

THE BEATITUDES: Our King — His Kingdom — His Citizens

1. Introduction and Overview

Matthew 5:1–12 (ESV) ¹Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²And 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 those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵“Blessed are the meek, 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 are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I think it would be safe to brand 2020 with the word “crises” (plural). From early in the new year there was one crisis after another. The challenge of living in a time of crisis is that a single crisis demands your attention. COVID-19 created political/ideological and economic crises — not just here in California; not just in the United States — but on a global scale! On top of that there has been within our country the added crises of the deeply and visceral division on the subject of racism and presidential politics.

Christians — Our King is sovereign in the affairs of man! There is no pandemic (or for the conspiracy theorists, there is no scamdemic/planned-demic) outside of His control. This disruption of life as we knew it has not only been global in scale — it has been by divine permission!

It might seem hard for some to believe this — but the crises of 2020 have exposed an identity crisis — a breakdown of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. A short excursion into social media this past year exposed how many Christians have defined discipleship by secondary cultural issues rather than the primary issues of allegiance to Jesus and His Kingdom.

By the way — that was essentially the behavior of the Pharisees who dug in hard and fast on their interpretations of interpretations of Scripture and then classified people as “in” or “out” depending on whether or not they agreed with or conformed to those secondary boundary markers. Defining yourself by what you’re against rather than by the heart and the ways of Jesus and His Kingdom is a crisis of identity. Though we claim to bear His name we don’t look much like Him.

Our King is demanding our attention — and He is especially demanding the attention of His people! He wants us to pay attention to what these crises have exposed about the way we actually view **Our King** — the way we actually view **His Kingdom** — the way we actually view what it means to be **His Citizens**.

In our study of the Gospel according to Mark we learned that *Christology leads to discipleship; discipleship flows from Christology*¹. Across the board, the Gospels make it clear that Jesus is the King on a Cross. Because Jesus is the King on a Cross, His Kingdom is a Cross-shaped Kingdom — and the citizens of His Kingdom are shaped by the cross.

We also saw in Mark’s Gospel that Jesus made it clear that His identity and His mission demand absolute allegiance to Him! He made clear what absolute allegiance to Him looks like — and what absolute allegiance to Him was going to cost.

Right out of the gates, 2021 is screaming for every bit as much of our attention — and demanding every bit as much of the real estate of our minds and our hearts as 2020 (Reactions to the senatorial returns in Georgia / the storming of the Capital building).

That’s why I believe it is important to start 2021 by allowing **the words of Jesus** to recalibrate our core convictions concerning our King, His Kingdom and our citizenship in His Kingdom. It is a time for deep and personal examination. We closed our study last week with the questions: **WHO are we supposed to BE in this world? HOW are we supposed to think and live?** The answer to those

¹ Edwards, J. R. (2002). *The Gospel according to Mark* (p. 268). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

questions is wrapped up in the nature of our King and His vision of His Kingdom and His citizens. We find all of that in the verses that were read to us this morning.

LET'S START with the backdrop of the words of Jesus that were read to us.

Matthew 5:1 (ESV) Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

I've been to the place that is believed to be the location where Jesus delivered the "Sermon on the Mount." It is SUPER beautiful and super peaceful! It is custom made for meditation and contemplation.



When we read Matthew 5:1 — and verses 2-12 and the rest of Matthew 5 through Matthew 7 — it's easy for us to think of this as an amazing bit of quiet time between Jesus and a small audience. I've been there with 30 people and 300 people. I sat there and worshipped in music and listened to pastor Chuck teach through the Sermon on the Mount — and then walked down the side of the mount quietly thinking about the words of Jesus.

But the scene at the start of Matthew 5 was nothing like that!

Matthew 4:24–25 (ESV) ²⁴So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains,

In those crowds there were blind men that had lived their lives as beggars — but they were running back to their old friends that were still sitting somewhere,

blind and begging, and saying to them, *Come on, you've got to see this!* And their friends would say, *What do you mean 'see this?'* And they would say, *That's what I want to tell you about. He's opening the eyes of the blind — you've got to come with us!* In those crowds there were people who were crippled that Jesus had healed and they went running back to their friends that were crippled saying, *He's giving out legs! You've gotta come — and they carried them to Jesus.* There were those who were full of leprosy — the untouchables in Israel — appendages were gone — and Jesus made them whole! That means that fingers, ears, noses popped back again. There were people who were **demon-possessed, the epileptics, and the paralytics. And he healed them.** It was pandemonium!

