

**THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM, PART 8: “PORTRAIT OF CHRIST’S DISCIPLES”  
MATTHEW 5:1-16**

**Personal Introduction**

Hi everyone!

If you don’t know me, my name is Eric and I’m a pastor here, and it’s my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

**Sermon Series Introduction**

We’re currently in Part 8 of our sermon series called “The King and His Kingdom,” where we’re going through the Gospel of Matthew together.

Today’s sermon is titled: “Portrait of Christ’s Disciples”

So let’s get right into it.

**Sermon Introduction**

“I doubt if there is any problem in the world today—social, political, or economic—that would not find happy solution if approached in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount.” – Franklin D. Roosevelt [32<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States]

“If it weren’t for the message of mercy and pity in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, I wouldn’t want to be a human being. I would just as soon be a rattlesnake.” – Kurt Vonnegut [Well-known author and self-proclaimed “Christ-loving atheist”]

“If I had to face only the Sermon on the Mount and my own interpretation of it, I should not hesitate to say, ‘O yes, I am a Christian.’” – Mahatma Gandhi [Established Hindu and prominent leader in the Indian independence movement]

No matter what religion or background, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is one of the most *beloved* sermons of all time—but also one of the most *misunderstood*.

Everyone recognizes that Jesus taught something *revolutionary*—something the world desperately *needs*.

At the same time, everyone wants to have “[their] *own* interpretation of it.”

But that’s *not* how speech and communication work, especially when it comes to *teaching*.

Jesus’ teaching is not meant to be interpreted however we want; he intends it to be understood *exactly* as *he* meant it.

And we’ll find that it’s *more* revolutionary than we may have thought.

**Scripture Introduction**

Turn your Bibles to Matthew 5:1-16.

I’d encourage you to keep your Bibles open and follow along with the verses as they come up throughout the sermon. It will help you follow much more easily.

I’d highly recommend using a physical Bible, but if you don’t have one, you can download the ESV Bible app, or just ask someone next to you, and I’m sure they’d be happy to share with you.

<pause>

Last week, we transitioned from the introductory chapters of Jesus' genealogy, birth, and preparation to ministry to the main body of the Gospel account, where Jesus officially began his public ministry.<sup>1</sup>

He preached, "*Repent*, for the *kingdom* of heaven is at hand"; he called his first *disciples*; and we ended with a summary of his *ministry* throughout Galilee where "great *crowds* followed him" from all over the surrounding regions.

Today, we move into the section known as "The Sermon on the Mount," where Jesus carefully *clarifies* what it *truly* means to follow him—to be his disciple, to be a citizen in his kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

The Sermon on the Mount runs from chapters 5-7.

I wish we could devote an entire sermon series on the Sermon on the Mount, but since we're going through the *entire* Gospel of Matthew, we'll need to move along more briskly.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the 20<sup>th</sup> century pastor, preached 60 sermons through these three chapters, which are compiled into an excellent two-volume book called *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*.

But for us, we'll cover it across *five* weeks, Lord willing.

<pause>

The Sermon on the Mount was the *launchpad* for Jesus' public ministry. So what would he say?

That's what we'll *begin* to look at today.

### Scripture Reading

Let's read Matthew 5:1-16.

<sup>1</sup> Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

<sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

<sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

---

<sup>1</sup> "The duration of Jesus' ministry has traditionally been thought to have been three years: a year of obscurity, a year of popularity, and a year of increasing rejection. Matthew and the other Synoptic Gospels (Mark and Luke) largely omit discussing the first, obscure year, but it is recounted in John's Gospel (cf. John 1–4)" (Study note on Matthew 4:12-15, in *ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008]). R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: "This section [4:12-16], like 2:13–23, reveals Matthew's special interest in Jesus' geographical movements and their scriptural justification. It bridges the gap between Jesus' experiences in the Jordan valley and the wilderness (3:13–4:11) and the opening of his public ministry in Galilee. The Gospel of John records Jesus' early activity (both in Judea and Galilee) while John the Baptist was still active (John 1:35–4:42; N.B. 3:24); this activity, if it is intended to be chronologically arranged in John, must presumably be fitted in after Matthew 4:11, the 'retreat' of 4:12 being that of John 4:3."

<sup>2</sup> R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: "The theme of this, Matthew's longest and most wide-ranging collection of Jesus' teaching, is indicated by the stated audience (see on 5:1–2); it deals with the character, duties, attitudes and dangers of the Christian disciple. It is a manifesto setting out the nature of life in the kingdom of heaven. The Sermon thus makes no claim to present an ethic for all men; indeed much of it would make no sense as a universal code. It is concerned not with ethics in general, but with discipleship, with man in his obedience and devotion to God, not with a pattern for society. To interpret it legalistically as a set of rules is to miss the point; it represents a demand more radical than any legislator could conceive, going far beyond what human nature can meet, a demand for perfection (5:48). And central to it is the person of Jesus himself: for his sake the disciples are to be persecuted (5:11); he sets before them his own interpretation of the will of God (5:17–48: 'I say to you ...'); their eternal destiny depends on their relation to him (7:21–23) and their response to his teaching (7:24–27). The Sermon is thus far from being just a collection of moral precepts. It presents the radical demand of Jesus the Messiah on all who respond to his preaching of God's kingdom. 'The Sermon on the Mount compels us, in the first place, to ask who he is who utters these words.'"

<sup>7</sup> “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

<sup>9</sup> “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

<sup>10</sup> “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

This is God's Word.

### Overview

We'll look at this passage in two parts.

- I. Eight marks of Christ's disciples (vv. 1-12)
- II. Two effects of Christ's disciples (vv. 13-16)

Just as a heads up: these two parts will *not* be equal in length, but the second part will be much *shorter* than the first part.

### I. Eight marks of Christ's disciples (vv. 1-12)

Look at verses 1-2.

[<sup>1</sup> Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

<sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:]

From the end of the last chapter, we know that the “crowds” came to Jesus largely for his miraculous *healings*—for the meeting of their *felt needs* (4:23-25).

Here, Jesus goes up on the mountain<sup>3</sup> and *sits down* to teach, which was the traditional position of *formal* instruction.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 129) writes: “NIV's “on a mountainside” renders εἰς τὸ ὄρος (*eis to oros*). The article does not suggest some well-known mountain (Hendriksen; Turner, *Syntax*, p. 173), still less the mountain where Moses received the law (Loisy). Even Davies (*Setting*, p. 93), after exploring all possibilities, concedes Matthew could have more explicitly delineated a “new Moses” theme. In fact, *to oros* (lit., “the mountain”) and the corresponding Hebrew and Aramaic may mean nothing more than “the mountain region” or “the hill country,” a point rightly recognized by NIV when it renders *eis to oros* elsewhere in Matthew “into the hills” (14:23; 15:29) or, in the plural, “to the mountains” (24:16). Jesus withdrew to the hill country west of Lake Galilee: the text requires nothing more.

<sup>4</sup> John Blanchard (*The Beatitudes for Today* [Kent, UK: Day One Publications, 1996], 19) writes: “In our contemporary Western culture, sitting down to speak is a very informal practice, something done in a house meeting, at a picnic or in some other small group. In Jesus' day, however, exactly the opposite was true. Jewish religious leaders were in the habit of standing and walking around as they taught, but when they wanted to make an official statement, as opposed to giving less formal teaching, they sat down; as Jesus was to tell his disciples later, “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat” (Matt 23:2). One expert has suggested that every synagogue had a special chair called ‘Moses' seat’ which was reserved for the town's leading religious teacher. Jesus himself reflected this practice. Before teaching the series of major parables we noticed earlier, he ‘got into a boat **and sat in it**, while all the people stood on the shore’ (Matthew 13:2); in Mark's version of the major teaching segment recorded in Matthew 18 we are told that it was given ‘**sitting down**’ (Mark 9:35, NASB); and the long statement about

You can imagine the scene: Jesus sits down; his *disciples* gather closest to him; *others* begin to settle in around them; and by the end of the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 7, it says “the *crowds* were astonished at his teaching” (Matt. 7:28).<sup>5</sup>

The opening words from Jesus’ mouth are what we know as “The Beatitudes,” from the Latin *beatus*, which means “blessed.”

These are *eight* descriptions (or *marks*) of what it truly means to be “blessed.”

And it’s *not* what *anyone* would have expected.

