

# Matthew: Blessed are Those

## by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

### Prayer of Illumination

Gracious God, give us humble, teachable, and obedient hearts, that we may receive what you have revealed and do what you have commanded. Amen.

### Background

Matthew is the first book of the NT because it's so steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures—quoting the Old Testament sixty-one times. In other words, 20% of Matthew is the Old Testament!

Jesus' genealogy or family tree in the first chapter of Matthew is another natural bridge from the First Testament to the Second Testament. Of the four gospels, Matthew is quoted the most by the early church fathers.

Matthew wrote in the latter half of the 1st century to a predominantly Jewish audience.

He utilized and adapted the ancient Greek literary genre called the bios (life) which focuses upon episodes of an individual's life that reveal their character.

Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfillment of God's ancient promises and prophecies in the Old Testament regarding the Anointed One—which means Messiah in Hebrew or Christ in Greek.

Matthew describes Jesus as a rabbi or teacher—in fact 43% of Matthew contains Jesus' teachings—a much higher percentage than, say the gospel of Mark, which only 20% of the book is made up of Jesus' teachings.

Matthew presents Jesus as not only the Son of David, but also as a New Moses. Matthew is arranged in five major discourses, as if Jesus' teachings were a New Torah or Pentateuch—the first five books of the Hebrew Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Rabbis at the time spoke of the Yoke of the Torah. Jesus changed this when he said, "take My yoke upon you."

The first of the five discourses of Jesus in Matthew is known as The Sermon on the Mount—which opens with the Beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount is likely the most influential spiritual teaching in human history.

Mountains are important for Matthew—they symbolize God's revelation and call to mind Moses and Mt. Sinai.

So Jesus is not only a law-giver, but he perfectly reveals, obeys, and fulfills God's Law.

In Matthew, there's also a strong emphasis upon the Kingdom of Heaven, which is God's rule and reign on earth ushered in through Jesus and his mission.

In Matthew, Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven, rather than the Kingdom of God, because of the Jewish reticence to speak God's name, out of reverence. The Kingdom of Heaven is here now, yet its fullness has not yet been entirely realized. So there's a tension in Matthew between the already and the not yet.

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven."

Let's hear now the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount from:

**Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12 (NRSV)**

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

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

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

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

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

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

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

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

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.**

## SERMON – Matthew: Blessed are Those

There are some realities out there that are absolutely counter-intuitive, and make you say, "Wait...what!?!?"

Like in science:

\*Warm water freezes faster than cold water.

\*Cold water boils faster than warm water.

\*The earth's largest desert contains 90% of the world's fresh water—Antarctica.

\*If you were born on Venus, you would celebrate your first birthday before you were one day old. It takes Venus 18.3 days LONGER to spin once on its axis than it takes for the planet to orbit the Sun.

Relationships can be counter-intuitive too:

\*If you want someone to be interested in you, appear uninterested.

\*The more you try and control someone, the further they will slip from your grasp.

\*When we see someone being vulnerable, we think they are strong.

And there are counter-intuitive spiritual truths:

Jesus was fond of saying in Matthew,  
"You have heard it said, but I say unto you."

Jesus loved to turn conventional wisdom on its head:

\*The first will be last.

\*The greatest must become like a child.

\*To live you must die.

\*The leader must be a servant.

\*Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

But then we come to the Beatitudes and Christ throws us a curve ball, no a knuckleball, saying essentially:

"How blessed," says Jesus, "are the depressed."

Wait, what?

What in God's name is Jesus getting at here?

Jesus takes people considered by the world's standards unblessed and unbleisable—the poor in spirit, the grieving, the meek, the persecuted, and shows us that these are the ones that have a special place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed ARE—present tense.

And Blessed YOU WILL BE—future tense.

Despite outward appearances, all is not lost—there is hope.

Jesus took his mission statement from [Isaiah 61](#) in the Hebrew Scriptures. Listen how closely his mission aligns with the Beatitudes:

The Lord has sent me to bring good news to the humble, to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all who mourn, and to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for grieving, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

When you find yourself among those of whom Simon and Garfunkel sang: “the sat upon, spat upon, and ratted upon,” know that Jesus is coming your way on a search and rescue mission.

Rejoice and be glad!

Not for your trials, but because you're not forgotten. You're not hopeless. You're not useless—even if it feels like it. Rest assured: There will be a reversal of your fortunes.

You are the very person Jesus came for. You matter. Jesus is here to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor over you. You are #1 on God's priority list.

So, what does it mean to be blessed?

