Chapter 5:1-10
The Beatitudes
(Luke 6:20–49)

To begin, we note that “Matthew groups the sayings of Jesus in five major “books” by topic: Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7), Mission Charge (Mt 10), Parables of the Kingdom (Mt 13), Church Discourse (Mt 18) and Eschatological Discourse (Mt 24–25).”¹ “…these discourses are the most extensive and intentionally organized collection of Jesus’ teaching ever recorded.”²

A major theme in Matthew is the authority Jesus possessed, an authority that comes from the Father. This authority is exercised in his teaching, (chapters 5-7), and in his miracles (chapters 8-9). These two sections are not the only place this authority is demonstrated, but they do play a major role in Matthew’s outline of Jesus life and ministry. Ultimately they are designed to prod the reader to ask the same question asked by the apostles “What sort of man is this…? (Matthew 8:27)

1. Teaching in the Hills (5:1–2)

The “sermon on the level place” in Luke 6:17 may be the same as this one. The “level place” would simply be an area in the foot hills where the crowds had gathered. However, if so, each author, Matthew and Luke, crafts the record of the sermon to fit the theme and purpose of their respective books. However, there is little doubt that an itinerant preacher like Jesus would teach these foundational principles often as he traveled through Galilee—this was not a one-time sermon. So, Luke’s version could come from another event and location.

The Setting

At one time, Israel had a kingdom under King David and his descendants. Now they were subjects in another kingdom, Rome. In the midst of this oppression, John the Baptist and Jesus appear preaching “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. This is what Israel had been hoping to hear, the Messiah King is here. It is now time to rise up and throw off the oppressor and establish this kingdom. “Social conditions in first-century Palestine inclined many people to suppose that revolutionary violence was the appropriate response to the violence of oppression they experienced.”³ It is important that we read this sermon in the light of what this audience was expecting of this coming kingdom. The disciples and the crowd that sat down to hear this sermon came with certain preconceived attitudes on what the Messiah would bring to Israel. The revival of a political kingdom was always at the top of the list. They were poor and oppressed by

the Roman army and their tax collectors. God was now going to throw off the oppressor and set up his kingdom as he once did with King David. A son of King David was here and he was preaching the kingdom. How exciting.

Why the Sermon on the Mount?

In Matthew chapter 1, we are introduced to Jesus by means of his genealogy and his birth. Chapter 2 moves us through the story of the wise men to Joseph’s and Mary’s return to Nazareth. In chapter 3 Jesus enters his ministry by means of his baptism and anointment as prophet, priest and king. In chapter 4 Jesus endures the temptations that God’s first son, Israel, failed, and thereby demonstrates his moral qualifications to represent the nation.

Now, in chapters 5-7, Jesus will instruct the crowds in 1) who enters his kingdom and 2) how does one live in his kingdom.

Matthew has just noted that Jesus was preaching “Repent, for the kingdom is at hand….“ (Matthew 4:17, ESV) and “…proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom … among the people.” (Matthew 4:23, ESV) Questions remain: who enters this kingdom and how does one live in this kingdom? This sermon will answer both questions.

We remember that Israel was baptized unto Moses in the crossing of the Red Sea (I Corinthians 10:2). They then went into the wilderness and were tempted. After this Moses goes up the mountain and receives the Law. And so with Jesus, he is baptized, tempted in the wilderness and now goes up the mountain and teaches the real meaning of the law.

Jesus kingdom is in fact a covenant renewal, which will be consummated in the New Covenant at the Passover just before his crucifixion. It corresponds to Moses’ experience. “In Deuteronomy, the people came through the wilderness and arrived at the border of the promised land, and God gave them a solemn covenant. He listed the blessings and the curses that would come upon them if they were obedient or disobedient (Deuteronomy 28). Now Matthew has shown us Jesus, coming out of Egypt (2:15), through the water and the wilderness (chapters 3 and 4), and into the land of promise (4:12–25). Here, now, is his new covenant.”

As we look at this section, we see that the beatitudes break down into two groups. “The first group pertains to one’s disposition toward God, while the second group has to do with one’s demeanor toward others….“ In the first group (5:3-6) are: the poor in spirit, those that mourn, the meek, those that hunger for righteousness. In the second group (5:7-10) are: the merciful, the pure in heart, peacemakers and the persecuted.

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

crowds

Although early in Jesus work, still we can see that crowds are already taking note of him (Matthew 4:23-25).

the mountain⁶ Most of Galilee consists of rocky terrain, at heights of between 1500 to 2100 feet. In our context, we would not be looking at a very high elevation. It would be areas where crowds could easily assemble, foothills or hill country is probably the idea. “….the corresponding Hebrew and Aramaic may mean nothing more than “the mountain region” or “the hill country” ….”⁷

his disciples⁸ At this point, we know that six of the Twelve have been called by Jesus (Matthew 4:18-23; John 1:43-45). However, it is not unlikely that most of the Twelve are now a part of this band of brothers. A larger number of people, who are in the early stages of hearing what Jesus has to say and considering his claims on their lives, are listening as well. They are disciples in a very lose sense but in fact, some in the crowd may someday be a part of the Twelve.

“….in Matthew’s Gospel “disciple” is not necessarily a reference to the twelve apostles, nor even to committed believers and followers; it can refer to someone who is merely following and learning at that moment—without reference to his level of commitment….⁹

Matthew 5:2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

It is important to remember that these teachings are addressed to a subjugated nation. This sermon addresses Israel’s condition as people “…chastened by the humiliation of

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⁹ D. A. Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 15.
exile and beyond, and living as a subject people; longing for God to put things finally to rights....”

This sermon will teach Israel how to live under these oppressive conditions while waiting for the full manifestation of the kingdom of heaven. Since most people in the last 2,000 years have lived life under circumstances involving oppressive governments, the abusive rich and crushing poverty, this sermon has meaning not only in the context of these disciples but for us as well.

2. The Good Life: The Paradoxical Values of the Kingdom of Heaven (5:3–10)

As we read through the Beatitudes, you will notice that I provide two interpretations for each beatitude. The first represents what Jesus means and what the crowd should learn, the second represents what in their own self-serving state they actually wanted to hear. Jesus is quiet aware of this mixed multitude and indeed must deal with the worldly agenda of these Zealots throughout his ministry.

a. The “Beatitude” Form

Blessed μακάριος or Approved. As in most words, there are various facets to this Greek word as well. Some of the ideas conveyed would be approved, congratulated, fortunate, benefited and rewarded. Although some modern translations prefer “happy” to “blessed,” this is not generally a good exchange.