According to the New Testament, to be *blessed* is *not* about having a beautiful vacation, a loving family, a nice house, or a good job (as in #blessed), but it is first and foremost about being in right *relationship* with God (e.g., Luke 11:28; Rom. 4:7-8; Rev. 14:13, 19:9; cf. Ps. 1:1-2; 32:1-2).

It’s primarily *relational*, not *circumstantial*. It’s knowing that by faith in Christ, we have the *acceptance* and *approval* of God, no matter what.<sup>6</sup>

We still have a *glimpse* of this understanding of “blessing” in how people pursue marriage. Before proposing, a man often approaches the woman’s *father* to ask for his “blessing.”

He’s *not* asking for money or a material gift. He’s asking for the father’s *relational* favor—for his *acceptance* and *approval*.<sup>7</sup>

When we have the *acceptance* and *approval* of God through *faith* in *Christ*, we no longer *need* to find “blessings” in *material* comforts or *temporal* circumstances.

It’s only when we understand *blessing* in *this way* that the beatitudes begin to make sense.

---

the end of the world was delivered when Jesus was ‘**sitting** on the Mount of Olives’ (Matthew 24:3).” Regarding how Jesus “opened his mouth” to teach, Blanchard writes: “The important thing to notice is that this particular phrase occurs in just two other places in the new Testament, and on both occasions the context is particularly significant. When the Apostle Philip had a remarkable encounter with an Ethiopian court official who invited him to explain a passage from the Old Testament, ‘Philip **opened his mouth**, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him’ (Acts 8:35, NASB). When Peter was invited by a Roman army officer Cornelius to preach to him and to his relatives and friends in Caesarea Luke tells us, ‘And **opening his mouth**, Peter said: ...’ (Acts 10:34, NASB). Philip’s sermon sparked off a strategic advance in the growing impact of the early church, while Peter’s sermon to Cornelius marked a critical phase in releasing the gospel to the Gentiles. In both cases this ‘opening of the mouth’ seems to highlight the significance of the event. The same is certainly true when the phrase is used by Matthew to introduce the Sermon on the Mount. What we seem to have here is not a collection of ‘bits and pieces’ but a unified and structured statement which formed a launchpad for the three years of ministry to follow” (18-19). D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 129) writes: “NIV masks the idiom ‘he opened his mouth and taught them,’ found elsewhere in the NT (13:35; Acts 8:34; 10:34; 18:14) and reflecting OT roots (Job 3:1; 33:2; Dan 10:16). It is used in solemn or revelatory contexts. ‘To teach’ (*edidasken*) is imperfect and inceptive: ‘He began to teach them.’ Contrary to Davies (Setting, pp. 7–8), one must not draw too sharp a distinction between preaching (*kēryssō*, Mt 4:17) and teaching (*didaskō*, 5:2): see on 3:1 and the linking of these categories in 4:23; 9:35. SBK (1:189) notes that teaching was not uncommonly done outdoors as well as in synagogues.”

<sup>5</sup> John Blanchard (*The Beatitudes for Today* [Kent, UK: Day One Publications, 1996], 25-26) writes: “As Jesus made his way up the mountainside, many people followed him. When he sat down, his inner circle of followers, the disciples, would have settled down closest to him. Others, including some of those who had been struck by his earlier teaching, would have sat as near as possible. Beyond them, other people would have spilled out over the mountainside, exactly as we would expect. Those closest to Jesus would have heard every word, caught every gesture, seen every expression. Those further back might have missed some of what was said, while those on the outer fringes may have heard very little. What we do know is that sufficient people heard enough to produce the astonished reaction which Matthew records.”

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson (*The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 16) writes: “Although some modern translations prefer “happy” to “blessed,” it is a poor exchange. Those who are blessed will generally be profoundly happy; but blessedness cannot be reduced to happiness. In the Scriptures, man can bless God and God can bless man. This duality gives us a clue just what is meant. To be “blessed” means, fundamentally, to be approved, to find a. When man blesses God, he is approving God. Of course, he is not doing this in some condescending manner, but rather he is eulogizing God, praising God. When God blesses man, he is approving man; and that is always an act of condescension. Since this is God’s universe there can be no higher “blessing” than to be approved by God. We must ask ourselves whose blessing we diligently seek. If God’s blessing means more to us than the approval of loved ones no matter how cherished, or of colleagues no matter how influential, then the beatitudes will speak to us very personally and deeply.”

<sup>7</sup> And it’s *not* mere *tolerance* that he’s asking for either. It wouldn’t satisfy the man to hear from the father, “Well, I don’t like you, but my *daughter* does, so I’ll *tolerate* you as a son-in-law.” That’s *not* really giving his *relational* favor (or *blessing*) to the marriage. Carl R. Trueman (*Strange New World* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022], 143, Kindle) writes: “To *tolerate* somebody is, by definition, to *disapprove* of them, albeit in a rather *passive way*.”

And since they come at the *beginning*—not the *end*—of Jesus' sermon, if we don't understand *them* rightly, we won't understand anything *else* rightly either.

They are the *foundation* for everything to follow

Essentially, this sermon is for Christ's *disciples*, for *citizens* in his kingdom, for those *already* approved and accepted by God—because *no one* can live out the Sermon on the Mount without *first* being converted and empowered by the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

This will become increasingly clear as the sermon progresses, where Jesus draws sharp *distinctions* between “you” and “them”—between his *disciples* and the *world*.<sup>9</sup>

It's also best to understand the eight beatitudes *not* as eight random, standalone descriptions, but as a *progression*—one flowing into the next, each giving a *fuller* portrait of what it means to be a Christian.

They come as a *package*; we cannot pick and choose which marks to accept and which to discard. Jesus is saying that *all* these marks will characterize his disciples—not just pastors, missionaries, or *mature* Christians, but every *Christian*—period.

<pause>

Before we jump into the actual words of the Sermon on the Mount, it might be helpful to give some guidance on how to listen to it.

If you're a follower of Christ, listen to be *challenged* and listen to be *encouraged*.

- In terms of challenge, as Jesus describes a portrait of his disciples, constantly be asking yourself, “Is he describing *me*?”

<sup>8</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 1:23) writes: “The Beatitudes do not come at the end, they come at the beginning, and I do not hesitate to say that unless we are perfectly clear about them we should go no further. We have no right to go further. There is a kind of logical sequence in this Sermon. Not only that, there is certainly a spiritual order and sequence. Our Lord does not say these things accidentally; the whole thing is deliberate. Certain postulates are laid down, and on the basis of those, certain other things follow. Thus I never discuss any particular injunction of the Sermon with a person until I am perfectly happy and clear in my mind that that person is a Christian. It is wrong to ask anybody who is not first a Christian to try to live or practice the Sermon on the Mount. To expect Christian conduct from a person who is not born again is heresy. The appeals of the gospel in terms of conduct and ethics and morality are always based on the assumption that the people to whom the injunctions are addressed are Christians.”

<sup>9</sup> John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 18–19) writes: “Jesus emphasized that his true followers, the citizens of God's kingdom, were to be entirely different from others. They were not to take their cue from the people around them, but from him, and so prove to be genuine children of their heavenly Father. To me the key text of the Sermon on the Mount is 6:8: ‘Do not be like them.’ It is immediately reminiscent of God's word to Israel in olden days: ‘You shall not do as they do.’<sup>4</sup> It is the same call to be different. And right through the Sermon on the Mount this theme is elaborated. Their character was to be completely distinct from that admired by the world (the beatitudes). They were to shine p 19 like lights in the prevailing darkness. Their righteousness was to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, both in ethical behaviour and in religious devotion, while their love was to be greater and their ambition nobler than those of their pagan neighbours. There is no single paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount in which this contrast between Christian and non-Christian standards is not drawn. It is the underlying and uniting theme of the Sermon; everything else is a variation of it. Sometimes it is the Gentiles or pagan nations with whom Jesus contrasts his followers. Thus pagans love and salute each other, but Christians are to love their enemies (5:44–47); pagans pray after a fashion, ‘heaping up empty phrases’, but Christians are to pray with the humble thoughtfulness of children to their Father in heaven (6:7–13); pagans are preoccupied with their own material necessities, but Christians are to seek first God's rule and righteousness (6:32, 33). At other times Jesus contrasts his disciples not with Gentiles but with Jews, not (that is) with heathen people but with religious people, in particular with the ‘scribes and Pharisees’. Professor Jeremias is no doubt right to distinguish between these as ‘two quite different groups’ in that ‘the scribes are the theological teachers who have had some years of education, the Pharisees on the other hand are not theologians, but rather groups of pious laymen from every part of the community’.<sup>1</sup> Certainly Jesus sets Christian morals over against the ethical casuistry of the scribes (5:21–48) and Christian devotion over against the hypocritical piety of the Pharisees (6:1–18). Thus the followers of Jesus are to be different—different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious. The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian counter-culture. Here is a Christian value-system, ethical standard, religious devotion, attitude to money, ambition, life-style and network of relationships—all of which are totally at variance with those of the non-Christian world. And this Christian counter-culture is the life of the kingdom of God, a fully human life indeed but lived out under the divine rule.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Touchstone, 1995], 108) writes, “With each beatitude the gulf is widened between the disciples and the people, their call to come forth from the people becomes increasingly manifest.”

