

**Blessed**  
**Matthew 5: 1-12**  
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Prior to chapter 5, Matthew gives us a lengthy ancestry-dot-com of Jesus' lineage, going through all the names of His heritage; then tells the stories of Jesus' birth, His baptism by John, His temptations in the wilderness, His call of the first disciples, and the beginning of His public activity testifying to Jesus being a great healer. But in Matthew's first four chapters, we hear only **one line** of Jesus' public teaching: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

It's an important line. Matthew crystallizes Jesus' message as the coming of the kingdom and an invitation to "repent" – turn around, head in a new direction, or – as someone recently suggested: "Go beyond the mind you have." I like that. "Go beyond the mind you have." Let God take you to new places. Those are disciple-worthy instructions for us and a good way to approach scripture always. The kingdom of heaven has come near.

"Heaven" in Matthew's phrase "kingdom of heaven" does not refer to the afterlife. "Kingdom of heaven" is Matthew's phrase for what Mark and Luke call the "kingdom of God." Matthew changes the phrase not because he's thinking of life after death, but because of his Jewish reverence for "GOD" – doesn't want to speak the name of God. The custom would have been to use something synonymous so he avoids saying the kingdom of God and uses kingdom of heaven substituting that word. But it means the same thing for him.

Thus, and most importantly, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, is not about the next world, but life in THIS world. According to Jesus, heaven's in great shape. Earth is where the problems are. God's kingdom – "...to come on earth as it is in heaven..." – is FOR the earth; heaven's kingdom, God's kingdom, is about THIS world.

That's the backdrop to what is known as the Sermon on the Mount – chapters 5, 6 & 7 in Matthew - incredibly pointed, thoughtful, insightful teaching from the Master. And these 8 Beatitudes are the opening words to the first inaugural address of the kingdom of God, the State of the Union as it's intended to be, with God's ways holding sway over every Nation and over all peoples.

Sometimes we get confused we think these are rules to get us into heaven. These are not "entrance requirements for the kingdom of heaven." If you and I see them as rules to live by, we sever them from their roots in the tradition of the Jewish prophets. Matthew's community is steeped in Isaiah – Jesus quotes Isaiah more than any other prophet. If you read through Isaiah, you hear over and over and over in his

words, announcements of the signs of God's presence in the world, using language about peace, light, justice, healing, liberation and joy. Each Beatitude echoes the descriptions of the kingdom of God that Isaiah gives to the people so they can be hopeful what happens when they see God's kingdom breaking into their world.

Jesus picks that up Himself and announces that what is coming into being in His life, and in the lives of those who find in Him God's Good News is the very kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven made real. For Jesus it would be a description of what God's passion, God's love, and God's truth brings to pass when God's people are attending to God's ways in their lives and in the world.

So He says **BLESSED are you.** How blessed. There are a multitude of ways of understanding that word – honored; content; settled in the core of their very being – how BLESSED are those who know to whom they belong and thus “get it.”

For instance, “Blessed are the poor in spirit. Those who KNOW they don't have it all figured out; who know they are impoverished. Because they will have an attitude of receptivity and openness, bound to be a blessing because when we are open, we are able to receive the very things God wants and longs to give us. These are the things you and I cannot manufacture within ourselves – grace and peace and hope.

An old story illustrates this. A young seeker, keen to become the student of a certain renowned master, is invited to an interview at the master's house.

The student rambles on about all his spiritual experiences on his journeys, his past teachers, his insights he has received, his current pet philosophies. The master listens silently and begins to pour a cup of tea. He pours and pours, and when the cup is overflowing he keeps right on pouring. Eventually the student notices what's going on and interrupts his monologue to say, “Stop pouring! The cup is full.”

The teacher says, “Yes, and so are you. How do you expect me to teach teach you anything?”

“**Poor in spirit**” means an inner humility; a beginner's mind. Oh, if we all had a beginner's mind every day we woke up. “What new can You teach me, can You show me, give me this day O God to use me for Your purposes.” **Recognizing** my spiritual poverty is the beginning of finding myself in God's Kingdom.

That's the way these Beatitudes work. They turn it all upside down for us; turn everything on its head.

**Blessed are those who mourn.** Mourn for their spiritual poverty and that of others – and what it means and how our poverty impacts the world. Our spiritual brokenness. Mourning for where the Kingdom isn't being fulfilled – mourning about the things Jesus wept about.

**Blessed are the meek.** I think of meek as “teachable, moldable, pliable.” I’ll be worth far more if I am willing to submit to **GOD’S** way; rather than insisting on **MY** way.

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.** Yearning for the righteousness and justice of God is what opens us to the personal and corporate transformation that builds a bridge to God’s desired future on this earth as in heaven.

**Blessed are the merciful.** Anybody who recognizes the poverty of spirit in themselves and in others, recognizes we share a common condition and all that does is enables us to deeply care for one another. Mercy – we care for one another instead of taking advantage of those around us. Mercy begets mercy.

**Blessed are the pure in heart.** An undivided heart singular in mind and devotion to what God is passionate about.

**Blessed are the peacemakers.** Living for the well-being God desires for the world, where relationships – individual or corporate – are made right and bring peace.

**Blessed are those who are persecuted.** What can happen to you and me when we exhibit God’s desires for the world, in a world where the Kingdom is not yet fully realized, and where there are those who prefer their ways – the world’s ways – over God’s ways. They don’t like when God exhibits in our lives kingdom rules.

Most importantly hidden under these Beatitudes, the truth that the people who benefit most when God rules, when these things are breaking into this world, the ones who benefit are those who in the moment today have no reason for hope or cause for joy – the poor, the outcast, the marginalized, who have been denied their share of God’s blessings and justice in this world – in short, people for whom things have not been the way they ought to be. For such people, the coming of the kingdom of God, the breaking in of God’s kingdom on this earth is a blessing, because when God rules, all this will change; things will be set right.

The Beatitudes are not so much something you and I do – as they are who you and I become the more we allow God to break into us – our hearts and our minds and our lives - in the process of the journey as we follow Christ.

After all, if you read those Beatitudes, who exemplifies it most? It’s Him. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the One who impoverished Himself. Who let go of that royal Godhead and emptied Himself for our sake. The One who mourned for the brokenness in the world. The One who was meek, gentle, in our midst. The One who was persecuted for our sake. Following in His steps, God’s kingdom comes ever more close. Amen.