But why “approved”? “In the Scriptures, man can bless God and God can bless man. This duality gives us a clue just what is meant. To be “blessed” means, fundamentally, to be approved, to find approval. When man blesses God, he is approving God. Of course, he is not doing this in some condescending manner, but rather he is eulogizing God, praising God. When God blesses man, he is approving man; and that is always an act of condescension.”

This is a great summary and explanation of the word we generally translate “blessed.” So instead of “blessed is the man” we should be thinking “approved is the man....” Man seeks the approval of God; here we are told how to obtain it.

This approval has both a present application and a future one. As a present application it “presents the demand that the person receiving the message takes up in the most serious sense the way of life revealed: It requires no less than a radical decision, as it lays claim to the recipient’s entire course and conduct of life. Thus, the benefit of this

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12 D. A. Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 16.
revelation goes hand in hand with the demand of a response. Without adequate response the beatitude turns into condemnation.”¹³ It is a call to salvation.

But this approval also has a future application. “It is important to realize that the beatitude is pronounced in the present, but its main concern is the eschatological destiny of the individual.”¹⁴ So God’s approval is not simply for the present, but extends through eternity as well.

(1) Who enters the kingdom?” (5:3–6)

The first section of the Sermon answers the question “Who enters the kingdom?” A careful look at the answer makes it clear that disciples of Jesus—believers, enter the kingdom. This is the person who has responded to Jesus’ call to repentance and in fact did repent.

Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

It seems that Jesus is reflecting on Isaiah 66 in this beatitude.

“All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” (Isaiah 66:2, ESV)

the poor in spirit

In the Old Testament the poor were cared for by God but they were not viewed as spiritually superior to others. However, you may have noticed that the New Testament seems to be somewhat friendlier to the poor and somewhat more critical of the rich. Through the later history of Israel this began to change. Under various invasions and persecutors “the wealthy upper classes were enticed to betray their religious heritage by the attractions of heathenism while the poor remained loyal to it. Poverty did not allow the poor the arrogance or aggressiveness of the wealthy. Their vulnerability forced the poor to look to God for everything. They quietly endured earthly suffering, waiting patiently upon God, for that is all that they could do. The term “rich” came to refer to the “worldly” and “impious” while the “poor” referred to the opposite, the “godly” and

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¹⁵ approved, congratulated, fortunate, benefited and rewarded
“pious.” By the time of the New Testament, the poor had taken on an approved spiritual quality.

However, Jesus is not here speaking of financial poverty as in itself a virtue; he is speaking of spiritual bankruptcy, a condition that “the poor” tend to recognize quicker than do the rich. This is in fact our condition, but it is not one we are willing to admit. So, in the face of spiritual ruin, we labor hard to make deposits into our account by our own works and thereby claim we are rich.

“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” (Revelation 3:17, ESV)

But the man who is approved by God understands that he is “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.”

A proof of the spiritually confused state of most people today can be found in the opinion of many that “most people are basically good.” And when given an opportunity, we will be quick to note that their good works outweigh their bad works. And as a result, they are not poor in spirit failing to note that God’s evaluation of these righteous deeds are but filthy to his holy gaze.

“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” (Isaiah 64:6, ESV)

But those approved by God respond differently.

“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:13–14, ESV)

So indeed, here is a man poor in spirit.

“Poverty of spirit is the personal acknowledgment of spiritual bankruptcy. It is the conscious confession of unworthiness before God. As such, it is the deepest form of repentance. It is exemplified by the guilty publican in the corner of the Temple: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” It is … a confession that he is sinful and rebellious and utterly without moral virtues adequate to commend him to God. From within such a framework, poverty of spirit becomes a general confession of a man’s need for God, a humble admission of impotence without him.”

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“At the very outset of the Sermon on the Mount, we learn that we do not have the spiritual resources to put any of the Sermon’s precepts into practice. We cannot fulfill God’s standards ourselves. We must come to him and acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy, emptying ourselves of our self-righteousness, moral self-esteem, and personal vainglory.”

“The poor in spirit will be those who sense the burden of their present (impoverished) state, and see it in terms of the absence of God; who patiently bear that state, but long for God to act on their behalf and decisively claim them again as his people. To people like this belongs the kingdom of heaven which has now drawn near.”

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.” (Isaiah 57:15, ESV)

The man who recognizes his spiritual poverty is truly approved by God.

for theirs is

In this beatitude the audience is told that being poor in spirit results in the present possession of the kingdom of heaven.

the kingdom of heaven—the reign of God.

“First, the idea of “kingdom” in both the Old and New Testaments is primarily dynamic rather than spatial. It is not so much a kingdom with geographical borders as it is a “kingdominion,” or reign. In the Scriptures, the spatial meaning of kingdom is secondary and derivative.

Second, although the kingdom of God can refer to the totality of God’s sovereignty, that is not what is in view in the Sermon on the Mount. Indeed, in the universal sense, God’s kingdom—his reign—is eternal and all-embracing. No one and nothing can escape from it. ….

But this cannot be the kingdom of God most frequently in view in the New Testament. In the Sermon on the Mount, not everyone enters the kingdom of heaven, but only those who are poor in spirit (5:3), obedient (7:21), and surpassingly righteous (5:20). Similarly, in John’s Gospel, only he who is born from above can see or enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). Since the universal kingdom by definition must include everyone whether he likes it or not, we see that the kingdom in these passages cannot be universal. There are conditions to be met before entrance is possible ….

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19 D. A. Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 18.
Third, the expression “kingdom of God,” in the saving sense … applies to both present and future. Taken together, the books of the New Testament insist that the kingdom of God has already arrived; a person may enter the kingdom and receive life now, life “to the full” (John 10:10). Jesus himself argues that if he drives out demons by the Spirit of God—and he does—then the kingdom of God has come (Matt. 12:28). Nevertheless, the books of the New Testament insist that the kingdom will be inherited only in the future, when Christ comes again. Eternal life, though experienced now, is consummated then, in conjunction with such a renovation of the universe that the only adequate description is “a new heaven and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1; cf. Rom. 8:21ff.).

Jesus tells several parables with the specific purpose of removing misconceptions among his followers, misconceptions to the effect that the full arrival of the kingdom would be achieved without any delay. He wanted them to think otherwise: the coming of the kingdom in its fullness might well require significant delay. For example, in one parable in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 19:11ff.), Jesus pictures a man of noble birth who goes to a distant country and then returns; and he receives full authority of a kingdom only after he has returned. Jesus is that nobleman, and the consummation of the kingdom awaits his return.

