

Matthew 5:1-12
The Blessings of the Kingdom

Jesus begins his sermon, his new law, by pronouncing a series of blessings. This already is remarkable. In the Law of Moses, God gave a list of commandments to be kept. And he pronounced blessings on those who kept them. In other words, the commandments came first and the blessings followed upon their keeping.

But here the blessings come first and make no prior requirement other than a broken spirit and a contrite heart — faith, in other words. This is the difference between the principle of Law and the principle of grace. The Law says, “Do this and you will live.” Grace says, “Here is life for the asking. Take it and walk in it.”

Therefore these blessings divide into two parts. First we see the blessings upon those who have nothing, on the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Then we see the blessings upon those who walk according to this grace, those who show mercy, who are pure in heart, who make peace.

And lastly we see the blessing upon those who embrace this ethic and are persecuted for it.

I. Blessings on Those Who Have Not

A. Poor in Spirit

1. Blessed are the poor, he starts!
 - a) Forget about the “in spirit” for a moment.
 - b) The first four words out of his mouth are startling. They set the tone.
 - c) The poor it would seem are by definition NOT blessed.
 - d) If they are, where is the sign of it?
 - e) Jesus signals from the outset that he is about to radically reinterpret what it means to be blessed by God.
2. Jesus is here alluding to Isaiah 61
 - a) The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound
 - b) In Luke, Jesus read this in the synagogue and said, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”
 - c) In Matthew, he will allude to it again when John the Baptist asks whether he is the Messiah or not— Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵“The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.
 - d) When the Messiah comes, he brings a blessing to those who cannot see it or hear it or walk toward it or offer him anything in exchange.
3. And so the blind, the lame, the deaf, the poor become symbolic of a SPIRITUAL condition, a condition of having nothing to offer God, no way to compel him to give his blessings.
4. Those who are poor IN SPIRIT recognize this. They know that apart from the grace of God they are blind and deaf and lame and destitute.
5. They have nothing to offer for this blessing
6. But they receive it in faith
7. Jesus tells them the kingdom is theirs, and they believe him.
8. Thus the blessings of the kingdom are begun
 - a) God’s blessing in this kingdom will go out to those who do not deserve it, cannot buy it, and can never repay.
 - b) The blessing goes out freely as an act of God out of his mere good pleasure.
 - c) To those who know their poverty, this is good news indeed.
9. Parable of Pharisee and tax collector
10. So the blessing continues to come to us as we remain poor in spirit.
11. The kingdom is yours not because you deserved it or can earn it but because it is the Father’s good pleasure to give it to you.

B. Those Who Mourn

1. Again, a surprising statement.
2. Again, almost by definition, those who are full of grief would seem NOT to be blessed.
3. But in the kingdom of God, they are supremely blessed and their tears shall be wiped away.
4. What sort of mourning are we talking about?
 - a) The first blessing gives us a clue
 - b) It is a spiritual mourning.
 - c) They mourn because they are full of sin and cannot remove it.
 - d) They mourn because they cannot present themselves to God and are miserable apart from him.
 - e) They mourn because they are brought low by the curse that came into the world because of Adam's sin
 - (1) They are perhaps sick or weak or wretched in other ways.
 - (2) And the weariness of this life grieves them and they long for the rest that Adam lost
5. IOW they mourn over the fall, and they mourn over the curse.
6. And they shall be comforted.
 - a) In the last day, their tears shall be wiped away
 - b) Their faith in Christ will be vindicated and clothed in his righteousness, they shall enter eternal rest
 - c) Therefore, they are blessed NOW

C. The Meek

1. Jesus now quotes Ps 37:11
2. Let's look at the context —
 - ⁷Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
 - ⁸Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—it only *causes* harm.
 - ⁹For evildoers shall be cut off;
But those who wait on the LORD,
They shall inherit the earth.
 - ¹⁰For yet a little while and the wicked *shall be no more*;
Indeed, you will look carefully for his place,
But it *shall be no more*.
 - ¹¹But the meek shall inherit the earth,
And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.
3. So it is not those who swagger around and boast in their strength who are blessed.
4. It's not the movers and the shakers, the planners and the doers
5. It is not those who APPEAR to be blessed, i.e. the evildoers who prosper
6. These are not the ones upon whom the Father has set his love
7. But rather those who wait patiently for the Lord to save his people and establish his kingdom, they will be blessed by inheriting what God is preparing for his people.
8. So the wicked become merely the caretakers—and not very good caretakers—of that which will be restored and handed over to God's people in the last day.
9. Jesus will later hold himself out as the example of meekness—Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
10. And we have already seen it in him
 - a) Born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, ministering in Galilee of the Gentiles
 - b) He chooses fishermen as disciples
11. So he will continue
 - a) Ministering to the poor and needy
 - b) And humbling himself to serve his disciples, even to the point of death.
12. So let us receive this inheritance in meekness and walk with meekness toward one another, even as our Savior did toward us.

D. Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

1. Not those who have righteousness, but those who need it.

2. They recognize that they do not have what they most need to stand before God
3. They do not attempt to manufacture that righteousness by their own efforts
 - a) Vos—"A Jew lives in you and me and in every human heart by nature."
 - b) But the Law has proved that no one can be righteous enough to stand before God
 - c) So we must abandon that idea and hunger and thirst for what we do not have.
4. Vos — "A satisfying righteousness therefore must be provided for the people of God. And it must be provided outside of us. To eat means to be nourished from without. Since the sinner is devoid of all righteousness, it is self-evident that the source of his supply must be sought beyond the confines of his own evil and empty nature. For it to be otherwise would mean that hunger could be stilled with hunger."
5. They shall be satisfied
 - a) A righteousness imputed to them
 - b) They shall behold God's face in righteousness and be satisfied.

II. Blessings on Those Who Act Out of Grace

A. The Merciful

1. This is something Jesus says again and again in Matthew.
2. In this very sermon he will go on to say that if we do not forgive the sins of others, our sins will not be forgiven.
3. What can this mean?
4. Is Jesus after all establishing a covenant of works with us
 - a) If we do this for him (forgive) then he will do the same for us
 - b) If this is so, then all is lost!
 - c) How can we forgive until we have been forgiven?
 - d) How can we show mercy until we have received it?
5. For this very reason, Jesus does not pronounce this blessing first
6. Rather, he first pronounces blessings upon those who have nothing.
7. Then, when he has filled us with the knowledge of those blessings, he calls us to act in the strength they provide.
8. If we say God has been merciful to us, yet we show no mercy, have we really apprehended the mercy of God?
9. Therefore let us often reflect on the amazing mercy of these first four blessings that we may be moved by that to show mercy to one another, being tender-hearted and forgiving one another.
10. And God, in turn, will bless us further. Indeed our own actions will be a testimony of the mercy of God to us as well as to others.
11. So this blessing turns us back to the earlier ones to understand the mercy of God that we may be made merciful and thus be further blessed.

B. The Pure in Heart

1. Here we are given a theme that Jesus will go on to develop in this chapter
 - a) Purity is a matter of the heart
 - b) The Jews thought they could make themselves ritually pure with ceremonial cleansings and thus stand before God.
 - c) But that sort of purity is insufficient for the reward here promised, the sight of God face to face.
 - d) The purity that God seeks is a purity in the inmost being, in the secret recesses of our hearts.
2. But how can we provide this?
3. This blessing also turns us back to the earlier ones.
4. We hunger and thirst for what we do not have and God will bring that about in our inmost being.
5. Think of it!
 - a) What good would it be to say that we will see God, even though our hearts are not pure?
 - b) God's design is much better.
 - c) He will purify our hearts and THEN he will bless us with seeing God face to face.
6. So we are here offered blessing upon blessing
 - a) First the blessing that comes to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. We shall be satisfied. We shall be made righteous to our very core.
 - b) Then the blessing that comes upon those who are righteous to their very core.

C. The Peacemakers

1. Under Moses, it was the warriors who were blessed.
2. For Israel came announcing God's judgment against the Canaanites.
3. But now God comes offering peace.
4. And since he has made peace with us (1st 4), let us make peace with one another and with all men.
5. Then we shall be God's ambassadors, his very sons, announcing peace just as God's firstborn Son came to announce it.

III. Blessings on Those Who Are Persecuted for Righteousness

A. A Surprising Blessing

1. Like many before it.
2. Again, it would seem that the persecuted are by definition NOT blessed.
3. We can believe that they WILL be blessed ... someday ... for their struggles.
4. But Jesus puts this in the present.
5. How are they blessed?

B. For Theirs Is the Kingdom

1. Already the Kingdom belongs to them.
2. Already they are citizens of it.
3. They have received the righteousness they hungered for, and now they are persecuted for it.
4. No matter.
5. The persecution becomes the occasion of further blessing.
6. For as they suffer, they realize that the Kingdom indeed belongs to them and all that they value is there and cannot be taken away from them.

C. For So They Persecuted the Prophets

1. Thus they are identified with those whom God has loved before.
2. Thus they are identified with Christ.
3. To suffer for righteousness is to suffer for Christ
4. To suffer for righteousness is to suffer WITH Christ
5. It is a fellowship in his own sufferings.
6. And these sufferings lay up a reward in heaven that is "great," beyond all compare.
7. Therefore we ought to REJOICE in suffering, if it is not because of our sin.
8. What can assail these blessings, then? Or what can take them away?
9. If even persecution and suffering serve only to increase the blessings that citizens of this kingdom have, then the blessings are secure.
10. And if even suffering is glorious in this kingdom, how much more glorious will be the day in which Christ is revealed?
11. Let us therefore suffer patiently, even rejoicing in our sufferings as we wait for the day of his appearing.