

Matthew 5:1-12      The Message of the King: What Makes for a Happy Life? Jan 25, 2015  
Psalm 1  
Psalm 112

This morning we have been pursuing the theme of the “blessed man” in the Psalms.

Psalm 1 – blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked’ –  
but delights in the law of the LORD.

Psalm 84 – blessed are those who dwell in your house...  
blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion...  
blessed is the one who trusts in you...

Psalm 32 – blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.  
Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity...

There are many other Psalms that use exactly the same word  
that Jesus will use in the Sermon on the Mount.

The blessed life – the happy life – the good life –  
what does it look like?

The Psalms describe such a life in precisely the way we would expect:

one who turns away from evil and trusts in the LORD –  
one who dwells in the presence of the LORD and finds strength in him –  
one whose sin is forgiven and stands as righteous in the sight of God.

*That’s* the blessed life – the happy life – the good life.

But Jesus opened his mouth and taught them, saying,  
“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

In our next Psalm we sing of the “blessed man”  
that he gives to the poor – that he is the patron of the helpless.

Indeed, Psalm 112 uses a lot of the same vocabulary as the beatitudes.

Many of the same ideas are present.

But Psalm 112 seems to presume that the “blessed man” is a prominent man,  
a powerful man who is able to use his position in society for the good of others.

Jesus removes that presumption.

Whether you are powerful or not does not matter to Jesus.

Whether you are “mighty in the land” is immaterial to the King!

The simple reason for the difference is that Psalm 112

was originally spoken by someone who was *not* the Messiah,  
but who was longing for the Messiah,

and therefore was thinking of that Blessed Man who would come –  
whereas Matthew 5 was preached *by* the Messiah –

the one who fulfilled Psalm 112,  
and therefore has no need of someone to “make things right” –  
because he is the one who makes all things right!

So as we sing Psalm 112, let us sing it to Jesus, the Blessed Man –  
the one in whom all the law and prophets *and the apostles* has been fulfilled.

Sing Psalm 112  
Read Matthew 5:1-16

**Introduction: “He Went Up on the Mountain” (v1-2)**

*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:*

“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain...”  
Jesus has been proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom.  
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”  
He has been proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom  
and he has been healing the sick, casting out demons –  
  
and so the crowds are following him.

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain.

If you would understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus,  
then you need to understand this!

The “crowds” will follow Jesus – like groupies – for a while.  
But the disciples *came to him*.

The crowds like to be 'around' Jesus – because Jesus does lots of nice things for them.  
They want to be around Jesus –  
but they do not want to come to him, because the one who comes to Jesus  
must 'deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.'  
Jesus Groupies just wants the 'benefit' of being around Jesus.  
There are lots of benefits –  
and, yes, it is possible to obtain some of them without coming to Jesus.  
You can be healed from your diseases.  
You can learn some good ethical principles and become a better person.

But if you want to see God,  
if you want eternal life,  
if you want the Kingdom of Heaven,  
you must come to Jesus in faith.

And if you say, "Oh, I already did that,"  
that won't work!

Faith that is in the past tense is no longer faith.  
Has your faith grown stale?

You need to come to Jesus *today* in faith.

Is Jesus your Lord?  
Then hear him.

Because what Jesus is saying to his disciples that day on the mountain  
is what Jesus has been saying to his church ever since!

We call this "the Sermon on the Mount" – but that just describes *where* it happened.  
If you want a better name for what it is all *about* –  
then R. T. France rightly calls it "The Discourse on Discipleship."

In the coming weeks we'll talk a lot about the things that Jesus *commands*.  
But here in verses 1-12,  
there are only two commands:  
"rejoice and be glad" (v12).

Jesus is not saying "you need to try harder to become this way."  
Jesus is saying, "Here is what my people look like –  
so rejoice when they treat you the way they treat me."

### **1. The Happy Life: What Does "Makarios" Mean?**

Before we can look at any of the particular "beatitudes"  
we need to make sure that we understand what we mean by "blessed."

The Greek word here is "makarios."

Some people have argued that we should *not* translate this "blessed" –  
because the Greek word *eulogetos* would be the proper word for "blessed" –  
*makarios* is used here in order to convey the idea of "the good life" – or "the happy life."

They argue that "blessing" is too "churchy" a word,  
and that people don't understand what it means.

I certainly can appreciate their point.

I once stopped using the word "blessing" entirely  
because I was so fed up with the trite usage that it often gets:  
you know, when your Aunt Bertha says "I had a blessing the other day!"  
when all she means is that something good happened.

If Aunt Bertha understood what Jesus is saying here,  
then she would say, “I had a blessing the other day  
when a death squad massacred my church.  
I’m so blessed!”

If you cannot see how the attack of a death squad on your church would be a blessing,  
then you do not yet understand what it means to be a Christian!

