

Beatitude People

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[0 : 00] Would you take out your worship outline and turn to the page where they have the scripture listed and in a moment we'll read the scripture responsibly.

And then as a sign of your desire to hear the scriptures and to let your life be shaped by them, would you stand with me for the reading of God's word?

And the scripture this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 4, beginning in verse 12. When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.

Leaving Nazareth, he went up and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. To fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah, the land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

The people living in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.

[1 : 10] From that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. As Jesus was walking beside the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew.

They were casting a net into the lake for they were fishermen. Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men.

At once, they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two brothers, James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, and their father Zebedee, preparing their nets.

Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, the epileptics, the paralytics, and he healed them.

[2 : 23] Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him. Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down.

His disciples came to them, and he began to teach them. And he said, and read with me the bold, Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. Blessed are the people who are persecuted for the evil of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

[3 : 35] Be glorious and be glad. Because faith is over the Lord in heaven. For it is the same way that you are persecuted for the cross. For it is the same way that you are persecuted for the cross.

The words we just read, the so-called Beatitudes, are probably the most widely known of all of the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth.

We find them printed on posters in bookstores and coffee houses. We find them printed on greeting cards, sent and received even by those who do not know who spoke the words.

I am drawn like a magnet to this opening section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Partly because of the portrait of the new humanity he is sketching.

That is what the Beatitudes are. Poor in spirit, pure in heart, peacemakers. A portrait of the new humans, the one true human, is bringing into being in the world.

[5 : 03] But I am drawn like a magnet to this opening section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount mostly because I want to hear Jesus speak His blessed to me.

Given who Jesus is, no one else's opinion but His means as much. I want to be the kind of person, I want to be the kind of human being about whom and to whom Jesus says, blessed.

I assume you would like the same thing too. So just for a moment, will you look again at the text we read? Either in the order of worship or in your Bible.

Just look again at these blessings and these promises and as you do, ask yourself the question, which of these is most inviting and which of these is most unsettling which of these is most inviting? Which of these is most unsettling? Thank you. Two years ago, as some of you might remember, I preached a nine Sunday series on Jesus' Beatitudes.

[6 : 57] One introductory sermon and then one sermon on each of the eight blessed are. George Lowen has gathered the audio version of those sermons into one CD packet and you can obtain that in Pinder Hall at the connection point afterwards.

And if you're listening to this message on the internet, you can simply contact the church office to obtain your set. So this morning, what I want to do is work with the Beatitudes as a whole.

But before we do, let us pray. Lord Jesus, as we follow you into your sermon on the mount, will you speak these words into each of us that we might become more fully human?

Amen. Amen. Amen. Last Sunday, as we listened to the whole of Matthew 5, 6, and 7, I said that we must be very careful to never separate the sermon on the mount from the preacher on the mount.

You separate the sermon on the mount from the preacher on the mount and the sermon goes off the rails. Which is why we bothered reading the text of the gospel of Matthew before the sermon on the mount.

[8 : 41] When the sermon on the mount gets disconnected from the preacher on the mount, it all goes wrong. Terribly wrong. That's the case with everything in the Christian life.

Disconnected from Jesus and it goes wrong. Separate the sermon on the mount from the preacher on the mount and the sermon becomes either frustrating idealism or oppressive legalism.

It either becomes this mountain we try to climb and can't make it and walk away in despair or it becomes this heavy weight we carry and we walk away drained and weary.

the sermon on the mount is neither idealism nor legalism. The sermon on the mount is life.

Life as it is when the preacher on the mount gets a hold of us. So the question is who is this preacher?

[9 : 53] Who is this man who speaks in a way that no one else ever has? Matthew tells us that he goes up the mountain not a mountain like those north of our city but one of those hills surrounding the Sea of Galilee one of those hills with a concave shape making a natural amphitheater with incredible acoustics.

I've been in the place where Jesus supposedly preached his sermon and you can speak to thousands of people without raising your voice. Matthew says Jesus goes up the mountain. Now what is this little geographical detail telling us? What does Matthew want us to think as Jesus goes up the mountain?

well who else in the great story goes up a mountain? Moses yes Moses the human leader of the greatest human liberation movement in history.

Moses goes up Mount Sinai he goes up the mountain to receive the law of God the Ten Commandments he goes up the mountain to receive the revelation of God's will for life.

