

Scripture:

Psalm 15

Micah 6:1-8

Matthew 5:1-12

“Blessed are...”

As Jesus climbed the mountain in Matthew 5 --- and gathered His disciples around Him at the top ----- despite it being early on in His ministry ---- He already had huge crowds following Him and gathering around wherever He went.

And the real draw ---- at least initially --- was His ability to heal.

The main reason people gathered around Him when He first started ministering --- had very little to do with His teaching ---- and far more to do with His healing.

Indeed as many have argued Jesus could have spent all of His time just healing people and do nothing much of anything else – but of course he chooses otherwise.

The way Matthew 5 starts out is interesting ----- “Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them.”

The crowds are gathering --- and they’re getting bigger and bigger --- and they’re following Him like a swarm.

Over and over again in the gospels we see Jesus withdrawing from the crowds --- and this is precisely what He is doing here.

“Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down.” ----- Jesus sees the crowds and so he goes way up high to get away -- -- and the He sits down.

And He begins to teach His disciples ---- “His disciples came to him and he began to teach them.”

So Jesus seeing all the crowds climbs up high and sits among His little band of disciples and begins to teach.

It's as if Jesus realizing that He could simply go from town to town --- crowd to crowd healing and healing and healing ----- putting out bushfire after bushfire --- crisis after crisis ---- without also ever getting the opportunity to reflect and teach and nurture His disciple along --- steps off to the side with them for some valuable one on one --- uninterrupted time.

It's as if Jesus realizes that He may not have too many opportunities like this ---- so He seizes the moment.

And He begins by sharing with them the many blessings of God ---- the wonderful things God provides and affords us with.

So up high --- withdrawn ---- alone with His disciples --- away from the demands of healing and questions and the concerns of others ---- Jesus turns to His disciples and shares with them what He thinks is important.

So this sermon isn't as much about Jesus on a mountain teaching thousands of people ----- it's more about Jesus --- going high up --- out of the reach of thousands --- and sitting and teaching and sharing intimately with His very closest followers --- those who will carry on His ministry long after He is gone.

And as He sits intimately with them He begins to share with them just how grand and beautiful and blessed it is to be with God.

And so ----- the beatitudes.

And these 8 --- "Blessed are..." --- statements are less about a list of things that we are to try to live out as Christians ----- and instead are more of a collection of blessings that God bestows on us.

Often the beatitudes are heard as a kind of cheques and balances list of tasks --- things to do.

Be poor in spirit so that you can go to heaven.

Be meek so that you will inherit the earth.

Be merciful so that you will be shown mercy.

Comfort others so that you too will be comforted.

But in truth the beatitudes are not about us doing something and then God rewarding us for having done that something.

Instead they are about the gracious and merciful character of God.

They are a ---- “God is like this...” --- kind of list.

They are a God loves you so much ---- that He has done all of the following things for you.

And they are things that God does for us now

So instead of being a --- “to do” --- list ---- think of them as a kind of inventory of God’s blessings to us.

A number of experts in Semitic languages --- Hebrew and Aramaic --- suggest that the way The Beatitudes have often been presented in English are not at all how they would have been heard or understood in the original Aramaic that Jesus first spoke them in.

Instead they suggest a kind of presentation that goes something more like ---

You’re blessed when such and such transpires --- not you’re blessed when you do --- but you’re blessed when you discover such and such ... thanks to God.

Others even go so far as to say the beatitudes would have been said something more like ----- “Oh the bliss when ...” ----- or --- “Oh the sheer and utter joy when ...”

Or ---- “Oh the wonder and beauty when God ...”

Or ---- “Oh the blessedness when God...” --- “The goodness and joy of God when...”

They are more like triumphant shouts of joy --- than anything else.

So ---- with this in mind ----

“Blessed are the poor in spirit --- for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” ---- becomes ---- “Oh the joy and the bliss ---- and the blessings we have ----- that we can put our trust in God and know that He will always be with us and we will always be with Him.”

The poor in spirit refers to humility and trust in God --- to be poor means to have nothing but God.

Blessed are we that we can have heaven through no doing of our own but because of God and His goodness.

That’s the meaning of ----- “Blessed are the poor in spirit --- for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” --- that we are blessed with heaven through no doing but our own but because of God.

