

How Are Citizens of the Kingdom to Live among the Nations?

MATTHEW 5:1-12

Main Idea: God's people can delight in their call to live differently, knowing that true blessing comes from submission to and dependence on God who will reward them as they become more like Jesus.

- I. **Delight in Your Spiritual Bankruptcy apart from God's Grace (5:1-3).**
 - II. **Delight in Your Deep Grief over Sin because God Will Comfort You (5:4).**
 - III. **Delight in Your Dependence on and in Your Submission to God, and He Will Reward You (5:5).**
 - IV. **Delight in Your Longing for God, and See God Satisfy You in Him (5:6).**
 - V. **Delight in Graciously Helping Others, Knowing God Will Graciously Help You (5:7).**
 - VI. **Delight in a Clean and Pure Heart, for You Will Enjoy Eternal Fellowship with God (5:8).**
 - VII. **Delight in Being a Peacemaker because It Gives Evidence that You Are a Child of the God of Peace (5:9).**
 - VIII. **Delight in Inevitable Persecution because You Will Receive a Great Reward, and You Are in Good Company (5:10-12).**
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Over the years I have heard more than once, “This is the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived.” The reference is to the “Sermon on the Mount” of Matthew 5–7, a title given to the sermon first by Augustine (AD 354–430) (Quarles, *Sermon*, 6). Now, not everyone would agree with this judgment. Ayn Rand, author of *Atlas Shrugged*, “regarded its prescriptions as among the vilest ever uttered. . . . She [also] regarded Christian morality as a poison” (Hart, “Trouble,” 18). In contrast, Mahatma Gandhi praised the writing and said, “[T]he Sermon on the Mount . . . went straight to my heart” (*Ghandi*, 68).

As we prepare to walk through this gold mine of biblical truth, it might be helpful to gather a few facts about the sermon itself. *First*, we

find a *Reader's Digest* version of the sermon in Luke 6:20-49. *Second*, the sermon does not teach men and women how to live to get into the kingdom but how men and women in the kingdom should live. This is a discipleship discourse. *Third*, its teaching is to be personally applied to us today, as citizens of God's kingdom, though there is a now/not yet reality to our citizenship: we are kingdom citizens now, but we await the full manifestation of that kingdom when Jesus returns. *Fourth*, Luke's account especially (but also Matthew's) is a beautiful balance of both the positive and the negative, and its breadth is extensive. It deals with

attitudes	love	the inner man	discipleship
conflicts	giving	works	obedience
opposition	enemies	discernment	true loyalty
money	rewards	judgmental attitudes	wisdom
materialism	mercy	prayer	true reality
flattery	hypocrisy	forgiveness	true security

Fifth, both accounts are certainly a summation or condensed version of a much longer, more detailed sermon. Jesus preached for more than ten minutes! *Sixth*, it is the first of five major discourses in Matthew's Gospel.

Discourse 1	5–7
Discourse 2	10
Discourse 3	13
Discourse 4	18
Discourse 5	24–25

Matthew's Gospel portrays Jesus as a new and greater Moses. He is the greater lawgiver and prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18:15-20. *Seventh*, the sermon consists of three basic types of discourse material: (a) beatitudes, (b) ethical admonitions, and (c) contrasts between the teachings of Jesus and the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees.

Eighth, there are numerous interpretive approaches to the sermon:

- A. **Utopian ideal ethic**—teachings are impossible, unrealistic demands in this age.
- B. **Millennial ethic**—teachings apply to the future kingdom of Revelation 20.
- C. **Spiritual elite ethic**—teachings are only for the truly spiritual.

- D. **Eschatological (end-time) ethic**—believing the end of the age was imminent, Jesus gave principles for such an impending period. Thus, the sermon provides only an “interim ethic.”
- E. **Intentional/internal ethic**—one’s intention and internal motivation is the thrust of the sermon.
- F. **Call to repentance**—the sermon’s intent is to reveal our spiritual impotency and drive us to repentance.
- G. **Principles of life for kingdom citizens**—the sermon is a charter of conduct for Jesus’s followers at any time in any age. This view sees God’s kingdom as inaugurated in the first century, currently present, and still awaiting complete consummation at Christ’s second coming.

This last is the best understanding and easily incorporates views E and F. As Sinclair Ferguson well says, “The sermon is a description of the lifestyle of those who belong to the Kingdom” (*Sermon*, 3), what Augustine called “a perfect standard of the Christian life” (*Serm. Dom.* 1.1.1).