[11 : 21] Jesus sees the crowds flocking to him and he goes up the mountain the new Moses the greater Moses the greater than Moses but he does not go up the mountain to receive a new law he goes up the mountain to announce the fulfillment of the law of God he goes up the mountain to announce the fuller vision of God's will for life which means then that the parallel with the Moses story is not Jesus and Moses the parallel with the Moses story is Jesus and God when Jesus goes up the mountain he's not playing the part of Moses when Jesus goes up the mountain he's playing the part of God which is why unlike Moses he does not say thus says the

Lord unlike Moses he says truly I say to you who is this I who speaks without any appeal to any higher authority who is this I who articulates a vision for human life and grounds it in himself I'll tell you who he is he's the God Moses met on the mountain come down in our flesh and blood and going up the mountain to tell us what life is all about just before God with us goes up the mountain

Matthew tells us that Jesus had been going throughout the region of Galilee and Syria preaching teaching and healing Matthew summarizes Jesus ministry around those verbs preaching teaching and healing Matthew will do so again in the ninth chapter of his gospel and Matthew will summarize the ministry Jesus gives to his disciples around those same three verbs preaching teaching and healing they always go together why because those verbs are tied up with Jesus gospel Jesus comes preaching what the kingdom of heaven has come near Jesus comes teaching what the nature of this kingdom of heaven that has come near and Jesus comes healing restoring and liberating healing all kinds of sickness and freeing people from the demonic why because the kingdom that he comes preaching and teaching is all about the recreation of the fallen world Matthew wants us to realize that before this preacher preaches his sermon on the mount he preaches his gospel

Matthew 4:17 repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near now in the four gospels the phrase kingdom of heaven and the phrase kingdom of God are used interchangeably because they're referring to the same reality that's why Mark records this same scene saying Jesus comes on the scene and says the time is fulfilled the kingdom of God has come near the gospel according to Jesus the good news according to Jesus is the startling and explosive announcement that in him and because of him the long awaited kingdom of the God of heaven is breaking into the world what was thought to be holy future is now taking place in the present what was thought to only take place at the end of time is taking place in the middle of time before he preaches his sermon on the mount before he speaks his beatitudes

Jesus comes announcing good news this word announcing is literally heralding hear ye hear ye you're supposed to get the picture of Jesus going through Galilee and Syria saying hear ye hear ye I have good news for you the time is fulfilled God's glorious recreating reign is breaking into the world bless the Lord oh my soul now this is how I like to make the point the gospel according to Jesus is such good news not only because our sins have been forgiven and we have been acquitted before the throne of the universe the gospel according to Jesus is such good news not only because we have been reconciled to God and adopted into his family the gospel according to Jesus is such good news not only because we have been given the gift of eternal life and filled with the

[16:34] Holy Spirit the gospel according to Jesus is such good news because God's new world order is now breaking into the brokenness and injustices of this world the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light on those who live in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned Jesus gospel is that it is a new day the future is breaking into the present heaven is invading earth Jesus preaching and teaching and healing are the signs that that's all true the preacher and the teacher does not heal to prove that the kingdom has come near the preacher and teacher heals because the kingdom whose presence he announces is all about God reordering God rectifying God restoring God recreating creation Jesus preaching teaching and healing are inextricably intertwined which is to say that

Jesus preaches in order to free us Jesus teaches in order to restore us Jesus preaches and teaches in order to heal us in his beatitudes therefore Jesus is painting a portrait of people who are being healed in his beatitudes he's painting a portrait of people who are being freed and restored in his beatitudes Jesus is painting a portrait of people who are turning around and embracing him and this good news of the invasion of the kingdom people who are poor in spirit pure in heart peacemakers who end up getting in trouble now look again at the beatitudes as a whole here's my plan for this morning here's the outline let's just make a number of observations about the package as a whole and then

I'm going to suggest some of the implications of the observations all right so observations and then some implications notice that the whole package is wrapped around by the word kingdom for theirs is the kingdom surprise given the fact that Jesus gospel is about the kingdom beatitude one for theirs is the kingdom of heaven beatitude eight for theirs is the kingdom of heaven do you see that eight theirs is the kingdom of heaven one theirs is the kingdom of heaven eight theirs is the kingdom of heaven it's what scholars call an inclusio a way of bracketing a text of scripture all eight of the beatitudes are wrapped with this word kingdom notice also the tense of the verb that is used in the wrapping is present beatitude one for theirs is beatitude eight for theirs is not will be not one day in the future theirs will be but is now today in this very moment notice that the eight beatitudes come to us in two sets of four two sets of four beatitudes one to four and then beatitudes five to

eight beatitudes one to four poor in spirit those who mourn the meek and gentle those who hunger and thirst for righteousness beatitudes five to eight the merciful the pure in heart the peacemakers those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness now get this get this beatitudes one to four come to us in thirty six words leading to the word righteousness the attitudes five to eight come to us in thirty six words leading to the word righteousness righteousness justice or better yet right relationship justice is all about right relationships righteousness is all about right relationship that will be the theme of the rest of

