

Week 5: *Matthew 5:1–16*

Hook



Main Point: Disciples are to live differently than the rest of the world. When they do, they will stand out for their humility, love, mercy, and selflessness. This will show the world who God is.

Whether it be a family, club, team or even a country, there are expectations these groups have of their members. Membership into a group normally comes with some expected attitudes, behaviors and sacrifices. Within your LifeGroup, break up into groups of four. Allow 2–3 minutes for the groups to discuss what attitudes, behaviors and sacrifices would make your LifeGroup most effective for growing in Christ and community.

Dedicate a portion of the white board in your room to record the appropriate suggestions from the groups (you will reference this list later in the Took section).

Just like the attitudes, behaviors and sacrifices mentioned, Jesus taught how citizens of the kingdom of God should live their lives.

Week 5: *Matthew 5:1–16*

Book

Main Point: Disciples are to live differently than the rest of the world. When they do, they will stand out for their humility, love, mercy and selflessness. This will show the world who God is.

Matthew 5:1–10 [Read]

Talking Point 1: God's idea of "blessed" is upside-down from the world's idea.

Q: What surprises you about this list of "blessed are the . . ."?

Q: What do the qualities on this list have in common?

This chapter begins a new section of teaching called the Sermon on the Mount. The structure of Matthew's Gospel is narrative interwoven with five carefully crafted blocks of Jesus's teaching. Each block of teachingⁱ is topical, marked off by a similar concluding formula—"When Jesus had finished saying these things...." This first (chapters 5–7) and the last (chapters 23–25) are the longest blocks.ⁱⁱ It was typical of ancient writers to rearrange events or teachings, not necessarily to write them chronologically, so if different teachings or miracles of Jesus happen in different order from Gospel to Gospel, that doesn't mean their accounts aren't accurate or true.ⁱⁱⁱ Having spent the first four chapters establishing that Jesus was announcing the coming of a new kingdom of God, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus now explained the ethics of that kingdom.

Martin Luther argued that the ethics laid out in the Sermon on the Mount were an impossible demand like the Mosaic law, so they exist just to point us to the need for God's grace.^{iv} Other scholars have argued that they describe the ideal of God's kingdom, which will never be fully realized until the future consummated kingdom. Though it is impossible to be perfect in this life, by the power of the Holy Spirit, as new creations, citizens of God's kingdom should try to live by this ideal, keeping in mind that we will all fall short.^v Jesus' giving these ethics of the kingdom from a mountain is reminiscent of God giving Moses the Law on Mt. Sinai.^{vi}

Before Jesus gets into the ethics of the kingdom, in this opening section, He describes those who are "blessed" in God's kingdom. This word can also mean "happy," but not the kind of transient happiness we think of, like "these jeans make me happy." It means a deeper joy or contentment. It speaks not of physical blessings but of spiritual blessings that bring contentment and joy.

The word for “bless” would call to memory the Aaronic blessing the priests regularly said over the people: “The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24–26). Blessing comes from the Lord, from His face—His presence with us, an intimate relationship with Him. Like the blessing of Zephaniah: “For the Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you with his love; he will exult over you with loud singing” (Zephaniah 3:17).

The list Jesus gives doesn’t really sound like blessing the way we typically think of blessing. Those who mourn? The meek? The persecuted? This doesn’t sound like health and wealth or peace and prosperity. Jesus is teaching us that blessing isn’t God’s giving us stuff or fixing all our problems, but His being *with us* through it all. Look at verse 4, “those who mourn.” Why does it say they will be blessed? “For they shall be comforted.” Have you ever known someone who said they felt closest to God in a time of great suffering or trial? It is in the difficult times that we experience God’s comfort, His peace, His blessing. We learn to lean on Him and trust Him to provide. Each of the beatitudes ends with some way God’s presence satisfies the need. These are called “divine passives”—it is implied that God is the One who will satisfy them, show them mercy, etc.^{vii} Blessing is God’s presence with us, a God who is near whenever we call on Him (Deuteronomy 4:6–7).

Craig Keener writes that these beatitudes describe what kingdom-ready people should be like—humble people who submit to God’s kingship and yearn for His will above all else. The fact that both the first (v. 3) and the last (v. 10) beatitude end with “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” is an *inclusio*^{viii} that frames the whole section, meaning it applies to all of them.^{ix} Each beatitude shows us just how different the values of the kingdom of God are from the kingdom of this world. What is highly esteemed by God (humility, meekness, mercy, etc.) is often scoffed at by the world. The world says, “If you want to be happy, pursue success and happiness for yourself.” God says, “If you want to be happy, give your life for others.” Let’s briefly look at each beatitude:

- *Poor in spirit*—Matthew specifies poor “in spirit,”^x not just poor financially. The Greek word reflects humility; it comes from a word which means “to crouch as a helpless beggar.” Like a beggar, the poor in spirit are painfully aware of their need for God to provide. This is anyone, rich or poor, who humbles himself or herself before God and lives in complete dependence on Him.
- *Those who mourn*—This can mean mourn or lament. They are those who pour out their pain, grief or other “negative emotions” to God rather than blaming Him or holding it all in. They will be comforted.
- *Meek*—Meekness is not weakness, but a gentle strength that comes from humility. A meek person defers to God’s will over his own and doesn’t take matters into his own hands but trusts in God.

