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Jan. 24th, 2021

Matt. 5:1-16

The Upside-Down Values of the Kingdom

Intro

Why do we do the things that we do? We might want to say, “We do what we think is right.” But I think we all know that’s not really true. At the end of the day, we all *do the things* that we *most want to do*, whether we consciously think about it that way or not. We might do something that we *mentally know is wrong* because we *still want to do it, even more than we want to do the right thing*. Why? Why do we function this way? I think the answer is fairly simple: *we most want the things that we think will lead us into **the “good life”*** - a life full of happiness, meaning, and purpose. We all have different ideas of what such a life looks like, or how to get there, yet *each of us has an idea of “the good life.”* And we all do the things that we think will take us there. We might express it in terms of what we think will give us the most “happiness” and joy, or what we think will give our lives the most *meaning and purpose*. It’s the *life* we think is most worth living; it reveals our truest *beliefs, values, and desires*. Our view of the good life shapes our *actions* as we live in pursuit of it. Not only that, but it shapes our *values*. We value the *character traits and ways of life* that match up with what we think will bring about “the good life,” true happiness, joy, peace, comfort, meaning, and satisfaction.

We can see this in the businessman who sees the “good life” in terms of being rich and successful; therefore, he’s willing to do whatever it takes to make his fortune. He doesn’t value *honesty or integrity or humility*; these are not the quickest paths to riches. Instead, his life is characterized by *greed, selfishness, dishonesty, and pride*. We see this in the highly competitive athlete or soldier who prizes *strength, confidence, and courage*, but not *meekness and mercy*. Others value “being true to yourself” and “listening to your own heart,” finding the path to happiness and meaning *within* ourselves; but not being “pur in heart” towards God. If someone thinks that the *good life* is centered around money, power, pleasure, or the admiration of others, then they will *value* the kinds of traits and lifestyles that reflect their goals; and this will *shape and drive their actions*. We do what we do because we are striving after what we *most desire: what we think is the **good life***. When we look at the World around us - the Kingdom of Man - we often see “visions of the good life” that are twisted, can never truly satisfy, and prize values and

traits that *tear others down, exalt one's self, and seek happiness and meaning at the expense of others.*

Matt. 5:1-16

As we've seen over the last few weeks in our journey through Matthew, Jesus came to bring about a *different Kingdom - the Kingdom of God.* And this Kingdom has a *very different vision of the Good Life,* calling for very different *values.* That's what we see here, in our passage: *the upside-down values of the Kingdom of Heaven;* values that look *upside-down* in the eyes of the world, but make sense when our *vision of the "good-life"* is pointed *above* rather than *below.*

Jesus gives a list of Kingdom *values and characteristics,* describing the people who are *blessed* by God in His Kingdom. We call this list "*the Beatitudes.*" This is a very famous passage, familiar even to many non-believers. Yet, it is also commonly misunderstood, and there are many different interpretations that have been put forward. Therefore, it will help us to answer basic questions, right from the start.

First, *what does the word "blessed" mean?* This word can also be translated "happy," which some of your versions might say, but I don't think that is a very good translation; it misses much of what this word means, especially *here.* Its referring specifically to *approval before God;* to be *blessed,* according to the Bible, is for the Lord to be pleased with you and let his favor rest upon you. To be blessed here speaks of *being approved of by God* - which, consequently, should make us very happy!