Jesus sermon on the mount unless your righteousness exceeds do not practice your righteousness to be seen by others seek first the righteousness of God the attitudes one to four thirty six words righteousness the attitudes five to eight thirty six words righteousness pretty cool eh one more observation it's the meaning of the word blessed makarios is the word that Jesus uses and although makarios is often translated as happy you've probably seen this version as happy are those who although makarios is often translated as happy to do so is misleading profoundly misleading do not translate this word as happy because we can be pronounced makarios and not be happy you see makarios does not refer to how you and

I assess our situation makarios refers to how God assesses our situation whether or not you or I feel good about our situation is not the point of this word the point of this word is how God feels about the situation that's not quite how to put that but at least it puts the emphasis where it belongs makarios is an objective state of being not a subjective feeling what matters is not how I feel about myself and my situation what matters is how God feels about me and my situation and contrary to what I or you might feel about me and my condition God might declare me makarios us so as I've said in other contexts we need to find another synonym for blessed some propose fortunate fortunate are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness fortunate are those who are poor in spirit others suggest approved approved are those who mourn approved are those who are pure in heart others propose congratulations that's getting a little better congratulations to the meek to the gentle congratulations to those who are persecuted for righteousness sake

[23 : 54] I've mentioned in other contexts that Karl Barth probably the greatest theologian of the 20th century said that we should render makarios as you lucky bums now as I've been living in the Beatitudes this time around I keep being drawn to the word right on I think that captures what Jesus is saying here right on are the poor in spirit right on are those who know they do not have what it takes to live the kingdom right on are those who mourn right on are those who lament the condition of the world without the light right on are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness now when I hear Jesus blessed or right on I might feel happy but that's not the point the point is

God's assessment of me and my condition okay let me now suggest a few implications of those observations because the whole package is wrapped by the word kingdom I think we can read the word kingdom with all a beat petites to the kingdom bless it are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for theirs is the kingdom and blessed are the merciful for theirs is the kingdom and blessed are the pure in heart for theirs is the kingdom and blessed Blessed are the peacemakers, for theirs is the kingdom.

And blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom. You see that? Another implication.

Because the whole of the Beatitudes is wrapped by the word kingdom, I think that Jesus in his Beatitudes is telling us what the kingdom involves. This in-breaking kingdom is about the comforting of people in their grief.

This in-breaking kingdom is about inheriting the earth. The earth. That's because the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God is very earthy.

[26 : 31] Not earthly, but very earthy. I think that the center of the whole Sermon on the Mount is the Lord's Prayer. And I think that the center of the Lord's Prayer is on earth as it is in heaven.

As we discover from the last book of the Bible, the revelation of Jesus Christ, our destiny is not to go to heaven. Our destiny is for the new heavens and the new earth to come to earth.

The in-breaking kingdom is all about inheriting this being redeemed earth. The in-breaking kingdom is about the satisfying of the deepest longings of the human heart.

The in-breaking of the kingdom is about receiving and basking in and extending mercy. It's about experiencing the undeserved compassion of God.

The in-breaking of the kingdom is about seeing God. We are going to see God. The in-breaking of the kingdom is about being called and treated as children of God.

[27 : 40] The kingdom is about a new family with a new father and a new big brother and a new spirit that binds us together in a new love. Oh, Father, won't you cause your kingdom to come on earth? Another implication.

All eight of these beatitudes are interrelated. You can't separate them. It's like the fruit of the spirit that Paul talks about in his letter to the Galatians. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

All together, interrelated, all in the same branches. So, too, the eight beatitudes. The poor in spirit are also pure in heart. The pure in heart are also poor in spirit.

Those who mourn are also merciful. Those who are merciful can also know how to mourn. Those who are meek and gentle can make peace. Those who make peace are those who are meek and gentle.

That's why they can make the peace. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness get persecuted for their hunger and thirst for righteousness. And those who are hungering and thirst for righteousness will hunger and thirst for righteousness.

[28 : 46] All the more. On it goes, in and out, interrelated. Another observation. The beatitudes flow naturally from one to the other.

I think Jesus gives us the beatitudes in the order he does because number one leads to number two. Number two leads to number three. Three to four. And on it goes. Poverty of spirit awakens mourning.

