

Beatitudes: *A Portrait of Kingdom People*

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - April 26, 2020
(Based on Rev. Darrell Johnson's book *Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*)

Matthew 5:1-12

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.

He said:

3

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

4

**Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**

5

**Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**

6

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.**

7

**Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.**

8

**Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.**

9

Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.

10

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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

Would you pray with me?

Almighty God,

*You have set before us the Way of Jesus, but we often try
to find our own path. We ask for Your help to repent when
we go astray and then turn away from our sin to return to
Your Way. Come Holy Spirit to guide us in Your wisdom
and be our companion on this journey of faith. In the
name of Jesus Christ, who is our Brother and Savior.
Amen.*

For this series on the Beatitudes, I'll be drawing from Rev.
Darrell Johnson's book titled *Beatitudes: Living in Sync
with the Reign of God*. I want to begin by spending some
time in the context in which Jesus first spoke these
Beatitudes. E. Stanley Jones, a missionary to India, wrote
in his book, *Christ of the Mount*, “without the context,
Jesus words meant to give life, become either frustrating
idealism or oppressive legalism.”

So here is some of the context from Matthew 4:12-25,

Jesus Begins His Ministry

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; **13** and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. **14** *This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:*

15

**“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles**

16

**“The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light,
And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death,
Upon them a Light dawned.”**

17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The First Disciples

18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. **19** And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. **21** Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. **22** Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Ministry in Galilee

23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. **25** Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and *the* Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and *from* beyond the Jordan.

Matthew is careful to help us realize that Jesus spoke His Beatitudes, and the rest of His Sermon on the Mount which follows, right after He first announced His gospel, His good news. He speaks His Beatitudes in the context of gospel. This is crucial to grasp and remember.

“What is Jesus’ gospel: His good news?” This is the second most important question we can ever ask, the most important being, *“Who is Jesus?”* *“Who is this Jesus, who walks into our lives and calls us to follow Him into a whole new kind of life? Who is this Jesus, who promises a different quality of life to everyone who will journey with Him? And then second, this second question follows: “What is the good news He brings? What is His good news for the world?”*

Jesus puts it in one line, one world changing line: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”** (Matthew 4:17). The

gospel according to Jesus is the announcement that in Him and because of Him, the long-awaited kingdom of the Living God is breaking into the world! In and because of Jesus, the long-awaited reign of heaven is breaking in upon the earth! *Hallelujah!*

In the Gospel according to Mark, we have an expanded version of Jesus' announcement of His gospel. Mark 1:15 gives us the only definition of the gospel that Jesus ever gave. Mark tells us that after John the Baptist had been put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee **“preaching the gospel of God.”** And this is what Jesus said: **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.”**

Do you hear the life-changing news Jesus is announcing? The gospel according to Jesus is the announcement of the great fact that impacts everything. The gospel according to Jesus is that in Him, and because of Him, history has reached a major point: **“The time is fulfilled.”** We are now going from one era into a whole new era. The gospel according to Jesus is that in Him, and because of Him, the long-awaited, glorious, re-creating reign of God is invading the world.

The gospel according to Jesus is good news not only because our sins have been forgiven and we are acquitted before the Judge of the universe. It's good news not only because we are adopted into the family of God. Good news, not only because we have been given the gift of

eternal life. The gospel according to Jesus is good news because God's new world order is breaking into our own brokenness. Isaiah 9:2 says of Jesus, **"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them."** The future is breaking into the present; heaven is invading earth. *Hallelujah!*

Understandably, Jesus couples His announcement of this great fact with a call to change our thinking. **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"** (Matthew 4:17). **"Repent and believe in the gospel [the good news]"** (Mark 1:15). "Repent" simply means "think again" or "think anew." More simply, it means "turn around." He's saying, "You have been heading in the wrong direction. Make a U-turn and believe My good news." "The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God has come near; make a U-turn in the road, embrace Me and My gospel, and put your weight on My good news."

It is in that context that Jesus speaks His Beatitudes. And here is the implication for our understanding of His words: The clearest sign that human beings are in fact "turning around and believing" is that they are becoming "Beatitude people." The clearest sign that human beings are in fact making a U-turn and embracing Jesus and His gospel is that they are becoming "blessed-are people." "Beatitude people."

