

Bible Lesson; week 1

Introduction to the Beatitudes

Open in prayer, today we are starting a whole new series of lessons about the Beatitudes. The word “Beatitude” may sound a bit difficult and intimidating, but I know you can handle the big lessons Jesus has to teach us. We have lots to learn, so let’s get started! Before I tell you what a Beatitude is, let’s read the section of Scripture where we find them. This is the passage we will keep coming back to over the coming weeks. Turn to Matthew 5:1-12 and follow along as I read. There is a word that is going to come up a bunch of times in this passage. See if you can catch it! (This is from the New International Version. Feel free to read from your preferred translation, but be aware that the language may vary from one translation to the next. I will use primarily this translation to explain words such as “poor in spirit” and “meek.”)

“Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them. He said:

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

⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

⁵ *Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

⁷ *Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

¹¹ *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil
against you because of me.*

¹² *Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they
persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Did anyone catch that important word

The most important word in this section is the word BLESSED. Did anyone catch how many times the word blessed appeared in this passage? (Let them refer to their Bibles and count.) The word blessed shows up nine times in these twelve verses. That means it is an important idea. Matthew 5:1-12 is known as the Beatitudes. Beatitudes is an old, fancy word that means blessed.

The Beatitudes are a list of blessings from God.

The Beatitudes start off a section in Matthew called the Sermon on the Mount. Chapters 5-7 of Matthew record many teachings, or words of Jesus. Chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew record many of his miracles, or the works of Jesus. This whole section, Matthew 5-9 paint a pretty good picture of who Jesus is, what he did, and how we can be more like him. The Beatitudes, or Blessings, are like an introduction to these chapters.

So what is a blessing? (Allow children to answer. Don't correct them, just get a feel for what they think blessings are.) We use the word blessing a lot. We ask God to bless our family, bless us, we even say "bless you" when someone sneezes! When you ask people what blessing means, you may get a lot of different answers. Some people say having a home is a blessing. Others say their pets are blessings. Most everyone would agree that family is a blessing. Lots of people say a blessing is God's love and peace in their lives. Do you think these people, and your answers are right? Yes! It is a blessing to have a home, and a family, and pets, and friends, and food and toys, and getting to go to school, and having God's love and peace in our lives. These things are all blessings. But being blessed means so much more than that. Here's a simple way to define what a blessing is: a blessing is God's gift favor in our lives, even when we don't deserve it. Because God loves us, he wants to give us good things. Let's look at Scripture to prove it. Turn a few pages in your Bible to Matthew 7:9-11.

"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

Do your parents love you? Of course! How do they show you that they love you? They feed you, teach you, take you to school, care for you when you are sick, play with you, hug you, and buy you things that you need and want. Your parents give you good things out of love. Now in Matthew 7, Jesus is saying that if your mom and dad on earth love you that much, and they are imperfect sinners just like everyone else, how much more does our perfect heavenly Father love and care for us? God blesses us and gives us good gifts because he loves us.

Now with your parents, do you always get your way? Of course not. You can't stay up all night, you can't have ice cream for dinner, and you can't ride your bicycle on the highway. You have to go to bed and get a good night's sleep. You have to do your homework before playing video games. You have to have vegetables with dinner. And sometimes you get a new coat for a present instead of that cool RC car. Why would your parents do these things? It's because your parents know that you need these things to live a happy, healthy life. You have to eat well, sleep well, stay safe and work hard in school to feel your best and do your best.

Now let's think about how that relates to our relationship with God. Do we always get what we pray for? Do we always get our way? No, we don't. Matthew 7:11 says that our Father in heaven will give us good gifts when we ask him. There's just one thing. God knows what a good gift is better than we do. Sometimes when we think of blessings, we think of stuff, like money or food or a house. These things can be blessings. We may think about health and family and friends when we think of blessings. These things can be blessings too. But what about people who don't have homes? What about people who are sick and in the hospital? What about orphans who don't have any family? Are these people not blessed? Has God forgotten about them?

I want you to listen closely here, because this is very, very important. We can be homeless, family-less, and in the hospital, and still be very, very blessed.

Let's have a sword drill to find out how we can always have God's blessings, even when it seems like we have nothing in life. Take out all bookmarks and fingers from your Bibles and hold them over your heads. When I say go, look up Psalm 29:11. Go! (Read, or have a student read, Psalm 29:11.) "The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace." When we follow Jesus, God strengthens us and gives us peace. We don't have to have nice things or even be healthy to be blessed. We are blessed when God is with us, and God is with us, in our hearts, when we choose to love him and follow his commandments. Jeremiah 17:7 says, "Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him."

Over the next several weeks, we will study the Beatitudes one by one. The Beatitudes are blessings we receive when we have certain attitudes. These attitudes that we will learn about are the attitudes of people who follow Jesus. We're going to call them the BEE ATTITUDES, because they are what our ATTITUDES should BE. These are the opposite of the ME ATTITUDES, which are what we have when we choose to make ourselves and what we want more important than Jesus and what he wants. To remind us to have BEE ATTITUDES, a lot of our crafts and activities are going to be bumblebee related. So as we work on our craft, be sure to include a few bees in your drawing to remind you to think about what your attitude should be.

End in prayer.