

## How Are Citizens of the Kingdom to Live Among the Nations?

### Matthew 5:1-12

**Introduction:** 1) Over the years I have heard more than once: this is the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived. The reference: “the Sermon on the Mount” of Matthew 5-7, a title given to the sermon first by Augustine (A.D. 354-430) [Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount*, 6]. Now, not everyone would agree with this judgment. Ayn Rand, author of *Atlas Shrugged*, “regarded its prescriptions as among the vilest ever uttered....She [also] regarded Christian morality as a poison” (David Bentley Hart, “The Trouble with Ayn Rand,” *First Things*, 5-1-11, p. 18). In contrast, Mahatma Gandhi said, “No higher literature has ever been penned than the Sermon on the Mount.”

2) As we prepare to walk through this goldmine of biblical truth, it might be interesting to gather a few facts about the sermon itself.

First, we find a Reader’s Digest version of the sermon in Luke 6:20-49.

Second, the sermon does not teach men and women how to live to get into the kingdom, but how men and women in the kingdom should live. This is a discipleship discourse.

Third, its teaching is to be personally applied today, as citizens of God’s kingdom, though there is a “now/not yet reality” to our citizenship. We are

kingdom citizens now but we await the full manifestation of that kingdom when Jesus returns.

Fourth, Luke's account especially (but also Matthew's) is a beautiful balance of both the positive and the negative, and its breadth is quite extensive. It deals with:

attitudes	love	the inner man	discipleship
conflicts	giving	works	obedience
opposition	enemies	discernment	true loyalty
money	rewards	a judgmental attitude	wisdom
materialism	mercy	prayer	true reality
flattery	hypocrisy	forgiveness	true security

Fifth, both accounts are certainly a summation/condensed version of a much longer more detailed sermon. Jesus preached for more than ten minutes!

Sixth, it is the first of five major discourses in Matthew's Gospel.

- A) 5-7
- B) 10
- C) 13
- D) 18
- E) 24-25

Jesus in Matthew's gospel is portrayed as a new and greater Moses. He is the greater lawgiver and prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18:15-20.

Seven, the sermon consists of three basic types of discourse material:

- A) Beatitudes
- B) Ethical Admonitions
- C) Contrast between the teachings of Jesus and the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees.

Eighth, there are numerous interpretive approaches to the Sermon:

- A) Utopian ideal ethic – impossible, unrealistic demands in this age.
- B) Millennial ethic – teachings apply to the future kingdom of Revelation 20.
- C) Spiritual elite ethic – teachings are only for the truly spiritual.
- D) Eschatological (end time) ethic – believing the end of the age was imminent, Jesus gave principles for such an impending period. Thus the sermon provides only an “interim ethic.”
- E) Intentional/internal ethic – one’s intention and internal motivation is the thrust of the sermon.
- F) Call to repentance – sermon’s intent is to reveal our spiritual impotency and drive us to repentance.
- ❖ G) Principles of life for kingdom citizens – the sermon is a charter of conduct for Jesus’ followers at any time in any age. This view sees God’s kingdom as inaugurated in the first century, currently present, and still awaiting complete consummation at Christ’s second coming. This is the best understanding and easily incorporates views E & F. As Sinclair Ferguson well says, “The sermon is a description of the lifestyle of those who belong to the Kingdom” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, Banner of Trust, 1987, 3), what Augustine called “the perfect measure of the Christian life (Augustine, *Serm. Dom.* 1.1.1).

3) The sermon begins with a preamble known as “The Beatitudes (5:3-12), eight declarations or pronouncements of blessing, perhaps drawing upon the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:29. The word beatitude comes from the Latin word *beatus* meaning “happy” or “blessed.” The Greek word is *makarios*. The word captures the idea of those who are the fortunate and blessed recipients of God’s grace and favor (Quarles, 42). It is, therefore, more than an emotion. As Donald Hager notes, “it refers to the deep inner joy of those who have long

awaited the salvation promised by God and who now begins to experience its fulfillment” (*Matthew* 1-13, 91.) For our study, and as a change of pace, I will utilize the word “delight.” I believe it will serve us well.

- 4) It is not uncommon for preachers to do individual sermons on each beatitude. I was tempted (!), but have chosen to take them as a group to experience their full impact. Citizens of God’s Kingdom, having been redeemed by Christ and brought into this Kingdom, are to live a certain kind of way among the nations! Here we learn what it means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (5:13-16). Let’s delight and take joy in this high and holy calling from our King!

### **I. Delight in your spiritual bankruptcy apart from God’s grace 5:1-3**

- 1) With the crowds flocking to Him (4:23-25), Jesus ascends a mountain, likely located on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee. Taking the traditional posture of a teacher or rabbi, this new and greater Moses (e.g. greater Lawgiver; cf. Deut. 18:15-20) sits down, gathers his disciples around Him (v. 1), “opened his mouth and taught them” (v. 2). There are two concentric circles of listeners: 1) the innermost circle is His disciples and 2) the outermost circle is the crowds. What a scene.

