

The True Disciple (Matthew 5:1-12)

Each of the Beatitudes, or blessings, describes both the identity of Jesus' true disciples and then their destiny. It is surprising when Jesus announces that the most blessed or most favored by God, are the poor, the mourning, the meek, the hungry and thirsty, the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. These descriptions are plain statements of fact, not commands. They are all drawn from the Old Testament's descriptions of God's faithful people, who look to the only One who can help them, especially in times of crisis.

The word blessed, which is the first part of each verse, means more than the superficial idea of happiness or material well-being. It refers to people's attitudes and actions that matter in spiritual well-being. The emphasis is not on the blessings to be received; it is on the conditions of the heart and mind that makes it

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possible for a person to experience the blessings of God.

The last part of each verse is the promise or the destiny of each true disciple. And the first and last promises are the same: “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” In other words, Jesus’ disciples are blessed right now because they live under the loving rule and care of God. However, the other promises are all in the future tense: they will be comforted...will inherit the earth...will be filled. Of course, while these promises are yet to come, in some sense we already enjoy them in part. However, we will receive them fully at the return of Jesus, when God’s kingdom shall be fully established.

The Beatitudes were not directed to an unbelieving world. They were given in a teaching-learning situation to God’s disciples. These inner attitudes do not come to us automatically at our conversion.

Consequently, each of us as true disciples should sit at the feet of

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Jesus and listen attentively and responsively, as he describes the inner attitudes of an ideal citizen of his kingdom.

As we listen for a consciousness of spiritual poverty, we hear “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3) Are you overwhelmed with a consciousness of spiritual poverty? Do you feel like a pauper in the things of God? Do you reel destitute as far as spiritual achievement goes? Are you filled with pride concerning your spiritual attainments? In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Jesus described a proper attitude of spiritual poverty in the person of the publican. He used the role of the proud Pharisee to indict many of us for our self-righteousness and lack of humility.

Now, as we listen for a great grief for sin and failure, we hear “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted “(Matt 5:4). The grief that Jesus here speaks about is not that which is normally expected at

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the death of loved one. It is a personal grief that is the result of the awareness of the spiritual poverty referred to in the previous beatitude.

Is there a sense of sorrow in your heart because of your own personal transgressions and failure? Grief over personal sin is a basic requirement for continued spiritual growth. To neglect Christ's forgiveness is to be overwhelmed with ingratitude and self-righteousness. Do you grieve because of the sins and failures of others, or do you find it easy to be critical? In this picture of the inner attitude of a true disciple, Jesus is referring to a condition of the heart that is described by the psalmist: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Ps

51:17). In this Psalm, David is grieving because of his sin. His grief led to confession, and his confession made possible his cleansing.

Now as we contemplate a meek and teachable spirit, we hear, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit

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the earth” (Matt 5:5). Meekness is not to be confused with weakness. Jesus is not encouraging an attitude that says, “Excuse me for living.”

Meekness refers to an open mind and a teachable spirit, which are essential if one is to be possessed by the mind of Jesus Christ. To be meek is to be the very opposite of the egotistical know-it-all who has the last word on every subject. Those who enjoy horseback riding know that some horses have what is called a tender mouth, while others are tough-mouthed. Those with a tender mouth are sensitive and responsive to the movement of the reins. This is the attitude toward God of one who is meek.

Now as we think about an intense hunger and thirst after righteousness, we hear, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt 5:6). To be able to appreciate this Beatitude, one needs to have suffered the pangs of hunger and the torment of an unsatisfied thirst. Jesus uses these two deep appetites of life to illustrate the

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deep spiritual hunger of a true disciple to be right with God and his fellow human beings in all things.

We live in a world in which there is a tremendous hunger for wealth and an insatiable thirst for pleasure. There is a continuous struggle for success. Jesus declares in this Beatitude that his disciples will be characterized by an intense hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Being right with God means that while we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and are given a right standing before God on the basis of that faith, we

need always to bring every facet of our life into harmony with the benevolent will of God. Do you really want to be right with God?

Being right with our fellow humans means that the true disciple will put forth continuous effort to maintain right relationships with his or her fellow humans.

The Bible emphasizes that we cannot enjoy the favor of God if we mistreat our fellow humans.

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Now as we think about intelligent sympathy, we hear, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matt 5:7). Jesus declares that his disciples will be compassionate toward others. As the recipients of mercy, they are to be merciful toward others. They are to demonstrate mercy and kindness toward the unfortunate. To be merciful is to be habitually looking at others through the eyes of Jesus Christ. He saw the internal as well as the external needs of people. The parable of the good Samaritan is a demonstration of mercy.

Now as we think about a devoted and undivided loyalty to God, we hear, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt 5:8). To be true in heart or motive is to have unhindered access to the throne room of the Eternal. In this Beatitude, the word “pure” refers to that which is unalloyed, unadulterated, unmixed—an undivided allegiance to the will of God. The background of this Beatitude is the throne room of a Mideastern monarch. A king was always safely

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guarded from attack by an enemy. Only those of unquestioned loyalty to the king were ever granted the privilege of entering the throne room. This beatitude is referring to a present experience with God rather than to a future prospect of seeing God after we reach heaven. Jesus is declaring that his disciples can experience the real presence of God in the here and now if they are utterly devoted to him.

And now as we think about peacemakers who are regarded as the children of God, we hear, “Blessed

are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matt 5:9). This Beatitude refers to something much closer to home than the work of a diplomat in his or her efforts to establish peace among the nations of the world. Jesus is declaring that those who possess the inner spiritual characteristics described in the previous verses will experience the apex of spiritual achievements by leading others to know God through faith in Jesus Christ. In modern terminology, he is

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declaring that the natural function of a genuine Christian will be to produce other Christians.

We must not forget the final beatitude: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:10). This is just as much a feature of the true disciple as meekness and purity of heart. God’s faithful people have always been the object of abuse. Don’t be surprised when the world opposes you. Indeed, be surprised if it doesn’t.

It is good to be reminded of our true identity. The world either ignores God's people as being of no consequence, or actively abuses and maligns them. In the end, there is only one opinion that matters, and that is God's. And God says his children are the truly blessed ones.

So, what are the **lessons** we can learn from this Scripture reading from Matthew?

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This **Scripture reading from Matthew** highlights the characteristics and attitudes that are blessed by God. They recognize the need for spiritual dependence on God, encourage empathy and compassion for others' suffering, promote humility and gentleness over aggression, highlight the importance of seeking justice and moral integrity, stress the value of showing mercy to others, emphasize the significance of inner purity and sincerity, encourage active efforts to foster peace and reconciliation, and affirm that suffering for one's faith is honored by God.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Heavenly Father, in the midst of our mourning and our broken hearts, you call us blessed. You overturn the world's wisdom, giving your kingdom to the lowly and to those who are pure in heart. Give us a deep hunger and thirst for justice, and perseverance in the work of peace, so that through our words and our actions the world may see the love of Jesus Christ and hear your call to justice, hope, and peace. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**