

### Illuminating the Beatitudes, Pt. 4 (Mt 5:1-12)

This morning, our gospel passage<sup>1</sup> included a cluster of some of Jesus' hardest sayings, particularly the ones regard our response to abuse, such as His teaching to "turn the other cheek" and "give the shirt off your back", which are often misunderstood as Jesus calling us to be doormats. So, back in August I unpacked Matthew's version of those teachings with a sermon that I believe ended up being our YouTube page's most watched sermon in four years. But rightly so, because it showed how Jesus' intent differed significantly from the common understandings of these hard sayings. So, I commend you to check out the sermon from August 25th of '24 if you missed it.<sup>2</sup> And I can shamelessly plug that, because none of them were my original ideas, but were based on the scholarship of the Bible Project, like this series on the Beatitudes that I want to conclude today.

So, returning to Matthew's Beatitudes, which are recounted on the chart (see later pages), each begin with the phrase "Blessed are..." And remember that this phrase is not meant to be read as a *command*. Rather, Jesus is providing revelations about the truly good life that can only be found/received through Him. But, on this chart, I've put the original scripture from Matthew in the middle column, while the right-hand column is meant to clarify, using modern language, what the series has taught seems to have been what Jesus meant with each of them, based upon scholarship of Biblical word studies and the cultural context Jesus lived in.

So, after the first three sermons of this series,<sup>3</sup> Beatitudes 8 & 9 are what we have left to re-interpret in this way. But I want to go ahead and jump to Beatitude 9. The Ninth is a summary or conclusion to the first eight, but I want to look their first because Jesus makes a subtle but significant change here, in contrast to the first eight. Where for the first eight Jesus had over and over said "Blessed are *those*", here in the ninth Beatitude Jesus changes to object from the third person to the second person; He changes it from "those" to "you". So, just looking at the original text of this ninth Beatitude, you'll see that Jesus now speaks directly to the listener - to us, the read- and says,

"<sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

So, where we might tend to read those first eight Beatitudes (at least in the original language) as abstract ideas or imagine other people who might really benefit from understanding their (true) meaning, here Jesus is turning to each one of us, as if to ask: "Do you hear what good news I'm inviting you to embrace in any of the Beatitudes?"

And so, before unpacking eight (and nine) this morning, I want to briefly review the first seven and invite each of us to open our ears to where the Spirit of Christ might speak to (each of) our hearts and invite us to take a new step of trust in Him. ...Because the good news is that every step we take toward believing in Jesus' Beatitudes, any new step we're willing to risk (taking) toward living like they're true is another step into the truly good life.

So, my encouragement here would be to just let my review of these Beatitudes' meaning just wash over you. But if one hits you - if the Spirit gives a gentle prick to your heart - Pay attention to how God

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 6:27-38

<sup>2</sup> Manuscript: [https://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/files/ugd/8c239b\\_9638aa1f4e914331a223a53723c5fc81.pdf](https://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/files/ugd/8c239b_9638aa1f4e914331a223a53723c5fc81.pdf) Video: <https://youtu.be/J-0ByRUF12U>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/beatitudes>

might be inviting you to take a step toward Him in that area. With each beatitude I'll try to make a suggestion or two of what such a step could be. And, particularly as we head into Lent, perhaps there is some way you could make that your focus for that season. [Again, the good news is that every step we take toward believing in Jesus' Beatitudes, any new step we're willing to risk (taking) toward living like they're true is another step into the truly good life.]

With the first three Beatitudes, Jesus is speaking good news to when any of us find ourselves in circumstances that no one would envy.

With the **first Beatitude**, I've clarified Jesus' meaning as "The (truly) good life belongs to those who are powerless, economically or spiritually, because they will more easily grasp their need for God's reign in their lives." And this is meant to be encouragement for *any way* you may be feeling downtrodden right now:

- maybe financially you're feeling really limited right now;
- or it's depression or anxiety or even more severe mental illness;
- perhaps you keep hitting up against emotional triggers from trauma in your past;
- or maybe you're struggling to believe in God at all.

