

WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 2

Cascade of Blessings

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Matthew 5:3-12
Subject: Who are blessed
Complement: those who are part of the kingdom of heaven.
Exegetical idea: Those who are part of the kingdom of heaven are blessed.
Homiletical idea: **When you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed!**
Purpose: To help my hearers to understand that the Beatitudes are not a list of obligations in order to earn salvation or a list of required characteristics for those who want to walk with Jesus, but rather a reminder that those who are part of the kingdom of heaven are blessed.

Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is considered by many to be one of the greatest teaching discourses of all time. The most complete account is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters five, six and seven. You have a copy of that record in your hand this morning, and I hope that you will bring it with you for this entire series of messages, which we have entitled “Walking with Jesus.”

In the first message from this series, we listened to the testimony of James, the son of Zebedee. His testimony helped us to understand some of the historical background for the giving of this great sermon by Jesus. In the inspiring commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, we read these encouraging words:

Let us in imagination go back to that scene, and, as we sit with the disciples on the mountainside, enter into the thoughts and feelings that filled their hearts. Understanding what the words of Jesus meant to those who heard them, we may discern in them a new vividness and beauty, and may also gather for ourselves their deeper lessons.

If you missed the first message in our series on Walking with Jesus, you can watch it online at

www.forestlakechurch.org. You might also want to get your own copy of this inspiring book, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing! It would be a wonderful companion book to read as part of our series on the Sermon on the Mount.

Bible scholars have had lively discussions over whether this Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5-7 was actually presented by Jesus on a single occasion, or whether it was collated from a variety of presentations by Jesus. One thing is certain. Even Matthew, in his 107 verses, does not record every word of Jesus. There is a parallel account by Luke, found in Luke chapter 6, which records 30 additional verses. Some of Luke's verses are very similar to Matthew and others add new information. So even Matthew's 107 verses is not a complete record of every word that Jesus spoke that day on the hillside. But whether this great Sermon on the Mount was spoken by Jesus on a single occasion, or whether it represents a collation of a variety of presentations by Jesus, what is important is this: the Holy Spirit directed the apostle Matthew to record these sayings of Jesus for the blessing of His followers. We believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof for correction, for instruction in righteousness. 2 Tim 3:16

The record of this great sermon on the mount by Jesus, as preserved for us by the apostle Matthew, begins with a collection of sayings which have been referred to by many Christians as the Beatitudes. We'll discover the meaning of that word later in our study because this first portion of the Sermon on the Mount will be the focus of our study today. Because this brief portion of Scripture is such a foundational part of the teaching of Jesus, I want to invite us all to read it together. The copy that you have in your hand is from the NKJV. Let's begin reading from Matthew 5:1, and we will read through verse 12.

“.....”

Many followers of Jesus have committed these words of Jesus to memory. And I would encourage you to do the same. How many of you here today have already memorized the Beatitudes? By hiding these words of Jesus in our hearts, we will be able to meditate upon them, day and night. We will be able to see new vividness and beauty and gather for ourselves their deeper lessons. Obviously, these words of Jesus are important. He even presents them in a way that makes it easy for us to memorize them.

Having affirmed the importance of these words of Jesus, we must admit that there is a great deal of confusion, both spoken and unspoken, about why Jesus spoke these words at the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount. What are these Beatitudes all about?

First, let me assert that these sayings of Jesus are NOT a list of obligations in order to earn salvation. You could easily come to the conclusion that these sayings of Jesus at the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount are a list of obligations in order to earn salvation. You have to be poor in spirit, you have to mourn, you have to be meek...in order to earn your place in the kingdom of heaven.

But that is NOT what Jesus is saying! How do we know that? The startling announcement of Jesus in Matthew 4:17 was this: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” What does repentance mean? Repentance means a turning around. A change of mind. We repent of our sin. We repent of trying to save ourselves. We repent of pushing God away from our lives. We say “Yes” to God’s mercy and grace. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! That’s the way of salvation!

Before this sermon on the Mount was ever preached, a Jewish leader named Nicodemus

came to speak with Jesus because he believed that Jesus was a teacher sent from God.

Nicodemus came at night, perhaps because he was afraid of what people might think, or perhaps because he wanted to find Jesus alone. Jesus told Nicodemus the way of salvation. It was not by following a list of rules. How could Nicodemus be a part of Jesus' kingdom which would last forever and ever? Some of you have memorized those words of Jesus, recorded by the apostle John in John 3:16. What did Jesus say to Nicodemus? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." It is "by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Eph 2:8-9

So let us begin by asserting that these sayings of Jesus at the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount are not a list of obligations in order to earn salvation. Jesus is NOT saying, "You have to be poor in spirit, you have to mourn, you have to be meek, you have to hunger and thirst after righteousness, you have to be merciful..., and so on, in order to earn salvation."

Secondly, let me assert that Jesus does not give these sayings at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount as a list of required characteristics for all who would walk with Him and be a part of His kingdom. But you might say, "Wait a minute, Pastor. Shouldn't those who walk with Jesus be poor in spirit? Should they recognize their spiritual need?" The answer to that question is "Yes!" It's crucially important for those who walk with Jesus to recognize their spiritual need? Unless we recognize our spiritual need, we will not be open to His grace. Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Matthew 7: 7 And all of that happens because we recognize our need.

I also believe that those who walk with Jesus, those who choose to be a part of His kingdom, will mourn about their spiritual condition. And that's not a one time occurrence. Are we not, as followers of Jesus, constantly aware of the fact that we are not all that we should be? We cry out, like the apostle Paul, "O wretched person that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" And the same answer comes to us, by the Spirit of God, that came to the apostle Paul: "Thanks be to God! Through Jesus Christ, our Lord!"