- *Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*—Matthew specifies that this is not physical hunger but spiritual hunger, a yearning for things to be right with the world. It is a hunger for God’s justice, for God’s will to be done.
- *Merciful*—Mercy is one of the words God uses most often about Himself and refers to His eternal lovingkindness toward His people even though they kept being unfaithful to Him (Exodus 34:6–7, et. al.). It is one of the things God required of His people (Micah 6:8). To love mercy is to act with love and compassion toward everyone by withholding judgment.
- *Pure in heart*—These are the ones who have been washed clean by Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:11) and have received a new heart of flesh, not stone (Ezekiel 36:26), a heart of unmixed devotion to God, who set their minds on godly things and long to do what is godly (Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:2).
- *Peacemakers*—This was a term often used of emperors who tried to reconcile enemies with each other. It is peacemaking, not peacekeeping. It does not mean avoiding conflict, covering up hard things, or making unhealthy concessions to keep the peace, but doing the hard work of confronting the heart of the conflict and working through it to true reconciliation.
- *Persecuted*—This was one of the ways Jesus was claiming His divinity. Typical rabbis asked their disciples to suffer for God’s name, but not for their own.^{xi} Jesus takes His ethic of nonretaliation to the next level. Not only were they not to fight back when they were persecuted on His account, they were to rejoice in it because it was for righteousness’ sake.

This isn’t what Jesus’ Jewish audience expected from their Messiah. They believed the coming of the kingdom of God would bring a political revolution, not meekness, humility and persecution. It’s also completely upside-down from what the world thinks of as “blessed.” As theologian N. T. Wright preached, “Ever since Nietzsche it has been customary to sneer at the apparently wimpish version of human life in the beatitudes: the meek, the mourners, the merciful, and so on—when surely everyone knows that the people who make the world go round are the arrogant, the go-getters, the people with sharp swords or at least sharp elbows, the pushy, the proud.”^{xii} But in the kingdom of God, the meek inherit the earth.

Q: Look at each point on the list. How are they all connected to the overall theme of God’s kingdom, to submitting to His rule and reign in our lives?

Q: How would living this way affect your relationships with other people? If the whole Church lived this way, how would it change our communities?

Q: Which of these things does God need to grow in you or change about you? How can you be changed?

Matthew 5:11–12 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Even persecution is a blessing.

Q: How can Jesus tell them to rejoice in their persecutions?

The list of beatitudes ended with the *inclusio* in verse 9, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” In the Greek, verses 3–9 all follow the same format, like stanzas of a poem—Blessed are ___ for _____. Verse 11 still starts with blessed, but it is not in the same short couplet format. The New International Version shows this by indenting verses 3–9 and making verses 11–12 a new paragraph.

In verses 11–12, Jesus continued talking about persecution, but now made it personal to His audience. Instead of just “blessed are the . . .” He said, “blessed are *you*.” These two verses act as a bridge between the Beatitudes and the description of Jesus’ disciples as salt and light in the world (vv. 13–16). The Beatitudes are all about humbling yourself and pursuing God’s kingdom as your life’s mission and His will instead of your own. Then we will be salt and light in the world.

Jesus said when His disciples are persecuted for His sake, they are to be glad because it puts them in good company with the prophets who were also persecuted for speaking God’s Word when people didn’t want to hear it. No one *enjoys* persecution or should seek it out, but doing what is right and speaking the truth is worth it. Jesus promised that those who are persecuted for God will be rewarded in heaven, which Jewish tradition also taught.^{xiii} But it’s not just about enduring persecution by hoping in some great heavenly reward, like we’re making a deal with God. It’s about changing our entire perspective of the purpose of our life, as kingdom people living temporarily in this world.

In the book of Acts, we see the disciples doing just this. After being flogged by the Sanhedrin for preaching about Jesus, they left “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41). Imagine this kind of dedication to the cause of the Gospel! Just a couple of months before, they had run in fear for their lives when Jesus was arrested. Peter denied ever having even known Him! Here, just a few months later, they rejoiced that they had the honor of being persecuted for His sake. Talk about lives that had been turned upside down!

What was the difference? What happened during those two months to completely change their hearts and their attitudes? First, they saw Jesus raised from the dead. Then, they were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Then, they prayed that the Holy Spirit would give them a boldness to preach, no matter the cost to their lives (Acts 4:29–31). After that, they really did rejoice when they were persecuted, because their whole perspective had changed. They saw their persecution as a way to “share in Christ’s sufferings” and a way to bring greater glory to God’s name through their lives (1 Peter 4:13–16). They weren’t just doing it to get a reward in heaven. They were living as though they were already in God’s kingdom. Their whole lives were about building God’s kingdom. It was their life’s mission and their joy. Persecution for the mission was an honor.

Q: Share any stories you have heard of Christians being persecuted around the world today. How do they find joy and strength in their persecution?

