

Series: From Israel to Everyone: Disciples who Demonstrate God’s Presence (a study of Matthew).

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:1-12
questions. Color Pg)

(App to get lesson/slides, ask

This lesson requires a warning label! It aims to expand our concept of *heaven* and our definition of *blessed*. *Matthew’s* gospel upgrades our perspective from *heaven* as a “distant, after-death destination” to *heaven* as “a peaceful atmosphere pressing into the present, petitioning us to breathe in its *blessed* air and live by its laws.” I recently heard this unsettling statement in episode 4 of the “[Heaven and Earth](#)” Bible Project podcast series: “Never once in the Bible is the phrase ‘go to heaven’ used to talk about what happens after you die. Not even once.” Being unsettled by that, I’ve been researching: “What does the Bible actually say about heaven and going there after we die?” If you find examples, please let me know! However, I share this jarring example for another reason: to illustrate how The Sermon on the Mount in *Matthew 5-7* would’ve jolted the Jewish audience as Jesus attempted to expand their expectations. I wonder, “When has a sermon ever unsettled you so much that you wanted to live differently?” Perhaps this sermon from Jesus will provoke us to believe this...

BIG IDEA: Upgrading our perspective activates our faith.

Our perspective of *heaven* was previously upgraded in *Matthew 3:1-2* where it said: *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* His message was echoed in *Matthew 4:17* which says: *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* In last week’s lesson, John Crabb pointed out this “already and not yet” paradox of Christ’s *kingdom*. Paradoxes are seemingly illogical proposals that are simultaneously true (e.g., “Parting is such sweet sorrow”, “Less is more”, “Mercy triumphs over judgment”). The *heaven at hand* paradox is simple and profound: If King Jesus has come, then so has His *kingdom*...at least, in part. In fact, many Scriptures suggest *heaven* is not far off. Jacob was given a dream in Genesis 28 with a stairway linking heaven to earth. The term “[Temple](#)” has long symbolized this *at hand* [overlap of the two](#) because it’s where God met with people.

Israel even built the Jerusalem temple on a *mountain* so that it appears suspended in between. Biblically speaking, then, *mountains* [symbolized heaven meeting earth](#) and were places [where people encountered God](#).

Look how *Matthew* employed this image in *5:1-2: Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them.* It sounds as if Jesus only spoke to the 12, but *Matthew 7:28-29* tells us the entire *crowd* heard. Matthew used this *mountain* moment as more proof that Jesus re-enacted the Exodus! After mentioning a dreaming Joseph in *chapter 1*, Jesus exiting Egypt in *chapter 2*, Jesus crossing a major water way in *chapter 3*, and Jesus entering a wilderness in *chapter 4*...Matthew depicted Jesus on a *mountain* discussing laws like Moses on Mount Sinai. This time, though, God in a human body *sat* like a Jewish Rabbi (teacher) and upgraded our perspective of His laws. According to a Messianic Rabbi named Barney Kasdan (p. 39), Israel has long expected: “*The Messiah (to) sit and expound...the mysteries of the Torah (first 5 books of the OT) which have remained hidden until now.*” That’s because God had made this promise in Deuteronomy 18:18, “*I will raise up for them a prophet like Moses from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*” This is what the “*The Beatitudes*” in *5:1-12* are all about! Their name comes from a Latin word (beatus) meaning “*happy or blessed.*” As non-Latin speakers, it’s clear that all 9 phrases begin with the letter B and are attitudes that upgrade our definition of the *blessed* life like Professor Macke’s proposition seeks to expand our perspective about *heaven*. We’ll say more about that next time!

For now, let’s just read and take in all *12 verses*. As we do, notice how *verses 3 and 10* form bookends to the Beatitudes. Both are in the present tense: *theirs IS the kingdom of heaven* (i.e., “*THESE are my people!*”). The middle verses reveal a future focus--the “*not yet*” nature of *the kingdom* (the restoration yet to come): *shall be, shall inherit, shall receive, and shall see*. Professor Jeannine K. Brown (p. 52) said, “*The beatitudes indicate the great reversals that God’s kingdom is bringing about and will usher in.*” So, processing these preposterous-sounding propositions involves asking, “*How does this apply to me?*” but mainly “*How is earth made better*

*as I embrace and live out these attitudes of faith?” Okay, let’s read: **Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others 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 so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*** We often think that means “you’ll be rewarded when you get there”, but remember, it’s part of a larger sermon where Jesus taught us to pray: “Your will be done on earth as in **heaven.**” What I’m hearing is hope--maybe we need not be in such a rush to leave here and go there!

