

The Difference

Matthew 5: 7–16ⁱ

Blessed Are the Broken.

Blessed are the broken, or, to use the words of Jesus:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit... Matthew 5:3 ESV

Blessed are those who recognize that they have no goodness—no righteousness—of their own, and so, come to God poor, helpless, and mourning over the state of their hearts—mourning over the sin that they find there. And, indeed,

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:4 ESV

Those who have this view of themselves and of the world—this understanding that they can contribute nothing at all to their salvation—will approach the Lord in meekness and humility. They will come to Him with the understanding that when their righteousness is not measured against the standard of others, but against the perfect holiness, righteousness, and purity of God, they will always turn up empty. But, that’s OK, because

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5 ESV

Of course, none of these things are acceptable to the world, especially today. Just this past week I was looking online for a copy of John Owen’s book, The Mortification of Sin, and, presumably because my self-esteem is low enough to look for such a book, Amazon thoughtfully suggested what they claimed was a related book called, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and this under the tagline, “Start living the life you know you deserve.” So, apparently the broken are not blessed, nor do we need a Savior. A good cognitive behavioral therapist would do the trick.

See, outside of Christ, these words of Jesus describing what some have called “the upside-down kingdom” where the first shall be last and the last shall be first, make no sense at all. But that’s the point. John R.W. Stott wrote.

Jesus emphasized that his true followers, the citizens of God’s kingdom, were to be entirely different from others. They were not to take their cue from the people around them, but from him, and so prove to be genuine children of their heavenly Father.

He went on:

There is no single paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount in which this contrast between Christian and non-Christian standards are not drawn. It is the underlying and uniting theme of the Sermon; everything else is a variation of it... Thus the followers of Jesus are to be different—different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious.ⁱⁱ

And this—the difference between Christ’s people and the world—is something that we have to carry with us through our study if we want to understand what Jesus was saying, not only

here in the Beatitudes, but throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Our human nature—which is to say, “Our pride”—may react badly to the idea that it is only the broken who are ultimately blessed by God, but we’ve seen it in all of the Beatitudes so far, and we see it again in verse 6, the fourth of the great blessings pronounced by the Lord.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Matthew 5:6 ESV

Of course, the difference here can be seen in the fact that Jesus spoke a blessing upon those who hunger and thirst, when the world would rather say, “Blessed are the satiated. Blessed are those who want for nothing at all. Blessed are the comfortably well off.” But the difference can also be seen in the fact that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied, not with the things of the world. Not with “perishable things such as silver or gold”ⁱⁱⁱ, or even with the delicacies of a five star kitchen, but with the righteousness of Christ Himself.

Blessed are the Merciful.

And we see the difference again right away when we pick up the text in verse 7, where Jesus went on to say:

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” Matthew 5:7 ESV

Now, once again, “Blessed” describes the merciful in the here and now. As we noted last Lord’s Day, these Beatitudes are not merely promises of blessing in some far off day. The blessing applies today, and it describes, in this case, the one who shows mercy to others, mercy being defined in the simplest terms as basic

compassion or forgiveness...^{iv}

So, why not simply “Blessed are the compassionate”? or “Blessed are the forgiving”? The answer is found in the latter half of the definition. The answer is found in the object of such “compassion or forgiveness”. Specifically, mercy can be defined as

compassion or forgiveness shown towards an enemy or person in one’s power.

See, a little later in the Sermon on the Mount—verse 46 of this chapter—Jesus would say:

⁴⁶ ...if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? Matthew 5:46 ESV

This is a principle that will come up more than once, so I don’t want to dwell on it for too long, but again, notice the difference the quality of mercy demonstrates between the children of God and the children of the world. Even tax collectors according to Jesus, considered to be the lowest of the low in Judean society, love those who love them, and no doubt they are willing to show a measure of compassion or even forgiveness in that direction too, but those who are in Christ extend that same quality of compassion and forgiveness even toward their enemies.

This was the force behind the parable of the good Samaritan. A man, the Samaritan, who had every reason to despise and ignore the one who had been beaten and left for dead, chose instead to show compassion, and through that compassion, forgiveness for one who most likely, under different circumstances, would have despised him back.

