

Blessings

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT THE RIGHT ATTITUDES THAT BRING BLESSINGS

Focal Verses • MATTHEW 5:1–12

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: EXAMINE the irony of the Beatitudes; DISCOVER the reversal of the world's values that Jesus teaches; and DECIDE how to live out Christ's values as we pursue God's kingdom.

In Focus

Denise was in shock. The CEO called Denise's name to receive the "Employee of the Year Award." She could not believe it. Denise had only been employed with the district for a few months. She worked as many extra hours as possible because she was still trying to pay her way out of the financial crisis her husband created when they separated. Still, Denise simply wanted to do her best and treat people well as a new employee.

The CEO read a statement telling how Denise kept working hard following the murder of her husband, Greg, a few months ago. Denise had to attend court for a few days during the criminal trial against Greg's killer. She felt guilty about missing work but tried her best to still look for joy each day and trust God while she mourned and worked.

Denise never seemed bitter when she was working or dealing with customers. The CEO said Denise's commitment and spirit amid her hardship moved many in the company to reevaluate their own commitment and attitudes. The company decided to award Denise as the "Employee of the Year" for raising the company's consciousness during her darkest moments.

Denise began to cry. No one at work knew about how Greg had mistreated and abandoned her and their children, left her for another woman with whom he had secretly fathered twins. But God saw everything. God saw how she endured and refused to speak words of bitterness. And in her lowest valley, God was always there to bless her. Walking up to receive the award, Denise shouted, "God, I thank you for this blessing!"

How do Jesus' words—that those most in need and persecuted are the ones who are blessed and to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs—impact how you see your life? Which of the Beatitudes rings in your spirit the loudest?

Keep in Mind

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:12, KJV).



Focal Verses

KJV **Matthew 5:1** And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2 And 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 they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after 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 the children of God.

10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

The People, Places, and Times

Mercy. God does not condone sin or ignore it; instead, He pours out mercy and compassion on the person who is constantly falling short but repents from sin. One who is merciful recognizes the state of an unbeliever and shows pity to the sinner, praying for and loving that individual, and doing what can be done to help. The merciful in the context of Jewish financial law recognized when there was lack and held off on demanding payment for a debt until the person was in a better position to repay.

What does mercy mean in our modern context?

Background

The book of Matthew is the first book we encounter when reading the New Testament. Named after its author, Matthew the tax collector, this book offers a collection of sayings Jesus uttered to small and large crowds during His ministry. We come to know Jesus as a teacher early on in this book in Matthew 5–7, best known as the Sermon on the Mount. After a

crowd gathered around Jesus from neighboring cities, He climbed to a mountain top and began to speak to His disciples about societal ethics.

During this time, the Roman Empire was a hierarchal society with a small middle class. A few powerful men and their families ruled. In effect, their reign influenced the values of society. As an advocate for the lower class, Jesus offered a new value system, which favored their daily experience. The word “blessed” beginning each statement spoken by Jesus in the Beatitudes signifies the ironies of life. While those in lower strata face negative circumstances daily, Jesus teaches them to not allow the negativity to affect their attitude. Instead, He instructs them on how to follow Him and grow in their relationship with Him through changing their attitudes. Jesus teaches His followers to reject the values of the world and embrace His values, thus altering their concepts of blessings and rewards. Blessings become less about material gain and social status and more about a stronger relationship in Jesus. God also promises “the

kingdom of heaven” (vv. 3, 10). While our reward may be delayed, we can rejoice and be glad in the meantime knowing we are living according to the teachings of Jesus. An attitude check enables the followers of Jesus to have a new way of life.

How do you describe your attitude?

At-A-Glance

1. Reflecting on Our Attitudes (Matthew 5:1–9)
2. Ready for Others’ Actions (vv. 10–12)

In Depth

1. Reflecting on Our Attitudes (Matthew 5:1–9)

Jesus leaves the crowd, climbs the mountain, and takes a seat. The disciples follow Him, positioning themselves to hear the first of Jesus’ five lessons recorded in Matthew. The first seven statements Jesus makes focus on the development of human character traits. Each statement shows the paradox between what the world believes and what Jesus is teaching. Jesus offers the disciples instruction on a different and new way of living, which is more fulfilling and rewarding than the ways of society. What society had deemed as valuable does not equate to true value in the lessons of Jesus. Jesus calls the disciples to sacrifice a value system—rooted in self-centeredness and material possessions—for one that calls individuals into closer relationships with Jesus and their neighbor. The Teacher shows us our value does not depend on our material possessions when He promises the kingdom of heaven to those who are destitute (v. 3).

