

Matthew 5:1 – 12

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² He opened his mouth and began to teach 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 gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive 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 have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Cultural Background

- Jesus had just announced ‘the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations. The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called ‘the kingdom of heaven’ or ‘kingdom of God’. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature.
- The fact that Jesus sits down (5:1 – 2) is significant. Rabbis sat down to deliver their most important teachings.
- The beatitudes (5:3 – 12): they are a distillation of Old Testament hope, in particular as the OT anticipated the Messiah and the new covenant. Jesus is now gathering up all the prophetic expectations together and placing himself and his movement squarely within them, expressing them, fulfilling them.

Guiding Questions

1. Who does God bless in the kingdom? How?
2. Is Jesus describing eight different people (blessed x8) or one person?
3. What does this tell us about the character of this God?

Matthew 5:1 – 12 Old Testament Background (Optional Examples)

Jesus	Fulfills the Old Testament Hope for Renewal	
<p>³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>	<p>Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. Where then is the house you will build for me? And where is a place I may rest? For my hand made all these things. Thus all these things came into being, declares the Lord. But to this one I will look, to the one who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my word. (Isa.66:1 – 2)</p>	
<p>⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.</p>	<p>The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn (Isa.61:1 – 2)</p>	
<p>⁵ Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.</p>	<p>But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (Ps.37:11, 22, 29) But he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land (Isa.57:13) Enlarge the place of your tent; stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; lengthen your cords and strengthen your pegs. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left. And your descendants will possess nations and will resettle the desolate cities. (Isa.54:2 – 3)</p>	
<p>⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.</p>	<p>Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David. (Isa.55:1 – 3)</p>	
<p>⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.</p>	<p>The merciful man does himself good, but the cruel man does himself harm. (Prov.11:17)</p>	
<p>⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.</p>	<p>Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. (Ps.24:3 – 4)</p> <p>But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD, I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jer.31:33)</p>	
<p>⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.</p>	<p>I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners, creating the praise of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near. (Isa.57:18 – 19)</p>	
<p>¹⁰ Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.</p> <p>¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p>	<p>e.g. Elijah (1 Kings 21), Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.</p>	

Matthew 5:1 – 12 Old Testament Background (Optional Example from Isaiah)

Old Testament Hopes for Renewal...	...Are Inaugurated by Jesus
<p>Example passage: Isaiah 57:12 – 21</p> <p>¹² “I will declare your righteousness and your deeds; But they will not profit you.</p> <p>¹³ When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you. But the wind will carry all of them up, And a breath will take them away. But he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land And will possess My holy mountain.”</p> <p>¹⁴ And it will be said, “Build up, build up, prepare the way, Remove every obstacle out of the way of My people.”</p> <p>¹⁵ For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.</p> <p>¹⁶ For I will not contend forever, Nor will I always be angry; For the spirit would grow faint before Me, And the breath of those whom I have made.</p> <p>¹⁷ Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain [opposite of mercy] I was angry and struck him; I hid My face and was angry, And he went on turning away, in the way of his heart.</p> <p>¹⁸ I have seen his ways, but I will <i>heal</i> him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners,</p> <p>¹⁹ Creating the praise of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near,” Says the LORD, “and I will <i>heal</i> him.”</p> <p>²⁰ But the wicked are like the tossing sea, For it cannot be quiet, And its waters toss up refuse and mud.</p> <p>²¹ “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”</p>	<p>³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (see also Isa.66:1 – 2)</p> <p>⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (see also Isa.61:1 – 2)</p> <p>⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (see also (Ps.37:11, 22, 29; Isa.54:2 – 3)</p> <p>⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (see also Isa.55:1 – 3)</p> <p>⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (see also Prov.11:17)</p> <p>⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (see also Ps.24:3 – 4, and Dt.30:6; Jer.31:31 – 34; Ezk.36:26 – 27)</p> <p>⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (see also Isa.57:18 – 19)</p> <p>¹⁰ Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p>

