
LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 5:1-16

To understand the what a truly blessed person looks like according to the Beatitudes.

#Blessed

It has become all too common. Surfing through social media, you come across a picture of a brand new car, newly purchased and still on the lot. A friend or family member is standing next to it, beaming with happiness, stunned that they are about to drive this new acquisition home, and to sum up the whole sequence of events is one word: #blessed.



It seems rather intuitive, and yet when one stops to consider what it means to be blessed, it's not as clear as it should seem. In fact, if ten people were asked what it meant to be blessed, there is a high probability that you would get more than one answer back, although they all likely would have things in common.

Jesus, on the other hand, tells us what it means to be blessed, and it's not at all the kind of definition you would expect. As it turns out, it has nothing to do with financial prosperity, a fun vacation, a lucky break, or a new house. What does the blessed person look like? The blessed person is, "poor in spirit, mournful, gentle, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking, and have been persecuted, insulted, and falsely spoken about" (vs.3-11). Not exactly the kind of person you'd call, "blessed." Perhaps if we understand the actual definition of what it means to be blessed, we will perceive life a bit differently.

A Greater Moses?

Matthew is really good at making connections to the Old Testament, as we have already seen. In this segment, there are a few details that should not go unnoticed.

THE FIRST DISCOURSE

As mentioned in the introductory session, Matthew's Gospel has five major discourse sections. Think of Matthew as a movie that is being narrated by someone, and the discourse sections are scenes where the actual actor is speaking. While the Gospel According to Matthew says much about *who* Jesus is, it also records *what* Jesus actually said. The so-called, "Beatitudes" are the first of five discourse sections. There *might* be a small correlation here. The five discourse sections *might* correlate to the five books of the Torah that Moses authored. I emphasize, "might" because the New Testament never explicitly tells us that this is the case.

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GOING UP THE MOUNTAIN

When God issues the Ten Commandments to Moses, Moses goes up onto Mount Sinai to receive them (Ex. 20:20). In the same way, Jesus is seen going up the mountain to issue these statements. In some way Matthew, once again, *might* be portraying Jesus as the new, "law-giver." That's not to say that Jesus didn't actually go up onto a mountain. The region where this was all happening had plenty of hillsides and mountains to travel up and down. The fact that Matthew details this, however, is interesting.

BLESSED AND COMMISSIONED

The Beatitudes are a series of blessings that Jesus defines for those who are following Him. In the same way that the LORD blesses the people of Israel before commissioning them to follow Him on Mount Sinai, Jesus gives a blessing and then immediately calls for their obedience in the rest of this chapter. This sequence in some ways mirrors that of the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness.

The Eight Blessings

Jesus next issues eight blessings, and as can be seen, they are quite counter to what the modern world (and the ancient world for that matter) would have thought of as a blessing.

1. BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT (V.3)

This should not mean a, "poor quality of faith." Rather, this is someone who recognizes precisely how destitute they are apart from saving faith in Christ, and therefore rely entirely upon the saving grace of God. In this sense, "the kingdom of heaven," is not their reward, but the direct consequence of their reality. No one can enter the kingdom without full reliance on God's saving grace.

2. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN (V.4)

The idea of mourning once again is connect to the spiritual condition not only of the believer, but the fallen world they live in. This is someone who mourns over personal loss as a result of sin, and injustice that others face at the hands of evil people. God will comfort them now, and even more fully in the future kingdom when evil and pain is eradicated.

3. BLESSED ARE THE GENTLE (V.5)

The word for, "gentle" is better understood as, "meek." It's a word that mean, "power under control." This was used to describe Roman war horses, animals with incredible power but trained to do exactly what was commanded of it. There is also a sense of humility here, and likely a connection to Psalm 37:11. Poor people often had no ownership over their land, and were oppressed by evil landlords (James 5:1-6), but in the future kingdom, believers will rule over all of the new heavens and earth with Jesus (Revelation 20-22).

4. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (V.6)

This taps into the basic needs of human life, but applies them in a spiritual sense. These are individuals who so strongly desire to see the kingdom of God come to full fruition. They will be satisfied in the future kingdom, because God will not allow unrighteousness to continue.

5. BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL (V.7)

This blessing is both practical and looks to the future kingdom. It is true in general, that people who are merciful often receive mercy. It is also true that merciful individuals are shown mercy in eternity, because of their saving faith in Christ.

6. BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART (V.8)

Purity is a word often used in the sense of ritual cleanliness, but here is applied to the heart. This makes sense, as Jesus later says, “out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts...” (Matt. 15:19). This is a person who has a strong bent towards moral uprightness. This also harkens to Psalm 24:4 and 73:1. A pure heart is what God requires of every believer.

7. BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS (V.9)

This is often understood as, “peacekeepers” and incorrectly so. Jesus is not asking us to keep peace by avoiding conflict, but to make peace from already existing conflict. He tells us later, “Do not think that I came to bring peace... but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). Conflict is a necessary reality of the Gospel. However, we are to do everything within our grasp to end conflict by making peace. This is a quality that every Christian should strive for.

8. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN PERSECUTED FOR THE SAKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (VS.10-12)

Everything mentioned are qualities not celebrated by the world, and thus one should expect persecution as a result of following Jesus. Persecution for the sake of obedience to Christ then is a blessing in and of itself, because it indicates obedience!

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Matthew 5:1-2. Describe in your own words what is happening in these verses. Where did the crowds come from (Think back to the end of chapter 4)?
2. Who is Jesus' audience while He is teaching? The crowds or His disciples or both? Why?

Day Two

1. Read Matthew 5:3-6. In your own words, write down the first four blessings, and describe why they are true and what the result of each of them are.
2. These four blessings describe four different characteristics of a believer. What do all four characteristics have in common and how are they different than the next three blessings?

Day Three

1. Read Matthew 5:7-9. In your own words, write down the next three blessings, and describe why they are true and what the result of each of them are. These three also all have something in common. What is it?
2. Read Matthew 5:10-12. How is this blessing the result of properly doing what the first seven blessings ask of us? Why are believers to respond with rejoicing and gladness if eighth blessing happens?

Day Four

1. Read Matthew 5:13-16. What two illustrations does Jesus use to show His followers how they should live their lives? What do these two examples mean?
2. What are ways in which a follower of Christ might lose their saltiness or cover up their light? What is the result when that happens? What are practical ways Christians can be more effective in, “letting their light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven?”

Week 7 Discussion: How Blessed?

In Matthew 5:3-12, Jesus unfolds what it looks like to be a blessed person, and it is shockingly quite different than the world defines it. Discuss together as a group how you fare in each of these, and which ones you could use improvement. Be honest! Honesty is where true growth occurs.

1. Icebreaker: Before this study, how would you have defined what it means to be blessed? Did that answer change after the study?
2. Read Psalm 1:1-3. What does the Psalmist say the blessed man is like? What is he not like? How does this passage correlate with the Beatitudes (Hint: Read verse 3)?
3. Which of these eight Beatitudes do you feel like you are the best at? Which of them do you have the most difficulty with? For example, if you are someone who is good at mediating between people who are in disagreement, that would mean you excel in peacemaking. On the contrary, if you are someone who holds grudges or is unforgiving, you may not be the most merciful individual. Discuss this as a group.
4. While Christians in the United States don't face the same type of persecution that some Christians in other parts of the world face, they do still face some adversity. What type of adversity have you faced for being a Christian? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
5. How should a Christian respond to persecution? Use Scripture if possible.

Takeaways:

1. Jesus' definition of being blessed is very counter to how the world defines it. We are to reflect the characteristics of the Beatitudes if we truly desire to live the blessed life.
2. Followers of Jesus who are truly obedient will face persecution and adversity for living out their faith, and this persecution should serve as an indicator that they are doing something right.

PRAYER REQUESTS: