



**Series: The Upside Down Kingdom**

**Date:** February 25, 2024

**Speaker:** Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

**Text: Matthew 5:1-12**

**Title: The Upside Down Kingdom I**

### **STARTING POINT**

Good morning mercy church! Today we are beginning a new series of sermons in Chapter 5 of the gospel of Matthew. It's gonna go about 8 weeks so if you are new with us this is awesome. Because you get a wonderful introduction to the heart of who Jesus is and the life available to us in him. And listen, It takes about 5 weeks in my experience to decide if a church is the right fit for you anyway. Sometimes you know in the first 5 minutes. BUT, if you are like yeah maybe this is the spot for me...my recommendation to you is to give

it 5 weeks. And 5 weeks takes us right up to easter so, I want to invite you to walk with us at least from now till easter.

As a part of that, I want you to go ahead and plan to come to starting point next weekend. It's like a brief orientation to mercy church where you learn a little about us and the mission we believe God has called us to here and how you could be involved in it. Only takes about 15-20 minutes and happens after every service. Next Weekend.

Ok, Matthew 5. I want to read our sermon series text to you. Because it is short. And then I want to spend today introducing you to why this passage is so important for us that we would camp out in it for a couple months. But first, let's read it. And if you can, I know you just sat down but I want to ask you to stand back up in honor of reading God's word. Matthew 5.1-12.

1 When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to teach them, saying:

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



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4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.

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

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

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

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

11 "You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. 12 Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you. -- Matthew 5:1-12

Ok you can be seated. We will spend the next 8 weeks in these 12 verses. This short teaching of Jesus is the opener to his famous sermon on the mount and is commonly referred to in the church as the "Beatitudes."

Next week we will get into the first beatitude and each subsequent week we will go through the next beatitude. Because these summarize life in the kingdom of God. BUT, before we do that, I want to take today and explain their purpose and power as a whole unit. So, today's sermon is something of an introduction to the beatitudes. And this sermon will have 4 sections. Here they are:

- 1. The Purpose of the Beatitudes**
- 2. What it means to be Blessed**
- 3. The difficulty of the Beatitudes**
- 4. The victory in the Beatitudes**

### **We start with the Purpose**

The Beatitudes reveal to us the blessed life in God's kingdom.

Listen while we will spend our time concentrated on these 12 verses, we must remember that this is a PART of Matthew's gospel. And so, to fully understand the purpose we have to zoom out and see where it fits in Matthew's gospel. Just like in any story. If you had never seen any of the Marvel movies. And I turned on Avengers Infinity War and your first introduction was you saw Iron Man holding Spider-Man as he vanished into



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dust...you'd be like...WHAT AM I WATCHING? And where is Zendaya? You need some backstory.

Well thankfully Matthew is ALOT easier to explain than the Marvel Universe. Here's the deal. In this part of the gospel, Matthew is introducing us to Jesus who teaches AND Jesus who heals. Matthew 5-7, the sermon on the mount, shows us Jesus the teacher. Matthew 8-9 shows us Jesus the healer. And there are identical verses that basically operate like bookends on this whole section.

23 Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. -- Matthew 4:23  
35 Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. -- Matthew 9:35

So, what Matthew seems to be doing is giving us some teachings of our Lord to show us the nature of the kingdom and then some miracles from our Lord to show us the power of the kingdom. Why does this matter? Because listen the common error I see in our world is embracing only one side or the other of Jesus. Some want to focus on his

teachings.... claiming he was a good ethical teacher. He showed the way to live. But want to deny his power. This is common in the secular humanist crowd. Maybe you are here and not a Christian and you aren't necessarily antagonistic toward Jesus. In fact, you may say...Yes blessed are the meek & the merciful...this is a good teaching to live by. But casting out demons and stilling storms... you are skeptical. Well, Matthew is making sure you see his teaching & his power TOGETHER. Matthew does not let you accept him as a good teacher only.

But there are others who love the idea of Jesus as a miracle worker...there is a charismatic fascination with his power but when it comes to Jesus' instructions to guard your tongue, to stay faithful in your marriage, to love your enemy, to die to yourself in service of God & others.... oh, that's way too invasive and you want no part in it.

