

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



Cover artwork by Harvey L., former Crossroads student

LESSON 1

The Beatitudes



CROSSROADS

Copyright © 1997, 2004, 2016 by the Publishing Center at Crossroads Prison Ministries. All rights reserved. No part of this lesson may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

v.0717

International Office:
Crossroads | PO Box 900 | Grand Rapids, MI 49509-0900

LESSON 1. The Beatitudes

The Introduction and Setting of the Sermon

Crowds. Miracles. Teaching. As you read through the Gospels, you will find that these three words describe a large part of Jesus' ministry.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Matthew 4:23-25, 7:28-29, 8:1-4, 19:2; Mark 1:21-28, 4:2; Luke 4:38-44, 9:37-45; and John 9:1-12, 11:38-57.

In our text (Matthew 5-7), Jesus sits on a hillside by the Sea of Galilee and teaches. The "sermon" taught there, known as *The Sermon on the Mount*, represents the main themes of Jesus' preaching during His ministry. Essentially, it is a description of life in the Kingdom of God.

The Sermon on the Mount has been called the "Constitution of the Kingdom of God." This is because the sermon teaches us the characteristics of citizens of the Kingdom of God and the basic principles by which the Kingdom is governed. By viewing Jesus' sermon this way, an outline of its contents becomes clear:

- I. Matthew 5:1-16 describes the characteristics of citizens of the Kingdom of God.
- II. Matthew 5:17 to 7:29 addresses the life and conduct of citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Even though there was a large crowd present to hear Him, Jesus' sermon was directed toward the disciples, and through them, to the whole Church, including us. Let's learn from this sermon how God would have us live in His Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BEATITUDES

READING: Before you continue, please read through *The Beatitudes* found in Matthew 5:1-12.

In the Old Testament, God formed the nation of Israel, calling them into a relationship with Himself (see Exodus 20 and 24; Deuteronomy 5 and 6, and 7:6). As King, God established a formal agreement with the citizens of His Kingdom called a *covenant*.

Prophets of God were called to pronounce God's blessing on the people when they obeyed the covenant or His curses when they disobeyed the covenant. The declarations of blessing were called *oracles of weal*. The declarations of curses were called *oracles of woe*. Matthew 5:3-13 is called *The Beatitudes*, which means the "blesseds," because they are oracles of blessing (weal) from Jesus Christ, the Great Prophet. If we want to be faithful citizens of God's Kingdom we must understand what Jesus teaches in *The Beatitudes* and implement His teaching in our lives.

Some say the word "*blessed*" simply means *happy*. But it means much more. Blessedness is the deep, abiding joy that comes when we live in harmony with God and the principles of His Kingdom.

There are some important things to note about *The Beatitudes*. First of all, *The Beatitudes* show us the character of the true Christian, a citizen in God's Kingdom, a character that can only be produced through the power and grace of God. Secondly, *The Beatitudes* bring us to Christ, because from them, we notice our failure to live how God calls us to, and therefore recognize our need for Christ's righteousness to be credited to us. *The Beatitudes* are also written in an order that describes the process of growth in the Kingdom of God by which we can examine our own spiritual growth and health. As we study *The Beatitudes*, let us examine ourselves before God.

1. Before you continue, pray and ask God to show you what it means to be a citizen in the Kingdom of God as you study *The Beatitudes*.
 Check here when you're done.

2. The word "blessed" means to have the deep, abiding joy that comes when we live in _____ with God and the _____ of His Kingdom.

3. The Psalms begin with an oracle of weal and an oracle of woe. Read Psalm 1.
 - a. What does a blessed person delight in?

 - b. What will be the future of the wicked?

THE FIRST BEATITUDE

Poor in Spirit
Matthew 5:3

The first of eight beatitudes describes the beginning point of growth as a citizen of the Kingdom. It is being "*poor in spirit*." This phrase can be understood by thinking of actual poverty, the state of being poor, as it is described in the Bible. In the Bible, the poor are those who have to utterly depend on others because they lack the personal resources or abilities to live in a state of wellbeing. Likewise, Christians who are "poor in spirit" have recognized that they are totally dependent on God for their own wellbeing. They have recognized the sin and corruption of their hearts, and know that they do not have the resources or abilities to please God on their own. They know that they need the help of the King—Jesus Christ.

