

Picture this, a huge crowd has been following Jesus, the miracle working rabbi who teaches with power. He is about to give the most important sermon ever. It's the most **world shaking, paradigm shifting, horizon changing** teaching ever known to humanity. **It's the biggest thing since God told his people that he was the one and only amid a polytheistic world.**

If there was ever a time when we could hear God speak to us, it's listening to this sermon and for us reading this sermon. After all, **it's God, in the flesh, speaking** to his people directly. **This is called the Sermon on the Mount**, and it is found in its fullest form in **Matthew chapters 5-7.**

It is so crystal clear in that first verse and then it gets weird, hard to understand, easily misunderstood. **There are some head scratchers**, for the people who were listening were mostly Jewish. **And people have been scratching their heads ever since then.** Much of the head scratching was because people were saying, **"He couldn't have meant that."**

When Jesus is teaching, it's important to know who was listening. Here's where you need to **picture Jesus, in a big crowd with his disciples**, probably more than just the 12. These were the people who were **physically, as well as spiritually, following** him. **The crowds** are people who have come to see this rabbi and healer that everyone is talking about. Jesus has, at the very least, become **regionally famous.** **The crowds haven't made any commitment** to Jesus. After Jesus teaches or heals someone, **he watches to see who sticks around.**

The third group who was often represented were those who were anti-Jesus. These were the **religious leaders.** They were anti-Jesus because **the change he seeks to bring** in God's people will make **much of what they do irrelevant.**

Picture Jesus with at very least two levels of listeners. His disciples are in the front. Behind them, leaning against rocks in what we would call **the lawn seats**, are the next level, the crowd. **This sermon is primarily to the disciples, with points of invitation to the crowd to become disciples.**

Let's read the first two verses so that we can picture this in our minds. One day as he saw the **crowds gathering**, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. **His disciples** gathered around him, ² and he began to teach them.

These next nine statements are traditionally called, **"The Beatitudes."** This comes from the **Latin term, "beatitude/beatus," which means "blessed"** which is the word each statement begins with. **Some translations use happy or fortunate**, but because those have been **watered down** by our culture, "blessed" seems to be the best choice.

Before we read these statements of what it means for God to say, "You are blessed" let's look at how **we usually use the word "blessed."** Let's make a list. **These are typically when something bad has passed, then we are now blessed.**

As we read these amazing verses, **I want to encourage you to have it in front of you.** Use your Chronological Bible, a different Bible, or your phone. **I want you to be able to reflect on the section** without putting it on the screen **25 times.**

³“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. ⁴God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. ⁶God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. ⁷God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. ⁹God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. ¹⁰God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. ¹¹“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. ¹²Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way. Matthew 5:1-12

Here’s how we get it wrong with the beatitudes.

1. These are Jesus inviting people to **“meritorious attempts at earning salvation”** (NIV App. Comm) by living out these character qualities **in order to enter the Kingdom.**

If you are really good at “beatituding” then you get into the kingdom he is talking about. But isn’t that **just replacing the law with another law?** Then the **bean counters** are going to take this and **fill in all the gray areas about what kind of “mourning” counts and what level of poor is Jesus talking about; things are tight** (more month than the money), **don’t get to go skiing** this winter, **can’t use your debit card, or flat broke and on the street** because they **confiscated your debit card.**

1. **These are burdensome ethical demands.** The only imperative is to rejoice.

Or this is God, just pushing people around asking them to jump, but making the goal too high for them to reach. **Then only the elite beatituders write books** about them and **give retreats so that people can feel worse** about themselves.

1. **These are pie in the sky** and will only come to pass in eternity when things are perfect.

This is the “nothing to get too worried about here.” These won’t be **in play until we are in eternity.** So **don’t stress** about not **understanding or being uncomfortable** about these because, **“he couldn’t have meant that.”**

This is a list of who are already blessed, or you could say are “better off” in this new kingdom.” Somehow this **sad sack list of losers has a leg up** on all of the really successful people. **Here’s Jesus’ list of those who are already blessed, not waiting to be blessed.**

- **Poor,** who realize they **don’t bring anything** to the table.
- Those who **mourn, because things aren’t like they should be.**
- The humble
- Those who **hunger and thirst for justice**
- Those who are **merciful,** those who **don’t use their natural advantages to dominate.**
- Those who have **pure hearts loyal to God, God isn’t one of many self-help options.**

- Those who **work for peace between people and God** and people and people. **Instead of minding their own business.**
- Those who are **persecuted unjustly**, that one doesn't make any sense at all.

