

# **FLOURISHING**

## **The Beatitudes**

Studies in Matthew 5:1-16  
with Group Discussion Questions



**FOUR OAKS CHURCH**

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# Matthew 5:1-5

*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*

## The Broken and Beautiful

The Sermon on the Mount is so familiar in the Christian world, gracing notebook covers, appearing on cross-stitch, and etched into coffee mugs, that the earth-shattering nature of Jesus' words may be blunted in our ears. When we take time to pause and reread His words, the magnitude of Jesus' promises should really stop us in our tracks. Take a look at the very last word in the Old Testament, in Malachi 4:6. That phrase "utter destruction" in Hebrew means, "curse". The literal, final word from God the Father was a promise to curse His people and expose them to all evil. And then...nothing. He was silent for 400 years.

The Lord eventually had mercy on His people, and as Paul writes in Galatians 4:4-5, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." Importantly, when Matthew documents Jesus' first sermon, the first word out of our Savior's mouth was, "Blessed." What a relief! For centuries, the people of God had hung on the words of Malachi and only knew the last words from God as in the form of a curse. Imagine the disciples and the crowds - poor, lowly, and meek, drawing near to gather even a whisper of encouragement from the Savior. Upon listening, their hearts burst with hope, and they inhaled powerful promises that spun the known world upside down.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Spurgeon specifies that Jesus, "is speaking of a poverty of spirit, lowliness of heart, an absence of self-esteem."<sup>1</sup> The New Living Translation Bible adds that they recognize their need for Jesus. Do you consistently feel as though you are at the mercy of Jesus? Jesus says you are an heir to the kingdom of heaven where the highest levels of joy await. Has the Spirit been training you to be absent of what the world says is self-esteem and instead throw yourself at the feet of Jesus to find your identity? Those who do not esteem themselves are seen as valuable to the Lord and are assigned a higher worth than those who do.

Blessed are those who mourn. In this case, Spurgeon mentions that both traditional mourning, as well as mourning for sin, are blessed and comforted. Are you broken over your sin? Does the fallenness of the world grip you and bring you to a place of sorrow? "The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles" (2 Corinthians 1: 3b, 4a), ministers to our brokenness and heartaches, not simply so that comfort is the end but, "so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." (2 Corinthians 1:4b).

Blessed are the meek. The meek are quiet-spirited, gentle, self-sacrificing, humble people. In this country, where we support the haughty and embrace the proud, meek people are often looked down upon. There is an old saying, "Wisdom, fear, and

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<sup>1</sup>Spurgeon, C.H. "The Beatitudes". Spurgeongems.org, Retrieved 4 March 2019, <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols55-57/chs3155.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>Garza, Al. Matthew: A Rabbinic Jewish Source Commentary and Language Study Bible: KJV-Greek-Hebrew with Transliteration. Sefer Press, 2015.

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meekness say they are of high esteem but meekness is greater than them all."<sup>2</sup> In the Lord's economy, meekness is a grace and those who demonstrate it inherit the earth.

In these verses, Jesus promises to bless His hurting children; however, they are not intended just to encourage us when we are broken. We are also encouraged to be broken: broken of our haughty spirits, broken by sin, and broken of pride. Let us strive more for godly brokenness and appreciate the One who blesses us for it.

## Sermon Notes

[illegible]

## Group Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you experienced the blessing of God. What were the circumstances? How did that encourage your faith?
2. When Jesus opens His mouth to preach, why do you think He begins by speaking a good word or blessing?
3. Jesus says that the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek are blessed by God. How does this reflect the heart of God?
4. What blessings does Jesus promise in these three beatitudes? How might these promised blessings be an encouragement to you today? To our world?
5. How have you seen these characteristics reflected or not reflected in your life? How might you grow? How can your group care for and encourage you?
6. Is there someone you know who is currently experiencing hardship whom you can bless today? Spend some time as a group praying for your relationship with them and how you (and maybe your group) can bless them.