All men live on the plane of “this world”; but from the time of Christ’s coming to the end of the world, the inheritors of the kingdom (and they alone) also live on the plane of the kingdom. …

Fourth, although entering into life and entering the kingdom are synonymous, they are not always strictly interchangeable. The very idea of “kingdom” as “dynamic reign” brings with it overtones of authority and submission not normally conjured up when we speak of “life.” The kingdom of God speaks of God’s authority, mediated through Christ; therefore it speaks equally of our whole-hearted allegiance to that authority. That is why Matthew 7:21–23 so stresses obedience: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ ”

It is the kingdom of heaven, then, that is the great theme of the Sermon on the Mount.21

theirs αὐτῶς

“We should understand this in the sense, “theirs alone.””22 “The repeated αὐτοί [theirs] in the second clause in each part of the Beatitudes in vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 has an

antithetical effect. It is not reading too much into these verses to find that it is ‘these’ people rather than ‘those’ who are blessed” (SM, p. 289).”

Take note of the phrase kingdom of heaven. It is found in verses 3 and 10. This phrase serves as a literary inclusio around the beatitudes. This is a tool by a speaker or writer by which he makes sure we view this material as a tightly packed set of ideas that is to be viewed as a unit. Its repetition also reminds us that this Sermon is in fact about the kingdom.

Notice the word “is”. This humble repentance and recognition of our spiritual desperate condition brings one into his kingdom now, not simply some day at the end of time. “The present tense is used for the blessing pronounced on them here and again in verse 10, but in the intermediate beatitudes the tense is future. We should not press this point too far, for the full blessing in all the beatitudes is future. But this present points to a significant blessing for the poor in spirit right now.”

In summary, the man who is "poor in spirit" recognizes his spiritual bankruptcy. And through this he enters into God’s kingdom. This man is approved by God.

The First Century Audience

But perhaps as Jesus preached “the kingdom of heaven” another thought raced through the minds of some present. With this expression, the Davidic kingdom comes rushing to the forefront of their thoughts. How they long for the kingdom!

Do doubt some in his audience heard more of Isaiah 61 than Isaiah 66.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;” (Isaiah 61:1, ESV)

Those that gave thought to this verse, could have easily misunderstood thinking that “liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” were referring to the soon defeat of Rome and the concomitant freedom of political Israel. It was not. He was instead addressing the condition of their souls and the liberty he was to provide in salvation through his death. But most did not understood this.

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24 “In literature, inclusio is a literary device based on a concentric principle, also known as bracketing or an envelope structure, which consists of creating a frame by placing similar material at the beginning and end of a section....” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inclusio

“The kingdom of heaven is not given on the basis of race (cf. 3:9), earned merits, the military zeal and prowess of Zealots, or the wealth of a Zacchaeus. It is given to the poor, the despised publicans, the prostitutes, those who are so “poor” they know they can offer nothing and do not try. They cry for mercy and they alone are heard.”

One can imagine the looks of excitement on the faces of some fading into looks of confusion, maybe even anger as they listen to the sermon. This kingdom is not geographic, it is moral, it is God’s reign in the hearts of men. This was not what many in his audience wanted to hear. People hear what they want to hear.

Matthew 5:4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

d. To be sad, to grieve for, to weep for, sorrow, grief.

Here Jesus appears to be addressing Isaiah 61:

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:1–3, ESV)

In Luke 4:16-19, we read that Jesus preached on Isaiah 61:1-2a up to the phrase “to proclaim the Lord’s favor” and then stopped. In Luke 21:22 Jesus addresses Isaiah 61:2b “and the day of vengeance of our God.” Here in Matthew 5:4 Jesus preaches on Isaiah 61:3. Clearly, this passage in Isaiah was important to him.

People mourn for many reasons, many are related to the consequences of sin, others to “unfulfilled expectations” or self-centeredness. But these mourn without the comfort of God. This is not the type of mourning discussed here.

“This verse follows naturally from the one which precedes it. Mournfulness can be understood as the emotional counterpart to poverty of spirit.”

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27 approved, congratulated, fortunate, benefited and rewarded
29 D. A. Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 19.
an emotional response, a deep mourning to the offended God. So the mourning is not
self-centered, it is God-centered; it is focused on our failures before a holy God. This
mourning recognizes the sin in one’s life and is frightened. It is a mourning over sin.
“This is the mourning experienced by a man who begins to recognize the blackness of
his sin, the more he is exposed to the purity of God.”30 “It is not the sorrow of
bereavement to which Christ refers, but the sorrow of repentance” (Stott, pp. 40–41).31
This fits the context and passage very well. Isaiah and Paul were men who understood
this.

“And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell
in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the
LORD of hosts!”’” (Isaiah 6:5, ESV)

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”
(Romans 7:24, ESV)

In our context here in the Sermon on the Mount, it is Israel that is to mourn and do so
because they are truly poor in spirit. They mourn not because they are economically
poor, they mourn because of their own sin, and because they do mourn over sin, they
will be comforted by God. People who do not mourn over their sin are not comforted by
God.

comforted παρακαλέω “…to cause someone to be encouraged or consoled, either by
verbal or non-verbal means—‘to encourage, to console, encouragement.’”32

“There is no comfort or joy that can compare with what God gives to those who mourn.
These people exchange the sackcloth of mourning for a garment of praise, the ashes of
grief for the oil of gladness.”33

There is a comfort now in time but there is a greater one in eternity.

“But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good
things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and
you are in anguish.” (Luke 16:25, ESV)

30 D. A. Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10
(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 19.
the Mount (Leicester, 1978).
32 Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic
33 D. A. Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10
(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 20.
“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”” (Revelation 21:4, ESV)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.” (2 Corinthians 1:3–7, ESV)

Charles Wesley’s words magnificently sum up these verses 3 and 4:

He speaks, and listening to his voice
   New life the dead receive,
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.

These have now believed.

**In summary**, those that mourn do so because they understand their spiritually bankrupt condition. Jesus approves this response and promises comfort.

**The First Century Audience**

But if Jesus’ audience read this Isaiah passage, they may have come up with an entirely different reason for this mourning. “Isaiah 61:1 functioned within Qumran to give the community hope that God would someday overthrow his enemies in judgment and establish a day of freedom, peace, and comfort.”

They mourned because of the Roman oppression and they looked with delighted in the comfort God was soon to provide and the vengeance he was about to pour out on his enemies. Indeed, all this is found right in the Isaiah passage Jesus is quoting.