- To have abundant financial resources?
- Good health? Family and friends?
- Career success? Notoriety?
- Accomplishments and victories?

I think we'd pretty much all agree these are good things—things we probably wouldn't deny if it was dropped in our lap. But these good things are temporal and fleeting. They can all vanish or be taken away at a moment's notice through bad markets, bad weather, bad health, bad press, or bad timing. This is why Jesus is talking about something different.

The beatitude blessings are for eternity—they endure in good times AND bad times. They're to be enjoyed in the present. They will be enjoyed, in full, in the future.

In the Bible the Greek word *makarios* (not to be confused with the Italian word macaroni) can be translated: Blessed – Happy – Fortunate – Prosperous – even Blissful. However you translate *makarios*, it's wonderful news.

The world has its own version on how to be prosperous and happy, the Top Dog in a dog eat dog world:

- Happy are those who walk over others to make it big.
- Happy are those who look out for #1 and don't give a rip about others.
- Happy are the power players and those who play hard ball.
- Happy are those who can get payback.
- Happy are the opportunistic and the trend setters.
- Happy are you who get the most likes.
- Happy are the superstars and celebrities.
- Rejoice, for you rule the world.

To this Jesus says, "It shall not be so among you." He gives us an alternative route in our pursuit of happiness:

### **BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT**

- The poor in spirit are those who know they need God.
- The poor in spirit are utterly reliant upon God for strength.

Paul reminds us, "when I am weak, he is strong." The poor in spirit do not put their trust in earthly powers, but rather trust in our Higher Power.

"It is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs." [Jesus]

### **BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN**

- Blessed are those who mourn the loss of loved ones.
- Blessed are those who lament that bad things happen to good people. That the wicked flourish.
- Blessed are those that weep that God's will isn't being done on earth as it is in heaven.
- Blessed are those that grieve over their sin and shortcomings.

Take courage—you will be comforted.

### **BLESSED ARE THE MEEK**

- Blessed are those who are not pompous or proud—but put others first.
- Blessed are those who don't throw their weight around—but rather wait upon the Lord.

Aristotle said that meekness is the Golden Mean, the perfect balance between too much anger and too little anger. To be meek isn't week. It's a disciplined strength. Gentle and humble of heart—like Jesus. The meek are blessed because they live a God-controlled life—passions, impulses, words, actions all are bridled by the Holy Spirit.

You are blessed because one day you will inherit the kingdom of Heaven.

## **BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS**

- Blessed are those who yearn to live the way that God requires—to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with your God.

Moses put it this way, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

And similarly Jesus says, “My food is to do the will of the One who sent me.”

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed because you will be filled. (The Greek word for “filled” literally means, “stuffed.”)

## **BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL**

For Jesus, one of the most important words is mercy.

- Mercy triumphs over judgment.
- To be merciful is to be forgiving.
- To be merciful is to see things from another’s perspective.
- To be merciful means that even if you have the power to pounce—you don’t. You harness your power for kindness.

“You reap what you sow.” And the merciful will reap mercy.

## **BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART**

When you’re pure in heart, you have a harmony between your inward thoughts and outward actions.

- You’re authentic. Genuine. Humble.
- Comfortable in your own skin.
- You have a singleness of purpose.

Kierkegaard was right, “Purity of heart is to will one thing”—to will God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will. You are blessed because you will see God.

## **BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS**

A peacemaker not only is peaceful, but they spread peace. They pass the peace. They pursue peace.

- Blessed are you when you seek to be in good relationship with others.
- Blessed are you when you’re a bridge, rather than a blockade. When you bring people together, rather than tear them apart.

You will be called a son of God or a child of God. This means you will be godly. You will share God’s character. You’ll be a chip off the old block—your Father in heaven.

## BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

As Christians we put ourselves out there.

- We stand up for righteousness and we stand up for the vulnerable.
- We're engaged with the world, rather than isolated from it.

There are times when we'll be in harm's way. Sometimes it's friendly fire. Other times fiery darts from the Evil One. When this happens, rejoice! Don't rant and rave. "Be glad" says Jesus. Don't grumble.

You're blessed, not because you're suffering—we're not gluttons for punishment—rejoice rather because your reward is great in the kingdom of heaven.

Christ will help you keep calm and carry on in hours of hardship, periods of powerlessness, and seasons of suffering.

Life won't be easy, but you'll find true satisfaction. Closeness with God. You'll be able to put in proper perspective the difficulties of your present. You'll enjoy today a foretaste of your full course meal in the future.

Come to Jesus and be blessed, today and forever.

**Amen.**

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