

# *The Sermon on the Mount* – Matthew 5–7

## *A Christian’s Character – 5:1-12*

### INTRODUCTION

This is a brief, but very informative preface to the most famous of Jesus’ teachings.

5:1 “Large crowds” followed Jesus in His early ministry to see Him perform healing miracles <sup>Matthew 4:23-25</sup>. However, here Jesus “went up” [*anabainō*: to go up (lit)] on a mountainside, similar to when the law was given to Moses <sup>Exodus 19:20a</sup>. Jesus “sat down”, assuming the position of a teaching rabbi <sup>Mark 9:35</sup>, with His disciples [*mathētēs*: a pupil who accepts instruction and makes it his rule of conduct].

5:2 Jesus “began to teach” his disciples. More literally, the phrase is “opened his mouth and taught”, which was a cultural expression indicating the seriousness of what Jesus was about to say.

### THE BEATITUDES (Declarations of Blessedness)

The qualities Jesus presented in the Beatitudes are spiritual, with allusions to the physical.

5:3 “**Blessed** [*makarios*: ultimate well-being <sup>Psalm 41:1-3, Revelation 1:3</sup>] **are the poor** [*ptōchos*: helpless] **in spirit for theirs is the kingdom** [*basileia*: royal dominion] **of heaven.**” God certainly will meet the material needs of the poor who cry out to Him <sup>Isaiah 41:17-18</sup>, but here, Jesus referred to those who confess spiritual poverty (bankruptcy) to God <sup>Isaiah 66:1-2</sup>. Only when man admits his absolute helplessness in his own strength <sup>1 Corinthians 1:25</sup> does he receive the greatest gift: heavenly citizenship <sup>Philippians 3:20</sup>.

The Bible presents groups of people who thought they were spiritually rich, but were actually poor. Two examples are: the Pharisees <sup>Luke 18:9-14</sup> and the Laodiceans <sup>Revelation 3:17-18</sup>.

Many Biblical scholars have applied the alternate translation of *makarios*: “happy” in this passage. However, this does not fit the context, because happiness is a subjective state, whereas Jesus was making objective judgements about the (ideal) Christian.

5:4 “**Blessed are those who mourn** [*pentheō*: grief for the death of a friend] **for they will be comforted**” Acknowledgement of spiritual poverty is one thing, but grieving over it is another. In mentioning it here, Jesus emphasized that true Christians must have a deep repentant sorrow <sup>Zechariah 12:10</sup> over their own sinfulness <sup>Luke 18:13</sup> as well as for the sins of others <sup>Psalms 119:136, Matthew 23:37-38, Philippians 3:18</sup>. Jesus offers the only genuine and effective comfort for a heart that mourns over sin <sup>Matthew 11:28-30</sup>.

5:5 “**Blessed are the meek** [*praūs*: a humble, gentle attitude to others resulting from a true estimate of self], **for they will inherit the earth.**” <sup>Psalm 37:11</sup> The taking on of Christ’s humility <sup>Matthew 11:29, 2 Corinthians 10:1</sup> (“clothed with Christ” <sup>Galatians 3:26-27</sup>) results in the Christian being an heir with Christ <sup>Romans 4:13, 8:17</sup>.

5:6 “**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness** [*dikaiosunē*: conformity with God’s claims], **for they will be filled.**” There are at least two aspects to righteousness in the Bible: legal and moral. Legal righteousness is justification (a right relationship with God). In context, this is not what is being referred to here, because the premise of the Beatitudes is that the person being described is a Christian, and has therefore, already received the gift of the righteousness of Jesus <sup>1 Corinthians 1:30</sup>. What Jesus presented here was the moral righteousness from obedience to God <sup>John 14:15, 1 John 3:21-24</sup>. Jesus told his disciples they would have to be more righteous than the Pharisees in order to get to heaven <sup>Matthew 5:20</sup>, because what Jesus desires (and described throughout the Sermon on the Mount) for the Christian to “hunger and thirst for” is not a claim of external conformity to rules, but an inner

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righteousness of heart, mind and motive. Jesus then made it clear that as a result of the Christian's striving for righteousness, He would provide all of their spiritual needs <sup>Ephesians 3:16-19, 1 Peter 1:3-9</sup>.