To reiterate what I said earlier: Matthew’s gospel aims to expand our concept of **heaven’s** location and the **blessed** life. It upgrades our perspective from **heaven** as a “distant, after-death destination” to **heaven** as a “peaceful atmosphere pressing into the present, petitioning us to breathe in its **blessed** air and live by its laws.” It’s less a place to escape, and more an invading regime. **The kingdom of heaven’s** nearness transforms this **mountain** of a sermon into a winnowing fork of urgency (cf. 3:12). Instead of prepping us for a distant vacation, we’re being called to reprioritize as we would for an incoming storm. Moreover, Jesus didn’t **sit** there and say: “You’ll feel **blessed** if you behave.” Nor were these mundane or timeless truths. I mean, mourners find few comforts on the earth, justice can seem elusive, and both can feel like far-off dreams. My point is: The Beatitudes are good news, not good advice! They aim to **upgrade our perspective and activate our faith.** I mean, “Can you think of ways your far-off visions of heaven are producing a mostly passive faith?” Well, Jesus has wonderful news for everyone: God’s right-side-up kingdom has begun turning the tables on an upside-down world. Friends, this is a powerful gospel worth believing

in! Just imagine how His kingdom could engulf earth and unseat the unjust ways of broken kingdoms if only we lived like it were true! And, as we like to say, wherever you are on your journey of trusting Christ, you need not work through anything alone. Reach out and let us help!

Sunday to Monday Connection: In chapter 5 of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus begins the Beatitudes and turns our idea of blessing upside down. Instead of calling the comfortable or successful blessed, He points to the humble, the grieving, the merciful and even those who suffer for doing what is right. He is telling us the King has come, and His kingdom is already breaking into the world. The Beatitudes show us what life looks like when we live under God’s rule in our current everyday lives.

- **Question:** Which Beatitude might God be inviting you to live out this week, even if it feels difficult or countercultural?
- **Next Step:** Remember that the blessed life isn’t about perfect situations, rather it’s about living in step with Jesus.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to explore what all this might mean for you, please speak with someone you know here or one of our church leaders.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- Bible Project - Gospel of the Kingdom [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Heaven and Earth [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Temple [Videos](#).
- Bible Project – Day of the Lord [Podcast episodes](#).

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Context:** “In 4:17 Jesus summarizes his message: ‘Repent, for the kingdom is at hand’; Matthew 5–7 shows in greater detail the repentant lifestyle that characterizes the people of the kingdom. This block is introduced by a common Old Testament literary form called beatitudes: ‘Happy are those who

... for they shall ...' (e.g., Ps 1:1). (The form appears also in some Greek literature, but is more common in Jewish sources.) Here the blessings are the promises of the kingdom for those who live the repentant life. Jesus' hearers would have understood them especially as promises for the future time of God's reign; we must read them in the light of the present aspect of the kingdom as well...Although one would stand to read Scripture publicly, the most respected Jewish teachers would usually sit to expound it, often with disciples sitting at their feet. Some scholars have compared the 'mountain' (cf. Lk 6:17) here to Mount Sinai, where God through Moses first taught his ethics by the law (Ex 19–20; cf. Is 2:2–3)." (Keener, 55)

