

## These Forty Days

Matthew 5:1-12

**\* Blessed are the poor in spirit. (vs. 3)**

- Psalm 42:1-2; John 15:5

**\* Blessed are those who mourn. (vs. 4)**

- Isaiah 61:1-3; John 14:26; Isaiah 57:18-19; Luke 4:18-19;  
Revelation 7:17

**\* Blessed are the meek. (vs. 5)**

- Matthew 11:29; Luke 22:42; Psalm 37:11; Isaiah 2:11;  
Romans 4:13

**\* Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for  
righteousness. (vs. 6)**

- Isaiah 51:1-2, 6

**\* Blessed are the merciful. (vs. 7)**

- Matthew 18:33-35; Luke 10:30-37; James 2:13

**\* Blessed are the pure in heart. (vs. 8)**

- Psalm 24:1-10, 73:1; John 1:7-9; Hebrews 12:14; Proverbs 16:5,  
James 3:14, 4:8; Hebrews 3:12

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## **These Forty Days** *Matthew 5:1-12*

If you look at this picture, you'd think it could be the hillside of any lake here in central or eastern Washington. But this isn't just any hillside; it's actually called a mount. And it isn't just any lake; it's actually called a sea. And it isn't just anywhere, it's actually on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It is the location of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount," where Jesus taught the crowds. He spoke with his back to the sea and the crowds gathered uphill around to listen to him. It is a location that Shelly and I had the privilege of being at with a group of friends many years ago, and I had the honor of sharing a message with them in that very spot that Jesus taught from. It is what Jesus taught at this place that is going to occupy our attention for these Sundays during Lent as we go through our Lenten devotional, "These Forty Days".

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount comes right after the beginning of his public ministry in Matthew's Gospel; in it he is laying the groundwork, establishing the bar of expectation for every single disciple of his right down to this very day. If you want to know how a Christian is expected to live, this is it. If someone didn't know anything at all about Christianity, they could read this sermon in Matthew 5-7 and understand what a Christian's character is, and how a Christian behaves.

At this point in the story, Jesus has called his first four disciples and now he's showing them the extent of what that discipleship means – he is describing the kind of life his disciples are to live. He has many followers – hundreds and probably thousands – and he is in the process of narrowing down the twelve when he gives this message. He has many more disciples than the 12 he ultimately chose as his apostles; there are at least 72 of them because he sent them out to preach and teach later (Luke 10:1-20). Jesus is teaching the disciples, while surrounding them on the hillside are many hundreds – if not thousands – of others that are listening in, too. Many who are gathered are not yet followers or disciples, but simply curious.

So Let's see what it says in Matthew 5:1-12. Would you stand with me as I read this passage for us.

"Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,

for they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”  
(Matthew 5:1-12, niv)

Thank you; you can be seated.

There is something very interesting that is important for you to know about this sermon; Jesus is giving this sermon about the new covenant on a mountain – that’s meant to exactly reflect the Exodus event (Exodus 19-24) when God gave the original covenant law to Moses. All throughout Jesus’ sermon are comparisons with various parts of the Old Testament Law (Exodus 5:21, 27, 31,33, 38-43). All of that is because Jesus is intentionally giving them and us the New Covenant (or really, the fulfillment of the Old Covenant).

Notice it says that Jesus “sat down.” Rabbis always sat down while giving instruction, and everyone listening stood up (at least the men in the crowd did). *Our* practice is the opposite of that: the speakers and preachers stand up and everyone else sits. What *we* do is a custom of the Greek and Roman speakers – but not Jesus and Jewish rabbis. By the way, that’s why I usually sit; because I want this to feel more like a conversation than a lecture, and yet, biblically speaking, what I share with you comes with biblical authority.

And notice the word, “disciples.” That word literally means, “learner.” That word is only found in the Gospels and Acts (Matthew 74 times, Mark 45 times, Luke 38 times, John 81 times and Acts 30 times). The title “disciple” is the earliest designation for followers of Jesus and it is still the best, because a Christian *is* a learner.