Secondly, *who are these people being blessed?* Each blessing addresses people exhibiting *different virtues* who receive *specific blessings.* Does that mean, then, that each line refers to *different groups of people,* so that we could theoretically belong to one or two groups - by being "poor and spirit" and "meek," for example - and thus be blessed accordingly, but *not* belong to the other groups, such as the "merciful" or "pure in heart?" No, I think that misses the point. These are all describing *one group of people.*

In the opening verse of chapter 5, Jesus goes away from the "crowds" and calls his *disciples, his followers,* to himself. he begins teaching about what it means to *follow him* and to be part of the *Kingdom of Heaven;* this section of teachings, in chapters 5-7, is commonly called the "Sermon on the Mount." The main point of this whole sermon is to teach us what it looks like to *live a Christian life - to follow Christ, as his disciple, and to live as a citizen of the Kingdom of God.* It only makes sense, then, that Jesus begins by describing *what kind of people*

enter into and belong to His Kingdom. That's the main point of our passage today, **Matt. 5:1-16.** He describes *those who are true disciples, true followers, true Christians.* This is why the very first blessing is "*theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*" In other words, it is *they* who will enter the Kingdom he ushers in. Then, the very last blessing repeats the same thing, showing us that *every blessing in between* is a blessing received by being **in the Kingdom of Heaven!** Each particular blessing plays off of the specific beatitude; and yet, all of them are wrapped up in the *blessings of the Kingdom of GOD - the blessings we receive as part of our salvation in Christ by grace through faith.* The point is clear: all the rest of the blessings are fleshing out the blessings we receive as being a part of the Kingdom.

Therefore, each line of the Beatitudes is a different *characteristic* that should be true of *every true believer*; and each *blessing* describes the blessings we receive by *belonging to the Kingdom of GOD* in Christ by faith. So verses 3-10 give us **8 characteristics** that should characterize each Christian - each *follower of Christ* - and verses 11-16 give further commentary on these verses, fleshing out a further description of the true Christian, our lives in this world, and the blessing in store for us.

I. True Believers are Spiritually Needy and Broken, yet are Accepted by God (vv.1-6)

We can group the **first four** Beatitudes together, in vv. 3-6, as primarily focusing on the state of **hearts before God**, having **true conviction, repentance, and faith.**

A. Poor in Spirit (v.3)

The first *Beatitude* is in **v. 3:** "*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*" To be *poor in spirit* means to be *aware of our spiritual neediness*; it means to recognize that we are *spiritually bankrupt* and have absolutely no righteousness, works, or merits of our own to stand upon before the Lord. It means being *broken over our sin* and to *confess that we are guilty before the Lord.* It is the acknowledgment of our *inability to fulfill GOD's righteous demands* or to *save ourselves from our sin.* In sum, to be *poor in spirit* is to *cast ourselves upon the Lord's mercy, recognizing that our only hope is his grace.*

And that is exactly what is promised in the blessing they receive: "*theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.*" Jesus is answering the question, "Who belongs to the Kingdom of God that Jesus brings?" The answer: *not the self-righteous and proud, but guilty sinners who are aware of how needy they are, and who know that their only hope is GOD's merciful grace.*

[Illustration] A later parable, from Luke 18:9-14, illustrates being “*poor in spirit*” perfectly: this is the **tax collector** who beats his chest and says, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” *That* is what it means to be poor in spirit. This is foundational for anyone to be a Christian; if we want to come to the Lord, to be part of his kingdom and be saved, then we *must be aware of absolute spiritual poverty and our need for God’s mercy.*

B. Mourn (v.4)

The second Beatitude is very similar and builds upon this idea: “*Blessed are those who mourn.*” This specifically refers to *mourning over sin*; and this flows right out of being *poor in spirit*, doesn’t it? It’s not enough to acknowledge our sinfulness and spiritual bankruptcy; we must *mourn, hate, and wage war against* our sin. As we fall under conviction, *we are broken and remorseful over our sin and grieve all the wickedness it has brought about.* Christians are people that *hate and mourn sin and its consequences.* We must rightly view sin as that which *rebels against God, opposes his righteousness, glory, and love, and brings evil and suffering to ourselves and other people.* If we understand that, such conviction moves us to *mourn and hate sin.*

This also means *mourning the sins of others.* As we love other people, we rightly *mourn and hate their sin* as well. We take each others’ sin seriously; we mourn and grieve, pray against it, and *wage our war together.*

Finally, this means *mourning the grievous effects of sin* - all of the injustice, evil, suffering, pain, and death brought about in this fallen world as Sin’s consequences. We must *mourn such realities.*

And Jesus promises that we “*will be comforted*” in the Kingdom, because Christ came to *defeat Sin and all of the miserable evil, suffering, and death it has caused.* Even now, we find comfort in him amidst these realities; and our comfort is rooted in the fullness of comfort to come. When the Kingdom of God is fully consummated, there will be *no more sin, temptation, evil, pain, suffering, or even death!* So *mourn* such dark realities and remember that Christ has *conquered over them all*, and we will be comforted in his eternal Kingdom, freed from sin and all its consequences!

C. Meek (v.5)

Next, “*blessed are the meek.*” To be *meek* means to be *humble and gentle-hearted.* It means *humbling ourselves*, both before God and others; it means *knowing and admitting our*

place and submitting to the Lord's Will. This is the *opposite* of being proud, self-righteous, and arrogant. One who is "*poor in spirit*" is humble and meek, both in his heart before God and in relationship to other people. Though such an attitude is rarely valued in the eyes of the world - after all, how will meekness help you climb the corporate ladder? - such humbled hearts "*inherit the earth*" - the *promised land* of God's eternal Kingdom, *the New Heavens and New Earth*.

How rare it is, though, to see true *humility* and *meekness* among us, even in the Church! May we be a people that are *meek and humble*, a people *gentle and lowly in heart* like our Lord.

D. Hunger and thirst for righteousness (v.6)

The fourth line *sums up* the first three characteristics and provides the foundation for the next four: "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.*" This means truly loving, desiring, and longing for the righteousness of God, yearning to stand as righteous before the Lord. When we have a right conviction of our sin and awareness of our sin and spiritual neediness, then we *long to have a right standing with God*; we long to be declared "righteous," to be found acceptable and pleasing in His sight, not condemned under his wrath and judgment, which is what we deserve.

And the wonderful blessing on Christ's Kingdom is, if this is our desire, then, *we will be satisfied!* The life, worth, death, and resurrection of Jesus provides all that is necessary to *satisfy God's wrath* against our sin! If we *turn to Christ in faith*, confessing our need for grace and trust in Him alone, then *God has declared us righteous!* We will enter into the salvation of His kingdom as *His righteous saints!* We will be satisfied because we are declared righteous in the gospel of Christ!

But to truly "*hunger and thirst*" for righteousness doesn't settle for just being declared righteous; this also means *yearning to be righteous, to live in such a way that is pleasing to God*. This leads us to our next point...

II. True Believers Desire, Grow in, and are Characterized by True Righteousness (vv.6-9, 13-16)

As believers, we must hate our own sin and love the righteousness of God. It logically follows, then, that we should strive to grow in righteousness. We see this in the next three beatitudes, vv.7-9.

1. Merciful (v.7)

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” As Christians, we are *banking our entire lives* on our belief that *God will show us mercy* on the day of judgment. We are sinners and deserve hell; and yet, we are trusting in Christ, believing God’s Word that we will be saved by *grace alone! God promises to show us infinite mercy and grace!* How can we, who receive such mercy, not show mercy to others? The heart that has been forgiven much and shown much mercy is *compelled to be merciful and gracious to others*. Let us confirm that we are true believers, that we *will indeed receive such mercy in Christ*, by being *exceedingly merciful people*. Let us be the first to forgive, the first to extend grace, the first to show compassion and mercy. Let us prove, by the grace of God, to be a people of *grace and mercy*.

