

Beatitudes Part 2

Matthew 5:7-12

Sometimes things are the exact opposite of what they seem. Just this last week my Amazon account has been suspended about 15 times. All I have to do to rectify the situation is click on the convenient link provided and enter in all my personal information and credit card number. My PayPal account has been frozen five times. I have received my last opportunity to renew my car's expiring warranty three times, which is kind of funny since both of our cars have salvage titles and we've never had a warranty on either of them.

A nice sounding lady has called me four times to help me with my social security disability application. That's awfully helpful of her since I've never even filed an application. Dell called me to help me with a problem with my computer, which is kind of weird, since I don't have a Dell. A Nigerian prince offered me a share of a great investment opportunity, if he could just transfer some money to my account temporarily for safekeeping. Oh, and, best of all, I have already won \$1,000,000. All I have to do is return the winning entry before the deadline, with my order, of course.

You see, things are not always what they seem. All of these scams and frauds use either fear of losing what I have, or my greed in gaining what I don't have to rob me of what I do have. The wording promises something really good. They appear to be helpful, but under this friendly veneer is an insidious and nefarious truth.

Not everything is what it appears to be. So it is when it comes to what the world says leads to happiness. There are certain paths that seem right and true to through the eyes of the world, but the actual destination is someplace else. Proverbs 14:12 says, "*There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.*"

Sometimes things are the exact opposite of what you had believed. The last thing you expected turns out to be true. Such is the case in Matthew 5 as Jesus begins the most famous of all of his teachings. It's called the Sermon on the Mount, and it begins with the beatitudes – a word that simply means blessing. Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5.

The beatitudes are the opposite of what we expect. What we thought leads to happiness, does not. There are so many things the world says will make you happy – money, power, pleasure. Our culture says here are the things that will fulfill you – accomplishment, notoriety, influence. But it's not working.

True blessing, it turns out, comes from the places we least expected it. Not just fleeting, momentary happiness, but blessing – what Max Lucado calls sacred delight.

We looked at the first four blessings last week. Jesus tells us *blessed are the poor in spirit*. That is blessed are those who recognize their own spiritual poverty before God. Because of our sin,

we have nothing before God. Once we recognize that we can't do it for ourselves, we can look to the one who has already done it for us.

This leads us to the second beatitude, *blessed are those who mourn*. In other words, blessed are those who are filled with a godly sorrow over their spiritual poverty. To those who are grieving over their sin, God promises comfort. This comfort comes not just alleviating the symptoms, but from curing the disease.

When we recognize that we have nothing before God, and we are filled with sorrow over that fact, then we also realize we have nothing over other people either. This brings to the third beatitude – *blessed are the meek*. Meekness is not weakness. It is to have a humble, gentle attitude toward others. The meek one day will receive the inheritance of an eternity spent in the presence of God on the new earth.

All of this leads us to the fourth beatitude - hungering and thirsting for righteousness. We long for what we do not have. We crave to be filled with what we cannot provide. And Jesus promises us that we will be filled. These first four beatitudes describe our journey to Christ.

As we continue on down the path of God's blessing, the last four beatitudes describe our journey with Jesus, after we have been filled. The first four beatitudes lead us to God. The last four describe our lives after coming to God.

I. Blessed are the merciful

Jesus says, "*blessed are the merciful.*" Since God has shown us mercy, we should show mercy to others. How can we demand that others live up to a level that we don't measure up to? Mercy is to show to others the same compassion and forgiveness that God has shown to us. By doing this we demonstrate the gracious nature of God in our own lives.

The Jews in ancient times had a really neat word for mercy. It meant to get inside another person until we see with their eyes, think with their mind, and feel with their emotions.

By Jesus' day, however, this was not a popular idea. The Jewish religion had become self-righteous and judgmental. 1st Century Judaism fostered hatred toward all Gentiles, or non-Jews. Jewish Rabbis taught that God hated all who were not Jews, and mercy wasn't even viewed as a virtue.

The Romans who occupied Israel weren't any better when it came to mercy. They saw mercy as a sign of weakness. They had built their empire through aggression and conquest, and to show mercy meant that you were vulnerable.

I'm not sure we're any better with mercy. Oh, if we need mercy, then we're all for it. We think we deserve it. Others ought to show us mercy, but when it comes to others, then we want them to get what's coming to them. We demand justice, maybe even revenge. The world's meatitudes would say, "Happy are those who get even, for they will have the last word."

Have you ever had a really rude, impatient driver almost run you off the road, just because he couldn't wait a little bit? You're thinking all sorts of hateful things about him. A few miles later you see that a cop has pulled that very car over. What are you thinking? That's right. Good! He got exactly what he deserves. I hope he writes him a really big ticket. You're not thinking, I bet that driver has had a really hard day, and there was probably a good reason why he was in such a hurry. I really do hope that officer just gives him a warning.

Now, if we're the ones that get pulled over, then we are hoping for mercy. We think we need mercy. That's how we are. God says, I've shown you mercy. I want you to show mercy to others.

But now look at the promise. *"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."* God shows us mercy, but if we don't show that same mercy to others, God will no longer show us mercy. He will hold us to the same standard we apply to others. As Jesus will echo this same idea later in the sermon when teaches us in the Lord's prayer, *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matt 6:12)"* And in Matt 7:2 he says, *"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

God doesn't want us just to be recipients of his forgiveness and mercy, He wants us to be conduits, channels through which his mercy can freely flow to others. Does God's mercy flow through you? Does it run through your life into the lives of others, or does it just stop with you? Do you give others what they deserve or do you give them what they need? Do you want God to give you what you deserve, or do you want him to give you what you need?

II. Blessed are the pure in heart

The sixth beatitude is *"Blessed are the pure in heart."* Pure means free of impurities, genuine, authentic, without error. It is to be unpoluted. We see the heart as the center of our emotional lives, but in biblical language, the heart refers to more than just our emotions. Heart refers to our desires, our thoughts, our goals, our will, as well as our feelings.

Our hearts are to be pure, genuine through and through. It is one thing to have a pure appearance, but to be pure in heart is something else entirely. It means we shouldn't have hidden agendas or ulterior motives.

Our dining room carpet has a spot. I don't know what happened there originally. It may have been there when we bought the house. We've rented a rug doctor and we've gone over that spot dozens of times. We've had a professional carpet cleaner come in and give it the full steam treatment. And each time, it looks clean. That spot is the same color as everything else, but give it a couple of weeks and that spot always comes back. There's something there, deep beneath the surface that a brush, some hot water and detergent just can't get to.

Our hearts can be the same way. When our hearts conceal secret sin, there are ambitions and desires that we don't want people to see. We can clean up our act so that what people see and hear seem okay, but the whole time we are pursuing something else entirely. We wear masks and put up facades. But when God cleanses us of our sin and fills us with His righteousness, we can live our lives inside out. Lives of true authenticity. There should be no difference between who we are when no one's looking, and who we are in the midst of the crowd. Having experienced the inner cleansing of God's grace, our life is transformed into one of authenticity.

Look at this beatitude this way, "Joy-filled are those who have had their inner-most thoughts, feelings and desires scrubbed clean of all filthiness, impurity and contamination." How about your life? Is it a shiny exterior, but a filthy mess on the inside? Do you find it constantly necessary to make people think you're something you're not?

Only God can wash you clean. Through his Holy Spirit, he can scrub the grimmest memories, He can scrape away the grittiest experiences. He can bleach the moldiest desires. He can reach the darkest, dankest, dirtiest crevices of your heart.

Only after you have received God's heart cleaning service can you see God. An impure heart makes blind to the things of God. A dirty heart makes us too embarrassed to stand in the presence of God. In the O.T. people were not allowed to look directly at God's presence. God said the experience would be too overwhelming. It would be too much for them to take. Even the sight of an angel sent people to their knees trembling in fear. There is no way a sinful human being could handle seeing perfectly pure and holy God. Isaiah, in his vision of the heavenly throne declared, "Woe is me, for I am done in. I am ruined." God had to purify him with a hot coal. Moses was permitted only to look only after God's presence had passed by. His face then shone with such brilliance that it terrified all of the other people, and they begged him to put a veil over it.

But Jesus says that we can be made so pure that we will be able to see God. Hebrews talks about approaching the throne of grace with confidence. One day we will see God's presence face to face. And it won't be in fear and trembling. It will be with love and joy and adoration. We will be able to look God in the eye without one shred of shame or embarrassment. We won't feel the need to hide one thing, because Jesus will have cleansed every sin, every single one- every speck, every spot. Gone. Forever.

III. Blessed are the peacemakers.

The seventh beatitude is "*Blessed are the peacemakers.*" Over the years Christians have disagreed about whether this should be interpreted physically or spiritually. Some say Jesus promising us peace from earthly wars and conflicts. Others say, no this is a spiritual peace, an inner peace with God. Ultimately, though, these two go hand in hand.

