

Matthew 5:1-12 - #blessed

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Preacher: Guest: Matt Terrell

[0 : 00] Thank you for having me here this morning.

As Chad said, my name is Matt Terrell, and I am the RUF campus minister down the road about an hour and a half at Samford University. Some of you may recognize me. I was actually here a year ago on this very same Sunday for Senior Sunday.

You are in danger of creating a tradition that every Senior Sunday you have to have me here, so you might want to talk to Chad about that if that's not something you're interested in. I'm especially excited for you seniors.

You did it. You graduated high school, or maybe you're about to graduate high school. Maybe you have a couple more tests to go. I'm excited for you. That's a big deal. College is a big deal.

Phil, you have a lot of exciting things on your horizon. I'm reminded of Phil Dunphy. For any of you Modern Family fans out there, Phil Dunphy is the goofy dad, father of three, in the television show Modern Family.

[1 : 13] And when his oldest daughter is getting ready to go off to college, he creates a book of words to live by, a book of wisdom for her. His name is Phil, and he calls it Phil's Ossophy.

And it is a bunch of pithy sayings, wise words for her to live by that she can sort of take with her to give her direction while she is away at college, away from home for the first time.

I'm just going to read you a couple of these. Phil's Ossophy. He says, the most amazing things that can happen to a human being will happen to you if you just lower your expectations.

Another thing, another bit of advice from Phil Dunphy. He says, if you love something, set it free unless it's a tiger. Words to live by from Phil Dunphy.

And really what he's trying to do, this is a father's attempt to give his daughter direction, to give her something, a compass, words to live by as she heads off to college.

[2 : 20] Jesus is doing something similar here in this passage. That right here in the words that we're about to read, these are words to live by for the Christian. This is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount.

This is the longest stretch of teaching uninterrupted that we have from Jesus in the Bible. And where he begins here is he's giving direction. He's giving a compass. He's giving us true north, something to know for certain.

I think this is particularly important for us to look at this morning for you seniors because you have a lot of exciting things in your future. You have a lot of change in your future.

And what comes with that is a lot of upheaval. Oftentimes. A lot of new things, new people, new ideas, new experiences, new places.

And what comes with that is a lot of upheaval and confusion and frustration and disorientation. And what Jesus is doing here in this passage is he is reorienting us around what is true.

[3 : 31] He's giving us a compass. Words to live by. So let's look together at Matthew chapter 5 beginning in verse 1. Verse 1.

Verse 1.

On my account. Rejoice and be glad. For your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is God's word and not mine. So let's pray and ask for his help as we look at it this morning. Our Father in heaven. Our Father in heaven, you are good and you are faithful.

We thank you that you do not leave us lost. And disoriented. And disoriented. And disoriented. But you give us your word.

[5 : 18] You give us your truth. You give us your son. That we might know what is real and what is true. Holy Spirit as we study your word this morning.

Would you come and do what only you can do. Would you bring us out of darkness and into light. Would you bring the dead to life in us. It's in the name of Jesus that we pray.

Amen. You may have noticed as we read through this passage that the word blessed or blessed shows up a bunch. In fact, nine times in these 12 verses, Jesus says the word blessed.

It's a key concept here in this text. And what Jesus means here by the word blessed is basically this. He means happy.

Happy are those. Happy are those. Now when Jesus says happy, he doesn't mean happy in a shallow way. Like just sort of put on a smiling face and everything is going to be okay. He means happy in a much deeper, a much more lasting way.

[6 : 25] When Jesus says the word blessed here, he means a deep assurance of being cared for. There's a television character by the name of Don Draper.

He's the main character in a TV show called Mad Men that's set in the 1960s. He is an advertising executive just sort of at the very beginning of the advertising industry in New York in the 1960s.

And he is in the business of happy. What he does is he studies happy and he learns how to sell happiness to people. That's his job is to sell happiness.

This is what he says in the very first episode of the very first season. This is what he says. He says, Do you know what happiness is? Happiness is the smell of a new car.

It's freedom from fear. It's a billboard on the side of the road that screams with reassurance that whatever you are doing is okay. You are okay.

[7 : 30] That's actually a decent description of what Jesus means by the word blessed here. That when Jesus is pronouncing blessing, what he's saying is, You are okay. I've got you.