2. Pure in heart

“Blessed are the pure in heart.” This is the opposite of hypocrisy. It means *sincerity, genuine moral purity*. Such a person does not live a double-life; this is the opposite of the self-righteous hypocritical pharisees, described as “white-washed tombs” who looked righteous on the outside, in their external works, but had *dead, impure hearts*. We must be ever vigilant of our motives. We are in grave peril if we are ever satisfied with merely the *appearance* of godliness on the outside. There is *no room for mere religious formality* in the Kingdom. Let us have *clean hearts*, purified by the blood of Christ and His Holy Spirit. Let us set our eyes on the Lord, to *love, worship, and obey him* with a *pure, sincere genuine heart!*

And the promised blessing is that we *“will see God.”* Let us truly set our hearts on the Lord in faith.

3. Peacemakers

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” In Christ, we are *adopted by God* as his children, his “sons.” This means each believer *desires and gradually becomes* more like Christ. Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker; he came to *bring peace* between God and man, by dealing with our sin. When we are reconciled to God, this brings *peace between us, between person to person*, in Christ. Likewise, *we must be people who love peace and unity*. This is the opposite of being argumentative, quarrelsome, and divisive. We cannot be characterized as those who love to argue, to grumble and complain, to fight and divide. We must *love peace and fight for peace* in all of our relationships, *especially with each other, as a local church*. The New Testament spills much ink over issues of unity and division, doesn’t it? We must be *peacemakers*, striving for unity and peace with others *even when it is difficult*. We have

a church business meeting today; what a wonderful opportunity to put this into practice! Let us be a people *defined as peacemakers*.

B. Salt and Light

These beatitudes define what our *hearts* must be like; the end of the passage, **vv. 13-16**, make it clear that such hearts *overflow into our lives and actions*. In a string of metaphors, Jesus declares that **true faith cannot be hidden, but necessarily leads to a transformed life; the grace of God grabs hold of our hearts, and His work is made evident by the fruit of our lives, as a witness to the power of the gospel at work within us**.

In v.13, he says, “*You are the salt of the earth*” (**v.13**). Salt is a **preservative, slowing decay**. In the same way, Christians’ lives must function as **moral preservatives** against the backdrop of **moral decay** in this fallen world. We must be *distinct* from the unbelieving world around us.

It is not enough to claim to be a Christian but to live a life that looks *exactly like* the lives of unbelievers. We cannot claim to be citizens of the Kingdom of God yet *fully embrace* the lifestyle and values of the Kingdom of this World. After all, as Jesus says, “***but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.***”

Jesus continues, shifting to a different metaphor: **light**. “*You are the light of the world*” (**v.14**). We are like a “*city on a hill*”, lit up on a dark night, that cannot be hidden. In the same way, the *gospel faith* within us changes us; it leads to a visibly changed life. True faith produces *fruit*. So not only are our lives *distinctly different*, but they are to function as a *witness* to the good news of Christ we believe in. Light *dispels darkness*; that is its purpose. We do not “*light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*”

True believers live *transformed lives*; our faith must be *visibly evident* to all as an outward display of this inward reality. Our *identity* - who we are in Christ, as his people, being citizens of the Kingdom of God - is necessarily displayed by our *lives and actions*. True citizens of the Kingdom live lives that reflect the values of the Kingdom - indeed, the *life of the King*, Jesus. We must be a people characterized by *godliness* - not only confessing our sin and brokenness, but also increasingly *desiring and pursuing* righteous lives.

But as we do so, it will bring *opposition our way*. If we live as lights in the world, the *darkness* will oppose us.

III. True Believers Face Persecution because of Christ, yet Joyfully Persevere in Christ (vv. 10-12)

In the last Beatitude, Jesus say, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake*” (v.10). Living a righteous life *inevitably brings hostility, opposition, and even persecution*.

In verse 11, he presents persecution as a broader category than we often use it: it obviously can include violence, governmental sanction, or death; but also includes *being reviled,*” or mocked, and being *slandered*, having “*all kinds of evil [uttered] falsely*” against us. Jesus intends us to see *insults, mockery, and marginalization* to be included in the list of persecution as well. This is a *warning* that every believer, to some degree or another, will face *hostility and opposition - indeed, persecution - on behalf of Christ as we seek to live out righteous lives*.