The sermon begins with a preamble known as “The Beatitudes” (5:3-12), eight declarations or pronouncements of blessing that possibly draw on Moses’s words in Deuteronomy 33:29. The word “beatitude” comes from the Latin word *beatus*, meaning “happy” or “blessed.” The Greek word is *makarios*. The word captures the idea of those who are the fortunate and blessed recipients of God’s grace and favor (Quarles, *Sermon*, 42). It is, therefore, more than an emotion. As Donald Hagner notes, “It refers to the deep inner joy of those who have long awaited the salvation promised by God and who now begin to experience its fulfillment” (*Matthew 1–13*, 91). For our study I will use the word *delight*. I believe it will serve us well.

Preachers commonly do individual sermons on each beatitude. This is a tempting approach, but I have chosen to take them as a group to experience their full impact. Citizens of God’s kingdom, having been redeemed by Christ and brought into this kingdom, are to live a certain kind of way among the nations. Here we learn what it means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (5:13-16). Let’s delight and take joy in this high and holy calling from our King!

Delight in Your Spiritual Bankruptcy apart from God’s Grace

MATTHEW 5:1-3

With the crowds flocking to him (4:23-25), Jesus ascends a mountain, likely located on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee. Taking the

traditional posture of a teacher or rabbi, this new and greater Moses (e.g., greater Lawgiver; cf. Deut 18:15-20) sits down, gathers his disciples around him (v. 1), and “[begins] to teach them” (v. 2). There are two concentric circles of listeners: the inner circle is his disciples, and the outer circle is the crowds.

The eight beatitudes all begin with the word “blessed.” The first begins, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Why? It’s because “the kingdom of heaven is theirs.” Those who see themselves as a spiritual beggar and a pauper before God, totally destitute of personal righteousness before a holy God, should take great delight. Why? Jesus says that today, right now, their citizenship is in the kingdom of heaven (God). The poor in spirit “cry out to God for help, depend entirely on God’s grace to meet their needs, have a humble and contrite spirit, experience God’s deliverance, and enjoy His underserved favor” (Quarles, *Sermon*, 43). Psalm 86:1-5 is probably one Old Testament background for this beatitude. This verse from the song “Rock of Ages” by Augustus Toplady is a wonderful expression of the psalm’s truth:

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

John Piper summarizes well the poor in spirit:

What then is poverty of spirit?

- It is a sense of powerlessness in ourselves.
- It is a sense of spiritual bankruptcy and helplessness before God.
- It is a sense of moral uncleanness before God.
- It is a sense of personal unworthiness before God.
- It is a sense that if there is to be any life or joy or usefulness, it will have to be all of God and all of grace.

The reason I say it is a SENSE of powerlessness and SENSE of bankruptcy and a SENSE of uncleanness and a SENSE of unworthiness, is that, objectively speaking, everybody is poor in spirit. Everybody, whether they sense it or not, is powerless without God and bankrupt and helpless and unclean and

unworthy before God. But not everybody is “blessed.” (Piper, “Poor in Spirit”)

Do you see yourself as a spiritual cripple who can hope only in Jesus? Rejoice! Be happy in your spiritual plight. Delight in the truth that you are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven now and forever!

Delight in Your Deep Grief over Sin because God Will Comfort You

MATTHEW 5:4

The first two beatitudes find a similar theme in Isaiah 61. The “poor in spirit” and “those who mourn” parallel the “poor” and “those who mourn” in Isaiah 61:1-3. “The context of Isaiah 61,” as Quarles writes, “portrays the ‘mourning’ as an expression of sorrow over Israel’s exile, which was a punishment for their sin” (*Sermon*, 53). Israel is “broken-hearted” and mourning in ashes and despair over their sin. However, Yahweh will not forsake those who cry out to him for salvation. He will send his anointed one, the Messiah, “to bring good news to the poor” (Isa 61:1). He will “comfort all who mourn” and give them a “crown of beauty” and “splendid clothes” (Isa 61:2-3). Our Lord Jesus, who applies these verses to himself in Luke 4:18-19, encourages us in the Beatitudes to wait on the Lord’s salvation, knowing that the promises of Isaiah 61 will also be ours. Those who are spiritual paupers now will be spiritual billionaires in God’s eternal kingdom.

The second beatitude, mourning over our sin, naturally flows from the first, being poor in spirit. Now, to delight in mourning seems paradoxical at first. It’s like saying, “Wealthy are the poor” or “Healthy are the sick” (Merritt, “Joy”). But spiritual equations often turn our normal way of thinking on its head. As Jeannine Brown writes, these beatitudes show “the great reversals that God’s kingdom is bringing about and will usher in” (*Matthew*, 52). While the world considers the rich and powerful to be blessed, Jesus says that the truly blessed are the spiritually poor and oppressed because they will receive the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is the supreme example of this truth. He became poor for our sake (2 Cor 8:9), emptying himself and dying on the cross (Phil 2:5), but now God has exalted him, and all people will bow before him (Phil 2:10).