- In terms of encouragement, reflect on how Jesus describes his disciples and rejoice in knowing that *in Christ* those things *are* true of you.

If you're not a follower of Christ, listen to *learn* and listen to *respond*.

- In terms of learning, as Jesus describes what it means to be blessed—or accepted and approved—by God, constantly be asking yourself, “How is this different than what I thought?”
- In terms of responding, reflect on *who* is teaching these things and respond with true repentance and faith in *him*.<sup>10</sup>

<pause>

Now, let me trace the *progression* first to give you the big picture, and then we'll look at each mark more closely.<sup>11</sup>

Look at verses 3-10.

<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

<sup>7</sup> “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

<sup>9</sup> “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

<sup>10</sup> “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.]

In verse 3, Christ's disciples *first* realize that they are *spiritually poor*—that they stand as sinners before a holy God and have nothing to offer. They're spiritually bankrupt.

In verse 4, they don't merely *acknowledge* their sins—they *mourn* their sins.

<sup>10</sup> John Blanchard (*The Beatitudes for Today* [Kent, UK: Day One Publications, 1996], 27) writes: “What Jesus preached was what we call a ‘double-barrelled’ sermon. It was crammed with meaning for believers, challenging their lifestyle and testing the depth of their commitment. But it also had a devastating message for unbelievers, shattering their illusions as to the kind of life which is pleasing to God and satisfying to man.” John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 28-29) writes: “Tolstoy embodied in himself the tension between the ideal and the reality. For on the one hand he was convinced that to obey the Sermon on the Mount was ‘quite feasible’, while on the other hand his own mediocre performance told him that it was not. The truth lies in neither extreme position. For the standards of the Sermon are neither readily attainable by every man, nor totally unattainable by any man. To put them beyond anybody's reach is to ignore the purpose of Christ's Sermon; to put them within everybody's is to ignore the reality of man's sin. They are attainable all right, but only by those who have experienced the new birth which Jesus told Nicodemus was the indispensable condition of seeing and entering God's kingdom. For the righteousness he described in the Sermon is an inner righteousness. Although it manifests itself outwardly and visibly in words, deeds and relationships, yet it remains essentially a righteousness of the heart. It is what a man thinks in his heart and where he fixes his heart [Cf. Matt. 5:28; 6:21] which really matter. It is here too that the problem lies. For men are in their nature ‘evil’ [Matt. 7:11]. It is out of their heart that evil things come [Cf. Mark 7:21-23] and out of their heart that their mouth speaks, just as it is the tree which determines its fruit. So there is but one solution: ‘Make the tree good, and its fruit good’ [Matt. 7:16-20; 12:33-37]. A new birth is essential. Only a belief in the necessity and the possibility of a new birth can keep us from reading the Sermon on the Mount with either foolish optimism or hopeless despair. Jesus spoke the Sermon to those who were already his disciples and thereby also the citizens of God's kingdom and the children of God's family [E.g., 5:16, 48; 6:9, 32, 33; 7:11]. The high standards he set are appropriate only to such. We do not, indeed could not, achieve this privileged status by attaining Christ's standards. Rather by attaining his standards, or at least approximating to them, we give evidence of what by God's free grace and gift we already are.”

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carson (*The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 16) writes: “[N]otice that two of the beatitudes promise the same reward. The first beatitude reads, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (5:3). The last one says, ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (5:10). To begin and end with the same expression is a stylistic device called an ‘inclusion.’ This means that everything bracketed between the two can really be included under the one theme, in this case, the kingdom of heaven. That is why I have called the beatitudes, collectively, ‘The Norms of the Kingdom.’”

In verse 5, recognizing and mourning their sins affects how they carry themselves before *others*—they're *meek*.

In verse 6, they don't just accept their sinfulness—they *hunger and thirst for righteousness*. They *feel* their spiritual emptiness and *desperately* desire to be more righteous.

In verse 7, Christ's disciples don't live isolated lives. They enter into the misery of others, showing *mercy* as they themselves have been shown mercy by God.

In verse 8, everything they do stems not from *external* religious performance but from a heart that is single-mindedly devoted to God—a *pure heart*.

In verse 9, *out* of that devotion, they imitate their heavenly Father by being *peacemakers*—between people and God, and between people in conflict with each other.

In verse 10, not everyone will appreciate this way of life. They'll be *persecuted*—facing all kinds of opposition, mistreatment, and slander—simply for identifying with Christ.<sup>12</sup>

So *that's* the big picture. Now, let's look at each of the eight marks more closely.

<pause>

The first mark of Christ's disciples is in verse 3.

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

Jesus is not talking about *material* poverty but *spiritual* poverty—the recognition that we as sinners have no righteousness of our own.

This very first beatitude *dispels* any notion that salvation comes by your own good works. The kingdom of heaven *belongs* to those who have *none*—to those who are spiritually *poor*.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 54) writes: "The beatitudes paint a comprehensive portrait of a Christian disciple. We see him first alone on his knees before God, acknowledging his spiritual poverty and mourning over it. This makes him meek or gentle in all his relationships, since honesty compels him to allow others to think of him what before God he confesses himself to be. Yet he is far from acquiescing in his sinfulness, for he hungers and thirsts after righteousness, longing to grow in grace and in goodness. We see him next with others, out in the human community. His relationship with God does not cause him to withdraw from society, nor is he insulated from the world's pain. On the contrary, he is in the thick of it, showing mercy to those battered by adversity and sin. He is transparently sincere in all his dealings and seeks to play a constructive role as a peacemaker. Yet he is not thanked for his efforts, but rather opposed, slandered, insulted and persecuted on account of the righteousness for which he stands and the Christ with whom he is identified. Such is the man or woman who is 'blessed', that is, who has the approval of God and finds self-fulfillment as a human being."

<sup>13</sup> John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 32) writes: "[Jesus] had compassion on the needy and fed the hungry, and he told his followers to do the same. Yet the blessing of his kingdom was not primarily one of economic advantage. Further, if he was not offering physical relief immediately, neither was he promising it in a future heaven and meanwhile pronouncing the poor and the hungry 'blessed'. To be sure, in some circumstances God can use poverty as a means to spiritual blessing, just as wealth can be a hindrance to it. But this does not make poverty in itself a desirable condition which Jesus blesses. The church has always been wrong whenever it has used the first beatitude either to condone the poverty of the masses, or to commend the voluntary poverty of monks and others who have taken a vow to renounce possessions. Christ may indeed still call some to a life of poverty, but his call cannot justly be heard through this beatitude. No. The poverty and hunger to which Jesus refers in the beatitudes are spiritual states. It is 'the poor in spirit' and 'those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' whom he declares blessed. And it is safe to deduce from this that the other qualities he mentions are spiritual also. It is true that the Aramaic word Jesus used may have been simply 'poor', as in Luke's version. But then 'the poor', God's poor, were already a clearly defined group in the Old Testament, and Matthew will have been correct to translate 'poor in spirit'. For 'the poor' were not so much the poverty stricken as the pious who—partly because they were needy, downtrodden, oppressed or in other ways afflicted—had put their faith and hope in God." Stott goes on to write: "It has already been mentioned that the Old Testament supplies the necessary background against which to interpret this beatitude. At first to be 'poor' meant to be in literal, material need. But gradually, because the needy had no refuge but God [Zeph. 3:12], 'poverty' came to have spiritual overtones and to be identified with humble dependence on God. Thus the psalmist designated himself 'this poor man' who cried out to God in his need, 'and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles' [Ps. 34:6]. The 'poor man' in the Old Testament is one who is both afflicted and unable to save himself, and who therefore looks to God for salvation, while recognizing that he has no claim upon him. This kind of spiritual poverty is specially commended in Isaiah. It is 'the poor and needy', who 'seek water and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst', for whom God promises to 'open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys', and to 'make the wilderness a pool of water, and the

The same message of John the Baptist, Jesus, and every disciple of Jesus has always been “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” And the beatitudes show us what that repentance looks like in the life of Christ’s disciples.

