

Blessed of God – Part I

(Matthew 5:1-3)

By Randy Wages

8/28/05

Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

Matthew 5: 1-12:

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: ²And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

³Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. ⁵Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. ⁷Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. ⁸Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God. ⁹Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. ¹⁰Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness's sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹²Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Introduction to the Beatitudes: “Blessed of God – Part 1” (Matt. 5:1-3)

I've titled the message this morning, “Blessed of God – Part 1,” taken from Matthew 5, verses 1-3. The reason I say Part 1 is that we won't get too far into these verses this morning because, before considering each verse individually, I want to begin by discussing things that are commonly true of all of these verses – these verses which begin, “Blessed are . . .”

If you heard the introductory message on the Sermon on the Mount, you will recall that we established that its central theme is the Gospel of the kingdom and the nature of the kingdom of heaven itself. Keep in mind it is not a kingdom with geographical borders but rather it speaks of a dominion or reign – a spiritual kingdom, inhabited by spiritual children. It is a kingdom that most do not enter – a fact clearly set forth by Christ in these 3 chapters.

We studied how Christ is speaking of the same gospel ó the gospel of the kingdom ó the same gospel as set forth in the epistles. We saw how the scepter of righteousness is the scepter of His kingdom ó that is, that righteousness itself (perfect satisfaction to God's law and justice) is the authority or rule or the basis upon which this kingdom is established, upon which it is entered into, and through which grace itself (God's way of salvation) reigns ó grace reigning through righteousness as the scriptures assert. Now last week's introductory message to the Sermon on the Mount sets the stage for a proper understanding as we begin a verse by verse study of the passage.

So today we will take a look at this opening passage of the Sermon on the Mount ó verses often referred to as the "Beatitudes" ó the first 12 verses of Christ's sermon. I know that when I was growing up, in Sunday School I was required to memorize verses 3- 12, and I was taught to remember that these were called Beatitudes because they set forth the "attitude" that we ought to be manifesting. Well, that is exactly the connotation put on these verses by many who call themselves "Christian" as they perceive these words of Christ as things we ought to aspire or strive to be in order to be blessed by God.

Today I want to declare to you that nothing could be further from the truth because nothing ó nothing that proceeds from our own efforts can procure, sustain, or even influence God so as to acquire the blessed standing that is spoken of here in these verses. If that were possible, then salvation (because that is part and parcel of the blessing spoken of) would not be by grace, but would be of debt ó a holy God would owe the ungodly sinner salvation based upon something that proceeds from his sinful flesh, from you, the sinner, delivering that which is required ó and that is what the Bible calls "works" ó a presumed way of salvation clearly excluded by God's word ó it is the broad way that leads to destruction and not God's way ó how He saves or eternally blesses sinners. God clearly sets forth in His word, ***For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Eph 2:8-9)***

So we see that these characteristics of those Christ proclaims to be "blessed" are not things we strive to do in order to receive the blessing or reward.

Consider what the Psalmist wrote in Psa 14:1-3. There we read: *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.* Here we see what God found when He looked down from heaven ó He found none doing good. That describes all of humanity born of Adam. And from among that abominable group are some who Christ here calls õblessed.õ

Remember that Jesus told Zaccheus in Luke 19:10 that He, “... *the Son of man, is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*” And Christ also said in Luke 5:31-32 that: *õThey that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. ³²I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”* The point is this ó As Christ seeks out His sheep, does he find in them these characteristics which some might erroneously say constitute or contribute to their righteousness (their being poor in spirit, mournful, meek, peacemakers, etc.) and in finding these qualities present, thereby opts to bless them? No, He seeks those who are sick ó calling not the righteous but sinners to repentance ó to a total change of mind (so they couldn't already have been poor in spirit, etc.) ó they are all called to repentance ó to a total change of mind with regards to who God is and how He saves them ó with regard to the Gospel of the kingdom. God justifies the ungodly the scriptures tell us.

