

Matthew
An Introduction to the Beatitudes
Matthew 5:3-12
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Well, I encourage you to take your copy of God's Word and turn with me to Matthew, chapter 5; Matthew, chapter 5. In Matthew 5, beginning in verse 3, and running down through verse 16, here at the very beginning of “The Sermon on the Mount,” our Lord describes those who are truly citizens of His kingdom. Down in verses 14 to 16, He describes their powerful influence; they are salt and light—salt in a decaying world, light in a darkened world. But before that, in verses 3 through 12, Jesus describes the character of those who are truly His. We just read it a moment ago in Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1 to 12.

Now, we call these sayings of our Lord, “The Beatitudes.” The English word ‘beatitude’ actually comes from the Latin word that was used to translate ‘blessed’ in *Jerome's Latin Vulgate*. Then later, when it came into English, Myles Coverdale, William Tyndale's friend, used the word ‘Beatitudes’ as a heading for this section of Matthew's Gospel, and it stuck. So, now we refer to them as “The Beatitudes.” Some argue that there are nine Beatitudes, but most scholars agree that verses 10 through 12 outline just one Beatitude, since all three of those verses deal with the theme of persecution. So that means there are actually eight Beatitudes that are given to us here in Matthew's Gospel. Lord willing, next week, we'll begin to work our way through each of these magnificent statements of our Lord.

But today, in the few moments we have as we prepare for the Lord's Table, I want to make sure that we understand these as a whole. You see; to properly interpret each of them, we first have to understand the guiding principles for interpreting all of them. And there are four guiding principles of interpretation that should govern our study of these magnificent statements. Let's

look at these principles of interpretation together. The first principle is that “The Beatitudes describe all true Christians,” the Beatitudes describe all true Christians. Now that is true in three distinct ways. I would put it like this, first of all, “Every true Christian displays these qualities.”

The emphasis is on the word ‘every,’ there are no exceptions. In these condensed, powerful statements, Jesus describes those who truly belong to Him, who are in His kingdom. And we know this because of how Matthew, and probably our Lord, structured these Beatitudes. Notice, when you look at the eight, six of the eight have an attached promise about a future blessing. You see that in verses 4 through 9. But the other two of the eight don't have a promise of future blessing. Instead, the first Beatitude and the last Beatitude are actually statements of present reality. Notice verse 3, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Verse 10, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus means that the spiritual kingdom over which He reigns, and eventually the physical kingdom that He will establish, belongs to these people. By attaching that statement to the first Beatitude and to the last Beatitude, Jesus was wrapping all eight of these into a neat package. He's saying, “These qualities belong to all of those who are truly in His spiritual kingdom, the kingdom over which He rules.” So, every true Christian displays these qualities.

But not only is that true, I would put it a second way, and that is that “Every true Christian displays all these qualities,” every true Christian displays all these qualities. All eight of these are found to some extent in all of Jesus' true followers. Keep your finger here in Matthew and turn over to Luke 6, Luke's version of “The Sermon on the Mount” and The Beatitudes.” And in fact, you might want to put something here because we'll be back here in a moment. Luke, chapter 6, and look at verse 20. As Jesus begins, Luke says this, “turning His gaze toward His disciples, He *began* to say,” that is, “Now Jesus is saying this,” He's preaching this sermon, as

we saw last week, primarily to His disciples, those who claim to be His followers. And “He began to say to them,” verse 20, “Blessed are you who *are* poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” So, He's addressing this Beatitude and the last Beatitude, as it's parallel in Matthew's Gospel, we see, to those who are His disciples. All of these are spoken to His disciples, and these realities belong to all of them, and all of these qualities mark them; we'll see why in just a moment.

