

# Blessed, Happy, Poor, and Mourning!

Thomas Robinson, *Seeing Life Through Jesus' Eyes 12*, April 15, 2012

## Matthew 5:1-9

<sup>1</sup> Now when **Jesus** saw the **crowds**, he went up on a **mountainside** and sat down.

**His disciples** came to him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to **teach** them. He said:

<sup>3</sup> “**Blessed** are the **poor in spirit**,  
for **theirs** is **the kingdom of heaven**. [Isa 52:6-10; 61:1-4]

<sup>4</sup> **Blessed** are those who **mourn**,  
for they will be **comforted**. [Ps 126:1-6; Isa 40:1-4; 61:3]

<sup>5</sup> **Blessed** are the **meek**,  
for they will **inherit the earth** (land). [Ps 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34]

<sup>6</sup> **Blessed** are those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**,  
for they will be **fully fed**. [Isa 25:6-9; 55:1-5]

<sup>7</sup> **Blessed** are the **merciful**,  
for they will be shown **mercy**. [Isa 52:8-9; 55:6-8]

<sup>8</sup> **Blessed** are the **pure in heart**,  
for they will **see God**. [Isa 40:5-11]

<sup>9</sup> **Blessed** are the **peacemakers**,  
for they will be called **children of God**.” [Isa 63:16]

## Isaiah 61:1-4 (Mt 11:2-6; Lk 4:16-21)

<sup>1</sup> **The Spirit** of the **Sovereign LORD** (Yahweh) 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**, <sup>2</sup> to proclaim **the year of the LORD's favor** and the day of **vengeance of our God**, to **comfort all who mourn**, <sup>3</sup> 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**. They will be called **oaks of righteousness**, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

<sup>4</sup> They will **rebuild the ancient ruins** and restore the **places long devastated**; they will **renew** the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.

## Matthew 18:1-4

<sup>1</sup> At that time the **disciples** came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is **the greatest in the kingdom of heaven**?” <sup>2</sup> He called a little child, whom he placed among them.

<sup>3</sup> And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless **you change and become like little children**, you will **never enter the kingdom of heaven**. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, whoever takes a humble place – becoming like this child – is the **greatest in the kingdom of heaven**.”

## Matthew 5:20; 6:33

<sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless **your righteousness** surpasses that of the teachers of the law and Pharisees, you will certainly not enter the **kingdom of heaven**. ...

<sup>33</sup> But **seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you.

## Jesus on the Mountain – How to Start!

After looking at many parts of the Sermon on the Mount we come to the beginning. We started with the theme “*Seek first the Kingdom of God*” (6:33) that Jesus sounds from the beginning “*The Kingdom of Heaven is near*” (4:17). Heaven is the realm of God that permeates all reality. Jesus prays for God’s kingdom to come “*as in heaven, so upon earth*” (6:10). In his resurrection, Jesus embodies the ultimate union of both parts of God’s reality – our future. To reach that resurrection he had to travel the hard road of God’s love through the cross, the suffering servant, embodying both God’s people and God’s arm of deliverance (Is 53:1). Here we listen as Jesus steps onto that road. He begins his teaching to disciples and crowds defining the vision of reality, the life, the steps on that road for himself and his disciples. “Beatitudes” – “Blessings” (Greek, *makarios*). Those blessed by God, happy. But Jesus is intently paradoxical – joining words like poor, mourning, hungry, thirsty, persecuted.

### What Do the “Beatitudes” Say?

Often the impulse of interpreters has faced the difficulty of Jesus’ words and turned them into platitudes (“Be Happy Attitudes”): Don’t be prideful; depend on God; treat others well. Those things are important, but Jesus never speaks in platitudes. He is always challenging. It is hard for us to overcome our puzzlement and feel the impact of the blessings if we don’t sense the crisis in God’s story with his people that Jesus embodies – a crisis rooted and given form in the OT prophets and psalms. God’s kingdom is near, fulfillment of hopes.

Read the second half of each blessing: There is a description of the prophetic promises for God’s people: Sharing God’s kingdom, comforted after exile, inheriting the land/earth, being fully satisfied, receiving pardon/mercy, seeing God’s coming, being God’s sons. God was beginning to do the “new thing” pointed to by Isaiah and other prophets.

Around Jesus there were various views of how these promises come to reality. The Sadducees in the Temple had given up the hope. Essenes formed a tightly organized pure community waiting for an apocalyptic battle with sons of darkness. Pharisees called all Jews to live by carefully keeping the Torah regulations to bring renewal and new age. Zealots, inspired by the Maccabees, prepared for battle now to drive out the Gentiles and retake the land.

In the blessings, Jesus defines the path to those promises: Each blessing marks out a contrast to other paths being offered. It was the hard road rejected by most of the people around him. To many, Jesus’ way did not seem glorious, strong, triumphant, rigorous, pure, or effective. Even his own disciples struggled to grasp the reality of Jesus’ way: God’s righteousness.

God’s kingdom belongs to the poor (in the view of the Spirit), those mourning the sin and separation of God’s people, those waiting for God (meek); those hungry for God to set the world right in his way; showing mercy and peace to enemies, with hearts centered on God.

### What the Beatitudes Mean

With Jesus’ resurrection that kingdom breaks into reality with authority. We are called into a kingdom in conflict with the powers of death. Other options still resound in people’s ears. We are called to be plunged into Jesus and learn to live a life that to many sounds difficult and restrictive but is in fact as expansive as God’s love and all his creation, heaven and earth.

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## Scriptures for Further Reflection

### Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

<sup>1</sup> **Comfort, comfort my people**, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is **pardoned**, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries: *"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."* ...

<sup>9</sup> Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, *"Behold your God!"*

<sup>10</sup> Behold, **the Sovereign LORD comes with might**, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. <sup>11</sup> He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

### Isaiah 52:6-10

<sup>6</sup> My people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am. <sup>7</sup> How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, *"Your God reigns."*

<sup>8</sup> The voice of your watchmen – they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye **they see the return of the LORD to Zion.** <sup>9</sup> Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the **LORD has comforted his people**; he has redeemed Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> The LORD has **bared his holy arm** before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

### Isaiah 55:1-8

<sup>1</sup> "Come, **everyone who thirsts**, come to the waters; and he who has **no money**, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. <sup>2</sup> **Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?** Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, **that your soul may live**; and I will make with you an **everlasting covenant**, my steadfast, **sure love for David.** <sup>4</sup> Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. <sup>5</sup> Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

<sup>6</sup> **Seek the LORD while he may be found**; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that **he may have compassion** on him, and to our God, for he will **abundantly pardon**. <sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.”

### Isaiah 25:6-9

<sup>6</sup> On this mountain **the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food**, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. <sup>7</sup> And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. <sup>8</sup> **He will swallow up death forever**; and the **Sovereign LORD will wipe away tears from all faces**, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

<sup>9</sup> It will be said on that day, “**Behold, this is our God**; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

### Psalm 126:1-6 A Song of Ascents.

<sup>1</sup> When the **LORD restored the fortunes of Zion**, we were like those who dream (were comforted). <sup>2</sup> Then our mouth was filled with **laughter**, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” <sup>3</sup> The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. <sup>4</sup> **Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!** <sup>5</sup> **Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!** <sup>6</sup> He who **goes out weeping**, bearing the seed for sowing, shall **come home with shouts of joy**, bringing his sheaves with him.

### Psalm 37:9-11

<sup>9</sup> For the evildoers shall be cut off, but **those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land**.

<sup>10</sup> In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. <sup>11</sup> But **the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace**.