

READ: Matthew 5:1-5

Jesus's first three "Blessed" statements are very countercultural. In American culture, the "poor in spirit" generally inherit or acquire very little. Similarly, those who mourn are often times seen as weak or are considered to be doing little to solve the problem. Likewise, in today's culture, the go-getters, the independent, and often the arrogant are those who "inherit the earth."

Why and how does Jesus justify this seemingly upside down and backwards approach to blessing? The poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek are rarely blessed with tangible earthly treasures; however, the blessings of God's kingdom are not always tangible, and they certainly are not confined to earthly riches. The blessings to which Jesus is referring include joy regardless of troubling circumstances, hope in the midst of pain, and eternal life with Him. Those who reflect the beatitudes ("Blessed" statements) will receive their reward in eternity.

JOURNAL: How can you begin to reflect these beatitudes in your day to day life? Note some changes you may have to make in order to become poor in spirit, to become someone who mourns, and to become meek.

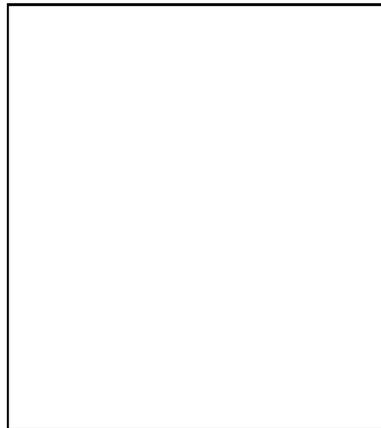
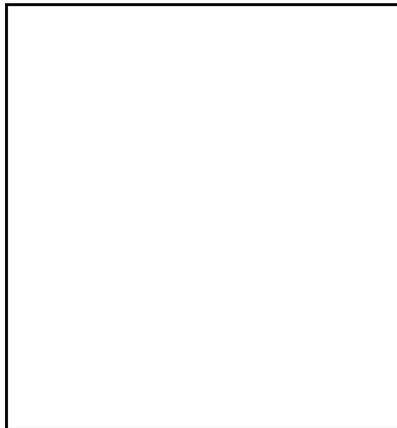
PRAY: Confess any behavior that contradicts the beatitudes you studied today, and ask for forgiveness. Pray that God would give you the perseverance to continue becoming more like Him and humility to recognize your strengths and weaknesses. Offer your arrogance and pride to God and ask that he would turn them into humility and meekness.

READ: Matthew 5:6-7

What do you think it means to “hunger and thirst for righteousness?”

Jesus says that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled with it. As humans, we naturally “hunger” for things that will instantly gratify our desires, whether that be possessions, relationships, or acceptance. God’s will, however, is that we would hunger, or truly desire, to do what is right. 1 John 5:14 says, “If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” If you sincerely ask God for a hunger and thirst for righteousness, he will transform your heart accordingly.

In the box on the left, write some earthly things you are currently hungering for. In the box on the right, write some steps you could take instead to begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness.



READ: Matthew 5:8

Just as the hungers we discussed yesterday can keep us from experiencing life to the fullest inside the will of God, impurities in our hearts can keep us from seeing and truly interacting with God. Verse 8 says that the pure in heart will see God. Imagine you and God standing on opposite sides of a large glass box. If the box is completely empty (completely pure), you will be able to see God on the other side. But if the box gets filled with dirt, you will no longer be able to see Him. In this situation, the glass box represents your heart and the dirt represents sin and impurity. When your heart is filled with sin and impurity, you will no longer be able to see, hear, and interact with God to your fullest potential.

JOURNAL: Is your heart pure? What dirt is in your box that you need to clean up in order to see God? What steps do you need to take to clean it?

PRAY: Pray that God would reveal himself to you and that you would be able to see Him working in your life. Pray Psalm 139:23 over yourself:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart;

Test me and know my anxious thoughts.”

READ: Matthew 5: 9-12

Being persecuted is not something most people would see as a blessing. But Jesus is not most people. This is just another example of the contradiction between God's kingdom and earthly kingdoms. Notice in verse 10 the reason for persecution: "Because of righteousness." Two days ago, we talked about hungering for righteousness. When we hunger for righteousness and are then filled with it, our viewpoints will contradict worldly viewpoints; thus, persecution enters the picture.

Now, Jesus is not saying to do anything possible to get others to mistreat you and then claim it as "persecution." Rather, he is saying that if we act according to his plan and his character, the world will not accept us. In most cases, we, in the United States, will not be physically persecuted because of our faith. However, we must remember that this is not the reality of all Christians around the world.