A third way to put this is that “Every true Christian must grow in these qualities.” So, every true Christian has them, every true Christian has all of them, but at the same time, every true Christian must grow in the display of these qualities. Although every Christian has them to some extent, there is an implied exhortation in our Lord's words, an implied command. We are to excel still more in pursuing these qualities. I mean, think about it, eight times Jesus says “blessed” (happy), are people who manifest these qualities. They're desirable, and therefore we should seek them in greater measure. In fact, as we'll see as we walk through “The Beatitudes,” in other New Testament passages, we are commanded to pursue with greater diligence these very qualities. So, every true Christian not only displays all of these qualities, but we must all grow in our display of these qualities. So, the first guiding principle then, for interpreting the Beatitudes, is remember as we go through them that they describe all true Christians.

A second guiding principle of interpretation, and this surprises many, is that “The opposites of the Beatitudes describe every unbeliever,” the opposites of the Beatitudes describe every unbeliever. Now, let me set this up for you. The New Testament is clear that there are only two spiritual kingdoms. Colossians, chapter 1, verse 13, Paul writes, “He (God) rescued us from the domain of darkness.” There's the first kingdom, “the domain of darkness.” In Matthew, chapter 12, verse 26, Jesus calls it “Satan's kingdom.” Do You understand that on this planet, there is a

spiritual kingdom over which Satan rules? It's the "domain of darkness;" it's Satan's kingdom. There's the first spiritual kingdom. Colossians 1:13, Paul goes on to say, "God rescued us from (Satan's kingdom) the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." Those are the only two kingdoms. And folks, listen to this, everyone who has ever lived in the history of the world has belonged to one of those two kingdoms. In fact, everyone alive today on this planet belongs to one of those two kingdoms. Let me make it even more personal; everyone sitting here this morning belongs to either the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of God's beloved Son. There's no neutral territory; there's no middle ground. You're either in Satan's kingdom or you're in the kingdom of God's Son. Those are the only two options. How can you know which kingdom you really belong to? Well, the Beatitudes describe those in Jesus' spiritual kingdom, but the opposites of these eight qualities describe those in Satan's kingdom. And Jesus made this very clear when He preached this sermon. Turn over again to Luke, chapter 6; Luke, chapter 6, and look at verse 20 again. Jesus began to teach them, saying:

Blessed *are* you *who are* poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed *are* you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap *for joy*, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

Now you'll notice here that Luke records only four of the eight Beatitudes that Matthew records. But Luke does something else that's very interesting; he includes four woes, four pronouncements of damnation on those who are the opposite of those who enjoy these blessings.

So, there are four woes that correspond to the four blessings. Look at verses 24-26.

But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe *to you* who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe *to you* when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.

Do you see what Luke is telling us? He's telling us that when Jesus originally preached this sermon, for every one of the positive descriptions of those in His kingdom, He listed the opposite corresponding description of those who are in Satan's kingdom. You see, we can test ourselves to see if we still belong to the kingdom of darkness, to the kingdom of Satan, or if we belong to the kingdom of God's beloved Son.

Now, turn back to Matthew 5 and let me show you how this works, verse 3, let's take the opposite. Unbelievers don't see themselves as poor in spirit; instead, they think they're spiritually rich. Verse 4, unbelievers don't mourn over their sin, they laugh, they take it lightly. To them, sin is a big joke. Verse 5, unbelievers aren't humble and gentle; they're proud and they're harsh. Verse 6, they don't hunger and thirst for righteousness; instead, they love their sin, or they see themselves as already full of their own righteousness. Verse 7, unbelievers don't show mercy to others, but they're unforgiving, they're brutal in their thoughts and in their words and their actions toward others. And listen, if you doubt that, just go on the internet, find the comment section on some web page, and you will see the human heart. Verse 8, unbelievers are not pure in heart; instead, their hearts are consistently dirty and filthy. Verse 9, they're not peacemakers; instead, they constantly incite arguments; anger and conflict mark all of their relationships. And verses 10 to 12, unbelievers are not persecuted for righteousness; other

unbelievers actually like them because they're just like them. So, when you come to the Beatitudes, when you come to these eight amazing statements of our Lord, you have to remember, number one, that “The Beatitudes describe all true Christians,” those in Jesus' kingdom. And number two, “The opposite of the Beatitudes describes all unbelievers,” those in Satan's kingdom.

