

Showering Us with Blessing

Matthew 5:1-12 (February 2, 2020)

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When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵“Blessed are the meek, 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 receive mercy. ⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Historical Context

Matthew 5:1-12 is the opening of [Sermon on the Mount](#). This passage is often referred to as "The Beatitudes," based on the original Latin word for "Blessed." These beatitudes introduce the Sermon on the Mount, which is the first major speech, of five, in Matthew's gospel.

The Beatitudes are not, themselves, the gospel; they are "law." They tell us what we ought to do. Matthew intends this sequence: The gospel is announced, and its effects demonstrated (4:23). Then, Jesus instructs his followers, or would-be followers, on how to live in its light.

Theme: Showering Us with Blessing

Are we far less eager to be blessed than God is to bless us? Or maybe it's more that we have a hard time believing God wants to bless us in the first place. It may be that our picture of God is distorted so it seems out of character for God to bless without requirement. Or maybe it's not that we don't know God well enough to recognize God's grace, maybe it's that we know ourselves too well to feel worthy of that grace. After all, we are intimately familiar with our faults and limitations, our insecurities and failures. And knowing ourselves this well we may find it hard to believe God loves us unconditionally. Very little if anything in our world is unconditional. We're used to paying for our mistakes, paving our own way, toeing the line and reaping the consequences when we don't, and so it may not only be unexpected, but downright unsettling to imagine that God behaves differently, showering us with blessing apart from anything we have done, earned, or deserve.

But let's be clear, Jesus isn't setting up conditions or terms but rather is just plain blessing people. All kinds of people. All kinds of down-and-out, extremely vulnerable, and at the bottom of the ladder people. Why? To proclaim that God regularly shows up in mercy and blessing just where you least expect God to be -- with the poor rather than the rich, those who are mourning rather than celebrating, the meek and the peacemakers rather than the strong and victorious. This is not where citizens of the ancient world look for God and, quite frankly, it's not where citizens of our own world do either. If God shows up here, Jesus is saying, blessing the weak and the vulnerable, then God will be everywhere, showering all creation and its inhabitants with blessing.