

Simply Unexpected – Week 1 – “The Blessings of Poverty and Grief”

Introduction to the Beatitudes

The word “Beatitudes” refers to the opening section of the Sermon on the Mount as recorded by Matthew in chapters 5-7. Luke also records these sayings with some small differences (Luke 6:20-23). The English word “beatitude” is derived from the Latin word *beatitudo*, which means to be “happy,” or “fortunate.” This is reflected in some English translations. The Greek word means to be “blessed,” “fortunate,” “happy,” or “privileged” because of one’s circumstances. It is important to remember this as we study what Jesus taught about the true meaning of blessedness in the life of the disciple.

The Sermon on the Mount is directed primarily to Jesus’ disciples – those who have committed themselves to following him. They speak to how we should live after we have entrusted our lives to him. They are primarily a word for the believer, not the seeker. One emphasis of the Beatitudes is that followers of Jesus should live, act, and speak in ways that set them apart from the world and its values. They are a call to action as much as a pronouncement of blessedness.

Our previous series, True North, encouraged us to consider what it means to be made in the image of God and how it changes our focus from what is temporary and changing to the One who is permanent and unchanging. When we focus our attention on God and travel in the direction of “True North” our perspective shifts from worldly values to God’s values. Our changed perspective changes both how we view the world and how we live out our calling as God’s children and followers of Jesus. This series will address how we put this changed perspective into practice.

Begin your study time together by reading Matthew 5:1-12. Our study this week is focused on the first two Beatitudes, which pronounce the blessedness of those who are poor in spirit and those who mourn. We do not associate these circumstances with happiness or blessedness as a rule. This tells us that the focus is on something more than our emotional state. The circumstance upon which are blessedness or happiness based is our relationship with Jesus. When we keep our focus on Jesus, we find blessedness in every situation, good or bad, because we respond to them from the perspective of faith, not the perspective of the world.

This week: The blessings of poverty and grief.

³*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Matt. 5:3-4 NIV)*

Opening Discussion:

1. Share one thing that you found helpful from Sunday’s message.
2. What are some of the worldly circumstances in which we find happiness?
3. What is your understanding of what it means to be spiritually blessed?

Study Time:

Jesus’ pronouncement of blessedness is a call to action – to choose a way of life that is blessed by blessing others. The first Beatitude exhorts us to cultivate a “poverty of spirit” that clears the way for a deeper relationship with God.

1. The phrase “poor in spirit” refers to humble dependance on God. It encourages us to eliminate from our lives whatever gets in the way of understanding how much we need Him. The New English Bible renders this Beatitude “How blest are those who know how much they need God.”
 - a. What are some obstacles (i.e., habits, attitudes, preconceptions) that can cause us to lose our focus on God?
 - b. What are some ways that having less of what we want to have or do – wealth, possessions, habits, or hobbies – can draw us closer to God?
 - c. What are some ways that having less than what we think we need – being in want – physically or spiritually, can help draw us closer to God?

