

The Sermon on the Mount
A New Kind of Obedience
Part 1 | Matthew 5.1-12 | #blessed

For the next 2 months we are going to look closely at the most important sermon ever preached. It is nicknamed the Sermon on the Mount and we will be looking at it from the gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7. The sermon is filled with some of the most recognizable teachings of all time. Regardless of your faith background you probably have heard some version of “blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” “an eye for an eye” “love your enemies” “do not store up treasures on earth that you can’t keep” “do not be anxious about tomorrow because today has enough trouble” “judge not, that you not be judged.” “do unto others as you want them to do to you.” Or if nothing else “Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...” The Lord’s Prayer and the rest of these teachings are all slam packed into these 3 chapters.

It really is hard to summarize this sermon. But...there is a sense throughout it that Jesus is completely overhauling everything the world knew at the time about living a life God would approve of. See this sermon is filled with, on the surface, directives about how you should live. And that’s what is attractive to some people trying to find their way back to God. Maybe that’s why you are here at Mercy. To figure out God or get your life in order. And that is good!

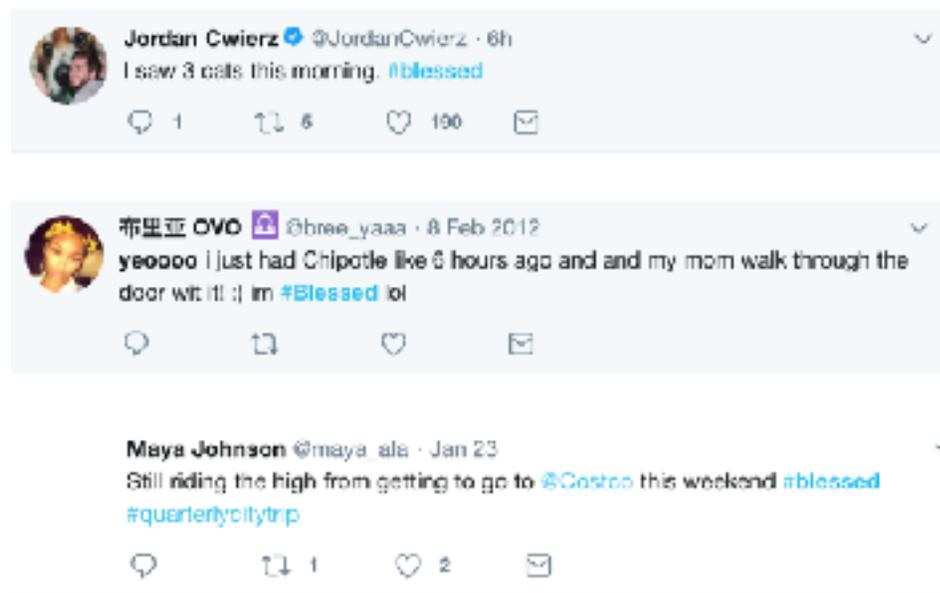
You gotta “get your life together” and here is 3 chapters of a bunch of things to do that will help. Seems great on the surface! But Jesus knows that won’t last. He knows you can’t possibly live up to God’s standards. Just giving you the 10 commandments...it won’t work. It will leave you religiously tired. Like SO, SO many in our region. What we are going to see in this series is that what we really need is not just more obedience to God, **but a whole new kind of obedience. An obedience that flows out of already having God’s approval and having his love instead of an obedience fueled by a search for his love. See God’s commands for your life are very good for you. But, when they are a religious obligation they are a weight. And eventually people get tired of carrying the weight and they drift away from God.**

My hope for you is that by the end of the series obeying God...something that is good for you...will be transformed from being a religious duty to being a gospel delight. Jesus is seeing how religious duty has corrupted God’s people. A whole religious establishment had been built that exalted the people who looked and acted like they obeyed God’s laws the most. The religious leaders were the power brokers and they used the law as a way to exalt themselves and to hold power over others. And Jesus is going to obliterate the whole system in this sermon.