A couple of other things: it says the disciples “came” to Jesus – it’s the same word that is used to describe how Moses came to God to receive the Law on Mt. Sinai. That is also on purpose; Moses came to God to receive the Old Testament Law or expected way of life. The disciples come to Jesus (who is God) to receive the New Testament law or expected way of life. That’s why the Sermon on the Mount is so important for us – just as much as the Ten Commandments are. Then notice when Jesus starts speaking, it says, “he began” – the language is far more significant than the words indicate. “He began” was a phrase that emphasized the solemnity of what he was about to say, like when a king stands on a balcony before thousands of his loyal subjects and opens his mouth and the crowd hushes to hear what he’s going to say because it is so very important. That’s the word picture we’re given when it says, “he began to speak.”

So this first part of the sermon lists some interesting statements. Jesus starts with what has come to be called “The Beatitudes.” The word *beatitudo* comes from the Latin word, “Beatus” and “beatitudo” which means “Blessed,” or “utmost bliss.” Some have said these are “Be attitudes” or attitudes that we should have. But Jesus is not just giving us an attitude adjustment; it is far more transformational than that.

The Greek word for “blessed” is “makarios,” so for centuries these were called “macarisms.” Your Bible might say, “Happy are those,” but the word “blessed” means much more than a just a simple feeling. This is much different than what our world considers “blessed” to mean.

Imagine if we were to come up with a set of Beatitudes for the today’s world. What if we made a list of the kinds of people who seem to be well-off—who seem to have it made—by today’s standards? It might go something like this:

Blessed are the rich and famous, because they can always get a seat at the best restaurants.

Blessed are the good-looking, for they shall be on the cover of *People* magazine.

Blessed are those who party, for they know how to have fun.

Blessed are those who take first place in the division, for they shall have momentum going into the play-offs.

Blessed are the movers and shakers, for they shall make a name for themselves.

Blessed are those who financially support state governors and medical facilities, for they shall be the first to get vaccinated.

Blessed are those who demand their rights, for they shall not be overlooked.

Blessed are the healthy and fit, because they don't mind being seen in a bathing suit.

Blessed are those who make it to the top, because they get to look down on everyone else.<sup>1</sup>

The meaning of “blessed” that Jesus uses is more than just the world’s definition, and more than a superficial happiness that’s dependent on circumstances; it is a change-of-life kind of nature or character that transforms how we live and view life around us and how others see us.

The way that Jesus is presenting this part of the sermon is a sort of poetic rhythm, kind of like spoken word speeches or poetry slam or rap poetry – it would be similar to the poem that was written and recited by Amanda Gorman on inauguration day. Say what you want about the political party that was inaugurated; that young, 22 year old woman is a powerful poet who is going to have a significant influence in the years to come. But both the power and the poetic nature of what she said is only somewhat like what was happening when Jesus sat down and recited these beatitudes. What Jesus did is called “synthetic parallelism” – it is a type of Hebrew poetry in which the second line completes the first, defining more specifically what “blessed” means.

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Wilkerson, in his sermon “The Heartbreak Gospel,” [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com)

“Blessed are” is a state of being, more than an emotion. It means literally “all the happiness of” and involves a spiritual rebirth; in other words, it can only be understood or experienced by those who enjoy a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The interesting thing is the sheer paradox of what Jesus is saying, because none of the conditions and attitudes that Jesus speaks of are typically considered “happy” or “blessed.” These are very paradoxical. I shared this on Wednesday night at our Ash Wednesday service as we began this journey of Lent – that the Christian life is one of paradoxical living.

The Christian life is full of paradoxes that seem like contradictions:

- Salvation is free, but it costs everything.
- Giving is getting.
- The last are first.
  
- Scattering is gaining.
- Holding is losing.
- Having nothing is possessing all things.
- Happiness is found when it is no longer sought.
- Things which are not, bring to nothing things which are.
  
- Give to receive.
- Conquer by yielding.
  
- Find rest under a yoke.
- Reign by serving.
- Made great by becoming small.
- Exalted when humble.
- Become wise by being fools for Christ's sake.
- Made free by becoming bondservants.
- Gain strength when we are weak.
- Triumph through defeat.
- Find victory by glorying in infirmity.
  
- Find life by losing it.
  
- Blessed are....all these things.

Those paradoxes are never more pronounced than they are here, where Jesus announces the way his disciples live.

