

Grace to Live – Blessed Are

Matthew 5:1-12 | Sunday, July 22, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

BLESSED ARE

Matthew 5:1-12

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

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

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

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

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

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

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

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

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This passage of scripture introduces the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew is telling us about the life of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus. In this book, the first in the New Testament, he gives us five sermons, or five teachings from Jesus. They cover a variety of topics, and this is the most famous. Many have said, and I would agree with them, that this is the greatest sermon of all time, the greatest sermon ever preached -- not to be confused with the sermon I'm preaching, but the sermon that Jesus preached. I'm not sure this will make the top ten on anybody's list, but it will be good, mainly because it is the word of Jesus that's being explained. That's my hope. This passage is so profound. Three chapters: Matthew 5, Matthew 6, and Matthew 7.

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When I was a freshman in college, maybe a senior in high school, living locally, I worked my summers in a Winn-Dixie warehouse. I was the janitor, I think. I rose to that position. During the day I would go throughout this massive warehouse and clean up things that people dropped. I just walked up and down aisles with a mop and a broom and a dustpan and cleaned up the aisles.

I would come home and say to my mom and dad, “I don’t find this fulfilling.” So my mom took out index cards and wrote out chapters of scripture. I would go during the day and memorize scripture while I cleaned. During one summer I memorized the Sermon on the Mount; at best I could remember most of it or all of it. I think my mom chose that passage because of its profound implications and relevance for all of us. I’m grateful that she did. **It contains a marvelous description of the Christian life, of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and how we live as people who believe in Jesus.**

Part of the great motivation for us is the beginning, which we call the Beatitudes. “Blessed are,” and then this description, these eight characteristics that are laid out by Jesus in what is really the introduction to his message. Here is where I want to begin. It’s a very powerful, motivating factor. **Jesus, in essence, is saying, “I am about to lay out for you how to have a happy life, how to have a blessed life.”**

The word “blessed” is not a word that we are maybe familiar with using in a biblical sense. Its background would be the Old Testament. It describes the deep, supreme condition of happiness, or being under and experiencing the favor of God. Some translations translate the word, “happy are.” That’s probably a little superficial for us. It’s a deep happiness. It’s an abiding happiness. It’s an ultimate happiness. It’s an inner strength and joy.

We start here because what we find is that as you go to live out the Sermon on the Mount there is a temptation to say, “Man, this is just too difficult. This is absolutely impossible and unrealistic. There is something that potentially rises up within us, but this is an invitation to happiness and a compelling life that we can have no other way.

It’s fascinating for me, because Jesus really begins the sermon motivating us: “Blessed are,” and he ends the sermon with a motivation. The conclusion, when we get to the end of chapter seven, is kind of a negative motivation. It’s a warning that not everyone who thinks they know God knows God and not everyone who thinks they’re doing right is doing right.

He ends with this little story, this parable. He likens your life to the construction of a house. He says, “Build your life on the foundation of me, of my teaching, of my words. Believe them. Trust in me. Follow me. And when the time of testing arrives for your life, you will stand strong. But if you build on any other foundation, the storms of life and ultimately the final judgment will wipe away the house of your life.” He is motivating us.

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What makes a message or a teaching great? It's new information? It's entertaining? It's interesting? It's engaging? Certainly, the Sermon on the Mount is all of those things. But it changes you. **Jesus makes you a new you. He transforms you. He brings to you a new way of thinking, a new heart, a new ability, a new reality.**

Let me just say this to make this first point. Here is a bit of a lengthy quote by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, but it's helpful. It helps make this point of motivation. Lloyd-Jones writes:

*If you want to have power in your life and to be blessed, go straight to the Sermon on the Mount. Live and practice it and give yourself to it, and as you do so the promised blessings will come. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Listen to this – this is a little radical, it may stretch some of you.) If you want to be filled, don't seek some mystic blessing. Don't rush to meetings hoping you will get it. **Face the Sermon on the Mount and its implications and demands. See your utter need, and then you will get it.** (Now, this is the statement I want you to grab hold of.) **It is the direct road to blessing.***

Would you like a happy life? Can I just ask you as we begin: **Are you happy? Where are you seeking happiness?** Well, we've given a title to this series: "Grace to Live." The word "grace" is a word that describes the freeness of salvation that comes to us in Jesus, the gift of salvation.