That’s what we are going after in this series. It’s going to be a spiritual workout ok. We are going to push you to obey God, to align your life around how God says to live, more than you ever have before. But at the very same time we are going to go to war on the “religious duty” motivation that tires out so many people.

And if over these next 8 weeks you will accept the challenge to search your motivations for why you are trying to obey God...then you will find wisdom that will revolutionize your life and draw you close to God.

And so Jesus goes up on this mountain. Luke tells us his disciples and a great crowd of people were there listening. and as soon as he starts speaking he has us hooked. Because his sermon starts with how to be Blessed! In our passage today, Matthew 5.1-12, Jesus lays out 8 different ways we can be “blessed.” Now we gotta define that word because its been hijacked by hashtags. So let me go into a little fallon hashtag segment and show you how people use this word:



It's a mostly empty word because of how widely and comically it is used. But the actual word has deep meaning. Which is the greek word Makarios that means favored by God. It describes their position in life, not their mental state. So its not that you just feel good, its that objectively your life is a good life. And we crave that ya'll. We want the good life. Because underneath the façade we walk around with is an understanding that life is fragile & it could fall apart. Friendships, health, jobs, bank accounts, costco...all these are not as stable as we want them to be and could go away at any moment.

And yes, ya'll are smart people so you are probably thinking “Real nice set-up pastor. I bet instead of finding blessing in these things we are supposed to find blessings in Jesus.” A real shock plot twist I know. Yes, the 8 ways to be blessed in this passage are descriptions of one who has been saved by Christ. Someone who has a heart that is filled by the love and joy of Christ.

In fact, here's the thread I'm going to keep coming back to: **The blessing of God is not found in your circumstances but in your relationship to Him.** Hang on to that today...

BUT, regardless of where you stand with God, I think you are going to find yourself feeling like these make a lot of sense. That's why all most great philosophers acknowledge Jesus to be the greatest moral teachers of all time. His counter-intuitive logic ends up making a lot of sense.

Let's jump in. We'll walk through these 8 ways to be #blessed.

[1] Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. [2] And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

[3] "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Ok right out of the gate we gotta define what poor in spirit is. And you probably want to write it down because in this is an absolutely essential key component of all of Jesus' teaching.

Poor in spirit means you daily embrace dependence on God for all you need.¹ The poor in spirit recognize they are completely spiritually destitute on their own and so they have to depend on God. The way one commentator said it was the poor in spirit are simply those who **know they need God**.

When Jesus says poor he's not talking about financial poverty per se. There are two words for poor used in the new testament. The word "Penes" means financially poor. We translate that as "college student." The word 'poor' here is "ptochos" which means utterly destitute & outcast from society. And Jesus attached 'spirit' l to evoke an image of utter spiritual destitution. And he's saying those who realize how spiritually weak they are...theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And its no surprise Jesus starts here because he is going to war against the pride of the religious elite who walk around with the pride that comes from their own sense of self-righteousness. And Jesus is saying if you are convinced in your own power...in your own kingdom...you will not be able to receive God's kingdom & the power that comes with it. If you are standing on your own righteousness, you cannot receive God's righteousness. But, if you are poor in righteousness then...and only then...can you receive God's righteousness.

I see this with new parents. Parents who feel **capable** on their own will not experience God's power in parenting. And sometimes good people crumble under the weight of not being able to figure out how to parent their kid, but being too proud in spirit to admit it! My buddy J.D. Greear said it this way: "It's not poor parenting that messes up your kids, but confidence in your good parenting."²

It's true for your career: If you are proud in spirit about your career success...it will one day crush you. This happened to me. I don't need much to be happy, I just need

¹ Thank you to J.D. Greear for the phrasing on this one found in his sermon on this passage from 2016. I found the meaning of the phrase 'poor in spirit' best explained in Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 95). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

² Greear, "8 ways to be happy according to Jesus" from the Whole Story sermon series in 2016. Much of the insight into this 'poor in spirit' idea is owed to him.

to be the most successful person ever in my field for my age. And then...I didn't get a promotion that I thought for sure I should get. And what happened? The level of disappointment I experienced revealed that I was depending on peer approval & praise, not God, for happiness & contentment. And my god of peer approval let me down. Like all false gods will. I'm not saying if you don't get a promotion you should be happy. Its ok to be disappointed. Maybe you were the better candidate. But do you go into depression? Into questioning who you are?

