

## **The Beatitudes: Matthew 5:1-12**

A study

Rev. Charles R. Biggs

---

### **Introduction to the Beatitudes**

Today we will begin a study on the 'Beatitudes' from Matthew chapter five. The Beatitudes teach us of the blessedness, or covenantal happiness we have as the people of God because of God's salvation and His continued working in his people.

In the past, the 'Beatitudes' have been falsely interpreted by some as being the steps one attempts to climb in order to be a Christian. We should never interpret the 'Beatitudes' in such a way. The 'Beatitudes' are simply what those who have been gripped by the grace of the Lord Jesus and have been saved by his precious blood will begin to look like. In other words, the 'Beatitudes' are the characteristics of Christ-likeness that will gradually be manifested in the believer's life. The 'Beatitudes' are, if you will, "Attitudes of Gratitude" for the work that Christ has already begun in us, and knowing that this work will continue until the Day when Christ returns for us (Phil. 1:6).

The term 'Beatitudes' may sound like a new Beatles-like rock band or a new reggae band making it into mainstream music. However, the term has nothing to do with a rock or reggae band. The term 'Beatitudes' come from the Latin translation of *makarios*, a Greek word meaning "happy" or covenantally "happy". When the Bible was translated into Latin from Greek, the word *makarios* was translated as *beatus*, thus the reason they are called *beatitudes*. An example of true *makarios* or covenantal happiness is revealed in Psalm 1.

**Psalm 1:1** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; <sup>2</sup> but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. <sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. <sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; <sup>6</sup> for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

### **The Blessedness of the Beatitudes**

You could say that the 'Beatitudes' that are taught by Christ in Matthew 5:1-12 are a summary of the righteous life, hopes, desires, struggles, and praise of all of the Psalms (more on this as the study develops!). As

Psalm 1:6 says: "The LORD knows the way of the righteous". The 'Beatitudes' could very helpfully be summarized as the 'way of the righteous'. The opposite of the 'Beatitudes' is to walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners, and sit with the scoffers in this fallen world. The path of the righteous is much different, and so a lot more narrower than the broad way of the wicked that leads to destruction (Matthew 7).

The "*blessed*"-ness of the 'Beatitudes' should not be misunderstood as our own American way of defining happiness. The "blessed" or happy come from "delighting in the law of the LORD" (Ps. 1). The "blessed" that is spoken of is "covenantal blessings" or "covenantal happiness". As Moses went up on Sinai to bring down the Law to the people of God in the Old Covenant, so Jesus is going up on the mount, as One Who is greater than Moses, to bring down the Law that will be fulfilled by grace. When Moses told the people about obedience to the Law in Deuteronomy 28, he spoke of their lives as being blessed by their obedience. Notice in Deuteronomy 28:9, that keeping God's commandments is described as "walking in his ways". This is the "blessed walk" of Psalm 1 and the "narrow path" that Jesus describes in Matthew 7.

**Deuteronomy 28:1-9: "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. <sup>2</sup> And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. <sup>3</sup> Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. <sup>4</sup> Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. <sup>5</sup> Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. <sup>6</sup> Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. <sup>7</sup> "The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. <sup>8</sup> The LORD will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>9</sup> The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways.**

Moses also teaches the people about the curses for disobedience. This is important! Blessed are those who are obedient to the Law by God's grace, but cursed are those who disobey.

**Deuteronomy 28:15ff: <sup>15</sup> "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. <sup>16</sup> Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. <sup>17</sup> Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. <sup>18</sup> Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. <sup>19</sup> Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. <sup>20</sup> "The LORD will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me. <sup>21</sup> The LORD will make the**

pestilence stick to you until he has consumed you off the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>22</sup> The LORD will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat, and with drought and with blight and with mildew. They shall pursue you until you perish....

The curses Moses reveals are more in number than the blessings in Deuteronomy 28! The path of the wicked is indeed broader and filled with more curses than the narrow path of the righteous!

### **JESUS: the Blessed Keeper of the Law**

The people of God in the Old Covenant who were awaiting a Messiah, an Anointed King to rule over them and all the earth, were awaiting one who would enable them to love and keep the Law of God (Ezek. 36). By the time the Messiah, the Christ comes to them, the majority of those who call themselves "God's people", are trusting in their own righteousness and their own works of the Law, rather than looking to God for grace and mercy. In other words, many of those who called themselves by the Name of the LORD were not poor in spirit, mourning over their sins, being meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, nor building Christ's Kingdom through peace rather than their own might and power!

Jesus wants His people to know that he has not come to abolish the Law of Moses, but to fulfill it! (Matthew 5:17). The people of God must be humbled and forsake any attempt at earning their own righteousness through works! Jesus is the Blessed Keeper of the Law spoken of in Psalm 1! The people of God are to trust in Messiah and His fulfillment of the Law, they are to "live by faith". The Messiah was to be cursed for their sins against God's holy law and to offer the blessings of His Law-keeping Spirit to them so that they might have new hearts! The Apostle Paul would explain this later in his letter to the congregation at Galatia.