Those who are *blessed*—or *approved* and *accepted* by God—*know* they have nothing to offer him. *Everything* they have, including their citizenship in the kingdom, is *from* God by his grace *alone*.

*Nobody* can *merit* their way in. And if you think you *can*, then you *prove* by that very thought that you are *not yet* a citizen of the kingdom.

This is the starting line for everything that follows.

<pause>

The second mark of Christ’s disciples is in verse 4.

<sup>4</sup> “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Jesus is not talking about *general* mourning over sad circumstances, but he’s building on the *previous* beatitude.<sup>14</sup>

It’s one thing to *acknowledge* that you’re a sinner; it’s another thing to *mourn* over it.

The Christian *grieves* his sins—not merely because of their negative consequences, but because he has committed them against his loving heavenly Father.

He *also* mourns over the sins of *others*—the bitter consequences and the coming judgment they will face.

George Whitefield, the 18<sup>th</sup> century preacher, was said to have hardly preached without weeping. When brought to his attention, he responded:

“You blame me for weeping, but how can I help it when you will not weep for yourselves, though your immortal souls are on the verge of destruction...and you may never more have an opportunity to have Christ offered to you?”<sup>15</sup>

*That’s* the heart of Christ’s disciples.

This isn’t about the *tears* so much as the *heart*.

---

dry land springs of water’ [Isa. 41:17, 18]. The ‘poor’ are also described as people with ‘a contrite and humble spirit’; to them God looks and with them (though he is ‘the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy’) he is pleased to dwell [Isa. 57:15; 66:1, 2]. It is to such that the Lord’s anointed would proclaim good tidings of salvation, a prophecy which Jesus consciously fulfilled in the Nazareth synagogue: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor’ [Isa. 61:1; Lk. 4:18; cf. Mt. 11:5]. Further, the rich tended to compromise with surrounding heathenism; it was the poor who remained faithful to God. So wealth and worldliness, poverty and godliness went together. Thus, to be ‘poor in spirit’ is to acknowledge our spiritual poverty, indeed our spiritual bankruptcy, before God. For we are sinners, under the holy wrath of God, and deserving nothing but the judgment of God. We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, nothing with which to buy the favour of heaven” (38-39).

<sup>14</sup> Sinclair Ferguson (*The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Life in a Fallen World* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2015], 18) writes: “Mourning is grief and sorrow caused by profound loss. We usually associate it—and the beatitude that those who mourn will be comforted—with death. But that kind of mourning is in fact the most painful form of a widespread experience. What we feel when we are deeply disappointed in a friendship, or lose our job, or fail an exam, are also forms of mourning. Is Jesus, then, giving us a word of general encouragement in what he says here, assuring us that sorrow will eventually abate? Is he saying, ‘Keep going. It will soon pass. Time heals all wounds’? That would be far too superficial a reading of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is speaking about life in the kingdom of God. The poverty he describes is in a man’s spirit, not his pocket. Similarly, the grief Jesus describes is man’s mourning over his own sinfulness; it is regret that he has proved a disappointment to the Lord. Numbed by the discovery of his poverty of spirit, he learns to grieve because of it. Here, then, is another characteristic of the Christian. He does not excuse his sin, or belittle it, or ignore it. He does not weigh it in the balance with what he regards as his better qualities, or the fruitfulness of his service. Rather, he cries out with Paul, ‘What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?’ Then he is comforted by the answer: ‘Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord’ there is deliverance and comfort (*Rom. 7:24-25*).”

<sup>15</sup> Observed by Whitefield’s young assistant, Cornelius Winter, quoted in Dan Korzep, “George Whitefield’s Evangelistic Preaching,” March 19, 2018, <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2018/george-whitefields-evangelistic-preaching>.

Only those who mourn their *own* sins and the sins of *others* will know true *comfort*—the comfort of *forgiven sins*, and the comfort of the *coming day* when every tear will be wiped away and there will be no more sin, pain, or mourning.

<pause>

The third mark of Christ's disciples is in verse 5.

<sup>5</sup> “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

The word “meek” is difficult to define. In a sense, it's to be humble, gentle, and self-controlled—but it's *more* than that.<sup>16</sup>

Martyn Lloyd-Jones gives a more nuanced definition:

“Meekness is essentially a true view of oneself, expressing itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others.”<sup>17</sup>

For example, if I thought I preached *poorly* today, and I shared that with someone, and they responded, “Yeah, you really didn't preach well today.” If I get defensive and try to convince them otherwise, then I'm not meek.

Or if you told your close friend, “I know I've been really *selfish* these days,” and they responded, “Yeah, you *have*.” If you get defensive and recall *all* that you've done for them recently, then you're not meek.

It's always easier to call *ourselves* a sinner than to accept *others* calling us one.<sup>18</sup>

But if we truly understand that we're spiritually poor and we truly grieve our sins, then *that* true view of ourselves ought to express itself in our attitude and conduct with others. We'll be humble, gentle, and secure.

---

<sup>16</sup> D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 133) writes: “The word “meek” (*praus*) is hard to define. It can signify absence of pretension (1 Peter 3:4, 14–15) but generally suggests gentleness (cf. 11:29; James 3:13) and the self-control it entails. The Greeks extolled humility in wise men and rulers, but such humility smacked of condescension. In general the Greeks considered meekness a vice because they failed to distinguish it from servility. To be meek toward others implies freedom from malice and a vengeful spirit. Jesus best exemplifies it (Mt 11:29; 21:5). Lloyd-Jones (*Sermon on the Mount*, 1:65–69) rightly applies meekness to our attitudes toward others. We may acknowledge our own bankruptcy (v. 3) and mourn (v. 4). But to respond with meekness when others tell us of our bankruptcy is far harder (cf. also Stott, pp. 43–44). Meekness therefore requires such a true view about ourselves as will express itself even in our attitude toward others.” John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 42-43) writes: “The Greek adjective *praūs* means ‘gentle’, ‘humble’, ‘considerate’, ‘courteous’, and therefore exercising the self-control without which these qualities would be impossible. Although we rightly recoil from the image of our Lord as ‘gentle Jesus, meek and mild’, because it conjures up a picture of him as weak and effeminate, yet he described himself as ‘gentle (*praūs*) and lowly in heart’ and Paul referred to his ‘meekness and gentleness’.<sup>7</sup> So, linguistically speaking, the NEB is quite correct to refer in this beatitude to ‘those of a gentle spirit’. But what sort of gentleness is it, on account of which those who have it are pronounced blessed? It seems important to note that in the beatitudes ‘the meek’ come between those who mourn over sin and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The particular form of meekness which Christ requires in his disciples will surely have something to do with this sequence. I believe Dr Lloyd-Jones is right to emphasize that this meekness denotes a humble and gentle attitude to others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves.”

<sup>17</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (London: IVP, 1972), 1:68.

<sup>18</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 1:65) writes: “[H]ere we are reaching a point at which we begin to be concerned about other people. Let me put it like this. I can see my own utter nothingness and helplessness face to face with the demands of the gospel and the law of God. I am aware, when I am honest with myself, of the sin and the evil that are within me, and that drag me down. And I am ready to face both these things. But how much more difficult it is to allow other people to say things like that about me! I instinctively resent it. We all of us prefer to condemn ourselves than to allow somebody else to condemn us. I say of myself that I am a sinner, but instinctively I do not like anybody else to say I am a sinner. That is the principle that is introduced at this point. So far, I myself have been looking at myself. Now, other people are looking at me, and I am in a relationship to them, and they are doing certain things to me. How do I react to that? That is the matter which is dealt with at this point. I think you will agree that this is more humbling and more humiliating than everything that has gone before. It is to allow other people to put the searchlight upon me instead of my doing it myself.”

Think about how much of our lives we spend in self-pity or prideful frustration about what others said or did to us. But the meek person stops feeling sorry for himself and stops trying to prove how good and capable he is.

That's how he *once* lived, but in Christ, he's done with all that. Christ's disciples know they don't deserve anything, so they're thankful for everything.<sup>19</sup>

And to those who know they deserve nothing, Jesus gives a surprising assurance: "they shall inherit the earth"—that is, the new heavens and new earth when Christ returns. They don't *earn* it, but they *inherit* it through faith in Christ, who has all authority in heaven and on earth and gives it freely to all those who belong to him.

<pause>

The fourth mark of Christ's disciples is in verse 6.

<sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Matthew uses "righteousness" to mean "a pattern of life in conformity to God's will."<sup>20</sup> That's why, earlier in chapter 3, Jesus told John the Baptist to baptize him in order for them "to fulfill all righteousness"—to obey God's will.

So here, Christ's disciples don't look at their sins and shrug, "It is what it is," but they *desperately* desire to live in conformity to God's will.

Consider the verbs Jesus uses—*hunger* and *thirst*.

Hunger is *painful*. Thirst makes your mouth dry and your head *ache*. The longer they go unsatisfied, the more desperate you become.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 1:69) writes: "[T]he man who is meek is not even sensitive about himself. He is not always watching himself and his own interests. He is not always on the defensive. We all know about this, do we not? Is it not one of the greatest curses in life as a result of the fall—this sensitivity about self? We spend the whole of our lives watching ourselves. But when a man becomes meek he has finished with all that; he no longer worries about himself and what other people say. To be truly meek means we no longer protect ourselves, because we see there is nothing worth defending. So we are not on the defensive; all that is gone. The man who is truly meek never pities himself, he is never sorry for himself. He never talks to himself and says, 'You are having a hard time, how unkind these people are not to understand you'. He never thinks: 'How wonderful I really am, if only other people gave me a chance.' Self-pity! What hours and years we waste in this! But the man who has become meek has finished with all that. To be meek, in other words, means that you have finished with yourself altogether, and you come to see you have no rights or deserts at all. You come to realize that nobody can harm you. John Bunyan puts it perfectly. 'He that is down need fear no fall.' When a man truly sees himself, he knows nobody can say anything about him that is too bad. You need not worry about what men may say or do; you know you deserve it all and more. Once again, therefore, I would define meekness like this. The man who is truly meek is the one who is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do. That, it seems to me, is its essential quality."

<sup>20</sup> D. A. Carson (*The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 22) writes: "What is this righteousness which we must thus pursue? ... Now, however, those who have studied Matthew's use of the term increasingly recognize that "righteousness" here (and also in verses 10 and 20) means a pattern of life in conformity to God's will. Righteousness thus includes within its semantic range all the derivative or specialized meanings, but cannot be reduced to any one of them. The person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, then, hungers and thirsts for conformity to God's will. He is not drifting aimlessly in a sea of empty religiosity; still less is he puttering about distracted by inconsequential trivia. Rather, his whole being echoes the prayer of a certain Scottish saint who cried, "O God, make me just as holy as a pardoned sinner can be!" His delight is the Word of God, for where else is God's will, to which he hungers to be conformed, so clearly set forth? He wants to be righteous, not simply because he fears God, but because righteousness has become for him the most eminently desirable thing in the world."

<sup>21</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 1:80-81) writes: "'Hunger' and 'thirst'; these are not passing feelings. Hunger is something deep and profound that goes on until it is satisfied. It hurts, it is painful; it is like actual, physical hunger and thirst. It is something that goes on increasing and makes one feel desperate. It is something that causes suffering and agony.... The Psalmist has summed it up perfectly in a classical phrase: 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.' He is hungering and thirsting after Him—that is it. Let me quote some words of the great J. N. Darby which I think put this exceedingly well. He says, 'To be hungry is not enough; I must be really starving to know what is in His heart towards me.' Then comes the perfect statement of the whole thing. He says, 'When the prodigal son was hungry he went to feed upon husks, but when he was starving, he turned to his father.' Now that is the whole position. To hunger and thirst really means to be desperate, to be starving, to feel life is ebbing out, to realize my urgent need of help. 'Hungering and thirsting after righteousness'—'as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth—so thirsteth—my soul after thee, O God.'"

Except the hunger and thirst here is not for food and water—it's for a life lived in conformity to God's will.

Of this beatitude, Martyn Lloyd-Jones says this:

“I do not know of a better test that anyone can apply to himself or herself in this whole matter of the Christian profession than a verse like this. If this verse is to you one of the most blessed statements of the whole of Scripture you can be quite certain you are a Christian; if it is not, then you had better examine the foundations again.”<sup>22</sup>

If we hunger and thirst to live according to God's *will*, then we will naturally delight in God's *word*—for *that* is where God's will is made known.<sup>23</sup>

And the assurance given is that “they shall be satisfied”—fully on that final day, but even now there is a real joy in living a life that pleases our heavenly Father.<sup>24</sup>

Ask yourself: What am I hungering and thirsting for? Money? Love? Success? Pleasure? Approval?

The teacher in Ecclesiastes had all those things and called it all *vanity*—fleeting, meaningless, never enough.<sup>25</sup>

True satisfaction is found in hungering and thirsting for *righteousness*.

<pause>

The fifth mark of Christ's disciples is in verse 7.

<sup>7</sup> “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Part of conforming our lives to God's will is being *merciful* to others.

Mercy can be understood as “a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness of [others].”<sup>26</sup>

Christ's disciples do not move *away* from the misery of others—they move *towards* them, because that's exactly how Christ has dealt with them.

<sup>22</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (London: IVP, 1972), 1:74.

<sup>23</sup> D. A. Carson (*The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 22) writes: The person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, then, hungers and thirsts for conformity to God's will. He is not drifting aimlessly in a sea of empty religiosity; still less is he puttering about distracted by inconsequential trivia. Rather, his whole being echoes the prayer of a certain Scottish saint who cried, “O God, make me just as holy as a pardoned sinner can be!” His delight is the Word of God, for where else is God's will, to which he hungers to be conformed, so clearly set forth? He wants to be righteous, not simply because he fears God, but because righteousness has become for him the most eminently desirable thing in the world.”

<sup>24</sup> D. A. Carson (*The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 23) writes: “This does not mean that the person is now so satisfied with the righteousness given him that his hunger and thirst for righteousness are forever vanquished. Elsewhere, Jesus does in fact argue along such line: “Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.... I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 4:14; 6:35). So there is a sense in which we are satisfied with Jesus and all he is and provides. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which we continue to be unsatisfied. An example from Paul makes this paradox understandable. Paul can testify, “I *know* whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day (II Tim. 1:12); but he can also say, “I *want to know* Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...” (Phil. 3:10). In other words, Paul has come to know Christ, but knowing him, he wants to know him better. In a similar way, the person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness is blessed by God, and filled; but the righteousness with which he is filled is so wonderful that he hungers and thirsts for more of it. This built-in cycle of growth is easy to understand as soon as we remember that righteousness in this text refers not to obeying some rules, but to conformity to all of God's will. The more a person pursues conformity to God's will, the more attractive the goal becomes, and the greater the advances made.”

<sup>25</sup> Bobby Jamieson, *Everything is Never Enough* (New York: Waterbrook, 2025), 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> D. A. Carson (*The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 23-24) writes: “What is mercy? How does it differ from grace? The two terms are frequently synonymous; but where there is a distinction between the two, it appears that grace is a loving response when love is undeserved, and mercy is a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness of the one on whom the love is to be showered. Grace answers to the undeserving; mercy answers to the miserable.”

As one commentator puts it, “[T]o be meek is to acknowledge to others that *we* are sinners; to be *merciful* is to have compassion on others, for *they* are sinners too.”<sup>27</sup>

Showing mercy to others does not *earn* God’s mercy for us—remember, we are spiritually bankrupt and cannot merit it.

Rather, showing mercy is *evidence* that we have *already* experienced God’s mercy in Christ.

Think about the relationships you have among your family members, co-workers, friends, and church members.

And ask yourself: Is there someone struggling right now that I’m consciously not reaching out to?

It’s easy to rationalize: “I’m *always* the one who initiates. Somebody else *will*—or *should*—do it. I have enough going on in my life right now.”

But you don’t need to solve all their problems to show that you care. A message, a conversation, a prayer, a visit—these often mean more to those who are struggling than you realize.

Like our merciful God, we move *towards* the misery of others.

<pause>

The sixth mark of Christ’s disciples is in verse 8.

<sup>8</sup> “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

The acts of mercy we do are not just merely *external*, but they flow from a *pure heart*.

To be “pure in heart” carries *two* related meanings.

First, Christ’s disciples are not to be “whitewashed tombs” (Matt. 23:27)—*appearing* righteous on the *outside*, while dead and unclean on the *inside*.

Rather, their holiness is to flow from their *hearts*—the control center of the whole person—for out of the *heart* flow the springs of everything we speak and do (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 12:34; 15:19).

Second, to be “pure in heart” means to be single-mindedly devoted to God.