The parable of the unforgiving servant serves as another example, at least in a negative sense. But consider the best example of all. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote:

The perfect and central example of mercy and being merciful is the sending by God of His only begotten Son into this world, and the coming of the Son. Why? Because there is mercy with Him. He saw our pitiable estate, He saw the suffering, and *in spite of the law breaking*, this was the thing that moved Him to action. So the Son came and dealt with our condition.^v

It's also worth noting that as the Son "dealt with our condition," beaten, battered, and bleeding out on a Roman cross, He looked upon the criminals who were crucified to His right and left, and upon the soldiers who after they nailed Him to those rough timbers went on to cast lot for His garments, and upon those who stood by, not only watching but scoffing, and He prayed for them:

³⁴ ... "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34 ESV

An old spiritual says, "What wondrous love is this?" but really, it's the very incarnation of the mercy and compassion of God. We need to keep that scene in mind when we read in Colossians chapter 3, that we are to

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Colossians 3:12-13 ESV

For,

Nothing proves more clearly that we have been forgiven than our own readiness to forgive.

wrote John R.W. Stott.

To forgive and to be forgiven, to show mercy and to receive mercy: these belong indissolubly together...^{vi}

Indeed,

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Matthew 5:7 ESV

Blessed are the Pure in Heart.

Of course, as verse 6 flows into verse 7, verse 7 flows into verse 8, and we read there:

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8 ESV

And we could just camp here. Of all of the beatitudes, if any of them deserve their own sermon, or even a series, it would be this. “They shall see God.” What an incredible promise to those who are, in themselves,

¹² ...separated from Christ...**having no hope and without God in the world.** Ephesians 2:12 ESV

It is the answer to Jesus’ prayer:

²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, **to see my glory** that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. John 17:24 ESV

It is the fulfillment of David’s words in Psalm 37, verse 4.

⁴ **Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.** Psalm 37:4 ESV

because when we delight ourselves in the Lord—when God becomes the desire of our heart—then He gives Himself to satisfy our hunger and thirst for righteousness. And this is the very definition of what it means to have a pure heart. A pure heart is a heart that is not divided. It is the heart of one who seeks above all else to love the Lord his God, heart, soul, strength and mind. It is a heart that cries with the Psalmist:

²⁵ **Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.**

²⁶ **My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.** Psalm 73:25–26 ESV

“Here,” as G. Campbell Morgan noted,

...we have more than cleanness; we have wholeness, the undivided heart, the heart that is utterly and absolutely loyal.^{vii}

And here is the reward. “They shall see God.” Another commentator asked, “...why is this statement put here? You would have thought, perhaps that it should have come at the beginning, because...to see God is the whole purpose of all religion.”^{viii} He offered an interesting answer, but I want to propose another. As incredible as the promise, “They shall see God” truly is, the condition—the description of those to whom this promise is made—would have been overwhelming to the point of despair if Jesus had started here, because only a fool, knowing his own heart, would hear this and think, “Well, OK then.”

Hearts Made New

As the prophet Jeremiah said:

⁹ **The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?** Jeremiah 17:9 ESV

That’s why the Disney advice to “follow your heart” just may be the worst advice ever given. Besides, on another occasion Jesus Himself said:

¹⁸ ...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person..." Matthew 15:18–20 ESV

And if we are honest we know it's true. If we are honest, our spirit resonates with the Psalmist when he cried to God,

³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Psalm 51:3–5 ESV

And even this level of self-awareness is the work of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the grace of God (and that's the key here), we *are* truly wicked enough to hear Jesus words and think we'd be OK. Which is why Jesus began with "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." Blessed are those who understand who they are, and who God is, and who come not in self-righteousness and pride but with an empty heart, who come, praying along with David,

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ **Create in me a clean heart, O God...**

(a pure heart; an undivided heart),

...and renew a right spirit within me. Psalm 51:7–10 ESV

And this too is the work of the sovereign God. It is the point of our salvation and the power of Christ's atoning sacrifice, and all of the beatitudes reflect just this. We come to God poor in spirit, mourning our sin, meek, hungry and thirsty for a righteousness that we can never attain. We come in brokenness, admitting to all that the world denies about the human heart. We come in emptiness...and God fills us. He satisfies. He comforts and blesses. He gives us Heaven and earth, and most of all He gives us Himself, and, as in the song:

God alone is enough. God **alone** is enough.

Whoever has God, wants for nothing at all.^{ix}

Oh, may God give us grace to grasp the reality of this; to understand that in the end, this is the greatest difference of all.

¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹ Corinthians 13:12 ESV

This is the promise of God to all those who in their brokenness turn to Him through faith in Jesus Christ. Even so,

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8 ESV

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- i All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).
- ii 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, 19.
- iii Cf. 1 Peter 1:18.
- iv Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- v D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount: Volume One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 100.
- vi Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 48.
- vii 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), 44.
- viii Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 106.
- ix "God Alone Is Enough Lyrics - John Michael Talbot." n.d. FlashLyrics. Accessed April 21, 2024. <https://www.flashlyrics.com/lyrics/john-michael-talbot/god-alone-is-enough-41>.