

The Beatitudes of Jesus.

Text: Mat 5:1-12

1) What Christ Looks For In Us Christians

Suggested Hymns:

2) What Christ Promises Us In Return

505, 437, 501, 323, 452

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 5:1–12, ¹ *And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.* ² *Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:* ³ *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.*

⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Ever since God first began to make His Word known to man, an uncounted number of sermons have been preached in the world. In the days of the Old Testament we read that Noah was *“a preacher of righteousness,”*¹ by whom God appealed to the people to repent as the world faced the destruction of the Flood.

We remember Moses, the mouthpiece of God’s revelation to Israel. We have the record of the prophets during the critical and anxious days of waiting for the fulfilment of the Messianic promises.

Then John the Baptist, the preacher of repentance, introduced the greatest of them all, Jesus of Nazareth, whose final commission to preach the Gospel to every creature, became the impulse, for all the formal and informal preaching of His Apostles and of every Christian preacher since their time to the end of the world.

Today, week after week, many thousands of sermons sound forth into the world, some of them before small gatherings of only a few souls, others before millions of listeners over radio and television. No one will ever estimate how many sermons have been preached in the world, and very few of them are remembered for any length of time.

But there is one that is the most famous of them all, our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. In all the ages it has been a favourite subject in literature and painting. It is quoted time and again in the writings of men. There are those who never go to church, never listen to any preaching, and know little of God's Word, but who are nevertheless familiar with at least part of the Sermon on the Mount.

And most of all, it is the opening words of our text today that have found their way into widespread favour and familiarity among men. The Beatitudes, together with the Lord's Prayer and Psalm 23, are perhaps the most famous passages of all the Scriptures.

But although the Sermon on the Mount is well known, it is often misunderstood and misused by people. Some claim that it is all we need to know of the Bible, that it is the essence of the Gospel, that it is the main message of Christ to our world, that it is a complete summary of all that is good and true in religion. However, that is going too far!

Beautiful and precious as these words are, they are not Gospel in the real sense of the word. They are instructions of the Law, and St. Matthew clearly indicates that they were spoken to the disciples of Jesus, to those who had already come to faith in Him. Nevertheless these disciples needed that message. And we need it also.

May therefore the Spirit of God be with us today as we consider the opening words of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. These verses are called the Beatitudes, because each one of them begins with the word "*blessed.*" Let us learn from these Beatitudes. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Let Us Learn From These Beatitudes What Christ Looks For In Us Christians

The Poor in Spirit

Our Lord begins by saying: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”* This does not mean those who are poor in material possessions, nor the poverty-stricken in money and goods, but rather those who realise themselves to be spiritually bankrupt because of the enormous debt of their sins and because of their complete lack of righteousness and merit before God.

With the tax-collector they know themselves to be sinners. With the prodigal son they say: *“I have sinned.”* With Paul they exclaim: *“O wretched man that I am!”* And that kind of an attitude Christ still looks for in us today. When we come before God, we must come with the humiliating confession that we are also spiritually bankrupt, and that we have amassed a mountain of debt before Him and have nothing with which to pay.

The Mourners

And that condition of spiritual bankruptcy must not be a matter of indifference to us. The second Beatitude says: *“Blessed are those who mourn.”* Luther began his 95 Theses with the words: *“Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ... intended that the whole life of believers should be penitence.”*

That is the mournfulness that Christ requires, which He still looks for in us Christians today. It is the sadness that comes with sincere contrition for sin and iniquity. It is included in one of the Christian Questions of Luther for our self-preparation for Holy Communion, *“Are you also sorry for your sins?”* The answer is - *Yes, I am sorry that I have sinned against God.”*

It is true that the Christian is God’s happiest creature, that even in the depths of earthly grief he is able to maintain a contented heart. But when the Christian thinks of his sin, he is deeply grieved, sad, and mournful.

The Meek

The thought of the third Beatitude is a result of the first two: *“Blessed are the meek.”* Those who are poor in spirit and grieved by their sinfulness have learned to walk humbly before God, and they will be gentle, tolerant, and kind also toward their fellow men.