Mourning gives birth to meekness and gentleness. Meekness and gentleness causes a hunger and thirst for righteousness. A hunger and thirst for righteousness produces a merciful heart.

Mercy begins to cleanse us and create a pure heart. A pure heart then begins to make peace.

Peace. And those who start to make peace become the children of God.

And those who make peace as children of God find themselves getting persecuted for doing that.

Right on. I know it doesn't feel happy. Makarios, says the preacher.

[29 : 55] Right on, says the master. Right on are the poor in spirit. This is what happens to us when the kingdom of God comes.

We see in this kingdom all that life was meant to be. And we began to realize just how far short we fall. Blessed are those who mourn.

We meet King Jesus and we see in Jesus all that we were meant to be as humans. And we began to grieve over our spiritual poverty. Right on are the meek and the gentle.

We see ourselves in Jesus and we come off our horses and we become humble before him. You might know that only three people in the Bible are called meek. They are Moses, Paul and Jesus. Hardly weak. That's because meekness has nothing to do with weakness. The meek are not weak. The meek are those who are willing to humble themselves before the living God and let God run the world.

[31 : 03] And when they do, strangely, they become very strong. Strong like Jesus. And strangely, they begin to inherit the earth which Jesus, the meek, inherits.

Right on are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. We were made for relationship with God and with ourself and with others and with the earth. And when we meet the king in his inbreaking kingdom, we see the original design and we long for it like the hungry long for food and the thirsty long for water.

Our appetites change and we crave this full or goodness of God for the world. Right on are the merciful. Of course, because the fact that the kingdom has come to us is all about mercy.

No one deserved this. No one ever will deserve it. And so we find ourselves stop. We stop making other people deserve it. Right on are the pure in heart.

Not the perfect in heart, at least not yet. Pure. The word means unalloyed, like pure gold or like pure maple syrup. The real deal.

[32 : 14] No faking it anymore. Coming clean before God. I had someone in my office this week who needed to confess their sin. And they confessed their sin and I was able to say over that person, pure in heart.

You came clean. Right on are the peacemakers. But of course, this kingdom is all about peace. Shalom, wholeness in every dimension of our existence.

Alive in a passion to make peace in the city and not satisfied until everyone in the city knows the prince of peace. Right on are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

Not happy. Anyone who is happy for being persecuted must be a masochist. Or not being persecuted for right relationship. Right on because in hungering and thirsting for justice, you come up against those forces that want to keep people captive.

So, do you see this interrelatedness? And do you see this flow? One more observation. The last one for today.

[33 : 28] None of us makes ourselves into Beatitude people. None of us makes ourselves into Beatitude people.

I just set you free from a horrendous burden. None of us makes ourselves into Beatitude people. Oh, we do have a part to play. We are to repent. Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near. Repent means turn around. Turn around.

Turn around and embrace this king and the good news of his kingdom. But we do not make ourselves into the kind of people Jesus blesses. That is his job.

He makes us into the people he blesses. He preaches the gospel of the kingdom to us. He then teaches us what this kingdom is all about. And then he heals us.

[34 : 26] He makes the kingdom start to work. He frees us. He restores us. He goes to work to shape us into his image, into the image of the one true human.

And then he looks at us and he says, bless it. Just like he did at the beginning of time. When he called seas and stars and animals into being and says, good.

Just like he did when he created us in his image and said, very good. The preacher, teacher and healer gets hold of us, goes to work and then says, looking at us, Makarios.

Right on. So. Look at the text again. Whether in your Bible or in the print in the order of worship. Look at the text again. And this time. Ask the question. Which of these beatitudes do you see him working in you already?

[35 : 41] And which of these do you want him to work in you now? Which is already being worked in you? And which one do you want to see him work in you?

And this time. Express your answers. To Jesus. Before I give you the benediction.

A number of people have expressed a desire to be baptized, which is music to our ears. And we'd like to know how many so we can start making plans for that. So if you would like to talk about baptism, you can either email me at the church website or there is a little blue piece of paper in the pew rack.

A very simple thing. It says, yes, I'm interested in baptism. Here's my contact information. Fill that out. Give it to one of the ushers or one of the members of the staff. And we'll follow up with you. In scripture, the order is turn around. Embrace the king. And go into the water. Be baptized. And if you haven't been baptized yet, we'd love to help you do that.

[36 : 50] Now, receive then this benediction. The Lord bless you. And keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you. And say to you. Right. On. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.