And Matthew says I'm sorry you cannot have the miracles of the kingdom without the king of the kingdom. You cannot have his power in your life without his authority in your life.

**So here sit the beatitudes...whose purpose is to introduce us to life in the kingdom of God under the reign and rule of the king of kings - Jesus Christ.**



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And let me say, Matthew uses the term “Kingdom” on both ends of this and throughout his gospel. This list is what life looks like under new management. You need to think...a new King has come, and this is how it's going to be now. Sometimes I hear people talk about salvation as “asking Jesus into your heart.” That language is nowhere to be found in scripture. What I do see is “here is how to enter into the kingdom of God.”

The king has come, and he’s put his way down for all. Think of it like when a new CEO comes, or you get a new teacher midway through the year. When the new boss comes in, a new culture...a new way of doing things...comes too. This always happens in church revitalization work. A new pastor comes in who offers new ways of reaching the community. And it’s common usually for some to be resistant. They’ve always done things a certain way. And until they connect the dots that those old ways are what was killing the ministry, they will remain resistant. But once they embrace the new ways, they start to experience fresh life and vitality as a church. Now that’s generally true with churches, but it’s ALWAYS true with Jesus.

The beatitudes are laying out a new way of life, a blessed life, that is available in the kingdom of God. And he’s talking to two groups at the same time. Look at verses 1&2 again:

1 When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to teach them,

There were the crowds, and there were his disciples. And at the end of the sermon on the mount, it says some of those in the crowds started to believe & follow Jesus. That is our intent here at Mercy Church. Our primary purpose in gathering is to teach the disciples of Jesus about the ways of the kingdom of Jesus. How to live according to his power & his purpose for life. But we try to do so in such a way that you who may be more of an observer, an onlooker in the crowd...can discover the true Jesus and find salvation in him. Just like this whole message was heard by a crowd so we want you to hear it and over the course of these 8 weeks consider it. Respond to it.

The purpose of the beatitudes - To reveal to us the blessed life in God’s kingdom.



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And can I say one last very important thing on this? God's blessings are available to his people NOW and FOREVER. That's very important. See the beatitudes are promises. Future looking. Except for the first and last. Those are present tense. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs IS the kingdom of heaven. So, what do we make of the now and the future.

What it means is that Jesus has brought the kingdom, in some foretaste fashion, here and now. And you and I who are in Christ can experience the blessings of this kingdom now. But also, the full experience of these promises will come in the age to come. Take verse 4 - those who mourn will be comforted. And Revelation 21 tells us ONE DAY he will wipe away all tears. BUT Romans 5 says we can rejoice in our present sufferings in Christ because it produces hope that does not disappoint. So, there is a present blessing meant to buoy us in this life until we experience the FULLNESS of this blessed state in the age to come.

And I take time to say that because it means AS YOU LEAN IN to the beatitudes...there is a NOW promise for you. You will experience the blessed life NOW, not just in the age to come. So, over these next 8 weeks there is PROMISE & BLESSING

for you to unlock as you take steps to walk with God. There is a NOW and a NOT YET to this life and I want you to walk in the now.

Now second part of the sermon. **What does it mean to be blessed?**

Ok over and over Jesus says "Blessed" are this group of people who exhibit these characteristics. What does blessed mean? Well, nothing like a good Greek lesson here. The Greek word is 'mikarois' and it's had some different English translations.

The only one other than blessed I want to bring up is Sometimes translators will translate this "HAPPY." The reason this is not a good translation is because 'happy', in our language, is a feeling. If you feel happy, you are happy. And the problem with that is - feelings are temporary. You might feel happy now, but you may not later.

So, we need to talk about Mikarios as FIRST an objective reality...that will THEN lead you to a deep abiding experience with God.

Like the blessing of marriage. When you get married you enter into an objective reality. You ARE married. And with marriage come blessings -



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new realities like a person to share life with & lean on & opportunity for children. But you don't always feel...blessed. Sometimes you may feel...cursed.

- Like WHY ARE YOU LIKE THIS? Are you trying to make me crazy? You look beautiful but you sound insane. Why are we arguing about which Orange Juice to buy.

You don't always FEEL your objective REALITY. Sometimes Courtney has to sit under the preaching of a guy she doesn't LIKE. Feelings change though.

