

The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:1-12

First, we need to understand a Greek word: *makarios*

- it is the first word of each beatitude
- it is difficult to translate into English, but the most accurate translation is probably the one you see most often: *blessed*
- that said, we need to understand what "blessed" means
 - it *doesn't* mean "happy"...happiness is too fleeting, too dependent on external realities
- "blessed" here is probably best understood from God's perspective
 - our blessedness is not a function of our own emotional well-being, although joy, contentment...happiness, if you will...can be a consequence of being blessed
 - from God's perspective, however, blessedness is a function of having a heart for God, of being aligned with God's will...
 - and that, in and of itself, doesn't always equate to joy
- therefore, when the beatitudes say, "Blessed are..." what they're saying is something like, "Those who have a heart for God and are aligned with God's will are..."

There are nine beatitudes...

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

- "poor" here is best understood both in economic and spiritual terms...and the point is not that it's better to live in material and spiritual poverty...
- the point is that when you have little or no material or emotional resources you must rely on God's providence...you must be faithful in the midst of oppression and be sensitive to others who are similarly oppressed
- think of it this way: material wealth tends to lead us to depend on ourselves, putting our hope and our emotional well-being in things of this world, and less so on God
- we live in a culture that celebrates self-sufficiency; the Kingdom demands God-sufficiency

Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted

- the focus here is on the source of the comfort, not on the fact you mourn
- we all mourn because suffering is part of the human condition, but in the Kingdom, mourning does not mean despair
- so the issue is from where does our comfort come?
- in the Kingdom, the source of our comfort, the source of peace that passes all understanding is God...not things of this world...things which are, themselves, temporary and can be lost
- this beatitude also speaks to our attitude toward others...that we are called to weep with those who weep as surely as we're called to rejoice with those who rejoice

Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth

- “meek” here does not mean weakness...it’s the same word translated as “gentle” when Jesus says, “I am gentle and humble of heart”
- “meek” means an unwillingness to assert your own well-being at the expense of others
- content with the Kingdom of God, you feel no need to build a kingdom of your own
- and “earth” here is better understood as “land,” which, for the Jews, of course referred to an actual geographic place, the “Promised Land”...
- but also had a metaphorical meaning which applies to you and me: the promise of peace and *shalom* or wholeness

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled

- the key to this beatitude is what Jesus means by “righteousness,” and there’s two ideas at work here...
 - first, living righteously...living as God expects us to live
 - but, equally, righteousness for others, which is to say, *justice*, because part of living as God expects us to live is putting the wellbeing of others ahead of our own
- “filled” in that living righteously results in a Kingdom society where peace, justice, and holiness shape the entirety of creation

Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy

- “merciful”: demonstrating forgiveness and kindness, but based not on whether someone deserves it but because it's the right thing to do...
- and because we ourselves have received mercy...think “Good Samaritan”
- and we need to understand that showing mercy is not passive...not merely refraining from inflicting suffering on someone or allowing suffering to happen without ourselves participating in it, but proactively working for compassion and justice

Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God

- “purity” here is single-minded devotion to God and the Kingdom
- such purity of heart creates purity of action, so that we see God not face-to-face but in the attitudes and behaviors of others

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God

- which simply underscores the centrality of peace—and those things like justice and compassion required for peace—to the Kingdom
- and that to the extent we work for peace, we work for the Kingdom, and we reflect God's will and character

And, the last two, *blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness* and *blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you because of me...*

--living the Sermon on the Mount is not without price...the price you pay for leading change...

--because living in a world so contrary to the Kingdom, to be an agent of the Kingdom is to be an agent of change...and the persecution is a measure of the change