PRAY: Take some time to pray for your brothers and sisters around the world being forced to meet in secret just to worship the same God that you are able to worship so freely. Pray for boldness for these men, women, and children, and pray that the same sense of boldness would wash over you.

If and when you are persecuted in one way or another, remember James 1:2-3:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance."

READ: Matthew 5:13-16

What does it mean to be the salt of the earth? Obviously, the most well-known use for salt is for seasoning and flavoring. It impacts the way a food tastes, usually in a positive manner. In the same way, we, as Christians, are to impact the world around us in a positive manner. It is our duty. Jesus goes so far as to say that we are “no longer good for anything” if we are not fulfilling this duty.

What are some ways you are or could be impacting the world around you?

Now, what does it mean to be the light of the earth? Light illuminates dark places, makes surroundings known, and gives guidance. All of these uses are beneficial and should be put to use. Hence, Jesus says, “Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.” Yet, for whatever reason, we insist on doing exactly that so often. We stay quiet when we should speak up. We shy away from opportunities to be bold. We compromise our values to avoid sticking out. We avoid moving against injustice because of apathy. All of these instances are examples of hiding our light.

What are some specific ways you are hiding your light, and what can you do to begin letting it shine again?

PRAY: Pray for consistent joy and a loving spirit so that you may be salt to the world around you. Pray for boldness and compassion to let your light shine to those who need it most.

READ: Matthew 5:17-20

What did Jesus mean when he said he did “not come to abolish them (the Law or the Prophets) but to fulfill them”? This statement perfectly displays the unity of the Gospel and the way that everything comes together through it. If Jesus were to have abolished the Law, the Bible itself would be self-contradictory. Because he fulfilled the Law, the Bible works together as a cohesive story. But then how does one explain the contradictions between Old Testament law and what Jesus taught? The reason is more logical than you might think, and there are a couple very similar ways to explain it: Covenant Theology and New Covenant Theology. The two are very similar, with some minor differences.

Covenant Theology says that Old Testament Law was divided into ceremonial, civil, and moral law. Ceremonial law, used to direct Israel’s worship, and civil law, used to guide Israel’s everyday life, are no longer necessary to be obeyed, according to Covenant Theology, but moral law, such as the Ten Commandments, should still be strictly obeyed. Tomorrow we will cover New Covenant Theology.

PRAY: Spend some time today thanking God for the masterful cohesiveness with which he has comprised his Word. Thank him for sending his son to fulfill the law, and ask him to grant you wisdom so that you may continue to better understand his Word.

REREAD: Matthew 5:17-20

Now, we can move onto New Covenant Theology. According to New Covenant Theology, all Old Testament Law is null and void now that Jesus has ushered in the New Covenant with his crucifixion and replaced the Old Testament Law with Jesus's teachings. While Covenant Theology keeps the moral law division of the Old Testament, New Covenant Theology requires us to obey only what is taught in the New Testament. While this may sound like a big difference, the moral law of the Old Testament and the teachings of the New Testament overlap in almost every area.

Now that you understand why and how Jesus fulfilled the Law, you can further understand what he says in the following verses.

The next few verses are primarily directed toward the Pharisees and those with legalistic tendencies. This is why he says in verse 20 that our righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were very good at keeping and obeying laws, but their hearts were not pure. They obeyed laws for selfish gain, to make themselves look righteous. God is far more concerned with the heart than our outward "righteousness."

JOURNAL: Are there any areas in your life where you are like the Pharisees? Are there any areas where you act righteous but your heart is not in the right place.

PRAY: Ask God for forgiveness from your legalism. Pray for a pure heart. Pray that your obedience would not be rooted in selfish ambition.

READ: Matthew 5:21-26

Just as he did when talking about legalism, Jesus again emphasizes the heart when talking about anger. He challenges the notion that anger is okay if it is not taken to the point of murder. This portion of the sermon, like the last, is directed at the Pharisees and those like them. These legalistic people thought intense anger and bitterness toward a person was okay as long as they did not act on it. Jesus challenges this belief, teaching that what is in the heart is just as important as outward action.

Jesus also teaches to settle disputes quickly, before matters get out of hand. When we combine this teaching with Jesus's condemnation of anger, we learn that we should settle our anger with the person who we feel has offended us. Jesus says in Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. "

PRAY: Ask God to reveal any anger or bitterness in your heart. Pray Psalm 139:23 over yourself:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart;

Test me and know my anxious thoughts."

