

Beatitudes: The Pursuit of Happiness

Matthew 5:1-12

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Beloved, I invite you this morning to turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter number 5. Let us read from verses 3 through to verse number 12 in Matthew chapter number 5. We'll begin at the start of the chapter:

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'"

Let us pray. Father, we ask now that You would send the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our understanding, that You would speak to us through the authority of Your Word, and we, like Your disciples, will come and sit and learn and hunger to hear the words of the Master speaking to our hearts today. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Last week, we considered the first sermon, which was an introductory on the Sermon on the Mount, and we considered the setting in which this sermon was given, and how we as God's people are to approach this sermon. We saw how not to approach it from an interpretive standpoint, but we also saw how we should approach it from a spiritual standpoint, that we are to be like the disciples of Jesus. That when their Master went up into the mountain, took His seat, He opened His mouth, and He taught them, saying. They were found there at the feet of Jesus, hearing His word, as Mary was when Jesus was speaking with her.

But today, I want us to consider this morning a brief summary, if we could say, or at least a summarized view of the Beatitudes. As we approach each Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount, I want us to first consider an introduction of the Beatitudes. There is a lot here to get right and consider before we move any more closely looking at any particular passage. Where does this term "Beatitudes" come from? You don't find it in the passage of Scripture here, but it is really from the designation of the Latin word "Beatus," which is translated as "blessed," which was the Latin version of what it means to be blessed. The Beatitudes span from verses 3 down to verse number 12, and they each reveal themselves by the beginning statement, which is "blessed," a beginning declaration of those that are to be regarded as blessed.

There's discussion as to whether there are eight or nine Beatitudes, depending on how you consider the last one regarding persecution. But what is more important to consider overall with regards to the Beatitudes is the placement of the Beatitudes. Why did Jesus begin the Sermon on the Mount with describing to us those that are truly blessed of God? And when you go through each Beatitude, you will find that those that are truly blessed by God have something to do more with their character than their conduct. You see, the Sermon on the Mount deals with conduct; there is no question as to that. But the placement of the Beatitudes, as dealing with our character, is there as it were as a sort of emphasis that all true conduct must first arise from good and proper character. And so, it is important to realize that to apply ourselves to the rest of the sermon but not find ourselves as having these characteristics, we really labor in vain and will find ourselves almost impossible to do the rest of the sermon.

And so, we see the priority by the placement of this priority of character over conduct, showing that the latter must arise from the former. But also, what we find interesting about the Beatitudes is that there is a design, and every design of the Beatitudes is equal in that it begins first and foremost with a declaration. There's a declaration at the beginning: "blessed, blessed, blessed," a declaration of those persons that are truly blessed. And after the declaration, there is a further description as to those who are to be regarded as truly blessed. And then we see a statement of reason as to why those that are to be considered as truly blessed will be blessed, why and how they should be blessed. And that is that they have received the kingdom of heaven, as it were; they are meek, and they will inherit the earth. And some of those are both given to us now and also in the age to come.

And so, that is the design of each Beatitude, and their purpose is simple: it is to make plain to the disciples of Jesus Christ wherein true blessedness lies. It is to make clear to the disciples of Jesus Christ what it means to be

regarded before the eyes of God as people that are truly blessed. You see, the disciples of Jesus Christ were to be as their Master: despised, rejected, and forsaken. But would that mean that they were not blessed? Would that indicate, should they then think that the blessing of God is not upon them? Well, the Sermon on the Mount shows that the measure of how the world regards what is blessed is different to that which Jesus wants His disciples to understand. That though they be regarded as those that are despised and forsaken and unaccepted by the world, they are in the eyes of their Father and in the eyes of their Master, those that are truly blessed.

The Beatitudes are important not just because of what they teach, but because they sit, if we could say, in the history of mankind as a sort of answer to man's fundamental question: the issue of blessedness, or if we could say, what it means to live a truly happy life. Not in the subjective way, as well, I'll explain in just a moment, but the meaning of what that looks like. The question that man is pursuing and trying to understand and seeking after is a happy life, or a blessed life, or a life that is truly to be regarded as satisfied, one that is truly arrived at its purpose and intent. This has been the question that man has sought to answer from the beginning. Philosophers have come up with ways to seek to answer it; people have sought to answer it through many other ways. But what is interesting about this sermon is that Jesus Himself lays out for us what a true happy life consists of, what a true life of blessedness actually consists of. He answers the age-old question of wherein this true happiness lies. He gives the answer to the heart that pursues happiness, and He answers the question in a way that people perhaps don't really want to receive, but nonetheless, it is the answer that the pursuit of happiness is found only in those who are blessed by God, and it goes on to describe what their life and character look like to those that are truly happy, truly to be regarded as blessed.