Mourning in this context is an act of repentance and sorrow over our sin and sinful condition. We see God for who he is (Isa 6) and

ourselves for who we are. We are heartbroken, filled with the kind of grief one experiences, for example, in the death of a loved one. It is a James 4:8-10 kind of grief and mourning. You are crushed in your heart and soul over your sin and the price it required in the brutal death of God's only Son.

This type of mourning requires a change of heart. Jesus's first concern is not changing our actions but our "spirit." We need to change internally. As James Merritt puts it, "The world tries to change a man from the outside in, but Jesus changes a man from the inside out" ("Joy"). Proper actions externally will come only after God has changed us internally so that we mourn over our sin and repent.

On the other side of mourning, there is hope, even joy. As a result of our mourning over personal sin and the sinful world in which we live, divine comfort and grace flow in our direction (cf. 2 Cor 1:3-11). Having broken us, a good and gracious Father now blesses us with a holy comfort. Sinclair Ferguson reminds us, "The child of the kingdom knows higher joys as well as deeper sorrows, more sensitive mourning but also more profound comfort, now that he is the Lord's" (*Sermon*, 20). Indeed, "The sorrow of the sinner's exile from God will be replaced by the joy of His presence," the presence of a kind, loving, and perfect heavenly Father (Quarles, *Sermon*, 54). D. A. Carson says, "The great lights in church history learned to weep" (*Sermon*, 19). Here you find excellent company in men like Calvin, Whitefield, Wesley, Shaftesbury, and Wilberforce (*ibid.*). This is a mourner's bench I would gladly join.

Delight in Your Dependence on and in Your Submission to God, and He Will Reward You

MATTHEW 5:5

Psalm 37:11 says, "But the humble [meek] will inherit the land and will enjoy abundant prosperity." The meek are those who say to their King, "Not my will, but your will be done." They give the Lord Jesus a blank check and delightedly ask him to fill it in as he chooses. A meek person is not a weak person but a strong person in Christ. When we are broken, in a saving way by God, our will is now completely and totally surrendered to God and his will. Quarles says that a meek person is one who delights in "a servant relationship to God and who subjects himself to

Him quietly and without resistance” (*Sermon*, 55). Ferguson adds, meekness is

the humble strength that belongs to the man who has learned to submit to difficulties (difficult experiences and difficult people), knowing that in everything God is working for his good. The meek man is the one who has stood before God’s judgment and abdicated [surrendered] all his supposed ‘rights’. He has learned, in gratitude for God’s grace, to submit himself to the Lord and to be gentle with sinners. (*Sermon*, 21)

There is an eschatological hope for the meek: “They will inherit the earth.” This may refer to the earthly reign of King Jesus in his millennial kingdom in which we will share (Rev 20:1-6). But it will certainly include the recreated and restored earth that accompanies the new heavens and new Jerusalem of Revelation 21–22.

In addition to seeing this hope, it is of significant interest to note that two persons are recognized for their meekness in the Bible. One is Moses in Numbers 12:3. The other is Jesus in Matthew 11:29. Meekness “is virtually the only personal quality about himself to which Jesus drew attention” (cf. 2 Cor 10:1; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:24-25) (Ferguson, *Sermon*, 22–23). I love these words of Sinclair Ferguson concerning meekness: “It enhances manliness; it adorns femininity. It is a jewel polished by grace” (*ibid.*, 23).

Delight in Your Longing for God, and See God Satisfy You in Him

MATTHEW 5:6

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are consumed with a passion for righteousness. They have an insatiable appetite, an intense longing, to be conformed to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29). Without it they will starve. Without it they will die from thirst. In fact, such a person “longs to live a godly life as much as a starving man longs for his next piece of bread or a parched tongue yearns for a drop of water” (Quarles, *Sermon*, 59). What a witness such a life is among the nations. And what a promise we find at the end of this verse. We seek him, and he is our satisfaction. We long for him and his righteous

character, and he fills us up! By means of Christ's redeeming work and transforming grace, God gives me new appetites that he promises to satisfy.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has put eternity in our hearts. Likewise, Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they rest in you" (*Confessions*, 3). We all have what I call "a hole in the soul" that can only be satisfied and filled by a relationship with a perfect heavenly Father. Matthew 6:33 provides a wonderful commentary to the fourth beatitude. There Jesus says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you." The world is hungry for happiness, and it is starving. The Bible tells us to hunger for holiness and be satisfied.

