

The Sermon on the Mount

Week 1 – Background and the Beatitudes

Matthew 5:1-13

(NRSVue Translation)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

Blessed are **the poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are **those who mourn**, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are **the meek**, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are **those who hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for they will be filled.

Blessed are **the merciful**, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are **the pure in heart**, for they will see God.

Blessed are **the peacemakers**, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are **those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Bibliography:

- *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume One*, written by William Barclay
- *Following the Call*, compiled and edited by Charles Moore

Sermon on the Mount Background

- The Sermon on the Mount only appears in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5 through 7 – though much of what Jesus shares appears in various places in the Gospel of Luke as well.
- Matthew is particularly prone to collecting and compiling blocks of material in his gospel – with most scholars recognizing a structure of five great discourses in his Gospel (likely recalling the Pentateuch).
- Matthew takes great care to present Jesus’ words as authoritative...
 - Mountains are a consistent site of divine revelation in the Bible
 - Early in the Gospel, Jesus’ early years resemble that of Moses’
 - The language used to set up Jesus’ teaching is that of the authoritative words of a Rabbi

Why study this during Lent?

The season of Lent – as a time of repentance and renewal – asks difficult questions of us:

- What does it mean to follow Christ?
- Where am I falling short of that holy calling?
- What might I need to turn away from?
- What am I being called to turn towards?

Sermon on the Mount helps us fundamentally understand what it means to follow Christ – and the season of Lent is an opportunity to reorient our vision, thinking and actions to better live as one of Christ’s disciples.

The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes are crucial for understanding how Jesus wants us to reorient our lives – comes from the Greek *Makarios*, “divinely blessed”, “happy”, or “a joy completely independent of all the chances and changes of life”.

These blessings are not future tense; they are a present reality. “These are not pious hopes of what shall be; they are congratulations on what is”.

The Poor In Spirit

Philip Yancey – Evangelical author and speaker

“Dependance, humility, simplicity, cooperation, and a sense of abandon are qualities greatly prized in the spiritual life, but extremely elusive for people who live in comfort... I now view the Beatitudes not as patronizing slogans but as profound insights in the mystery of human existence.”

Dorothy Day – Journalist and founder of the Catholic Worker

“Nowadays religious communities are good, I am sure, but they are mistaken about poverty. They accept, admit poverty on principle, but everything must be good and strong... when a community is always building, enlarging, and embellishing, there is nothing left over for the poor. We have no right to do so as long as there are slums and breadlines somewhere.”

Those Who Mourn

Nicholas Wolterstorff – American philosopher, professor and ethicist

“Who are the mourners? The mourners are those who have caught a glimpse of God’s new day, who ache with all their being for that day’s coming, and who break out in tears when confronted with its absence... the mourners are aching visionaries.”

Frederica Mathewes-Green – Eastern Orthodox writer

“We are fully known, even in the depths that we ourselves cannot see, cannot bear to see. Instead of hoping that God will love us for our good parts and pass over the rest, we know that he died for the bad parts, and will not rest until they are made right.”

The Meek

Elizabeth Elliot – Missionary to Ecuador and radio host

“Meekness is teachability... we won’t make it into the kingdom without that simple willingness to be taught and corrected and helped. Meekness is an explicitly spiritual quality, a fruit of the Spirit, learned, not inherited. It shows in the kind of attention we pay to one another, the tone of voice we use, the facial expression.”

John Chrysostom – Archbishop of Constantinople, church father

“For what is more lovely than a mouth that knows not how to insult, but is used to bless and give good words? Reflecting then on these things, become like Him, to the utmost of your power.”

Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

William Barclay – Scottish New Testament interpreter and author

“This Beatitude lays down the main cause of failure in the Christian life. That cause of failure is simply that we do not sufficiently desire to be a Christian. The great barrier is our deep-rooted unwillingness to pay the price of it, our fundamental desire not to upset life, but to keep it as it is.

Luke gives us a different, and a complimentary, version of this Beatitude: “Woe unto you who are full! For you shall hunger.” That means: “Woe to you who are satisfied, who are content with the way things are... you may live comfortably now, but the day comes when you will discover that you have somehow missed the greatest things of all”

The Merciful

Charles E. Moore – Writer, teacher and pastor in the Bruderhof community

“Showing mercy is one thing, being merciful another. Being merciful is not just doing kind deeds. Mercy assumes a certain posture. The merciful know what it means to need mercy; that’s why they can’t help but respond to the guilt and suffering of others. They, like Jesus, are moved with compassion toward all those who have lost the way.”

Leo Tolstoy – Russian novelist, pacifist, and reformer

“As one candle kindles another, and thousands are lit from that one, so also one heart enflames another and thousands are set a-glowing. If only the love is multiplied then the miracle is accomplished which was performed at the distribution of the five loaves. All are satisfied, and still much remains.”

The Pure In Heart

Thomas Merton – Trappist monk and author

“The man of simple intention works in an atmosphere of prayer: that is to say he is recollected. His spiritual reserves are not poured out into his work, but stored where they belong, in the depths of his being, with his God. He is detached from the work and from its results. Only a person who works purely for God can at the same time do a very good job and leave the results of the job to God alone.”

Brennan Manning – American author, priest and public speaker

“Holiness is not a personal achievement. It’s an emptiness you discover in your self. Instead of resenting it, you accept it and it becomes the free space where the Lord can create anew.”

The Peacemakers

John Dear – Catholic peace activist, author, and retreat leader

“As peacemakers, we are nonviolent to ourselves, nonviolent to all others, all creatures, and all creation, and we work publicly for a new world of nonviolence. We are peaceful toward ourselves, and we steadfastly cultivate inner peace. We do our part to make a more peaceful world.”

Thomas Merton - Trappist monk and author

“Instead of loving what you think is peace, love other people, and love God above all. And instead of hating the people you think are warmakers, hate the appetites and disorder in your own soul, which are the causes of war. If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed – but hate these things in yourself first, not in another.

Those Who Are Persecuted

Oscar Romero – Salvadoran Catholic archbishop, martyr, and saint

“A church that does not provoke crisis, a gospel that does not disturb, a word of God that does not rankle, a word of God that does not touch the concrete sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed – what kind of gospel is that? Dear brothers, do not betray your service to this ministry of God’s word. It is very easy to be servants of the word without disturbing the world in any way.”

Jeanne DeCelles – Leader in Catholic charismatic renewal movement

“Confrontation was not popular in first-century Palestine. It is not popular anywhere today. To bring gospel values to bear on labor practices, governmental decisions, and even religious traditions and policies is no more popular for a follower of Jesus than it was for him.”