But what does it mean to be blessed? We really have to understand this because as we go through each Beatitude, if we misunderstand the declaration, we'll get ourselves into all sorts of trouble as we look at the interpretation. What it does not mean is "happy" in the sense of a superficial, subjective, passing emotional experience. The problem is not the word "happy"; you know, in other places, this same word has been translated as "happy." But the problem is how the modern usage of the word "happy" and what it has become. Jesus is not talking about a life of superficial, subjective, passing emotional experiences that is promised to those that are of this character. Rather, what Jesus is showing is that the blessed person is not the one necessarily that has a grin and a smile on their face 24/7, but "blessed are those that mourn," says the Scripture. And so, if it refers to a simple, subjective, passing emotional experience, how can one be blessed and mourning at the same time? Well, it doesn't refer to that, and that's simply why the laughter, smiles, and ecstasy that we see in our lives, but

yes, also in the lives of others, is no true mark of those that really know God.

What I mean to say by that is this: that you can find among sinners and amongst the cults of the world a group of people that know how to put on a grin and know how to put on a smile, but they are not to be regarded as those that are truly blessed. This is best well illustrated in the Lord Jesus, the one who is the blessed one, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself had varied emotional experiences. The Bible teaches us that Jesus experienced sorrow as He wept when He was there at Lazarus's tomb. We see that Jesus displayed righteous indignation there when He saw the temple of His Father, which was a house of prayer, being desecrated by those who were making merchandise in that house of prayer. We see that with anger, He drove out the money changers. We see also Jesus deeply distressed in the Garden of Gethsemane when He cried out to His Father, "Lord, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done." And we see our Lord Jesus Christ pained on the cross and thirsting when He says, "I thirst," and "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And He is going through great pain and suffering and affliction there at the cross. Yet, we may never ever charge Him as being one who wasn't blessed. That would be considered utter blasphemy to consider the Lord Jesus Christ was not blessed, as the book of Romans says, "He indeed is God blessed forever." He is Lord and let the blessed one.

And so, we must first understand that He's not talking about happiness in that subjective emotional passing experience. Neither is it talking about health, wealth, and prosperity. The blessedness that is revealed in these passages does not regard our materialism. And although God does provide for His people's needs, and although God does open His hands and He satisfies the desires of every living thing and provides for His people, that we can say with confidence that we have never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread, one thing is certain in this passage: that the blessed ones are not the ones that can look at their material possessions and therefore say, "This is what it means to be truly blessed by God." Among those in this passage that are blessed by God are the persecuted, and usually, the persecuted are those that are ripped out of their own homes, taken to be killed, or taken to suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ, indeed suffering much loss. But the blessings in the Beatitudes are very clear that they are not the material blessings that follow, but they are the things that are described here as those that see God are blessed, those that obtain mercy are to be considered as those that are blessed. The Bible teaches us that we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, and the Beatitudes affirm that, showing that what we obtain from the Father as blessed ones proceeds from Him, from whom all special spiritual blessings come.

Also, another thing that we need to consider here is this: that the Beatitudes are not for a special class of Christians. And what I mean by that is this: we can come to texts like this, and we can see how daunting, how confronting, how high and lofty their instructions are, and we can deceive ourselves so as to think, "I need to be, for example, filled or baptized with the Spirit to display these things," or "These things are an impossibility unless I'm a minister of the gospel," or "Unless I have, you know, this kind of a qualification," or "Unless, for example, I'm one of those who, you know, who has God's special blessing on my life." If we do that, we'll rob ourselves of the commandments that are made here. The Bible is clear that all Christians are to display this; this is part and parcel, as it were, of the fruit of the Spirit. Just like the fruit of the Spirit is the marks and the evidences that the Holy Spirit of God has regenerated you and dwells within you, so the Beatitudes are to be treated as such, that those that have been regenerated by God, those that have had the Spirit of God indwelling them, should show forth in some measure, at the least, whether in seed form or whether in greater measure, they should show forth these fruits of those that belong to the kingdom of God. And we would do ourselves an injustice to think that this blessing, if we say, "All those that are blessed," or "These things that we are to do," is reserved for a special group of people. My friend, we are to receive this word as for us, now that God has given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of Him. The filling or the empowering of the Holy Spirit in Scripture is more connected often to work than it is to our walk, but we are to walk in the Spirit, the Bible says, and not to fulfill the lusts of our flesh. And here, this passage makes clear that we need to understand that this is spoken to the disciples of Jesus, and they are to obey these things.