## Additional Reading

From *Blessed are the Poor in Spirit Who Mourn* by John Piper<sup>1</sup>

What is the biblical solution when a person is paralyzed by a sense of guilt or unworthiness or uselessness? I believe with all my heart that the solution is not self-esteem. God did not say to Moses, "Stop putting yourself down. You are somebody. You are eloquent." That is not the biblical way. What God said was, "Stop looking at your own unworthiness and uselessness and look at me. I made the mouth. I will be with you. I will help you. I will teach you what to say. Look to me and live!" The biblical answer to the paralysis of low self-esteem is not high self-esteem; it is sovereign grace. You can test whether you agree with this by whether you can gladly repeat the words of Isaiah 41:13, "Fear not, you worm Jacob. . . . I will help you, says the Lord; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel." In other words, God's way of freeing and mobilizing people who see themselves as worms is not to tell them that they are beautiful butterflies but rather to say, "I will help you. I am your redeemer . . . Go to Egypt now, and I will be with you.

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<sup>1</sup>Piper, John. "Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit Who Mourn". DesiringGod.org. Retrieved 4 March 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/blessed-are-the-poor-in-spirit-who-mourn>

# Matthew 5:6-8

*Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.* — Isaiah 49:13

## God's Promises For Our Benefit

On the heels of calling for repentance and commissioning His disciples, Jesus delivers The Beatitudes. This is important because only in recognizing our empty-handedness and following Jesus can we hope to exemplify characteristics that mark true people of God. Without Christ, we can't begin to muster such qualities as purity, clean hearts, and genuine sympathy. So far in Matthew 5:3-5 we have seen that in humility we receive grace; in grieving our sin we receive comfort, and in fleeing pride we know our Advocate.

Now we turn to the next few verses:

### Verse 6

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

For many of us at Four Oaks, we rarely know real hunger and thirst. Yet for many of Jesus' hearers and for many in our city today, hunger and thirst are constant. People were then and are many times now living day-to-day, needing to be satiated. We have the privilege of having these needs quickly and easily appeased. Jesus used that concept of "need," a deep, in-your-gut, ongoing drive to be satisfied, not only for our physical needs but also to describe a drive to be right with God and to be an agent of righteousness in the world. Going through Redemption Groups, I began to see my tenacity for self-righteousness. Running towards my pride, instead of away from it, peace and joy eluded me. But when we yearn for God's righteousness, He responds to our feeble reaches with the nourishment of food and water which is Jesus Himself. Only in Him do we know the satisfaction of being full.



**Verse 7**

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

Here we see the reciprocity of compassion. Giving and receiving mercy form a circular pattern. God has undergirded me through deep emotional pain. God has sustained me through difficult physical suffering. God has upheld me in dire financial circumstances. God's mercy offers relief, heals all types of pain, and does not allow me to cave to the evils of this life. God uses this to motivate me to show compassion to others as they navigate their own experiences of misery. Showing mercy and having mercy ebb and flow, intertwine, and topple over and under each other like waves of the sea.

**Verse 8**

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

God created the heart to be central, not only in our physical livelihood, but also our spiritual - revealing motives, desires, thoughts, intentions. Out of our hearts flow deceit, envy, slander, pride; and the list goes on. Because we know this, we also know it is not possible to fulfill the biblical meaning of purity – blameless, complete, and free from sin – apart from Christ. So how does having a clean heart through Christ cause us to see God? Simply put, by applying Christ's righteousness in place of ours, we have access to God Himself, and He allows us to see (perceive and know) Him. We see Him in His work in response to prayer. We see His goodness in creation. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we hear His voice in fellowship with other Christians. We know His presence always.

Come, let's run after Him together. We can see and know the One who knows and sees us!

## Sermon Notes

[illegible]

## Group Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you were really hungry! What happened?
2. Jesus says that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. What does it mean to hunger for righteousness? How can you be filled?
3. What is mercy? What are some ways you have either shown mercy to others or have been shown mercy by others? (In light of the promise found here, maybe the incidents were related to one another.) How might you display mercy this week?
4. What is a particular way you want to grow in purity of heart? How might the reward promised to the pure in heart be an encouragement to you as you seek purity?
5. Ultimately, we know that Christ alone makes us completely pure in heart; how can you look to Him when you're found with impure thoughts, motives, or actions?
6. Spend some time as a group praying for one another in these areas of desiring God, showing mercy, and pursuing purity.