Questions

1. Is Jesus trying to describe one person or eight different people? (Answer: one person, but let the conversation flow for a while)
 - a. Happiness: Jesus first describes the state of happiness in his kingdom. The word 'blessed' (*makarios*) was the same word people used to describe life on the near-perfect island of Cyprus. The state Jesus describes is like a Club Med vacation!
 - i. Break up into pairs. Make eight statements about what our culture (or our campus) says it takes to be happy. Phrase each as follows:
 - ii. 'Happy are the _____; for they _____'
 - iii. Read Jesus' statements. How do they compare?
2. Why might the first four feel good to people? Only if they are spiritually needy and honest about it.
 - a. v.3 echoes or restates Isaiah 66:1 – 2, the anticipation of the new covenant shift that God will dwell with/within the humble and poor in spirit. This is great in terms of identifying God's heart to be with and indwell us. The gates of the kingdom open wide for the one who comes to Jesus without spiritual resources of their own. To be 'poor in spirit' is to say, 'Lord, I need You. I have no resources on my own.'
 - b. v.4 comes from Isaiah 61:2, about the Servant's mission 'to comfort all who mourn.' In that context and in this one, it is about mourning one's own sin; the word 'comforted' is related to the word 'comforter' and contains intimations of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. To mourn is to say, 'Lord, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for what my sin and that of others has caused.'
 - c. v.5 is probably better read 'blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land'; and would therefore be a direct quotation from Psalm 37, which repeats it several times. The main idea is that of inheritance, and Jesus is declaring that those who do not take matters into their own hands (like Israel historically did by negotiating treaties with enemies or rushing into battle on their own) will inherit the state of blessing and abundance from God. To be meek is to say, 'Lord, I trust You to lead me into my inheritance, the land of blessing. Not by my power but Yours.'
 - d. v.6 relates to the motif of eating and banqueting, for instance in Isaiah 55:1 – 2. It is about desiring (hungering and thirsting for) covenant faithfulness. Righteousness is not 'individual piety' and therefore related to individual acts of prayer or kindness. It has to do with total covenant-keeping on the community and individual level. Moses and the Prophets alike were anticipating the resumption of the covenant; Jesus is now declaring it in his new covenant. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to say, 'Lord, I want to see You fulfilling Your covenant promises.'
 - e. Leader Illustrate: tell a story of when you (or someone you know) recognized that you were poor in spirit (Lord I need you), mourned sin (Lord, I'm sorry), were meek (Lord, I trust you to lead me into who I was meant to be), and hungered and thirsted for righteousness (Lord, I want you to fulfill your promises).
 - f. Optional Illustration: Let me tell you Benjamin Carson's story. Dr. Benjamin Carson is now the Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins (since 1984). He is also a Professor of Neurosurgery, Plastic Surgery, Oncology and Pediatrics. His practice includes traumatic brain injuries, brain and spinal cord tumors, congenital disorders, epilepsy, and other diseases. He's written over 90 neurosurgical publications and has been awarded 24 honorary degrees. But his most transformative moment happened when he met Jesus. Being black and at the mostly white Higgins Elementary School in Detroit was hard. He was at the bottom of the class. What made it harder was that his dad left the family when he was eight, leaving Benjamin, his older brother Curtis, and his mother Sonya to fend for themselves on the streets of Detroit. Not surprisingly, with this background, Benjamin had a major problem with anger. In seventh grade, Benjamin was at his locker. A bigger boy was teasing him for something he said in English class. Their voices rose, and finally Benjamin turned away to open his combination lock. Just as he opened the lock, the other boy shoved him. Without thinking, Ben smashed the lock into the boy's forehead, creating a three inch gash. In the principal's office, Ben apologized, saying sincerely that he hadn't meant to do it. Afterward, Ben forgot about it, saying to himself that he wasn't the kind of guy who'd split open a guy's head on purpose. But in ninth grade, the unthinkable happened. Ben was listening to the radio with his friend Bob. 'You call that music?' Bob shouted, flipping the dial. 'It's better than what you like!' Ben yelled back, grabbing for the dial. 'Come on. You always...'. In that instant, blind anger took possession of Ben again. Grabbing a camping knife