Christians who are poor in spirit are humble. They live in humility when they are living in complete dependence on God—His mercy and His grace. These Christians must rid themselves of their selfishness, pride, and self-reliance.

Poorness in spirit is realized in our lives as we stand in the awesome presence of our holy and just King. We see that as we stand before God's majesty we are nothing and depend totally upon Him.

Being poor in spirit is the first step in Christian growth because no one will enter the Kingdom of God without poverty in spirit. Notice that this first step opens the Kingdom of Heaven to the Christian. In our world, the rich, powerful, and famous have kingdoms. In God's Kingdom, however, it is the poor in spirit, those who utterly depend on God, who gain the Kingdom of Heaven.

4. Fill in the blanks from your reading.

Christians who are "poor in spirit" have recognized that they are _____ on God for their own wellbeing. They have recognized the _____ and _____ of their hearts, and know that they do not have the resources or abilities to please God. They know they need the _____ of the King.

5. Read 1 Peter 5:5-7 and answer the following questions.

a. With what are we to be clothed?

b. "God _____ the proud, but shows _____ to the humble"
(1 Peter 5:5).

6. Read Isaiah 6:1-5. Here Isaiah is driven to see that he is poor in spirit. What caused this?

7. Read Philippians 2:3-5 and fill in the blanks below.

Do nothing out of selfish _____ or vain _____. Rather, in _____ value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the _____. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as _____.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Job 5:11; Proverbs 3:34, 11:2; Ecclesiastes 5:1-3; Isaiah 57:15, 66:2; Matthew 20:26; Luke 6:20, 14:10; John 13:14; Romans 12:3, 12:16; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:12; and James 1:9, 4:10.

THE SECOND BEATITUDE

Mourning Over Sin
Matthew 5:4

How can this be: Blessedness from mourning? Yet, that is exactly what this beatitude declares. The "mourning" in this beatitude refers to the mourning that occurs when we stand in poverty of spirit before a holy God. Citizens of the Kingdom of

God constantly recognize their unholiness and sin before their Holy King, and sorrowfully mourn over it. They cry out to the Holy One for grace, mercy, and freedom from sin and its consequences. Not only do citizens of the Kingdom of God mourn over their own sins, but they mourn for all the sin around them. They recognize that all sin and unholiness is a stench in God's nostrils.

Notice Jesus' promise to those who mourn because of their sin and unholiness—*"they will be comforted."* When Christians face the terror that comes from recognizing their sin before a holy God, they are filled with joy and blessedness as the Gospel declares their deliverance from this sin and reconciliation to God in:

- the past as Christ forgives them for sins committed.
- the present as they are delivered from the daily power and effects of sin.
- the future as they recognize that their sin will be removed forever when Christ redeems His people on the Last Day.

The Christian knows that there will not be complete comfort from mourning in this life. There will still be suffering and affliction, and we still struggle with sin (Romans 7). But for the Christian, there is true and complete comfort in heaven and because of this, we can rejoice (Psalm 30:4-5, 126:5-6) and not lose heart (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

8. How does God respond to our sin according to Romans 1:18?

9. Read Psalm 5:4-6 and fill in the blanks below.

"For you are not a God who is _____ with _____; with you, _____ people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot _____ in your presence. You _____ all who do wrong; you _____ those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, Lord, _____."

10. According to what we learned in this beatitude, what does the Christian mourn over?

11. Read 2 Chronicles 7:14.

a. If we want God to hear us when we talk to Him, what must we do?

b. If we do this, what will God do?

