

**Echoes from the Mountain: The Sermon on the Mount**  
**The Beatitudes: Part 2**  
**1-29-17**  
**Text: Matthew 5:1-11**



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**Reflection questions...** [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

*“How would you define the good life? What is the life that works? What are the means you are using to attain it? Would you say that your present pursuits are allowing you to experience it or simply frustrating your efforts?”*

*“As you consider the text and the context, how would you say that the idea of blessing differs from our notion of happiness?”*

*“Given the nature of the crowd hearing Jesus’ teaching, how would you imagine their response? In what ways would you assume the teaching to be paradoxical?”*

Jesus says, often those who presumed they were “in”, are really “out” (Matthew 23:13); those who assumed that because of their status and condition that the boundaries were closed off to them were actually finding their way “in”.

*“Do the Beatitudes seem to address simply our posture toward God or our response to others, as well? Which ones seem directed at our relationship with God? Which seem directed at our interactions with others?”*

*“Have you found yourself, at times, more open to Jesus because you felt you had less to lose? Have you found yourself, at other times, reticent about following because of the significant re-orientation of life that it requires? The cost?” (Luke 14:28).*

*“Why is profiling our default response? Why do we fast-forward to pre-mature conclusions about another’s circumstance before we are willing to consider the level of our compassion?”*

*“How might you respond this week in some quiet act of subversion? What one, definable act of defiance (against injustice) might you commit in order to join with another to help eliminate their misery?”*

*“In what area of your life would you like to see righteousness restored? What right or position are you clinging to which is obstructing the rightness of the Kingdom in your situation?”*

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**Teaching Notes...**

**The Sermon on the Mount portrays what it means to be human and what that life looks like when it is defined by and empowered by the lovingly- restorative rule of God; it's what life would look like if God were King and his desires were the rule of the day. In a word--- the "Kingdom".**

This is the largest collection of Jesus' teaching and likely amongst some of the most widely recognized and familiar words of Jesus we have on record.

At a cursory glance, we would have to say that they make for a good door-room poster, but seem a bit "utopian" or "idealistic" to the serious thinker. That's not reality.

Jesus is addressing a question that the entire world was/is asking: ***"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*** (Matthew 19:16)

We live in a world that is ultimately confused about how to define the 'admirable' life; no real consensus about what it looks like or how to attain it, other than our own individual preferences and interpretations.

To compound the issue, our culture seems determined to provide enough "alternative facts" or "augmented reality" to keep us either distracted or entertained: deterring us from any thoughtful or introspective search for what matters most.

This is not a general statement about the way the world works. In fact, it seems counter-intuitive. What we would expect to hear: blessed are the wealthy, the powerful, the aggressive, the satisfied, the notable... they're the real winners! That's the good life!

Those pronounced 'blessed' are not to be envied or consider themselves to be in a favorable position simply *because of* their condition itself, but because that condition itself has not precluded them from interacting with the rule/desires of the Kingdom despite all of the physical, religious and socio-economic limitations placed on them.

Matthew locates this teaching of Jesus immediately on the heels of an invitation to 'follow' him. That seems to suggest that our identification with him (finding life through him, receiving life in him and learning life from him) is vital to understanding the response of his apprentices.

*"Who are these folks in the crowd?"*

They are the subsistence workers, those who are sick and have no access to health care, those who are being so oppressed by the presence of evil in their lives as to inhibit their functionality. They are those whose circumstances have driven them to the margins, both socially and religiously. The voiceless. The defenseless. The helpless. These are the ones who flock to Jesus (pardon the pun).

So, Jesus begins to pronounce a series of blessings that are ultimately ironic, and paradoxical, and hopeful. They are not to be extracted as singular virtues, but as a "mosaic", of sorts, which combines to put on display the surprising nature of grace and undermines the accepted, cultural norms of the prevailing empire, as well as the present religious hierarchy as to who is "blessed".

## **Blessing is God's fundamental framework for life.**

**Beatitudes:** from the Latin, "**blessed**". From the very beginning of the story, it is woven into the very fabric of creation.