Psalms 24 says that the one with a “pure heart... does not lift up his soul to what is false” (Ps. 24:4)—that is, he does not pursue after idols.<sup>28</sup>

These two are related because *only* those who are single-mindedly devoted to God will be inwardly pure, doing righteous acts not out of *hypocrisy* but out of a *heart* that truly loves him.

And the assurance they have is that “they shall see God.” And for the one who is wholeheartedly devoted to him, there is no greater reward. We see him now *by faith*; but on that final day, we will see him in all his glory *by sight*.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 48.

<sup>28</sup> The psalmist prays in Psalm 86, “[U]nite my heart to fear your name. I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever” (Ps. 86:11-12).

<sup>29</sup> D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 134-135) writes: “Some take it to mean inner moral purity as opposed to merely external piety or ceremonial cleanness. This is an important theme in Matthew and elsewhere in the Scriptures (e.g., Deut 10:16; 30:6; 1 Sam 15:22; Pss 24:3-4 [to which there is direct allusion here]; 51:6, 10; Isa 1:10-17; Jer 4:4; 7:3-7; 9:25-26; Rom 2:9; 1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 2:22, cf. Matt 23:25-28). Others take it to mean singlemindedness, a heart “free from the tyranny of a divided self” (Tasker; cf. Bonnard). Several of the passages just cited focus on freedom from deceit (Pss 24:4; 51:4-17; cf. also Gen 50:5-6; Prov 22:11). This interpretation also prepares the way for Mt 6:22. The “pure in heart” are thus “the utterly sincere” (Ph). The dichotomy between these two options is a false one; it is impossible to have one without the other. The one who is singleminded in commitment to the kingdom and its righteousness (6:33) will also be inwardly pure. Inward sham, deceit, and moral filth cannot coexist with sincere devotion to Christ. Either way this beatitude excoriates

What makes it difficult to be pure in heart is the heart's tendency to be "a perpetual idol factory" (John Calvin). There are always competing desires threatening our single-minded devotion. But even when such desires push the Christian off course, his heart's true north is always God.

In essence, that's *repentance*. The whole Christian life is one of continually turning *away* from the idols of our hearts and turning *back* toward God in faith.

The goal is not purity for its own sake, but the goal is *God*—we want to *see God*. As our desires for God *grow*, our desires for idols slowly *die*. That's *sanctification*. And it's a *certainty* for every Christian.

So if you're struggling with sin right now, I'd encourage you to share it with another Christian brother or sister. There's no need to struggle alone. God has given us the church to walk alongside us as fellow pilgrims toward our heavenly home—where we will all see God together.

<pause>

The seventh mark of Christ's disciples is in verse 9.

<sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

When we think of peacemaking, perhaps we *first* think about dealing with *interpersonal* conflict. But our biggest conflict is not with *people* but with *God*.

That's what the first few beatitudes have been helping us to see. We've sinned against God and we ought to mourn our sins. We deserve his wrath rather than his mercy.

But praise *God* that he makes peace with sinful man through the blood of Christ.

That is the most *fundamental* peace we *all* need—to be *forgiven* and *reconciled* with God.

So, being a peacemaker ought to include us helping others make peace with *God*. In other words, we ought to be *evangelists*.

Whenever we *evangelize*—or proclaim the gospel to persuade others to put their trust in Jesus—we are *imitating* our heavenly Father, who is the *ultimate* peacemaker.

"They shall be called sons of God" means that others will see the family resemblance.

But "peacemaking" goes *beyond* evangelism—it *does* also means resolving conflict with *others*. Ephesians 2 says, "[Christ] himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14).

So we *also* imitate God's character when we do all we can to kill hostility between one another by resolving conflicts well.

This flows from being "pure in heart," because only a person who is single-mindedly devoted to *God* will willingly endure the pain of rejection, of rebuking, of listening, of being misunderstood, of apologizing—when he could simply avoid it.

As with God, being a peacemaker always costs something.<sup>30</sup>

---

hypocrisy (cf. on 6:1–18). The pure in heart will see God—now with the eyes of faith and finally in the dazzling brilliance of the beatific vision in whose light no deceit can exist (cf. Heb 12:14; 1 John 3:1–3; Rev 21:22–27)."

<sup>30</sup> John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 51-52) writes: "This will remind us that the words 'peace' and 'appeasement' are not synonyms. For the peace of God is not peace at any price. He made peace with us at immense cost, even at the price of the life-blood of his only Son. We too—though in our lesser ways—will find peacemaking a costly enterprise. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has made us familiar with the concept of 'cheap grace'; there is such a thing as 'cheap peace' also. To proclaim 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace, is the work of the false prophet, not the Christian witness. Many examples could be given of peace through pain. When we are ourselves involved in a quarrel, there will be either the pain of apologizing to the person we have injured or the pain of rebuking the person who has injured us. Sometimes there is the

To be clear, there's a world of difference between being a *peacekeeper* and a *peacemaker*.

A *peacekeeper* tries to keep the so-called "peace" by avoiding conflict—ignoring problems and hoping they'll be forgotten.

But a *peacemaker* sometimes has to break the false "peace" by initiating hard conversations, listening well, and addressing root problems.

Peacekeeping *seems* easier in the moment but creates far *harder* problems later. Every unresolved conflict is a brick laid until there's a wall—and walls are far more daunting to remove.

Peacemaking removes each brick as it's laid. It requires more effort in the *short-run*, but it makes relationships far *easier* and more *enjoyable* in the *long-run*.

<pause>

The eighth mark of Christ's disciples is in verse 10.

<sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Persecution is the inevitable result of a *counter-cultural* life that runs against the grain of this world.<sup>31</sup>

It shows that *though* we are *in* the world, we are not *of* the world (John 17:14-16)—that we've been transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of the beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

Notice that the first and last beatitudes carry the same assurance—"theirs is the kingdom of heaven"—*bookending* all eight beatitudes and *confirming* that they come as a complete package for what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom.<sup>32</sup>

---

nagging pain of having to refuse to forgive the guilty party until he repents. Of course a cheap peace can be bought by cheap forgiveness. But true peace and true forgiveness are costly treasures. God forgives us only when we repent. Jesus told us to do the same: 'If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him' [Luke 17:3]. How can we forgive an injury when it is neither admitted nor regretted? Or again, we may not be personally involved in a dispute, but may find ourselves struggling to reconcile to each other two people or groups who are estranged and at variance with each other. In this case there will be the pain of listening, of ridding ourselves of prejudice, of striving sympathetically to understand both the opposing points of view, and of risking misunderstanding, ingratitude or failure. Other examples of peacemaking are the work of reunion and the work of evangelism, that is, seeking on the one hand to unite churches and on the other to bring sinners to Christ. In both these, true reconciliation can be degraded into cheap peace. The visible unity of the church is a proper Christian quest, but only if unity is not sought at the expense of doctrine. Jesus prayed for the oneness of his people. He also prayed that they might be kept from evil and in truth. We have no mandate from Christ to seek unity without purity, purity of both doctrine and conduct. If there is such a thing as 'cheap reunion', there is 'cheap evangelism' also, namely the proclamation of the gospel without the cost of discipleship, the demand for faith without repentance. These are forbidden short cuts. They turn the evangelist into a fraud. They cheapen the gospel and damage the cause of Christ."

<sup>31</sup> John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 52) writes: "Not all attempts at reconciliation succeed. Indeed, some take the initiative to oppose us, and in particular to 'revile' or slander us. This is not because of our foibles or idiosyncracies, but 'for righteousness' sake' (10) and 'on my account' (11), that is, because they find distasteful the righteousness for which we hunger and thirst (6), and because they have rejected the Christ we seek to follow. Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems." D. A. Carson ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 135-136) writes: "It is no accident that Jesus should pass from peacemaking to persecution, for the world enjoys its cherished hates and prejudices so much that the peacemaker is not always welcome. Opposition is a normal mark of being a disciple of Jesus, as normal as hungering for righteousness or being merciful (cf. also John 15:18-25; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Peter 4:13-14; cf. the woe in Luke 6:26)."

