

# Right Side Up in an Upside Down World

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our text today is the opening lines of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In light of all that California has gone through this past week, in fact, in light of all that California has gone through this past year, perhaps our text ought to be the closing lines of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

The closing lines are where he speaks of the rain descending and the floods rising and the winds blowing and bursting against houses. The houses built on sand fall big time.

The houses built on the rock stand. In other places in the Bible, the rock is Jesus Christ himself. But interestingly here, in his sermon, Jesus makes the rock our hearing and doing his word.

Our text today is Matthew chapter 5, verses 3 through 12. The well-known and much-loved Beatitudes. If you are able, will you please stand for the reading of the word?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

[ 1 : 13 ] Blessed are the meek, the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the people of heaven. Blessed are you, when people cast insults against you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of me. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Lord Jesus, we pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you would take these words off the page and make them come alive in us as never before.

Amen. Please be seated. Now, before we grapple with the Beatitudes, I want to make two more preliminary remarks as we launch into this half-year journey in Jesus' brilliant sermon.

[ 2 : 34 ] The first preliminary remark is that you will get a whole lot more out of the journey if you have a handful of partners who are traveling with you.

We will find the sermon taking a deeper hold on us if we are part of a home group where we can wrestle with the meaning and the implications of Jesus' words with other believers.

Therefore, beginning the week of January 22nd, we are calling all of us to join in a six-week small group experience.

Home groups that are already meeting are going to be shifting their study to the Beatitudes. New groups are already being formed, and there will be a group for every day of the week. If you have never been part of a small group, or if you were part of one and then dropped out, please give this six-week experience a try.

Jesus gospelizes us as individuals, but also, and more importantly, more powerizes us in community. Jim Stockle is available at a table out in the porch afterwards where you can go by, and he will help you connect to a handful of journey partners.

[ 3 : 52 ] The second preliminary remark has to do with the place of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel. How did Matthew intend the church to use this sermon in its life and mission?

How did Matthew intend this sermon to function in the life and mission of the church? Well, as you know, Matthew concludes his gospel with Jesus' great commission.

Go make disciples of all the nations. That is Jesus' great agenda for his church. Go make disciples. Not just converts with their ticket to heaven in hand, but disciples.

How? Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. That is, initiating people into relationship with the God who is triune, immersing them in the fullness of the Trinitarian life, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

To obey all that I have commanded you. It is what many people are calling the great omission in the great commission. A job of teaching which we simply have not done well enough yet.

[ 5 : 06 ] Teaching all that Jesus commanded. Where can we find that all? At least, where can we find the essence of that all? Matthew to the rescue.

Matthew was a tax collector. That is, Matthew was an accountant who was always organizing things. And Matthew has gathered Jesus' teachings together in five sections.

Five times in Matthew's gospel, we find a big chunk of instruction, followed by the phrase, And when Jesus finished saying these things. And when Jesus finished saying these things.

And when Jesus finished saying these things. Five times. Why five sections? Many scholars argue, In order to portray Jesus as the new and greater Moses.

Moses' teaching is collected in five books. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

And so Jesus' teaching is collected in five books. But behold, something much greater than Moses is here.

[ 6 : 11 ] Here is the one who Moses met on the mountaintop, now in our flesh and blood. These five sections of Jesus' teaching, Constance, sort of, discipleship manual.

I think Matthew is saying to the church, Teach these five sections. Build these five sets of teachings of Jesus into believers, disciples, who can make other disciples.

The five sections are, And you might want to write these down. In reverse order, I'll give them to you first. The five sections are, First, in reverse order, The Sermon on the End Times, Matthew 24 and 25.

The Sermon on the Church, Matthew 18. The Sermon on the Mystery of the Kingdom, Matthew 13.

The Sermon on Mission, Matthew 10.

In Matthew 10. And the Sermon on the Mount, In Matthew 5, 6, and 7. Book 1, Matthew 5 through 7, Gospelized Humanity. Book 2, Matthew 10.

[ 7 : 17 ] Gospelized Mission. Book 3, chapter 13. Gospelized Interpretation of History. Book 4, chapter 18.

Gospelized Ecclesiology. Couldn't come up with a better term. And Book 5, Matthew 24 and 25.