But let me assert again that these sayings of Jesus at the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount are not a list of required characteristics of all who would follow Jesus. That's not the reason Jesus gave them. When Jesus said to His first disciples, "Follow Me," did He say, "Follow Me if you're poor in heart, if you mourn, if you're meek, if you hunger and thirst after righteousness...?" Is that what Jesus said? No! Jesus simply said, "Follow Me!" Jesus invites us to follow Him just as we are! Now, I'm thankful that Jesus doesn't leave us where we are! I'm thankful that Jesus changes us. I'm thankful that we are born again by His Spirit. I'm thankful that if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation! But I'm especially thankful that we can respond to the call of Jesus just as we are. As the old Gospel song puts it, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come!"

So these Beatitudes, this collection of sayings at the beginning of Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount are NOT a list of obligations in order to earn salvation, and they are NOT a list of required characteristics in order to follow Jesus. Then, what are they? Why did begin His great Sermon on the Mount with these memorable sayings? A clue is found in the first word of each of the eight sayings recorded in Matthew 5:3-10, and repeated in the first word of Matthew 5:11.

Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Do I need to repeat the word another 4 times, or did you get the message? A clue to understanding the purpose of Jesus in beginning His great Sermon on the Mount with this collection of sayings is found in the word “Blessed.”

The word translated “blessed” in Matthew’s account of the Sermon on the Mount is the Greek word MAKARIOS. This word is used more than 40 times in the New Testament, from these words of Jesus recorded in the book of Matthew all the way to the book of Revelation, where we are told, “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”

On several occasions, the KJV translates the word MAKARIOS as “happy.” And Young’s concordance would agree with that meaning for the word MAKARIOS. Happy. Remember that these sayings at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount are called the Beatitudes? That word comes from the Latin *beatitudo*, which means happiness.

But the word MAKARIOS is more than a feeling of elation, an emotional exuberance. This word MAKARIOS has the connotation of a deep inner joy. A radical joy. A joy that wells up within you when you experience the blessing of heaven.

And why do we experience this blessing of radical joy? The answer is found in the first and the last of the sayings of Jesus at the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount. Matt 5:3 Blessed....for theirs IS the kingdom of heaven. And again in Matthew 5:10. Blessed....for theirs IS the kingdom of heaven. Those who are part of Jesus’ kingdom of heaven are blessed, filled with radical, overflowing joy!

But you might say, “I still don’t understand Matt 5:10. How are you blessed when you are persecuted?” I think that the apostle Peter helps us to understand this verse. In 1 Pet 3:14, we read, “But even if you suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed.” The persecution is

not the reason that you are blessed. You are blessed even though you are suffering persecution. You are blessed because you are part of the kingdom of heaven! You experience the blessing of radical joy. It's a deep inner joy that transcends outward circumstances. Even if you are reviled and persecuted, you are blessed because you are part of the kingdom of heaven.

This kingdom that Jesus speaks about is a present kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, Jesus declared. The kingdom of heaven is in your midst! And we become a part of that kingdom by repenting of our sins and receiving Jesus as our Messiah, our Savior and Lord. But this kingdom is also a kingdom which is to come. A kingdom of glory. A kingdom where God will make all things new. A kingdom where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. And there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and there shall be no more pain!

Here this message, loud and clear, at the beginning of Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. This great sermon opens with a cascade of blessings. And Jesus tell us "When you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed!"

In the past few months, I have been reminded again that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed. Some months ago, a member of our church family, Larry Christensen, was diagnosed with stage 5 melanoma. Now, I'm not an expert on cancers of any kind. But I understand the classifications of stage 1, stage 2, stage 3, stage 4 and stage 5. To be diagnosed with stage 5 melanoma is very serious.

When Larry learned about his diagnosis, he wanted to do everything that he could to live. He loved his family, he loved his church and he loved life. So Larry decided to have the melanoma removed from his thigh. Unfortunately, the melanoma had already spread, and it would rapidly spread to the rest of his body.

Larry was fighting for his life. He started chemotherapy just a few weeks ago and came home a week ago yesterday to recuperate from his first round of treatments. We were all praying for Larry, and our prayers were answered. You say, “Oh, is Larry doing better now?” No. Larry stopped breathing early Sunday morning, and is waiting the call of the Lifegiver when Jesus returns in glory.

Then, how were our prayers answered? We were praying that God would bless Larry and that God would fill Larry with peace as he rested in the arms of Jesus. A few weeks ago, when I was visiting with Larry at his home, we talked about Jesus and the kingdom of heaven. Larry wasn't preoccupied with buying more life insurance or getting a supplemental health insurance plan. He was resting in the arms of Jesus. Larry knew that Jesus loved him. And Larry was resting in the arms of Jesus. In my last prayer with Larry, just a few days before he died, we rejoiced together in the blessed assurance that only Jesus can give.

Larry was a living example to me that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed! Larry sleeps now, in a sure and certain hope of a resurrection when our Lord Jesus returns in glory. For him, time stands still. He made his choice. He chose to rest in the arms of Jesus. He chose to be a part of the kingdom of heaven. He experienced deep in his soul that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed.

Most of us are not battling with stage 5 melanoma. But each one of us can experience the truth that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven you are blessed! My wife and I experienced some unexpected financial blessings last December. A year-end bonus. An honorarium for speaking at a leadership conference. Then we were blessed again to be able to add those funds to our Christmas upside-down offering. Then we were blessed again to be part

of a church family that is experiencing miracles of God at every turn! We too are experiencing a cascade of blessings. When you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed!

And I don't know about you, but I feel so blessed that I just want to give blessings back to the Lord in return. I want to say with the Psalmist, "I will bless the LORD at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the LORD. The humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together!"