
Learn: Blessed Discipleship

Matthew 5:1-10

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What makes you happy?

Finish this sentence in your mind; "I am happiest when..."

What do you pursue to make you happy?

What makes you unhappy? Distressed?

How do you measure God's favor on your life?

But let's not focus on you or us for the moment. Let's think about what Matthew is doing...

Jesus begins preaching the message of the Kingdom, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is near."

Jesus calls His disciples who will form the nucleus of the new Israel in Him.

Jesus has been moving throughout the country, as the new Joshua, conquering with Word and works."

Jesus has been demonstrating that He is the true King brining the preaching of salvation and the power of miracles, fulfilling the Old Testament.

Enormous crowds are coming from all over Israel. But Jesus goes away from the crowd, gathers his disciples and begins to teach the character and conduct of the Kingdom. And it is an upside-down Kingdom. This is nothing like what the Jews wanted. They wanted a King who would overthrow Rome and restore Israel to their former glory. This is nothing like what kingdom builders want or do today.

John Stott is so helpful as we approach this text when he talks about *Christian counter culture*.

Sometimes it is the Gentiles or pagan nations with whom Jesus contrasts his followers. Thus pagans love and salute each other, but Christians are to love their enemies (5:44-47); pagans pray after a fashion, 'heaping up empty phrases', but Christians are to pray with the humble thoughtfulness of children to their Father in heaven (6:7-13); pagans are preoccupied with their own material necessities, but Christians are to seek first God's rule and righteousness (6:32, 33).

At other times Jesus contrasts his disciples not with Gentiles but with Jews, not (that is) with heathen people but with religious people, in particular with the 'scribes and Pharisees'. Professor Jeremias is no doubt right to distinguish between these as 'two quite different groups' in that 'the scribes are the theological teachers who have had some years of education, the Pharisees on the other hand are not theologians, but

rather groups of pious laymen from every part of the community'. Certainly Jesus sets Christian morals over against the ethical casuistry of the scribes (5:21-48) and Christian devotion over against the hypocritical piety of the Pharisees (6:1-18).

Thus the followers of Jesus are to be different – different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious.

Jesus was greater than Moses and although his message was more gospel than law, yet he did choose twelve apostles as the nucleus of a new Israel to correspond to the twelve patriarchs and tribes of the old. He also claimed to be both teacher and lord, gave his own authoritative interpretation of Moses' law, issued commandments and expected obedience. (Stott, p. 19-20)

Before we can actually open this text, we need to be sure we understand a couple of things.

What does it mean to be "blessed"? Blessedness brings three important, complementary ideas to our minds.

Blessings are the graces, good and hardships that come from or through God's hands.

Blessed is the state of people who receive these things from God. We are blest when God chooses to so grant us even what we do not want.

Blessedness is not measured primarily by our present circumstances, but in the anticipation of the results that will flow from it and the rewards that are attendant to it.

Where do these phrases come from? Are they connected to the Old Testament?

The Beatitudes take us into a realm that is beyond the Law of Moses completely. The Sermon on the Mount does expound and explain the law at certain points—but it goes beyond it. (D. Martin Lloyd-Jones cited in Reisinger, John G.. *But I Say Unto You* . Unknown. Kindle Edition.)

According to Jesus, who is "blessed"? Is it the courageous, the wise, the temperate, or the just? No. How about the agreeable, the funny, the intelligent, the attractive, the sensitive, and the fit? No. According to Jesus, the one who is poor, sad, lowly, hungry, and mistreated is blessed.

The new age the Christ ushers in is counter to what is normal. This is the unexpected world and wisdom of Jesus. This is the beginning of Jesus' narrow-gate theology, teaching that separates the "crowds" who want health and wealth in the here and now and the "disciples" who are willing to deny themselves, pick up their crosses, and follow Jesus (cf. 5:1). This is not to "the few, the proud, the Marines," but "the few, the humble, the followers of Jesus." This is what it means to be a "blessed" disciple of Jesus Christ. Are you?

The New Testament makes it clear that the early Church's message always ... had two aspects – one theological, the other ethical: (i) the Gospel which the apostles preached; and (ii) the Commandment, growing out of the Gospel, which they taught to those who accepted the Gospel. The Gospel was a declaration of what God, in his grace, had done for

men through Christ; the Commandment was a statement of what God required from men who had become the objects of his gracious action.' The apostle Paul commonly divided his letters in this way, with first a doctrinal, then a practical section.