There's a third principle for interpreting these sayings, and it's “The qualities in the Beatitudes are produced in us by grace alone,” the qualities that are listed in these Beatitudes are produced in us by grace alone. Now, let me take that statement apart in three different ways. First of all, let me put it this way; “These qualities are not natural to us.” As we saw in Luke, unbelievers by nature demonstrate the very opposite. Unbelievers naturally consider themselves to be spiritually rich. “I'm good enough for God,” or “My good things outweigh my bad.” They laugh about their sins; they make jokes about it. And the same thing holds true for all of the other qualities that Jesus lists here. These qualities aren't natural.

In fact, think about it this way, Christian, we are all born into Satan's kingdom. When you came into this world, you belonged to Satan's kingdom, and if nothing has happened to change that reality, you are still in Satan's kingdom. There has to be a radical change, a change Jesus called the “New Birth,” in which the Holy Spirit radically changes your heart. You see, the reality is, left to ourselves, these things still describe us. But we need to be changed, we need to be made different, and that's the work of the Holy Spirit. Until we're changed, we're all characterized by exactly these opposite qualities. You know, a lot of people think Christianity is about, you know, trying to be a better person, trying to turn over a new leaf, trying to work harder at pleasing God, trying to earn your way into God's favor. Listen, the truth is, none of these qualities are natural. You cannot demonstrate them until the Holy Spirit changes your heart.

Secondly, I would say that “They're not merited or achieved.” The first beatitude makes this crystal clear. Jesus says that to be in His kingdom, you first have to become (What?) “poor in spirit.” Literally, we'll look at it next week, “a beggar in spirit.” You have to admit that you are spiritually bankrupt, that you haven't merited or achieved anything that matters to God; that what you have to offer God, He doesn't want. Instead, we only get into the kingdom of Jesus by grace—that was the good news He preached. Jesus taught that sinners like us could get into His spiritual kingdom. How? By what He would accomplish in His work on the cross. In Mark, chapter 10, verse 45, Jesus said, “The Son of Man (speaking of Himself, the Son of Man) came...to give His life as a ransom for many.” In Greek, the word ‘for’ there is actually ‘instead of,’ ‘in the place of.’ “He came to give His life as a ransom instead of, or in the place of, all who would believe in Him” (Paraphrase). Belonging to Jesus' kingdom and therefore displaying these qualities, this is only possible by God's grace alone. That brings us, as we think about this point that these qualities are produced in us by grace alone, to this third way to express it that I think is so crucial, and that is this.

“These qualities are produced in us at the new birth through the work of the Holy Spirit.” The reason that all true Christians display these qualities and are growing in these qualities is the new birth. We have been changed by the Holy Spirit. That happened at the moment of our conversion, and we began to demonstrate, to some extent, all of these qualities. But at the same time, the Holy Spirit came to take up residence in us. He lives within us, and by His work and His presence in our hearts, He continues to produce these qualities in us. Galatians 5:22, (Right?) “The fruit the Spirit (produces in us) is,” what? It goes on to list virtues, some of which are here in the Beatitudes.

Lloyd-Jones writes, “We are not told in the Sermon on the Mount, ‘Live like this, and you'll become a Christian.’ Rather, we are told, ‘Because you are a Christian, live like this.’” You see, there has to be a heart change, where, by God's grace, by the powerful work of His Spirit, He changes your heart and begins to produce these qualities within you. If we're going to interpret the Beatitudes rightly, we have to remember these guiding principles” “They describe all true Christians;” “Their opposites describe every unbeliever;” and “These qualities are not natural—they're not achieved or merited, but they are produced in us by grace alone, through the work of the Spirit alone.”