Not --- do this --- be poor in spirit --- so that you can be rewarded --- go to heaven.

By grace we have been saved not through any effort of our own.

By grace we are blessed not through any effort of our own.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” --- means ---- “Oh the bliss --- oh the joy of knowing that we are comforted.

Comforted when we mourn and hurt and experience suffering in the world.

And the bliss and blessedness of receiving God’s comfort comes not just by only ever addressing all of our personal suffering but by entering into suffering as a greater reality beyond just ourselves --- the suffering of others.

Oh the bliss of receiving God’s comfort when our hearts are broken because of the suffering we see and because of the suffering we sometimes cause.

The reality of comfort only comes to us if we are first able to truly understand the need for it.

The depth of the comfort of God reaches its peak only when we truly see that there is indeed great suffering in the world and that we are sometimes even part of the cause of this suffering.

Oh the blessedness of God's comfort --- is the message here.

Oh the joy of knowing that there is the comfort of God for all that causes anguish in this world.

Blessed are those who mourn --- blessed are those who look pain and suffering and anguish in the face ----- for they will be comforted.

Whereas those who shy away from it --- are soon consumed and crippled by it.

And then we have "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." --- verse 5.

And ---- "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." ---- means --- -- "Oh the bliss --- Oh the joy of those who can find the happy medium between too much and too little."

There is the spendthrift --- the miser --- and then somewhere between the spendthrift and the miser is the generous person ---- the meek is the one who finds the happy medium between too much and too little.

One of the great blessing God provides is that He abides in us ---- inviting us to do His will instead of just leaving us be to be run and pushed and shoved to and fro by our own passions and emotions --- needs and wants.

There is bliss ----- there is blessedness ---- in knowing that we are not just left to our own devices and abilities.

Oh the bliss ----- Oh the blessedness that God frees us from enslavement to this want and that want --- submitting our appetites not just to themselves but to His will.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” --- speaks to the truth that we cannot lead others or help others until we have found our own direction and help in life.

It's not about do this ---- to get that.

It's not about be meek so that you can rule the earth.

It's fortunate and blessed are we that God provides us with the means to actually grow and advance and not be run by just emotion or adrenaline or personal appetites.

Fortunate and blessed are we that God provides to us some harmony ----- community and fellowship here on earth instead of just leaving us to only ever compete and bulldoze each other over --- trying to satisfy insatiable individual human needs and desires.

And so it is with doing the right and wise and faithful things.

Oh the bliss in knowing that the world can actually function when we do the right and wise and true and faithful things ---- and that we don't have to resort to purely selfish motives in order to survive.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness --- for they will be filled.” --- means ---- “Oh the joy of knowing that the goodness we so crave and thirst for can actually happen --- does actually exist --- it's not just a fairy tale.”

Blessed are we that the goodness we yearn for deep inside is actually possible ---- thanks to God.

Oh the bliss of knowing that God actually makes things better and life isn't just a dull race or grim game that ends when our bodies finally totally fail us and we die.

Oh the bliss that beauty and wonder and love of God isn't just for story books --- and we will experience eternal peace.

And now the 5th one --- the heart of the matter ---- Jesus moves along at a pretty good clip --- there's no filler here.

“Blessed are the merciful --- for they will be shown mercy.” --- is all about the joy of knowing that we are forgiven by God.

In a sense this is the greatest and most central theme running through the entire New Testament --- the idea --- the reality ---- that because we are forgiven we also are to forgive.

Oh the bliss that just as we are forgiven by God we can actually forgive others as well.

It's not forgive others so that you will be forgiven ---- it's thank God --- it's oh the bliss --- it's oh the joy of knowing that just as God forgives us so we are enabled to forgive others instead of having to be trapped in anger ---- and guilt and resentment all the time.

Guilt --- resentment ---- hanging on to things unnecessarily--- are purely human constructs ---- God forgives and it is over ----- God forgives and that is it ---and that is a blessing for sure.

And it is right here clear as day in the very heart of the beatitudes ---- nestled in the middle ---- the very heart of the gospel --- God forgives.

Henri Nouwen shares ----

“Jesus says --- “Let go of your complaints -- forgive those who loved you poorly, step over your feelings of being rejected, and have the courage to trust that you won't fall into an abyss of nothingness but into the safe embrace of a God whose love will heal all your wounds.”