Knowing Jesus is counterintuitive. It's upside down. It's inside out. Jesus does the opposite of what we really expect. He says, "Listen, if you want to know the heavenly Father, if you want to know me, then it's not something you earn. It's not as a result of your own works or your own goodness or your own righteousness. It's something that I do for you and I give to you as a gift. You receive it by trusting in me. **Your own goodness and righteousness will never be enough to overcome sin in your life, but your relationship can be completely restored with God by just receiving this gift. It's upside down. It's inside out. It's the opposite of what we might intuitively be drawn to.**

But then, as soon as you say that, as soon as we begin to grasp that that's taught all throughout scripture, we think, "Okay, well then maybe my actions mean absolutely nothing. Maybe the way that I live and what I do...I mean if I can't earn my relationship, if I'm not relating to God based on my own works, my own goodness, then I guess it doesn't matter what I do."

Then again, it flips and Jesus says, "No, no, no, that's not the point at all. **I'm giving you my grace, not so that you don't have to live, but so that you can live, so that you can live a life of knowing me and following me and a life that begins to reflect my goodness and righteousness.**"

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If you are a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, let me just speak to you for a moment. I think these three chapters describe for you how to live -- how Jesus, your Lord, calls you to live day in and day out. If you read it and take it at face value you, will find it very difficult. Very difficult. I'm just being honest. So, buckle up. Get ready.

Now, if you say, "Well, I'm here and I don't know where I'm at with Jesus; I've not yet really trusted him, followed him," I'm glad you're here. What I would say is, when we read the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus ascends this mountaintop and has his closest followers there, his disciples. But there are others that are overhearing or listening. That's actually a very good way to expose yourself to the teachings of Jesus. In fact, it may be the best way. You are kind of on the edge looking in, saying, "Okay, let me see what this is about." That's maybe even better than what we call evangelism.

You know, evangelism is where Christians go out and tell people about who Jesus is. It's necessary, because it's the only way that many people will hear. We'll actually talk about that in this series. But an even better way, maybe, is just for you to be here and to look in and say, "Let me see what these people are about." There are those listening to the Sermon on the Mount who fall into that category.

So, "Grace to Live." Here's what I want to do. I want to begin by giving you an overview. Let me give you an outline of the Sermon on the Mount. I'm going to put up three points. They are:

- 1. The Beauty.**
- 2. The Lunacy.**
- 3. The Glory.**

Here is what I mean by those three points. When you look at the Sermon on the Mount, you will see described here a beautiful life. There is a tremendous attractiveness to the teaching of Jesus. But as you read it, you will discover this is impossible. I can't live it. No one can really live it. In fact, it's so out of reach that you will be tempted to say maybe Jesus never intended for us to live it. There's a beauty to it. There's an impossibility, like a craziness, crazy impossibility. And then the glory. Jesus actually is inviting you to a miracle in your own heart and life so that you can begin to experience this beautiful life.

Are you ready? Let's jump in with #1.

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I. The Beauty.

Let me just walk through the sermon a little bit and give you an overview, if I might, of chapters 5, 6, and 7. Open the text and what you'll see is what we just read. The first 12 verses are an introduction. I think that introduction really extends through verse 16, where Jesus is introducing the message for us. Then in verse 17 Jesus makes this statement: **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”**

Jesus begins here to teach on his understanding of the Old Testament Law. Some people would actually say that that verse is the theme to the entire sermon. I don't think it's the theme to the entire sermon, but I think it's the theme to the entire chapter. Let me put up an outline for you.

- **Chapter 5 talks about how to please God. What is a life that pleases God?**
- **In chapter 6 we'll talk about how to walk with God, how to approach God.**
- **And chapter 7 is on how to get ready to see God.**

So, how to please God, how to walk with God, and how to get ready to see God. Let's just go through it a little bit. We're not going to look at it in depth, but I think it will help you to get an overview. In these verses Jesus says, “Listen, I want you to understand something. I've come to fulfill the law. I haven't come to replace it. I haven't come to change it.” In fact, he says, “Not one t will be uncrossed; not one i will be undotted, but I have fulfilled it and I am calling you to a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees.

The scribes were the teachers, the experts of God's word, God's law. They were like the seminary professors. The Pharisees were the leaders -- the pastors, the elders -- the leaders of the community. He was saying, “I'm calling you to a life that is greater than the righteousness you've seen.” He is not saying that just as a rejection of their righteousness. **He is really calling them to a superior, true righteousness.**

Then he begins to go through this. If you look at your headings, he talks about anger, murder, lust, love, divorce, integrity, loving your enemies. He begins to describe here in chapter 5 a life where we live loving others with the same enthusiasm, the same energy, the same sacrifice with which we love ourselves. He unpacks that, not just in how that will appear to others, not just in ways of our external interaction, but he actually deals with the condition of our hearts -- what's going on inside of us -- as he describes the person who really pleases God, the life that pleases the Lord.