I'm caring for you. It carries with it this idea of validation. What Jesus is saying is, You are beloved. You are cared for. You can be certain of that.

That's what Jesus means by blessedness here in this passage. So what we're going to do for the next few minutes is unpack this idea of blessedness from this text. We're going to look at three things.

If you're an outlined person, this is your outline for the morning. We're going to look at three different aspects of this blessedness. The priority of blessedness, the character of the blessed, and the source of blessing.

So the priority, the character, and the source. So first, the priority of blessing. It's really easy, particularly because this is a familiar passage to us, to breeze on by this.

[8 : 30] But it's important to note that Jesus begins this teaching by pronouncing blessing. That as he is starting his teaching ministry here in Matthew chapter 5, in this long Sermon on the Mount, that he doesn't begin with something to do.

He begins with blessing. And he has really challenging words for us and for the people that he's speaking to later on in the Sermon on the Mount about how we should conduct ourselves and what our lives should look like as followers of Jesus.

But he starts with blessing. Not with what to do, but with pronouncing blessing. This is actually the way that God has always worked. Way back in the Garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve, before sin even entered into the world, God creates Adam and Eve and before he sends them out and commissions them, the creation mandate, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.

All these great things. Before that, it says, he created them. And he blessed them. Before he sent them out to do anything, it says, he blessed them. The same thing with the people of Israel.

God rescues them out of slavery in Egypt. And he's getting ready to constitute for himself a new people. And in Exodus, he's about to give them the Ten Commandments and the law and the instructions for the tabernacle and all this stuff.

[9 : 47] And he's basically saying, this is what it looks like to be my people in the world. Before he does any of that, what does he say? In Exodus chapter 20, verse 2, he says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery in Egypt.

See, before he asks anything of us, he says, I bless you. He pronounces his grace upon his people. This is the way that God works. Now, here's why this is important.

Because we often don't see or experience God in this way. We often see and experience God as, you know, he's disappointed in us or he's at least waiting to be disappointed in us or he's angry with us or he's at least waiting for us to screw up so that he can be angry with us.

And, you know, he may be okay with you this morning because you're sitting in church and that's the right thing to do on a Sunday morning is to come to church. It's just a matter of time before you mess things up and you're back in the doghouse with God.

And we often think that the real stuff of Christianity is our obedience, is the stuff that we do for God. Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that our obedience is irrelevant.

[11:00] Again, Jesus has some really challenging things to say later on in the Sermon on the Mount about how we should conduct ourselves. But he's saying that's not his priority. By beginning here, what he's telling us is that the real stuff of Christianity is not what we do for God, but what God does for us.

By beginning the Sermon on the Mount here, Jesus is showing us that the whole of the Christian life is bathed in God's grace, is baptized, is washed in God's grace, is lived in light of his blessing. That Jesus is blessing you, is blessing me before we do anything. Here's why this matters. This matters because you have a list.

Particularly you seniors, you're about to graduate, you have a list. You have a list of the things that you want to accomplish when you're in college. The ways in which you want to grow. You know, you have a list of clubs and organizations that you're going to be involved in, of Bible studies and campus ministries, of the kinds of grades that you want to get, the friendships that you want to build, the relationships that you want to cultivate, the kind of jobs that you're going to get, and how you're going to grow spiritually while you're in college.

You have a list. You don't have to be a senior about to head off to college to have a list. I have a list. You have a list this morning of things that you think, if I can do these things, I just need to get my act together and then God can really bless me and be happy with me.

[12:33] If I can defeat this sin or if I can get this person to convert to Christianity or if I can organize this church event or fix this relationship, you have a list. And when Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by pronouncing blessing, what He is telling us, what He is communicating to us is that before we lift a finger on that list, before we even write the list down or think of the items on that list, Jesus is saying, I love you.

You are blessed. You are beloved. Now this matters because some of you will complete your list. Some of you will check off all the items on your list and then you will wonder, why do I feel so cold and empty? I've done everything that I think God wants me to do and I am still not where I want to be.

And some of you will fail miserably at checking off the items on your list and you will wonder, can God love someone like me? Am I really worthy of blessing?

