

**The Beatitudes**  
**Matthew 5:1-10**  
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- I. The Person of the Christ (1:1-7:29)
  - A. The Incarnation of Christ (1:1-2:23)
  - B. The Preparation of Christ (3:1-4:11)
  - C. The Beginning of Christ's Ministry (4:12-25)
  - D. The Beginning of Christ's Teaching (5:1-7:29)

Matthew introduces the public ministry of Jesus by establishing that His ministry would be based in Galilee. While Galilee was originally part of the kingdom of Israel, after the Assyrian invasion of the Northern Kingdom, it was considered to be largely a Gentile land. In this land, Jesus would choose His disciples and train them to reach the nations, and His ministry would involve preaching, teaching and healing which would draw multitudes. This previews what Matthew will develop in the rest of this Gospel.

One issue regarding the sermon on the mount is how it compares to Luke 6:17-49. Much of the material in this passage in Luke is similar and even identical to Matthew 5-7. One difference is that Luke describes Christ as standing on a level place (Luke 6:17) rather than up on a mountain (Matthew 5:1). Most consider the level place to be on the mountain and that these are two versions of the same message by Jesus.

Evidence supporting the view that Luke and Matthew provide somewhat different reports of the same message is as follows:

- The level place would only make sense if it was in an area of significant elevation, else there would be no ability to describe a place as "level" without a surrounding context.
- The order of the message follows the same sequence in both, with Luke being a much briefer version, omitting Matthew 6:1-34 entirely.
- While Luke omits much of what Matthew includes, Luke also includes some of what Matthew omits (e.g. Luke 6:24-26). This is common in the Gospels with select material that overlaps in many but not all places.
- The place of this message differs in each Gospel account (e.g. Matthew is called by Jesus before this sermon in Luke) but Luke records events chronologically while Matthew records them topically. This is no different than other messages by Jesus.

The beatitudes recorded in Luke reference economic issues (poor in 6:20, 24 and hunger in 6:21, 25) which should not be conflated with Matthew's record of spiritual issues (poor in spirit in 5:3, hunger and thirst for righteousness in 5:6). Both are true in their own right and neither writer misrepresented Christ's words.

### **The setting of the Sermon on the Mount (5:1-2)**

The audience listening to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:3-7:27 were the disciples but not only the disciples since we know the crowds that gathered were astonished at His teaching. We can therefore conclude that this teaching of Jesus was intended for a broad audience, not simply those who are devoted followers. This teaching of Jesus would be important for everyone, regardless of their spiritual condition.

Yet while this passage is relevant to a broad audience, much of the teaching is directed to His disciples. Phrases such as, "you are the light of the world" (5:14) assume the hearers are His true followers. God is repeatedly referred to as their Father. The warnings about persecution coming (5:11-12) and false prophets (7:15-18) would be heard by followers who could be vulnerable. They are instructed in true righteousness in contrast to their religious leaders and Jesus speaks of their reward.

But much of the last chapter (7:13-14, 21-27) is directed at the multitudes. So it is impossible to strictly characterize the audience and thus the Sermon on the Mount is profitable for all hearers.

Much of the sermon is about the future. The use of the future tense occurs throughout these three chapters. Jesus and John had taught that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (3:2, 4:17). These teachings instruct the disciples about bearing good fruit in keeping with repentance, the message of both John and Jesus (3:8-10; 7:19). This fruit describes those whose destiny is the kingdom of heaven.

It is worth noting how Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5-7 is developed in the epistles, particularly in the book of James. Paul (Philippians 3:12, Colossians 3:13), Peter (1 Peter 1:15), and John (1 John 2:1) taught the importance of keeping a high moral standard in separation from sinful behavior. James taught that true faith brings the fruit of good works (2:14-26). The application of spiritual truth to life is the meaning of bearing fruit in keeping with repentance.

## **The construction of the beatitudes**

Matthew 5:3-10 is a distinct section of Jesus' sermon as seen in how it is packaged. Each beatitude states the characteristic that describes a blessed person and each characteristic is followed by a corresponding promise of God that constitutes the blessing.

While very similar, Matthew 5:11-12 is different from the eight beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-10 in one significant way: it is grammatically in the second person rather than the third person. The beatitudes are therefore general statements to mankind while 5:11-12 are specifically to those who are true disciples.

Each beatitude begins with the word "blessed." Some translations and many Bible teachers translate the word "blessed" (Greek, *makarios*) as "happy." The idea of happiness does not convey the true spiritual meaning as people can be very happy about many spiritual things. Happiness is more of an emotional, fleeting outflow of an event while blessedness is an established approval by God that does not fade.