Then in chapter 6 he talks about how to walk with God, how to approach God. Many of the things that we think God wants, God doesn't want. And many of the things that we understand to be a part of religion are not really the religion that Jesus calls us to. He talks here about prayer and fasting and giving and how to worship God and approach God and

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walk with God in this life. When he does that, he transforms for us, really, our understanding of how we relate to God, so much so that he reduces life to a simple key in verse 33 of chapter 6. “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...” As he does that he says, “Listen, if you will trust in me and follow the Lord, you will experience peace and a freedom from anxiety that you can know in no other way.” Walking with God.

Then in chapter 7 he talks about how to get ready to see God. Now, these chapter divisions are not strict. They are general, just to give you a sense of the content. But he actually describes for us preparing yourself for standing before the Lord and giving an account for your life. That’s how the sermon breaks out. It’s really a description of a beautiful life.

C.S. Lewis in [The Screwtape Letters](#) makes a very simple point. If you are familiar with this particular book, it’s just fascinating. I had never read it until the last few weeks. One of my sons encouraged me to read it with him and I did. I recommend it. But in it, creatively, C.S. Lewis has a demon, this powerful principality, who is training his nephew to be a demon. If that sounds rather sinister, C.S. Lewis came up with the idea for [The Screwtape Letters](#) during a bad sermon. It’s true. He was listening to a sermon that he thought was a bad sermon. His mind began to wander and he came up with the idea for a great book. Maybe some great books will be born today. That’s not the use I’m hoping for from this particular message, but it could happen.

There is one point in the training where this principality says to his nephew, “You know, we’ve never created a pleasure. We’ve never come up with an original pleasure. Only our enemy (he is speaking about God) has ever created pleasure. Everything we know about pleasure is an imitation, an excess, a twisting of what God created.” That’s a powerful idea.

You understand that God created pleasure. It’s true that when you’re tempted, when I’m tempted, it appeals to this sense of pleasure in the moment, but it always comes, sooner or later, with a bitter aftertaste and with destruction. That’s powerful because when we are stepping out to follow God, we’ll be tempted to say, “If I really trust in God, if I really go for it in the Lord, if I follow him with all my heart, well, I’ll miss out. I won’t have as much pleasure. I won’t have as much happiness or joy.” Jesus begins this sermon by saying, “No, no, no, no. This is the pathway to happiness, to true happiness.” He describes for us then this beautiful, amazing life.

Now, the second point:

II. The Lunacy.

The problem with the life that Jesus describes? You can’t live it. You find it impossible. Loving everyone that I encounter as I love myself. Loving even my enemies, understanding that it’s not just adultery that we are to avoid, but

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lustful thoughts in the heart, and that murder has its seed in anger and hateful attitudes towards others. And adultery is in seed form in the lust that dwells in our hearts. When we really take that seriously and begin to try to live it out, we say, “I can’t do that, and no one can do it. This is crazy!”

So we begin to come up with explanations, like, “Well, surely Jesus just couldn’t have meant for us to really live this.” One explanation that we come up with is that Jesus gave us this impossible standard so that it would drive us to him, so that we would see our need and we would receive grace. That’s one application of the sermon. It’s not the only one, but it is one. It is one of the healthy impacts that takes place.

Other people just redefine the sermon. Okay, let’s dumb it down a little bit. Let’s bring it down to a level where it’s somewhat achievable. It’s kind of what the lawyer is trying to do who has a discussion with Jesus about who is his neighbor. Jesus tells him the famous parable of the Good Samaritan. “Tell me who my neighbor is. At least help me rule out some people. I can’t love everybody like this, right?”

There is another way that people have dealt with this. There is a whole theological position that says the Sermon on the Mount isn’t even for today; it’s for a future time. That’s convenient, right? Let’s just take huge chunks of scripture and say, “That’s for heaven. That’s not for here! I don’t have to forgive you. Maybe in heaven.” I don’t think that’s what Jesus means at all. Let me just fill this out for you with a couple thoughts.

Matthew 5:48: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” I find that to be a troubling statement. There is a church here in town – I don’t want to tell you which church it is, but it’s Church by the Glades, located over here out west. They have people wearing these t-shirts: “No Perfect People Allowed.” They are all over the place. I kind of like the phrase and tried to find a way to steal it, but I wasn’t sure how I could do that without sending people to Church by the Glades. I like what they are trying to do with that. They are trying to say, “You know what? We are saved by grace. No matter who you are and what you’ve done, you are welcome here.” That’s a good impulse.