12. Read Isaiah 6:1-8. God met Isaiah in a powerful way. What was Isaiah's response to God's majestic holiness?

The Beatitudes move in an order that describes the process of spiritual growth by which we can evaluate our spiritual condition as citizens in God's Kingdom. When Christians begin with poverty in spirit, they start to mourn over their sin and the sin of the world as it is lived out before the face of a holy God. This then leads to meekness. Meekness is the quality of having a submissive, gentle, and patient attitude even though we may have great strength and power.

Meek people are **not** weak people. The word for meekness in this verse finds its background in the training of horses. A horse is a very powerful animal, able to kill someone with a simple kick of a hoof. The goal in training a horse, however, is not to remove the power of the horse, but to bring its power under the control of its master. The goal of the trainer is to get the horse to submit to its master and follow their lead. The same can be said of a Christian. God has created us with great power and abilities in both mind and body. These are to be submitted to our Master. When we have submitted to God we are then called meek. A meek person is a person harnessed under God's control.

People who submit their lives to God will "inherit the earth." This does not mean that we will just inherit a piece of property. Rather, it means that we will receive from God blessing and security as we live in His presence.

In one sense, the meek already inherit the earth in this life because we already experience the presence and blessing of God in a limited way right now. In heaven, however, we will experience the full security that comes by living totally in God's presence without the influence of sin and evil around us.

13. How does the definition of biblical meekness described above differ from the idea that meekness is weakness?
14. Read Philippians 2:6-11, Hebrews 2:9-18, and 1 Peter 2:21-25 and review the crucifixion story in Matthew 27:27-55. Make a list of some of the ways Christ demonstrated meekness.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Job 22:21; Psalm 37:11; 2 Corinthians 10:1; Galatians 5:23; Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 4:5; Colossians 3:12; Titus 3:2; and James 3:17, 4:7.

The beatitude “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*” refers to the desire to be free from all sin in all forms; it involves a sincere desire to be holy. Righteousness is being right with God.

We remember that blessedness is the deep, abiding joy that comes when we live in harmony with God and the rules of His Kingdom. This beatitude teaches us that we must hunger and thirst to live right with God. We must hunger and thirst to live our lives according to His commands. Hunger and thirst are deep passions and cravings that go on until satisfied. It becomes desperate and agonizing. The psalmist’s hunger in Psalm 42 is what Jesus is talking about here.

If we truly hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will be satisfied by Christ Himself, because He alone is our righteousness. Satisfaction in Christ happens immediately for those who believe, but just like you continually crave food and drink, there is also an ongoing process because the removal of sin, which is done by the Holy Spirit, is a lifelong process. The perfect fulfillment of this beatitude’s promise comes in heaven, when all Christians will be gathered at the throne of God, standing blameless and perfect before Him and experiencing the true fulfillment and satisfaction of their souls’ deepest longings.

15. Read Matthew 6:31-33.

- a. What must a Christian seek first?

- b. What will then be added to us?

16. Fill in the blanks below based on your reading.

“*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*” refers to the _____ to be free from _____ _____ in all forms; it involves a sincere desire to be _____.

17. Memorize Psalm 42:1-2. Check here when you’re done.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Psalm 1, Psalm 17:15, Psalm 37; Isaiah 26:9; Hosea 14:9; Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 5:19; Ephesians 4:24; 1 Timothy 6:1; and 2 Timothy 2:22.

THE SIXTH BEATITUDE

Pure in Heart
Matthew 5:8

When the Bible speaks about the heart of a person, it is referring to the inner, hidden part of us—who and what we really are down deep inside. The heart is our inner person, the part of us from which flow our thoughts, desires, intentions, beliefs, and purposes. The heart is the center of the human being, the fountain from which all things flow. God, therefore, is uniquely concerned with our heart. God searches our hearts. He is searching for pure hearts.

The word “pure” has two meanings. First, to be pure is to be single or unmixed. A pure person is not “two-faced,” nor are they a hypocrite or a deceiver. The pure Christian is one who serves God alone, and is motivated by a single love for God alone.

Second, to be pure refers to being cleansed and without dirtiness. In the Bible, sin is often referred to as impurity or uncleanness. The Bible says that no one with impurity or uncleanness will enter into the Kingdom.