Pride and intolerance cannot live in a heart that has learned to know its humble position before God and that has experienced true sorrow and mourning for sin. Such a person will not *“think of himself more highly than he ought to think.”*² Our Lord has given us the instruction of St. Paul: *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”*³ And St. Peter says: *“All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.”*⁴

The Seekers After Righteousness

Then Jesus says: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”* Again He gives us a link in that golden chain of Christian virtues. Truly humble, recognising our shortcomings, we are to hunger and thirst for the righteousness of Christ to cover our sins, and then there will be in us also, the sincere desire to live to a fuller extent that kind of a life that is right, that is just in dealing with others, and pious in the sight of God.

That is what Paul meant when he said: *“And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”*⁵

The Merciful

Still another quality that Christ looks for in us Christians is that of real mercy, pity, and compassion. We need that so much in our world today. There is so little sympathy among people, so little consideration for the problems of others, so little understanding for their needs, and so little willingness to help.

Often that is true also among Christians. In these last days of the world there is great distress everywhere. Again and again God places before us the opportunity to be of positive and practical help to our fellow men.

And as in ancient times the heathen were amazed at the love and mercy shown by those who had accepted the faith of Christ, so today also the quality of mercy should still be a prominent characteristic of God’s people in a world where love has grown cold and where mercy is a rare virtue.

God said to His people of old: ***“Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his neighbor.”***⁶ There He laid down a command for His people of all time. And He has emphasised that will by the word of St. James, ***“Mercy triumphs over judgement.”***⁷

The Pure

Now the Beatitudes continue: ***“Blessed are the pure in heart.”*** The world is becoming increasingly evil as the end approaches. But the people of Christ are urged to purity of heart ***“that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”***⁸

This should be our daily prayer: ***“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”***⁹ For one of the requirements of pure religion, in the words of the Apostle, is this, that a Christian ***“keep himself unspotted from the world.”***¹⁰

The Peacemakers

Furthermore, ***“Blessed are the peacemakers.”*** In a world where strife and hatred abound, where even within the Church there is a sad increase of bitterness and contention, these words of Jesus come to us with special force and significance today.

Christ does not demand peace at any price. He does not require surrender of the truth that lies at the root of unionistic efforts within the Church, nor the abandonment of human rights that makes for a policy of appeasement in the affairs of this world and aims at pacifism and disarmament.

God has clearly declared in many passages of the Scriptures that the truth must not be sacrificed and that human rights should be defended against tyranny and aggression. But true peacemakers work for peace at its very source. They recognise the fundamental cause of all disturbance within and without the Church to be human sinfulness, which separates man from God and turns man against his fellow men.

The true peacemakers therefore seek to establish peace through the Word, through the persistent application of the Gospel. ***“Be reconciled to God”***¹¹ is the basic approach to the problem. Then all other peace can follow, for a person

who has found peace with God will endeavour to live at peace with his fellow men and will obey the injunction of the Apostle: *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”*¹²

The Persecuted

But all of the good things of these first seven Beatitudes are so little appreciated in our world of evil. Therefore Jesus also gave us the eighth: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. ... Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.”*

This implies a kind of summary of all that Christ expects of us: Live your faith, and testify of your convictions. Then let come what may, even though it may bring you hardship, suffering, and persecution. Christ does not encourage voluntary martyrdom here, the fanatical self-exposure to criticism and opposition that forms the self-righteous glory of those who have a false religious zeal.

There is in these words an appeal for steadfastness in the face of hardship and opposition that arise against us for righteousness’ sake and because of our faithfulness when the charge and accusation against us is false and when sufferings come upon us for the sake of Jesus Christ in whom we believe.

These, then, are the characteristics that our Lord looks for in us Christian believers here on earth. They cover a wide range of our life and include many of our obligations toward God and man. As in the days of our Lord, so also in our day they express our Saviour’s ideal for His believers everywhere.

2. Let Us Learn From These Beatitudes

What Christ Promises Us In Return

And now, in order to encourage us, our Saviour has given us words of precious promise. Each one of the Beatitudes begins with the word *“blessed,”* and in each case a specific blessing is described. These are not rewards of merit, but gifts of grace given to those who believe.