TAKE ACTION: If God revealed anyone to you who you are angry or bitter toward, take action and ask for forgiveness. Text, call, write a note to, or talk in person to them. Even if you feel you did not do anything wrong, ask for forgiveness for your anger and bitterness toward them. Forgiveness is powerful. Let God work through it.

READ: Matthew 5:27-32

Jesus again challenges cultural norms and goes straight for the heart in regards to adultery and divorce. Instead of focusing on the outward behaviors, he focuses on the heart conditions that cause them. While he is speaking directly to married people, the principles behind his teaching apply to everyone. If premarital sex is wrong, then according to what Jesus says in these verses, the lust for it is also wrong.

This is a topic we like to dance around in the church because it makes people feel uncomfortable. However, it's important to discuss so that we can be aware of what God expects of us in this area. So, the big question is: What exactly is lust? In the context of this passage, lust is the unhealthy, deliberate desire for sexual intimacy with someone.

JOURNAL: If you're human, the odds are that you've been guilty of lust at some point or another. Don't let Satan fill you with guilt and shame because of this. Rather, ask God for forgiveness, and think about some ways to combat your behavior. Journal some ways you can keep yourself from lust. Write down some Bible verses you can think of when you begin to fall.

PRAY: Confess your downfalls to God. Get it all out in the open. Thank God for his forgiveness. Thank Him that He knows your heart and loves you deeply regardless of your mistakes. Pray for victory over lust or other heart issues you may have. Pray victory over your friends and family as they battle with their own heart issues.

READ: Matthew 5:33-37

“I promise.” This statement seems to validate our word nowadays. It’s as if commitment is not solid enough. Why has “I promise become so popular, and so important, to include at the end of a statement of commitment? Because many commitments are empty. An empty commitment directly breaks God’s command to be truthful. Now, was Jesus saying to never promise or take an oath of any kind? No. Oaths are important in some parts of society, such as in court and in marriage, but they should not be taken lightly.

MEDITATE: Meditate on verse 37:

“Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

Let the truth of this verse soak into your heart. Do nothing but think about its truth for several minutes. Meditate on ways it applies to your life.

JOURNAL: Write down any ways you can let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no.”

PRAY: Ask God for forgiveness for making empty promises. Pray for mutual truth between yourself and those you talk to. Pray against the deceit of the world and of the enemy. Ask for strength to hold to your word.

READ: Matthew 5:38-42

Revenge. It's the climax of countless books and movies. It's something we love to see. We want to see the underdog triumph and give the oppressor a taste of his own medicine. And we ourselves want to have revenge on those who do us wrong. Many times, we genuinely believe that the person who has offended or hurt us *deserves* to be offended or hurt in return.

Jesus again challenges this cultural norm, even encouraging his followers to give their oppressors more than they ask of them. Whether it was offering the other cheek to be struck, giving up one's cloak, or going two miles instead of one, Jesus preached radical love in the face of adversity. Many Jews wanted Jesus to be their leader who would lead them out of the Romans' captivity, but Jesus had a greater plan to deliver so many more from a greater captivity— the captivity of sin that could only be broken by love.

EVALUATE: How good are you at resisting revenge? When someone offends you, do you try to get back at them? Are you patient when dealing with adversity, or do you lash out?

PRAY: Pray for the patience described in James 1:19:

“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear,
slow to speak, slow to anger.”

Pray also that God would soften the hearts of those who have hurt you. Pray that they would notice your new patient response and that God would be glorified through you.

READ: Matthew 5: 43-48

Yesterday, we talked about avoiding revenge. In today's reading, Jesus takes it a step farther, saying that we should love our enemies. This is an area where we should most definitely follow in Jesus's footsteps. Jesus was slandered, falsely accused, beaten, and sent to be crucified, yet in Luke 23:34, he prays on behalf of those crucifying him, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."

This prayer is the perfect example of His own statement in verses 44 and 45 of today's reading: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your father in heaven."

After all, God truly does love every single person on this earth. It only makes sense that we would pray on their behalf, regardless of how they treat us.

MEDITATE: Meditate on verse 44:

"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Let Jesus's words overwhelm you. Let these words infiltrate every bit of your being so that you may truly carry them out to the best of your ability.

PRAY: Pray for anyone you consider an "enemy." Pray that God would open your eyes to the struggles they are encountering right now. Ask for compassion to see what they see and feel what they feel. Pray that God would reveal himself to them and overwhelm them with his love.

PRAY: Pray that God would open and soften your heart in order to receive guidance from his Word. Ask him to prepare you for this time with Him.

