

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
March 15, 2015 & March 22, 2015
The Beatitudes: “Lucky you!”

Memory Verse:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8)

Intro:

The Beatitudes are a set of eight evidences of God’s grace in the life of His disciples. Jesus presented them exactly that way. Some believers have looked at them as things to attempt or accomplish in order to achieve a closer walk with God, but I believe this to be a misunderstanding of the order of development of a Christian that may come from a simple misunderstanding of the word translated “Blessed.”

Without considering the contextual meaning of the word, we might quickly think that Jesus is giving us a list of “to dos” that result in us being “blessed.” Nowadays, we think of blessings, rightly, as gifts that come from God, but when we put them next to actions, we assume that they are effects that we can make happen by performing the actions. (An example would be, “God blessed me with good health” but we also know that we can cause “good health” by eating right and exercising and keeping away from smoking and drinking and other bad habits. It’s true that God controls the blessing, but we associated it with the actions WE take.) The truth is that our modern sense of “cause and effect” is not what Jesus was addressing. He wasn’t saying, for example, “If you want comfort in your life, go out there and mourn every day and you’ll be blessed with comfort.”

The Greek word translated to “blessed” is used in other prominent texts from the ancient world. Plato, a famous Greek writer and philosopher, used the same word to mean someone who was “fortunate” as in someone who experienced a sudden, unexpected profit in their business. While a good work ethic can be blessed by God with a profit, this isn’t the word being used here. Also, the Greek poet Homer used the word to mean “happy,” not like a feeling of happiness but the way you might describe a very lucky or fortunate event or circumstance that happened at just the right time, for example a ship at sea that suddenly caught a strong wind to speed them home. Sailors work hard, but they don’t cause the wind.

Likewise, when Jesus uses the phrase “Blessed is...” Jesus is commenting on how fortunate, how lucky, the people with these traits are and then gives reason for it. He’s not presenting us with a pathway to strive toward being accepted by God; he’s saying that these are evidences of God’s grace and work in someone’s life, and stressing how fortunate they are to have received such a gift. That being said, let’s take a look at these blessings. Each of these could have an entire sermon preached on them. There’s almost no end to the depth of these statements, and yet Jesus was able to word them so perfectly and concisely that it only takes a few verses to contain them, and he could speak them to a crowd in a manner of minutes. Truly He was a **master** thinker and teacher as well as the Son of God! For purposes of this lesson, we will do a brief survey of each Beatitude, so don’t consider this a complete study, but more of a starting block for you to study, pray and contemplate them for yourselves.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (v. 3)

Disciples are blessed if they are poor in spirit. These are the people who recognize and accept that they have a lack of spiritual goodness. They are unworthy by themselves in the sight of God and they are painfully aware of it. This awareness brings conviction, humility and a tendency toward confession and

repentance from their sin. This ease acceptance of their dependence upon God's mercy to even begin to serve Him does NOT come naturally. We are ALL spiritually stillborn, dead in our sins. There is none righteous. No, not one. The Holy Spirit reveals our situation to us and regenerates us through the hearing of the Word of God and we are saved! Without Him, we would never have realized our abject spiritual poverty and inability to please Him apart from Jesus Christ... and so He gives us that gift, that blessing and there's no greater fortune than realizing that poverty because it is only then that we can confess and repent and take hold of the reconciliation with God that Christ offers. Without that spiritual poverty, we could never gain the riches of the kingdom of heaven which are now ours, as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

The spiritual poverty Jesus speaks of has nothing to do with financial wealth or the lack of it. There are rich Christians who regularly show the humility of the spiritual needy and dependent upon God, while there are some who are poor who are so proud they would never acknowledge their need for Jesus and who would reject even the kingdom of heaven if it meant they had to admit their own sin. God's kingdom has been made available to all, but only the poor in spirit will receive it.

2. **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (v. 4)**

Mourning is a state of grief that comes from the realization of a sudden loss, or a lack of something, or something that can't be restored. Mourning is painful but it is honest. Those who are truly mournful don't care about what others think: some weep, some scream and cry, some even react physically, running, falling down, fighting or struggling against others. There's nothing pretty about mourning, but there's nothing dishonest, nothing prideful and nothing held back.

Now we can spiritualize this and say that those who are mournful over their own sin or the sinful state of others or their country will pray and seek God to find the comfort they need and this is true. However, all loss (death of loved ones, loss of health or ability, loss of wealth, status, freedom, and so on) stems from a single event: the fall of Man. Adam's original sin. On that day, mankind learned what loss and mourning was; and God also experienced it as well. However, God did not leave His fallen creature in disgust, but comforted Adam and Eve by making clothes for them to relieve them of the shame of their nakedness and, more than that, God promised them that one day He would redeem them and would restore all things.