So let's look at each one. By the way, if you look at the sermon manuscript in your app or on our website, you'll see many Scriptures listed in your notes that I won't take the time to read. I'm not going to spoon feed all of this to you. I expect you, if you are serious about being a disciple, then you will do your own study. Download the manuscript and read it, follow along with your outline and the Scriptures that are provided, and look them up. This is *your* study of the Sermon on the Mount. Make the most of it. But let me give you an overview.

First is...

**\* Blessed are the *poor in spirit* (5:3)**

This is an important one to start with. What Jesus is saying is that a disciple is one who recognizes his or her spiritual poverty. Another way to say it might be “blessed are those who know their spiritual need.” It is a “desperation” for God. It is similar to what the Psalmist talked about in Psalm 42:1-2 –

As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God? (Psalm 42:1-2, niv)

*(see also John 15:5)*

What Jesus is talking about is a poverty of spirit that means the dethronement of pride. Do me a favor: picture in your mind the word “sin.” Now, imagine a circle around the middle letter of the word. What is that letter? “I.” The center of sin is “I” – it is selfishness, it is ego, it is pride. Ego kicks Christ off the throne of your life and keeps him off. If you are living a “me-first,” “looking out for number one” life, you are not living the Christian life. Lent is to remind us of this; this is the way of Jesus.

*Pray*

Next is...

**\* Blessed are those who *mourn* (5:4)**

This follows the realization of how poor we are without Christ and how desperately we need him; it is the ache we feel when we realize how poor we are without him. When this is the case, we will be comforted *now* by the presence of the Holy Spirit; in fact Jesus quoted Isaiah to announce that he was the Messiah and began his ministry. He did that when he read from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth, the town he grew up in:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair. (Isaiah 61:1-3, niv)

(see also John 14:26, Isaiah 57:18-19, Luke 4:18-19)

This is again promised for us in Heaven by Jesus himself:

For the Lamb at the center of the throne  
will be their shepherd;  
'he will lead them to springs of living water.'  
'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'" (Revelation 7:17, niv)

*Pray*

Next is...

### \* **Blessed are the *meek* (5:5)**

This is similar to those who are "poor" in verse 3; this is someone who, being so humble, doesn't seek gain for themselves but instead is always looking to others' needs. A good example of this is the most generous segment of our society. A study was done to determine which economic group in our society gives away the greatest percentage of their income. The groups were categorized among the wealthy, the middle class, the working poor, and the nonworking poor. The group that is the most generous is the working poor, because they know what it is like to be in need. The wealthy gave away the largest *amounts*, but it was also a smaller percentage of their income. The Christians who realize that they are poor in spirit are among the most generous, because they know what it is like to be in need, and they know how much God provides for them.

Now it is important to say here that this is not a self-effacing, negative, false humility. Neither is it an Eeyore kind of attitude ("Hallo, Pooh." "It's not much of a tail, but I'm sort of attached to it." "The sky has finally fallen. Always knew it would." Those are actual quotes of Eeyore!). Christian meekness is *true strength*; it is a yieldedness to God and accepting his will in all things. Jesus is the example of this when he said he is gentle and humble at heart, (Matthew 11:29), and he demonstrated it in the Garden of prayer before his crucifixion when he said:

"Let this cup pass from me Father, but not my will but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)

Jesus said that the meek will inherit the earth. That's a reference to Psalm 37:11 that every good Jew knew:

"The meek shall inherit the land, and enjoy peace and prosperity." (Psalm 37:11)

This is different than our way of thinking. Our way to win the world is to assert ourselves – for the self to overcome obstacles and opposition and win. It is the narrative of every Rocky movie that's ever been made – the individual asserts himself or herself and, against all odds, finally wins. This opposite-of-meekness strikes a chord with our *natural* way of living. That is why the self-help industry of books, seminars, coaches, and such has grown to a \$12 billion dollar money-making machine – increasing by over \$9 billion in the last ten years alone.

But God's Word says that the proud will be brought low (Isaiah 2:11) and that those who are left to inherit it all will be the meek who trust God (Romans 4:13).

*Pray*

Next is ...

**\* Blessed are those who *hunger* and *thirst* for *righteousness* (5:6)**

Anyone who is a parent knows that a baby cries out for the food that only its mother can provide. In the same way, if a person has been born again, he or she will cry out for God, knowing that God alone is what will feed and fill them. (Isaiah 51:1-2, 6) The word for “filled” is from the Greek word “Chortos” which means “grass.” This is not referring to the stuff that’s been legalized here in Washington. “Chortos” is a word-picture of cattle grazing and eating until they are filled – having an entire pasture to eat from, plenty to fill them and far more than they will ever need. That’s what this is saying about those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Writer William Fitch said, “Fullness is God’s answer to the empty heart” – God fills us with himself!