In any of these states of hardship, Jesus shockingly insists that the good life can be had because while the Lord doesn't *desire* or *cause* such hardship for us, those circumstances *can* move us out of the lie self-reliance, which is encouraged in our society will absolutely hinders the Kingdom of God in our lives. # #

And piggybacking that, we come to the **second Beatitude**, that addresses grief. Whether at the death of someone we love, an unwanted change in a relationship, a frustrating change in society, or a change in our lifestyle we haven't chosen, grief is a necessary response to loss. But none of us *wants* to grieve; in fact, we might do everything we can to avoid it, because it is a painful journey. And yet, the capacity and willingness to grieve is actually a gift to our souls, the pathway to receiving God's comfort & peace. # #

Then, with the **third Beatitude** Jesus is speaking to anyone who feels marginalized or underprivileged or are on the margins of society, and promising a community - the Church - where all can be equal. Where He's calling away from evaluating people by the worldly standards of wealth or class or sex or ethnicity and instead to recognize the image of God in each other - meaning every soul is equally valuable.

So, all three of these first Beatitudes represent how it can be a gift - counter-intuitively, to be sure - when God redeems unwanted circumstances in our lives to break us free from self-sufficiency and toward reliance on Him and interdependence with others. So, if any of these strike at your circumstance, perhaps a response can be a simple prayer that God would help you out of the self-reliance that keeps us isolated and stuck in our pain, and perhaps even show you a step you can aim to take in the upcoming season of Lent. The good news is that every step we take toward believing in Jesus' Beatitudes, any new step we're willing to risk (taking) toward living like they're true is another step into the truly good life.] # #

Well, turning to the middle section, with **Beatitude Four** Jesus shifts our focus to consider how we relate to others. To "hunger and thirst for righteousness" is about hungering to relate more rightly and

Beatitudes 1-3: In Christ, the good life is surprisingly available to those who are without.		
ONE	<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	The (truly) good life belongs to those who are powerless, economically or spiritually, because they will more easily grasp their need for God's reign in their lives.
TWO	<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.	The (truly) good life belongs to those who grieve, because the failure to grieve loss will leave our souls disquieted.
THREE	<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.	The (truly) good life belongs to those on margins, the unimportant & afflicted, for they will inherit earthly community as God intended.

healthily - to those close to us. Is there a relationship where you struggle to have much empathy, or perhaps one where the struggle is to live with healthy boundaries? Or is relating to our loved ones more healthily even as a radar as something we're thinking about? It can be so easy to identify ways others relate to people (or us) dysfunctionally, but the truth is that we do as well, and *that* is where we actually have some authority to seek change.

However, we can't change ourselves: God is the changer of hearts; only He is more powerful than our sin. But acknowledging our need to Him lays the groundwork for God to build a desire in us for relational health that will surpass that *resistance* to change that comes with our sin-sickness. And if the Spirit has your attention on this, would just naming some of the dysfunctional ways we may fall short of loving others in grace & truth be something we'd be willing to do, to invite *Him* to lead our hearts toward loving people better? # #

Well, if Beatitude Four is about loving those closest to us more like Jesus does, with the **fifth Beatitude** Jesus is exhorting us to have eyes for situations where His Spirit will prompt us to love those *beyond* our close circle of family & friends with the generosity that we usually reserve for our inner circle. As we all know, this is often much easier said than done! But, the extent that we lack this holy reflex, is usually rooted to our own hearts not grasping God's generous love toward us. We can't give away what we aren't first receiving ourselves. So what can we do to change this?

Well, this is the purpose of any daily spiritual practice we might do. I know people pray and read scripture and may do any number of spiritual disciplines for all sorts of reasons, but the purpose of them *is* to get us to a place of receiving and resting in God's love for us. So, during Lent sometimes folks take on a new or different daily discipline that might deepen our abiding in God's love. Perhaps even just participating in the Icons thing on Wednesday night could be a step toward that?