“…to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn,” (Isaiah 61:2, ESV)

This is the message they were looking to hear: the day of vengeance. But they would have been shocked to learn that the day of vengeance of our God would not be against Rome, but against Israel—the new Egypt and Sodom (Revelation 11:8)!

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Luke makes this clear while speaking of the coming destruction upon Israel saying “for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.” (Luke 21:22, ESV)

But, people hear what they want to hear.

**Matthew 5:5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth [land].”**

In Greek this word generally means gentle, humble, considerate or meek. But Jesus is quoting a Psalm 37 and this makes a difference.

“In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.” (Psalm 37:10–11, ESV)

And since this is the passage Jesus is addressing, we need to ask, what does the Hebrew word here translated “meek” mean in that language. The word in Hebrew found in Psalm 37 conveys an additional idea beyond gentle; it means afflicted, oppressed or tormented. Under the conditions found in Israel at this time, the occupation and rule of Israel by Rome, it is not hard to believe that Jesus was referring not only to the gentle and mild but perhaps even more so to the afflicted, oppressed and tormented by Rome.

At this point in the commentaries we are often assured that being meek does not mean being weak, etc., etc. But in fact often that is exactly what it means. And because they are meek and weak, there is nothing they can do about the Roman oppressor and his affliction, oppression and torment; they are simply told that on the other side, as God completes his purpose through it all, that they shall inherit the earth.

**earth **γῆ or land**

It is fascinating to note that in Psalm 37, the passage Jesus is referencing, the phrase “inherit the land” is found six times. Of course, “inherit the land” to the Jews had only one meaning, inherit the land of Israel, a land that he no longer possessed as subjects of Rome.

So, who inherits this land? In Psalm 37, verse 3 it is the “good,” in verse 9 it is those who “wait on the Lord,” in verse 11 the “meek,” in verse 22 “those blessed by the Lord,”

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35 approved, congratulated, fortunate, benefited and rewarded  
38 *meek* עָנָו (ʿā·nāw).1. ... humbleness, humility, unpretentiousness, i.e., a quality of sincere and straightforward behavior, suggesting a lack of arrogance and ... 2. ... afflicted, oppressed, needy, i.e., those tormented and weak and so not able to help themselves, and so be of low status in a society.... James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
in verse 29 “the righteous,” and in verse 34, it is again, those who “wait on the Lord.” What does this tell us? Perhaps the last two verses to Psalm 37 answer that question.

“The salvation of the righteous is from the L ORD; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble. The L ORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.” (Psalm 37:39–40, ESV)

The word “salvation” in Hebrew, like “saved” in Greek, can simply mean some kind of earthly deliverance. But generally it refers to endless deliverance, eternal life. What is the thrust of our passage in Matthew 5? The poor in spirit in verse 3 were those without spiritual resources. As for those who mourn in verse 4, “This is the mourning experienced by a man who begins to recognize the blackness of his sin, the more he is exposed to the purity of God.”

And now we come to the meek of verse 5. As we saw above, these are the “good,” those that “wait on the Lord,” the “afflicted,” the “blessed of the Lord,”—“the righteous.” They are the approved, the blessed by God. It is to these that the “salvation of the righteous” is extended “from the Lord.” In other words, Jesus continues to speak of the spiritual condition of those that hear this message, the poor in spirit, those that mourn, the meek, it is these that inherit the land. But the land is no longer simply geographic Israel, the context transcends that, it now includes an eternal inheritance:

“To an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,” (1 Peter 1:4, ESV)

“One day heaven and earth will be joined together forever, 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.” So the meek do indeed inherit the earth, the new land of Israel, but this is now an eternal land, a new heaven and a new earth.

In summary: Jesus here extends an eternal reward to the oppressed, they shall inherit “the land” which now transcends in meaning to heaven itself. “For Matthew, the land is spiritualized to refer to God’s new world.”

Here is where Jesus lossed some of his audience.

**The First Century Audience**

There is something here of importance. In the midst of this oppression, the God ordained response is not anger or wrath, the response of God's people is to be meek.

*Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.* (Psalm 37:8, ESV)

This is what Jesus was telling this audience and this some would not hear. Jesus’ message to them was that there should be no anger, wrath or revolution.

Jesus message is found in Psalm 37:

*“Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.”* (Psalm 37:1–2, ESV)

Meekness is always a virtue, but in this context it ascends to wisdom. The fool frets because of evildoers and responds in fierceness and violence. The wise respond with meekness. The fool seeks war and calls the wise weak, but God says the meek shall:

*“…delight themselves in abundant peace.”* (Psalm 37:11, ESV)

But some in this audience here verse 10 more clearly than they do verse 11.

*“In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.”* (Psalm 37:10, ESV)

They hear a message far less eternal and far more immediate. And when they hear Jesus say “Blessed are the meek” they certainly understand that this word refers to the afflicted, the oppressed, the powerless under the boot of Rome. So, they hear “Blessed are the afflicted, the oppressed, the powerless for they shall inherit the land.”

When they read Psalm 37, they read: “For the evildoers shall be cut off” (Psalm 37:9, ESV) “In just a little while, the wicked will be no more (Psalm 37:10, ESV) and the “transgressors shall be altogether destroyed.” (Psalm 37:38, ESV).

This resonates with this audience; to cut off the evildoers (Rome) and see the Davidic King and his people “inherit the land” is a message that sells in first century Israel. But in fact, this is not Jesus’ message. People hear what they want to hear.

*Matthew 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

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42 approved, congratulated, fortunate, benefited and rewarded
**hunger and thirst**

Few things drive us like hunger and thirst, they strip from our lives all competing interest. Under their demands we become fixated on their unending screams. This is the metaphor Jesus uses to teach us the importance of righteousness. Nothing is more important and nothing is to get in our way as we pursue this goal. Yet, in fact, everything gets in the way.

Of course Jesus is addressing spiritual hunger and thirst not simply the physical needs of his audience. This idea is illustrated in the Psalms:

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:1–2, ESV)

“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” (Psalm 63:1, ESV)

**righteousness**

This word is often misunderstood. It has taken on such a religious aura that it is in danger of losing its meaning. What it means is simply doing what God requires, doing what is right. It is a life or lifestyle in conformity to justice, law, and morality as revealed by God. “...righteousness, is thus conformity to the claims of higher authority and stands in opposition to...lawlessness.”