The New Moses (v.1-2)

Matthew is writing the sermon on the mount to be similar, but different from the Moses' receiving of the Law on Sinai.

Its Place...

5 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

Seeing the crowds

When Moses received the Law, He went up originally with the seventy elders and leaders. He went on up to receive the Law. The Law was given through a mediator, Moses. The people did not receive it directly. The Law was given twice: once written by God's hands on the two tablets of stone. Those tablets were broken when Israel made and worshipped the golden calf. Moses received a second set of tablets and the whole Levitical code. These were written by Moses finger. This was for the nation of Israel whether they were believing or not.

Jesus is going to give the principles and precepts of the forever kingdom, the church. He is the new Law giver. But He is not mediating. He is revealing. Moses received the Law. Jesus is giving the basics, the beginnings, of Law of Christ.

Going up to the mountain

In Matthew mountains are important. Seven times we find Jesus on one – at his temptation (4:8), when he went away to pray (14:23), when he healed and fed the multitudes (15:29-38), during the transfiguration (17:1), when he gave the Olivet Discourse (24:3) and the Great Commission (28:16), and here in the Sermon on the Mount (5:1).

Sitting down to teach

Common position for a teacher of His day. It was the posture of a rabbi, a teacher. Jesus is making a point. His New Covenant people will be taught by the Lord and by the Spirit through His disciples. So, there is a contrast to the Old Testament and Moses where there is no seating...

Gathering His disciples

The Mosaic Law was for the Nation of Israel, the prototype of God's people. All of the nation was under the Law and in the Mosaic Covenant. It did not matter if people were believers in the Law; they were still subject to it. So, the nation throughout its history mostly had a small group, a remnant, who were true believers. They were regenerated by God, exercised faith walked with God according to the light they had through the Scriptures.

The Sermon on the Mount is for the church, for God's genuine people. This is for us. IT is not for some future literal Jewish Kingdom here on earth. This is for us to think carefully about and to cultivate in our character and conduct.

Jesus is aware of the crowds, what Jesus says here is uniquely for God's people. It is not for sinners. It is for saints. Jesus' ethical teaching condemns the lost while it characterizes the believer.

Its Delivery...

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

It is Revelation

The universe was created by the Word of God. He spoke, it was so. God's speech has both a creative and controlling power. Why would Matthew write that Jesus opened His mouth? If Jesus is going to teach, then of course He opens His mouth. Jesus is not receiving the Law to pass on to His disciples. Jesus' speaking is revelatory.

When Jesus opens His mouth to speak, the kingdom is being created by the Word of God. Jesus speaks, it is being formed. The universe was spoken into existence. Now Jesus is speaking and believing and transformed hearts are becoming the kingdom. The New Testament Kingdom is not defined by geography. It is defined by all the people who have become disciples. It is not a place; it is a people.

It is Instruction

The Law was legislation and declaration. But the tone and tenor of Jesus' teaching is different. There is teaching about what will characterize true disciples. There are commands and imperatives for true disciples to believe and obey. But the formulas here are not "Law-giving", not in the Old Testament sense of Law.

The Kingdom is being "taught into existence..." He declares what will be the character and the conduct of this from heaven, forever kingdom. Teaching will be front in center among the new people of God. Without truth and truth being taught, the church cannot and will not exist.

Where does this instruction come from? Do these beatitudes simply come out of the mind and heart of the Christ? Or are they to be found and in fact, are being drawn from the Old Testament? It seems that most can be seen in Isaiah 61. Let me just point you to that for your own study. But I would fail you if at least we don't hear what Matthew is doing as Jesus preaches and teaches on mount.

Hear then Isaiah 61:1-2:

61 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

The New Characteristics (v.2-10)

The members of, the disciples in, the forever kingdom are characterized here. Genuine disciples, not the crowd, will be blessed because they will be this kind of people.

There is no basis to take the sermon on the mount as the ethical requirements for humanity. These are the marks of true disciples. Why are these important?

What stands out right away is this not what is normally associated with the word, "kingdom". To raise up a kingdom normally involves power. It involves might, strength and an aggressive movement to conquer. Jesus is raising up a kingdom of people. But this kingdom is genuinely up-side-down or more properly, down-side-up. What is blessed, what is commended, what is desired, in fact what will be in God's forever kingdom appears to be the opposite of power. To the world and to some Christians, this looks like weakness. I want to say to you that it is weakness. It is not the power the world expects.