from his back pocket, Ben snapped it open and lunged at his own friend, toward his stomach. The knife hit Bob's heavy ROTC buckle with such force that the blade snapped off. It fell to the ground. Ben looked at himself in disbelief, unable to say anything. He turned, ran home, and locked himself in the bathroom for two hours. He looked at himself in the mirror. He felt sick. Even though Ben would say later that his temper was pathological, uncontrollable and irrational, he wrote, 'From somewhere deep inside my mind came a strong impression. Pray...I had been trying to control my temper, figuring I could handle it myself. Now...I knew the truth... 'Lord, You have to take this temper from me.' Something happened there in that bathroom. Because after that, Benjamin Carson was never controlled by anger again. He later became a neurosurgeon, in fact the one who separated the Siamese twins joined at the head by veins inside their brains! But what is important here is the deep character transformation that Jesus brought about in him. Benjamin Carson could have been a competent anything. What matters is why: that why is discovering his spiritual poverty, mourning his sin, entrusting his life to Jesus to lead him – precisely the first 3 beatitudes here.

- g. Notice how Jesus says 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' in v.3 and v.10. Why might he repeat this? To emphasize that these things are a package deal. One cannot be wrenched out from the others. Thus...
 - h. **STATE STRONGLY:** Jesus is not talking about eight different people. He is talking about one person, and the process he calls all people into with him. **THE EIGHT BEATITUDES REFLECT A PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION WITH JESUS.** We go through it at conversion, and we will surely go through it multiple times over multiple issues afterwards, but the principle is the same. This is how Jesus transforms us.
3. What does it mean about Jesus that he gave those four first? In order to enter his kingdom, you have to acknowledge emptiness and spiritual need. No pretending, no arrogance. This is important because what Jesus calls us to is so radical that we'll need to come back continually to these first four beatitudes to be reminded that Jesus can indeed live through us in the ways he commands us to live.
 4. Is there a logical sequence Jesus is using here? Probably. It seems like some kind of transformation is implied as we progress through them. Being merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker seem to flow out of the first four.
 - a. v.7 has to do with loving one's neighbor, but stated in terms of mercy. If you know how much you have been forgiven, you know how much others need God's mercy, too. Mercy, forgiveness, and loving one's enemy are strong themes throughout Matthew, and are the identifying ethics of Jesus' new covenant people. The seeming cause-effect language does raise questions. Probably can be understood to mean, 'If you have truly received mercy from Jesus, you'll be a fundamentally merciful person, and will ultimately receive mercy.'
 - b. v.8 being pure in heart echoes Psalms language (Ps.24:4, Ps.51:10, Ps.73:1) about God wanting His people to have pure hearts, based on God's forgiveness and cleansing of us. In this context, 'pure in heart' means dedicated to Jesus and his kingdom mission to heal and transform humanity. The Greek word also connotes being 'single' focused, which Jesus expands on later in Mt.6:19 – 24. Kierkegaard rightly said, 'Purity of heart is to will one thing.' 'Seeing God' seems to be meant in Heb.12:14, 1 Jn.3:2, and Rev.22:4 as a future event, but there is always the possibility here that Jesus is referring to himself or referring to seeing God's Spirit at work in the present.
 - c. v.9 being a peacemaker, to my knowledge, is not a direct quotation from an OT text. However, 'peace' (Hebrew *shalom*) is squarely placed in passages about new covenant hope (e.g. Isa.40 – 55). Jesus personalizes it and makes it a missional, evangelistic characteristic. He means probably the 'ministry of reconciliation' between humanity and God that Paul speaks of in 2 Cor.5:18-20 as well as the 'peace' spoken of between Jew and Gentile in Eph.2:11-22. Being a 'son of God' of course reflects Jesus' own role in bringing peace, and thus identifies us with Jesus.
 - d. v.10 – 12 link Jesus and his disciples to the prophets of old, since the prophets were persecuted. They bore the word of God, they insisted upon the return to covenant faithfulness ('righteousness'), and they were attacked and despised for it. We will have a role in the world calling it to Jesus, and the world will respond negatively to the message and often to us. But we are not to back down or hide. This will tie in to why we are a city on a hill (the new Temple dwelling place of God, the new Jerusalem) and salt of the earth.
 - e. Why would the 'righteous' be persecuted? Perhaps because they are 'peacemakers' between God and humanity and between human beings, too. People may not be interested in 'peace with God'

through Jesus, or they think that ‘peace with God’ can be achieved without Jesus. Nor are they all that interested in peace with one another, even though Jesus will call his people to love their enemies, etc.