Delight in Graciously Helping Others, Knowing God Will Graciously Help You

MATTHEW 5:7

Jesus says that those who demonstrate mercy to others will receive mercy from God. Carson writes, "Mercy is a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness of the one on whom the love is to be showered. [If] grace answers to the undeserving; mercy answers to the miserable" (*Sermon*, 24). Mercy is a grace that flows directly out of the previous four beatitudes. The person who knows his spiritual bankruptcy (v. 3), grieves over his pitiful condition (v. 4), submits his will to God's will in all things (v. 5), and longs for godly righteousness (v. 6) shows mercy to the poor and needy because he knows himself to be poor and needy (v. 7). Ferguson says, "Mercy is getting down on your hands and knees and doing what you can to restore dignity to someone whose life has been broken by sin (whether his own or that of someone else)" (*Sermon*, 31). How much mercy you show is almost certainly the result of how much mercy you know!

Quarles rightly highlights one important, even critical, aspect of mercy: forgiveness. He notes, "Mercy involves more than generous giving to the needy. It also involves forgiving others for their sins as an expression of gratitude to God for His gracious forgiveness" (*Sermon*, 63). We should never forget this foundational Christian truth: we will never forgive anyone as much as God in Christ has forgiven us (see Eph 4:32).

Proverbs 14:21 says, "The one who despises his neighbor sins, but whoever shows kindness [mercy] to the poor will be happy." No wonder

Jesus tells us that extending mercy to others is necessary for a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). Not surprisingly, Jesus repeatedly chastises the Pharisees for failing to show mercy to others (9:13; 12:7; 23:23; see also 18:21-35). Piper is on target:

Mercy comes from mercy. Our mercy to each other comes from God's mercy to us. . . . You get the power to show mercy from the real feeling in your heart that you owe everything you are and have to sheer divine mercy. ("Merciful")

Delight in a Clean and Pure Heart, for You Will Enjoy Eternal Fellowship with God

MATTHEW 5:8

Citizens of the kingdom need to remember that God is more concerned with our inward character than our outward conduct, our attitudes more than our actions (5:27-28; 23:25-26). The bottom line is that he is most concerned about our hearts. Those who are pure in heart receive an incredibly glorious promise: "They will see God." First Samuel 16:7 reminds us that man sees the outward appearance, but the Lord sees the heart. Matthew 12:34 tells us, "The mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart." Matthew 15:18-19 adds,

But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a person. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander.

The condition of your heart, the inner person, the real you, is critically important to Jesus. It should be equally important to us. To be pure in heart is to have a dirty heart made clean, an impure heart purified, a filthy heart cleansed. Psalm 24 is a probable Old Testament grounding for this beatitude. Verse 4 speaks of having clean hands and a pure heart. Being pure in heart involves a passionate pursuit of righteousness and obedience. We are fully aware of the deceptive wickedness and deceitfulness of the human heart (Jer 17:9). To be pure in heart, we must draw near to God (Jas 4:8) and purge every idol from our hearts that would usurp God from his rightful kingship in our lives. A line from William Cowper's hymn "O for a Closer Walk with God" accurately expresses the proper Christian desire: "The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol may be; Help me tear it from its throne, and worship

only Thee.” A longing for God’s presence, a pursuit of God’s purity, a delight in God’s pleasure—these are the things that cultivate and characterize a pure heart.

Delight in Being a Peacemaker because It Gives Evidence that You Are a Child of the God of Peace

MATTHEW 5:9

In 1978 President Jimmy Carter brokered a Middle East peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, between the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and the Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin. In an address before a joint session of Congress on September 18, he closed by looking at his two friends and saying these words: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be the children of God” (Carter, “Address”). These are interesting words from a Christian directed at a Jew and a Muslim. They are understandable words to be sure. But without a doubt they are misapplied words.

This verse does not tell us how to become sons (children) of God. John 1:12 does that (see also Gal 3:26). No, peacemaking is a characteristic of God’s children, those who have entered his family by adoption through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 4:4-5). Ferguson points out,

Jesus’ logic is not difficult to follow. God is described in Scripture as the God of peace [Rom 16:20; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:20]. As such, he has made peace for us through Christ; he has reconciled us to himself (2 Cor. 5:19-21). Making peace is part of God’s gracious character. Those who have become members of his family will share in his family likeness. His sons will be peacemakers. (*Sermon*, 37–38)

Peacemaking will have evangelism as its first priority, helping to make peace with man and God through the proclamation of the gospel. It will also involve helping brothers and sisters in Christ live at peace and in harmony with one another. Romans 14:19 reminds us, “So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.” Hebrews 12:14 adds, “Pursue peace with everyone.” The word “peace” is mentioned in the Bible almost 400 times (NASB or ESV). Our Lord Jesus is called the “Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). God sent his Son that we might have peace with God (Rom 5:1), peace from God (2 Cor 1:2), and the peace of God (Phil 4:7). His children will follow in his footsteps.

