

Living the Beatitudes

Prepare: Read Matthew 5:1-12



In Matt. 5:1-12, Jesus teaches the Beatitudes. The photo above shows the actual location by the Sea of Galilee where he did this. It was on the acoustical slope of mountainside. In Bible symbolism, when an event takes place on a mountain, it means that this is an important contact with God!

In the scene set by Matthew, Jesus first notices the crowd. We can imagine that He feels a great concern for each person. He understands their needs, and He wants to help them. The best teaching He can give them is one that will guide them into a more love-filled life, in which they are closer to God than ever before. Picture yourself in the crowd. He is speaking to you. He is addressing the needs you have today.

The first set of Beatitudes (verses 3-6) focuses on our relationship with God. The rest of them will center on our relationships with each other. This pattern reflects Jesus' core message: first love God with all your heart and soul and mind, and the second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37).

The first four beatitudes tell us that God is the source of our happiness. When we accept into our daily lives the values of God's kingdom, we grow into a fuller relationship with Him.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We are "poor in spirit" when we stop placing our confidence in material security or other false gods (the kingdom of the world). By depending instead on God (the kingdom of heaven), we experience His power and love and faithfulness.

Think of a time when you died to yourself by choosing to be poor in spirit, trusting in God when it seemed easier or more sensible to trust in the things of this world. Remember how much closer to God you felt!

2. Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

We "mourn" or "sorrow" when our flesh-nature wants to take the easy path that leads to sin but our spirit chooses to resist and to take the holy path. God comforts us while we struggle and suffer. His ability to comfort us is limitless.

Recall an experience you had fighting against yourself because you didn't want to do something God's way. Did you feel like crying in frustration? Did your flesh-nature mourn when you refused to give in to it? How did God comfort you?

3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

We are "meek" or "lowly" when we are submissive to God and obedient to His commands. Inheriting the "land" means becoming one of God's royal children in the kingdom of heaven. What are some rules of the Church that people don't like to obey? Is there a rule that you first disobeyed then obeyed? Why did you change? What effect did it have on you?

4. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

We "hunger and thirst for holiness" when we choose to live morally, i.e., when we conform our will to God's will. This hunger will be satisfied because God helps us achieve righteousness. What may seem impossible for us is not impossible for God. Reflect on how you have grown in righteousness. What activities have purified you? Have you ever experienced growth in your ability to love or to be stronger morally because you were tested?

The second half of the Beatitudes focuses on our relationships with each other. The first three of these deal with how to live like Christ, the remaining ones show the results from that kind of living. The second half of the Beatitudes also reflects the spiritual growth that is produced by the first half.

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.

When we are poor in spirit and place our trust in God's mercy (verse 3), the next step is to give His mercy to others, and this results in the blessing of receiving even more of God's mercy (verse 7). Call to mind some of the contrasts between the world and Christianity; for example, lying versus honesty. When you have chosen the Christian way, see how this shows the purity of your heart!

6. Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God.

When we've wanted to sin but we've chosen instead to live God's way even though it makes our flesh-nature mourn (verse 4), we become pure in our hearts and we can see God more fully, i.e., we dwell in the presence of God (verse 8). This purity allows the light of Christ in us to shine more brightly onto others, and they are brought closer to God through the witness of our lives.

7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they are children of God.

When we are meek (verse 5), we become peace-makers (verse 9), because we no longer fight and argue with others. Consider how God deals with us when we choose the path of sin. Does He fight against us? Sometimes it seems like we're wrestling with Him, but it's not God who's arguing: We're the ones who do all the complaining and yelling and struggling. Being peacemakers means we live as His children by handling conflicts the same way He does. We love our "enemies" unconditionally. We turn the other cheek. Reflect on a time when you served as a peacemaker. How did it reveal Jesus to the people with whom you dealt? Did you have the opportunity to see the difference it made in their spiritual lives?

8. Blessed are the persecuted, for their reward will be great in heaven.

When we live the Beatitudes, we become more like Christ than those who don't, and for this reason they persecute us. They convince themselves that they are better than we are, to avoid realizing that they should give up their old ways and be converted. If we're not experiencing persecution, we're not really living the Beatitudes.

When was the last time you were persecuted because of your relationship with God? Perhaps someone misunderstood your faith or rejected you or deliberately caused problems for you. Did you feel blessed by it? Did you feel closer or further from Jesus when it happened? Did you grow spiritually or did you lose some faith because of it? Why?

It's difficult living out the beatitudes. It takes great effort, but the Holy Spirit is here to help you, to comfort you, to guide you, and to reward you!



Growing through the Beatitudes

Prepare: Read Matthew 5:3-10

1: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

I am a wretch, because I do not want to fully empty myself to become poor in spirit. I want to be in control of my life, my desires, and the people around me. I want to be important, applauded, admired, listened to and believed. I want the glory to go to me, not just to God. I want more than God's approval — I want the approval of people, too. Lord help me! I belong more to this world than to heaven.

2: Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

I am a wretch, because I'm not sad about the control my flesh-nature has over my spirit. Rather, I mourn when I can't have things my way, and so I gain no comfort. Lord help me! Help me see my sins as they really are — harmful to my spirit.

3: Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

I am a wretch, because I am not meek; I do not control my desire to get riled up over situations that don't go my way. I get upset over people who oppose me. I get mad at them and try to make them change. I want them to believe I'm wonderful while behaving in a most un-wonderful way. Lord help me! Help me get my focus off of myself.

4: Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

I am a wretch, because I hunger more for the comfort of my flesh than I hunger for righteousness. I spend more time making myself feel good — watching TV, doing work I enjoy, socializing with people I enjoy, avoiding work and people that are difficult — than I do spending time in prayer and spiritual nourishment. Lord help me! Reverse this!

5: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.

I am a wretch, because I am quicker to complain about people than I am to give them mercy. Even if I think that I have given up being angry at them, I remain frustrated because they don't change the way I want them to. Lord, though I don't deserve it, give me Your mercy and help me be at peace with others.

6: Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God.

I am a wretch, because I have a heart that is far from pure; it is full of deception and manipulation, insistence on my own way, impatience, pride, self-interest, quickness to judge others, the desire to be pitied, and love for what is easy, fun and immediately rewarding. Lord help me! I see me more than I see You! Help me to stop focusing on myself and every problem in my life and to focus more on You.

7: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

I am a wretch, because I am more interested in fighting than in making peace — fighting for the truth, fighting to be heard, fighting to be understood, fighting to make someone else cater to me and give me attention. Lord help me! I'm fighting against You! I'm fighting against my inheritance of love! Help me to believe and trust that You will take care of everything that I think needs fighting for, Your way, which is the way of peace and love.

8: Blessed are those who are persecuted, for their reward will be great in heaven.

I am a wretch, because I don't want to be persecuted. I do not agree to suffering with joy. I want everyone to like me and approve of me. And when I suffer at the hands of others, I want to make them stop hurting me. I do not want to offer the other cheek. I do not want to allow people to nail me to the cross. Lord help me! Help me to want to be like Jesus. Only You can achieve this ~ without You it is impossible, because I try so hard to be unlike Jesus!

Suddenly, I realize something. I have entered into the first beatitude! Lord, I have emptied myself before You; I have become poor in spirit. And now I can just about feel that sense of mourning, too. Thank You, Lord, I am on my way to purification, because You are answering my pleas for help!