If Jesus were handing out t-shirts on this day, they would say, “Be perfect. If you’re going to follow me, be perfect.” That’s a small group of people, right? It’s Jesus. There is an impact when you read this sermon where Jesus is disarming all of your defenses to righteousness. All of the excuses that I want to make to justify the mediocrity of my morality, Jesus just – boom! – deals this blow to them. “No, no, no, no, no – that’s not what I want for you.” So your only conclusion is: “Jesus, that’s crazy! I can’t be God!”

Or the passage that I referenced earlier. In Matthew 5:17-20 he says, “Take the most righteous people you know, the people who’ve given their entire lives to studying the scripture -- you are to be more righteous than they are. And don’t think that my righteousness is somehow easier than the righteousness that’s described in the Old Testament.”

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There is the passage with wise, wise Solomon, the third king of Israel. When he dies, his son Rehoboam comes to the throne. Some people come to Rehoboam and say, “Rehoboam, your dad taxed us. He was always building, always expanding, and we are completely worn out. His yoke was heavy. We want to know: Are you going to have a light yoke or a heavy yoke?”

Rehoboam was like: “Hmmm, I don’t know. Let me get back to you,” and he goes to get counsel. First of all, he goes to the old men and gets their counsel. They say: “Rehoboam, listen, go to the people. Don’t speak harshly to them. You have no track record with them. This is what you do: You speak gently to them. You speak nicely. You build their trust, and they will serve you forever.”

Then he went to a second group of potential advisors. He went to his friends, some young men, his pals. They said, “Listen, Rehoboam, you go to those people and you tell them that your little finger is thicker than your father’s thigh. And you tell them, ‘My dad disciplined you with whips, but I’m going to discipline you with scorpions. You just thought his yoke was heavy.’”

Guess what happened. He went with the young advisors and then there was a split in the kingdom. Jeroboam led one group and Rehoboam was left with two of the 12 tribes, and Israel was never united in the same way under one king, all 12 tribes independently.

I have to be honest with you and say that when I read Matthew 5:17-20, it feels like that’s what Jesus is doing. “You thought the Old Testament was difficult? My little finger is thicker than the thigh of the Old Testament.” It’s crazy!

I know I’m repeating myself here but I want you to grab ahold of this, not through some kind of Christianese lens where you filter out the penetrating cutting edge of it so that it really penetrates into your soul.

Let’s go to the last point.

III. The Glory.

The glory is that Jesus is really calling us to this magnificent life. He does it in the very beginning, with the Beatitudes. That’s what these blessings are. They are called Beatitudes. I think there are eight of them. There is some confusion about whether there are seven or eight or nine, but I think there are eight. When you read the verses, he is describing conversion for you -- that to follow him is going to look very different than what you thought it would look like, and that it has to do with your identity in him and who you are.

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So you read “Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those that mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are the peacemakers.” You look at these blessings and you see that he is describing the quality of a person. Yes, there are things that you do that come out of that, but overall, he is describing what a follower of Christ looks like. He is giving us an identity. **What Jesus is saying to us here is: “I have a beautiful life for you. You can’t live it on your own, so I’m inviting you to trust in me and follow me and watch what I will do in your life.”**

The blessings are counterintuitive. They are the opposite of what we would expect. Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they that mourn. Really, in essence you could translate it: Blessed are the unhappy, for they shall be happy. The kingdom of God is theirs. And you’ll say, “Jesus, I don’t understand this.”

When you read the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount for the very first time, if you are taking the Word seriously, you may be tempted to think, “I just don’t even know what this means.” It’s only after you read the entire sermon and you come back to it that you begin to see. “Okay, now I’m beginning to grasp a little bit about what Jesus might be saying.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” To the person who says, “I don’t have the innate inner ability to live the life that God requires; I am poor in spirit,” Jesus is saying, “You are ultimately happy, because you will receive the kingdom of God. You will come to me and receive what you are not in and of yourself.”

“Blessed are they that mourn.” These are people who are really deeply grieving over their inability, their poverty of spirit – theirs and the sin of others, and the social injustice in this world. I don’t know if that connects with you.

I’ll give you a very fresh illustration. This morning, walking out the door early, my lovely wife very gently comes to me and says, “Sweetheart, can I share an observation with you?” In that moment, I seriously thought about saying, “No. I’m not up for an observation right now. Thank you.” But foolishly I said, “Sure, I would love to hear your observation.” She shared an observation with me and I didn’t really like it. I’m going to be honest with you. She did it so gently, so humbly, so carefully. So, I’ve grown a little bit. I’ve reacted really poorly in times like this before.