So what does blessedness mean? It doesn't mean those things that we just looked at, but what does it mean? Well, it means to be regarded as being in a truly prosperous condition, having attained to true happiness, or if I could say, true satisfaction. What does blessedness mean? It means to be one who is regarded as truly prosperous before God. And what are its characteristics? Well, first and foremost, the blessing we first must understand is gracious. The ones that are to be regarded as blessed by God are not blessed by God because of what they have done, but rather because of what God has done in His mercy toward them. This is evidently clear to us in the priestly benediction, the Aaronic priestly benediction in Numbers 6:24-26. The Bible says, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." And what we see in this passage of Scripture is that the blessing of God comes from God, and it comes from God as a merciful expression of His countenance shining upon us. It is gracious; it is the countenance and the face of the Lord, which refers to in Scripture as God's active regard toward His people, God's active spe-

cial regard of blessing, God's active special regard of help and assistance and mercy and giving to them. It's God's visitation to man. That's what it means by God causing His face to shine upon us, or God—it's almost like the Sun that shines, and the rays and the beams extend from the Sun to man, and we receive that which the Sun gives off. So when God causes His face to shine upon men, it is the gracious blessing of God that proceeds from His face, an active regard toward His people. And God then blesses, keeps, and He does this all in His mercy. And why that is important is to realize that we do not earn blessing; blessing comes to us by the grace of Almighty God. The Psalmist understood this in Psalm 4:6, "Who will show us any good? Who will show us any blessing?" The answer to that is, "Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us." Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. When God turns His face toward us, it is as it were that His blessing flows to us. Psalm 80 also relates salvation, any kind of deliverance, as coming from the face of the Lord as part of His blessing. In Psalm 80:3, it says, "Restore us, O God; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved." It is God who shines His face and extends His mercy. The Psalmist calls it in Psalm 42:5, "the help of God's countenance," the help of His face. And that is God extending His blessing and mercy to us graciously by the extension of His goodwill and pleasure.

But also, the Bible teaches us that this blessing begins with regard to a right relationship with God, that the blessing announced in all these passages are impossible apart from a right standing with God. The Psalmist says this in Psalm 32:1-2, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity." What is David saying here? That the man that is truly blessed by God is one who is marked by forgiveness, whom God doesn't regard his iniquity, the one that is truly justified in the sight of God. He is to be regarded as blessed. Why? Because his relationship to God is one that has been restored through the Lord Jesus Christ, and God regards him as righteous in His Son. That is what it means to be blessed. That's where the blessing begins, if I could say. That God lifts up the face of His countenance upon man. In sin, man is redeemed by the mercy of God, and in faith, they cast themselves on the Lord Jesus Christ, and God declares them righteous in His Son, and they are blessed and made righteous, declared righteous, and regarded as God by God as righteous. And this is where the blessing really begins. There's no point going about the Beatitudes trying to be poor in spirit and trying to all these things if you have not entered through the straight gate. We may look at the Beatitudes as the narrow path after you enter into the straight gate, but you must enter into the straight gate. And those that have entered into the straight gate, they are the ones that are on the narrow path, and in that sense, the Beatitudes reveal to us the pathway of the blessed. These are the ways of those that have been blessed by the salvation of God, our disciples of Jesus Christ, and are continuing on

in the blessing of God through the Beatitudes, if we may say.

And what we also see here is the same thing as that continued pathway in Psalm number one that was read to us this morning, that the continued blessing is the pathway of the holy. The Bible is very clear, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law, he does meditate day and night." Listen to what the Bible says, "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf shall not wither, and whatsoever he does shall prosper." What is God announcing to us? That the man that is truly blessed by God evidences his blessedness in a life of holiness, where he departs from evil, walks on the way of righteousness, and loves and meditates upon God's Word day and night. And the Bible declares that this man is blessed. And what is his life look like? A tree that's planted, rooted by the rivers of water. And what happens from that tree? His life is a prosperous one, prosperous, yes, one that has been truly marked out as a man that is blessed by God. And the psalm finishes this way, "For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish." The Lord knows the way of the righteous. Hang on a minute, God knows everything, doesn't He? Know the pathway of the wicked also? Yes, in that sense, He does. But that is not what the text is referring to. God has an intimate attention and love and blessing that He displays upon the way of the righteous that leads to life, and the pathway of the wicked, the broad road that leads to destruction, there is no blessing on that path. He knows the way of the righteous; He blesses the way of the righteous.