## Additional Reading

From *Do You Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness?* by R.C. Sproul<sup>1</sup>

We're conditioned to define ourselves in terms of our accomplishments rather than in terms of our character. But Jesus pronounced blessing on a character trait: blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. He affirmed that this would not be a fruitless endeavor, for He promised, "They will be satisfied." Often, the teachings of Jesus, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, echo sentiments that are found in Isaiah. In one place, God says this: "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive" (Isaiah. 41:17–19).

This promise that God made, in a dry and parched desert land, was that He would fill those who are hungry and thirsty for Him. He said, "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1). We feed upon the bread of life, the bread that has come down from heaven, that nourishes the soul and fills the human spirit.

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<sup>1</sup>Sproul, R.C. "Do You Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness" Ligonier.org. Retrieved 4 March 2019, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/do-you-hunger-and-thirst-righteousness/>

# Matthew 5:9-12

*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

—Romans 12:18

*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*

—Hebrews 12:14

*If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

—1 Peter 4:14

## Peacemaking and Perseverance

### People Problems

The last three Beatitudes from Jesus are, in many ways, the pinnacle invitation from Jesus about the nature of being in the world but not of it. In a very short amount of space, Jesus succinctly talks about what the believer can expect when we follow Him. The world is a broken and messed up place where our bodies and minds are diseased. Not only that, hostility and strife have infected us all. The reality Jesus portrays is that in a broken world if you breathe air, then you and the people around you are experiencing relational discord in one way or another. What Jesus wants us to learn is that our time here on earth will not be devoid of relational problems, but in fact, will be characterized by them just like the prophets' lives were. At the same time, Jesus calls us to respond to persecution and people problems by embracing the life-giving hope of the kingdom of God. We embrace that hope by being peacemakers who initiate reconciliation, are able to live peaceably, and persevere in our Christ-allegiance in the face of persecution.

## **The Peacemaker**

The fight-or-flight response is the reaction that happens in the body when a person faces trouble. I remember my dad once telling me, "If a bear charges, don't run, just curl up and cover your head." On the one hand, this is good counsel, but does it apply to people problems? We can't just curl up and cover our heads, nor does Jesus want us to retaliate. Once again, Jesus wants to give us a view of the world—His view of the world—and be the kind of people that reflect His character. He is, after all, the "God of peace" (Romans 16:20) who initiated peace with us "by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). We now step into conflict, neither fleeing nor fighting, but absorbing offense and exemplifying grace. Peacemaking is the perfect opportunity to demonstrate and declare the gospel. As we mimic Jesus we are identified as "sons of God".

## **The Persevering**

In verses 11 and 12, Jesus' last discussion of the blessed is, in essence, the cumulative effect of the other beatitudes because it is instructive to us about our response. From the very first promise of the gospel (Genesis 3:15), God tells us that there will be enmity, or hostility, between those of the serpent and his offspring and the offspring of the woman. If there is enmity between the serpent (Satan) and the offspring of the woman (Jesus), how much more will there be among mankind? It's why Paul says that "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12). With this truth in mind, Jesus is telling us that when we experience persecution or the world reviles us, we are not merely to grieve a loss or endure a duty, but enjoy an opportunity. Does that sound strange? Ok, good—you're getting it! The question is, "How do we step into this reality?"

When you feel like a outsider, remember that you are a citizen of the kingdom of God. When you feel like the persecution you are enduring at the hands of unbelievers at work, home, or in your community is too much to bear, pray for boldness and remember that Jesus said, "so they persecuted the prophets before you." You're not alone; you stand with saints in all the ages who are in glory now with Jesus, who was the apex of innocent suffering as He died for your sins and for mine.

