

## Blessed are the Broken

Matthew 5: 1–8<sup>i</sup>

### Repentance That Leads to Salvation

Immediately after Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, he was led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. After that, we are told in Matthew, chapter 4:

<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to preach... Matthew 4:17 ESV

And, furthermore,

<sup>23</sup> ...he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues **and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom** and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. Matthew 4:23 ESV

This led to immense crowds from all across the region gathering to hear and see this Rabbi from Nazareth in Galilee. Some were perhaps desperate, others merely curious, “But whatever the motive”, as G. Campbell Morgan wrote,

..., they came, all sorts and conditions of men. People jostled each other who had never done so before; Pharisees side by side with publicans; ritualists side by side with harlots, and sinners; men of light and leading, and the scholarly men of the age, side by side with the illiterate, the degraded, the depraved. The presence of Jesus meant the massing of humanity without any reference whatever to the mere accidentals of birth, and caste, and position.<sup>ii</sup>

And to all, Jesus’ message was the same. “Repent,” he cried, “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and John R.W. Stott wrote,

The Sermon on the Mount, then, is to be seen in this context. It portrays the repentance (metanoia, the complete change of mind) and the righteousness which belong to the kingdom. That is, it describes what human life and human community look like when they come under the gracious rule of God.<sup>iii</sup>

It describes what we might call true, Gospel repentance—the godly sorrow that leads to salvation without regret, spoken of by the Apostle in Second Corinthians, chapter 7. Even so, in Matthew 5, verses 1 and 2:

<sup>1</sup> Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them... Matthew 5:1–2 ESV

And this is what He said:

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<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Matthew 5:3–6 ESV

And before we go any farther we need to notice a couple of things about each of these blessings, or “beatitudes”, as they are commonly called. First, note that in each and every case there is the adjective, “blessed”, that describes a person who possesses a certain quality, followed by a promise which states the reason for the pronounced blessing. But each begins with Jesus stating the blessing as an objective fact. He does not say, “You will be blessed with a future possession of the kingdom of heaven if you will just become poor in spirit now.” There is no commandment here to be pursued. There’s simply a statement of fact. This is a construction we see over and over again in the Psalms.

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers... Psalms 1:1 ESV

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage! Psalms 33:12 ESV

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! Psalms 84:4 ESV

<sup>12</sup> O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you! Psalms 84:12 ESV

And the list goes on, but the point is that in no case, either in the Psalms or in the Beatitudes, is the promised blessing put forward like a carrot on a stick. We’re not being told, “Give it a try; see if it works for you; see what it feels like to be blessed and maybe you’ll like it.” We’re simply being told that this is a fact. This is the truth.

<sup>3</sup> “**Blessed** are the poor in spirit... <sup>4</sup> “**Blessed** are those who mourn... <sup>5</sup> “**Blessed** are the meek... <sup>6</sup> **Blessed** are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...” Matthew 5:3–6 ESV

Part of our problem here, I think, is that we have so impoverished the word blessing, that it’s most commonly used now as a benediction over someone who just sneezed. In a slightly more “religious” way, we sometimes say, “*God* bless you,” but what does that even mean in context with a sneeze? To bless has been reduced to something akin to “you’re in my thoughts,” and, again, thank you, but what exactly does that mean?” It’s sad, really. One modern dictionary even offers this definition, “bringing you happiness, luck, or something you need.”<sup>iv</sup> So, now to be blessed is pretty much the same as having good luck, which, for someone who does not believe, is probably true.

But consider Numbers chapter 6, verses 22 – 27. There we find that very familiar instruction:

<sup>22</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>23</sup> “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, <sup>24</sup> The LORD bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Now, notice especially the last verse. God said:

<sup>27</sup> “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, **and I will bless them.**” Numbers 6:22–27  
ESV

And when Almighty God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, blesses you, you are truly blessed. It’s not a matter of whether you feel it. It’s not a matter of whether or not you can see it on the CT scan results, or your bank balance. It’s a simple statement of fact. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:

<sup>3</sup> **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,** Ephesians 1:3 ESV

Now, I don’t know if we all woke up thinking about that this morning—I suspect not—but whether or not you did, it’s simply true. If we belong to God through faith in Jesus Christ (and this, not of ourselves), then we *have been blessed* (past tense) in Christ with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places. That means right here, right now (world without end, amen!)

Even when it seems that the promise is in the future tense (“for they shall be comforted...” or, “for they shall inherit the earth...”) the adjective, “blessed” describes the person in his present condition, not the person as he shall one day be. In other words, it’s true that one day, “the meek **shall** inherit the earth”. It’s equally true (and perhaps more importantly) that the meek are blessed even now, because the promise is already an absolute certainty. And this holds for “those who mourn”, and for “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” as well.

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It’s important too, because otherwise the question would arise, “Isn’t Jesus teaching some sort of salvation by works here? In John Stott’s words:

Does not Jesus state clearly, for example, that the merciful will obtain mercy and the pure in heart will see God? And does not this imply that it is by showing mercy that we win mercy and by becoming pure in heart that we attain the vision of God?ʸ

But, no; just, no. The scriptures do not contradict themselves. They have a single author. The Son of God who spoke the beatitudes is one in essence with the Spirit of God who breathed out Ephesians 2, 8 and 9.