And so, what do we learn from all this? Well, we learn these important truths: that blessedness is not what the world gives us or may promise us. The blessed man is the one that receives the blessing, listen, from God. So in the pursuit of happiness, to look anywhere else but to God is to be unsatisfied, to not arrive at the blessing. And so, we must not in any way try to find blessing outside of God. Blessing is intimately connected to the God who blesses, and that is very important for us to grasp.

The second thing that we have to understand from the text that we look at is this: that blessedness is not measured by our subjective emotional experience but is to be received as an objective reality. And I'm going to take the understanding of that passage from the doctrine of justification as revealed in Psalm 32. "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity," because they are redeemed in their son. This is a declaration of God that has, if I could say, no promise of experiential reality. What I mean by that is this: that even though you may one day feel like you are unforgiven, or that God is regarding sin against you, if God has declared you righteous, the Bible says you are righteous.

And if God has declared you righteous, even though you feel sinful, you may say, "I have been blessed in Christ Jesus with a righteousness which does not belong to me." You see the trouble if we think of blessedness in terms of our experience alone. I'm not saying there's no experiential aspect to feeling blessed, but if we bank it on that, we will find ourselves wondering day and night whether we are blessed by God or not, not understanding what God has done for us in His Son. That is what makes us truly blessed, and we will start hungering and thirsting for a blessedness outside of God and outside of Christ that will lead us on a path, a dangerous path of destruction. A lot of God's people get into trouble at this point because they do not realize what they have already been provided for in Jesus Christ, and therefore they don't understand the blessing of God that is upon their life.

Let me illustrate all this in regards to a child and their parents. You might see a child in a family, and it's a good family, and you know the parents are good, godly parents that love their child, that bestow blessing and love and care for their child. And I don't know if you've ever done this—I think I've done this to a child before—we go up to them and you say, "You know, you're really blessed, aren't you? You're a really blessed kid, aren't you?" Now, what do you mean by that? What do we mean by that when we say that? What we're simply saying is this: that that child's relationship to their parents is one that can be regarded as blessed because of their commitment of faithful, loving parents to that child. And you say, "Aren't you really blessed?" because that child is blessed by his parents. But you come to the house tomorrow, and the child's chucking a tantrum, and he got three smacks on the bottom, you can still say to that child, "You know, you are truly blessed," even though that child may be in tears. They are regarded as blessed and continue to be regarded as blessed because of the relationship that they have with their parents, and that they are under the watch care of a father and mother that is, if I could say, in human terms, causing their face to shine upon them, caring for them, acknowledging them, setting their attention and love and affection upon them. And that is how we are to consider what it means to be blessed.

Now, what is at the heart of all this? But what it is, is this: that as man longs for blessedness, as man looks for blessing, as man longs for a truly happy life and pursues deep satisfaction with temporal things, we can be sure that they will never find it until they find a right standing with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is man in trouble? Because man doesn't realize that he has fallen in Adam. There was a time in the world where all of mankind was truly blessed. Adam and Eve in the garden with God, in fellowship with God, no sin, no pain, no sorrow, no suffering, walking with God as it were in the cool of the day. But that blessedness was severed by sin; that blessedness was disrupted by disobedience, and the

blessedness that Adam and Eve experienced under the rule of God, under the reign of God, under the kingdom of God, now was broken, and all that are in Adam are born outside of the rule of God, are not under, in, or within the kingdom of God, and they, like their father Adam, have been severed from the blessing of God that comes from being under His rule, under His shadow, under His salvation.

And what has man done? Has he returned to God? No, he has sought out of his own inventions to make himself blessed apart from God, and he is sought out, as the preacher sought out in Ecclesiastes, through the pathway of intellectualism. Maybe he thought, "I can find the true meaning of life and know what it means to truly be blessed," but he did not find it. He said, "Oh, if I heap up to myself pleasure upon pleasure, whether it be in alcoholism or drugs, or whether it be in women, or whether it be in entertainment and pleasure upon pleasure, maybe I'll arrive at the fine and find the true meaning and purpose of life," and he did not find it in pleasure. He thought, "What about wisdom? Surely, if we take all the brains of the history of man and put them together, they surely can find out what it means to be truly blessed and a happy life." No, did not find it. Popularity, he sought it out in there; he did not find it. And in wealth, but he never attained to it. All that the preacher declared was vanity, vanity, all is vanity, and chasing after the things in this world is like chasing the wind, and he did not arrive at the meaning of life under the Sun. The longing of the soul of that man was not satisfied. Of course, you get to the end of the book, and you see that Solomon himself found it, but I speak of that man as he's revealed in mankind, did not find it, did not find it.