Is Jesus talking about me here in this passage? And what Jesus is saying here at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount is He's saying, before you lift a finger at succeeding at your list or at failing at your list, you are blessed.

[14:02] His priority is not on your obedience or your achievements or your spiritual resume. His priority is His blessing over you. He is determined to bless.

Secondly, the character of the blessed. We're familiar with this passage. It's often referred to as the Beatitudes and they fall out into two major categories. And what Jesus is doing is He's actually describing, okay, what do the people of God, those who are blessed by Jesus, how do they conduct themselves in the world?

And it really falls out into two categories. And the first category is that the character of the blessed is humble. They're humble. Look at what He says in verse 3. He said, blessed are the poor in spirit.

Now, poor in spirit, what does that mean? Basically, what Jesus is getting at here is blessed are the spiritually bankrupt, those who know that they have no spiritual resources in and of themselves.

These are people who don't say, you know, well, at least I'm not as bad as so-and-so. At least I can count on that in myself. Now, what Jesus is saying is the poor in spirit are people who know they've got no leg to stand on.

[15:18] That all this blessing that Jesus is pronouncing comes to me, comes to you, in spite of us, not because of us. Secondly, not just poor in spirit, but blessed are those who mourn, verse 4.

These are, those who mourn, he doesn't just mean they grieve like when somebody dies. He's tying this idea to poverty of spirit, to being poor in spirit. Somebody, blessed are those who mourn.

These are the people who don't just acknowledge their spiritual poverty in an intellectual sense, but they feel it. They experience it. That their sin grieves them deeply.

Blessed are those who mourn. Verse 5, blessed are the meek. We tend to think of meekness as weakness or timidness, but that's not what Jesus means. By meekness, what Jesus means is confident and bold humility, a lack of self-assertion that these people who are meek don't need to parade their good accomplishments in front of other people because they know that they're taken care of.

It's a bold humility. Fourth, in verse 6, he says, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. What Jesus is saying is these are the people who long for righteousness, for goodness, for justice, to characterize the world.

[16:33] and they know that that starts with them. They know that that doesn't start with other people getting their act together. It starts with them. It starts with Jesus' work of righteousness beginning in their own life.

What Jesus is describing here in these first few beatitudes is he's saying, look, the community of people who I am blessing are a needy people. We sang about this just a few minutes ago. I need thee. Oh, I need thee. Every hour, I need thee. It's a humble people. Jesus is describing the island of misfit toys.

Do you guys remember the island of misfit toys from the old Burl Ives, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, claymation version? They come upon this island and it's all these rejected toys because they're not, they're just something not quite right about all the toys on the island of misfit toys.

So there's a, there's a Charlie in the box instead of a Jack in the box. There's a, there's a cowboy who rides an ostrich instead of a horse. There's a train with square wheels. None of them quite fit together.

[17:42] None of them are quite the way that they were supposed to be. It's an, it's an island of misfits. And what Jesus is describing here is the same. It's a community of broken, messed up people who aren't quite the way that they are supposed to be.

but they know it and they understand it. It's a needy, humble community of people. What I would encourage you, especially you seniors, to do is to look for that when you get to your college.

Look for that in your local church. Look for that in your campus ministry. Don't look for the campus ministry that's going to take over the world for Jesus. Don't look for the campus ministry that has all the right answers.

Look for the campus ministry. Look for the church that knows we need Jesus. Badly. A humble community. It's not just a humble community.

It's also a loving community. Jesus continues in verse 7. He says, Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are those who move towards others in love. They give their time and their energy and their money and their love to meet the needs of other people.

[18:55] They're merciful. Verse 8. He says, Blessed are the pure in heart. When Jesus says pure in heart, it doesn't mean inner moral purity here. What he means is that they have a heart that is pure, a heart that is undivided in its allegiance.

A heart that is undivided in what it loves. Those who are pure in heart are becoming more and more, learning more and more to love what Jesus loves and to hate what Jesus hates.

To be shaped by him. The pure in heart. Verse 9. Blessed are the peacemakers. This is a great word, the peacemakers. It's this great Hebrew word for shalom, which means universal, wholehearted flourishing.