But sometimes our hearts have been so hurt that just doing a spiritual practice is not always enough.

- Maybe we're really angry with God, and so before we can receive His love, we need to express that anger, without holding back.
- Or maybe we had significant deficits to the love we needed in our (more) formative years, which has led us

Beatitudes 4-6: Learning to engage with others the way Jesus did is the path to the truly good life		
FOUR	<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.	The (truly) good life comes to those who hunger and thirst for right & healthier relationships with those close to us, for God will guide us into them.
FIVE	<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.	The (truly) good life comes to those who treat their neighbors with the generous love most might only reserve for (their) family, since this requires us to open our hearts to the generous love of God, who always loves us this way.
SIX	<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.	The (truly) good life comes to those who open our hearts for God to heal our disordered desires, for this will lead us (more fully) into the wholeness and partnership with God that He intended for us all along.

Beatitudes 7-9: Becoming a presence of shalom in the midst of conflict (and disagreement).		
SEVEN	<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.	The (truly) good life comes to those who seek Shalom (well-being) for all, rather than living for themselves or seeking to win at others' expense, because this reflects the love of their Father in Heaven."
EIGHT	<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	The (truly) good life comes to those who are willing to be disliked for working toward shalom for all, because (in time) it even will lead to more shalom for us.
NINE	<sup>11</sup> Blessed are <u>you</u> when people insult <u>you</u> , persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against <u>you</u> because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is <u>your</u> reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before <u>you</u> .	If you are willing to be disliked like me (Jesus) and to love others like I do (seeking shalom for all), even when you have life circumstances that no one would desire, rest assured that the (truly) good life will be yours, now and in eternity.

into a place of self-protection now - consumed with only looking out for ourselves because we didn't experience someone adequate looking out for us. # Well, those deficits aren't our fault, and yet Jesus may be inviting us to take a courageous step toward exploring that pain with Him or in safe spaces with those skilled to guide us in that. #

And this leads neatly then into the **sixth Beatitude**, where Jesus emphasized His desire to free us from the sin that still binds us. Personal moral failings that may be habitual or impact our well-being in significant ways – gossip, rage, resentment, lust, or other addictive behaviors - our supposedly personal and private sin doesn't just impact us; it interacts with how we interact with everyone around us. Recently I had this realization that I was carrying a resentment toward someone - no one here! - and that it was making me more prone to cop a resentment toward any and everybody - making it so hard to forgive! Well, here again, naming those desires before God - in confessing our sins to another believer, a very Lenten thing to do - each of these can be a next step we can take toward freedom. The good news is that every step we take toward believing in Jesus' Beatitudes, any new step we're willing to risk (taking) toward living like they're true is another step into the truly good life. #

Well, moving into **Beatitude Seven** that we looked at last week, there Jesus begins to address the way societal pressures - when the chaos & conflict endemic to every human society steals our peace - the postures we can take on about how to get that peace back. These dynamics impact how we relate to individuals or attitudes we may hold toward groups of people we disagree with for this reason or that. And what was illuminated about this Beatitude last week is that Jesus wants us to take seriously the temptation of things we don't like out there getting us wrapped up in living for ourselves - seeking "peace" for ourselves - at the expense of considering the challenges and difficulties of others.

Jesus instead calls us into His way of sacrificially loving all people toward living in more grace and truth. In the Gospels, Jesus modelled for us what this looks like with His non-anxious presence and equanimous posture toward anyone who is caught up in self in any direction,<sup>4</sup> and advocating for the shalom - the well-being - of all people. And What is needed for us to follow Jesus in this way - to love sacrificially those we may vehemently disagree with - is that we trust in the Lord to care for us, so we *can* seek first His kingdom (rather than our own).