READ: Matthew 6: 1-4

Jesus's main message here is clearly to be humble in giving. But there is something implied as a prequalification for this lesson to even apply. We must give. Giving of time, money, and/or talents is clearly commanded in the Bible. Read these verses to see what God has to say about giving.

Deuteronomy 15:10

Proverbs 21:26

Mark 12:41-44

What do these verses say about giving?

The Bible does not say that giving is a special gift or calling, and Jesus does not imply this during the Sermon on the Mount either. Giving is a command to all followers of Christ, and as Jesus said in Matthew 6:1-4, we should be give humbly and generously. If we follow God's command to give, as promised in Deuteronomy 15:10, he will bless us.

JOURNAL: What are you giving right now (time, money, talents, etc.)? What are some new ways you could begin to give?

PRAY: Thank and praise God for his example of generosity toward us. Pray for a generous spirit and humility as you give. Pray that all credit for your generosity would be directed back to God.

READ: Matthew 6:5-8

In these verses, Jesus highlights two main parts of effective prayer: privacy and simplicity. God desires to have you alone, focusing on him. He desires to have your full attention. This is why privacy is so important.

God also already knows what you want to say before you say it. Don't stress about finding the right words or sounding "dumb" when you talk to God. He desires simplicity. He desires to know your heart as it truly is.

MEDITATE: Meditate on verse 8 of the passage you read today:

"Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before
you ask him."

Let the truth of this verse soak in to every part of you. God knows you. He knows your thoughts and who you are better than you know yourself.

PRAY: Practice praying as Jesus commanded in Matthew 6:5-8. If you are not already alone, go somewhere where you are. Fully focus on God. He wants your full attention and affection. Pray simple prayers. Praise God for who He is. Confess how you have fallen short of his glory. Thank him for all the ways he has blessed you. Finally, ask him to provide for your needs and the needs of others, however that may look.

READ: Matthew 6: 9-15

BREAK IT DOWN: In your own words, write what you think each part of the Lord's Prayer means.

"Our Father in heaven, _____
hallowed be your name. _____

Your kingdom come, _____
your will be done, _____
on earth as it is in heaven. _____

Give us today our daily bread, _____

and forgive us our debts, _____
as we also have forgiven our _____
debtors. _____

And lead us not into temptation, _____
but deliver us from the evil one." _____

PRAY: Pray the Lord's prayer as Jesus prayed it. Then, pray it in your own words. Think how it may apply to your day today and ask God for the guidance and patience it takes to carry out his will, forgive your debtors, and resist temptation.

READ: Matthew 6: 16-18

Live for an audience of one. In speaking about fasting, Jesus emphasizes the concept of living for God's approval and not for man's approval. When Jesus says the hypocrites "have received their reward," the reward he speaks of is man's approval and praise.

You could be fasting, volunteering, or speaking in front of a crowd. If you are doing it in order to gain man's approval, that will be the only reward you get.

On the contrary, if you truly live for an audience of one and fast, volunteer, or speak in order to glorify God, He will reward you greatly. While the reward may not come during your time on this earth, it will be so much sweeter than the short-term, futile approval given by man.

JOURNAL: Have you ever done a good deed in order to gain someone else's approval? The odds are that you have at some point. Spend some time writing your thoughts about the situation. Identify what made you want the approval of man so badly. Write a prayer to God asking for forgiveness for desiring man's approval over His approval.

PRAY: Praise God for everything He is. Let Him know that you are willing to live for Him and His approval only. Pray for strength to resist the temptation to live for man's approval. Pray Philippians 2:13a over yourself: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit."

READ: Matthew 6:19-24

Money. It can be used for good. It can be used for evil. We can choose to control our attitude toward it, or we can let it control us. In 6 short verses, Jesus makes some spectacular points about money and possessions:

1. Earthly possessions are temporary (6:19).
2. We are filled with light when focused on heavenly things and filled with darkness when focused on earthly things (6:22-23).
3. You cannot serve both God and money (6:24).

Jesus conveys the dangers of loving money in this passage. He does not necessarily say that material possessions are inherently evil, but he does say that loving money will lead to trouble in our lives. Time after time, those who have more than enough money end up feeling incomplete or unaccomplished in the end if they don't have Jesus. In the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 5:10:

“Whoever loves money never has enough;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.

This too is meaningless.”

JOURNAL: Are you consumed with money or possessions? What are some steps you can take to focus on heavenly treasures instead of earthly ones?

PRAY: Pray that God would allow you to see how meaningless and temporary material possessions truly are. Pray for a new, renewed passion to serve Him and only Him.