2) The eight beatitudes all begin in the same way with the word “Blessed.” The first, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Why? Because “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Those who see themselves as a “spiritual beggar and a pauper” before God, totally destitute of personal righteousness before a holy God, should take great delight. Why? Because today, right now, their citizenship is in the kingdom of heaven (God). The poor in spirit, “cry out to God for help, depend entirely on God’s grace to meet their needs, have a humble and contrite spirit, experience God’s deliverance, and enjoy His underserved favor” (Quarles, 43). Psalm 86:1-5 is probably one Old Testament background for this beatitude. And, this verse from the song “Rock of Ages” by Augustus Toplady is a wonderful modern expression of its truth:

“Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Savior, or I die.”

John Piper summarizes well the poor in spirit. He writes,

“What then is poverty of spirit?

- It is a sense of powerlessness in ourselves.
- It is a sense of spiritual bankruptcy and helplessness before God.
- It is a sense of moral uncleanness before God.
- It is a sense of personal unworthiness before God.

- It is a sense that if there is to be any life or joy or usefulness, it will have to be all of God and all of grace.

The reason I say it is a SENSE of powerlessness and SENSE of bankruptcy and a SENSE of uncleanness and a SENSE of unworthiness, is that, objectively speaking, everybody is poor in spirit. Everybody, whether they sense it or not, is powerless without God and bankrupt and helpless and unclean and unworthy before God. But not everybody is ‘blessed.’” (“Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit Who Mourn,” 2-2-86).

Do you see yourself as a spiritual cripple? Rejoice! Be happy in your spiritual plight. Delight in the truth that you are a citizen “of the kingdom of heaven” now and forever!

## **II. Delight in your deep grief over sin because God will comfort you 5:4**

The first two beatitudes find a similar theme in Isaiah 61. The second, mourning over our sin, naturally flows from the former, being poor in spirit. Now, to delight in mourning at first seems paradoxical. It’s like saying “wealthy are the poor” or “healthy are the sick” (James Merritt, “The Joy of a Broken Heart”, undated manuscript). But, spiritual equations often turn our normal way of thinking on its head. As James Merritt puts it, “The world tries to change a man from the outside, but Jesus changes a man from the inside out” (Ibid).

Mourning, in context, is an act of repentance and sorrow over our sin and sinful condition. We see God for who He is (Isa. 6) and ourselves for who we are. We are heartbroken, filled with the kind of grief one experiences, for example, in the death of a loved one. It is a James 4:8-10 kind of grief and mourning. You are crushed in your heart and soul over your sin and the price it required in the brutal death of God's only Son.

Yet, on the other side of mourning, there is hope, even joy. As a result of our mourning over personal sin and the sinful world we find ourselves in there flows in our direction divine comfort and grace (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3-11). Having broken us, we are now blessed with a holy comfort from a good and gracious Father. Sinclair Ferguson reminds us, "The child of the kingdom knows higher joys as well as deeper sorrows, more sensitive mourning but also more profound comfort, now that, he is the Lord's (*Sermon on the Mount*, 20). Indeed, "the sorrow of the sinner's exile from God will be replaced by the joy of His presence," the presence of a kind, loving and perfect heavenly Father (Quarles, 54).

D. A. Carson says, "The great lights in church history learned to weep" (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 19). Here you find excellent company in men like Calvin, Whitefield, Wesley, Shaftesbury and Wilberforce (Ibid). This is a mourner's bench I would gladly join.

**III. Delight in your dependence on and in your submission to God and He will reward you** **5:5**

1) Psalm 37:11 says, “But the humble [meek] will inherit the land and will enjoy abundant prosperity.” The meek are those who say to their King, “not my will, but your will be done.” They give the Lord Jesus a blank check and delightfully ask Him to fill it in as He chooses. A meek person then is not a weak person but a strong person in Christ. Broken, in a saving way by God, his will is now completely and totally surrendered to God and His will. Quarles says a meek person is one who delights in “a servant relationship to God and who subjects himself to Him quietly and without resistance” (Quarles, 55). Ferguson adds, meekness is, “the humble strength that belongs to the man who has learned to submit to difficulties (difficult experiences and difficult people), knowing that in everything God is working for his good. The meek man is the one who has stood before God’s judgment and abdicated [surrendered] all his supposed ‘rights’. He has learned, in gratitude for God’s grace, to submit himself to the Lord and to be gentle with sinners” (p.21).

2) There is an eschatological hope for the meek: “They shall inherit the earth.” This may refer to the earthly reign of King Jesus in His millennial kingdom which we will share in (Rev. 20:1-6). It will certainly include the recreated



and restored earth that accompanies the New Heavens and New Jerusalem of Revelation 21-22.