Another way to make the point: In His Beatitudes, Jesus is painting a portrait of people in whom He and His gospel are taking hold. Jesus is giving a profile of people who are

making a U-turn and welcoming Him and His Kingdom reign. He's drawing a sketch of those in whom God's new world order is emerging; those upon whom the light of grace is dawning. In His Beatitudes, Jesus is painting a portrait of those who, in the language of the Gospel of John, are being **"born again from above"** (John 3:3 paraphrased). In His Beatitudes, Jesus has put together a profile of kingdom-people, twice-born people, Spirit-filled people. Jesus is describing a humanity transformed by Him and His good news.

Now before we begin to make our way through Jesus' Beatitudes in this series, I want to make two observations about the Beatitudes as a whole.

All eight Beatitudes are true of all upon whom the Kingdom comes... to one degree or another. That means Jesus is describing eight qualities that emerge in every "Kingdom-ized" person. This is our blessing as Jesus' friends, Jesus' followers.

Then let me give a key observation about the word "blessed." The word translated "blessed" is a word crammed full of meaning. The Greek word is *makarios*. *Makarios* refers to how God assesses us and our condition. God says we're blessed when the Kingdom comes upon us. To bring out the fuller meaning of the Greek word, Rev. Darrell Johnson suggests it means more than just blessed. Our condition as Kingdom-ized people is more than blessed, we're getting to experience

something of God's kingdom now and Jesus is saying how blessed we are. Rev. Darrell Johnson says *makarios* means something like, "*You lucky bums!*" I like that. You lucky bums, you're following Jesus, He's your Brother, you have a relationship with our Heavenly Father and these Beatitude qualities are coming to you... "*You lucky bums!*"

Now the qualities Jesus blesses may come as a surprise to our humanity, but as we gain a fuller view of God's Kingdom, as we get in step with the Holy Spirit, these begin to be the right way of living. We're living in sync with His Kingdom.

You know when you sync a smartphone to a computer, or your photos go right from your phone to the cloud and your computer. You're aligning all the information in the phone with all the information in your computer. You know when two or more musicians are playing a musical piece or an orchestra is playing and they feel they are in sync with each other. Well, there's something about these Beatitudes that we line up, we're in alignment with, we're in sync with, when God's Kingdom comes to us.

So congratulations to the poor in spirit, you're in sync with the kingdom of heaven. Congratulations to the merciful, you're in sync with the kingdom of heaven. Congratulations to the pure in heart, *you lucky bums* are in sync with God's kingdom.

Now what you or I think or feel about these qualities is not the point. The point is what God thinks or feels. In His Beatitudes, Jesus is announcing the Divine “blessed.” Makarios, Congratulations, *You lucky bums*, You’re in sync with God’s Kingdom.

Then one last thing to keep in mind as we go on to look at the Beatitudes as we go on to look at the Beatitudes in coming weeks. I think this will help us. These Beatitudes are not natural human qualities, it is then understandable why we might not think of them as good qualities for living. None of us can produce these qualities either, and if we could, we’d think we have to earn our way to heaven. These are not natural human qualities and we can’t produce them on our own. That is good news!

Get this: Jesus did not come into Galilee looking for “Beatitude people.” He wasn’t looking for “Beatitude people” who were ready to be called into His kingdom. No, Jesus first called ordinary, broken people, to Himself and into His kingdom. Then as a result of contact with Him, as a result of following His Way, the qualities He blessed began to appear in their lives.

The first line is not “In sync are the poor in spirit, therefore they get the kingdom.” It is “In sync are the poor in spirit, because it is a sign that the kingdom is breaking into their lives.” Not “therefore,” but “because.” If it were “therefore,” we might try to become poor in spirit in order to get in on the kingdom, and we would end up being

proud that we were humble enough to be humble. Or worse, we'd think we have to be better in order to merit God's blessing and how miserable that would make life.

Poverty in spirit, mourning, gentleness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, mercy, purity in heart, peacemaking, and being persecuted are all the result of the gospel breaking through to us. They are consequences of turning around from our ways and embracing the reign of Jesus in our lives and the world.

This is especially good to know regarding "pure in heart." Whatever it means, it is not the result of our own self-effort; it is the result of an ongoing encounter and ever-deepening relationship with Jesus. It is the result of being infused by His grace, the result of the kingdom breaking in and doing its re-creating work. *Hallelujah!*

This does not mean that we are merely passive before Jesus, for He continually calls us to repent and believe, to turn around at ever-deeper levels and embrace Him and His reign more fully. As we do so, day after day, week after week, year after year, we are slowly, but surely, turned right-side up in an upside down world. We are synchronized with the Kingdom come.

Good news! The kingdom of God has come near, and a new kind of humanity is emerging in the world! We will look at this new humanity in the coming weeks in our Beatitude series.