Let me say that again:

If you cannot see how the attack of a death squad on *this* church would be a blessing,  
then you do not understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus!

I agree entirely that “makarios” refers to the “happy life.”

That’s what *blessing* is all about.

When God blessed Adam and Eve in the garden  
he bestowed upon them “the happy life” –  
a life characterized by the Kingdom, by comfort, by the inheritance of the earth,  
by satisfaction, by mercy, by the vision of God, as the sons of God.

But in the Old Testament, when the biblical authors  
were looking for a word that would communicate this,  
they did not use the *noun* “blessed” (*barach* – or, in the Greek, *eulogetos*).  
They used the *noun* *asher* (or, in the Greek, *makarios*).

So, for instance, in the Psalms, whenever you see the phrase,  
“blessed be the LORD” – you will find *barach* –  
but when you see the phrase, “blessed is the man” – you will find *asher* –  
that is, *makarios*.

So in Hebrew – and in Greek – there are two different words:  
one is used to communicate the idea of the verbal blessing – (*barach/eulogetos*)  
- to declare that someone is blessed (the benediction) -  
the other is used to communicate the quality of life as blessed (*asher/makarios*)

And such is the poverty of the English language  
that we have only one word to express both ideas.

I say all this to help you understand that you almost need to paraphrase “makarios”  
in order to communicate the real meaning:

“the happy life – the good life – the truly and authentically *human* life,”  
belongs to this sort of person.

I think that “blessed” is a very good translation –  
but in order to help you understand *what* blessed means,  
I will regularly use other words so that this aspect of *blessing*  
will hopefully sink in!

We have seen throughout the first part of Matthew's gospel  
that Matthew is intent on showing how Jesus fulfills the whole OT –  
but Jesus fulfills the whole OT in a surprising way.

You see that even in the beatitudes.

Listen again:

## **2. “Happy Are the Miserable!” The Upside Down Kingdom (v3-10)**

<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<sup>[a]</sup> of God.*

<sup>10</sup> *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

So what are you supposed to do?

Okay, I need to become more merciful, more pure in heart, and...

No.

That's not the point.

There are no commands in these verses.

This is not a list of things that you are supposed to do.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a *prescription* for how to live your life.

This is a *description* of the life that God blesses.

This is the happy life – the good life – the life truly worth living –  
because this is *the life of Jesus himself*.

Stanley Hauerwas rightly says:

“The sayings of the Sermon on the Mount are the interpretation of Jesus' life,  
and that same life is the necessary condition for the interpretation of the sermon.”

The prophets all preached a message of repentance.

And often, like Jeremiah, their message was somewhat depressing!

“Repent! But your repentance isn't good enough!”

We get overwhelmed by the prophets because the gloom and doom is unbearable!

Okay, fine! I get it! I'm not good enough!!

So where does Jesus get this crazy idea that he can preach a message  
saying that if your righteousness does not *exceed* that of the scribes and Pharisees,  
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven?! (v20)

It's because Jesus understands that *he is the blessed man!*  
The Sermon on the Mount is not an abstract ethical sermon  
on how you need to be a better person.  
The Sermon on the Mount is not a manual of individual ethics,  
but "the constitution of a people."

As Hauerwas puts it:

"The sermon, therefore, is not a list of requirements,  
but rather a description of the life of a people gathered by and around Jesus.  
To be saved is to be so gathered.  
That is why the Beatitudes are the interpretive key to the whole sermon –  
precisely because they are not recommendations.  
No one is asked to go out and try to become poor in spirit or to mourn or to be meek.  
Rather, Jesus is indicating that given the reality of the kingdom  
we should not be surprised" to find these things  
as characteristic of those who come to him. (p61)

In other words, the Sermon on the Mount is not a goal for you to aspire to.  
It is a description of what the Kingdom and people of Jesus are like.  
This is who Jesus is – and therefore it is who you are.

The problem throughout the OT is that *no one* fully embodied God's standard.  
Everyone fell short.  
But in Jesus, the Word became flesh.  
The Sermon on the Mount (together with all the scripture) is *embodied* in Jesus.

But when we say that the Sermon on the Mount is embodied in Jesus  
that means that it must also be embodied in us who have been united to Christ by faith.

But rather than be all "me-centered"  
as we go through the beatitudes,  
don't think about yourself!

Rather, think *first* about Jesus!  
How does *Jesus* exemplify these things!

And second, think about each other!  
How do you see these qualities and characteristics in one another.

There will be a pop quiz after the sermon!  
Because your assignment will be to think of two people in the church

each of whom exemplifies one of the qualities in the beatitudes –  
and tell them about it!

In many ways,

the terms that Jesus uses would have been familiar to his hearers.