The Christian with a pure heart strives to be like Jesus: free of sin and loving God with his or her all. Since God alone can change and purify the heart, this beatitude must find a special place in our prayers.

The promise attached to this beatitude and the goal of Christian living is to “see God.” As with the other Beatitudes, this promise is partly fulfilled already today, but not yet completely. We can see God working in nature, history, and Scripture. We even see God at work in our own lives. Indeed, God is near us, but He is invisible. And we long to see Him face to face. We hunger to gaze upon His glory, seeing Him as He really is. While there are times in this life where we may have special mountain-top experiences with God, this promise to see God will be truly fulfilled when we reach heaven.

22. Fill in the blanks from your reading above.

First of all, to be pure is to be “_____” or “_____”
...Second, purity refers to being “_____” and “without dirtiness.”

23. Read Psalm 15 and Psalm 24:3-6. How does David describe the person who will be in God’s presence?
24. The purity spoken of in this beatitude also reminds us of the life of holiness God calls us to. Read Hebrews 12:14. In order to see God, what must we have?

25. Revelation 22:4 speaks about heaven. What will we be able to see there?

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Job 33:9; Psalm 24:4, 51:10, 73:1 and 13, 119:9; Proverbs 20:9; Jeremiah 4:14; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Philippians 1:10, 2:15, 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 1 Timothy 1:5, 4:7; and 2 Timothy 2:22.

THE SEVENTH BEATITUDE

Keeping the Peace
Matthew 5:9

Let's review. The citizen in God's Kingdom will be poor in spirit, mournful over sin, meek, hungering for righteousness, merciful, and pure in heart. A Christian with these characteristics must now become a peacemaker.

Peace can be defined as the presence of order and harmony and the absence of hostility. Peacemakers, therefore, are people of God who bring peace to our world of chaos, sin, and hostility.

God is a God of peace. In Creation, He brought order and harmony out of chaos. In Redemption, He ends the hostility that exists between Himself and humanity by the sacrifice of His own dear Son. As God is a peacemaker, so the Christian must be a peacemaker. We must be people who bring justice, order, and reconciliation to our world. While there are many ways for us to do this, at the forefront of our activities should be the proclamation of the gospel of peace and reconciliation.

If we do this, we earn the right to be called the "children of God" because we are being like Him, reflecting the character of our Father in heaven. If we do this, we are working together with Christ—the Prince of Peace.

26. Read Isaiah 9:6-7. These verses are a prophecy about the coming of Jesus Christ to establish His Kingdom, the very Kingdom described in *The Sermon on the Mount*.

- a. What title given to Christ correlates with this beatitude?
- b. Fill in the blanks from verse 7. "*Of the greatness of his government and _____ there will be no _____.*"

27. Read Romans 12:17-21. List **three** things that we can do to promote peace.

- a.
- b.
- c.

28. Read James 3:18. Fill in the blanks below and remember this proverb as a helpful tool in life.

“ _____ who sow in _____ reap a harvest of righteousness.”

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Psalm 34:14; Romans 12:18, 14:19; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 2:14-15 & 17, 4:3; Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Titus 3:2; Hebrews 12:14; James 3:17-18; and 1 Peter 3:11.

THE EIGHTH BEATITUDE

Persecution
Matthew 5:10-12

The Prince of Peace—Jesus Christ—was persecuted and killed. All Christians should be prepared for the same. The world hates righteous people. The world hates peacemakers. 1 John 3:13 says that this shouldn't surprise us.

We must be careful with this beatitude. Notice that we are blessed if we are “*persecuted because of righteousness*.” Righteousness is being like Jesus, and if we live like Jesus we can expect to suffer. However, Christians cannot use this verse to somehow justify being obnoxious or overbearing in their dealings with people.

