

Session 1

#BLESSED

Matthew 5:1-12

Memory Verse

¹¹ You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. ¹² Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

– MATTHEW 5:1-12, CSB



#Blessed


THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus challenged conventional thinking, in His time and ours, about what it means to be “blessed.” In the Beatitudes, Jesus explained that His followers are blessed despite their present reality because of the sure future hope that is stored up for them in Christ.

Superstars want the ball when the clock is running out and someone has to score. When NBA players huddle up to receive instructions from the coach, everyone knows that the ball is going to James Harden, LeBron James, or Kawhi Leonard. The pressure is there, the work is near impossible, and the hopes of tens of thousands of people rests on their shoulders. Yet, they want the ball. They are relaxed, focused, and confident. Why? Because they believe in their ability, lean on their training, and have confidence in their skill. These players are calm under fire because they believe that the thing in which they have confidence (themselves) is greater than the challenge that lies ahead.

Followers of Christ have even greater confidence, but it isn't because they are superstars and can rely on anything within themselves. Christians have peace, joy, and hope in the midst of the fiercest storms of life because they are moored to an unshakable anchor. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life in their place and then died a sinner's death in their place. Now, He intercedes for Christians before God the Father. Those who are in Christ rest in the grace, mercy, power, and promises of their Savior. They know that He will not fail or falter.

Jesus' words in Matthew 5:1-12 were meant to remind Christians that their hope isn't in themselves but in what their great God has done and will do.

 What comes to mind when you hear the word blessed?

 How has your definition of what it means to be blessed been shaped by the Bible?

Session Summary

The Beatitudes introduce Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is the longest continual teaching recorded in the Gospels. The Beatitudes are short statements that summarize the essence of the Sermon on the Mount: those who are in Christ are characterized by a state of blessedness in this fallen world, humble submission to God's Word, and confident hope of eternal life with God.

In the Beatitudes (and the Sermon on the Mount), Jesus directly addressed His disciples. He described what a life devoted to Him looks like (humble, meek, peaceable, pure, etc.). Yet, He did not say that people should make themselves become humble, meek, pure, and so on. Nor did He say that those things qualify people for eternal life. Rather, Jesus said that those who exhibit those qualities (Christians) will receive eternal life, not as a result of exhibiting those qualities, but because of their position in Christ. This isn't a cause and effect relationship; it is simply a correlation. If we don't understand this, then we will badly misunderstand and misapply what Jesus said in the Beatitudes.

1. Be Aware (Matthew 5:1-12)

Each Beatitude begins with the word "blessed." Jesus began with this word in every formulation of His introductory statement because it was His main point. As a side note, when we see a word repeated in a single Scripture passage, then we should take note. In this instance the word "blessed" is repeated nine times.

Unfortunately, the word blessed has been redefined and watered-down by current usage to such a degree that we may not understand what Jesus meant here. For Jesus, blessed referred to a state of wellbeing in relation to God, which is secure now and forever. On the other hand, current usage of the word generally refers to material or circumstantial prosperity. The oft-trending #blessed is very rarely applied to statements of the assurance of eternal life with God in heaven or a deep abiding peace in the midst of unbearable pain or unjust persecution.

If we searched for social media posts tagged with #blessed, then we would more likely find references to job promotions, the purchase of a new car, a bathroom remodel, or someone's child receiving accolades for sports or grades. The term "blessed" has been gutted of its power and has become a bumper sticker to slap on to anything that makes us proud or happy in the moment.

? **How do Jesus' words in the Beatitudes contrast with modern conceptions of blessing? Why is it better to be blessed in the way Jesus said, even if it's not easier?**

A straightforward reading of the Beatitudes leaves Christians with more assurance of hardship, struggle, and loss than it does material blessing here on earth. Jesus said that Christians are blessed when they are persecuted, mourn for sin, and hunger and thirst for righteousness. He said, "your reward is great in heaven." People who say they are Christians and think they will gain materially because of their allegiance to Christ have received a false gospel and need correction in their understanding of the nature of Christ's work.

True Christians cling to and rejoice in their blessed state of being reconciled to God. Those who have tasted the goodness of the biblical gospel wouldn't trade their blessed state with all the material blessing on earth. A Christian's treasure in heaven isn't riches or fame, it is God Himself who is Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, and Provider. The promise of this blessing isn't tied to their ability to be worthy of it. Christians are blessed because of their position before God that is secured through Jesus' good work on the cross. Christians depend completely on Jesus to be and remain blessed. Christians will persevere in their state of blessedness before God the Father because the gift of salvation that God has given them in Jesus is irrevocable.

? Application: Has your understanding of blessing been wrong? Why or why not? How does the biblical view of blessing change the way you think about your circumstances?

2. Be Conformed (Matthew 5:1-12)

Just before Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew gave an account of Jesus' calling of the disciples (4:18-22). Then, to introduce the Sermon, Matthew described it this way, "He went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, 'Blessed . . .'" Jesus addressed all who would listen, but He was directly speaking to His disciples and, by extension, Christians today.

? What in the Beatitudes gives evidence that Jesus was speaking specifically of His followers and not of all people in general?