When we are blessed by God's promise we can be confident in our Lord for His future provision. The promise of each beatitude is established by God in the future, as seen in the word "shall" (5:4-9) and in the future kingdom of heaven (5:3,10). Blessedness will come as God's favor, not in our achievement. God's approval is rooted in our character more than in our behavior, yet our behavior is the fruit of our character. This is why the essence of the Christian life is the internal love of God in our heart, mind and soul rather than the external conformity to a code of conduct.

The content of the first ten verses of Matthew 5 deals with the godly character of those believers in the Son of God. This is foundational to the rest of this sermon for who we are will determine how we think, which will determine what we do. Thus these characteristics that Jesus described as blessed are essential for the reception of the rest of His teaching.

### **Blessed are the poor in spirit (5:3)**

Being poor in spirit is to recognize our own unworthiness before a holy God. We are in great need and are in no place to demand anything from God. Because we are repentant in light of the kingdom of heaven being at hand, we humbly acknowledge our dependence on God rather than pridefully consider ourselves righteous. The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector (Luke 18:9-14) describes the contrast between being poor in spirit and full of ourselves.

The poor in spirit will enter the kingdom of heaven while the self-righteous will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). This promise of the kingdom of heaven results from the attitude of our heart, not our performance, wealth, reputation or ministry to others. This attitude comes from God's grace, through our faith, so that we have no place to boast in our privileged state (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The first beatitude (5:3) and the last beatitude (5:10) both promise the kingdom of heaven. The two beatitudes bookend this section of Scripture. This is a literary device (known as an *inclusio*) that serves to unify the passage together. All eight of these beatitudes are united by this promise regarding the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, the middle six beatitudes are connected to the kingdom of heaven.

### **Blessed are those who mourn (5:4)**

Mourning is a sense of grief or deep sorrow. The reason for mourning is a matter of debate. Some view it as similar to being poor in spirit, as a great sense of personal failure over sin. Some view it as related to persecution, which is also found in Matthew 5. Some relate it to the afflictions of life that are healed in the kingdom (cf. Isaiah 61:1-11).

What helps us with understanding the cause of this mourning is the parallelisms within these eight beatitudes. We have already seen the parallel between the first and the eighth beatitude. This beatitude parallels the seventh beatitude in grammatical construction. Both of the promises found in Matthew 5:4 and Matthew 5:9 are future passive promises ("for they shall be"). As we will see, there is a grammatical relationship between Matthew 5:5 and 5:8 as well as between Matthew 5:6 and 5:7.

Since Matthew 5:4 is connected grammatically with Matthew 5:9, we can conclude that there is a relationship between mourning and peacemaking. The similarity between mourning and peacemaking is a humble sense of deferring our rights and will for the sake of a greater good. While not divorced from our personal sense of spiritual need, the mourning from persecution not only aligns with the greater context (5:10-12) but also fits the work of peacemaking in light of such persecution. When we are persecuted, there is a despair over such mistreatment. The sorrow should move us to peacemaking rather than conflict creation. The ungodly respond to misfortune and distress with anger that leads to conflict, whereas the godly respond with mourning that leads to peacefulness.

### **Blessed are the gentle (5:5)**

The word “gentle” can be translated “meek” and is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Matthew 5:5 is mirrored by 5:8 in that both promises are a future transitive verb with a direct object (“for they shall”). Both promises involve the coming kingdom which will be on earth (5:5 - “shall inherit the earth) and with Christ reigning (5:8 - “shall see God”).

It has been observed that Psalm 37:9,11 also speaks of this same promise:

*Psalm 37:9: For evildoers will be cut off,  
But those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land.*

*Psalm 37:11: But the humble will inherit the land  
And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.*

Between these two verses about the humble who wait on the Lord inheriting the earth is this statement regarding deliverance from the wicked in Psalm 37:10:

*Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more;  
And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there.*

So in the Old Testament, the inheritance of the earth is in the context of the persecution of ungodly men. This also matches the context of the beatitudes (Matthew 5:10-12, speaking of the Old Testament prophets being mistreated).

We can conclude that Matthew 5:5 does not speak about a vague sense of gentleness but gentleness in response to the oppression of the wicked. The godly response to such evil against us is the humility that Jesus displayed (Matthew 11:29; 12:18-21; 21:5). Indeed, Peter instructs us to refrain from retaliation since Christ is our example of entrusting ourselves to Him who judges righteously rather than rely on our self-defense for relief (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Since those destined for the kingdom of heaven will always be the few (Matthew 7:13-14) and can never overpower the children of the flesh, there is no practical ability to truly deliver the Church to societal righteousness in this present age. We patiently await the coming kingdom, doing the will of God in the ministry of the gospel for true deliverance. Human efforts to reform the world’s system are more than doomed to fail; they are a distraction from the true work of God.

### **Blessed are the those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (5:6)**

The promise of a deep desire for righteousness is satisfaction. Matthew's use of righteousness throughout his Gospel is in an ethical sense, unlike Paul's use of the term in a positional sense. This is not the imputed righteousness of Christ through justification by faith but the practical application of righteous living according to God's will.