And what Jesus is saying is that those who are shaped by my grace, by my blessing, move out into the world to pursue flourishing, not just for themselves, but for everyone around them.

Blessed are those who make peace holistically. Spiritual peace, physical peace, social peace, relational peace. Blessed are those who are peacemakers.

[20:02] Then in verse 10, he says, blessed are the persecuted. Because what Jesus understands is that as we, as Jesus' people, move out into the world in love, we will face opposition.

You will face opposition. Sometimes when you move out into the world in love, it will be beautiful to the people around you. Sometimes it will be confusing and ugly and offensive to people.

And Jesus is saying, blessed are those who are persecuted. And what he's doing in all of these beatitudes is he's painting a picture of a humble and a loving community.

An island of misfit toys that moves out into the world in love. That is what it means to begin to be shaped by his grace, by his blessing. The language that I use over and over with our students that are involved in RUF at Sanford is that we are a beautiful mess.

A beautiful mess. This church is a beautiful mess. RUF at Sanford is a beautiful mess. It's beautiful because Jesus is blessing it and loves it and loves you.

[21 : 17] But it's a mess because I'm part of it. And it's a mess because you're part of it. And there's a tension here in what Jesus is describing.

And the tension is that Jesus is showing us his priority to bless, to love, to bestow honor upon his people. But he's also emphasizing the profound neediness, the profound unworthiness of the people that he's blessing.

He chooses to bless those people who seem to be the least worthy of being blessed. He chooses to bless people who struggle to recognize their own neediness or who do not rightly appreciate his blessing in their life or who fail often to move towards other people in love.

How does Jesus reconcile that tension? Lastly, let's look at the source of blessing. What is it? I mean, clearly, it's not my worthiness to be blessed.

It's not your worthiness to be blessed. Jesus is not describing an all-star roster here when he's going through the Beatitudes. He's not describing people who have it all together. So what is it?

[22 : 31] How can Jesus bless when we are so unworthy of it? So far, we've only looked at the front half of each of the Beatitudes that describes the character of the blessed.

Let's look together at the back half of what Jesus is promising that the blessed will receive or what they will become. In verse 3, he says, they'll receive the kingdom of heaven.

In verse 4, he says, they will be comforted. In verse 5, he says, they will inherit the earth. Verse 6 says, they will be satisfied. Verse 7, they will receive mercy. Verse 8, they will see God.

Verse 9, they will be called sons of God. These are lofty promises that Jesus is making. And he can promise these things precisely because he knows where he is going.

He can promise these things precisely because of what he will accomplish on the cross. What's happening on the cross is that what is true of us in our unworthiness to be blessed becomes true of Jesus.

[23 : 39] And what is true of him in all of his worthiness to receive the blessing of the Father becomes true of us. That's what happens on the cross that it is God securing blessing for the people who are unworthy of it.

Our neediness, our sinfulness is put on Jesus and everything that he has earned is given to us. So Jesus can say, blessed are those who mourn.

They will be comforted because he mourned so much that he sweat blood. And he can say, you will inherit the earth because he lost everything on the cross.

And he can say that you will be filled, that you will be satisfied because he was stripped and he was emptied. And he can say, you will receive mercy because he received no mercy on the cross in your place.

And he can say, you will see God because Jesus lost God's face on the cross. He cried out, my God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?

[24 : 46] Where are you? See, what Jesus is doing is he's saying, you receive blessing because I receive curse. You receive love.

You receive blessing because I receive curse. Jesus is bridging the gap between his determination to bless and our unworthiness of that very same blessing.

And why does this matter? This matters because whether you are a senior in high school or a senior citizen or somewhere in between, there is nothing that can sustain you, nothing that can give you direction, nothing that can give you hope or joy or life, nothing that can help you keep your bearings and keep you sane in this world other than the blessing and the grace of Jesus.

So the question is this, will you trust him when he says, blessed are you? Let's pray.

Father in heaven, you are the giver of many good gifts, many blessings, some of which we are aware of, many of which we are not.

[26 : 28] I pray that you would help us to to lay our deadly doing down, not because obedience doesn't matter, not because what we do doesn't matter, because it does, but that all of our doing and all of our obedience would be bathed in, would be resting in your blessing.

Your blessing. Your blessing.