In this lesson, Jesus sets the foundation for the value system that must be embraced to gain access to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is concerned about the position of our heart, not

our position in society. This is why He highlights those who mourn, the meek, those who desire righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart and those who make peace. Jesus highlights the characteristics of a person whose attitude is not self-centered or pessimistic. Ultimately, He is describing the attitude and character of a follower.

Using these first seven statements about character traits, the disciples and readers can check their attitude. We cannot fully understand the value of the blessings associated with each character trait without checking our attitude. By taking on Jesus’ new value system, our worldview shifts and our actions change.

What are some ways God reminds you to check your attitude daily?

2. Ready for Others’ Actions (vv. 10–12)

The final two statements Jesus makes to the disciples address a rather weighty subject: persecution. Deciding to apply Jesus’ teaching to your life does not come without a cost. Sacrificing societal values and the dominant worldview makes one stand apart from the rest. Choosing to follow Jesus means committing to living your life in a way that does not always please other people. Jesus reminds us of the cost associated with taking on this new way of life (vv. 10–12). People may revile us, make negative comments, and persecute us simply because we choose to embody righteousness. Even with the right attitude, it can be difficult to endure these types of actions. However, our focus should not be on how people negatively treat us in this world. Instead we choose to live as Jesus instructs us, because this is how we grow in relationship with Him. Changing our attitudes helps our minds remain on the rewards we will receive in heaven. Yes, this reward is delayed and can be hard to wait for but we should not allow impatience to block our blessings. Thankfully, none of the blessings Jesus

talks about are temporary like that of material things. These eternal blessings strengthen our relationship with God and prepare us to receive our reward in heaven.

How do you deal with God's delay in your life?

Search the Scriptures

1. Based on the teaching of Jesus, what are some ways in which Jesus is calling His followers to move from a self-centered worldview to a communal worldview (Matthew 5:1–12)?

2. What does “blessed” mean in the context of this passage?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How do we see God's blessings in the midst of suffering and persecution?

2. Are all Christians experiencing God's blessings? Why or why not?

Liberating Lesson

During the middle of the twentieth century, racism and injustice remained deeply woven into the social fabric of American society. People of color, in particular African Americans, suffered from systemic, race-based disenfranchisement. Following in the footsteps of ancestors who blazed the trail to freedom before them, activists of different ages sought to bring about change in the face of dire circumstances. Enacting positive change required a constant attitude check. One reason the Civil Rights Movement gained success was that its initiatives were focused on community and not individuals. A communal, positive perspective fueled the desire to fight for justice and equality. Also, that value system did not reflect the prominent value system in society. As Christians, we must apply the instruction of Jesus as we follow in the footsteps of our ancestors in the fight for justice. Current circumstances cannot shape our attitudes. Following Jesus requires change.

Application for Activation

In the passage, Jesus gives His followers instruction on how to experience happiness and wholeness amid less than desirable circumstances. While our circumstances may not change, our perspectives should as God's children. We cannot live a life reflective of Christ if we allow societal values to influence how we respond to unfortunate situations.

Implementing the values in Matthew 5:1–12 is not easy.

1. Identify which Beatitude you struggle with the most and why.

2. Look for biblical examples of how this value is lived out.

3. For the next week, ask God to check your attitude and change your behavior.

Remember: A reward in heaven is promised, but we must first check our attitudes. The Beatitudes are instructions on how to faithfully respond with a new attitude.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Say It Correctly

Beatus. beh-AH-toos

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 218

Matthew 5:1–42

Psalm 89:1–8

DAY 219

Matthew 5:43–7:6

Psalm 89:9–17

DAY 220

Matthew 7:7–8:27

Psalm 89:18–29

DAY 221

Matthew 8:28–9:38

Psalm 89:30–37

DAY 222

Matthew 10:1–10:42

Psalm 89:38–45

DAY 223

Matthew 11:1–12:8

Psalm 89:46–52

DAY 224

Matthew 12:9–12:50

Psalm 90:1–6

Notes
