days those who live righteously, particularly in the areas of sex, marriage and the fight for life, are going to face persecution. There simply is no way around it. The day is coming and for some is already here.

Just this week a father shared with me about how his high school aged daughter has been struggling with criticism from her friends about her beliefs. Perhaps some of you face it with your co-workers or even your family members. If so, this Beatitude has an encouraging word for you today. Actually, it has numerous encouraging words. Jesus says that when we are persecuted for following Him, we are blessed. Not only are we blessed, but we can rejoice and be glad, because, and I want you to see this, our reward in heaven is what? It's great.

So, once again, I want to say, yes, following Jesus is hard. Yes, it is difficult, but yes, yes, yes, it is so worth it. Not only in this life, but even more so in the life to come.

And there you have the 8 marks of discipleship. A disciple recognizes they are spiritually bankrupt. A disciple mourns over their sin. A disciple is meek. A disciple hungers and thirsts for righteousness. A disciple is merciful. A disciple is single-minded in devotion to God. A disciple is a peacemaker. And as a result, a disciple is persecuted because they are following Jesus.

And I'd like to finish today by discussing what in the world we do with this. I have to tell you that I wrestled with this all week, because if you are like me, right now you are probably a little overwhelmed. Maybe even a lot. And in one sense I think this is good. I truly believe one of the purposes of the Beatitudes is to humble us, to help us understand how needy we truly are.

At the same time, we have to realize that in a real sense the Beatitudes are congratulations. Now, you might not feel very celebratory right now, but let me ask, why are they called the Beatitudes? Because they are blessings. In

the Beatitudes Jesus is pronouncing blessings on those who follow Him. Look at these blessings again.

Disciples are a part of God's kingdom.

Disciples will be comforted.

Disciples will inherit the earth.

Disciples will be satisfied.

Disciples will receive mercy.

Disciples will see God.

Disciples will be called sons of God.

Disciples have great reward in heaven.

I mean, what can be better than this? Jesus, the King, is promising all of these things to those who follow Him.

And so, if you are a disciple, I would encourage you to be both challenged and encouraged by the Beatitudes. Be challenged by the fact that you are undoubtedly imperfect in all 8 of them. Be challenged to humble yourself and call on God for mercy to help you follow Him more faithfully.

But don't just be challenged, be encouraged as well; be encouraged by the blessings that Jesus says you have and will experience more fully in eternity because you are following Him.

Now, let me speak to those today who are not disciples. What should you do? Well, it all begins with admitting your spiritual bankruptcy. You have to grasp the fact that you need God to rescue you. You can't go anywhere until you do that. But what if you don't feel spiritually bankrupt? What if you don't believe you are spiritually needy? If so, your only option is to fall on your knees and plead with God to open your eyes to see the true reality of where you are. But here is the great thing – when you get to that point, you are already there. And when you admit your spiritual bankruptcy, at that moment you become rich beyond compare, because you will have the most valuable thing in the world – Jesus Christ himself.

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