

Part One
The Beatitudes
Matthew 5:1-11

¹Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

STUDY

1) READ

- a) What are the key character traits of those who are blessed, according to Jesus?
- b) What are the key rewards or outcomes for those who are so blessed?

2) MEANING

- a) How do these characteristics compare or contrast with what is most valued by our culture?
- b) Who is Jesus speaking to? How does that help us understand the meaning of his words?
- c) Are these characteristics inspiring and obtainable? Or do they amount to a discouraging "new law" that is impossible to achieve? What is Jesus' purpose in making these statements?

3) APPLY

- a) Which of these characteristics primarily reflect our relationship to God? Which are more related to how we deal with others?
- b) If I were to rate myself on each of the characteristics Jesus talks about, which would be my relatively stronger points? Which ones do I struggle with the most?
- c) Do these verses give me a sense of hope? Or are they more discouraging, even depressing? How does my thinking need to change in order to better understand and apply Jesus' teaching and principles in the Beatitudes?

NOTES ON THE PASSAGE

v.3 -- Those who are *poor in spirit* recognize their fallen and sinful state, their need for God's mercy. It is the opposite of spiritual pride, self-reliance, and self-justification.

v.4 -- "*Mourn*" here refers, not to bereavement for lost loved ones, but rather to sorrow for the brokenness, evil and corruption in our world, as well as in our own hearts. It is part of repentance and contrition.

v.5 -- "*Meek*" here means 'gentle', 'humble', 'considerate'. The Greek word for "meek" in this text is the same as in Matthew 11:29, where Jesus describes Himself as "*gentle and lowly*".

v.6 -- "*Hunger and thirst for righteousness*" is a natural outcome of true repentance and is a work of the Holy Spirit within the believer.

v.7 -- "*Mercy*" includes forgiveness of others, but also compassion for people in need -- those in pain, misery or distress. Our actions should reflect and be motivated by God's mercy towards us.

v.8 -- "*Heart*" in the Bible refers to the whole person – mind, emotion, and actions. The "*pure in heart*" pursues God's transforming power in their inner-being, and acts towards others with sincerity, transparency and integrity, not from ulterior or mixed motives.

v.9 -- "*Peacemakers*" work towards reconciliation, just as Christ's mission was one of reconciling people to God (2 Corinthians 5:19). Our peacemaking efforts can be towards another person with whom we have conflict, between other individuals, or more broadly between groups in the church or in our society. The Bible elsewhere provides wisdom and boundaries in this area and does not confuse true reconciliation with appeasement.

v.10-11 -- "*Persecution*" can be expected in some measure by those whose heart, intentions, and actions directly conflict with their prevailing culture. This can take a wide range of forms from social pressure, ostracizing, canceling, to harsh physical or emotional treatment.

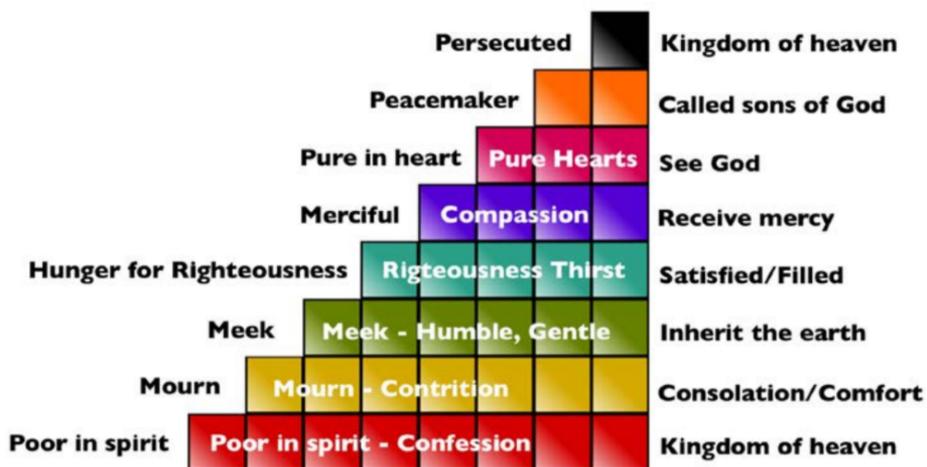
COMMENTS

The Beatitudes are among the most widely quoted and best-known teachings of Jesus. But they are often misunderstood as a set of achievement propositions: if I achieve this character trait, then I will earn this blessing. It is important to understand that Jesus is teaching his followers (“disciples”), not the great crowds that were nearby. His listeners would increasingly come to learn that their relationship with Him was based on His grace and mercy towards them, not on the merits of their good works.

This is evident in the order of the beatitudes. Recognition of our fallenness and sin, our inability to live according to God’s standards, is what defines “poorness in spirit”. Our spiritual poverty drives us to accept God’s grace and mercy that only Christ can provide, through His atoning sacrifice. Those who have accepted Christ’s mercy naturally “mourn” their own sins, as well as the evil, corruption, and dysfunction in the world. Appreciation for God’s grace then results in a “meek” or humble spirit. Finally, a *hunger and thirst for righteousness* flows from recognizing our *spiritual poverty*, accepting God’s grace and mercy, *mourning* sin and evil, and standing *meekly* before God. These character traits, which are rooted in our relationship with God, should in turn impact our behavior towards others. Christ calls His disciples to follow His example by showing *mercy*, seeking *peace*, acting with sincerity and *pure* motives, and enduring opposition and *persecution*.

When we are grounded in God’s grace and love, the character traits described by Jesus are something we will desire for our lives, just as we desire the Fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5) or the characteristics of love (1Corinthians 13). Further, because the Holy Spirit indwells and empowers us, we should see some evidence of these characteristics in our lives, even if they are just seedlings starting to sprout. Over time, the sprouts should grow and strengthen, but we will never reach full maturity in any of these qualities until Jesus comes again, takes us to Himself, and we are fully perfected and united with Him.

Likewise, the blessings described in the Beatitudes will be only partial in this lifetime. But ultimately, they will be fully realized. We will see God, be recognized as His children, be fully comforted, be perfected in character, and as co-heirs with Christ, inherit the kingdom of heaven as well as a new earth. These promises are profusely scattered all through the Bible; Christ brilliantly encapsulates them here in the Beatitudes. His words impart a clear promise that blessings in this life will be accompanied by internal struggles and external opposition, but an indescribably rich eternal future awaits those who believe and trust in Him.



Beatitudes: Seen as a progression of Spiritual growth