Gospelized Hope. Make disciples, Teaching them at least These five sections of Jesus' sayings.

Okay, now. Back to the opening line, Lines of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. I said last Sunday that we must always hear the sermon in its original context.

Jesus preached this sermon right after He first preached the gospel. Which means that this sermon must always be heard in its gospel context.

The question then is, what is the gospel? What is the good news? More specifically, what is the gospel according to Jesus? I ask the question again, and I will ask it again and again and again, because it is so easy to lose touch with His good news.

[ 8 : 32 ] The only definition of the gospel Jesus ever gave is recorded in Mark 1, 14 to 15. Mark tells us that Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God.

preaching the gospel of God. And then Mark tells us that this is what Jesus said. Listen. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. The time is fulfilled.

The kingdom of God has come near. Will you repeat those words with me out loud, please? The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. Again, please. The time is fulfilled.

The kingdom of God has come near. This is the announcement of a great fact which impacts every other fact. The gospel according to Jesus is that in Him, history has reached a crisis point.

The gospel according to Jesus is that in Him, that glorious future rule of God is now breaking in upon the world. Now, Jesus understandably couples this announcement of the great fact with a call to conversion.

[ 9 : 43 ] Mark 1, 15. Repent and believe this good news. Repent and believe this good news. Will you repeat those words with me, please? Repent and believe this good news.

Again, please. Repent and believe this good news. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent. Make a U-turn in the road. Turn around.

Believe. Embrace. Put your weight upon this good news. Are you repenting? Are you turning?

Am I? Are we as a community of believers in the process of turning around and embracing this great fact? The clearest sign that we are is that we are becoming beatitude people.

In His beatitudes, Jesus is simply describing people in whom His gospel is taking hold. In His beatitudes, Jesus is giving us a profile of those who are turning and welcoming His rule.

[10:46] He is drawing a character sketch, if you will, of those in whom the new world order is emerging, those upon whom the light of grace is dawning. In His beatitudes, He is painting a picture of those who, in the language of the apostle John, are being born again from above, of those who, in the language of the apostle Paul, are being filled with the Holy Spirit.

In His beatitudes, Jesus has put together a portrait of kingdom, born again, charismatic people. In His beatitudes, Jesus has put together a portrait of repenting, believing, gospelized humanity. Over the next eight weeks, we will work with each of the eight beatitudes one at a time. But today, I want to work with the eight beatitudes as a whole.

Before we look at each one of them separately, I want to lift up a number of observations of the whole package. And I have five such observations. Probably the five came from staying in this Moses motif or something.

Five observations. The first is, notice how the beatitudes are packaged. Notice that they are enveloped by the phrase, for theirs is the kingdom.

[12:11] Notice that the first and the eighth beatitudes end with, theirs is the kingdom. The first, blessed are the poor in spirit. Why? For theirs is the kingdom.

Not theirs will be the kingdom, but theirs is the kingdom. The eighth, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Why? For theirs is the kingdom. Again, not theirs will be the kingdom, but theirs is the kingdom.

Now, because all eight are bracketed by theirs is the kingdom, I think it exegetically sound to read that clause with each beatitude.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom, but also, blessed are those who mourn, for theirs is the kingdom. Blessed are the meek, for theirs is the kingdom. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom.

Blessed are the merciful, for theirs is the kingdom, and so on. Which means that the specific blessings promised in the second through the seventh beatitude are but different descriptions of the in-breaking kingdom of God.

[13:17] Looking at that whole package, we discover what God's new world order is all about. It's about being comforted. It's about inheriting the earth.

Notice that. It keeps us from over-spiritualizing the kingdom. Inherit the earth. It's about having the hunger for righteousness and justice satisfied. It's about receiving mercy. It's about seeing God, the greatest imaginal blessing of all.

It's about being called and treated as children of God. The whole package is wrapped up in theirs is the kingdom. Are you with me? Yes?

Second observation. Notice the position of the pronoun theirs and they. In the original, the pronoun stands at the beginning of the clause for emphasis.

Not for the kingdom is theirs. Not God they shall see. But they shall see God. Theirs is the kingdom.