Philosophers have scratched their heads for centuries, thinking about certain disciplines or certain detachments and certain denials that can be made to really find the happiness of life, hedonistic pleasures, but they have not attained to it. And so, where in lies this blessedness? It is to be found in the kingdom of God. It is to be found in being restored to God, to living under God's rule. And it was Peter that reminded his hearers when he preached a sermon in Acts chapter number three. He said these words, saying to Abraham, "God said to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" He said to the people there, "To you first, God, having raised up His servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you in turning every one of you away from his iniquities." You know what Peter says to his hearers? He says this to them: in the preaching of God's Word, God has sent His son to bless you. And you may pursue blessing in all other places, but the blessing of God revealed to Abraham, the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, He is the one in whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. It is in Him that true blessing comes, and Peter says to his hearers, "God sent Him to bless you." How would He bless us? How will He bless us? Will He get rid of the Romans and set up His kingdom

here so that we can have no more oppression? No, no, no. He sent Him to bless us by turning every one of you away from his iniquities. God sent His son to deal with sin because sin severed the relationship with God and brought the human race into a curse. As God sent His son to bless men with salvation, to declare them justified by faith in His name, and to give them righteousness, that they might be regarded as God as blessed, that God might once again turn His face to us and cause His blessing to shine upon us.

The answer is Christ, born of a woman, born under the law, kept the law of God perfectly, went to an old rugged cross to die for our sins, to bear our sins in His own body on the tree, that we might be righteous in Him. God sent Him, God sent Him, and He rose again from the dead, victorious over sin, death, and hell, to bless us with the kingdom of God. This was the blessing promised to Abraham, that in Galatians 3:9, Paul says, "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." So the question comes to you this morning: have you been blessed with faithful Abraham? How shall I know that I have been blessed with faithful Abraham? Has Jesus Christ turned you away from your sins? Are you one of those disciples of Jesus Christ that are marked by a poorness of spirit? Are you one of those who know and long for mercy and long to make peace because you have tasted of the peace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ? How shall I know that I have been blessed? The question comes to us: have you been saved? Have you received Jesus Christ as the Blessed One sent from God to bless men with salvation? Are you in the kingdom of God? "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God," but God has sent His son to redeem us from our sins.

I don't know about you today, but maybe you've been looking for happiness in all the wrong places. You've been pursuing satisfaction in this world, and you're like that hymn writer who said, "All my lifelong I have panted, after a drought from some cool spring, but I could never quench the yearning of the thirst which I had within." And he goes on to say, "Hallelujah, I have found Him, whom my soul so long has craved. Jesus satisfies my longings; through His blood, I now am saved." Pursuit of happiness, finding Christ, having eternal life through His name, being restored to God through Him. Jesus said, "I am the door; by me, if any man enters in, he shall be saved." But He goes on to say more than that, "I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." And the pursuits that the world follows after will never bring them into the abundance of the life that Jesus Christ can give alone because He can only satisfy the human longing of the heart that has been yearning for years, seeking to find that answer. But there, from the spring of life, we can be satisfied and regarded as truly blessed forevermore in the kingdom of God.

But you must come broken over your sin, confessing your ignorance and your thirsting after the things which God has not provided, and find in Him true salvation through faith in His name. And Christian, let us not be like the children of Israel when God's face shone upon them, opened the Red Sea, delivered them out with a mighty hand. They rejoiced in Him over on the other side, didn't they? God sent manna, God gave them water, but they began to murmur, "Oh God, we don't really feel blessed. We're in the wilderness, and we're hungry, and we're done with this manna that You've provided. We want something more. Let us go back to Egypt. Let us go consider the leeks and the onions and the garlic." You know, that was kind of, we feel like that's better for us.

The Bible teaches us plainly and simply that they had forgotten that which God has done for them, and God judged them because of it. Why? They did not have a right measure of what it means to be truly blessed by God. And Christian, maybe you're falling into that subtle trap where you're starting to question God's blessing because you're looking to materialism, because you're looking to the superficialness of a big happy smile. You think God's going to provide that on your face; He's never promised to provide that on your face. Not saying He cannot give that, but this is not the mark of those that are truly blessed by God.

And as we go through the Beatitudes, we need to recalibrate our thinking to what it means to be truly blessed by the Almighty God, being under the shadow of His rule. Let us pray.