3) It is of significant interest to note that two persons are recognized for their meekness in the Bible. One is Moses in Numbers 12:3. The other is Jesus in Matthew 11:29. Meekness “is virtually the only personal quality about himself to which Jesus drew attention” (cf. 2 Cor. 10:1; 1 Tim. 6:11, 2 Tim. 2:24-25, Ferguson, 22-23). I love these words of Sinclair Ferguson concerning meekness: “It enhances manliness; it adorns femininity. It is a jewel polished by grace” (23).

#### **IV. Delight in your longing for God and see God satisfy you in Him 5:6**

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are consumed with a passion for righteousness. They have an insatiable appetite, an intense longing, to be conformed to the image of Jesus (Rom. 8:29). Without it he will starve. Without it he will die from thirst. In fact, “He longs to live a godly life as much as a starving man longs for his next piece of bread or a parched tongue yearns for a drop of water” (Quarles, 59). What a witness such a life is among the nations. And, what a promise we find at the end of this verse. We seek Him and He is our satisfaction. We long for Him and His righteous character and He fills us up! By means of Christ redeeming work and

transforming grace I am given new appetites by God which He promises to satisfy.

Ecclesiasts 3:11 says God has put eternity in our hearts. Augustine said, “You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless, until it finds its rest in You.” We all have what I call “a hole in the soul” that can only be satisfied and filled by a relationship with a perfect heavenly Father. Matthew 6:33 provides a wonderful commentary to beatitude #4. There Jesus says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” The world is hungry for happiness and it is starving. The Bible says hunger for holiness and be satisfied.

**V. Delight in graciously helping others knowing God will graciously help you**

**5:7**

- Jesus says those who demonstrate mercy to others will receive mercy from God. Carson says, “Mercy is a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness of the one on whom the love is to be showered. [If] grace answers to the undeserving; mercy answers to the miserable” (*Sermon on the Mount*, 24). Mercy is a grace that flows directly out of the previous four beatitudes. The person who knows his spiritual bankruptcy (v. 3) grieves over his pitiful condition (v. 4), submits his will to God’s will in all things

(v. 5), and longs for godly righteousness (v. 6), shows mercy to the poor and needy because he knows himself to be poor and needy (v. 7). Ferguson says, “Mercy is getting down on your hands and knees and doing what you can to restore dignity to someone whose life has been broken by sin (whether his own or that of someone else)” (*Sermon on the Mount*, 31). And, how much mercy you show is almost certainly the result of how much mercy you know!

- Quarles rightly highlights one important, even critical aspect of mercy: forgiveness. He notes, “Mercy involves more than generous giving to the needy. It also involves forgiving others for their sins as an expression of gratitude to God for His gracious forgiveness.” (*Sermon on the Mount*, 63).
- We should never forget a foundational Christian truth: that we will never forgive anyone as much as God in Christ has forgiven us (see Eph. 4:32).
- Proverbs 14:21 says, “The one who despises his neighbor sins, but whoever shows kindness [mercy] to the poor will be happy.” No wonder Jesus tells us that extending mercy to others is necessary for a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees (5:20). Not surprising, Jesus repeatedly chastised the Pharisees for failing to show mercy to others (9:13; 12:7; 23:23; see also 18:21-35). Piper is on target: “Mercy comes from mercy. Our mercy to each other comes from God’s mercy to

us....You get the power to show mercy from the real feeling in your heart that you owe everything you are and have to sheer divine mercy” (“Blessed Are the Merciful”, 2-23-86).

**VI. Delight in a clean and pure heart for you will enjoy eternal fellowship with God 5:8**

- Citizens of the kingdom need to remember that God is more concerned with our inward character than our outward conduct, our attitude more than our actions (5:27-28; 23:25-26). Bottomline: He is most concerned about our heart. Those who are pure in heart receive an incredibly glorious promise: “they shall see God.” First Samuel 16:7 reminds us that, “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” Matthew 12:35 tells us, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” Matthew 15:18-19 adds, “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”
- The condition of our heart, the inner person, the real you, is critically important to Jesus. It should be equally important to us. To be pure in heart is to have a dirty heart made clean, an impure heart purified, a filthy heart cleansed. Psalm 24 is a probable Old Testament grounding for this beatitude. Verse 4 speaks of having clean hands and a pure heart. Being

pure in heart involves a passionate pursuit of righteousness and obedience.

We are fully aware of the deceptive wickedness and deceitfulness of the human heart (Jere. 17:9). To be pure in heart, we must draw near to God (James 4:8) and purge every idol in our heart that would usurp God from His rightful kingship in our life. “The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol may be; Help me tear it from its throne, and worship only Thee.” A longing for God’s presence, a pursuit of God’s purity, a delight in God’s pleasure, these are the things that cultivate and characterize a pure heart.