[14:20] Literally, theirs is of them. The implication being, theirs and only theirs. Of them and only of them.

They and only they. They shall see God. They shall see God. Reading the Beatitudes with this emphasis, we can hear the radicalness that Jesus intends. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs and only theirs is the kingdom.

Blessed are the meek, for they and only they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they and only they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they and only they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs and only theirs is the kingdom. To make the point more boldly, Jesus is saying that those who are not poor in spirit have not yet received the kingdom.

Those who are not meek will not inherit the earth. Those who are not peacemakers are not the children of God. Those who are not persecuted in some way are not yet living the kingdom life.

[15:30] Theirs and only theirs, they and only they. Are you with me? Third observation. Jesus is not describing eight different people here, but eight different qualities of the same person.

Say that again. He's not describing eight different people. He's describing eight different qualities of the same person. He's not describing eight different kinds of kingdom people. rather, he's describing eight interrelated qualities which emerge in every kingdomized person.

Jesus is not saying that when his gospel grabs a hold of us, one of us will be poor in spirit, another will be meek, another will be hungry and thirsty for righteousness. He's saying that each person grabbed hold of by the gospel becomes poor in spirit, meek, merciful, pure in heart.

Or to come at it from a different angle, the poor in spirit are also meek. The meek are also pure in heart. The pure in heart are also merciful.

The merciful also hunger and thirst for righteousness. One beatitude flows into the other. Poverty of spirit results in mourning over the sinful condition of the world and the sinful condition of one's own heart.

[16:47] Mourning gives birth to gentleness and meekness. Meekness creates a hunger and thirst for right relationships, which in turn produces a merciful heart, which in turn issues in pure heart.

Are you with me? Each beatitude, therefore, is interpreted by the other seven. This is especially important with the seventh beatitude, blessed are the peacemakers.

That's the one you find on Hallmark cards the most. Blessed are the peacemakers. I think what this is saying is that Beatitudes one through six describe the qualities of the persons who can make peace in the world.

And Beatitude eight describes what usually happens to those who try to make peace in the world. Jesus is saying that those who are able to make peace in the world are those who know and admit their spiritual poverty, those who mourn over the violence in the world and the violence in their own hearts, those who are meek, who recognizing their own powerlessness throw their weight on the power of God, those who are hungry and thirsty for right relationships, for moral, economic, social, spiritual wholeness, those who are merciful both to their enemies and to their friends who can't be merciful to their enemies, and those who are pure in heart.

They're the ones who can make peace. And Jesus is saying that those who try to make peace get in trouble with the status quo. They meet opposition.

[18:21] They get hurt. So Martin Luther King Jr. The point is all eight beatitudes are true of all upon whom the kingdom comes.

The eight are interrelated and inseparable. Fourth observation, the meaning of the word blessed. It's a word crammed full of meaning.

The word is makarios, M-A-K-A-R-I-O-S, makarios. Now, although makarios can be and often is translated as happy, to do so is misleading.

Yes, Jesus uses this word because he intends to bless us with happiness, but the translation happy are is misleading. For one thing, the English word happy is too weak.

A translation. Happy is related to happening, which means that happiness comes and goes as happenings come and go. But the primary reason why happy is misleading is that it puts the emphasis in the wrong place.

[19:32] You see, makarios does not turn on how you and I feel about ourselves and our circumstances. Makarios turns on how God feels about us and our circumstances.

Say that again. It's so crucial. Makarios does not turn on how you and I feel about ourselves or our circumstances. Makarios turns on how God feels about ourselves and our circumstances.

Whether or not we feel happy is not the point of this word. The point of this word is whether or not God is happy. Now, when I realize that God is happy about me and my condition, I might then be happy.

But my feeling happy is not the point. We need, therefore, a better synonym for blessed. Some suggest fortunate. That's good.

Others suggest approved. That's better. Still others suggest congratulations. I think that's getting there. it does put the emphasis in the right place.

[20:37] Congratulations to those who mourn. Congratulations to the persecuted. Yet even that word can be misleading because it can suggest that the mourners and the persecuted did something to achieve this blessedness.

Karl Barth suggests that we render Makarios as you lucky bums. That's getting real close. You lucky bums.