We know Jesus was talking about those who have been born again for three reasons. First, the context of the passage tells us that Jesus was speaking directly to His disciples. It's true that they weren't called Christians yet and Jesus had not yet completed His mission to save sinners through His substitutionary sacrifice. However, His disciples were those who were being drawn by God to the Son (John 6:44). These people were those who would believe on Christ's gospel first. Second, we know Jesus was talking about Christians because the descriptions He used are consistent with what a Christian life looks like. Christians are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and so on. Finally, we know Jesus was talking about Christians because He described a future hope that is only promised to Christians throughout the rest of the New Testament. Only Christians inherit the kingdom of Heaven. If we take all the Beatitudes together, then we get a description of what Christians have to look forward to.

Why is it important to make the distinction between Christians doing good works to earn their salvation compared with living in accordance with their true identity in Christ?

Many read the words “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” and think, “OK, well, if I ever want to see God, then I better keep my heart pure.” Or they may read, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Sons of God” and think, “Well, if I want to be a child of God, then I should try to make peace.” This interpretation of the Beatitudes is a fruit of the influence of the world and of Satan. It may be helpful to read through the Beatitudes and replace all the descriptions with the word “Christian” to help you get the picture.

Another way to think of it is like this: A man who has a son might say, “I love that little blue-eyed boy. He will inherit my estate one day.” Now, we would never say that the boy will inherit the estate on account of his blue eyes. His inheritance is secured because of his relationship to his father. He has blue eyes because he is his father’s son (the father also has blue eyes), but those blue eyes are the result of his being a son not the cause of it.

People are humble, meek, merciful, pure, peaceable, and so on because they are Christians, not the other way around. A person doesn’t make him/herself a Christian by being those things. They become those things as a result of being saved by God the Father through Jesus Christ. This is known as sanctification.

What is sanctification? How is sanctification certain for all who trust in Jesus?

Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Jesus. It commences after a person is born again, not before. Sanctification is progressive and doesn’t happen all at once. Also, like justification, sanctification is the work of God. Those who are united to Christ and saved have a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the power of Christ’s death and resurrection (Rom. 6:5-6).

Christians are continually and personally sanctified by the same power of the Spirit dwelling in them and the application of God's Word to their lives. Christians are freed from slavery to sin, and the various desires that are rooted in their old nature are more and more weakened as they grow in faith and grace. Further, their desire to be obedient to God's Word increases more and more. That's why Jesus could address Christians by using the characteristics that true Christians exhibit. Their increasing holiness is sure.

? Application: In what specific areas is the Lord sanctifying you? Where is He currently convicting you of need for change?

3. Be Encouraged (Matthew 5:1-12)

Jesus first noted what is experienced (blessed state). Then He described by whom it would be experienced (followers of Jesus). Finally, He explained why these people are blessed.

? What promises did Jesus make to Christians in the Beatitudes?

The promises that Jesus gave to those found in Him are astounding:

- for the kingdom of heaven is theirs
- for they will be comforted
- for they will inherit the earth
- for they will be filled
- for they will be shown mercy; for they will see God
- for they will be called sons of God
- for the kingdom of heaven is theirs

We can see that Jesus must have been talking to those who have been born again based on the testimony of the rest of the New Testament. Only those who are saved can hope for those promises. The standard measure for interpreting Scripture is the Scripture itself. When there is a question concerning the full and right meaning of any part of Scripture it must be understood in the light of related passages.

? What was Jesus' purpose for expressing these great promises to Christians?

The Christian's future hope that is secured by Jesus' work on the cross is a great encouragement to Christians to stay faithful to God's Word. In fact, God's promises to His beloved are one of the mechanisms that God uses to keep His children from falling away.

? Application: In what areas of your life do you need encouragement? If you are a Christian, how does the assurance of eternal life in heaven with your good Father help you? If you are not a Christian, how are you drawn to the hope of these promises?

Conclusion

The Sermon on the Mount is unique because it is such a long, uninterrupted teaching of Jesus. While He was probably speaking to a large crowd, the fact that He called His disciples to gather around as He began teaching indicates that this message was especially directed to those whom the Father was drawing to Jesus.

One way to think about the Beatitudes is to notice that Jesus gave the same general message worded nine different ways. He essentially said that Christians are blessed because of the great and precious promises that have been secured for

them. These were statements to help Christians remain faithful and joyful as they walk in obedience and submission to their Lord.

? How does your understanding of blessing need to change based on today's study?

? In what ways is the Spirit of God conforming you to the image of Christ?

? Do promises of heaven encourage you? Why or why not? How can you let those precious promises of God have more influence over the way you see the world?

CHRIST CONNECTION: These theological concepts are founded and rooted in Jesus' finished work on the cross. No justification, sanctification, or perseverance is possible without our Savior and Mediator, Jesus Christ.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: The most loving, kind, and compassionate actions a Christian can show toward others are praying that God would open their hearts to the gospel and, then, opening our mouths to humbly explain the gospel message. A person cannot be #blessed unless he or she is in Christ.



FOR NEXT WEEK

Raise the Bar

Main Passages

- Matthew 5:13-37

Session Outline

1. Where There's Fire, There's Smoke (Matthew 5:13-16)
2. God's Word Shows the Way (Matthew 5:17-20)
3. Not Just Hands, but Heart (Matthew 5:21-37)

Memorize

¹¹ You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. ¹² Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- Matthew 5:1-12, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - 1 Peter 1:14-16
- Tuesday - 2 Corinthians 7:1
- Wednesday - Hebrews 12:14
- Thursday - 1 John 3:6-10
- Friday - 1 Thessalonians 4:7
- Saturday - Romans 12:1