I hope you can see clearly how the persons described here in these verses as õblessedõ are the redeemed ones, given to Christ by God the Father, made blessed in the righteousness of the Son, regenerated / set apart in spiritual birth and life with an entirely new frame of reference by the power of the Holy Spirit ó so that they now manifest (to various degrees) these characteristics or qualities, fruits of the Holy Spirit purchased for them by the blood and righteousness of Christ. To misunderstand this will be to miss all that it is intended in these verses, consistent with the entire theme of the sermon ó the gospel of the kingdom whose scepter (or basis of rule and authority) is his righteousness ó not that which men can muster up in any way.

Now, a ðbeatitudeö is a statement of blessing, favor, approval, and grace. The dictionary applies to it the concept of utmost bliss. In the context of these verses, ðblessedö means to be supremely favored ó that is favored by God. And to be favored by God is to receive the utmost favor. It is to be highly and eternally favored by God. In short, we see that Christ is speaking of an eternal blessing as He uses the word, ðblessed.ö Verse 3 makes that clear from the ðgit-goø as Christ expresses that those who are poor in spirit are blessed ó “...*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” So we see that in the context here, Christ is describing those who possess eternal life, who will inhabit heaven itself ó citizens of the kingdom. Here in these verses, Christ gives a description of the people who make up the kingdom of heaven.

As the scriptures set forth, I want you to see that not only are these blessed ones (1) Godø sheep, the very elect of God who were given to Christ and for whom, (2) He walked on this earth, living, obeying, and dying as their Representative and Substitute to justify them before God, but the ðblessedö ones spoken of here in Matthew 5 (3) are also the ones to whom, in each successive generation, God the Holy Spirit has already given spiritual life to with all of its faculties ó eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts and minds to understand, so that they behold the glory of God in the face (or Person and work) of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4:6)

They are those who have been brought to see how God is both a just God and a Savior, based on the finished work of Christ our Lord and Savior in establishing righteousness. These blessed ones are those who are brought by the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit to continually look to Christ and Him alone for all of their blessedness. Yes, these which Christ speaks of here in Matthew 5 ó they are some kind of blessed ó eternally (now and forever) favored by God or blessed ó all based upon the Person and work of Christ!! ***What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? ³²He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*** (Rom. 8:31-32)

Now I donø plan to repeat all of this as we go through each and every one of these verses, but this is important to understand this aspect since each of these verses begins the same, with ðblessed areí ..ö So if weøre to correctly understand them, itø critical that we accurately grasp that the ðblessedö are those who have been redeemed by the blood-bought satisfaction to Godø law and justice. Now some interpret this word ðblessedö as ðhappyö ó but it

is evident from the context that to be eternally blessed in Christ is more than a pleasant emotional state. This is why some think an appropriate substitute for the word "blessed" would be the word "justified" for to be justified is to be found not guilty before God's holy law and pardoned, cleansed, reconciled unto God. It is to have all that's needed for the whole inheritance of grace and an unmatched blessing.

In this context, we have descriptions given of those who were most certainly justified by the cross of Calvary, [being "*justified by his blood*" (Rom 5:9)]. But these descriptions not only apply to those to whom God has been reconciled, but who also, as a direct result and fruit of that justification by what took place at the cross some 2000 years ago and they are those who (in each successive generation) are born again and regenerated by the life giving power of the Holy Spirit. And these, now being reconciled unto God in their own minds, walk in this world with an entirely different frame of reference, by faith (God's gift) seeing peace made between them, a sinner and the thrice holy God that Isaiah wrote about.

As a result of having been blessed by God at the cross of Calvary, they are given spiritual life and all the faculties that accompany that miraculous new birth, so that they demonstrate (to some degree) the various qualities or characteristics Christ sets forth in these verses. These blessed ones are those who are brought to know Christ and trust in Him alone, based upon His obedience unto death (His righteousness) and a satisfaction to the holy demands of God's law (both in precept and His requirement of perfect obedience being fulfilled and in satisfaction to the law's penal demands and an extraction of a sufficient payment for sin, no less than the precious, infinitely valuable blood of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

And these blessed ones have discovered that all this was made theirs by imputation and each and everyone of the sinner's sins (past, present, and future) laid upon Christ (charged to His account) and the very perfect satisfaction He made to God's law and justice, His righteousness, freely imputed or charged to the sinner's account. So Christ, who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), who had to remain spotless and even suffer without sin in order to meet the demands of a holy God and He died for sins that were laid upon Him but that He had no part in producing and that didn't contaminate the unblemished perfect sacrifice necessary to redeem His sheep.