**Galatians 3:10-13:** For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." <sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." <sup>12</sup> But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." <sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"-

Jesus wanted to clear up the wrong teaching and thinking of his people when he came and this is one of the reasons why Jesus climbs the mount to give a sermon that will change the lives and thinking of those who have ears to hear! This Jesus will turn their world upside down with one sermon. In fact, when Jesus completes the Sermon on the Mount, the crowds are amazed at his teaching with authority!

### **"I'm Beginning to Look a Lot Like Jesus"**

So what does one who has been saved by grace through faith, one who has been purchased and bought with a price by Christ's blood, what does one of these people look like who walk the narrow path, who live by faith in Jesus, and who are *blessed*? What are their characteristics?

Jesus said they are characterized by being poor in spirit; mourning; being meek, yet not weak; hungering and thirsting after righteousness; merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Jesus is not teaching that "if" you become all these things, then you will be a follower of Christ. Rather, he is saying "if you are a follower of Christ" then this is what you will look like.

It is like the hopes and aspirations we have for our own lives as well as the lives of our children. We pray and hope that we, as well as our children, even our family name will mean something in the big scheme of history. We pray that we as well as our children will become something worthwhile and helpful in our little worlds. Well, Jesus is saying that this is not only a mere hope or aspiration, but it will become a reality as we follow close to him by his grace. We will become what is revealed as "blessed" in the 'Beatitudes'. This is great news for sinners!

### **Kingdom Living in a Fallen World**

Before we begin our next study with the poor in spirit, allow me to sum up all of the 'Beatitudes', further illustrating how they relate to the Psalms in the Old Testament. Let's read Matthew 5:1-12, then we will proceed with our introduction to the 'Beatitudes'.

**Matthew 5:1-12: Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: <sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. <sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. <sup>8</sup> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. <sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. <sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Notice that Jesus notices the crowds, but he specifically addresses the disciples (5:1, 10-12- 2nd person plural, speaking to those persecuted, not the whole crowd). Jesus seems to be primarily speaking to his disciples, but the crowds are listening in. Jesus is turning his listener's world upside down as he usually did through his teaching. In order for him to explain the way of the Kingdom of God, it is no surprise that it was directly opposite to the ways and thoughts of this world.

To summarize what Dr. Sinclair Ferguson calls "Kingdom Living in a Fallen World", Jesus begins to teach the covenantal happiness, or blessings that come with being his follower. He begins with the poor in spirit. Before we can even follow Jesus we must be totally dependent upon the grace and the mercy of our Heavenly Father if we are to be saved. Then he speaks of mourning.

Mourners are those who do not expect constant joy and fulfillment in this world. Rather, they are those who know what it is like to suffer. They know things are not as they should be and they await a day when all of creation will be renewed (Rom. 8:18-25). They mourn for their own sins, not only totally dependent upon God for salvation, but totally repentant before God as they grow in their salvation. Those who mourn also are offended because God's holiness is offended by the sins of man, including themselves.

Then Jesus says "Blessed are the meek". Now what the world may call "weak", Jesus describes as meek. The meek know that they are citizens of two kingdoms and that ultimately all of their rights here on this earth should be given up and surrendered to Jesus, the One who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but Who made Himself nothing, even dying upon a cross meekly for his people! The meek are not weak, they have just learned to suspend some of their rights and strength for the sake of love and considering others better than themselves.

Then there are those who pursue righteousness. They know that the only thing that will truly satisfy is to be like Christ their Savior. So, they pursue, they strive at being Christ-like, by hungering and thirsting for his righteousness! They want to be like their Master!

Then there are those who are merciful, because they have experienced the deep, kind, undeserving mercy of God! They want to show the same mercy to others. They want justice, but they lovingly want to walk justly and love mercy because it is a reflection of God's mercy to them. Then there are the pure in heart who love what God loves and learn to hate what God hates. They know that God is continually purifying and sanctifying their hearts as they rest and depend upon His mercy and love to them.

The peacemakers know that their peacemaking is a double-edged sword. Their ultimate goal is to share the peace they have with God because of Jesus Christ with others. Knowing, however, that others who are not at peace with God and actually war against God will not accept their "terms of peace". Rather, they will persecute and say all kinds of evil against them because of Jesus.

In all of this, Jesus says "Rejoice and be glad for great is the reward of those who are like this!" The 'Beatitudes' are ultimately pictures of Christ and pictures of what we as Christ's people will begin to look like. By the power of Christ's Spirit, Christ will continue to be formed in us so that we will be presented to Christ when he returns as a pure, lovely, righteous Bride who will live with Christ forever!