



Session 1: The Beatitudes

- OPENING -

One important feature of The Sermon on the Mount is that it “presupposes an acceptance of the gospel,¹” and therefore the receiving of God’s grace. The Sermon on the Mount is not about how we are justified and brought into relationship with Christ; it is about our sanctification and how we grow in our fellowship with Christ.

- Why is this framing of the Sermon on the Mount absolutely vital as we start studying it in depth?

Second, the seemingly high bar set by Jesus in this sermon can lead to two dangerous responses. One is to lighten the force of Jesus’ words in the sermon by making them more palatable (“Oh, Jesus didn’t mean *that*...”) or by saying the Sermon is not for Christians (“This Sermon is only for first century Jews, not for modern Christians”). A second, and equally dangerous response, is to become legalistic in our practice and enforcement of the Sermon on the Mount. This can happen when we use it as a measuring stick to judge others.

- Which of these two dangers do you think is more of a danger for you, or for your group? Why do you think this is the case?

- DISCUSSION -

The Beatitudes: The People, The Characteristics, The Blessings

1. In his book, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, John Stott writes the following about the beatitudes, “These are not eight separate and distinct groups of disciples, some of whom are meek, while others are merciful and yet others called upon to endure persecution. They are rather eight qualities of the same group who at one and the same time are meek and merciful, poor in spirit and pure in heart, mourning and hungry, peacemakers and persecuted.”²

- Are you more accustomed to thinking of the beatitudes as being distinct and separate or as being one unified picture of who we are called to be as followers of Jesus Christ?

¹ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984): 37.

² Stott, 31.

- How does your understanding of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 compare to your understanding of the beatitudes? Do you view the fruit as being a more unified group of characteristics that God produces in us through the Holy Spirit or as distinct characteristics?
 - How might our understanding of the beatitudes and the fruit of the Holy Spirit be different from our understanding of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12?
2. Jesus describes those who have the beatitudes as “blessed.” It is a term that describes deep happiness, fulfillment, and satisfaction.
- How is this biblical idea of being “blessed” different from the types of happiness we so often pursue?
3. Notice that Jesus states that there is both a present reality (“Blessed *are*”) and a future hope (“for they *will*”) to the blessings. There is both a gift and a hope to these blessings. And, this blessing transcends happiness and is grounded in grace not performance.³ God “is declaring not what they may feel like (‘happy’), but what God thinks of them and what on that account they are: they are ‘blessed’.”⁴
- Do you think of God’s blessing in these verses as being conditional (based on your performance or your circumstances) or as permanent?
 - What difference does it make to think of them as being permanent?
 - Why is it important to remember that God’s grace given to us in Christ is the basis of the beatitudes?

The Beatitudes: Reading & Reflection

4. Take some time to slowly and prayerfully read Matthew 5:3-12 as a group. The beatitudes offer eight qualities or characteristics of followers of Jesus. The description includes those who: are poor in spirit, mourn, are meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, are pure in heart, are peacemakers.
- Which of these eight most surprises you?
 - Which of these eight are you most drawn to?
 - Which of these eight is most confusing to you?

³ David Turner writes, “The word ‘beatitude’ is related to the Latin *beatus*, which means ‘blessed’...To be ‘blessed’ is to be so much more than ‘happy,’ since the word ‘happiness’ conveys only a subjective, shallow notion of serendipity, not the conviction of being a recipient of God’s grace. God initiates blessing by graciously condescending to save people.” David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008): 149.

⁴ Stott, 34.

5. The beatitudes also offer seven blessings that Jesus declares for these people: they possess the kingdom of heaven; they will be comforted; they will inherit the earth; they will be filled; they will be shown mercy; they will see God; they will be called children of God.
 - Which of these blessings most surprises you?
 - Which of these blessings is most encouraging to you?
 - Which of these blessings seems most strange or confusing to you?
6. At the heart of the beatitudes is “the mercy principle” which is drawn from Matthew 5:7: *Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy*. The idea of “the mercy principle” is also repeated in various ways throughout the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., Matthew 5:43-44; 6:12, 14; 7:1-2, 12).
 - What does it mean to be a merciful person and would you consider yourself one?
 - Why do you think Jesus reiterates this idea throughout His teaching?
 - How would your life look different if you applied “the mercy principle” more often?
 - In what relationships do you find it most difficult to extend mercy?
7. Consider taking time to prayerfully reread the beatitudes in a couple of different translations (e.g., NASB, ESV, NIV, KJV, NKJV, NLT). You may also want to consider reading Matthew 5:3-12 in *The Message* for something different.
 - Does anything different stand out to you when read in different translations?

- CLOSING -

Take time to pray that God would graciously grow these characteristics in each member of your group and grow them in our church family as a whole. Pray that we would be inspired and encouraged by the blessings that are a part of these verses.

Consider committing to memorize this passage over the next two months as we study The Sermon on the Mount as a church.