READ: Matthew 6:25-34

Yesterday we talked about how money and temporary possessions are temporary and, in the end, meaningless. In this passage, Jesus takes this truth and applies it to the concept of worry. He covers both the “why” and “what” questions about worry. Why should we refrain from worrying? God cares for his other, smaller creations so much that he constantly provides and cares for them; therefore, He will provide and care for us. What should we refrain from worrying about? What we will eat, what we will drink, what we will wear. In short, we shouldn’t worry about anything. We should do our best to accomplish what we are able to accomplish and leave the rest to God and His provision.

WATCH: Go outside or look out a window at the birds, flowers, grass, trees, etc. God cares enough about all these things enough to provide for them. How much more will he provide for you?

JOURNAL: Write out a list of things you are currently worrying about. The list may be long, or it may be short. The goal of doing this is to bring to light the struggles or situations you need to surrender.

PRAY: Go through your list and pray about each situation you are worrying about. Surrender every aspect of the situation. Ask God for strength to handle the circumstance to the best of your ability. Also ask Him for humility to realize you are unable to handle the situation on your own.

READ: Matthew 7:1-6

“What goes around comes around.” While this saying is often used along with the Hindu and Buddhist principle of karma, Jesus enforces it in the first couple of verses of this passage. You will be judged by the same standard by which you judge others. The first five verses are a great guideline for all of our relationships and social interactions. We should not judge others harshly, or they will likely feel inclined to do the same to us. We should not point out others’ flaws if we have not first addressed our own flaws. Even then, we should rebuke others with grace and love.

Verse 6 is much more difficult to understand and interpret. “Don’t waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don’t throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.” What does this mean? It means that we should use discernment when Gospel. We shouldn’t try to force the Gospel (what is holy) on people who reject and blaspheme it over and over again (people who are unholy). There are other interpretations of this verse, but the language used in it lends itself most to this interpretation.

JOURNAL: Write about the part of the passage today that stood out to you the most and why it stood out to you. Write about how it applies to your life as well.

PRAY: Pray for patience and compassion. Pray for patience to love those whose choices you may not agree with, and pray for compassion to understand why they may make those choices. Pray for discernment to know when to share the Gospel.

READ: Matthew 7:7-12

At first glance, this passage may seem like it is referring to God as somewhat of a “genie in a bottle.” This, however, is not at all what Jesus is teaching. If we look at the passage in the context of the sermon as a whole, we can see what Jesus is truly saying.

In the Lord’s prayer in the sixth chapter of Matthew, Jesus includes the very important phrase, “your kingdom come, your will be done.” This phrase offers some important insight into what Jesus meant when he says in 7:11, “How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” Naturally, Jesus’s statements about God’s generosity should remain consistent with His desire to see God’s will be done. Therefore, we can deduct that Jesus is not referring to God giving us every single material blessing we desire; He is talking about God giving us the strength to obey and further His Kingdom.

Are you asking for the right things? Are you asking for things that will further God’s Kingdom, or are you asking for things selfishly and for your own gain?

MEDITATE: Meditate on 1 John 5:14.

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

PRAY: Put what you learned today into action. Ask God for love, for joy, for patience, for gentleness, or for whatever else you need to help you further His Kingdom. He will give it to you if you humbly ask.

READ: Matthew 7:13-14

Frankly, this passage is a little intimidating. If you're reading the NLT translation, you read that "the highway to hell is broad." But we should not allow this promise to intimidate us; rather, we should use it to motivate us to enter through the narrow gate and live lives devoted to Christ.

So why is this narrow gate so difficult to enter? Think about it. The narrow gate involves so much that is simply contradictory to our natural human tendencies. We don't want to deny our desires in order to live morally and help others. We don't want to admit that we don't know as much as we think we know. We don't want to hold our tongues. We don't want to forgive and love our enemies. We don't want to live life for anyone but ourselves. Entering through the narrow gate is difficult.

Don't misunderstand and think that we have to do all these things to earn God's love. These are all things we should do once we truly surrender to Christ. But, as we have covered, true surrender is difficult.

MEDITATE: Meditate on Luke 9:23.

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

Let the concept of total surrender soak into your mind and soul.

PRAY: If you've never surrendered to Jesus, maybe now is the time to do so. If you want to accept His gift of forgiveness, now that you can do so for free if you surrender your own life and take up your cross daily. If you have surrendered to Jesus, recommit to that surrender. Let God know that you're willing to follow no matter what the cost.