So those who mourn this broken world, their broken lives, their broken relationships, their broken hearts and look to God for comfort will find it. Those who become embittered and repress their sadness and anger because of their pride, or worse turn their unrighteous anger toward God, other people or themselves, will not find the comfort they desperately need.

3. **"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." (v. 5)**

Some translations use the word "meek" and with good cause. Meekness might bring to mind someone who is gentle, but it also can make some wrongly think that it is gentleness from a lack of power or ability to do anything else. The world would have us worship at the altar of a false god or hero. We regularly idolize those in fiction (movies, books, tv) who are tough, self-sufficient, loners who don't need anybody's help and are strong and ready to prove it the first time anybody crosses them. Clint Eastwood, John Wayne, Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Chuck Norris... the American Action Hero pantheon has as many "gods" as the Romans or the Greeks ever did. And if these are the heroes, what does that say about our cultural beliefs. "Might makes right." "Nice guys finish last." Basically, if you're strong, use it to go out and take what you want and who cares what anybody else thinks.

But contrary to popular belief, “Meek ain’t weak.” Meekness is the definition of power under absolute control and without aggression. An example would be a tame horse. A horse is hundreds of pounds of muscle and it wouldn’t take much for the weakest horse to hurt the strongest, toughest human. We don’t describe our cars’ performance in horsepower for nothing! Yet a tame horse is not scared of a man; he’s secure. He’s happy to serve, he’s comfortable in his role because his master has tamed him and taught him contentment, trust and control. Unless pushed to the limit, he’ll even avoid confrontation with other humans who might agitate him out of respect for the love and teaching he got from his master. But make no mistake, the horse is still a powerful animal but now his power is channeled toward a useful and constructive outlet.

The same goes for Christians. Man is an animal with power. We can use what power we have to hurt, kill, anger, frustrate, belittle and frighten others while trying to lift ourselves up in the eyes of men. But God’s people have been shown love and mercy and taught how to live without the need of showing off or making examples of others. They are comfortable with who they are and have a healthy correct self-image of who they are in Jesus Christ. As a result, they don’t feel threatened by the power or prosperity of others. They don’t feel diminished when someone else does well. They are secure in themselves and they are secure in the future that God will provide for them. This security and peace affords them a joy in life that others cannot know; an inheritance from God for this life and the life to come.

Again, some might mistake this for weakness and try to take advantage of us, and some may succeed in this life, but God is just and one day, His meek followers will get their just reward and inherit the earth while those who rebelled against God and His people will be shown how weak they really are against the wrath of God.

4. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” (v. 6)

“Hunger and thirst” imply desperation. If you are truly hungry and truly thirsty, you will become incredibly desperate, and desperate people will do whatever it takes to get what they need. Period. Those aren’t desperate aren’t hungry enough or thirsty enough to do what it takes. They might be content to just sit back and wait or occupy themselves with something else. Some might try to fix their hunger with work, sex and relationships, spiritual junk-food, self-help, materialism, etc. Many will try anything except righteousness, anything except coming to God.

Those who are desperate for righteousness will change what they need to change, read what they need to read, do what they need to do and avoid what they need to avoid in order to have it. A desperation for righteousness stems from a right relationship with God and a desire to be more like Him. The more we taste and see that He is good and experience the pleasures of His friendship and his love, the more we realize that the pleasures of the world taste like mud in comparison.

Christians who backslide and fall back into sin will be miserable. They may sin more and more to try to find a comparable “fix” in place of being right with God, but nothing will satisfy them but Him. A hungry man might eat all the grass, dirt or leaves that he can, and he might “feel” full, but eating all that won’t make him healthy, it won’t make him grow and it will eventually make him sick or even kill him. Why? Because man wasn’t made to eat that stuff. And when God makes us into new creatures in Christ, He gives us a natural hunger for righteousness and only righteousness will do. Not only that, but He promises that we will be satisfied. Why? Because we will be operating according to God’s design for us, calibrated to perfection, running like a well-oiled machine in the eyes of our maker, and our greatest satisfaction comes from when we bring God pleasure from our lives.