And in turn, all of those whose sins He bore, possess (through imputation) a righteousness that perfectly satisfies our Holy Father, but one they had no part in producing, which doesn't emanate from them, but rather one which still resides in the Lamb of God, seated at the right hand of the Father. But this righteousness, this satisfaction to God's justice is by imputation, it is truly no less than their own is a righteousness in which they stand before God, holy, and accepted (as the scriptures say) in the beloved.

Last week I made reference to Romans 4:6-8 which reads, *“Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, ⁷Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. ⁸Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”* This word *“blessed”* found here is the exact same Greek word for *“blessed”* that is used in Matthew 5. So we see that these are the same blessed ones spoken of here as well. Now that's the ground and basis of the ultimate blessing upon those being described in these verses. It's an eternal blessing and it's a wonderful blessing!!!

So, in the context of Matthew 5, we know then that the *“blessed”* speaks of those who inherit the kingdom of heaven. Some might ask, *“How do you derive all of this from these specific verses in Matthew?”* I don't. But as 2 Peter 1:20 tells us, no scripture is of any private interpretation. So, from the whole of the Bible, it is incumbent upon us to learn how this takes place for that is what the gospel sets forth is the good news of how God eternally saves sinners and through His Son merits for them heaven itself. Mark 16 tells us that those that believe the gospel are saved (that is they are blessed of God) and those that believe not (the gospel) are damned (cursed of God). You see that helps us to properly understand what it is to be *“blessed”*. It is the opposite of being *“cursed”*. So if we're to properly understand these verses, it must be in the context of God's Gospel is that which tells us how God saves sinners is how (as Ephesians 1 tells us), such sinners are *“blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: the Christ *“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”*”*

So how do we gain confidence that we are properly interpreting these verses? is Through it's consistency with all of scripture which sets forth God's Gospel (to be distinguished from the many counterfeits that the scriptures warn about).

So, to be in error on the Gospel, the good news of how God saves sinners, (as all of us are by nature, initially), is to interpret all scripture under a false premise. It takes spiritual life to see any different.

Now in these first 12 verses of Matthew 5, Christ repeats 9 times His pronouncement that the ones of whom He speaks are indeed those who are õblessed.ö Letø consider the pattern found in the beautiful language of this passage. First, itø critical that we understand that Christ is not describing here 9 different types of people who receive 9 different blessings. Rather, he is setting forth 9 characteristics or qualities ó each of which applies in some measure, in some degree, to each and everyone one who was justified at the cross of Calvary and is brought to spiritual life so as to experience (in some measure) that which is being described.

Their blessing isnø attributed at all to their efforts or to any achievement or accomplishment of theirs in having produced the characteristics set forth. These qualities or characteristics are not moral virtues, but rather they are Christian graces ó fruit of the Spirit. (Repeat). Christ is describing that which is found to be true of those who are the blessed ones, because they have been blessed ó because as objects of Godø eternal love, they were or would be justified at the cross of Calvary by the very one preaching this sermon to them and as a result of their justification, they were given spiritual life ó a radically different frame of reference, manifested by these various descriptions. Having been born again, they think different ó they now have a God given regard for His glory as seen in the Person and work of Christ and theyøve been brought to understand and value the good news pertaining to that ó the gospel message of how God saves sinners. They are given a love for this truth.

As such, their perspective on God and how He saves sinners is turned upside down. It was said by the Jews when Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica (Acts 17) with their message, the gospel concerning Christø person and work, that it õturned their world upside down.ö I believe we see in these verses that one who is so blessed of God has indeed had his or her world turned upside down. You see ó they have changed gods, having repented of that which all naturally suppose will attain their blessedness and instead brought to see their need for pure, unadulterated mercy ó to look to Christ and Him alone for mercy ó pardon and forgiveness based upon His propitious work of satisfaction to Godø holy law and inflexible justice.