But with **Beatitude Eight**, Jesus discloses a really tough reality that comes with following Him in this way of living. And that is that we *are* gonna be disliked for it and we are gonna be misunderstood by those who aren't following Jesus in this way.<sup>5</sup> And this will occur if you seek to relate in healthier ways to loved ones, like we talked about with the fourth Beatitude. Family systems are always resistant to boundaries and greater honesty, or any sort of change. But, of course, it also applies to how we live among people of all the political and religious tribes seeking to win out over one another.

You know, where I'm from in Alabama, college football is a really big deal. And it's such a big deal that when someone moves there from out of state, they will be told that they need to pick a side: Alabama or Auburn. And when children are born in Alabama their parents will seek to "raise them right" into the fandom of their preferred team. My mom's whole family are Auburn grads and there is a picture from when I was three where I was dressed in an Auburn shirt. But, luckily, my father soon stepped in and raised me right to cheer for Bama. (Of course, then I went and married an Auburn grad, but not without a few good humored jabs from friends.) But, in that culture, you've gotta choose; it's expected.

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<sup>4</sup> One step we can take toward this is asking God to help us carry whatever perspectives we have about what is wrong out there, carrying our views with humility – because every one of us is bound to be wrong and misaligned with the heart of God in all sorts of ways.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, this is not a license to people responding badly when we are a jerk to them as a sign God approves of our behavior. People can dislike us for good reasons. In other words, Beatitude 8 is governed by beatitude 5.

And when it comes to those caught up in the way of the world - religiously, politically - they're going to want us to choose - we've been groomed our whole lives to choose: to pick a team and identify with it.

- For some, the temptation is to become disciples of the Democrats & MSNBC, which is relatively equivalent to the position of the Sadducees (these groups in Jesus' day that we talked about last week)? Though maybe with some of that Roman immorality.

Now, this isn't to say we won't vote one way or another, but Jesus has called us to follow Him.

- For others the temptations is to be a disciple of the Republicans and NewsMax, which has become equivalent to the Zealots of Jesus' day, though maybe with a touch of Roman imperialism
- We also talked about the temptation to escape the tensions of disagreement and conflict like the Essenes?
- Or maybe we decide things would be better if people just became more Christian and lived by our set of morals and values, whether it helps them or not. Modern-day Pharisaism.

Instead of all of this, Jesus is calling us to follow Him, in cherishing justice and mercy, and sacrificial love over exercises of power. By the way, this is not an argument for engaging politically as a moderate or a centrist. That's not what Jesus did, because not all worldly positions are made equal in regard to how wicked or unjust they are. But there *are* enormous pressures to pick one of these worldly teams, or to stay on the team we picked long ago before we grasped that Jesus calls us to be loyal to Him instead, and share His passion for the physical and spiritual well-being of all people.

Friends, while the blessing and freedom of following Jesus in this way is immeasurable, there is still a cost, which is that when we seek to live in the way of Jesus it will result in us getting caught in the crossfire of a lot of angry people, because we won't be cooperating with any of their self-interested agendas. Like Jesus will say in the final Beatitude, the prophets did this and people despised them for it. So, following Jesus in this way is not an easy path. But it is absolutely worth the souls we will impact for the Kingdom and worth the impact on our souls and the peace and joy and love that will come to us, as well. With this Beatitude, Jesus is teaching that the (truly) good life comes to those who are willing to be disliked for working toward shalom for all, because WE ARE PART OF THAT ALL, so (in time) it will even lead to more shalom for us. # #

Well, in closing, with Beatitude Nine Jesus (basically) summarizes all the first eight, teaching that "If we are willing to be disliked like Him and to love others like He does, (seeking) shalom for all, even when we have life circumstances that no one would desire, rest assured that the (truly) good life will be yours, both now and in eternity. The good news is that every step we take toward believing in Jesus' Beatitudes, any new step we're willing to risk (taking) toward living like they're true is another step into the truly good life. So, what next step is the Lord inviting you to take - what step is He inviting me to take - whether during the Lenten season or today?

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.