They are in a state of blessing because they are in a deficit of something, that if they had that, they would be considered blessed or winning in life. The winners are those who are experiencing the exact opposite and it's because they are making it happen.

How can I make sense of what Jesus is saying? I want to give you some **handles** so that you know what to do with this. I want to **turn up the volume so you can hear that still small voice from the side of the mountain** speaking to you. **You could teach a year's worth of sermons** on the sermon on the mount. And this sermon **is one of them.**

He's talking about recognizing the Kingdom of God/Heaven. **It's hiding in plain sight.** And it is **the opposite** of what you would think. **It's upside down to what their culture and our culture say is important.**

Peter shared this verse with you last week. ¹⁷From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." Matthew 4:17 **Much of Jesus' public ministry he taught almost exclusively** about the kingdom of God, not his death, burial, and resurrection. **He came to announce that the Kingdom of God was to be ushered in by him.**

You may have noticed that **the beatitudes begin with the kingdom and end with the kingdom.** It's a **kingdom sandwich.** It begins with the kingdom **verse 3** and then **verse 10.**

Here's a **simple definition** that we have used. I learned this from one of my literary mentors, Bill Hull. The Kingdom of God is the restoration of God's loving rule over all things.

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. ¹⁰**May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.** ¹¹Give us today the food we need, ¹²and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. ¹³And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. Matthew 6:9-13 **In heaven as it was in the garden everything is as it should be,** and God's rule is accepted. **Sin broke everything.** Nothing works right. **What was to last forever begins to deteriorate.** But in heaven it's still as it should be. This prayer is telling us to **ask God to do things in this broken world** that are like what is happening in heaven.

Therefore, it is a present reality and a future hope. **This is not just about getting to heaven** when we die. It is right now. **The restoration is going on right now and continues** into heaven. **Nothing else matters if we do not understand that the kingdom is not just getting to heaven.** If we don't understand the kingdom, then we **will give little value to what we are doing here.** The world is a **sinking ship** that we need to get off.

Back to verse 3. ³"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Poor = "**humility in the midst of harsh circumstances**" (NIV App Comm) **creating an openness to God.**

Poverty is not blessed in and of itself. Poverty can create fear, which becomes anger. It can create sin. These are not what the kingdom of God is about.

⁴Jesus told them, “Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen—⁵the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.”⁶And he added, “God blesses those who do not fall away because of me.” Matthew 11:4-6 **When John’s disciple hears that Jesus is spending time with those who are poor and vulnerable and he is meeting their needs, that is the tip-off that Jesus is Messiah.** Jesus didn’t say, “Go back and tell John that I said I’m the Messiah.” **He was with those who are blessed because they are open to him as King.**

Jump down to verse 10: God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. **Then into verse 11 this same theme** of persecution continues. **Being in the kingdom means that because Jesus received persecution, don’t think you are immune to it.** But when it comes, understand that you are **blessed because you joined Jesus in his suffering.** He was rejected **so his followers will sometimes be rejected.**

Did I say that the sermon on the mount is about the Kingdom? Look at what Jesus says in chapter 6. ³³Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. Matthew 6:33

This sums it up. Don’t seek after other kings and kingdoms. In Jesus’ kingdom you must **seek after his restoration of his authority. You must look for it. It hides in plain sight.** It is **upside down from what power looks like** in this world.

There is no way to understand what Jesus is saying in these verses **if you don’t understand the kingdom.** And because **he is the King of said Kingdom, we need to respond to him in that way.** He’s talking about rejecting pride and self-sufficiency.

Kings don’t need us to affirm and allow their leadership by our votes or support. Kings already have all of that. **It’s up to people to recognize it.**

Look at verse three again. ³“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. **That does away with both pride and self-sufficiency.**

Verse five is even more obvious. ⁵God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. **Humility means you are an heir to all that belongs to the king.** You don’t get that **if you are the king of your own puny kingdom.**

And finally verse seven. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. **People who are proud and self-sufficient aren’t usually fluent in the language of mercy.** They usually are **about people getting what they have coming.** But as the second phrase states, **they won’t get that break when they need it.**

There is only one who is self-sufficient and worthy of praise. It’s the king of this kingdom.