We can see a little of this upside down perspective by observing the seeming paradoxes set forth by Christ in many of these verses. To be poor in some sense must be equated to being eternally rich. To mourn is to be comforted. To be meek is to have it all ó the full inheritance. To hunger and thirst is to actually be filled. To be merciful is obtaining mercy. To be persecuted is to have it made. To have others persecute you, rail at you and lie about you is cause for rejoicing. As you can see, these need some explanation. If someone declares, without any further explanation, that being poor in this world means you're actually rich, you'd question their sanity. So clearly, we need to interpret these verses in context and in light of the rest of the scriptures which collectively and clearly tell us the basis for God's eternal blessing upon sinners.

So, keep in mind that, when correctly understood, these qualities or characteristics set forth in these beatitudes are exclusively found to be true of those who are blessed of God ó who are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. You see, we can be confident in our understanding of what is meant by these various qualities or characteristics of believers (of those blessed by God) when we see how they uniquely, exclusively describe those Christ calls "blessed." Notice that Christ here doesn't say, "blessed are some of those who are poor in spirit," or "blessed are some of those who mourn," etc. ó you get the idea. No, Christ says "Blessed are the poor in spirit." I believe this means that everyone who is blessed of God is poor in spirit and everyone who is poor in spirit in the sense meant here is blessed of God. So if we properly understand that sense ó what it means in this context to be "poor in spirit," then we will have come to an understanding such that it must be applied and can only be applied to those who have been redeemed by Christ and given life to look to Him alone.

So, as we go through these verses, we'll try to apply that sort of test to our understanding of these various qualities, descriptive of those whom God has blessed, based upon that which is found to be true of them in the overall message of the Bible. Likewise, we can test the validity of our own understanding of these qualities (at least in part) by insuring that the characteristic (as we understand it) could not be found among those which God's Word clearly exposes as among the cursed, rather than exclusively found true of those eternally blessed by God.

And if we capture this correctly, I believe that God's sheep, who have already been granted spiritual life, will rejoice in seeing how they are numbered among the blessed of God. Don't you like to be reminded and have affirmed over and over the certainty of your blessed standing in Christ? I do. And I pray for any who hear this, but who do not find these descriptions of those who are blessed to be applicable to themselves so that God the Holy Spirit will do a work, even through this study, make His Word effectual and draw them unto Christ, to look to Him and Him alone and see the sure certainty of eternal bliss found there.

See, using the first of the beatitudes as an example, we should all, individually, ask ourselves: Am I among the poor in spirit, in the sense in which this is understood to be true, and only true, of those eternally blessed of God? In that sense, am I likewise poor in spirit? And the same question should be asked by each of us as we go through the other verses so am I among those that mourn (in that same sense)? Am I among the meek (in that same sense)? And so on as we proceed through these verses.

Now, as we look at each of these verses, keep in mind the pattern we find: In each verse, Christ says 1) Blessed (to the utmost) are those He is about to describe so and 2) then he describes a quality or characteristic uniquely found to some degree in each of those who are so blessed, and he closes each verse by 3) confirming their standing in Christ as one of blessedness by describing some aspect of the ultimate and wonderful blessing, inheritance or reward that awaits those whom (as Romans 8:28 says) love the Lord, those who are called according to His purpose, for these are those for whom all things work together for their good so their ultimate good so they are the blessed of God.

So, with the time we have left; let's at least get started by looking at these specific verses, reading again the first few verses, verses 1-3:

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: ²And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

³Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now as I pointed out last week, Christ is preaching to a multitude. In verse 1 it says "his disciples came unto him" and this causes some to think that he is only preaching to the twelve. But here the word "disciples" is not

necessarily a reference to the twelve. Nor is it even restricted to committed believers. It can refer to one who is merely following and learning at the moment. And for this reason, it appears He indeed did preach to a multitude of folks who had followed Him.

Now here we learn from verse 3, that if you are blessed of God so much so that it can be said of you that you possess, even now, the kingdom of heaven, then you are among those who are "poor in spirit." Well, what does that mean? Clearly it doesn't mean being poor in the pocket as one commentator put it (i.e. so with respect to worldly goods). No, in Revelations, we read that the curse of the mark of the beast is upon both the rich and the poor. Here in Matthew, it is clear. It reads, "***Blessed are the poor in spirit...***"