<sup>32</sup> John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 52-53) writes: "It is important to notice that this reference to persecution is a beatitude like the rest. Indeed, it has the distinction of being a double beatitude, for Jesus first stated it in the third person like the other seven (Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, 10) and then repeated it in the direct speech of the second person (Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you ..., 11). Since all the beatitudes describe what every Christian disciple is intended to be, we conclude that the condition of being despised and rejected, slandered and persecuted, is as much a normal mark of Christian discipleship as being pure in heart or merciful. Every Christian is to be a peacemaker, and every Christian is to expect opposition. Those who hunger for righteousness will suffer for the righteousness they crave. Jesus said so both here and elsewhere. So did his apostles Peter and Paul [E.g., John 15:18-25; 1 Pet. 4:13, 14; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12]. It has been so in every age. We should not be surprised if anti-Christian hostility increases, but rather be surprised if it does not. We need to remember the complementary woe which Luke records: 'Woe to

*Knowing* that this last beatitude is probably the hardest to accept, it's the *only* one that Jesus expands on.

Look at verses 11-12.

[<sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.]

For the first time, he switches from *third* person to *second* person—from "Blessed are *those*" to "Blessed are *you*."

It's as if Jesus locks eyes with the disciples sitting right in front of him and addresses them directly.

Notice a few things here.

First, being persecuted "for *righteousness*' sake" and being persecuted "on *my* account" are parallel—which means that living in conformity to *God's* will is synonymous with living for *Jesus*.

Also, in verse 12, if the *prophets* suffered for *God* and his disciples are to suffer for *him*, then *Jesus* is placing himself in the position of *God*.<sup>33</sup>

Second, in verse 11, Jesus doesn't focus on *extreme* persecution like imprisonment and death, but on *everyday* negative *speech* and *attitudes* towards his disciples—a co-worker's sarcastic comment about your faith, a family member's opposition to you getting baptized, a friend who quietly distances himself from you.

Third, Jesus calls his disciples to "rejoice and be glad" in the midst of such persecution for two explicit reasons.

"Your reward is great in heaven." Or look *forward*. Even if we lose every *temporal* thing on earth, we will inherit every *eternal* thing in heaven.<sup>34</sup>

And "they persecuted the prophets who were *before* you." Or look *backward*. Throughout history, all of God's people have experienced this. Persecution is not a mark of God's *displeasure*; it is a mark of his *blessing*.<sup>35</sup>

---

you, when all men speak well of you' [Luke 6:26]. Universal popularity was as much the lot of the false prophets as persecution was of the true."

<sup>33</sup> D. A. Carson ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 137) writes: "Verse 11 extends the persecution of v. 10 to include insult, persecution, and slander (Luke 6:22–23 adds hate). The reason for the persecution in Mt 5:10 is "because of righteousness"; now, Jesus says, it is "because of me." "This confirms that the righteousness of life that is in view is in imitation of Jesus. Simultaneously, it so identifies the disciple of Jesus with the practice of Jesus' righteousness that there is no place for professed allegiance to Jesus that is not full of righteousness" (Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 28). Moreover, it is an implicit christological claim, for the prophets to whom the disciples are likened were persecuted for their faithfulness to God and the disciples for faithfulness to Jesus. Not Jesus but the disciples are likened to the prophets. Jesus places himself on a par with God. The change from "the Son of Man" (Luke) to "me" is probably Matthew's clarification (see excursus at 8:20)."

<sup>34</sup> This doesn't mean that the more we endure persecution now, the greater reward we will have later. Remember again the first beatitude—we merit nothing for ourselves, but even the reward we receive in heaven is given graciously for our heavenly Father, and he assures us that it will be more satisfying than any loss or suffering we experience in this life. Jesus will later exhort his disciples, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

<sup>35</sup> D. A. Carson ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 137) writes: "These verses neither encourage seeking persecution nor permit retreating from it, sulking, or retaliation. From the perspective of both redemptive history ("the prophets") and eternity ("reward in heaven"), these verses constitute the reasonable response of faith, one which the early Christians readily understood (cf. Acts 5:41; 2 Cor 4:17; 1 Peter 1:6–9; cf. Dan 3:24–25). "Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact it is a joy and a token of his grace" (Bonhoeffer, pp.

If we *never* experience any such persecution, then we ought to examine the *genuineness* of our faith—for Jesus said, “If you were *of* the world, the world would *love* you as its own; but because you are *not* of the world, but I chose you *out* of the world, therefore the world *hates* you” (John 15:19).

We praise God for living in a city that protects religious liberty, so that persecution is *mild* compared to what it could be. Yet we know that’s not always the case, so we especially pray for our brothers and sisters in nations where persecution is far more *severe*.

In verses 11-12, the “you” throughout is *plural* in the original language—meaning “you all.” We’re not meant to face persecution alone. By God’s grace, none of us faces it in isolation, but we help one another persevere until the end, reminding each another that in Christ, “*ours* is the kingdom of heaven.”

<pause>

So those are the eight beatitudes. They were *revolutionary* when Jesus first taught them, and they remain *transformative* for all who are marked by them—because all of them are in direct *conflict* with the values of this world.<sup>36</sup>

I’d encourage you regularly reflect and pray through the beatitudes, and ask yourself: Do these eight marks characterize *me*? Or do I resemble more of the *world’s* values and standards?

This would be a great conversation to have with others later today or later this week. Ask those who know you well whether they see these marks in your life, and encourage one another as you see them marked by these beatitudes.

Those the world *pities* and *persecutes* are those that Jesus *congratulates* and calls *blessed*.<sup>37</sup>

And that is *exactly* why Christ’s disciples will have such profound *effects* on the world—which is what Jesus addresses next.

<pause>

So first, eight marks of Christ’s disciples; and second...

## II. Two effects of Christ’s disciples (vv. 13-16)

Look at verses 13-16.

[<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the

---

80–81). But in reassuring his disciples that their sufferings are “neither new, nor accidental, nor absurd” (Bonnard), Jesus spoke of principles that will appear again (esp. Matthew chs. 10, 24).”

<sup>36</sup> John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 54) writes: “Yet in all this the values and standards of Jesus are in direct conflict with the commonly accepted values and standards of the world. The world judges the rich to be blessed, not the poor, whether in the material or in the spiritual sphere; the happy-go-lucky and carefree, not those who take evil so seriously that they mourn over it; the strong and brash, not the meek and gentle; the full not the hungry; those who mind their own business, not those who meddle in other men’s matters and occupy their time in do-goodery like ‘showing mercy’ and ‘making peace’; those who attain their ends even if necessary by devious means, not the pure in heart who refuse to compromise their integrity; those who are secure and popular, and live at ease, not those who have to suffer persecution.”

<sup>37</sup> John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 56) writes: “Such a reversal of human values is basic to biblical religion. The ways of the God of Scripture appear topsy-turvy to men. For God exalts the humble and abases the proud, calls the first last and the last first, ascribes greatness to the servant, sends the rich away empty-handed and declares the meek to be his heirs. The culture of the world and the counter-culture of Christ are at loggerheads with each other. In brief, Jesus congratulates those whom the world most pities, and calls the world’s rejects ‘blessed’.”

same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.]

Jesus gives *two* parallel metaphors—salt and light—for the *effects* that Christ’s disciples are to have in the world.

For each, Jesus first *affirms* the influence of his disciples—“You are the salt of the earth” and “You are the light of the world.” He then adds a *condition* to their influence—salt is only effective if it’s salty, and light is only effective if it’s visible.<sup>38</sup>

Now let’s look at each of them more closely.

In verse 13, salt’s *primary* use in the ancient world was as a preservative. In an age without refrigeration, the way to prevent meat from slowly decaying was to rub salt into it.

So Jesus is saying that his disciples are to have a *preserving* effect on the world. Their presence—as they are marked by the beatitudes—prevents the slow decay or corruption of the world.

Christians restrain evil, so that the world will not be as bad as it could be.

Technically, salt cannot lose its saltiness, but it *can* become *contaminated by impurities*—which often happened in that time. And being more soluble than the impurities, the salt would wash out, leaving a substance that *looked* like salt but neither tasted nor acted like it.<sup>39</sup> It was good for nothing but to be “thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.”

If Christ’s disciples become contaminated by the world and their distinctive marks are washed out, they become useless. They no longer *restrain* the world’s corruption, but they *participate* in it.

But Jesus goes one step further. He says that his disciples are not only to *restrain* the world’s corruption (or *darkness*); they are to *radiate* God’s *light*.

In verses 14-15, light’s purpose is only realized when it can be *seen*. In an age without electricity, darkness was pitch black.

“A city set on a hill cannot be hidden” because even if there were only candle lights and lamps in the city, *against* the backdrop of utter darkness, its light would be visible for miles around.