Q: How do you think you would respond if the authorities threatened to flog you for preaching?

Matthew 5:13–16 [Read]

Talking Point 3: When we live differently, we show the world who God is.

Q: What does it mean to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world?

Q: How is this connected to what Jesus said about being persecuted for His sake?

Salt: In the ancient world, salt was extremely important and had many uses. The most common uses were as a preservative and to flavor food. Jesus' point was that salt that has lost its saltiness is good for nothing. The phrase "lost its saltiness" literally means "becomes foolish or useless." In the same way, a disciple who has lost his "discipleness" is good for nothing. Jesus described what a disciple was – meek, merciful, pure in heart, etc. If those who claimed to follow Jesus did not exhibit these traits, they would be useless in His kingdom.

What is even more significant about this metaphor is that salt is extremely stable and cannot lose its flavor. People knew this about salt even in the first century.^{xiv} Jesus intentionally used salt to describe an inconceivable situation. Salt cannot lose its saltiness! In the same way, a true disciple cannot lose his "discipleness." As a new creation in Christ, it is *who he is*. It is his new identity in Christ. The Beatitudes are not just recommendations for how to live a happy life. They *describe* what true disciples *are like*. Salt losing its saltiness is an intentional hyperbole used by Jesus to make a sharp point – "No true disciple *could* be merely nominal and remain a true disciple."^{xv} Not that all disciples have to do all of these things perfectly all the time. Just as we grow in the Fruit of the Spirit, we grow in the qualities of the Beatitudes over time. But as Jesus said about false prophets, you will know them by their fruit (Matthew 7:15–20).

Light: Jesus made a similar point about light. A light is useless if you hide it under a basket. The purpose of light is to shine, to illuminate a whole house (v. 15) or a whole area (v. 14). In the same way, Christ's disciples are made to shine their light to the world. The Beatitudes tell us how we change the world around us, turn the world upside-down, make it more like the upside-down kingdom of God in any way that we can.

The Old Testament had already talked about God's people being a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6), showing them how wise and compassionate and loving their God is by the way they lived when they followed His law (Deuteronomy 4:1–8). When they followed His law, other nations

would see how different they were from the rest of the world. They would take notice and be attracted to the light. When Jesus' disciples live as the kingdom people described in the Beatitudes, they certainly stick out like sore thumbs in this world. But that's a good thing! That means their light is shining. They are showing the world how different their God is from the way the rest of the world operates.

Q: Look again at the list of Beatitudes. Does your life look different from the rest of the world *in these ways*?

Q: In what ways have you been hiding your light under a basket? What do you need to change to let your light shine to the world?

Q: Why is it significant that our actions bring glory to God, not ourselves? How does this connect to the Beatitudes?

Week 5: *Matthew 5:1–16*

Took

Main Point: Disciples are to live differently than the rest of the world. When they do, they will stand out for their humility, love, mercy and selflessness. This will show the world who God is.

Draw everyone's attention to the list they created during the "Hook" portion for the lesson. Invite each individual to consider which of these attributes they should work harder to show. Invite each individual to pick an accountability partner within the group to aid in his or her pursuit to grow in Christ and community.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on each of the traits described in the Beatitudes. What would they look like fleshed out in your life in general? In particular situations you are dealing with right now? What impact could you have on your community if you lived this way all the time?

PRAY: For God to be glorified in your life. That He will grow you to be more like Jesus through the power of His Holy Spirit—in the Fruit of the Spirit, the Beatitudes, the qualities of love described in 1 Corinthians 13, the way of the new self in Colossians 3, and other ways of spiritual maturity. Ask Him to reveal ways you need to change, grow, and submit yourself to His authority.

ACT: Shine your light in the world this week. After reflecting on the ways you need to grow in the traits of the Beatitudes, choose one specific action you can take to show this trait. For peacemaking, it might be reaching out to someone in reconciliation. For mercy, it might be helping someone in need. These traits aren't just things we talk or think about; they have to be translated into action.

Hook, Took & Editing by Jacob Browning

i

▣ Five blocks of teaching in Matthew: (5:1–7:29; 10:11–42; 13:1–52; 18:1–35; [23:1] 24:1–25:46)

ii

▣ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

iii

▣ Craig Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 1999).

iv

▣ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017).

v

▣ R. T. France, *Matthew, NICOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

vi

▣ Craig Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 1999).

vii

▣ Craig Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 1999).

viii

▣ In biblical studies, an *inclusio* is a literary device, repeating the same language at the beginning and end of a section like bookends, that tells the reader that what's in the middle supports or explains the bookends.

ix

▣ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

x

▣ Luke only has “poor” here and only “hunger and thirst” below. Matthew adds “in spirit” and “for righteousness.”

xi

▣ Louis Jacobs, “Greater Love Hath No Man . . . The Jewish Point of View of Self Sacrifice” *Judaism* 6, 41–

47.

xii

▣ N. T. Wright, “The Great Story” (Sermon) June 26, 2011 -

http://ntwrightpage.com/sermons/Great_Story_StAndrews_600.htm

xiii

▣ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

xiv

▣ Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Pres, 1993).

xv

▣ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).