The Blessings

To the poor in spirit Christ promises the kingdom of heaven. All of the treasures of the Kingdom of Grace are in store for them in this life, and all of the

glories of salvation in the life to come. ***“We are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”¹³***

Those who mourn shall be comforted. There is a sorrow that produces death,¹⁴ a sadness for which there is no relief, but those whose mourning is based on contrition for sin and who have confidence in God’s grace in the Saviour shall receive the abundant comfort of forgiveness, for Jesus says: ***“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”¹⁵***

And those whom the wisdom of God then leads through much tribulation shall receive the strength and consolation of the God of all comfort, who says by His Son Jesus: ***“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”¹⁶***

Again, the meek shall inherit the earth. Although it seems at times that the proud and arrogant are the lords of the earth, yet theirs is only a passing glory and a temporary possession of the things that pass away. ***“Happiness is not measured by the acre.”***

The final promise of all good things remains with those who love God in true humility. And such a person can confidently say: ***“Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”¹⁷***

Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. The abundant righteousness of Christ shall cover their shortcomings, and the life that reaches out for the things that please God shall be filled more and more with God’s own righteousness until the image of God is perfectly restored, and the believer experiences the glorious fulfilment of his hope in the words of the Psalmist: ***“As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.”¹⁸***

More Blessings

So the merciful shall obtain mercy. God says: ***“whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”¹⁹*** Not only is the sympathetic life one which is respected and honoured by many here on earth, but God Himself offers His own divine compassion as a reward for mercy, for even a cup of cold water shall not be given unrewarded before God.

And on the Last Day it will be the merciful who shall hear the words of the Judge: *“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”*²⁰

“Blessed are the pure in heart,” says Christ, *“for they shall see God.”* To see God is to be in heaven. St. Paul says: *“Now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face.”*²¹ In Christ and through Christ the vision of God is granted to us already here on earth. And above all, the Apostle says: *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”*²²

Continuing then, our Lord says that the peacemakers *“shall be called the children of God.”* They are His children by adoption. He who is the God of peace is their Father. They shall be given the glorious consciousness of brotherhood with Christ and membership in God’s own family. They shall receive their eternal heritage with the saints in light in the glorious mansions of the Father’s house.

The Crown of Life

Thus the blessings of the Beatitudes build up toward a beautiful climax. Those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for the sake of their Lord and Saviour, are told: *“Great is your reward in heaven.”* Not because of the martyrdom itself, not as though persecution and hatred in this world give us the right to demand special distinction in glory. It is the loyalty and faithfulness which have brought us persecution in the world, that shall at the last be blessed with the crown of everlasting life.

St. Paul knew that when he said in 2 Timothy 4:7–8, ⁷ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* ⁸ *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

And the Saviour has promised: *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.”*²³

These, then, are the Beatitudes. They “are like so many facets of a diamond, each one manifesting forth the glory of the gem. They are a complete chain of precious pearls, each in its proper place, carefully linked one to another by God.” Here Christ shows us what He looks for in us, and what He graciously promises to us in return.

May God grant that both He and we shall not be disappointed, that He may find us faithful, and that we may receive the glorious reward of His grace! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Peter 2:5

² Rom. 12:3

³ Phil. 2:3

⁴ 1 Peter 5:5

⁵ Rom. 6:13

⁶ Zech. 7:9

⁷ James 2:13

⁸ Phil. 2:15

⁹ Psal. 51:10

¹⁰ James 1:27

¹¹ 2 Cor. 5:20

¹² Rom. 12:18

¹³ Rom. 8:16-17

¹⁴ 2 Cor. 7:10

¹⁵ Matthew 11:28

¹⁶ John 14:27

¹⁷ Psal. 23:6

¹⁸ Psal. 17:15

¹⁹ Gal. 6:7

²⁰ Matt. 25:40

²¹ 1 Cor. 13:12

²² 1 John 3:2

²³ Matt. 10:32