I like the phrase right on. Right on are the poor in spirit. Right on are those who mourn. Right on are the meek. Right on are the peacemakers.

Now, when I hear God's right on, I might feel happy. But the point lies where it should with what God feels about me and the circumstances. I think we can improve one more notch.

I suggest we use the phrase right up. Or better yet, right side up. Right side up are the poor in spirit. Right side up are the gentle.

[ 21 : 43 ] From the perspective of our un-gospelized value system, the qualities Jesus blesses are upside down, right? The meek inherit the earth. You've got to be kidding, Jesus.

Those who mourn are to be congratulated. Upside down, Jesus. No, says Jesus. Makarios, right side up. The qualities he blesses only seem upside down because we live in an upside down world. Jesus comes into the world and turns everything right side up again. Right side up are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Right side up are the peacemakers. Imagine vandals breaking into Mervyn's or Target or Nordstrom's this evening not to steal anything but to switch all the price tags.

Tomorrow morning television sets will go for \$6.95 and socks for \$125. Microwaves will go for \$350 while dishrags will go for \$150.

That is what happens when Jesus' gospel grabs hold of humanity. There is a switch in the price tags. Helmutilica says that Jesus' words initiate a transvaluation of values.

[ 23 : 01 ] Right up are the pure in heart. Right up are the merciful. Right up are the persecuted. Now how you or I feel about these qualities or circumstances is not the point.

The point is how God feels about it and in His beatitudes Jesus is announcing the divine blessedness, the divine congratulations, the divine you lucky bums, the divine right on, right side up.

Now when I realize that divine assessment I just might turn out to be happy. Now the fifth observation, the one that's worth the price of admission today. This is one I will reiterate again and again.

The qualities that Jesus blesses here are not natural human qualities. That is, none of us can produce these qualities.

The qualities Jesus blesses are not natural human qualities. None of us can produce these qualities. Jesus did not come into the world looking for beatitude people.

[ 24 : 09 ] He did not come into Galilee and search out for Makarios people to whom He could then give the kingdom. There weren't any. No, He first calls people to Himself and as a result of contact with Him, as a result of submission to His saving Lordship, the qualities He blesses begin to emerge in people's lives.

You see the difference? The first line of the Sermon on the Mount is not blessed are the poor in spirit therefore theirs is the kingdom.

The first line of the Sermon on the Mount is blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the kingdom. It's not congratulations to the poor in spirit now you win the kingdom.

It's congratulations to the poor in spirit your poor in spirit because the kingdom broke into your life. That's a big difference.

Not therefore but because. You see if it were therefore we would try to make ourselves poor in spirit in order to get the kingdom which means we would end up being proud that we were humble enough to become poor in spirit.

[ 25 : 29 ] You see? Poor in spirit mourning gentleness hunger and thirst for righteousness are the product of the gospel.

they are the consequence of submission to the reign of Jesus Christ. This is especially especially important to know about purity of heart.

Jesus promises to those who are pure in heart that they shall see God. That's my favorite beatitude. I would give anything to see God. What is this purity of heart?

Whatever it is it is not the result of my self effort. It is nothing that I achieve. It is the result of continual encounter.

It is the result of ever deepening relationship with the gospelizer. It is the result of the infusion of grace. It is the result of the infusion of the kingdom of God.

[ 26 : 29 ] Does this mean then that we are to be totally passive in this process? Not at all. For Jesus continually calls us to repent and believe.

To keep turning around at ever deeper levels and to embrace him and his kingship at ever deeper levels. And as we do day after day week after week we are slowly but surely turned right side up in an upside down world.

Are you repenting? Are you turning? Am I? Are you believing? Are you really embracing him? Am I? The answer is clear. In those who are the beatitudes are emerging.

let's do this in response to the word today. Let's just be still for a moment. Just be still.

[ 27 : 41 ] And in the silence examine ourselves. I don't know if that's the word. I couldn't find a better word. Let's let the text examine us.

That's a better way to put that. In the silence first of all ask this question. What one quality on this list do I find most attractive?

And which of those qualities do I shy away from and why? Which one of those qualities is very attractive to you and which do you shy away from and why?