[illegible]

## Group Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you made peace with another person. What were the circumstances? How did this experience make you feel? What lessons learned can you share with the group?
2. Jesus speaks of peace in this section of the beatitudes. How might His version of peace be different than the world's?
3. When conflict arises, how do you typically respond (fight, flight, or other)? How might you grow to be a better peacemaker?
4. The idea of persecution as a blessing is a pretty strange idea. What are some examples of day to day types of innocent suffering and persecution in our culture? How might you have more of a kingdom perspective when you experience these persecutions?
5. In Acts 4, the early church prayed for boldness in response to persecution. What specific areas of life might you begin to pray for more boldness (ex. work, school, family, public life, etc.)?
6. In other parts of the world, our brothers and sisters in Christ are experiencing great persecution. Spend some time praying for one another, for the persecuted church, and for our gospel partners in these areas. (If you want more information about the persecuted church, go to the Voice of the Martyrs webpage at [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com).)



## Additional Reading

From *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande<sup>1</sup>

### The “Four G’s” of Resolving Conflict

Glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Biblical peacemaking is motivated and guided by a deep desire to bring honor to God by revealing the reconciling love and power of Jesus Christ. As we draw on his grace, follow his example, and put his teachings into practice, we can find freedom from the impulsive, self-centered decisions that make conflict worse, and bring praise to God by displaying the power of the gospel in our lives.

Get the log out of your eye (Matthew 7:5). Attacking others only invites counterattacks. This is why Jesus teaches us to face up to our own contributions to a conflict before we focus on what others have done. When we overlook others' minor offenses and honestly admit our own faults, our opponents will often respond in kind. As tensions decrease, the way may be opened for sincere discussion, negotiation, and reconciliation.

Gently restore (Galatians 6:1). When others fail to see their contributions to a conflict, we sometimes need to graciously show them their fault. If they refuse to respond appropriately, Jesus calls us to involve respected friends, church leaders, or other objective individuals who can help us encourage repentance and restore peace.

Go and be reconciled (Matt. 5:24). Finally, peacemaking involves a commitment to restoring damaged relationships and negotiating just agreements. When we forgive others as Jesus has forgiven us and seek solutions that satisfy others' interests as well as our own, the debris of conflict is cleared away and the door is opened for genuine peace.

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<sup>1</sup>Sande, Ken. *The Peacemaker* (pgs. 12-13). Baker Books, 2004.

# Matthew 5:13-16

*Do you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the rule over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?*

—2 Chronicles 13:5

*I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, and I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison*

—Isaiah 42:6-7

## Who Does Jesus Say You Are?

These verses on salt and light, which close Jesus' section on the Beatitudes and give way to the rest of His Sermon on the Mount, are some of the most familiar verses contained within this discourse. The meaning, in one sense, is simple: the Christian life should demonstrate an influence to the world—they are to have a flavor and an illumination that is counter to the corruptness and darkness of mankind. However, there are some common points of confusion in the ways this text is often understood. Usually, believers refer to these verses in a strictly imperative form: "Christians need to become the salt of the earth and light of the world"—as though these are qualifications that the Christian must earn over time. It is important to know that when Jesus makes reference to these designations, He does so in an indicative sense—He is declaring what believers already are. A true disciple of Jesus Christ does not become the salt and light of the world, he is the salt and light of the world by virtue of his union with the Lord Jesus Christ (who Himself declared, "I am the Light of the world" [John. 8:12]). Because of this union with the Lord, what is true about Christ is also true about the Christian. Believers are salt and light—and only as a result of this truth are they to live out their identities.