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> **not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** Ephesians 2:8–9 ESV

And even the first of the beatitudes pronounced by Christ here in Matthew 5 told us,

<sup>3</sup> **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven** Matthew 5:3 ESV

This is in itself a beautiful proclamation of salvation by grace through faith. It’s as if Jesus were saying, “Blessed are the broken. Blessed are those who come in faith with no merit of their own.” Like the old gospel song,

**Nothing** in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling;

**naked**, come to thee for dress; **helpless**, look to thee for grace;

**foul**, I to the Fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.<sup>vi</sup>

Because this is true poverty of spirit. This is gospel repentance. As someone has said, we contribute nothing...absolutely nothing...to our salvation except the sin that made it necessary. So, the Sermon on the Mount is not a moral code or “The Law 2.0”. It’s a description of the life which is blessed by God, and at each point, we discover that far from commending us for our righteousness, or even giving us a target to aim for, the beatitudes point us to the reality that it is truly in Christ alone that we have any hope whatsoever of salvation. As Calvin wrote:

It deserves our attention, that he only who is reduced to nothing in himself, and relies on the mercy of God, is poor in spirit...<sup>vii</sup>

But then, poverty of spirit brings that godly sorrow I mentioned earlier; the godly sorrow that produces repentance which leads to salvation, and without regret. So, blessed, then, are those who mourn. Blessed are those who have seen themselves in the light of God’s perfect holiness and then mourned their sinful condition. They shall be comforted as they learn that Christ has fully paid for all their sins; that it was never about their works, but rather about His.

Furthermore, “Blessed are the meek...” and once again the meekness of which Christ speaks should be understood in relationship to God. “The meek,” wrote G. Campbell Morgan

...are those who are obedient to the rule of the King; meekness is the submissive spirit, the spirit of true humility, which is unconscious of humility; the spirit that rejoices in the Kingdom already established, on account of the comfort already given, and waits for orders, and does not obtrude itself.<sup>viii</sup>

Instead, the meek man who will inherit the earth is so, because he hungers and thirsts after a righteousness **not his own**, and “Do *not*,” writes the commentator,

...make this a small and narrow personal experience. It is that, but it is infinitely more. It is the passion for the setting up of the Kingdom of God amongst men.<sup>ix</sup>

So, of course, those who hunger and thirst for the righteousness—the justice—of God will be filled. The kingdom will continue to be established and the kingdom, by Christ’s own word, is already theirs. The Kingdom belongs to such as these.

### For Theirs Is the Kingdom

If the Lord is willing we’ll come back to this next Sunday when we consider the remaining beatitudes but for now, one last thing. While it would be accurate to say that all the promises of Jesus here have both a present and a future element such that we enjoy the firstfruits now while the full harvest remains for another day,<sup>x</sup> there are two which are stated definitively.

Verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, **for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** Matthew 5:3 ESV

and verse 10:

<sup>10</sup> “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:10 ESV

Frankly, by this alone we know that the beatitudes are a description of the life of faith, and not a prescription for the salvation of those who can attain this unattainable standard. In another place, Jesus said,

<sup>3</sup> ...“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3 ESV

Unless we are born again—unless we are saved—we cannot see the kingdom, much less then could we know that it is ours. This prompted Martin Luther to write,

Christ is saying nothing in this Sermon about how we become Christians, but only about the works and fruit that no one can do unless he already is a Christian and in a state of grace.<sup>xi</sup>

In other words, the life described in the Sermon on the Mount is for those who have been born again; those who have seen the kingdom of God and know by faith that they are citizens there.

Going forward, then, The Sermon on the Mount was not meant to make us feel inadequate or inferior; it is meant to turn our hearts to God, for just as the Kingdom comes progressively in time and space—it has come, it is coming, and one day it will come in all its fullness when the glory of the Lord is revealed at His return—even so our sanctification. We have been sanctified; we are being sanctified; and one day we will be like Him in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, for we will see Him as He is.

Then, we will see as we have been seen, we will know as we have been known, and we will rejoice eternally in the gifts that we possess already in this present age as we wait for “our blessed hope”,

<sup>13</sup> ...the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:13–14 ESV

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i All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).  
ii G. Campbell Morgan, *Studies in the Four Gospels: An Exposition of the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in One Volume* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1927, 1929, 1931), 38.  
iii John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 18.  
iv Cambridge Dictionary. 2024. “Blessed.” @CambridgeWords. March 6, 2024. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/blessed>.  
v Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 35.  
vi “Trinity Hymnal (Rev. Ed.) 499. Rock of Ages, Clef for Me | Hymnary.org.” n.d. Hymnary.org. Accessed April 13, 2024. <https://hymnary.org/hymn/TH1990/499>.  
vii John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, vol. 1* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 261.  
viii Morgan, *Studies*, 44.

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ix Morgan, *Studies*, 44.

x Cf. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 35.

xi Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 21* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 291, quoted in Stott, 37.