

Citizens of the Heavenly Realm

Matthew 5:1-12

Jesus looked around and saw lots of people around him. He went up the mountain to talk to them, so they could hear him better.

This is what he wanted to teach them:

When you are feeling down and think you're worthless, know that you are blessed. For God's kingdom is yours.

When you are sad because someone has died, know that you are blessed and you will be comforted.

When you feel like you have nothing to offer, know that you are blessed, because you will be given everything.

When you are hungry and thirsty for God, know that you are blessed and that God will fill you up.

When you are kind, even when you don't have to be kind, know that you are blessed. Because God notices and will be kind to you.

When your eyes and hearts are open to God, know that you are blessed, because you will see and feel God.

When you try to bring people together in peace, know that you are blessed, because that's what God's children are supposed to do.

When people make fun of you because you love me, says Jesus, you can be happy about it, because that's exactly what they have done to all of God's people before you.

As the youth read today's translation of the scriptures, many of the adults may have felt a little uncomfortable. There were many familiar passages we have memorized from the King James or American Standard settings. The meaning and usage of words changes over time and place. And for our youth, vocabulary and usage of language grows over time. This morning we had Dynamic Versions of the texts; attempting to hold the general meaning, but using accessible language.

Meaning of Blessed

Beatitude is a word that today is only used in reference to this passage in scripture. The word is from Latin, (the language of the Italic people, again not so relevant today), meaning 'to make happy.' In English we use the word, "blessed" or "bless-ed". Again, the meaning seems to have been diluted. Think of a word from today, something everyday. This may be different depending on our age.

Here is an idea: "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. *Chill*, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus, they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

In the book, *The Applause of Heaven*, author Max Lucando defines blessing as: "Blessing is a sacred delight. It is God doing what gods would be doing only in your

wildest dreams. It is good news coming through the back door of your heart. It is what you have always dreamed but never expected. It's the too-good-to-be-true coming true. It is having God as your biggest fan, and your best friend. It is sacred because only God can grant it, it is delight because it thrills."

Welcome to the "Sermon on the Mount"

Our Gospel readings from the Book of Matthew have brought us to Chapter Five. Matthew was an accountant. I am an accountant. We love order. If we were doing a book study this morning, we would see Matthew presenting the Ministry of Jesus in a perfect triune order. The Tenfold Message in Chapters 5–7 (The Sermon on the Mount, or sometimes The Kingdom Manifesto), The Ten Miracles in Chapters 8-10, and to those The Ten Reactions in Chapters 11-18. Our reading today of The Beatitudes, part one of Jesus' message, describes the citizens of the kingdom.

Each of the Beatitudes has two parts; the joy and the reason for that great happiness. The first and the last here are the same: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The six in the middle are all future rewards: "they shall". The kingdom is now and also shall be. Jesus in the Gospels proclaimed the kingdom is at hand; it is already breaking into the world, yet it is not fully revealed. It is here among us and it is indeed still coming.

Today we learn what may be a new word for the youth: paradox. It is a statement that contradicts or seems to contradict itself, yet often expresses a truth, such as "Less is more". God's kingdom is now because the Spirit of Jesus is with us; but, the heavenly kingdom is not here yet.

We can look at the Beatitudes as a process:

First, we recognize our own state, or condition, before God. Poverty in spirit is recognizing your insufficiency to earn God's blessing. "All have sinned and fall short of God's holy standard." We are sinful, yet special (again a paradox).

Knowing and understanding our spiritual condition we mourn and repent. Our grief expressed over our poverty of spirit ignites God's forgiveness, which brings cleansing to our heart and restores our relationship with the heavenly Father.

In the remaining six Beatitudes, we begin to resemble the Christ. When he issued the call, "Follow Me," he referred to a new life that is radically different from a life without Christ. The change is not outward; it is not a Hollywood version of Extreme Christian Makeover. God remakes us heart, soul, mind, and strength; from the inside out.

Now begins the development of our inner life. Blessed are the meek, hungry, and merciful; submitting, trusting, and forgiving are not natural tendencies. Meekness is allowing the almighty to shape your life as the master designer. Hunger, the quest to know God is never completed this side of heaven. Mercy, the most defining characteristic of Christ is forgiveness.

Next, we mature into an outward expression of Christ's life. Blessed are the pure, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. Each of these describes the ministry of Christ. Through purity we gain access to God. Peacemakers are the Children of God. "Sonship" was the highest place of honor at that time; people lived in extended family or tribal groups. Finally, we will join Christ in his suffering.

Ultimately, our discipleship will have a push-back from the mainstream. We must lay down grievances and pettiness and extend this blessedness to others. That's what allows us to pray for those who persecute us and to "be at peace with all humanity". (Rom 12:18)

Contrast the Mainstream (world)

Blessed are the beautiful, for they shall be admired.
Blessed are the wealthy, for they have it all.
Blessed are the popular, for they shall be loved.
Blessed are the arrogant, for they shall be promoted.
Blessed are the famous, for they shall be followed.

Purity of heart, peacemaking, mercy, doing justice, loving kindness, walking humbly with God; foolishness to many who are scrambling for bigger, better, and more. The New Testament reading: "God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the work of bringing life and hope; those who count for nothing."

We are living in a contentious time; frightening to many. It is especially important that we exhibit the character of Citizens of Heaven. For those of us called to action in Social Justice, even more important that we bring peace. The weapons with which we fight are not human weapons, they are not physical. Our victory is through the Spirit; God is mighty and is overthrowing strong fortresses.

Who will live in God's house?

Those who do what is right and speak the truth.

God's people don't try to trick others, or make fun of their neighbors.

Those who honor God and keep their promises, and do not cheat others. (Psalm 15)

God says, "Here is what I want from you: I want you to treat everyone equally, I want you to be kind and I want you to remember me with every step you take." (Micah 6:8)