We could do a whole bible study and look up all the verses, but I’m hitting the most obvious ones. **I’m Rev. Obvious.** Like I am prone to say, **“Just playing the hits today.”**¹²When Jesus heard this, he said, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do.”¹³Then he added, “Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’ For I have come

to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.” Matthew 9:12-13

Another way to say this is, the beatitudes show what God values. And it's not pride and self-sufficiency. **God values people knowing who the king is and it's not them.**

Pride and self-sufficiency **are what our culture values and rewards.** These are the **pull yourself up by your own bootstraps** kind of person. **I'm still looking for the straps on my boots.**

To understand what Jesus is saying, to hear his voice from the mountain side, we must use the **kingdom as a lens.** And because it's a kingdom, he's talking about **rejecting pride and self-sufficiency.** And when we get those two ideas then we can understand **what Jesus is up to...** He's talking about what God wants to produce in our lives.

The second phrase in each beatitude tells how we will be blessed. These are the **kinds of things that will be produced** when we enter the kingdom through Jesus. **First and foremost, we are blessed by having a good king who loves us and will walk with us through this life and death.**

In this kingdom, the people trust and allow their king to fill them at the points where they are lacking, where they recognize their own neediness.

“The beatitudes summarize the essence of the sermon's message, giving in a nutshell the way in which the kingdom makes its impact on the lives of those who respond to it.” Pg. 204

In the TV series, **The Chosen**, Jesus is talking with Matthew about how he has decided to begin his sermon. He says, **“I will start with a map that tells where they can find me.”** It is these places where people know that they need God, **that is where we see the signs of the kingdom.** Stuff being **restored** to how it was in the garden. **The easiest place to notice restoration is in the dilapidated building or neighborhood** where no one would want to be.

You will see this type of restoration happening in people's lives?

- Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
- they will be comforted.
- they will inherit the whole earth. They are at the center of what God is doing in the world.
- they will be satisfied. In a culture where **no one is ever satisfied**, they are always **looking for more.**
- they will be shown mercy.
- they will see God. Let that sink in!
- they will be called the children of God.
- the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. One more time with feeling.
- Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven.

These are like the fruit of the spirit. Our lives produce them because of the **spirits transforming power.** We will **become living examples of what God can do in people.** We are **light to illuminate** the way and **salt to give flavor.**

The kingdom, rejecting pride and self-sufficiency, and what God wants to produce in our lives leads to this point...He demands a choice between kingdoms.

¹³“You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. ¹⁴But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. Matthew 7:13-14 **Jesus is the narrow gate. He’s a king. He isn’t waiting on your vote to affirm his leadership.** He is waiting on your **trusting submission.** His kingdom **above all.** Jesus is the narrow gate, **he is not one of many options.** Oh, there are options of other kingdoms, **but if you choose any of those you don’t get his kingdom** which begins now and leads into eternity.

Here's something I want to challenge you to do right now. It’s a way to **practice choosing his kingdom.** Choosing his kingdom **means I trust him** to do what he wants and not always what I think is best for me. **I’m going to read this verse through and then tell you what the blank is for.** ⁸Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. _____ ⁹Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:8-10

You need to write into that blank the thing that you wish God would take away, but he hasn’t yet. You are **trusting him with that decision,** and you are now going to **celebrate that weakness, discomfort or disadvantage because it allows you to see God’s power and his kingdom.** Now you are open to **seeing how God wants to use this for his glory and for neighbors' good.**

I didn’t study and preach this so that you would have information about the kingdom. It is my desire that you...Experiencing the Kingdom Now! **Knowledge in the Bible is never reduced to intellectual understanding.** It is always about **experiencing and knowing.** We used to ask this question in the church of God, **“Can you see the kingdom?” Remember its hiding in plain sight.** It’s **upside down** to what the culture thinks and believes.

Actually, the exercise with 2 Corinthians is a way you have already begun to experience the kingdom.

1. Count the ways you are already blessed in Jesus’ Kingdom. Make a list.

This will take some work. I’m not talking about finding blessings in the good outcomes, the answered prayers. I’m talking about the ways Jesus said that you are already blessed. **You have kingdom advantages.** Look at the list of what God blesses. List these. **Do this all week.** Bring them to your **bridge group.**

The same for this next challenge. **You can experience the kingdom of God by recording how you see God restoring his loving rule or putting things right.**

1. Record where you have seen the kingdom coming.