**Righteousness is obedience to God’s law-word.** Everything in one’s life must be measured against the standard of the word of God.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Righteousness differs from holiness. Holiness addresses separation from sin; righteousness addresses obedience to God’s word. Righteousness refers to what God requires from us—<strong>behavior in conformity to the scripture; that is righteousness</strong>.</th>
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“Thorough righteousness is often parodied as some form of obsolete Victorian prudishness, or narrow-minded and vehement legalism. The pursuit of righteousness is not popular even among professing Christians.”

Many today are prepared to seek other things: spiritual maturity, happiness, the Spirit’s power, effective witnessing skills. Some chase from preacher to preacher and conference to conference seeking some vague “blessing” from on high. They hunger for spiritual experience, they thirst for...

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43 righteousness δικαιοσύνη “...the act of doing what God requires..., doing what is right.”


happiness. But righteousness, a life in obedience and conformity to God’s word? Not so much.

It is the blessed, the approved by God, that hunger and thirst for this “justice, law, and morality.” It would therefore seem that those who do not hunger for “doing what is right,” conforming their life to God’s revelation in scripture, are thereby not blessed, not approved by God, and very often, not saved either.

In most anything God requires us to do, a most useful response is the question: “how do I do that?” But it is a question common only to those that actually do hunger and thirst. If one actually seeks “conformity to justice, law, and morality as given by God” there is only one place to look. The place in which it was first given—the Bible. For man must live “by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4, ESV)

So, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, is to hunger and thirst for God’s word.

It is the Word that will change a person’s life. “My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.” (Psalm 119:20, ESV) “With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:10–11, ESV) “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” (John 7:37, ESV) With little hunger and thirst for God’s word, there is little righteousness. And in such circumstances, one’s lifestyle will not doubt demonstrate that point.

they shall be satisfied

“For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.” (Psalm 107:9, ESV)

This word is found again in Matthew:

“And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.” (Matthew 14:20, ESV)

And in an equivalent fashion, those that hunger and thirst for righteousness will obtain eternal satisfaction.

“As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.” (Psalm 17:15, ESV)

In summary: Jesus again extends eternal rewards for those that seek after God by conforming their lives to his Word; they seek righteousness. Such people are approved by God.

The First Century Audience
In the Old Testament we see that “righteousness, is the term used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew ṣdāqā, which is often better translated “deliverance” or “salvation,” sometimes even “victory,” referring to God’s putting right what is wrong.”\(^46\) In passages like the one in Psalm 72 we read of righteousness.

“In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me, and save me!” (Psalm 71:2, ESV)

It is a prayer for deliverance and rescue.

“…hungering for righteousness probably includes yearning for God’s justice, for his vindication of the oppressed….”\(^47\) For many in Israel at this time, to hunger and thirst for righteousness would then be a cry for God to exercise justice and right the wrongs in Israel, to deliver and rescue Israel from the enemy!

Here is a nation that was in subjection first to Babylon, then to Persia and now to Rome. The evil have for centuries oppressed them, \textit{but soon the righteousness of God will descend and destroy Israel’s enemies—and they hunger and thirst for it!} This Jesus is the one who can bring “deliverance” and “victory”; he can put right what is wrong in Israel.

The physical realities of hunger and thirst are quick to grab the attention of this crowd, which lays the foundation of another misunderstanding by some in Jesus’ audience. Here is a man that can turn crumbs into a mountain of food, great enough to feed an army! Certainly this one could lead the army of Israel against the Roman oppressor.

So, for many, this was a national cry for social justice—and that’s all; they had no spiritual dimension, simply an earthly one. People hear what they want to hear.

This ends the first group of beatitudes, the ones that address the question: \textit{Who enters the kingdom?} \((5:3–6)\) “The first four beatitudes express in one way or another our dependence on God; the next three the outworking of that dependence.”\(^48\)

In the very first beatitude the audience is told that being \textit{poor in spirit} results in the present possession of the \textit{kingdom of heaven}. The significance of this statement is enhanced when we realize that in all the other beatitudes we are told that they \textit{shall} benefit in the future. \textit{Someday} believers shall be \textit{comforted, inherit the earth, be satisfied, receive mercy, see God} and be called \textit{sons of God}. But \textit{today} the kingdom of God \textit{is} their immediate possession. This first beatitude clarifies the point of salvation for the child of God. It is the recognition that one’s spiritual poverty is the necessary


foundation for the salvation of the lost. “The repetition of the present tense clause signals the main theme of the Beatitudes, that the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven is a present possession and operation among those who respond to Jesus’ ministry.”

49 The next three beatitudes give us additional detail on what the heart condition of the child of God, they *mourn*, they are *meek*, they *hunger and thirst* for righteousness. The four that follow explain how the believer treats his neighbor.

(2) How does one treat neighbors in this kingdom? (5:7–10)

The first section of four beatitudes dealt with the heart condition of one that would enter the kingdom. The second section of the Sermon answers the question “How does one treat neighbors in this kingdom?” Someone who is truly a child of God is a very good neighbor.

Matthew 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

“With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless.” (Psalm 18:25, ESV)

merciful ἐλεήμων “Compassionate, benevolently merciful involving thought and action.”

51 The word addresses thoughts and acts—not just thoughts but actions as well. When actions are missing, mercy is missing. “The adjective for merciful … means those whose bent is to show mercy, not those who engage in an occasional merciful impulse.”

“…the merciful are those who demonstrate forgiveness toward the guilty and kindness for the hurting and needy.” The Pharisees, like many legalists, condemned the guilty and blamed the hurting and needy for their miserable condition. For them, mercy was a concession to sin; it bared them from judging the guilty, which they wanted to do, and was therefore not common. Legalists today are still long on condemnation and short on mercy.

“What is mercy? How does it differ from grace? The two terms are frequently synonymous; but where there is a distinction between the two, it appears that grace is a

50 approved, congratulated, fortunate, benefited and rewarded
51 merciful ἐλεήμων “Compassionate, benevolently merciful involving thought and action. … “Blessed are the merciful ones” … not merely those who express acts of mercifulness, but who have this attribute as a result of the indwelling God….” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).
loving response when love is undeserved, and mercy is a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness of the one on whom the love is to be showered. Grace answers to the undeserving; mercy answers to the miserable."  

**they shall receive mercy**

In Greek the phrase “they shall receive mercy” is one word. The word “they” is a part of the verb “shall receive”. However, in this case an additional “they” is added in front of the verb as well. The purpose of this addition is to make the point that THEY, those that show mercy, shall receive mercy. Meaning it would seem, that they alone, they that have been merciful, will receive mercy. The implication is that others may not receive mercy.