*Pray*

Next is...

**\* Blessed are the *merciful* (5:7)**

This means literally that the Christian life is filled with mercy – “mercy-filled.” This means we don’t treat people the way we think they deserve to be treated but instead give them compassion and forgiveness. Jesus taught a lot about how we are supposed to always be filled with mercy (e.g., Matthew 18:33-35, Luke 10:30-37).

Think about this: we always want “justice” right? Someone commits a crime; they should be brought to justice. Someone cuts in front of us in line or cuts us off on the road or doesn’t give us what we think we deserve or doesn’t treat us right at the check-out stand...most people will insist on justice. Christians offer mercy.

Before we moved to Yakima we lived in Mountain Home, Idaho, and we lived next door to some pretty cranky old people over our back fence. Having boys who were little at the time who loved playing soccer, occasionally a ball would fly over the fence, but when we’d go ask for the ball, they wouldn’t return them; they said the ball was damaging their grass and plants and trees. They kept the boys’ soccer balls. The boys tried to be careful, but it didn’t help. There were times when I was in the back yard scooping the dog poo with a shovel and I thought, I wonder what damage it would do to their grass if *this* flew over the fence?! Fortunately for them, my wife is more merciful than me. She and the boys would make May Day flower baskets and go give them to them, and other times they would bake cookies and would go over with the boys and deliver those things. See, I wanted *justice*, she offered *mercy*. Guess what happened? After a few times of Shelly and boys dropping off goodies, those cranky people started throwing the balls back over the fence. Guess what would have happened if we’d have done it my way of giving them justice? We would’ve had crankier neighbors and probably a higher fence. That’s because mercy trumps justice every time:



“For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:13, nrsv)

*Pray*

Next is...

**\* Blessed are the *pure in heart* (5:8)**

I wish we had time to do an entire series on this one alone. This is what we call holiness, or Christ-likeness, or theologians use the five dollar word, “sanctification.” This is something God wants from us and provides for us through Christ’s death on the cross and the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives. The word “pure” is “katharos” which means “cleansed.” It’s where we get the word, “carthartic” from – a cleansing. (see also Psalm 24:1-10, 73:1) It is what God will do for us:

“If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (John 1:7-9, nrsv)

Purity of heart has to do with our relationship toward God *and* others – we are to love God and love people. Do you want to see God – I mean *really* see Him? Being holy, or Christ-like – pure in heart – is how we see God:

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14 niv)

If you are not making every effort to live at peace with someone – with me or someone else around you – you are not being holy, and without being holy you won’t see God at work in your life. That’s why Jesus said earlier we’ve got to remove the self, and pride (e.g., Proverbs 16:5; James 3:14, 4:8; Hebrews 3:12). I’ve got several verses on this for you: please read them.

*Pray*

The next two are “peacemakers” and “persecuted,” and we are going to save them for next week.

Now, let’s step back for a minute before we wrap this up. Look at those: the first three beatitudes are about a person turning from sin to God. The 4<sup>th</sup> one is about God turning to us and making us righteous because of Christ. The next three are the behavior of a newborn child of God. And the last is how the sinful world will often treat the child of God (which, again, we’ll talk about next week).

But here’s the thing with these: with each of these beatitudes, Jesus isn’t speaking about *different* groups of Christians; as if one group of Christians are poor in spirit, and another group mourn, and another group is the meek type of Christians, on and on...Jesus is saying that *every* Christian should expect to, and is expected to have *every* one of these beatitudes.

So it’s examination time. In a prayerful attitude, look back over your list. What do you see that you need to confess, repent, and pursue? Which of these are you most needing in your

life? Pray about it – about all of them.

*Pray*

Please stand for this Benediction:

May Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, bless all of you who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, and pure in heart. And may God Himself give you the Kingdom of Heaven, comfort you, give you the earth as your inheritance, fill you with himself, show you mercy, and reveal himself to you.

And may you demonstrate the beatitudes to one another and to all those who do not know Jesus. Amen.