That brings us to a fourth guiding principle, and that is that “Jesus is the only One who perfectly lived out the Beatitudes.” When we look at these eight qualities that are listed here, Jesus perfectly kept and displayed them all except for one. Which is the one that Jesus didn't display? It's the first; Jesus never admitted His spiritual poverty. Why? Because He wasn't spiritually bankrupt. He's the only human to be truly rich in every spiritual virtue. And the New Testament describes Jesus' moral perfection, really, in three separate affirmations. I just want you to be reminded of these.

First of all, and this is truly incredible, “He has never committed a single sin.” Now, just think about that for a moment, I know you know that as a point of doctrine, but remember, Jesus lived here, He lived on this planet, He lived in a household with six younger siblings. A very small house, I might add. And He lived, after His father died, bearing the responsibility for shepherding those six younger siblings, and they all rejected Him until after His resurrection. And He had to work hard in a business where He interacted with the public. Those of you who have such jobs, you know what that's like. And He never committed a single sin, never a sinful thought, never a sinful attitude, never a sinful word, never a sinful act! 2 Corinthians 5:21, He

“knew no sin.” Hebrews 1:9 says, He “LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HE HATED LAWLESSNESS.” Hebrews 7:26, our high priest is “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners.” How was He separated from sinners? Because He wasn't one.

But secondly, another affirmation the New Testament makes about Jesus, not only did He never commit a single sin, “He has never had a sin nature.” John makes this point in 1 John 3, verse 5. Listen to what he writes there, this is different than “He didn't commit a sin.” He says, “In Him (in Jesus) there is no sin;” “in Him there is no sin.” That's making a different point than that He didn't commit a sin. John's point is that Jesus never had a sin nature. In Him, there was nothing sinful at all. And by the way, the form of His statement there is timeless. He's referring to Jesus' entire existence, His pre-existence as the eternal Son of God, His incarnation during the thirty-three years He was on this planet, His current state in heaven, and His eternal state. Jesus Christ always has been, is, and always will be without sin in His essential and eternal nature. He eternally exists without a nature stained by sin.

But that brings us to a third affirmation that really brings us back to the Beatitudes. It's not just that “He never committed a sin” or that “He never had a sin nature.” Thirdly, “He is positively righteous in every way.” That means “He perfectly demonstrates these qualities.” 1 John 2:1, “Jesus Christ (is) the righteous.” 1 John 3:3, “He is pure.” 1 John 3:7, “He is righteous.” That's all of the qualities, the virtues, that are described in the Bible, including these qualities. So apart from the first, being a beggar in spirit, which He was not, Jesus is the only One to perfectly manifest the other seven of these qualities. Think about it, although He never mourned His own sin because He had none, we find Him, even during His earthly life, regularly mourning over the sins of others, including even the sins of Jerusalem that they were going to be destroyed because of their sin. He is the humblest, gentlest person to ever live. From childhood, He hungered and

thirsted for righteousness. He is always merciful, the “bruised reed He never breaks and the smoking wick He never extinguishes” (Paraphrase). No one has ever been purer in heart than Jesus is. And He is history's greatest peacemaker—He brought peace between God and us. And He brought peace between Jew and Gentile in His church, and we see in today's news how difficult that is. Jesus is the Prince of peace. Because no one has ever been more righteous than He is, no one has ever been more wrongly persecuted than He was.

So, friends, understand that Jesus manifested these qualities perfectly. But here's where it comes to us. Amazingly, by His grace and through the work of His Spirit, He has changed us so that we have already begun to reflect His moral character. He's already begun to produce these qualities that are perfect in Him, in us. And someday, we will perfectly exhibit these qualities. Christian, let me just encourage you. if you have repented and believed in God's Son as your only hope of eternal life and of forgiveness and of being right with God, if that's your condition today, then He's already begun to produce His moral character in you. But someday, you will still be you, you'll still have your personality, your own distinctiveness, but who you are will perfectly reflect the moral character of Jesus Christ. These qualities won't be in you to some extent; they'll be in you like they're in Jesus. You will be like Him in that way.