“The religious leaders cannot receive God’s mercy because they have become so self-satisfied with their own religious attainments that they don’t believe that they need mercy.” Because they believed they had attained a certain level of perfection, the religious professionals did not see their own need of mercy. Such people will never see the need of mercy to others either—and they will not receive it themselves.

The “merciful” and those that “receive mercy” are believers. But, who are they showing mercy too? Consider the story of the good Samaritan that Jesus would tell in Luke 10. The Jews had been told to love their neighbor. That did not sit well, so they began to squeeze out the implications of the statement by asking who was their neighbor? The narrower the answer the better. Jesus’ response highlighted their racial bigotry. The hated Samaritan is their neighbor—a most unwelcomed answer. And it is they who must be shown mercy. So, this beatitude comes with a lot of baggage and in fact it does have broad implication for us as well as them. Jesus would teach mercy in two other parables in Matthew as well (18:23–35; 25:31–46).

This response to showing mercy is a natural outgrowth to the poor in spirit, those that mourn, the meek and those that hunger and thirst for righteousness. “…the person whose experience reflects these beatitudes is conscious of his spiritual bankruptcy (Matt. 5:3), grieves over it (5:4), and hungers for righteousness (5:6). He is merciful toward the wretched because he recognizes himself to be wretched; in being merciful he is also shown mercy.” Such a person wants to show mercy to others.

Jesus makes it very clear that mercy or the lack of it is a major criterion by which God will decide one’s eternal fate.

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And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you? And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” (Matthew 18:33–35, ESV)

Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:45–46, ESV)

This beatitude “forces the professing disciple of Jesus Christ to ask himself some hard questions. Am I merciful or supercilious to the wretched? Am I gentle or hard-nosed toward the downtrodden? Am I helpful or callous toward the backslidden? Am I compassionate or impatient with the fallen?”

In summary: believers love neighbors by showing mercy to neighbors. In response, God shows them additional mercy.

The First Century Audience

Let’s remember our first century context and consider the possibility that perhaps the call here is for the righteous to show mercy to their oppressors. What? No way!

“For those who are oppressed it is all too easy to think that at their moments of weakness and need, oppressors need to be ‘kicked in the teeth’, not shown mercy.”

So, any message of mercy to the Romans was likely to be met with cold silence. It’s bad enough to ask that the Samaritans be shown mercy—but to the Romans oppressor? That’s beyond reason!

Israel was a tinderbox of hatred toward Rome. There had been several revolts against Rome and there would be others. The crowds expected that this one, the one preaching a new Davidic Kingdom, to advocate with the insurrectionists and to promote revolt. Instead he pleads for mercy.

Perhaps proof that Jesus had this in mine is found in Matthew 5:41:

“And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” (Matthew 5:41, ESV)

So, Jesus is not advocating revolution against Rome, he is advocating mercy toward the hated Roman soldier or in fact toward any in need of mercy. Truly revolutionary. And most unacceptable. But people hear what they want to hear.


Matthew 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

It is likely that Jesus was thinking of this Psalm.

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” (Psalm 24:3–4, ESV)

pure καθαρός in heart

Sitting on this mountain in the first century, what do these people hear? Purity was most important to the first century Jew. It was a constant topic of discussion and it regulated their behavior in minute detail. “Antiquity considered impurity primarily a matter of external pollution and the cause of evil in its many forms; its removal was the purpose of purification rituals.” External pollution was so important in Israel that one could not even go to the market place without going through a ritual purification when returning home.

“and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash [βαπτίζω, middle voice—baptize themselves]. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing [βαπτισμός, baptizing] of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.” (Mark 7:4, ESV)

Of course, all these behaviors, this ritual, pointed to something. They were symbol. The purpose of ritual is to point those participating in the symbol to look to that which is symbolized. Washing of cups is important. But this command, this behavior was in fact looking beyond the immediate. The person participating in this ritual was to say to himself, if washing my cups are important, how much more so is washing my soul? But for some, this lesson was often missed.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (Matthew 23:25–28, ESV)


The Pharisees were fixated about having pure cups; Jesus explains the symbol, it is not about pure cups, it is about pure hearts. Jesus is hear clarifying the point, so he adds “in heart.” This is not a new teaching, just one forgotten by many.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10, ESV)

His followers were not to get lost in the symbol and forget that which it symbolized. They were to actually be clean, pure, in heart not simply in an external ritual.

Jesus drew attention to the importance of the internal over the external saying:

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.” (Matthew 15:19, ESV)

The Greeks said “know thyself” obviously believing this was possible. Jeremiah said

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, ESV)

In saying this Jeremiah was obviously implying that true self-knowledge was not even possible, but then explained who it is that does know us.

“I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.” (Jeremiah 17:10, ESV)

But, it is not possible for the fallen man to truly know himself. Only God himself can reveal that to us. So to be “pure in heart” one must go to God and his word. There you will hear offensive things about the state of your heart, and there you will find the means whereby purity of heart becomes possible.

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,” (1 Peter 1:22, ESV)

shall see God

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14, ESV)

In fact, Psalm 24 continues making this point.

“He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah” (Psalm 24:5–6, ESV)
Those that hunger and thirst for righteousness “will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness.” And those with a pure heart will see the face of the God.

“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” (Revelation 22:3–4, ESV)

But why is this beatitude in the section on one’s demeanor towards others instead of the section on one’s demeanor towards God? Indeed, it corresponds to “pure in spirit” in verse 3 and sounds much like it. Verse 3 addresses one’s relationship to God; verse 8 addresses one’s relationship to neighbor. The condition of the heart determines one’s actions toward others. The point is that one’s relationship with God and neighbor must both be pure. The pure in heart will not be filled with anger and hate toward others (Matthew 5:21–22) nor will they lust and prey on others (Matthew 5:27–28). Being pure in heart changes behavior toward others.

In summary: the pure in heart will love neighbor because this very cleanliness of soul will deliver the believer from hate and lust toward neighbor.

The First Century Audience

But there is more in this very passage, Psalm 24, and it is not likely that his audience missed it.

“Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!” (Psalm 24:7–8, ESV)

Now we’re talking! Those that are “pure,” obviously children of Abraham, will again be visited by the “King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!”

They can’t wait!

But they would have missed the point again, it is the pure “in heart” that Jesus is addressing. This draws attention to the failure of those that are ritually pure and nothing else. Some Christians today are like this. They partake of the rituals of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, but there is little behavior that demonstrates a love for neighbor. But, people hear what they want to hear.