The satisfaction for this longing for righteousness will come when we inherit the earth in the millennial kingdom. This coming kingdom will bring true righteousness in a full sense as we will enjoy our resurrected bodies that are imperishable, untainted by our sinful nature (1 Corinthians 15:42-57). Not only are we no longer battling our flesh but the Lord will reign on earth according to His will (Revelation 20:1-4). This is the ultimate satisfaction of our righteous longing and what Jesus instructs us to pray for (Matthew 6:10).

### **Blessed are the merciful (5:7)**

We can see this beatitude has the same grammatical structure as the last one, a future passive promise ("for they shall"). The practice of being merciful is the product of our desire for righteousness. Our ability to be merciful is because of God's mercy upon us (Matthew 18:21-35). Because God does not bring the punishment of sin upon us, we can forgive others (Luke 6:36).

Merciful people are forgiving (Matthew 6:12-15), compassionate (Matthew 9:13) and long-suffering (Matthew 18:33). Those eager for judgment demonstrate their lack of faith in God's Spirit to minister grace in the lives of others. That mercy is connected to the deliverance of righteousness with the coming of Christ in the prior verse shows that God's mercy and God's justice are not in conflict with each other. The fulfillment of God's mercy is to justly deliver the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven to those who were once alienated from God. Our ministry ought to reflect this characteristic of mercy rather than considering the judgment of man brings the righteousness of God.

While this fifth beatitude is connected with the fourth, it is also linked with the following three beatitudes. The first four beatitudes relate more to our personal character in relationship with God (poor in spirit, mourning, gentle and longing for righteousness). The second four beatitudes relate more to our personal conduct in relationship with others. In the fifth beatitude, we ought to treat others with mercy since mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:12-13).

### **Blessed are the pure in heart (5:8)**

Certainly being pure in heart is an inward sincerity of our submission to the Lord. But Matthew uses the word “hypocrite” in his record of Jesus' words fourteen times in comparison to only four for the other Gospel writers combined. The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes the hypocrisy of the religious leaders.

The Pharisees are described by Jesus as the opposite of being pure in heart. As hypocrites, they were concerned with their outward appearance of purity, rather than the inward reality of true purity (Matthew 23:25-26). Their lack of sincerity produced grave abuse of their followers.

The promise of seeing God is like the other promises of the beatitudes- reserved for the age to come. In this life, no one can see God (Exodus 33:20). But when Christ comes in the kingdom, we will see Him:

*“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 John 3:2-3).*

### **Blessed are the peacemakers (5:9)**

Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7) and will be the final peacemaker. But in this present age, Jesus did not come to bring peace:

*“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.” (Matthew 10:34-36).*

Peacemaking is a characteristic of God but in the service of Christ, it is impossible to obtain in a complete sense. We should not initiate but should seek to reduce it (Matthew 5:39). We should strive for peace, as far as it depends on us.

*“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (Romans 12:17-19).*

When we serve as not only being peaceful but working to bring about peace, we prove ourselves as part of God's family. When the Lord makes full peace in the age to come, we will enjoy the full blessing of peace on earth with all those with whom He is well-pleased (Luke 2:14).

**Blessed are those who have been persecuted (5:10)**

Just like the prior characteristics of those in the kingdom of heaven, persecution will come to them as well. This was promised by Jesus (John 15:18-25), Peter (1 Peter 4:12-14) and Paul (2 Timothy 3:12). The promise of the kingdom of heaven links to the first beatitude to close out this section.

Persecution for Jesus' sake is a testimony to our place in the kingdom of heaven. This truth will become a theme through this Gospel, which is why this subject is expanded upon by Jesus in Matthew 5:11-12. While the role of persecution serves to refine our character (cf. James 1:2-4), it truly is not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us, (Romans 8:18) for if God is for us, who is against us (Romans 8:31)?

**Conclusion**

There is a remarkable parallel between the beatitudes and the order of the condemnation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:

<b>Verse</b>	<b>Trait</b>	<b>Pharisees</b>
5:3	Poor in spirit	Loved places of honor (23:6-12)
5:4	Mourning	Devour widow's houses (23:14)
5:5	Gentle	Proselytizers (23:15)
5:6	Hunger for righteousness	Made false oaths (23:16-22)
5:7	Merciful	Neglected mercy (23:23-24)
5:8	Pure in heart	Inwardly self-indulgent (23:25-26)
5:9	Peacemakers	Inwardly lawless (23:27-28)
5:10	Persecuted	Fathers murdered the prophets (23:29-36)

Clearly, the antithesis of the righteous character that is exhibited by those of the kingdom of heaven is the unrighteous character of the Pharisees. Matthew 5:1-10 not only serves as a description of true righteousness but as an early rebuke of the religious leaders of Judea.