Now we know that to be "poor in spirit" also means more than just being spiritually poor. This is a common interpretation of this verse. But doesn't the Bible teach that all are found in that condition so spiritually bankrupt, in abject spiritual poverty with nothing to offer in order to obtain God's blessing. Listen to what Romans 3 says of us all: In verse 10 we read, "***As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹²They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.***" And then in vs. 20 again we read, "***Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.***" And then in vs. 23: "***²³For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;***" Well if this is the case, that every son and daughter of Adam who ever lived or will live on this earth are born spiritually poor, then so knowing that multitudes are not blessed of God, but as the Bible teaches even in this very sermon, in the broad way that leads to destruction, then the universal spiritual poverty of all can't be what is meant in this verse. Remember, if we understand it correctly, it must be exclusively true of those who are justified and given spiritual life so the blessed of God.

So who then are "poor in spirit." They are those who have been brought, by the life giving power of God the Holy Spirit, to know of their spiritual poverty so to know that they have nothing to pay, nothing to merit or earn them anything before God. They have been convinced of sin by the Holy Spirit, including the sin that would deceive us all so what the scriptures call the "deceivableness of unrighteousness" so of thinking anything other than the

imputed righteousness of Christ (the merit of His obedience unto death) charged to our account ó of thinking anything else would satisfy a Holy God so as to gain or even contribute to our acceptance by Him.

The õpoor in spiritö are those who see their abject poverty. They need mercy. And hereø the good newsô all who truly see their need for mercy (propitiation ó unmerited favor based on the satisfaction that Christ made) ó all who need that ó they find it!! They are those who heed the call the prophet in Isa 55:1 where he writes, *õHo, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*ö ó they need mercy!!! Theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Thatø the religion of grace which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. And these who are blessed to have seen that ó theyøll never let it go. No one will pluck them out of His hand. And today, if you have spiritual life, you remain õpoor in spirit.ö Remember, even in glory our song will be, õworthy is the Lamb that was slain.ö

Thereø a parallel record of these verses recorded in Luke, chapter 6. There in vs. 24 we read, ***“But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.”*** You see, to find anything of merit within ourselves, that we think commends us to God, or has any causal effect on our being favored by God, even our faith ó if we think weøre blessed of God because we believe ó i.e. ó we find something within us to distinguish us from others who arenø õblessed,ö then that is to be proud and õrich in spiritö before God. But as I just read in Luke ó that kind of õrich in spiritö has already received its reward ó its consolation.

As weøll see when (and if) we get to the next chapter of this sermon, Christ says of the hypocrites, who were giving their alms to be seen of men, ó that they have their reward. So to persist in clinging to the idea that any part of your standing before God is derived from something produced by or in you (to any degree at all ó even if you think your act of faith merely appropriates it) then that means that right now is as good as it will ever get for you ó you have your consolation ó the comfort you derive from this false sense of security, a presumption of being blessed of God, is the only reward you can reasonably expect as long as you remain so blinded.

But the poor in spirit, who have been given eyes to see their spiritual poverty ó *theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* My, my ó God shows us how utterly, completely destitute we are in terms of having anything of worth in his kingdom other than that which is freely given by another and in so doing ó unveils for us the sure certainty of blessings that only the perfect righteousness wrought out by our Substitute could gain for us. 2 Cor 8:9 reads, *“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”* Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Let’s assume that you saved up your money to go on a dream cruise vacation, but all you could afford was a small rat hole on the lowest deck of a commercial cruise ship. Now, some multi-billionaire comes along and says, put away your money ó I want to give you a gift, no strings attached ó to not just move up to a state room on the upper deck of a commercial cruise ship, I want you to take my luxury yacht with its entire crew and staff to wait on your every beck and call on a 3 month cruise around the world ó all expenses paid. Would you say, nah ó I’d rather just have what I can afford?

What an upside down world. The scriptures tell us that all we can afford is eternal destruction ó as sinners, that which we can earn is death. Rom 6:23: ***For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*** ó theirs is the kingdom of heaven itself. My, my ó the most luxurious yacht in the world (or anything for that matter that this world has to offer) is not worthy to be compared to that which nothing but the infinitely valuable blood of the God-man mediator could purchase. How dare we approach God with some “complimentary” offering of our own as if that could merit what only His obedient life and precious blood could merit for us? That’s a reward beyond our wildest dreams.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself ó the Bible.