Matthew 5:9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” (Psalm 34:12–14, ESV)

62 approved, congratulated, fortunate, benefited and rewarded
To effectively seek peace you must pursue it. You will never be a peacemaker passively. You must actively seek it. The passage “does not hold out a blessing to the peaceful, nor to those who yearn for peace, but to the peacemakers.”\footnote{D. A. Carson, \textit{Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 27.} There is not a lot of danger in being peaceful or in yearning for peace, but to be a peacemaker—that can get you in trouble! Yet, we are called to be peacemakers.

Over the centuries, governments have waged countless wars in the name of Christ and Christianity. It is not that governments care anything about Christ or his Church, it is that by using his name they believe they can add a moral justification to their cause. So, in the minds of many around the world today, Christianity is, falsely, thought to be the cause of much of the evil in the world. The Christian faith is viewed by some much the same way as radical Islam is viewed, a bloody religion promoting evil. And because such people seek peace, they believe that the only way to reach that goal is to eliminate all religions—to them, the source of war. This is increasingly the attitude of many people in the world today, perhaps especially in the "more enlightened" Western world.

However, if one looks carefully at the Bible, it is clear that it is the message of peace that characterizes Christianity.

> "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”" (Isaiah 52:7, ESV)

> “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14, ESV)

> “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” (Romans 14:19, ESV)

It is the one called, “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, ESV) that is the hope of a toxic world.

James, Jesus half-brother and careful student of the Sermon on the Mount, says this:

> “And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:18, ESV)

So, it is the mission of the child of God to be a peacemaker, especially if one wants a “harvest of righteousness” in life. All human peacemaking is in imitation of God who is the ultimate peacemaker. It is he that engages the violent soul, and at the cost of his Son’s own life and makes peace with those fallen in sin. “He acts as the great peacemaker, letting the sun rise on the bad and the good, and letting the rain fall on the righteous and the unrighteous (5:45). He forgives sins (6:12a, 14–15, 7:11) and he
hands out benefits to the undeserving (7:7–11).” And so we, his followers, walk in his steps and seek peacemaking.

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”” (Isaiah 52:7, ESV)

For Matthew, peacemaking was something done at the personal level. In the following verses, the Sermon on the Mount presents several cases of peacemaking all of which are exercised in the context of family and friends. 1) Pray for your enemies (5:23-24); 2) love your enemies (5:43-44); 3) greeting outsiders as friends (5:47); 4) forgiving the debts of others (6:12); 5) forgiving trespasses (6:14-15, 3), and 6) do not judge others (7:1-5). Such peacemaking behavior are the examples that are to characterize members of his Kingdom—Christians.

I Have Not Come To Bring Peace, But A Sword

In talking about peacemaking one must address Jesus’ comments in Matthew 10. They seem to fly in the face of his comments here. But do they?

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” (Matthew 10:34–35, ESV)

There is both the appearances of reality and the facts of reality in the things we view in life. Jesus is hear speaking of the appearance of reality. The apparent result of his coming was war, a sword, although the reality was peace. In fact, Jesus did not literally bring a sword. This is symbolic language to describe the response that others would have to his teachings, not the response Jesus would have towards others. They would hate Jesus and his disciples and they would seek to harm them. When Jesus says that he has come to bring the sword, he means that his teachings are divisive. They cause conflict, people hate them and they hate those that follow Jesus. So, it is they, the world, that actually bring the sword and they would use it to attack him, his message and his followers—all the while blaming Jesus and his Church, calling them hate mongers. It is in the light of this response that Jesus says “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Although he did not personally bring the sword, this sword came because he came; in Matthew 10 Jesus is noting that. His coming, his presence, will result in violence, literally or figuratively, especially in the violence of relationships. In fact, it is the relationships mentioned that give insight to this verse. It is family that responds in hate to some who embrace Jesus. It is a prophetic message on the enmity of those that hate holiness. For many that become Christians, they never again have

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an affectionate relationship with their family. But, regardless of this violent response on their part, Jesus is still the Prince of Peace.

**The Wars of Israel**

One other subject that bears on this topic of peacemaking is the wars of Israel upon the nations in the area around Palestine in the years after the Exodus. In a sense, it is the white elephant in the room when one talks about this verse.

In Deuteronomy we read how God instructed Israel to make war on the Amorites, Ammonites, Canaanites and other civilizations in that area. These were wars of extermination; in our age we would call them genocide. In the light of what Jesus is saying, does this make sense? These wars seem to be in such stark contrast to Jesus teachings that, as a result, many over the years developed a false view of the Bible talking in terms of the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. It was the only way they could comprehend the contrast. An understanding that harmonized these two did not seem possible.

The first thing we should note as we approach this subject is that all sins are capital crimes against God. Adam and Eve were told “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:17, ESV)

Although they died spiritually that day, yet God spared their physical death for a time yet future. Still, at any time God could righteously bring penalty upon them and their race. They were guilty and they were under the sentence of death.

From time to time God did in fact enter human history and bring this sentence upon the Adamic race. We see this very markedly in the Noahic Flood. So, in light of the fact that the human race is under the curse of death, and in light of God’s sovereignty in when this sentence is to be carried out, we can begin to understand his decision to exterminate these post-flood cultures as he did those from the pre-flood era.

In an earlier age God restrained this sentence upon these people. “And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” (Genesis 15:16, ESV) Because their iniquity was not yet complete, God delayed his judgment. But he would not delay it forever and the time did come when he would no longer delay. Sin has consequence.

God uses means to carry out his sentence of death. At the time of Noah, he used the flood. But at the time of Moses, he used Israel to carry out this sentence. In the days of Jeremiah he used Babylon to destroy Judea. In the period of the disciples, he used Rome to destroy Israel. And through the ages since he continues to use nations as well as natural disasters to carry out his sentence of death. I do not doubt that he will do so on our own culture as well.
The fact that God is a peacemaker does not mean that the sentence of death is negated. It is still in force and it is only through his own death that we avoid it.

Jesus ministry did not abolish the death penalty, in fact he came to fulfill the death penalty of sin. But in his ministry he makes it clear that his Kingdom is to be one of peace. He does not use his Church to carry out any death penalty. We are to be peacemakers, others will be his tools of judgment.

**sons of God**

To be a *son of God* is to be one who bears the character of God. “In Jewish thought, “son” often bears the meaning “partaker of the character of,” or the like. If someone calls you the “son of a dog,” this is not an aspersion on your parents, but on you: you partake of the character of a dog.”\(^6^5\)

“The ethics of the SM in its entirety is intended for those who regard themselves potentially as “sons of God” and whose training leads to this reward as their eschatological goal.”\(^6^6\)

The concept of *sons of God* goes deep into the Old Testament.