Now you listen to me for a moment. I have heard some of you and read what some of you have written. You have forgotten that we are sheep. We are weak. We are not using the muscular tools of the world's wisdom. We are not part of kingdom fashioned after the Old Covenant. It is not the tools of human power and strategy and physical resistance that bring about the kingdom of God. What is needed in the present crises is precisely what Jesus talks about here, what Matthew writes to us here. Matthew was writing to the church on the front edge of dreadful persecution. They were being scattered. Rome was beginning to persecute them. So how will God's people bring in a forever kingdom... how will they be and do?

Spiritually Poor

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

They will be spiritually poor. This has nothing to do with physical, personal, or spiritual poverty. This has nothing to do with being under-privileged, or down-trodden. This is not being poor. It is not blessing to live in poverty. There is no special 'kingdomness' found in poverty.

This is talking about spiritual poverty. It is right there in the sentence. True disciples will be marked by a kind of lowliness. They will see their deep need of God.

They will trumpet their spiritual greatness or personal power. They know that without grace, without mercy, they are spiritually destitute.

As one writer put it, “you are poor in spirit if you know there is nothing in you – not family ties, respect in the community, occupation, or so-called “good” works or personal “holiness” – that is valuable enough to commend you to God. ... You are blessed when you see you’re just a beggar coming to the door of the kingdom without anything to give to get you in.” (MacDonald, p.111)

What is the blessing conveyed upon those who are poor in spirit? They have the kingdom. The very ones who think of themselves as the least worthy, the least able, the lowliest, the most sheep-like are actually the ones who have, present tense, the kingdom. God blesses the poor in spirit with the present possession of the kingdom.

Spiritually Sorrowing

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

True disciples are those who are sorrowing. Sorrowing over what? In what or over what are true disciples grieving. Most commentators say that this is sorrowing over sin. I see no indication of that here. Should we sorrow over our sin? Yes, but only to the degree that we repent, confess our sins and are forgiven.

Because they are lowly, meek, humble, and persecuted, being a disciple brings with many pains, many losses, many deprivations. We are so used to our easy, comfort filled, Christian lives that it is hard to identify with this. IT was true of most in Jesus’ day. It was true of many in the church in Matthew’s day. I dare say most of you have few griefs and sorrows that are directly tied to your being a disciple of Jesus. Being in the kingdom of heaven will bring with many causes for sorrow and grief. This is well known by saints through the ages and saints in the world today.

What is the blessing conveyed up sorrowing saints who grieve in the world? Comfort. Sorrowing saints will be blessed by comfort. They will be like the saints of Romans 8. They grieve in the fallenness, pain, persecutions of this world like creation does and the Spirit does. But the love of God is comfort poured out on those who mourn. In the midst of sorrow and loss and deep pain that may even come through God’s fatherly, loving chastening, there is the assurance and confidence that we are loved. Sorrowing disciples will be comforted.

Spiritually Meek

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

True disciples are those who are meek. Meekness is a poise of the heart to submit to God, to His Word and to His providences. It is a heart submissive to God that then has the right disposition towards others in authority. Meekness may look like being weak, but it actually requires great spiritual strength. The easiest thing to do is chafe, rage, rebel against authority. A true disciple understands that the way to conquer the earth is not through power but through dying. The meek

person is willing to endure much to wait for God to bring about the fulfillment His purposes and His promises. The meek person is slow to defend self. The true disciple expends his strength in self-control, not in conquering others. If you understand and feel your need for God, you will not be bold, brash, and self-assertive. You would not be a macho man but a meek man.

What is the blessing for the meek? God blesses the meek by giving them earth... as an inheritance. In other words, the meek conquer the world as sons, not as soldiers. God simply gives it to them as their inheritance. But it is an indirect bequest. The earth is Jesus' inheritance. The true disciple, marked by meekness, jointly inherits the earth with Jesus.

Spiritually Hungry

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

True disciples are those who crave for righteousness. For them, they are hungry for true righteousness. Yes, this is hunger for holiness. But that is too narrow a sense of the what we hunger for. What a true disciple hungers for is true justice and true mercy. We hunger for that place justice and mercy kiss. We hunger for Jesus. We crave Him and His rightness, His holiness, His vindication. As spiritually poor, sorrowing, meek and persecuted in the world, we long for Jesus. We long for His approval. We long for His presence. We long for His coming. We long for when He will set all things right.

What is the blessing for those who hunger and thirst? We will be satisfied. What a wonderful thing. All craving for what God promises, all hunger and thirsting after Jesus will be satisfied. God never sends us away from the table without satisfying our hunger for righteousness. Since we are satisfied, we develop and even greater appetite for it. True disciples are blessed by having their hunger for righteousness satisfied.

