



Blessed!

BEATITUDE #1 | MATTHEW 5:3

Jesus climbs up a mountainside and the “sermon” he delivers – the first of several major teaching sections in Matthew – begins with the Beatitudes. The word “beatitude” comes from old Latin meaning “exceedingly happy” or “blessed.” The word for “blessed” in Greek is “Makarios.” It means much more than happiness; it means singularly favored, graciously approved by God. It refers to the highest type of well-being possible for human beings. It’s also the term that the Greeks used for the kind of blissful existence characteristic of the gods. To Jesus, a person who is “blessed” experiences hope and joy, independent of his or her outward circumstances. The disciples, riding on the wave of Jesus’ popularity, need to first understand Kingdom priorities and how different they are from the world’s priorities. Another way to say this first beatitude is this: When you’re at the end of your rope you’re blessed; with less of you, there is more of God’s influence in your life.” Identify what’s making you anxious today and then right into it, trusting the mercy of God to give you peace and joy.

BEATITUDE #2 | MATTHEW 5:4

Jesus doesn’t begin his sermon with a new ethical standard that we are commanded to follow. Instead, he starts his sermon with the good news that God’s grace and love and healing has come for all people, even those that the world so quickly dismisses and abuses. Jesus’ words are meant to be descriptive, not prescriptive. For instance, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Jesus isn’t saying, “You should mourn more.” He’s saying that, in the new Kingdom, God comforts those who mourn. Another way to say this might be this: “When you feel as if you’ve lost what’s precious, you’re blessed because you have the opportunity to embrace the One who is most dear to you.” What are you mourning today? What is weighing on your heart today? As you move through this day, identify what’s making you anxious and wade right into it, trusting the mercy of God to give you peace and joy.

BEATITUDE #3 | MATTHEW 5:5

What do the Beatitudes say to 21st-century, middle-class Americans like us who (from a global perspective) don’t worry about having a roof over our heads or food on our tables, and are generally no longer concerned that God is only “for” the rich and powerful (whose wealth and power is a clear sign of God’s preference)? One answer to that question is this: life is better – more joyful and rich – when there’s less of me and more of God. Another way to state this Beatitude might be this: “When you are content with who you are, you’ll find that you own the very things that can’t be purchased with money.” What things are getting in the way of having more God in your life? Are those things the source of your anxiety? Identify what’s making you anxious today, and then wade right into it, trusting the mercy of God to give you peace and joy.

BEATITUDE #4 | MATTHEW 5:6

When we look to the Beatitudes to describe what Kingdom reality looks like, we can summarize their core message this way: “In this new Jesus reality, when there’s less of me, there’s more of God.” Remember our reading from Day One? *The Message* translation puts it this way: “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you, there’s more of God and his rule.” The more we get out of the way, the more life presses upon us the reality that we are not in control, the more we lean into the promise of God and surrender ourselves to God’s love and presence and provision, the more joy and peace we’ll experience. Has that been your experience? If so, why is it so hard to live that way? Another way to state this beatitude might be this: “When you are hungry and thirsty for God, you will enjoy the finest feast you can ever imagine.” Are you hungry and thirsty for the things of God? For the very presence of God? Do you often hunger and thirst after the wrong things? Is this the source of your anxiety? As you move through this day, identify what’s making you anxious and then wade right into it, trusting the mercy of God to give you peace and joy.

BEATITUDE #5 | MATTHEW 5:7

Parenting is one of those areas in which many of us have struggled. When kids are little, we as parents control everything in their lives. But it isn’t long before they begin to push back on that control. Then they have the audacity to grow up, and go out and learn to drive, and leave home and make decisions, and the list goes on and on. We’d love to control them, but we’ve learned to let go, to trust them, and also to trust that God is always with them, working in their lives in ways we can’t see or fathom. Sometimes it feels as if the rope we’ve been holding onto has slipped

right out of our hands. We could fight that. We could yank on that rope and make them (and ourselves) miserable, but instead we've found grace to trust them, and to entrust them to God. We know that doing so doesn't mean that life will be perfect, or even that hardship and tragedy are not possibilities, but there is real peace and real joy in trusting that they are, and always will be, in God's hands. Here's another way to word this: "When you care for someone else, you'll feel as if that's the moment you are being cared for." Maybe some of our anxiety is trying to hang on to the rope too tightly. Identify what's making you anxious today, and then wade right into it, trusting the mercy of God to give you peace and joy.

BEATITUDE #6 | MATTHEW 5:8

Have you ever seen a Chinese Finger Trap? You put your fingers in and quickly discover that you're trapped. Your natural inclination is to pull your fingers out, but you soon realize that the more you pull and struggle the more tightly entrapped you are. The only way out is to do something counter-intuitive: press in. That's a great metaphor for life in this Jesus reality we call the Kingdom of God. The more we stress, strain and struggle, the more trapped in worry and anxiety we become. But the more we press into God's love, presence and provision, the more peace and joy we discover. Years ago, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote a prayer that's become famous around the world, and especially beloved in the recovery community. The Serenity Prayer goes like this: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." You might say it this way: "When you get outside of your own selfish self you'll be able to see God at work in your mind and heart." Identify what's making you anxious today, and then wade right into it, trusting the mercy of God to give you peace and joy.

BEATITUDE #7 | MATTHEW 5:9-11

Life is not always easy. There will be times when we wonder why we hold fast to faith. These verses can become a prayer for us as we learn to live into this Jesus-reality we call the Kingdom of God. What has you at the end of your rope today? What is it that you ultimately can't control but are having a hard time letting go? Entrust them to God. Stop fighting and start floating. With less of you, you'll discover more of the One whose love, presence and provision can be trusted. Adversity? Anxiety? "When your dedication to God brings persecution, you'll discover that adversity can grow you deeper into Kingdom living." Identify what's making you anxious today and then wade right into it, trusting the mercy of God to give you peace and joy.