- i. Why in the world would they be happy about it? Because they are seeing God at work in themselves and other people. ‘Pure in heart’ also means ‘single-minded’ or ‘single-focused.’ Soren Kierkegaard accurately said, ‘Purity of heart is to will one thing.’ That thing seems to be Jesus and his kingdom.
 - f. Notice how Jesus goes from the generic ‘they’ to the specific ‘you’ in v.11. This has a dramatic effect. It builds a lot of momentum, that’s for sure! It makes all the previous beatitudes roll into that last statement.
5. Application points:
- a. How can your sense of happiness and blessedness deepen in Jesus?
 - b. How can you see Jesus’ definition of blessedness/happiness as having an impact on the people around you? Who in particular? Why?
 - c. What about Jesus’ process of transforming us is freeing and liberating? What about Jesus is challenging?

Other Stories of Transformation

Erica Shinya was once a spoiled, rich kid from a Buddhist, Japanese-American home. However, she came to know Jesus, and now she gives herself to those in desperate poverty all over Southeast Asia. Her story encourages me. Erica’s father, Dr. Hiromi Shinya, invented a medical device now utilized in endoscopies around the globe, becoming a world-renowned — and wealthy — physician. ‘We went from this tiny, nothing apartment where we couldn’t afford milk to a 10,000-square-foot home with a swimming pool and tennis court,’ Erica recalls. ‘My first car was a BMW.’ But it couldn’t fill a deeper need in Erica’s life. ‘I felt empty. I had everything, yet I had nothing.’ In college, Erica accepted an invitation to a Bible study. She remembers clearly how deeply Jesus touched her. She saw that she was poor in spirit, needy and empty, and Jesus opened the door for her to enter his kingdom: ‘I was overwhelmed by the love and forgiveness of Jesus. Buddhism taught me to do the right thing, to do things by duty, by tradition. But there was no heart change. When I learned about Jesus, I recognized that my life needed to change, as well.’ She mourned the sin in her life, and wanted to change. Not surprisingly, Erica’s family was less than thrilled that Erica had become a Christian in college. As time went on, however, Erica’s parents began to see positive changes in their daughter. ‘Mom and Dad saw my rebellious spirit becoming more obedient, my selfishness turning into helpfulness around the house, and my pride turning into humility when I made a mistake—because before becoming a Christian, I never used to apologize for what I did wrong.’ The Shinyas could not argue with Erica’s transformation, and eventually accepted her decision to leave the family faith. At church, Erica met a Korean-American man named Frank Kim, her soon-to-be husband and a student at Harvard. Shortly before graduation, he felt led to become a minister. The two married and their passion for world missions led them to become founders of HOPE (Helping Other People Everywhere) Worldwide, an international charity ministering to the poor. They set up a prostitute rehabilitation center in Thailand, where a school was launched to teach professions to girls who wanted to change their lives. Other ministry initiatives include projects in ‘Smokey Mountain,’ a Manila garbage dump that was turned into government-assisted housing; helping underground house churches in Vietnam, starting a hospital in Cambodia, etc. Erica was diagnosed with lupus in the early 1990s, and after a long period of remission the disease reared its ugly head again a few years ago. Erica’s chronic lupus causes fatigue, loss of appetite, and severe migraine headaches; it forced her to resign from the board. But a healthy diet and lots of rest help her manage the pain. And she continues her ministry through writing and frequent trips back to Asia. Despite her pain, Erica says she wouldn’t trade her journey for anything: ‘God’s unexpected call on my life has given me the chance to impact many lives for Christ.’