I got convicted this week because a lot of times I'll ask you when I start "how you doing mercy fam?" And you graciously respond good but after reading this you should probably respond "like a destitute beggar in need of God's grace in my life so preach to me about Jesus!"

Brother, Sister, when you came in here today were you in the mindset that you need God today? See there is a financial connection right? Jesus is not saying that it is a blessing to have no money necessarily. But...he is acknowledging a connection and elsewhere he says it explicitly that it is HARD for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Because wealth has a way of convincing us we don't need God. And I'm telling you built into the american dream we've been fed for generations is the desire to be self-sufficient. To need no-one else. To be SELF-DEPENDENT. And the more wealth we build the harder it is for us to see a need for God.

We are in the most self-focused era in human history. We take SELF-ies. Where instead of being behind the camera observing life we become the center of our own lives. One presently awful form of this is the humble-brag. Where you talk about something awesome that happened to you and say #humbled. "Just got a perfect SAT, crowned homecoming King, and every college offered me a full scholarship. #humbled." YOU AREN'T HUMBLING BY THAT! You aren't trying to show your desperation for God. YOU ARE THINKING MORE OF YOURSELF THAN EVER BEFORE! #I'mAWESOME would be a better tag. What if we were real on social? I cheated on my calc test. #humbled. I was late to pick up my kids because I for a minute there I wasn't sure I wanted them anymore #humbled. I looked at porn again today #humbled. I just want my dad to approve of me #humbled. I wanted my career to amount to so much more than this #humbled. Because when you become poor in spirit...when you realize how much you need God... he's waiting for you there.

So let me ask you as you came in here today: **DO YOU THINK YOU NEED GOD?**

Listen Pride is the most dangerous of all vices. Because it blinds you to your need for God. And eventually you start to think you are entitled to a certain way of life, to a certain level of respect, and you become more and more unhappy when you don't get it. Search your heart today. Proud people are almost always unhappy people. Because they think they deserve everything they get so they can never be truly grateful. The poor in spirit, they can be grateful.

And here is where that connects to the kingdom of heaven: You cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven until you realize that you are spiritually destitute. That you are a sinner who cannot save himself or herself. In fact your sin has set you on a course for hell. Eternity apart from God. And if you will admit you are a sinner...if you will become poor & destitute in spirit...if you will as Jesus says “lose your life”...then you will find true life. He offers you salvation as a gift! You cannot earn it! But you can humble yourself enough to receive it. **The way up is down.**

Some of you are on a path to self-destruction and while we'd never want it for you maybe that's what you need to break you of your pride and make you poor in spirit. Charles Spurgeon said he'd learned to kiss the wave that crashed him back upon the rock of ages. Maybe you need to stop being angry at that wave and be grateful it put you in a place where you finally see your need for God.

Ok, lets move faster through these next 7

[4] “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

This one connects to verse 3. It's not enough to understand your spiritual disposition of being poor in spirit. As one commentator said you can't be poor in spirit with a cold heart. Our hearts should break at the reality of sin in the world. So this is not mourning as in bereavement for the loss of a loved one, but mourning something deeper.

“my eyes shed streams of tears because people do not keep your law.” Psalm 119.136

Throughout scripture there is a mourning that God's people have as a result of their awareness of two things: personal sin and the brokenness of the age.