That's the gospel of Jesus Christ right there ---- that's a version of Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.

Listen again ---- Henri Nouwen ---- “Jesus says --- “Let go of your complaints -- forgive those who loved you poorly, step over your feelings of being rejected, and have the courage to trust that you won't fall into an abyss of nothingness but into the safe embrace of a God whose love will heal all your wounds.”

We could almost stop there and have more than enough to think about for the day and then some.

But we'll finish ---- there's only a few more --- we don't want to cut Jesus short ---- "Blessed are the pure in heart --- for they will see God."

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God ---- is --- "Oh the bliss in knowing that because God is near to us and forges an honest and true no strings attached relationship with us --- we too can be pure and true in our motives."

Just as God comes to us freely --- honestly authentically ---- with no hidden agenda or ulterior motive ---- so too can we come to each other in the very same way.

And this next one is crucial --- they all are --- but this next one is just so practical in its power and application.

"Blessed are the peacemakers --- for they will be children of God."

"Oh the bliss of knowing that we are children of God when we strive to resolve things and work through issues and challenges."

Peacemakers are never people who evade issues --- or shy away from them or brush them under the carpet.

Peacemakers are the ones who face things ---- deal with them and overcome them ---- making peace --- even if the only way to peace is through intense struggle.

Of the joy of knowing that we are God's people --- children of God --- even when we have to struggle through things and work at making peace --- being peace-makers.

Not just peaceful people but makers of peace --- peace makers.

Oh the bliss --- oh the blessing of knowing that we are of God when we take challenging situations and address them head on and make peace of them.

It's not just about being peaceful ---- people at peace --- it's also about be but peace makers --- makers --- workers --- strivers for peace.

And then finally --- number 8 --- the last of these great God given blessings -
----- is the assurance that even when things go badly God is always there for
us and the assurance that just because things are challenging doesn't ever
mean that God has abandoned us.

Indeed often when we suffer something for our faith ---- those are the
precise moments that Christ is closest to us.

Oh the bliss of knowing that when things are going badly and life is hard it
not only doesn't mean that God is not with us --- instead it is actually a
greater truth that God is closest to us in these times.

Oh the joy in knowing that when things get bad that's when God is with us
most powerfully and closely.

The beatitudes then ---- are triumphant shouts of joy for all that God has
given us ----- things that the world cannot ever take away from us.

As Jesus said to His disciples in John's gospel --- chapter 16 verse 22.

“So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you
will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”

And no one will take away your joy.

That is the whole point of the beatitudes ----- no one can take away our joy -
-- no one can take away the blessings we have in God.

“Oh the joy...”

“Oh the bliss ...”

All of the things that Jesus speaks about in the beatitudes are impossible for
us to actually succeed at.

But ---- “Oh the Joy” --- “Oh the bliss” ----- that God provides them to us.

Christian joy is the joy that cannot just be stripped away by the world and
circumstances and events ---- evil --- harm --- struggle --- suffering.

Christian joy is the joy --- the blessedness --- that comes from walking in the company and presence of the Risen One ---- regardless of the weather and regardless of circumstances the befall us.

Jesus ---- seeing the crowds pressing in on Him --- slipped away --- and seized the opportunity to teach His disciples all about just how much God blesses us with --- and how fortunate and joyful it is that we have the many things God provides to us to cope and survive and even flourish and abound --- find meaning and purpose ----- and joy in life.

Jesus didn't ever just want His disciples to think that He was successful and wonderful and had all these people gathering around Him and following Him just because of things He was doing or miracles He was performing or sick people He was healing --- without also them knowing all about the blessings of God --- and the joys of a life of faith.

Blessed are

Blessed are ---- each and every one of us.

God loves us.

God has done so very much for us.

God has done everything for us even.

As Henri Nouwen so poignantly shares ----

“Jesus says --- “Let go of your complaints -- forgive those who loved you poorly, step over your feelings of being rejected, and have the courage to trust that you won't fall into an abyss of nothingness but into the safe embrace of a God whose love will heal all your wounds.”

Blessed are we ----- each and every one of us.

Blessed are we ----- we are all the apple of God's eye.

Amen.