Jesus doesn't say you will always FEEL happy. He says no, objectively this group of people, HIS people, ARE BLESSED. They are in a state of blessing. And they have not achieved this blessed state. This blessed state has been bestowed upon them by God. First let me give you that objective reality:

**Blessedness is the promised favor of God on the people of God.**

What is that favor? That favor is first and foremost that we who are in Christ are FREE from your sin and its consequences. The kingdom of heaven is

ours and ALL the promises of our future in it. BUT it is also a lived experience here in this life.

A.W. Pink described blessedness this way. You ARE free from sin - state. You now have a disposition that is the exact reversal of your sin nature. God in his kindness prompted you to look outside yourself and in doing so you found God's great gospel. You found Christ. And that leads to a deep experience here on this earth best described as a combination of AWE, abundance, and thankfulness.

Now let me give you the lived experience:

**Blessedness is the deep abiding joy that comes from knowing God and living out the ways of God.**

FIRST, it's an objective reality for the people of God. But in his kindness God made that reality one we can experience here in this life. And it is the greatest life there is. This is the invitation. To receive the TRUTH and experience the LIFE. But you cannot have the life without the truth.

Because it's in understanding these beatitudes are not talking about 8 different groups of people, but ONE people...God's People - that these beatitudes start to make sense. Otherwise, they are difficult proverbs. Meek will inherit the earth.



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It's a flowery sentiment but objectively confusing. After all, The strong control the earth, right? But this isn't just talking about meek people. It's talking about GOD's people, who practice meekness. And God's people WILL inherit the earth. All of these are describing what the people of God are to look like in the world. And as they live out the ways of God...though it will look strange to the world, it is in this life you find true joy. True abundance. TRUE blessing. It's not in building strength, power, money, sexual experiences, travel...the people of the world believe abundance lie there but it doesn't. True lasting joy, the satisfied life... is in the kingdom of Jesus as we live out his ways.

But with that, does come the 3rd part of our message. **The difficulty of the beatitudes**

When we walk through them for just a moment, we start to realize that even though we agree with their sentiment AND we have a desire to experience the blessed life...we usually fail to live this way. They can be a heavy burden.

**Blessed are those who are poor in spirit.** In other words, blessed are those who are recognize they don't have the power to fix all of their problems or

the problems of the world. Well, is that always you? Or do you sometimes believe you are capable? Do you sometimes believe nah, I don't really need God. I would argue the number one problem among the college educated and upwardly mobile, and there are ALOT of those here in our community....is they don't see a need for God. And if we are honest maybe we often operate in our day to day like we don't need him either.

After all, did knowing God CHANGE where your food came from this week? Or the quality of your work? We might want to be the poor in spirit but instead we live like we are sufficient in spirit on our own.

**Blessed are those who mourn** - Mourning, not toughing it out or pretending like suffering isn't happening. Mourning is admission of need. The world shouldn't be this way. But it is not simply talking about grief in suffering. It's coming right after poor in spirit because it is talking about mourning in spirit. It's realizing your spiritual problem is actually sin. And you are mourning because of your sin. Is that you? Do you grieve your sin & confess it? Or do you tolerate it? Do you ignore it hoping it will deal with itself?





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**Blessed are the humble.** The ones who see the problem isn't just beyond you, the problem isn't just sin, but also - the problem is YOU. It's you. And are humble enough to say I am a sinner, and I can't save myself & I need God. Man is that always you?

I could keep going. Are you always merciful? Are you always pure in heart? Are you always seeking to make peace? That's not a personality trait on the enneagram but a lived pursuit of unity among those in conflict.

And again remember, this is just the first few words of Jesus in the broader sermon on the mount. He says some things after this that set God's standards so HIGH it seems impossible to live up to. He says if you LOOK at a woman lustfully you've broken God's law. He says LOVE not just your neighbor but your ENEMY. Give generously without entitlement. Pray consistently in secret. And what you can feel beginning in the beatitudes that only gets more prevalent in the sermon on the mount is - Jesus is setting a standard that I'm going to fall short of.

The difficulty of the beatitudes is Jesus sets a standard we can't meet.