But there was even more than that going on here. Matthew tells us - **²⁵And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.**

The very nature of the crowds — where they were from — tells us that something incredible was taking place! This was anything but a homogenous group of people! In fact, that crowd was made up of people that would never have been together under any other circumstances. Jesus drew together people who held fundamentally different beliefs, world views, ideologies and Messianic expectations.

The Pharisees believed that the Kingdom of God would be ushered in by rigid adherence to the law and to the countless traditions built upon interpretations of interpretations. The Sadducees were basically materialist and pragmatists — “The Romans are here so let's just make the necessary compromises so we can make the best of our lives.” There were the Essenes who said, *Israel is hopelessly corrupt! We're out of here!* — and they took off to the desert near the Dead Sea. Then there were the Zealots. We learned about them in our study of the Gospel According to Mark. Rural Galilee (especially the North Eastern Shore of the Sea of Galilee) was the stronghold of the Zealot movement. The zealots advocated the violent overthrow of the Roman presence in Israel. Some of them were assassins. They were like the “Students for a Democratic Society” (SDS) in the 1960s — Blow it up and burn it down. It is hard to imagine the tensions *and* the anticipations in this crowd.

And along comes Jesus! He doesn't fit into anybody's agenda! He doesn't fit anybody's expectations! He is a King unlike any other king! His Kingdom is unlike any of the kingdoms of man. He is going to shake them to the core!

We can't miss that! We also don't want to miss this: The words that Jesus spoke to this radically diverse and hopelessly divided collection of men and women thousands of years ago on the other side of the world matter to us today because His words are not like any other words!

Matthew 5:1–12 (ESV) ¹Seeing the crowds,

And oh, our King saw them differently than they saw themselves.

The people in those crowds saw those that were like them and those that were not like them; they saw the crowd consisting of those that were with them and those that were against them. Yesterday in our Bible Bus reading in **Matthew 9** we were told that when Jesus looked at the crowds, He saw humans whose lives looked nothing like the life of flourishing God originally intended. He saw them as distressed — He saw them as sheep that were scattered — and He was moved with compassion for them.

Matthew 5:1–12 (ESV) ¹Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And when he gets up there, he sits down. That was a big deal! That was the official teaching posture of a rabbi.

Matthew 5:1–12 (ESV) ¹... and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

They walked uphill to hear Jesus teach. Did you know that this was one of several “uphill” moments in the life of Jesus? In each of those “uphill” moments the followers of Jesus heard the most incredible things.

Besides the Sermon on the Mount there was The Mt. of Transfiguration. We learned about that not long before Christmas in our study of Mark 9. There they saw the glory of the divinity of Jesus shine through the veil of His humanity — and they heard Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah about His death that He would

accomplish in Jerusalem — and they heard the voice of God the Father say, “*This is My beloved Son — Listen to Him!*”

Then there was the discourse on the side of the Mt. of Olives (Matthew 24-Mark 13 – Luke 21) in which they heard Jesus talk about how the history of the world would roll out up to His 2nd coming. The Great Commission was given on a mountain (Matthew 28:16-20).

Have you noticed that the Christian life involves a lot of uphill moments? You’re walking along with Jesus; you see Him working around you, touching the lives of others, and then He goes up onto a hillside and sits down. Not a literal hill, mind you, but a trial — a circumstance — a year (like 2020) that calls you to a greater cost to be near Him and hear His authoritative words as King concerning His Kingdom and what it means to be a citizen in His Kingdom.

Matthew 5:2 (ESV) ²And he opened his mouth and taught them,...

So, Jesus begins to teach this collection of spiritually, physically, socially and politically broken lives.

Beginning in verse 3 Jesus began to address the issues that everybody wanted to know about. WHAT is the *blessed* life? WHO is going to bring that life? WHO is going to experience that life? Jesus is going to make it inescapably clear that the *blessed life — human flourishing —* is wrapped up in Him, His character and life in His Kingdom.

Hence, He used the word KINGDOM to frame the beatitudes — and the word BLESSED nine times to show us that the person who is flourishing is the one who recognizes that Jesus is King and embraces His rule (His Kingdom).

Let’s start with the word KINGDOM.

We might say that the Beatitudes are the prologue to the Sermon on the Mount — and together they form the Manifesto of the Kingdom of God.

QUESTION: What is the kingdom of God? Jesus went everywhere teaching and preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Jesus spoke incessantly about the Kingdom of God.