When you are poor in spirit you mourn your sin and the sin of others

When you understand sin as something that separates you from God...the response of the heart is sorrow and repentance. 1 Cor 5 the apostle Paul talks about sin in the church and says you are arrogant for allowing it. Instead you ought to be mourning! The poor in spirit turns again to God for forgiveness. And says God again I've sinned and again I need your grace. And listen to me this is why you need the church. Because sometimes you are blind to your sin which means you are blind to what it is doing to you. And Hebrews 3 tells us we have to exhort one another & to be careful lest our hearts grow hardened and callous to our sin.

And there is a mourning for the sins of others which I think you can relate to. Someone you love is just running hard after their sin. You can't repent for them. And they are creating a path of destruction and all you can do is mourn & pray. He doesn't say blessed are you who judge. But who mourn. Mourning says I'm a fellow sinner that has found salvation and I want it for you to. Judging says I'm better than you and I pity you. And Jesus says when you mourn you are blessed now and you will be comforted one day. You are blessed because your mourning ties your heart to God's heart. And as fickle as our own hearts can be, loving what God loves and hating what

God hates is good for us. And one day this mourning will be replaced with comfort and joy. One day no more tears Rev 21.4. And so our present mourning holds for us an eternal comfort.

When you are poor in spirit you mourn the brokenness around you
The reality of sin's affect on the world is that the world is not the way it should be. And one who isn't absorbed in thinking about themselves all the time has the ability to see the world around them. And weeping is a response of a heart that cares deeply. And true mourning puts you in a place where you want to carry the pain & brokenness of others. Where you want to relieve their suffering like Christ has relieved your suffering.

There is a present blessing you experience when you enter into that pain, and there is a future blessing you will experience when the pain is gone forever. Blessed are you who cares for the pain of the orphan through foster care and adoption. Blessed are you who cares for the pain of the widow. Blessed are you who cares for the pain of the poor and economically oppressed through our ServeCLT partnerships. Blessed are you who truly listens to the pain of others who do not look like you.

There is a true blessedness that will come from entering into this brokenness & getting your heart so attached to people that you mourn their pain with them. A joy that comes from knowing that pain will be defeated one day. One day!

[5] "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Meek does not mean weak. It means humbling yourself and using whatever strength or position you have for the good of others. It reverses the cultural expression "gotta look out for number one." For Jesus and his followers, number 1 is your neighbor and self is #2. To be meek is to serve others above yourself whenever you can.

You catching a theme by now? Pride = bad. Humility = good.

Now to live a meek life requires a step of trust. You have to trust that God will provide for you when you are concerned with giving of yourself to others. The meek one is poor in spirit. And is fully trusting that God is enough for them so they do not have to worry about what people at school think, what people in the workplace think. They can serve others because they are fully content in the love of the one who served them. And the result? You will be blessed here and now.

This is where, even if you are not a Christian, you start to see some of the incredible wisdom of Jesus piercing through. If you've ever spent time serving those in need that can't return the favor... you know there is a hard to describe joy that you get from it. Now here's the thing...the church is supposed to be engaged in that kind of love all the time. Well, serving once in a while will make you feel good. Serving the same people all the time? That feel good wears off. It gets hard and frustrating. Some of ya'll know this. What keeps you going? What keeps you meek? Waking up and remembering that Christ forgot about himself...he emptied himself so that you could have life. And he says abide in that love.

[6] “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Oh man this one is awesome. The reality of the human condition is that we are all hungry and thirsty. We’ve talked a lot about this in our church. And the best way I’ve heard it articulated is by Blaise Pascal, a 17th century French physicist who dabbled in theology and wrote some incredible stuff. In his book “penses” he said there is a craving in every person that we try to fill with everything. But...it turns out this craving is an infinite abyss and can only be filled with an infinite unchanging object... in other words, God himself. ³

To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to desire knowing God himself about everything else. That’s why we’ve kicked off the past two years with a series called “Knowing God.” Nothing else will satisfy you.