If we live a righteous life, distinct from the *unbelieving world around us*, it will be received in negative ways. If you’re living in sin, and then see someone doing the right thing, it makes you feel *guilt and shame*; and it may even make you *angry* with that person. We’re tempted to *justify our sin* and *tear down* the person standing against our sinful lifestyles and values, to defend our own way of life and make ourselves feel better.

When I was in high school, I learned this to be true firsthand. I was on the football team, and the “values” lauded in the locker room were the opposite of the values of the Kingdom of God. But in the midst of this, I wanted to live as a Christian, and obey the Bible. I did not do this perfectly by any means and made a lot of mistakes, but I did recognize that the way of life on full display in the locker room was incompatible with the way of Christ. And so, there were times where I merely *refused to join in* and this immediately stirred up the wrath and mockery of my fellow teammates. I didn’t have to tell them what they were doing was wrong; just my attempt to be distinct was received as a message of *judgment* stirring up feelings of *guilt, shame*, and therefore, *anger and mockery*.

This is by no means limited to juvenile behavior in high school boys’ locker rooms. We see this on display throughout history, even in the culture around us today. Jesus reminds us that

this is how the “prophets who were before” us were also received. This is how Jesus *himself* was received.

Today, our culture *explicitly affirms and upholds* values that are in direct opposition to the teachings of Christ. We don’t have to look far to see this; there is a *sexual revolution* still raging in our culture. It preaches that *the good life* can only be found by *embracing or condoning sexual identities that are explicitly contrary to GOD’s good design for humanity*. We are told that even believing something *different* is to cause *harm to them*, which is why there is such a battle between LGBTQ issues and the freedoms of Speech and Religion. But my point in bringing this up is not first and foremost about *politics*; its to make the point that our culture is becoming *increasingly hostile* to the *beliefs, values, and ways of life* that we must walk in as Christians.

Jesus calls us to *turn away* from the sinful values of this world and to *walk in the righteousness of the Kingdom of God by grace*. But if we are *distinct like salt*, and *as visible as light in the darkness*, then there will be an inevitable collision with the world around us that takes *offense* at the righteousness of God.

And Jesus makes clear just what is going on here: he says when we are “*persecuted for righteousness’ sake*” we are, in fact, “*reviled and persecuted*” on *his account*. Therefore, we can boldly conclude, **it is all worth it:** as we count the cost of living a life of righteousness in Christ - as we count the cost of just what publicly following and obeying CHrist might cost us in an increasingly hostile culture today - we must *emphatically remind ourselves and each other this bold truth: it is infinitely worth it!*

If you count these costs, noting what kind of life CHrist requires of you and what that will mean for your lifestyle to change and what other people will think about you - if you count these costs and conclude *that it isn’t worth it* - well, *then you might not be a believer!*

The **blessing of the Kingdom** is the blessing of *eternal salvation*. No matter what the cost might be, it is *worth it* to follow Christ! Why? *Because those persecuted for his sake are blessed to belong to “the Kingdom of heaven.”* Eternal life and salvation in Christ’s Kingdom is worth temporary persecution, slander, mockery, and injustice in this life! Therefore, we can “*rejoice and be glad*” when we are persecuted for the sake of following Christ, for this a confirmation that we are living as *citizens of His Kingdom*, and we can look forward to the blessed eternal life in that Kingdom! Let us persevere, no matter what the cost, with *joy in Christ, by His grace!*

If you're not a believer today, the way for you to respond and have the kind of life described by Christ here is not by getting your act together, but by recognizing you are "*poor in spirit;*" mourn your sin and *turn to Christ: you will find comfort in his mercy and grace!* Trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as sufficient to save you from all your sins, and you will be saved by grace through faith alone! If you have any questions about this, or if you do believe and are interested in baptism or church membership, I would love to speak with you further about this. You can find me after the service, or you can even come now. Let us pray.