> “You are the sons of the **Lord** your **God**....” (Deuteronomy 14:1, ESV)

However, the children of Israel rejected God as Father and was in turn rejected by him.

> “They have dealt corruptly with him; *they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation.*” (Deuteronomy 32:5, ESV)

But the child of God in Jesus is already a son of God

> “For all who are led by the **Spirit of God** are **sons of God**.” (Romans 8:14, ESV)

> “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called **children of God**; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” (1 John 3:1, ESV)

Yet the fulness of this relationship is yet in our future.

> “The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his **God** and he will be my son.” (Revelation 21:7, ESV)

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The promise of being a son of God is the promise of eternal life. But for those that are not sons of God, their destiny is found in the very next verse.

“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8, ESV)

So, the promise of “son of God” is the promise of eternal life.

**In summary:** peacemakers love God by loving neighbor. They do this by seeking to replace hostility with peace.

### The First Century Audience

When Jesus was about twelve years of age, there was an uprising led by Judas of Galilee with an attack on Sepphoris…. This was Herod Antipas’ capital city in Galilee, 4 miles north of Nazareth. Perhaps men from Nazareth were in the uprising. The uprising was crushed by the Romans, and the Romans crucified 2,000 Jews outside Sepphoris. This was the context in which Jesus is preaching the virtue of being a peacemaker. “This beatitude must have been shocking to Zealots when Jesus preached it, when political passions were inflamed.”

As a result, one wonderers if about this time it dawns on some in the audience that this sermon is not going well. This man is simply proving to be a big disappointment. They seek a political leader to drive the Romans from the land. Instead his is a call to peace not war.

Under those circumstances, this message would not be received well by these Jews. Jesus is making the point that peace is better than war with Rome. And that climatic battle did come in A.D. 67-70, and then Judea and Jerusalem were destroyed, all of which proved Jesus’ point.

**Matthew 5:10** “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In fact, Jesus was persecuted for righteousness sake:

“For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face.” ….“For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.” (Psalm 69:7, 9, ESV)


68 approved, congratulated, fortunate, benefited and rewarded
And now we are told that there will be a concomitant blessing for those that are persecuted for his sake.

**persecuted διώκω** “…to systematically organize a program to oppress and harass people—‘to persecute, to harass, persecution.’”  

**righteousness** This word is used three times in this one chapter: 5:6; 5:10; 5:20 and twice more in the sermon: 6:1 and 6:33. **Righteousness** is important to God.

This word is used three times in this one chapter: 5:6; 5:10; 5:20 and twice more in the sermon: 6:1 and 6:33. **Righteousness** is important to God.

Persecution was and is common in a sinful world. Many good and innocent people have suffered persecution through the millennia. However, in this passage the phrase **for righteousness’ sake** indicate the central feature of what Jesus is here saying. The general injustice of persecution is not the point; the point is that one is to live life in conformity with the law word of God. This is what elevates these persecuted ones; they are righteous. Not righteous in some generic sense that Jew and pagan alike could make claim to but righteous to the standard of God’s word. Because of their relationship with God, they give persecution a greater pathos. These are the ones approved by God.

**for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Doing right as measured by the scripture demonstrates one’s membership in God’s kingdom. Doing wrong as measured by that standard would demonstrate that one is not a member of God’s kingdom.

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Doing right, living the word of God, shows to the world their own depravity and they will hate you for this and they will seek to harm you because of it. So if you do not lie and hate and slander and fornicate and sodomize, the world will despise you and seek to do you harm. Such a life exposes the filth of those that do. This cannot be allowed. “… they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;” (1 Peter 4:4, ESV) This results in God’s approval, blessing, on your life and demonstrates to whom you belong.

the kingdom of heaven

Verse 3 introduced this phrase and now we conclude these beatitudes with this phrase used again. The kingdom that Israel wanted and expected was far different than the one Jesus proclaimed in these verses. “For the SM, the meaning of the inclusio is clear: the sequence of virtues in vss. 3a–9a, combined with the eschatological promises in vss. 4b–9b, is held together by the theme of the kingdom of the heavens, in which righteousness reigns and will ultimately prevail.”

In summary: righteous living is a life style that does good to neighbors. It is a testimony of God’s holiness and therefore a means to love neighbor. However, many will hate the believer for his “holier than thou” attitude and they will act in keeping with this hate, they will seek your harm.

The First Century Audience

If you were determined to follow Jesus in first century Israel and be a peacemaker with the Romans, you most likely would find yourself persecuted for doing so.

“It is no accident that Jesus should pass from peacemaking to persecution, for the world enjoys its cherished hates and prejudices so much that the peacemaker is not always welcome.”

Those that heard and embraced this message were in danger of being declared traitors to Israel. Soon, this hatred of Rome would result in the final battle with this despised enemy. The Church historian Eusebius records the response of the Christians living in Jerusalem during the Roman siege. Instead of joining the efforts to war on Rome, the Church instead did what was considered treason, they left the war makers and fled to Pella. They had been taught by the founder of the Church to be peacemakers not war makers.

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Eusebius says, “But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgement of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.”

The flight of the Jews from Jerusalem was viewed as treason by the Jews and was one more reason to hate Christians. This response would result in suffering for righteousness sake by the Church.

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.” (John 15:18–20, ESV)

James, the half-brother of Jesus no doubt heard this sermon many times. As he nears the end of his own life he sums up the qualities of a Christian. His words remind us how carefully he listened.

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:17–18, ESV)

Notice how many “Sermon on the Mount” words are found in these two verses.

The Sermon on the Mount—a Summary

Who are blessed or approved by God? The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. In addition, there are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. These terms describe the Christian. They are a summary of 1) what we are to be and 2) how we are to live. They are the standard by which a believer must measure his life.

And to those that conform to this standard, promises are made: theirs is the kingdom of God, they shall be comforted, they shall inherit the earth, they shall be satisfied. All these describe the reward of those who come to faith in Jesus. To these are added: they shall receive mercy, they shall see God, they shall be called sons.

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of God and again, theirs is the kingdom of God. These are the terms that describe the reward of those that follow Jesus.

These two paragraphs are simply a summary of the words found in the Sermon. They are the words that describe those that God approves and they are the words that describe their reward. This is Christianity in a nut-shell. So, come back to the beatitudes often and thereby remind yourself what God approves and what he rewards.