These first four beatitudes are what have been called "the beatitudes of need." We need God. The last four beatitudes are "the beatitudes of action." The last four beatitudes are actions that please God because they are lovingly helpful to others. (MacDonald, p.114)

Spiritually Merciful

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

True disciples are merciful. Now Jesus focuses on our relationships. We extend to others the mercy we have received from God. True disciples are not marked by a critical spirit, judgmentalism, sharp-eyed adherence to our sets of standards. True disciples look with mercy and compassion on others who fail, fall and are borne down by sins and sorrows. This season of hardship and trouble during COVID has ripped the mask off our harsh, judgmental self-righteousness. How can we speak about other believers and to other believers the way many do? Where is your mercy? Oh I am sure you think your opinions are right... but I am

also sure that your attitudes and actions and words show little mercy, little grace, little understanding.

What is the blessing for the merciful? They will receive mercy. God will be merciful to them. Others will show them mercy. And so, mercy grows and spreads among God's true followers as a great mercy from our King.

Spiritually Pure

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

True disciples are pure in heart. Their beliefs are not tainted by known error. Their desires are framed, fueled and focused in the right things in the right ways. Their faith is tested, tried, and rises out of the flames as pure gold.

What is the blessing for the pure in heart? We are blessed to see God. This is an eschatological blessing. There is an already and not yet aspect. By faith we see... but one day we who have seen by faith will see by sight. We will see God.

Peacemakers

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

True disciples are marked by resolving conflict. They are peacemakers. This may have limited use in the world. It may be a part of salt and light functions. Conflict between disciples will happen. It happened among Jesus' disciples. It happened in the early church. It has happened between followers of Jesus down through ages. It has happened in this church. It has happened, I almost certain, to every one of you. But we should not be characterized by delighting in, starting and escalating conflict. Rather, we should be marked by how quickly, how easily, how skillfully we resolve conflict. God's true disciples are peacemakers.

What is the blessing conveyed upon peacemakers? They are identified as the sons of God. They have a public testimony that they are peaceable. This is the blessing God bestows upon us when we are poised and pursue peace in a way that is pleasing to our King.

Spiritually Persecuted

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

True disciples will be persecuted. Kingdom persecution is not for our own faults, but for our righteousness. We do what is right and we suffer for it. We can talk about the world persecuting us in a general sense and it feels threatening but not real. But it is people who will be the instrument of persecution. It is not "government". It is not "your job". It is real people in life who will persecute you. Yes, they may be nameless, faceless uniformed officers of the law or government. But it will still be people. Our present persecution is most likely by family, school mates, work colleagues, neighbors and sadly, even other Christians, who hate our humbleness, our meekness, our sorrowing. They despise that we crave to

know God and seek his righteousness. They revile and attack our peacemaking. They make war against us.

Why? Because ours is the present blessing of the heavenly kingdom. Notice that this is a present reality, a present possession. This has a future hope aspect to it. But for all of my dear brothers and sisters who are being persecuted in the world, who are losing their children who going to prison, who having their feet beaten, who are in solitary confinement, who have the fingernails and toe nails ripped out, who raped, beaten and die... we are present possessors of God's forever heavenly kingdom. This is the blessing from God and the blessedness in such suffering. Where true disciples are, where true disciples exhibit these characteristics, where true disciples receive these blessings, there is the kingdom.

Jesus began these statements about His upside-down kingdom with the blessedness of having the kingdom (v.3, 10). From poor in spirit to persecuted for righteousness, true disciples are, and are becoming, this kind of people.

Reflect and Respond

Are you trying to live the Christian life under the old Law of Moses or under the new Law of Christ?

Here are the characteristics of a true disciple as seen from the beatitudes. A true follower of Jesus recognizes their spiritual poverty, sorrowing for sin, meek, hungry to please God, merciful to others, uncorrupted in heart, seeks to make peace with others, and persecuted for being righteous, in both physical and verbal abuse. While we may not have an equal measure or opportunity for express or experience these characteristics, are they in you?

Here is what God blesses true disciples with. We will receive the forever, heavenly kingdom, inherit the earth, comforted by God, satisfied with righteousness, receive mercy, see God with both the eyes of faith and our glorified bodies, shall be identified as God's children and blessed with heavenly rewards not earthly gain. Do you see these are true blessings, as a full reward in being a disciple?

So Jesus calls us out of the world, apart from the crowd, to true Christian living as decided follower of the King. Do you? Will you?