The poor, those who mourn, the meek,  
those who hunger and thirst for righteousness  
the merciful – the pure in heart – the peacemakers –  
these are precisely the ones whom the scripture  
had always held up as the ones whom God will rescue and bless.

But Jesus brings them all together as if to say,  
“happy are the miserable!”

The kingdom that he preaches does not come in the way that Israel expected.  
It is an upside down kingdom – and so those who come to him in faith  
should expect their world to be turned upside down.

Pretty much all of the beatitudes are drawn from the Psalms.

<sup>3</sup> *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Psalm 41 opens “Blessed is the one who considers the poor!  
In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him.”

David had said that the one who considered the poor – the helpless –  
was blessed.

Psalm 41 speaks from a position of power (David, after all, was king!).  
But Jesus will speak from a position of weakness.

*“Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”*

Jesus says that it is not just those who consider the poor – but the poor themselves –  
who are blessed.

As we’ve seen many times when looking at OT texts,  
when the Bible talks about the “poor”  
it is not focusing on “lack of material goods.”

The poor (in the OT) often have houses and fields and good.  
At least for now!  
But probably not for long!

Because what the poor *lack* is not stuff, but power and protection.  
The poor are those who are helpless in the face of their powerful oppressors.

When Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit”

he is making it clear that he's not pronouncing a general blessing  
on all poor people.  
Rather, he is identifying a particular quality of the poor –  
they are *poor in spirit*.

This is an interesting choice of words,  
because the Greeks valued the “great-souled man” – the magnimous man –  
a touch of arrogance was considered a *good thing*  
by Aristotle and other Greek philosophers.

But in contrast, Jesus says that the *poor in spirit* are blessed – they are “happy.”  
And they are happy because *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

While the rich and powerful – the “great-souled” –  
stride through this age with great confidence and power,  
the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit.

Paul will say in Philippians 2 that we should have this same mind in ourselves  
that was also in Christ Jesus – who humbled himself and made himself nothing.

Jesus is the very epitome of “poor in spirit” –  
he does not exalt himself –  
and yet to him belongs the kingdom of heaven!!

<sup>4</sup> “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*”

We heard language like this from Ecclesiastes last summer.  
The happy life – the good life – is lived by those who mourn –  
those who see the present age as an age of misery and death.  
The word “mourn” does not just mean “cry.”  
The “mourner” is one who has just lost a loved one and is *in mourning*.

At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus wept.  
He joined in the mourning of this age.  
He grieved over the senseless power of sin and death in this world.

<sup>5</sup> “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*”

This is a quote from Psalm 37.  
Psalm 37:11 says that the meek will inherit the earth.  
Jesus simply adds that they are “happy” for this –  
drawing on Psalm 37:22,  
which says that those who are blessed by God will inherit the earth.  
The meek, in Psalm 37, are the poor and helpless who trust in the LORD.

And as Jesus humbled himself – even to the point of death –



he received the inheritance of the whole earth!

<sup>6</sup> “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*”

Let’s think about what we’ve seen:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek,...

In other words, if you are oriented towards power and stuff and happiness –  
then you are not living the “happy life.”

The blessed life – the good life –

belongs to those who are characterized by weakness, sorrow, and death.

Indeed, by those who *hunger and thirst* for righteousness –

As pants the deer for streams of water – so my soul, O LORD, pants for you!

(Psalm 42)

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

long for the world to be the way it should be –

but not just in a passive sense of “that *someone* would make it right.”

No, if you hunger and thirst for righteousness

*you want to be* one who does and makes right!

Jesus certainly *hungered and thirsted for righteousness!*

Psalm 65:5 says, “Blessed is the one you choose and bring near to dwell in your courts.  
We shall be *satisfied* with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple.”

And even so, Jesus promises that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness  
*will be satisfied.*

They keep building on each other!

<sup>7</sup> “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*”

Jesus will often speak of this.

In the same manner that you treat others, so God will treat you.

If you respond to others with strict justice –

then God will respond to you with strict justice!

But what is *mercy*?

Mercy “is a generous attitude which is willing to see things  
from the other’s point of view

and is not quick to take offense or to gloat over others’ shortcomings.”

(France 168)

<sup>8</sup> “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*”

Psalm 24 said that the one who is 'pure in heart' may ascend the hill of the LORD and stand in his holy place.

Psalm 84:4-5 – "Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion"  
Or Psalm 119:2 – "Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart."

And so Jesus says, "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."  
Jesus says that his people are pure in heart.  
He is not saying that you have to *become* pure in heart.  
He is pure of heart –  
and so therefore those who belong to him –  
those who partake of his new community –  
also are blessed – are happy –  
because they shall see God.

<sup>9</sup> "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons<sup>[a]</sup> of God.*"

Psalm 34:14 says "Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."  
And why is it that the peacemakers are called 'sons of God'?  
Well, Psalm 34-11 said, "Come, O children, listen to me,  
and I will teach you the fear of the LORD."