When we read the beatitudes, we see what life should be like. Maybe even the life we expect others to live. But we know in our hearts it is unrealistic to think we will live up to this. What a predicament. What is our savior and Lord doing here?

And here's the beauty of scripture and the importance of knowing how to read it. This **is** an ethical teaching. This is what your life is supposed to be like. And when you put your actual life up against the way of life the kingdom you belong to calls you to...you fall short. And that moment right there, the moment when you realize you don't live as you are called to live, created to live... THAT is when you need what C.S. Lewis called the deeper magic.

Because there is something that the enemy of God's people will use against God's kingdom people. When they sin, when they fall short of these things...he will do what he's done for a long time. He will start leveling accusations against you. Revelation 12:10

...the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them

before our God day and night... -- Revelation 12:10





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He will see your sin and he will accuse you before God. And he's right you are guilty. So, what will happen in your heart right there in that moment? What response will you choose? Because your **experience** of the blessing of being in the kingdom of God hangs RIGHT THERE in your response to your sin. As the enemy accuses you, how will you respond?

You MUST understand this. Because these next 8 weeks the beatitudes are either going to be a Burden OR an INVITATION.

The way the beatitudes are a burden is when you **believe** Satan's accusation but not Jesus' defense. Satan says to God LOOK AN IMPOSTER! And you feel it. You feel he's right. And you can either hide...or you can wallow OR...you can believe the gospel.

See the one who hides pretends like they aren't a sinner. They always appear put together and like a GOOD PERSON. Courtney and I see this a lot in new community groups. Whenever somebody comes in all smiley and says things like "everything is really good" and they have that permasmile on their face...Courtney and I are like "oh boy, they got problems" because everybody

has problems. Everyone sins. And if you PRETEND like you don't...if you walk through life like you got it all together - sin corrodes you from the inside you and the enemy says, SEE - they are imposters. Your pride is your downfall.

But the same is true with the one who wallows in their sin. The enemy says SEE - an imposter and you say YES. you are right. I AM a worthless sinner. I'm no good. And eventually your sense of self-worth erodes. And often what I've seen is you wander away.

Here's the thing. Both the one who FAKES & the one who Wallows, is relying on themselves. Both have a pride problem.

But the deeper magic is discovered when the people who belong to God's kingdom take the focus off themselves and put it ON their king. There you are able to say I am a sinner; thanks be to God I have an advocate who has defeated the accuser.

The deeper magic in the Chronicles of Narnia was the KING, Aslan, taking the place on the altar of the one who broke the laws of Narnia. It was a reminder that the accuser doesn't have the last



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word. See I read you PART of Revelation 12.10 but look at the full verse and verse 11.

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say,  
The salvation and the power and the kingdom of  
our God  
and the authority of his Christ have now come,

because the accuser of our brothers and sisters,  
who accuses them before our God day and night,  
has been thrown down.

11 They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony; for they did  
not love their lives to the point of death. --  
Revelation 12:10-11

Praise God!

The victory in the beatitudes is the hero, Jesus,  
takes our place and gives us his.

THAT's the deeper magic the enemy doesn't want  
you to believe. And when you get that, the  
beatitudes move from a burden to an invitation.  
And I hope that's what these next 8 weeks are for  
you. An invitation. To live not to earn your

salvation, not to earn your victory, but to walk as  
one who has received the victory from the one  
who did live these perfectly. Who wasn't just poor  
in spirit, Philippians 2 says he **emptied** himself.  
Who was meek & humble as he went to the cross.  
Who himself IS righteousness and mercy. Who  
made peace between God and man even as he  
suffered for it.

Throughout this series you'll see Jesus as the  
example, but you'll also see him as the hero. As  
your hero. And when you receive him as that, you  
can walk out the beatitudes and be blessed.

Walk as a citizen of the kingdom. Not perfectly,  
but purposefully. Seeking all God has for you as  
you live FREE from condemnation under the  
grace of God.

This will echo into next week as we hear the best  
but also hardest news we can hear. The KINGDOM  
of God is available to spiritually bankrupt people.  
What could be better than knowing all you need is  
empty hands to receive the kingdom of God?  
Unless of course your hands are full of things you  
can't let go. That's for next week.