There will never be real peace on earth as long as there is sin. James 4:1-2 is very clear about what causes human conflict. *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.”*

In 1968 a major paper reported that there had been 14,553 known wars since the time of Christ. According to the Encyclopedia of Conflicts there have been more than 200 significant conflicts since World War II. Jesus makes it clear there will be wars and rumors of war until the very end. The modern world with all of its overtures of peace knows none of it.

So how can Jesus call us to be peacemakers? First of all, he calls us to be peacemakers, not pacifists. There is a difference. Scripture knows nothing of the concept of peace at any price. From a biblical point of view, peace is more than just the absence of conflict. Peace comes from the presence of righteousness. Psalm 85:10 says that righteousness and peace have kissed each other. As long as there is sin there will never be peace. Man's peace is just a temporary cessation of hostilities. It will never last. God's peace is the presence of wholeness, forgiveness, righteousness and love.

To have real peace with other people we must first have peace with God. Scripture contains 400 direct references to peace. The Bible begins and ends with peace. In the Garden of Eden, a place without sin, and in the new heaven and new earth, a place again, without sin. True peace can only come from the God of peace.

If ultimate peace will not be achieved until the end of time, then how can we be peacemakers? We are peacemakers by striving to bring reconciliation wherever we can, by bringing others into the same relationship with God that we have. We establish peace by helping others to make peace with God. When we make peace with God, we can make peace with each other. In the early church, Jews and Gentiles who once hated each other, who would not even eat with each other, now worshipped with each other, and considered each other to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

There are three marks of a peacemaker. 1.) They have made peace with God themselves. 2.) They lead others to make peace with God. 3.) Help others to make peace with others. When we do this, Jesus says we will be called sons of God. Why? Because God is a God of peace. He made peace through his own Son. When we make peace we are being like his sons and daughters.

IV. Blessed are those who are persecuted

All of the beatitudes seem to run contrary to expectations, but none seems more contradictory than the eighth beatitude. Jesus says, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness.”* Even more ironic, is the fact that this potential of hostility comes right after the blessing for peacemakers. Those whose idea of Christianity is positive thinking don't know what to make of this verse. There is even a Bible version out there called The Positive Bible. It only

includes the Bible passages that seem positive and uplifting. Only the verses that make us feel good and happy about life are included. Not surprisingly, Matthew 5:10-12 is not included.

Yet, Jesus says that those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed. He says in verse 12 that they have reason to rejoice and be glad. TV preachers might sugar coat the Christian life. They may promise health and wealth for the faithful. But Jesus never sugar coats a thing. He knows that if we follow him, we will face hardship.

The fact is that even while as we strive to make peace in this life, we will often be the objects of hostility. Our sinful nature fights against peace with God, even though it is what we need most. Our sinful nature also fights against righteousness. Righteous people are a reminder of our own shortcomings. The mere presence of righteous people seem to expose the unrighteous.

When we think of persecution we tend to think of early Christians being thrown before the lions in the coliseum. We think of believers being burned at the stake or thrown into prison. But the word translated persecution here means to pushed, pressured, or pursued. This can come in all shapes and sizes. For Christians in modern America, these pressures may seem far more subtle, but they can be just as tempting and dangerous.

These may be as simple as pressure to keep our faith hidden at school or work. We may face ridicule for our faith and beliefs. Bible believing Christians seem to be the one group of people that you can make fun of, insult, and openly discriminate against with impunity. There is a rising tide of persecution in our country. We are regarded as simple minded and old fashioned. Hollywood regularly ridicules our faith. The world celebrates all forms of cultural diversity, except for Christian culture, which is regularly censored.

Persecution will be a growing reality in our lives. This should not come as a surprise. This is not unexpected. Are we ready?

Jesus doesn't promise that this persecution will be easy or pleasant. He doesn't say we won't feel it, or if we just pray it will go away. But he does promise we will be blessed. He promises this twice, and He promises a heavenly reward.

This beatitude isn't a command to seek out persecution. It will seek us out. It may be physical suffering. It may be emotional hardship or psychological pressure. You may be mocked or ridiculed or ignored. People will talk about you behind your back. Media personalities, celebrities and entertainers will talk about your beliefs and convictions as though they are silly and backwards.

Don't listen to them. Don't let their words get under your skin. Just look at each snarky comment as another deposit in your heavenly treasure. Respond to harsh words with words of grace and love. Know that you are being treated the same way as Jesus, and Jeremiah, and Daniel. Every insult is a badge of honor that identifies you with them.

