

## The beatitudes

"Now when [Jesus] saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them" ([Matt. 5:1-2](#)). The crowds probably followed him, as they often did. The sermon was not designed for the disciples only. Jesus told them to spread his teachings throughout the world, and Matthew wrote it down for more than a billion people to read. These teachings are for everyone who is willing to listen. First come the beatitudes (the word "beatitude" comes from the Latin word for blessed):

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit,** for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (v. 3). What does it mean to be "poor in spirit"? Low self-esteem, low interest in spiritual things? Not necessarily. Many religious Jews called themselves "the poor," for they often *were* poor, and they looked to God to supply their daily needs. So Jesus may have been referring to the faithful. But "poor in spirit" suggests something more. Poor people know that they have needs. The poor in spirit know that they need God; they feel a lack in their lives. They do not imagine that they are doing God any favors by serving him. But Jesus says that the kingdom is for people like them. It is the humble, the dependent, who are given the kingdom of heaven. They must trust in the mercy of God.

**"Blessed are those who mourn,** for they will be comforted" (v. 4). This statement includes an irony, since the word for "blessed" can also mean "happy." Happy are the sad, Jesus says for at least they have the comfort of knowing that their trials are temporary. Everything will be set right. But note that the beatitudes are not commands – Jesus is not saying it is spiritually superior to mourn. But in this world, many people are already mourning, and Jesus says that they will be comforted – presumably by the coming of the kingdom.

**"Blessed are the meek,** for they will inherit the earth" (v. 5). In ancient society, land was often taken away from the meek. But in God's way of doing things, that will also be set right.

**"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,** for they will be filled" (v. 6). Those who ache and yearn for justice (the Greek word for righteousness also means justice), will receive what they seek. Those who suffer from evil, who want things to be set right, will be rewarded. In this age, God's people suffer from injustice, and we long for justice. Jesus assures us that our hopes will not be thwarted.

**“Blessed are the merciful,** for they will be shown mercy” (v. 7). We need mercy in the day of judgment. Jesus is saying that we therefore should show mercy in this age. It is inconsistent for anyone to want justice, and yet cheat others, or to want mercy and yet be unmerciful. If we want the good life, we must live a good life.

**“Blessed are the pure in heart,** for they will see God” (v. 8). A pure heart has only one desire. Those who seek only God will be sure to find him. Our desire will be rewarded.

**“Blessed are the peacemakers,** for they will be called children of God” (v. 9). The poor will not achieve their rights through violence. God’s children need to rely on him. We should show mercy and humility, not anger and strife. We cannot live in harmony with a kingdom of righteousness by acting unrighteously. Since we want the peace of God’s kingdom, we should live in the way of peace.

**“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,** for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 10). Good people sometimes suffer because they are good. People take advantage of the meek. They may even resent those who do good, because a good example makes the bad people look worse. And sometimes the righteous, by helping the oppressed, weaken the social customs and rules that have given power to the wicked. We do not *seek* to be persecuted, but nevertheless, wicked people often persecute the righteous. Be of good cheer, Jesus says. Hang in there. The kingdom of heaven belongs to people like this.

Jesus then addresses his disciples more directly, using the second-person “you”: **“Blessed are you when people insult you,** persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (vs. 11-12).

There is an important phrase in this verse: “because of me.” Jesus expects that his disciples will be persecuted not just for being good, but because of their association with Jesus. So, when you are persecuted, rejoice and be glad—at least you are doing enough to be noticed. You are making a difference in this world, and you are sure to be rewarded.