The word used in the Beatitudes is "**makarios**". It's hard to find an English word to capture it well, but the basic meaning is, 'fortunate', 'happy', 'enviable', 'in a desirable situation', 'honorable'.

Literally, it is from a compound word: "*the good that someone has decreed; to cause to flourish*" **and** "*the divine plan or reason*" (logos: John 1).

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit... blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."*

One captures the essence of the Kingdom-vision [a world set right] and the other the nature of the Kingdom posture [selflessness].

### **"hangry for righteousness"---**

Hunger and thirst are associated with some deprivation. Something which is vital, but is vitally absent.

These are people who, themselves, have likely been the victims of abusive relationships and corrupt systems. They are not simply bent on "retaliation" because they are becoming convinced that, although it might satisfy some need for retribution, it would simply perpetuate the chaos and fail to produce the rightness of relationships envisioned in the Kingdom.

To the Jews, "**righteousness**" meant: 1) God's covenant faithfulness in the context of our infidelity, 2) loving-obedience as our anticipated response to the revelation of God's goodness [Deuteronomy 4:8].

### **poor in spirit---**

It's the unique absence of arrogance that is incrementally losing confidence in the ability of the un-reformed human heart to produce anything which might remotely resemble blessing.

(Gr. ptokos)- a person reduced to begging; destitute of all resources. It means '*to be completely empty and dependent upon someone else for provision*'.

The "*poor in spirit*" are the spiritually impoverished; the spiritually bankrupt; those with no leverage, no solid religious footing and no claims on God.

Is it a spiritual or an economic condition? Are the two ever separated? Jesus has this evaluation of human nature which understands that it is precisely those people who find themselves in such circumstances who are often the most available to God--- and, surprisingly, God is most available to them!

### **mourn**

Jesus says that it's good, at times, to feel empty because it connects us with our deepest longings. We mourn both the pain that we have experienced and the pain that we have inflicted, upon ourselves or others.

Mourning seems like the necessary step to experience whatever is "next". It's where we are both broken and consoled.

## **meek**

Meekness is a harnessed passion which prevents you from attempting to assert yourself (aggression and manipulation) but which rejects passivity. It is gentle, but just.

The meek, are perhaps, those who don't think of themselves as being all that important, but who are willing to engage all of the disorder and contribute in meaningful, even if not laudable ways. They are the ones who understand that they are part of a movement that is easily overlooked and ignored... just like themselves... yet, shows up in profound and "mustard-seed-like" ways.

## **merciful...**

*mercy (Greek)- kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them.*

These people are so internally disturbed by what they see going on in their country, in their school, in their office space, in their neighborhood that they must act and find ways to protest which are proactive, but peaceable.

## **When it comes to 'judgment and mercy', mercy wins** (James 2:12-13).

They know that they can't establish world peace or abolish hunger or eliminate ignorance and bigotry, but they refuse to sit idly by and watch the world self-destruct. They involve themselves in the tangible and concrete "micro-mercies" of the Kingdom.

## **pure in heart...**

The "*pure in heart*" are those who are not intent on being noticed. Those whose actions are glorious: are more concerned with God's reputation than their own. Who see God, who God seeing them and who see everyone else through such a lens.

## **peacemakers...**

Being a peacemaker requires a courageous entrance into the fray, into the midst of the conflict with one objective: to serve reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5).

In some fashion, the followers of Jesus are called to be not always out in front, but in the middle of all the chaos, helping to re-establish order.

## **persecution and insult...**

The "*because of me*" (because you are my follower) clause is one that distinguishes our behavior. It means that there are times when we incite such responses due to our own inappropriate expressions of anger or frustration. There are also times when, even as we respond rightly, our movements will be met with resistance and suspicion.

Jesus is intimating here (if not being explicit) that those whose values resonate with those of the Kingdom will not permit themselves to isolate/insulate themselves from all that is "un-righteous", but will, in humble, compassionate, quiet confidence demonstrate their Kingdom participation in ways that refuse to contribute to the chaos, but who are helping to set things right.

## **Philippians 2:3-8 [read]**