Notice that the beatitudes end right where they began, with the kingdom of heaven. Things have come full circle. When we suffer for the sake of Jesus, we know that we have been identified with him. We might be on the outs in this world, but we will have the kingdom of heaven. We may lose out here and now, but in eternity our reward will be very great. Jesus promises that our temporary suffering results in eternal joy.

It was French mathematician, physicist and philosopher Blaise Pascal who observed, "There is a God-shaped hole in the heart of every man." And we try to shove all sorts of things into that God-shaped hole. We put cars and houses and boats and clothes and smartphones, but none of the arrangements we try fills the empty place. We fill it with sex and drink and good times, but it drains out of the hole faster than we can fill it. We fill it with relationships and marriage and friends, but something is still missing. We fill it with achievement and success or the accomplishment of our children, but they still aren't shaped just right. Nothing that we shove in there can fill that hole.

John Eldridge writes in his book "Get Your Life Back," "We've been sucked into a pace of life nobody's enjoying." That is so true. We're living lives we don't really want to live. We can't keep living life at the speed of smartphones. That's why Jesus tells us that blessing and fulfillment lie down a different path.

It's a path that begins with admitting our spiritual bankruptcy before God. It's not always an easy path. We will be so identified with Jesus that people will mock us, tease us, and torment us. But Jesus assures us that this road ends in gladness and rejoicing. This road leads to lasting blessing-eternal blessing, a kingdom that cannot be shaken, the kingdom of heaven.

The beatitudes

Happy are the self-assured who feel good about themselves, for theirs is this world

Happy are those who celebrate, for they will be popular.

Happy are the self-assertive, for they will be able to take before others can get it.

Happy are those who hunger and thirst for pleasure, for they will be amused.

Happy are those who get even, for they will have the last word.

Happy are those with ulterior motives, for they will get what they really want.

Happy are the troublemakers, for they will get all the attention.

Happy are those who keep their faith to themselves, for great is their reward on earth.

Sometimes things are the exact opposite of what you believed. The last thing you expected turns out to be true. Such was the case for the families of Whitney Cerak and Laura VanRyn. Four Bible college students and a staff member were travelling in a school van when a tractor-trailer veered across the median. The entire driver's side of the van was peeled like a tin can ejecting several of the passengers.

When emergency workers arrived on the scene it was a bloody mess. Bodies, car parts, and personal belongings lay strewn about all over the place. There was only one survivor, a young lady barely clinging to life. With the help of fellow students, the emergency workers identified the bodies, gathered up the personal belongings, placing each with the appropriate body.

The family of Laura VanRyn was sent to the hospital to be with their badly injured daughter. The other families were notified where they went to coroner's office to identify their loved ones. The parents of Whitney Cerak were too distraught to make a visual identification of their daughter's badly mangled body.

A closed casket funeral was held. Her church of several hundred gathered to mourn. The grieving family slowly began the painful process of putting the pieces back together and moving on with their lives.

Meanwhile, at the hospital, Laura VanRyn, remained in critical condition. She stayed in a coma most of the time. When she was conscious, she was incoherent and unaware of her surroundings. She had suffered massive head trauma. Her face was badly wounded, and was covered in bandages. Her family gathered around her to love, nurture, and pray her back to health. They were so thankful their daughter had survived the horrific accident, and they were determined to see her fully recover. They kept a constant vigil. For five weeks they provided around the clock care. They kept a blog to keep their church, family and friends updated, and to rally their prayer efforts.

As the days and weeks passed, slowly Laura showed began to show signs of improvement. She showed greater awareness of her surroundings and she began to speak. The wounds were healing and some of the bandages removed. But the family's hope began to turn into confusion. Some of the things she said didn't make sense. Something didn't quite look right about their beloved daughter. Finally, she requested a pen and paper. She struggled to write, and she handed the notebook back. On it she had scrawled, "I am Whitney Cerak."

A tragic misidentification had taken place at the scene of the accident. Somehow between their similar appearances, the scattered IDs, and the shock of the horror, the girl's fellow students had told the emergency workers the wrong names. Because of the survivor's extensive head and facial injuries, Laura's family, wrongly thought the girl at the hospital was their own.

Whitney's family had gone through the pain of a funeral and saying goodbye. Laura's family spent five weeks caring for a daughter who was not their own. Suddenly, for one family, what

had been relief and hope, turned to sadness. For the other family, sorrow had turned into joy. Mourning had been turned into dancing.