***Matthew 4:23 (CSB)** ²³Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.*

***Matthew 9:35 (CSB)** ³⁵Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness.*

You never see Jesus saying, “Receive me as your personal Lord and Savior.” But we do see Jesus saying

***Matthew 4:17 (CSB)** ¹⁷From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

***Mark 1:14–15 (CSB)** ¹⁴.... Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God: ¹⁵“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”*

In fact, in His conversation with a guy named Nicodemus Jesus said what might be His most well-known words: “*You must be born again.*” He says that twice. But Jesus doesn’t just inform Nicodemus of the necessity of being born again. He tells him WHY he must be born again!

***John 3:3 (CSB)** ³Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, **unless** someone is born again, **he cannot see the kingdom of God.**”*

***John 3:5 (CSB)** ⁵Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, **unless** someone is born of water and the Spirit, **he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**”*

The idea of the Kingdom of God is not as mysterious as some people would like to think or make it out to be. Think about it. In the business world, what happens when a new CEO takes over? In the world of politics, what happens when a new president or a new king comes into power? That person exerts their authority /

their administration implements a new set of priorities, a new set of policies, a new set of strategies. If their policies, priorities, strategies and agenda are wise, what happens? In our culture we would say that there is “an improved quality of life.” That’s good, right?

Here in the Beatitudes (and throughout the Sermon on the Mount) Jesus makes it clear that He is the King and He has an agenda; He has a Kingdom; a government that reflects and expresses His character. He has policies — he has ways — He has values — that are formed in and expressed through the lives of the men and women who have embraced His rule.

The result is infinitely beyond an “improved quality of life.” When Jesus Christ exerts His rule over our hearts and lives; over our families and church the result is wrapped up in the other key word — “Blessed”. As we will see in a just a bit — we flourish. And that is no small bit of business.

So, let’s wade into that second word — BLESSED.

The Beatitudes actually explain the King; explain His Kingdom and **define** His citizens. He does it with a series of nine statements that each begin with “blessed.”

On first read it might seem like Jesus is describing nine different kinds of people that are *blessed* (the humble, the mourners, the meek and so on). These are not nine different kinds of people. Jesus is describing *one* group of people. Jesus is actually describing what happens to — what becomes of — the men and women who embrace His rule.

Here’s one reason why this is so important for us to see. There are a lot of men and women, maybe some with us in this room or joining us online, or perhaps someone you know, that aren’t sure if they’re saved because they have heard how their friends came to Jesus — or how the person sharing Jesus with them came to Jesus. Those other people had a powerful emotional experience or they were instantly set free from bitterness or an addiction. But none of that happened to themselves and they wonder if they’re truly saved.

In the Beatitudes Jesus cuts through all of that. It doesn't matter what your experience was like. He simply says: Anyone who has truly embraced Jesus as Savior and King has these characteristics. And those things set you in contrast to the world that refuses to be ruled by Him.

Now for the word itself — BLESSED.

Our culture has pretty much gutted this word of its rich meaning. For most people it's synonymous with "Happiness." "I'm just so blessed" or #blessed. For a lot of people — including church goers — "blessed" is when life rolls out the way they has always dreamed — that includes what they want and excludes what they don't want.

We live in a culture that is obsessed with "happiness." The "pursuit" of happiness is at the core of what America is.

The word that Jesus uses here is *way* deep! It is the word ***Makários***. We need to spend a few minutes looking at this word that is woven deeply into the fabric of the Kingdom — it is the descriptive of the life that is experienced by the citizens of the Kingdom.

1. "Blessed" = God is actively bestowing favor on a person.

*God's approval, favor, endorsement, congratulations*²

God does actively bless us in the revealing of Himself and His redeeming love in the servant King, Jesus. *He shines into our hearts the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus.* The person who flourishes is the person who recognizes that Jesus is King and embraces His rule/His Kingdom.

Matthew 11:2–6 (CSB) ²Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples ³and asked him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" ⁴Jesus replied to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive their sight, the lame

² Turner, D., & Bock, D. L. (2005). *Cornerstone biblical commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark* (p. 75). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news, ⁶and **blessed** (makarios) is the one who isn't offended by me."

2. Blessed = A declared observation about a **way of being** in the world **that leads to flourishing**.

We see this time and again in the Psalms. Right away, Psalm 1 comes to mind where David writes about the person whose life flourishes like a tree planted by rivers (plural) of water.

*Psalm 1:1–3 (CSB) ¹How **happy** is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers! ²Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. ³He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season, and its leaf **does not wither**. Whatever he does prospers.*

Isaiah 30:18 (CSB) ¹⁸.... All who wait patiently for him (YHWH) are happy.