5. **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” (v. 7)**

Mercy begets mercy. Those who have been forgiven much will love much. Anyone who has experienced the mercy of God will want to show mercy and compassion to all those they encounter. The merciful people are experienced people. They have compassion, pity and sympathy for those who have done them wrong. Our sense of justice wants to settle the score and in many cases wants to do more than that. However, mercy wants to call it even. Mercy wants to give up its right to get even. Mercy cares more about relationships than retribution or retaliation. The world would have us believe that the truly strong will prove it by bringing down the hammer, making judgment and getting even with anyone who dares to do us wrong. Mercy, like meekness, understands its place in the world. Once we were as guilty and worthless as could be. But as the song says, “Justice called and Mercy answered.” God proved that there was a higher right than being “right”. Grace trumps the Law. Mercy took the place of Justice, and Jesus’ Love satisfied God’s Wrath. The only ones who can truly be merciful are those who already have and will again receive mercy from God.

6. **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (v. 8)**

The pure in heart are those who have a clear conscience in the eyes of God. They have nothing to try to hide from God, no because they don’t sin, but because they are honest with God at all times. When they try and fail to do right, they bring it to God and confess. When they willfully sin, succumb to temptation or just plain do wrong, they confess that too. They aren’t perfect, but they refuse to add to their sin by trying to run and hide from God. They know that nothing good will come from avoiding God and they know that nothing BUT good will come from coming to God because He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Why are their hearts pure? Because they aren’t scared to bring them to God for cleansing and washing. Why shall they see God? Because they believe God is their Father and they come to Him. It’s not because they sin less than others, but because they come to God and embrace Him as a rescuer rather than running away. They see God for who He truly is, which makes them pure... which makes them able to see God for who He truly is. This is a cycle that no human can begin on their own, it HAS to be a gift from God, and God begins it the moment He regenerates us and saves us from sin.

7. **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (v. 9)**

Peacemakers are those who make peace. It’s pretty straightforward but almost impossible to live out. You see, it is inherent in our flesh to make war. Our flesh wants to make war with God every day. Don’t buy it? Watch children fight over toys. Watch grown men fight over grown women, and grown women fight over grown men. Then watch the men and women fight over money, sex and the television remote. We want to argue and fight and contend with each other because I am right and anybody who says otherwise deserves a punch in the mouth or a dirty word or a dirty look or a bad rumor started about them behind their back. Romans 8:7 says “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.”

One of Jesus’ many names and titles is the “Prince of Peace,” so anyone who has it in them to violate the peace in any way is violating and rebelling against the law of God. So those who are ruled by the flesh, those who follow and worship their fleshly impulses are those who love conflict: those who fight, argue, swear, and Gossip... don’t forget gossip. If you gossip, stirring up trouble and conflict between people and bad mouthing them to others, you are hostile toward God. HOWEVER, those who subject themselves to the law of God, those who are NOT hostile toward God, those who seek to walk in the spirit and not according to the flesh... those are the ones who will make peace. Like the meek, they

can't be threatened or shamed or embarrassed into starting a fight. Like the merciful, they would rather forgive and forget than strike back or even keep a grudge going. They are not workers of iniquity and they are not followers of the flesh, so what else could they be but the chosen sons of God. Once again, no amount of personal effort, self-help, yoga, meditation or any human work can bring this out of an unregenerate man, but God can save us from our sins and liberate us from the work of war and make peace-lovers and peacemakers of us.

8. “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.” (v. 10-11)

The final evidence of blessing, the final mark of a Disciple of Jesus, is one that He has shown and promised us in many other places. We've called it "taking up a cross." We've called it considering and then paying a cost. Jesus has told us that being His disciple will bring division between us and those around us who don't believe. It will cause families to turn on us, in some cases. It will cause unbelieving friends to avoid us or mock us. It will even cause governments to turn on their own citizens and imprison or even KILL them. All for the sake of believing in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross, His resurrection and the reconciliation with God Almighty that He fostered and offers to all mankind. Jesus says we are blessed when we are persecuted by such evil and irrational forces. Pride and blasphemy make men reject Jesus because Jesus' perfection dares to expose their sin and depravity. As a result they cling to their sin and their earthly power and kingdoms, all of which will dry up and blow away like chaff or sand at the beach. Meanwhile, the Kingdom of the One they reject will endure forever and will never weaken, and those they persecute will inherit that everlasting Kingdom and rule beside the one they rejected, and those that reject Him will be lost forever. So Jesus reminds us how blessed, how lucky, how fortunate we are to be on the side of the Almighty, the Loving, Faithful and All Powerful God of creation, and how all the persecution, insults and evil brought against us is nothing compared to the Love and Power that supports us!