- 5:7 **"Blessed are the merciful [*eleēmōn*: compassionate, involving both thought and action], for they will be shown mercy."** Responsibilities of the Christian include freely and gladly giving to others in need in the name of God. When he does this, Jesus gives so much more back. This principle applies not only to mercy <sup>Luke 6:36, James 2:12-13</sup>, but also to forgiveness <sup>Mark 11:25, Luke 6:37</sup> and love <sup>Luke 6:35, John 13:34</sup>.
- 5:8 **"Blessed are the pure [*katharos*: clean in a spiritual sense] in heart, for they will see God."** Giving their heart (the center or wellspring of life <sup>Proverbs 4:23</sup>) to God <sup>Psalms 24:3-4</sup> with the right motives, will lead not only to the Christian literally seeing God someday <sup>Psalms 17:15, Revelation 22:4</sup>, but also to their immediately sensing His active presence in their earthly lives <sup>Colossians 3:15-16, Psalm 51:10</sup>. Later in His ministry, Jesus made it clear the Pharisees did not possess this characteristic <sup>Matthew 23:25-28</sup>.
- 5:9 **"Blessed are the peacemakers [*eirēnopoios*: one who makes peace in others, having first received the peace of God], for they will be called sons of God."** The Christian's family relationship with God (being a son of God) is solidified when he actively pursues peace with everyone: the believer and unbeliever <sup>Romans 12:18, 1 Corinthians 7:15, Hebrews 12:14</sup>. However, the Christian must be discerning about the difference between God's desired "peace" and God's rejection of "appeasement", which implies a compromise of unchanging Biblical principles. God never desires peace at any price <sup>Matthew 10:34</sup>.
- 5:10 **"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."** When the Christian is actively practicing all of the character attributes, Jesus guaranteed they will experience spiritual <sup>Ephesians 6:12</sup> and earthly <sup>John 16:33</sup> (that are also spiritual) battles, because of the constant clash between two irreconcilable value systems: the world <sup>1 John 2:15-17</sup> and Christianity. The final gift Jesus promised in the Beatitudes was the same as His first gift: eternal citizenship in the kingdom of God <sup>Matthew 25:34</sup>.
- 5:11 Being insulted, persecuted and slandered with evil [*ponēros*: malicious moral or spiritual evil] for the sake of Jesus is a blessing and an indication of being a genuine disciple of Jesus <sup>Acts 5:41</sup>.
- 5:12 A true disciple is called to rejoice [*chairō*: joy as a direct result of God's Grace] ("leap for joy" <sup>Luke 6:23</sup>) in response to every type of circumstance <sup>1 Thessalonians 5:16-18</sup>, including persecution, because even though everything may be lost on earth, the reward in heaven will be great <sup>Matthew 6:20-21</sup>. Jesus closed this section with a reminder about the similar suffering of the prophets <sup>1 Corinthians 10:13</sup>.

There are many aspects of the Beatitudes that are important to consider:

1. The first 4 Beatitudes are vertical: they speak about the Christian's relation to God. The second 4 are horizontal: they are concerned with his relationship to other humans. Many Biblical doctrinal passages have this structure <sup>Exodus 20:3-17, Mark 12:29-31, Luke 11:2-4</sup>.
2. The Beatitudes are a summary description of the ideal character of a true Christian. These statements are Christ's own specifications of what every Christian ought to be. This concept is revealed here and in the Fruit of the Spirit <sup>Galatians 5:22-23</sup> (not fruits).
3. They are also a listing of the steps of spiritual progression of the Christian character. Each step presupposes the step just before and leads to the next step in the process.
4. The eight character qualities constitute the responsibilities and the eight blessings are the privileges of being a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven (God).
5. Note that the character traits presented are counter to everything the world teaches.

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