Another common misconception of the text is that believers act as the salt of the earth or light of the world independently and individually. But when Jesus gave this sermon He was addressing His disciples collectively (see verses 1-2). Although there is truth to believers being lights of the world in an individual sense (Philippians 2:15), Jesus' point here is that the people of God exist as salt and light corporately. It is in the context of the local church that the saints exist as salt and light, in the context of the body of Christ collectively united to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what does it mean for the church to be salt and light in the world? There are several practical ways believers can live this out:

### **Be at peace with one another**

In the ancient world, salt was used as a preservative, especially for food. However, in the regions of the Dead Sea (on the eastern borders of Palestine) the salt was contaminated by minerals and thus useful for nothing but throwing into the streets. Jesus declares that His people are salt—but then essentially asks this question: "But what kind of salt are you going to be? Pure salt, or contaminated salt?" In Mark 9:49-50, Jesus calls His disciples to have salt in themselves by being at peace with one another. Peace is a wonderful preservative bringing flavor to a world on its way to judgment. Peace lies at the heart of the gospel: peace with God, and peace with one's fellow man. Thus, to demonstrate peacefulness to the world at large—a gentle and non-quarrelsome spirit—is a wonderful way for the church to call the world to the gospel of peace, maintaining its preservative effect among fallen mankind. This is what pure salt looks like—a salt that retains its flavor and its usefulness (see Colossians 4:6).

### **Hold forth the word of life**

In Philippians 2:15, the Apostle Paul speaks about being lights in the world by holding forth the word of life, that is, the gospel. An evangelistic witness is a powerful way to shine the light of Christ in a darkened world. After all, the shining nature of Christians is not the goodness within themselves, but the gospel which they possess. This light must not be hidden under a lampstand, but must be held aloft for all to see. Thus, believers act out being lights in the world by daily interactions with others, which centers the focus upon the gospel.

## **Show forth good deeds**

In verse 16, Jesus specifies that the "light" He is calling His disciples to emulate is the manifestation of good deeds which cause those who behold them to glorify your Father who is in heaven. Christians are not saved by good works, but they are saved unto good works (Ephesians 2:10), and there must be continual evidence of this in their lives. Of course, there are ways to practice "good deeds" with an attitude of arrogant self-righteousness, and this attitude needs to be avoided. True goodness and righteous living is a lifestyle which points the attention of others away from oneself to the Father who is in heaven. Although the world will often slander the holy living of Christians for a time, the Christ-centered transformation of believers eventually softens the hearts of the unbelieving so that they will turn to glorify God themselves (see 1 Peter 2:11-12).

In the Old Testament, the coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, was promised in terms of salt and light. God entered into a "covenant of salt"—meaning a covenant of permanence, one which God would preserve—with David, promising to set one of His descendants upon the throne forever. When Isaiah prophesied of the coming of the Servant of the LORD, the Messiah, he saw one who would be a light to the nations and who would bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). Christians live as salt and light to the world only as an outflow of Jesus becoming salt and light to them, the salt of covenant faithfulness and the light of eternal salvation. Those who have received salt and light are ready to give it freely. Only when believers realize that the Son of God Himself has entered into time and history as a light shining in a dark place can they live out their calling to be salt and light to a lost and dying world.

[illegible]

## Group Discussion Questions

1. What are some types of foods and spices you enjoy? Also, do you like a lot of salt or a little salt?
2. Jesus says that we are the salt of the earth. What does He mean? How might people lose their saltiness?
3. Jesus also says that we are the light of the world. How can believers shine their light in the world?
4. Jesus addresses his disciples collectively as salt and light. How might working together rather than individually be advantageous to our effectiveness in reaching the world?
5. What are some practical ways you can be salt and light in the world? Who is a particular person you can "shine your light before" this week? Spend some time as a group praying for these efforts to serve others with the gospel.

## Additional Reading

From *The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7*<sup>1</sup>

Woodrow Wilson told the story of being in a barbershop one time. "I was sitting in a barber chair when I became aware that a powerful personality had entered the room. A man had come quietly in upon the same errand as myself, to have his hair cut and sat in the chair next to me. Every word the man uttered, though it was not in the least didactic, showed a personal interest in the man who was serving him. And before I got through with what was being done for me, I was aware that I had attended an evangelistic service, because Mr. D.L. Moody was in that chair. I purposely lingered in the room after he had left and noted the singular effect that his visit had brought upon the barber shop. They talked in undertones. They didn't know his name, but they knew that something had elevated their thoughts. And I felt that I left that place as I should have left the place of worship."

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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, John, *Matthew 1-7 MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (pg. 236). Moody Publishers, 1989.




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