Delight in Inevitable Persecution because You Will Receive a Great Reward, and You Are in Good Company

MATTHEW 5:10-12

This is the eighth and final beatitude. Verses 11-12 are best understood as an expansion or commentary on it. Once more, at first blush the statement seems nonsensical. Take delight and be happy when people revile you, persecute you, and speak evil and lie about you. Really? That's like saying, "Be sad when people are good to you!" However, I left out two key phrases found in verses 10-11. The first key phrase is "for righteousness's sake" (v. 10 ESV). The second is "on my [Christ's] account" (v. 11 ESV). Now the words of our Lord come into spiritual focus, and their sense becomes perfectly clear.

Living a life that reflects these beatitudes and the righteousness of God is an invitation to persecution. You would think the world would applaud such a person! Actually, they nailed the example *par excellence* to a cross. Jesus told us, "You will have suffering in this world" (John 16:33). He told us again in John 15:18, "If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you." Paul adds in 2 Timothy 3:12, "In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Jesus is clear that people among all nations will act and speak evil against you. When it goes beyond words, which can certainly hurt and wound, you may experience rejection; loss of family, friends, or job; imprisonment; torture; or even martyrdom for Jesus's sake. When that happens, know you are blessed. When that happens, rejoice. When that happens, be glad. Like the apostles you were counted worthy by God to suffer dishonor for his name (Acts 5:41). Why? First, it is evidence that you are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven (v. 10). Second, a great reward awaits you in heaven (v. 12). Third, you will find yourself in excellent company, "For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (v. 12).

John Piper's practical application of these three verses is helpful:

So we can see why a life devoted to righteousness or godliness will be persecuted or reviled or spoken against.

- If you cherish [moral purity], your life will be an attack on people's love for [unbridled] sex.
- If you embrace temperance, your life will be a statement against the love of alcohol.
- If you pursue self-control, your life will indict excess eating.

- If you live simply and happily, you will show the folly of luxury.
- If you walk humbly with your God, you will expose the evil of pride.
- If you are punctual and thorough in your dealings, you will lay open the inferiority of laziness and negligence.
- If you speak with compassion, you will throw callousness into sharp relief.
- If you are earnest, you will make the flippant look flippant instead of clever.
- And if you are spiritually minded, you will expose the worldly-mindedness of those around you. (“Persecuted”)

Conclusion

Why are the Beatitudes such a beloved portion of the Bible for a Christian? I think I have an idea. We love them because they give us a portrait of Jesus and who we are becoming in him! No one sympathized with spiritual beggars more than Jesus. No one grieved over sin and a broken world more than Jesus. No one was more meek in submitting to God’s will than Jesus. No one hungered and thirsted for righteousness more than Jesus. No one showed mercy to others more than Jesus. No one sought peace between God and man, and between man and man, more than Jesus. No one suffered unjust persecution and evil against themselves more than Jesus.

I look at the Beatitudes and I see Jesus. I look at the Beatitudes and I see who I’m becoming in him. Blessed! Delighted! Happy!

Reflect and Discuss

1. Matthew 5:1-3 teaches that spiritual beggars will possess the kingdom of heaven. How does recognizing ourselves as spiritual beggars affect the way we live each day? How can we cultivate this identity more?
2. Citizens of God’s kingdom should grieve over their sin and sin in the world. Are there some sins that seem easier for us to grieve over and some that we too often overlook? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to give God a blank check? Is that call something you find inviting or scary?
4. How does God satisfy those who hunger and thirst for righteousness?

5. Explain what “mercy” is. Why is being merciful a requirement for receiving mercy?
6. How can we tell whether we are “pure in heart”? What does this mean for us, knowing that we will not be completely perfect until Christ returns (cf. 1 John 3:2-3)?
7. How does peace play a central part in the Bible’s story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration? How can we reflect and participate in that story with our own peacemaking?
8. Why is persecution a necessary part of the Christian life? How does Christ’s death and resurrection give us comfort in the face of persecution?
9. How has persecution been a fuel for the spread of Christianity? What rewards does God promise for those who are experiencing persecution?
10. The Beatitudes describe a high calling for the Christian. How do our relationship to God and our relationships to one another give us the ability to act in these ways?