<sup>38</sup> John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 59) writes: “When we look at the two metaphors more closely, we see that they are deliberately phrased in order to be parallel to each other. In each case Jesus first makes an affirmation (‘You are the salt of the earth,’ ‘You are the light of the world’). Then he adds a rider, the condition on which the affirmation depends (the salt must retain its saltiness, the light must be allowed to shine). Salt is good for nothing if its saltiness is lost; light is good for nothing if it is concealed.”

<sup>39</sup> Daniel M. Doriani (“Matthew” in *Matthew-Luke*, ESVEC, vol. 8 [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021]) writes: “The pattern changes from ‘Blessed are’ to ‘You are,’ but the theme continues. Since salt retards decay, ‘You are . . . salt’ means that disciples restrain moral and spiritual decay (v. 13). Still, to impede decay, salt must stay pure. In Jesus’ day, salt was often impure, making it tasteless and worthless. The point, therefore, is that disciples must live by kingdom values if they hope to impede the immorality of their age.” D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 138) writes: “Salt was used in the ancient world to flavor foods and even in small doses as a fertilizer (cf. Eugene P. Deatrick, ‘Salt, Soil, Savor,’ BA 25 [1962]: 44–45, who wants *tês gês* to read ‘for the soil,’ not ‘of the earth’; but notice the parallel ‘of the world’ in Mt 5:14). Above all, salt was used as a preservative. Rubbed into meat, a little salt would slow decay. Strictly speaking salt cannot lose its saltiness; sodium chloride is a stable compound. But most salt in the ancient world derived from salt marshes or the like, rather than by evaporation of salt water, and therefore contained many impurities. The actual salt, being more soluble than the impurities, could be leached out, leaving a residue so dilute it was of little worth.” John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 59–60) writes: “The effectiveness of salt, however, is conditional: it must retain its saltiness. Now, strictly speaking, salt can never lose its saltiness. I am given to understand that sodium chloride is a very stable chemical compound, which is resistant to nearly every attack. Nevertheless, it can become contaminated by mixture with impurities, and then it becomes useless, even dangerous. Desalted salt is unfit even for manure, i.e. the compost heap. Dr David Turk has suggested to me that what was then popularly called ‘salt’ was in fact a white powder (perhaps from around the Dead Sea) which, while containing sodium chloride, also contained much else, since, in those days, there were no refineries. Of this dust the sodium chloride was probably the most soluble component and so the most easily washed out. The residue of white powder still looked like salt, and was doubtless still called salt, but it neither tasted nor acted like salt. It was just road dust.”

And in a house, nobody lights a lamp and then *hides* it, but it is placed to give *maximal* light. If you hide it, everyone remains in darkness and the lamp is useless.

In verse 16, Jesus explains that his disciples' *light* consists of their "good works." In context, that's "everything a Christian says and does because he is a Christian, every outward and visible manifestation of his Christian faith."<sup>40</sup> It's what was described in the beatitudes.

Such good works are *meant* to be seen, but they are not *done* to be seen. Christ's disciples don't want anyone focusing on *their* little light, but on the *source* of all light—desiring that others "give glory to [their] Father who is in heaven."

When Christ's disciples live out who they are—remaining *distinct* from the world—they not only hold *back* the darkness, but they bring people *out* of it.

But both metaphors of salt and light are *conditioned* on their *distinctiveness*.

In other words, a Christian's *usefulness* in the world depends on being *different* from the world.

<pause>

This is one reason that every church ought to be clear about who its members are—because church membership declares to that person and to the world, "To the best of our ability, we affirm that this person is a Christian."

When that line is blurred—whether through intentional attempts to be "seeker-sensitive" or simply through poor membership practices—the church becomes a mixed body of believers and unbelievers.

It loses its saltiness. Its light dims and eventually goes out entirely.

The church is meant to be a *distinct* community whose values run counter to the world's—and church membership is meant to protect that, so we can truly be salt and light in the world.

<pause>

As each of us go out into the world throughout the week, let's ask ourselves:

- Am I preserving others from corruption, or am I engaging in it?
- Am I shining the light of Christ, or am I hiding Christ from others?

Never underestimate a *Christian's* presence in the home and in the workplace.

And never underestimate a *church's* presence in the community and in the world.

Rodney Stark, a sociologist who was not a believer when he wrote *The Rise of Christianity*, argues that Christianity grew by 40% every decade for the first three centuries largely because Christians were simply being Christians in the world. He writes this:

Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world....

Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of societal relationships able to cope with many urgent problems. To cities filled with homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers

---

<sup>40</sup> John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 61) writes: "What this light is Jesus clarifies as our 'good works'. Let men once see your good works, he said, and they will give glory to your Father who is in heaven, for it is by such good works that our light is to shine. It seems that 'good works' is a general expression to cover everything a Christian says and does because he is a Christian, every outward and visible manifestation of his Christian faith. Since light is a common biblical symbol of truth, a Christian's shining light must surely include his spoken testimony. Thus, the Old Testament prophecy that God's Servant would be 'a light to the nations' is said to have been fulfilled not only in Christ himself, the light of the world, but also by Christians who bear witness to Christ [Isa. 42:6; 49:6; Luke. 2:32; Acts 26:23; 13:47]. Evangelism must be counted as one of the 'good works' by which our light shines and our Father is glorified."

and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachment. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fire, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services....

What they brought was not simply an urban movement, but a new culture capable of making life in Greco-Roman cities tolerable.<sup>41</sup>

As Christ's disciples, "we are not to conceal the truth we know or the truth of what we are."<sup>42</sup>

Jesus is not calling us to be anything other than what he has already made us to be.

Remember, Jesus didn't say "I *will make* you salt and light" but "You *are* the salt of the earth" and "You *are* the light of the world."

The call is simply to be our true selves—"openly living the life described in the beatitudes, and not ashamed of Christ."<sup>43</sup>

To be salt and light is a profound *freedom* and *privilege*—*freedom* from the fear of man, and the *privilege* to influence the world in a far more meaningful way than we ever could through our own smaller ambitions.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord has placed each of us in specific families, workplaces, and neighborhoods. Consider what opportunities he's given you there to restrain darkness and radiate light.

Christians completely changed the Greco-Roman world simply by being Christians. What might God do with all our little lights here in the largest city in the world—simply by being unashamed, distinct Christians?

## Conclusion

As we close, I want us to see that these eight marks and two effects of Christ's disciples are not a list of things to do, but they show us who *Christ* is and what *he* has *already* done in all who truly belong to him.

Seven of the eight beatitudes are later attributed to *Jesus* himself.<sup>44</sup> The *only* one that is *not* attributed to him is being *poor in spirit*—because that's *not* true of him, and that's *exactly* what qualifies him to be our Savior.

The gospel (or good news) is this: even though all of us have sinned against God—spiritually bankrupt in his sight and rightfully deserving his judgment—he came in the person of Jesus Christ to take on our punishment and give us his righteousness.

He who was spiritually rich chose to become poor, so that we who are poor might become spiritually rich in him (2 Cor. 8:9).

<sup>41</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociology Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), quoted in Hugh Whelchel, "Let These Stories of Christians Shaping Culture Inspire Your Work Today," January 27, 2017, <https://tifwe.org/christians-shaping-culture-inspire-your-work>.

<sup>42</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 62. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Touchstone, 1995], 118) put it more bluntly: "Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him."

<sup>43</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 62.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel M. Doriani ("Matthew" in *Matthew-Luke*, ESEV, vol. 8 [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021]) writes: "The Beatitudes also align closely with Matthew's portrait of Jesus. Seven of the eight beatitudes cite traits that Matthew later ascribes to Jesus, typically using the same Greek terms. Jesus repeatedly says that a disciple should be like his master (Matt. 10:24–25; Luke 6:40; John 13:16; 15:20). So Jesus blesses those who mourn (Matt. 5:4), and Jesus mourns over Israel (9:36; 23:37). Jesus blesses the meek (5:5), and he is meek (11:29). Likewise, Jesus pursues righteousness (5:6; 3:15) and shows mercy (5:7; 9:27–29; 20:30–34). He also grants and exhorts purity (5:8; 8:3–4; 23:25–26), offers peace (5:9; 10:13), and endures persecution (5:10–11; 26:47–27:44). Thus Jesus blesses disciples whose character conforms to his. Matthew frequently explores the way Jesus fulfills, and the disciples participate in, the Beatitudes."

He accomplished this through his death on the cross on our behalf and his resurrection three days later.

And all who repent of their sins and believe in him alone as their King and Savior are *forgiven* their sins, *united* to him, and *blessed* as citizens of his kingdom.

Let's pray.