- **The distinction:** People often say what wonderful teaching the Sermon on the Mount is, and that if only people would obey it the world would be a better place. But if we think of Jesus simply sitting there telling people how to behave properly, we will miss what was really going on. These 'blessings', the 'wonderful news' that he's announcing, are not saying 'try hard to live like this.' They are saying that people who already are like that are in good shape. They should be happy and celebrate. Jesus is not suggesting that these are simply timeless truths about the way the world is, about human behaviour. If he was saying that, he was wrong. Mourners often go uncomforted, the meek don't inherit the earth, those who long for justice frequently take that longing to the grave. This is an upside-down world, or perhaps a right-way-up world; and Jesus is saying that with his work It's starting to come true. This is an announcement, not a philosophical analysis of the world. It's about something That's starting to happen, not about a general truth of life. It is gospel: good news, not good advice...In our world, still, most people think that wonderful news consists of success, wealth, long life, victory in battle. Jesus is offering wonderful news for the humble, the poor, the mourners, the peacemakers. (Wright, 36-37)
- **Disciples:** "This is the first instance of mathētēs ('disciple') in Matthew. It identifies persons, represented by the four fishermen of 4:18–22, who have heeded Jesus' call and committed themselves to him and to his teachings (Jesus' sermon in Luke is prefaced by his choice of the twelve from a larger company of disciples; 6:13–16). From start to finish, this discourse is about discipleship and is addressed to all disciples. (Chamblin, 302)
- **Already/Not Yet:** "Eight stanzas that can be understood as two sets of four blessings. (The final beatitude in 5:11–12 is really an expansion on the eighth and moves outside of the poetic framework of 5:3–10.) It is significant that the first and last blessings (5:3, 10) hold the same affirmation: 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' This inclusio highlights the 'already' of the kingdom. Jesus announces that the reversal of situation and status has already begun. Yet the 'not yet' of the kingdom—that is, the fact that final restoration and reversal of fortune is still to come—is signaled by the intervening six blessings: 'they will be comforted,' 'they will inherit the earth,' and so on. Each of these is framed in the future tense. In this way, Matthew communicates the 'already and not yet' nature of God's reign in Jesus." (Brown, 53-54)

- **When these promises come true:** “There is a great temptation for Christians to answer: in heaven, after death. At first sight, verses 3, 10 and 11 seem to say this: ‘the kingdom of heaven’ belongs to the poor in spirit and the persecuted, and there’s a great reward ‘in heaven’ for those who suffer persecution for Jesus’ sake. This, though, is a misunderstanding of the meaning of ‘heaven’. Heaven is God’s space, where full reality exists, close by our ordinary (‘earthly’) reality and interlocking with it. One day heaven and earth will be joined together for ever, and the true state of affairs, at present out of sight, will be unveiled. After all, verse 5 says that the meek will inherit the earth, and that can hardly happen in a disembodied heaven after death. No: the clue comes in the next chapter, in the prayer Jesus taught his followers. We are to pray that God’s kingdom will come, and God’s will be done, ‘on earth as it is in heaven’. The life of heaven—the life of the realm where God is already king—is to become the life of the world, transforming the present ‘earth’ into the place of beauty and delight that God always intended. And those who follow Jesus are to begin to live by this rule here and now. That’s the point of the Sermon on the Mount, and these ‘beatitudes’ in particular. They are a summons to live in the present in the way that will make sense in God’s promised future; because that future has arrived in the present in Jesus of Nazareth. It may seem upside down, but we are called to believe, with great daring, that it is in fact the right way up. Try it and see.” (Wright, 37-38)
- **8 or 9 Statements:** “There is also evidence for viewing the beatitudes as two sets of four: the fourth and the eighth main clauses refer to ‘righteousness’; there are thirty-six words in verses 3–6, and thirty-six inverses 7–10; the subjects of verses 3–6 are alliterative (ptōchoi, penthountes, praeis, peinōntes: ‘poor, mourning, meek, hungering’). The ninth beatitude (5:11–12) differs from, but builds on, the first eight... Luke’s opening is in some ways like Matthew’s. Here too Jesus addresses his disciples in the hearing of the crowd (6:17–20; see p. 299–300) and makes 8 pronouncements consisting of 2 sets of 4 (6:20–26). Here too Jesus begins with short beatitudes (6:20–21), whose grammatical features recall those of Matthew 5:3–10; and he then utters a much longer one (6:22–23), which is very close to Matthew 5:11–12. Yet in other respects, Luke’s opening differs from Matthew’s. Luke 6:20–26 consistently uses the second person (‘you,’ ‘yours’), whereas Matthew mainly uses the third (5:3–10), then the second (5:11–12). Luke’s first set of four consists of beatitudes, his second of matching woes.” (Chamblin, 312-313)

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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