Now I should say, just as a disclaimer, there are many times when this has been the other way around. I’ve shared observations many times. She is nodding her head yes, multiple times. This is a part of marriage. You help one another in this way, right? Some of you are like, “I love this part of marriage, when I’m sharing the observation.”

I’m just, “Okay, Babe, thank you. Bye.” But I’m fighting back embracing a sullen spirit, right? So I get in the car. I’m driving. Thinking. What do you think the first thoughts are that come to my mind? “Yeah, but she’s like this. I’ve got some observations for her. She always...”

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I go to Starbucks, get my coffee, driving, about halfway to the church, and the Spirit of God says: “Have you ever considered that maybe she’s right?” I was careful here but I wanted to say, “Lord, you *always* take her side!” Can you grasp this for a minute? I’m a pastor! I teach God’s word for a living! I’m a holy man! There is a part of me that wants to say, “God, I am 50 something years old. Am I still so prideful that my wife can’t share a simple, gentle observation without it ticking me off?!” “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

I grieve over the colossal nature of my pride and sin, and I don’t grieve enough. And I’m giving you a pretty charitable illustration. There are other illustrations that I wouldn’t want to share with you. The kingdom of God is propelled into your life and blessing cascades over when you begin to say, “Blessed are the poor in spirit. This is glorious! You are changing me, O God.” Thank God that the day will come when Brian Brookins will stand before the God of the universe and he will not say, “You were a jerk.” He will say, “You were forgiven because my Son paid for all of your pride and lust and selfishness and anger and sin. Not only that, he began to produce in you a righteousness that is only explainable because of my grace in your life.”

I’m going to end with this illustration. I’d like to say more but I think it’d be best if I end. I’m a golf fan. The British Open is going on right now. It’s one of the four majors. There’s a major called the Masters. If you’re not a golf fan, I’ll just give you that introduction. In 2005, one of the greatest shots of all time took place. It was on hole #16 of Augusta, where the Masters is played every year. I’ve actually been to this golf course and been to this hole. It’s unbelievable. Tiger Woods, who won that year, hit the most amazing shot, where he chipped it off the green, 25 feet left of the hole. It comes to almost a virtual stop, then it rolls down the hill, very, very slowly. It takes forever, comes right to the lip of the cup, hangs there for a moment, and then falls in, and the place erupts. It was amazing! Then Tiger does one of these, you know... It was exhilarating. I saw it on TV and will never forget it.

In the same year, 2005, Billy Casper played the same hole. Billy Casper was a former champion, and the Masters has this rule. If you ever win the Masters, you can come back for the rest of your life. So you have former champions, 60, 70, even 80 years old, who come back to play. And they are not good anymore. They’re good, but not like they used to be. So Billy Casper comes back years and years after he has won the Masters. He comes to this hole, he tees it up, and he hits it in the water. He tees it up a second time and he hits it in the water. Five times he hits it in the water. Same hole. He gets a 16 on a par 3. That’s 13 over par on a par 3. I know that sounds impossible, but trust me, I’m capable of that.

He shoots that day a 106. Par is 72. It would be the worst round of golf ever recorded in the Masters history, but if you look at the record books, the worst round ever shot competitively is a 95. Billy Casper’s 106 is not there. The reason is because that day Billy Casper did not sign his scorecard. If you don’t sign your scorecard, the round is never registered.

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I've actually heard pastors use this illustration. I've heard a good friend use it recently, appropriately, to say that that's a picture of the Christian life. Jesus signs your scorecard. And your score is not the 106 that you may deserve, but it is what Jesus did for you.

That's a picture of grace. You read the Sermon on the Mount and you say, "I can't live the life that you require." Jesus has lived it in your place. He has paid for your sin and you receive the gift of his forgiveness, the gift of salvation. Isn't that good news? That's great news, but I think the illustration needs improvement, because I still want to play golf!

It's glorious to think I deserve a 106, but I'd like to shoot at least a 105 or a 104 or break 100. Jesus is basically saying here, "Listen, you'll never have the perfection that my father requires, and I'm providing it for you, but I'm also making you a new golfer. I'm giving you a new swing. I'm giving you a new body."

You should be getting excited right now! This is great news! I mean, the struggle of the Christian life in our imperfection is one where we are growing in our knowledge of Jesus, we are growing in righteousness of the heart that works its way out of our lives, into the world that we live in. So my record will always be the record of Jesus. I'll never earn my own righteousness. I'm free from that gloriously, but he has given me grace to *live*, not *not* to live. That's what we are studying here in this glorious sermon.