**VII. Delight in being a peacemaker because it gives evidence that you are a child of the God of peace 5:9**

- In 1978, President Jimmy Carter brokered a Middle East Peace Agreement between Egypt and Israel, between the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the Israel Prime Minister Menahem Begin. In an address before a Joint Session of Congress on September 18, he closed his address by looking at his “two friends” and saying these words, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be the children of God.” Interesting words from a Christian directed at a Jew and Muslim. Understandable words to be sure. Misapplied words there can be no doubt.
- This verse does not tell us how to become sons (children) of God. John 1:12 does that (see also Gal. 3:26). No, peacemaking is a characteristic of God’s

children, those who have entered His family by adoption thru faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 4:4-5). Ferguson points out, “Jesus’ logic is not difficult to follow. God is described in Scripture as the God of peace [Rom. 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20]. As such, he has made peace for us through Christ; he has reconciled us to himself (2 Cor. 5:19-21). Making peace is part of God’s gracious character. Those who have become members of his family will share in his family likeness. His sons will be peacemakers” (p. 37-38). Peacemaking will have as its first priority evangelism, helping to make peace with man and God through the proclamation of the gospel. It will also involve helping brothers and sisters in Christ live at peace and in harmony with one another. Romans 14:19 reminds us; “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” Hebrews 12:14 adds, “Strive for peace with everyone.”

Peace is mentioned in the Bible almost 400 times. Our Lord Jesus is called “The Prince of Peace” (Is. 9:6). God sent His Son that we might have peace with God (Rom. 5:1), peace from God (2 Cor. 1:2) and the peace of God (Phil 4:7). Those who are His children will follow in His footsteps.

**VIII. Delight in inevitable persecution because you will receive a great reward and you are in good company 5:10-12**

- This is the 8<sup>th</sup> and final beatitude. Verses 11-12 are best understood as an expansion or commentary on it. Once more, at first blush, the statement seems nonsensical. Take delight and be happy when people revile you, persecute you and speak evil and lie about you? Really? That's like saying be sad when people are good to you! However, I left out two key phrases found in verses 10-11. The first, "for righteousness sake" (v. 10). The second, "on my [Christ] account" (v. 11). Now the words of our Lord come into spiritual focus and their sense becomes perfectly clear.
- Living a life that reflects these beatitudes and the righteousness of God is an invitation to persecution. You would think the world would applaud such a person! Actually, they nailed the example *par excellence* to a cross. Jesus told us, "In this world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). He told us again in John 15:18, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." Paul adds in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Jesus is clear that people among all nations are going to act and speak evil against you. When it goes beyond words, which can certainly hurt and wound, you may experience rejection; loss of family, friends or job; imprisonment; torture;

even martyrdom for Jesus' sake. When that happens know you are blessed.

When that happens rejoice. When that happens be glad, like the apostles,

you were counted worthy by God to suffer dishonor for his name (Acts

5:41). Why? First, it is an evidence that you are a citizen of the Kingdom of

heaven (v.10). Second, there awaits you a great reward in heaven (v.12).

Third, you will find yourself in excellent company, "for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (v.12).

- John Piper gets very practical in the application of these three verse and I find his insights quite helpful. He notes,

“So we can see why a life devoted to righteousness or godliness will be persecuted or reviled or spoken against.

- If you cherish [moral purity], your life will be an attack on people's love for [unbridled] sex.
- If you embrace temperance, your life will be a statement against the love of alcohol.
- If you pursue self-control, your life will indict excess eating.
- If you live simply and happily, you will show the folly of luxury.
- If you walk humbly with your God, you will expose the evil of pride.
- If you are punctual and thorough in your dealings, you will lay open the inferiority of laziness and negligence.
- If you speak with compassion, you will throw callousness into sharp relief.
- If you are earnest, you will make the flippant look flippant instead of clever.



- And if you are spiritually minded, you will expose the worldly-mindedness of those around you.” (Blessed are the Persecuted,” 3-16-86).

## Conclusion

- Why are the Beatitudes such a beloved portion of the Bible for a Christian?

I think I have an idea. We love them because they give us a portrait of Jesus and who we are becoming in Him!

- No one sympathized with spiritual beggars more than Jesus.

No one grieved over sin and a broken world more than Jesus.

No one was more meek in submitting to God’s will than Jesus.

No one hungered and thirsted for righteousness more than Jesus.

No one showed mercy to others more than Jesus.

No one sought peace between God and man, and man and man, more than Jesus.

No one suffered unjust persecution and evil against themselves more than Jesus.

- I look at the beatitudes and I see Jesus.

I look at the beatitudes and I see who I’m becoming in Him.

Blessed! Delighted! Happy!