In the Septuagint (LXX) — the Greek translation of the Old Testament — the word **happy** is **makarios**. In both passages the life that flourishes is from a way of being in the world.

The same is true in the beatitudes. The King of the Kingdom describes for us **the way of being** (the character) of the men and women who have embraced Him as King and live under His rule as citizens of His Kingdom. He says that their way of being in the world (character) is humble, their way of being in this world is to mourn over their own sin and over sin everywhere, their way of being is meekness, their way of being is to hunger and thirst after the ways of God, their way of being is pure in heart, their way of being in this world is to be peacemakers, their way of being in this world is to suffer for righteousness. AND.... their way of being (character) leads to their flourishing.

THIS IS HUGE — True human flourishing isn't rooted in anything the world prescribes! It is rooted in the character of our King! You see, that way of being (that character) connected with **makarios** is actually the expression of their King's way of being! Jesus is the ultimate and perfect embodiment of each Beatitude.

That way of being (that character) that leads to *makarios* is the result the living relationship between the King and His citizens and the transforming power of His rule in their lives.

So, when we read this word ***blessing*** in the Beatitudes it is not a matter of either/or — it not a matter of God actively bestowing His favor OR a way of being in the world the leads to flourishing. It is both/and!

CLOSE

Here in the Beatitudes Jesus is speaking to men and women longing for true happiness — longing for and looking for a life that flourishes. They have a bunch of different views on how and where they might experience that life.

Here is where we come to what the King has to say about His heart and His ways — the ways of His Kingdom and the character of the citizens of His Kingdom.

DON'T MISS THIS — When Jesus showed up the descendants of Abraham had expectations of what the Kingdom of God was about — how it would come — who would be in it and how they got to be in it.

Jesus comes along and says — Do you really want to find this life that flourishes no matter what is going on? It's life in My Kingdom. Life flourishes where I am King! The way into My Kingdom is through submitting to My rule — My agenda and My promises. Look at how Jesus frames these nine “makarios” declarations. The first and the last end with the phrase: *“Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”* Jesus is saying: *Those who are poor in spirit, who mourn over sin, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for the ways of God — they are the ones who enter my Kingdom.* All of those character traits are the right response to the King. But that way of being flies in the face of fallen culture that is built on the pride of life, accomplishment, recognition.

Jesus doesn't stop there. He says: *Here's how the citizens of My Kingdom live in this world.* They are *merciful — pure in heart — peacemakers — persecuted because of righteousness.* We are going to unpack all of those — but **that** is the way citizens of His Kingdom live because they have a living relationship with the

True King who is perfectly merciful, perfectly pure, the ultimate peacemaker, who was persecuted on account of His perfect righteousness.

I'll put it another way — The rule and reign of Jesus in your heart is going to fundamentally transform you.

DON'T MISS THIS — The Beatitudes confront every ideology that exists in our world today. The Beatitudes tell us that His administration / His Kingdom is **nothing** like the vision of the world.

Jesus wants His Kingdom to crash in on fallen culture. By their very nature His Kingdom and those in it stand in absolute contrast to fallen culture. The men and women who are citizens in the Kingdom of heaven admire, seek and long for the very things that the world regards as weak, foolish and a waste of time.

Dr. Derwin Gray — *“The Beatitudes are a description of how God’s Kingdom enters man’s realm and transforms it. The Beatitudes are a picture of what God’s people under his rule and reign of grace live like on earth. They are the ethos of Heaven invading earth. It’s like God’s people bring the currency of Heaven on earth and spend it enriching everybody’s life.”*

It is my prayer that we will let the Beatitudes test us — disrupt us. It’s my prayer that we will measure our Christianity by the heart of our King and by the raw teachings of our King about His Kingdom and His citizens.

As we look at the twenty-seven books of the New Testament the word “Christianity” is only mentioned a few times. But the word “disciple” is mentioned 28 times and the word “disciples” is used 225 times. The point of our mission is NOT to get people to identify with the label “Christian.” The mission of Jesus is about people who embrace Him as redeemer and King and identify with his character, his nature, his heart, and his lifestyle.

We are living in time where misinformation and disinformation are rampant — culture wars are raging — and social discourse is filled with rage and bitterness. Christians who claim to be “Bible” people have drifted into and even dived into that mix.

More than ever we need the clear words of Jesus to recalibrate our hearts to the culture of the Kingdom of God — the economy of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is asking us to let Him rule as King in our hearts in such a way that **we** will take on **His** characteristics. And just like Jesus didn't fit in any system in the 1st Century, He won't fit in any system in the 21st century.