If you hunger and thirst for money...you will be disappointed. Because you can’t get enough money to fill that abyss in your soul. You will just become more anxious & worried about more things. If you hunger and thirst for romantic love...you will be disappointed because romantic love will never be enough.

[7] “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Ok on the surface this is confusing because it looks like we have to be merciful in order to receive mercy from God. Which seems to contradict everything about the true gospel message. Jesus clears this up in his parable about the man who was forgiven 10,000 talents over in Matthew 18. Remember that one?

Jesus says “the kingdom of heaven is like...” And then he tells this story.

The story is absurd and Jesus says likewise how absurd to not extend forgiveness to others because whatever they do PALES in comparison to the extent God has forgiven you in Christ.

The merciful are the ones who extend either forgiveness or generosity in proportion to what they have received from Christ.

And that sounds nice, but sometimes it’s hard right? Let me ask you: How would you fare if God forgave you only in proportion to how you forgive others? Yikes right. Thanks be to God he doesn’t operate that way. Why is this life blessed? Because in forgiveness there is freedom from the burden of anger and bitterness. That’s why I always go here with conflict resolution between believers. The measure at which you show mercy reflects the measure at which you’ve understood what mercy God gave you!

³ Full quote: “What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.” Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* VII(425)

[8] “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Pure in heart - the heart here is not the literal organ. The heart, in the way Jesus is using it here and in how it is used throughout scripture, is talking about the inner state of a person. Basically the seat of our thoughts, our will, and our emotions. The state of our heart is the state of our spiritual condition. And to be pure in heart means to keep your heart free from sin.

Now I gotta clarify: that is a battle. We always fight sin. But if we want to see God, to know his will for our lives and to walk closely to him...we cannot tolerate sin in our lives. Listen so many Christians struggle right here because you want God AND you want your sin. But sin is rebellion against God. The pure in heart is the one who fights to obey God and then runs to his forgiveness when they sin.

[9] “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Not peace-keepers who just want everybody to remain calm, but peace makers. Those who work to overcome hostility with good. This is both in a personal sense and in a societal sense. Personally a peacemaker values a relationship over being right. A peace-maker says that when I’m wronged I’m choosing love instead of vindication. On a bigger scale though it is one who actively seeks to end hostility through grace and love. In our country racial hostility and tension is very alive still today. But in our church there are people leading us who are choosing to step out and listen to one another and make true peace that can only be found in a deeper unity in Christ. But its hard.

Jesus made peace between God and us. He didn’t yield anything about his position right? We were wrong, he was right. But he valued US so he set aside his divinity and came and died for us so that we could be at peace with God. There will always be dying to yourself, emptying yourself & becoming poor in spirit, to truly understand someone and make peace with them.

[10] “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Same blessing “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” as the opening poor in spirit beatitude. And in verse 11 the pronoun changes from “they” to “you.” He’s talking to these people who will experience persecution for following him. And he is saying this is good! I’m not going to spiritualize this. At some point you will have the option to obey God where doing so will cause others to mock, scorn, or revile you. Maybe they won’t openly do it but they may ostracize you from the friend group. May say things about you behind your back. But listen Jesus says if the best they can do is mock you for your allegiance to God...that means you are right where you need to be! Blessed are those who value their relationship with God above everything else!

Let me close with this. All of these are about

Happiness is not based on circumstances but on your relationship to God
Courtney and I do a fair amount of marriage mentoring for engaged couples. Those couples that feel capable on their own to handle everything that comes at them in marriage...they are standing on their own righteousness. They come in all put together, and they hide their problems because they want us to see that they are strong on their own. Yet this kills them in marriage conflict because the secret to marriage conflict is to remember that you are a sinner first, sinned against second. Then you will be able to forgive because you'll do so in fresh view of how much God has forgiven you. In other words, the more you embrace how poor in spirit you are, the more you can access God's power for your marriage.