The fact that we are persecuted for righteousness gives us proof that we are in the Kingdom and are living as a Kingdom citizen. If we are persecuted simply because we have been like Christ, then we know we are going to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus knows we will be persecuted, and He expands on the beatitude in verses 11 and 12. He again reminds us that blessed persecution is that which occurs “*because of me*” (Jesus). He also reminds us that a great reward awaits us in heaven as we patiently endure suffering for His sake.

29. Read 1 Peter 4:12-16 and answer the following questions.
- When we suffer for Christ, what rests upon us?
 - When we suffer, we are not to be ashamed, but we are to do what?
30. Read 1 Peter 2:21-23. Here we learn that we are actually called to suffer. We are to follow the example of Christ. How did Christ respond to His suffering according to these verses?

31. Read Revelation 2:10 and 12:11. As citizens in God's kingdom, what must we be prepared to do?

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Psalm 37:32, 119:61; Proverbs 29:10; Isaiah 59:15; Jeremiah 20:18; Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 4:9; 2 Corinthians 1:24, 4:8, 6:4 & 8, 12:10; Hebrews 11:35, 12:3-4; and 1 Peter 3:14 & 16.

SUMMARY

The Christian's Function in the World *Matthew 5:13-16*

Matthew 5:13-16 will close our study of *The Beatitudes*. *The Beatitudes* have shown us who and what a true citizen of the Kingdom is. Now we must discover the function of the Christian and the Kingdom in this world. To help us understand this, Jesus uses the metaphors of salt and light.

First, the Christian and the Kingdom are like “salt” to the world. Salt is a preservative; it stops food from becoming rotten. Likewise, the Christian functions in the world as a positive influence to stop the decay of the world by sin and the evil one. The presence of the Christian in the world has a purifying and preserving effect; it keeps the world from total corruption.

Salt is also a flavoring, bringing out the good taste in food. The Christian functions in this way also, bringing out, enhancing, and supporting what is good in the world (see Colossians 4:1-5). Declaring to the world the joy of our salvation and the satisfaction that comes to our lives as we serve our King is of special importance.

The salt used in Jesus' time was of a type that could lose its saltiness—then it was thrown onto the roads as gravel (see Mark 9:50 and Luke 14:34-35). Here Jesus teaches that the true Christian must retain the Christian virtues discussed in *The Beatitudes*. If they do not, they too are worthless and will be thrown out to be trampled underfoot.

Second, Jesus uses the metaphor of “light” to illustrate the function of the Kingdom in the world. The world is in spiritual darkness, blinded by sin to the light and truth of God (John 8:12). As the full moon reflects the light and glory of the sun, so the Christian is to reflect the truth and glory of God and His Son to this dark world. The function of light is to make things visible, showing their true form. Likewise, the Christian and the Church shine into the darkness of this world, showing what God requires and revealing humanity's sinful condition and what is to be done about it.

This light must not be hidden—the world cannot survive without Christians (see Luke 8:16-18 and 11:33-36)! We are to be in the world, but not of it. Jesus gives us an awesome promise: if we reflect the truth and glory of God to the world through godly living, people will turn and glorify God!

32. The Law of God shows us how to live before other people. Read Deuteronomy 5:6-21 and Matthew 22:36-40.

a. Describe some ways that you can be *salt* and *light* where you are.

b. Some people have taught that Christians must leave the world altogether, living in total separation from the world. How does Jesus Himself refute this teaching in John 17:14-18?

33. Pick **two** of the eight beatitudes studied in this lesson which were the most important truths you learned and discuss how you will apply those characteristics to your life as you strive to live as a citizen in God's Kingdom.
34. If you belong to Christ, and live as a citizen in His Kingdom, pray to your King, asking Him for these characteristics and thanking Him for His blessings. For your next lesson: Read the entire *Sermon on the Mount* through all at one time—spend some extra time on Matthew 5:17-48, the passages you'll study next lesson.

Please print your full name and address. (Please do not remove the covers. The information you provide below is the only way we can track your lessons accurately.)

FIRST

LAST

ID#

INSTITUTION

HOUSING

STREET ADDRESS / PO BOX

CITY

STATE

ZIP