So, let me ask you today, “Do all of these qualities describe you?” I'm really asking, I'm asking you in your own heart of hearts to think about this, “Are you a ‘beggar in spirit,’ or do you think you're spiritually rich? Do you ‘mourn’ over your sin, or do you laugh at sin, take it lightly? Are you humble and ‘gentle,’ or are you proud and harsh with other people? Do you ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness,’ or do you love your sin? Or do you think you're already filled with righteousness in and of yourself? Are you ‘merciful,’ or are you unforgiving, consistently brutal in your thoughts and attitudes and comments toward others? Are you ‘pure in heart,’ or is your

heart constantly dirty? Are you a 'peacemaker,' or are your relationships filled with conflict and anger and unwillingness to forgive? Are you sometimes 'persecuted,' insulted, ridiculed because you try to be and do what's right before God? Or do you so perfectly blend in with unbelievers that they don't see you as different at all?" Lloyd-Jones writes these really insightful words. He says:

My immediate reaction to these beatitudes proclaims exactly who I am. If I feel that they depict a type of life which I dislike, then I'm afraid it just means that I'm not a Christian. If I do not want to be like this, I must be dead in trespasses and sins. I can never have received new life. But if I feel that I am unworthy and yet I want to be like this, however unworthy I may be, if this is my desire and my ambition, then there must be new life in me. I must be a child of God. I must be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven and of God's dear Son. (And then he ends with these sobering words.) Let every man examine himself.

Friend, if your life is characterized by the opposite of these Beatitudes, then Jesus would tell you today that you are not His, you are not a Christian, you don't belong to His kingdom. But let me give you the good news. Even today, if you are willing to repent of your sins and to turn to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, then God, today, will transfer you from the kingdom of darkness, Satan's kingdom, into the kingdom of His beloved Son, and He will give you the new birth. He will change your heart where these qualities begin to be demonstrated in your life. If you're here this morning and your life is characterized by the Beatitudes, not perfectly, but you look at your life and you go, "Yes, I can see these things, and this is my desire, this is what I long for," then Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is already yours. Today, you belong to His kingdom. And it's the fact that we have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness, Satan's

kingdom, into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, by Jesus' sinless life, by His substitutionary death, and by His supernatural resurrection, it's that fact that we celebrate in the Lord's Table.

Take a moment, confess your sin, and prepare your heart as the men come.

Our Father, we are so grateful that for many of us in this room, we look at these Beatitudes, and while we don't see them to the extent that we want to see them in our lives, we do see them. We recognize, Oh, God, that we are not the people we used to be, that You have changed us, that we now love what we once hated, and we now hate what we once loved, that You have given us an insatiable hunger for righteousness, that we mourn over our sin, that we acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy, that we want to be like Jesus. Father, that is not natural; that is because of the work of Your Spirit in our souls. And we give You thanks, O God. And we thank You that through Jesus' perfect life, lived in our place, through His substitutionary death, and through His glorious resurrection, and by working repentance and faith in our hearts, in Jesus, You have transferred us from the kingdom into which we were born, the kingdom of Satan, into the kingdom of Your beloved Son. Father, we praise You, we thank You.

And as we come now to remember His life, death, and resurrection in this ordinance, Lord, we come confessing our sins. I pray that right now, for all who know and love You, that Your Spirit would bring to mind those sins that each of us needs to confess to You, sins of thought, sins of attitude, words spoken, actions that in some way dishonor You, that disobey Your Word. Lord, bring those things to mind and help each of us in our souls right now to confess those sins to You. Thank You, O God, that You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, that the blood of Your Son keeps on cleansing us from all sin. Father, we are so grateful. We want to come to remember our Lord in this amazing ordinance with clean hands and pure hearts. So, forgive and cleanse us even now, and may we come truly in

worship, remembering all that He has accomplished on our behalf. We pray it in His great name.

Amen.