If you would be a child of God, then learn to be one who makes peace.  
What does it mean to be a peacemaker?  
A peacemaker is one who reconciles those who were hostile to each other.  
But a peacemaker is more than a mediator or conciliator.  
The mediator or conciliator is interested in bringing both sides together.  
The peacemaker is interested in bringing *shalom* – peace, well-being.

In this way, the happy life is a life that is characterized by *both* righteousness *and* peace.

So often we think that we have to choose between them.  
Will we insist on justice and righteousness?  
Or will we accept compromise – and make peace?

The happy life – the blessed life – is characterized by *both*,  
because true righteousness and true peace must exist together.

Which, of course is why verse 10 comes next:

<sup>10</sup> "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

Psalm 106:3 – “Blessed are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times.”  
When you do righteousness at all times –  
even in inconvenient times! –  
then you will be persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

And Jesus returns full circle to his first reason:  
“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”  
The poor in spirit (v3) is given the same reason for blessedness  
as the one who is persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

You may have noticed that in verses 3 and 10 it says “theirs *is*”  
while in the rest of the beatitudes it says “they shall.”

### **3. But Why Are They Happy? The “Is” and the “Shall Be” (v3-10)**

All of the other benefits promised to the “happy” are future:  
*They shall be comforted, they shall inherit the earth...*

All except the first and the last.  
The one thing that they have now – “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

How should we understand this “future”?  
They *shall* be comforted, they *shall* inherit the earth, they *shall* be satisfied...

The way that Jesus talks about the kingdom,  
you *cannot* make “shall” mean *only* in some distant future.  
In Jesus the kingdom *has come*.  
And so, if the kingdom of heaven *is* theirs –  
then we should expect to see much of the future benefits of verses 4-9  
even in this life.  
Much – but not all.

*they shall be comforted.*  
The comfort of the gospel begins now and will be brought to completion in the final day.

*they shall inherit the earth.*  
Now we are made partakers of the inheritance of Jesus by faith.

*they shall be satisfied.*  
(in their hunger for righteousness)  
Your desire – your longing – that you might look more like Jesus  
*will* more and more be satisfied in this life as you grow in grace.

*they shall receive mercy.*  
Because they are merciful people.

*they shall see God.*

We do not yet see all things under his feet,  
but we see Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father!  
Indeed, the purer your heart becomes, the more clearly you can see him.

*they shall be called sons<sup>[a]</sup> of God.*

And all this because  
*theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

All of the future benefits that we receive from Christ  
are ours because we share in Christ himself.

But how should we think about this?

Jesus said,  
In this world, you will have trouble.  
But take heart, I have overcome the world.

I understand why so many people walk away.  
They have been sold a bill of goods – and no one ever delivered.

They have been told: you can have all these great benefits in this life –  
if only you follow Jesus!

So they followed Jesus in order to get the benefits!

But that's not the way it works.  
If you follow Jesus, you will get trouble!  
After all, after describing himself and his community in verses 3-10,  
Jesus switches over to the second person and addresses *you*:

**Conclusion: This Means You (v11-12)**

<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.*

What are you going to do about this?

There is only one thing that that Jesus calls you to do!  
Rejoice and be glad!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out that  
“the followers of Jesus are no longer faced with a decision.  
The only decision possible for them has already been made.  
Now they have to be what they are, or they are not following Jesus.

The followers are the visible community of faith;  
their discipleship is a visible act which separates them from the world –  
or it is not discipleship.” (quoted in Hauerwas, 63).

Now, you may look at the list in the beatitudes and say,  
“I don’t see myself there at all!”  
“That’s not me.”

You may recognize yourself very well in the beatitudes.  
And that’s fine.  
You don’t need to.

You just need to follow Jesus.  
Don’t worry about which one of the beatitudes you are.  
But treasure and rejoice in the gifts and graces of others!

The desert Fathers understood this.

If you asked a one of these desert monks how to be perfect,  
he would usually say, “I have no idea – I am so full of sin –  
go ask Abba so-and-so!”

That’s why I said earlier that your assignment is *not*  
to figure out what graces God has given you.

Your assignment is to look around you and ask,  
“Where do I see someone reflecting/exhibiting one or two of these graces?”

And then make a point of encouraging them  
with what you see of the grace of God in their life.

It was a joy to read in Sara Mould’s email from Niger  
that she and her fellow believers felt no fear.  
They know full well that the reviling could turn worse,  
and the violence could turn from buildings to people  
(it has happened before!).

But when your hope is in the Lord Jesus –  
in other words, when your priorities have been reoriented by the Lord Jesus –  
then the prospect of dying for Christ doesn’t look so bad...