

## “Back to School with Jesus: It’s Going to be Great!”

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12

Graphics: back to school, paper, books, backpack

Big Truth: The Sermon on the Mount is essential teaching for the Christian life and the promise of blessing that comes through poverty of spirit and mourning which are the key foundation of the sermon. It’s great to learn the words of Jesus and even be able to recite them, as we share the good news. However, Jesus calls us to not only know the words and The Word, but to put those words into practice as we love and serve the world in Jesus’ name. Let’s go back to school with Jesus. Whether you are young or old, there is always something to learn so that you can put it into practice.

Focus Phrase: It’s going to be great, not just when Jesus returns, but here and now because he will!

### 1. Introduction

- A. We’re going **Back to School with Jesus!**
- B. If you missed the first message in the series, I encourage you to go back and watch or read that online. Here’s what we learned:
  - i. Since we’re getting ready to back to school, first, **Jesus is our Master Teacher**. He has authority to teach. He has direct connection with the Father. He IS what He taught - the Word of God made flesh - He IS the messenger AND the means.
  - ii. Second, it’s not that we simply learn what Jesus has to teach us, but that we **put it into practice**. Jesus taught in Word and Deed, and we’re called to learn and do, for Jesus’ sake.
  - iii. Finally, as a caution, what we’re learning from Jesus is counter-cultural. Jesus was and is counter-cultural. What we will DO with what we learn will be counter-cultural. That’s what we’re called to be and do...to worship, love, and witness to this Jesus who taught what appeared to be the opposite of what the world teaches.
- C. And NO WHERE is that more evident than in our scripture text for today from the Sermon of the Mount better known as **The Beatitudes**.
- D. Jesus, our Master Teacher, sat down one day on a mountainside to teach His disciples and others. And what he taught them was not algebra or language arts, as important as those are.
- E. What Jesus taught those on that mountainside that day was about **the reality of the coming Kingdom of God**, in which all those who follow Jesus by faith will experience blessing, freedom, wholeness, and mission.
- F. This section of the Sermon on the Mount gives us all a picture of what God sees when He looks at Jesus and the Kingdom that Jesus is ushering in.

- G. And, if Jesus were standing here today teaching us the Beatitudes, what He would start with and end with would be, “Listen Church, it’s Going to the Great!” That’s the title of this message.
- H. As we begin a new school year for our local schools and colleges, and Sunday School, and WE go back to school with Jesus, we can turn to each other and say, “It’s going to be great!” (In fact, turn to your neighbor and say just that.)
- I. Now...as you were saying that, I KNOW there was just a little doubt in your minds about that declaration. It could be that you’ve read the Beatitudes and you KNOW that what Jesus had to say was and is challenging. It may be that you HAVEN’T read the Beatitudes in a while and you aren’t sure what to expect. That’s all fair. See, we can try to assure each other that what Jesus taught is going to be great, but we must LIVE it to actually find out.
- J. When our son Ben started kindergarten, we lived on the opposite side of town from the school.
- i. That meant that Ben had to get on the bus early in the morning to get to school. There’s nothing scarier to parents than putting your 5-year-old on the bus for the first time, alone, with that huge backpack, compared to his little body, and waving goodbye through held-back tears. Just minutes prior, as you were walking to the end of the driveway, nervously awaiting the bus to appear down the road, you said some version of, “Don’t worry...it’s going to be GREAT!”
  - ii. We SORT OF BELIEVED it, but we waved goodbye and as the bus drove away, we turned and went back into the house for a good cry.
  - iii. Fast-forward to the afternoon on the first day of kindergarten for Ben, when that same bus came down the road and dropped off our sweet little boy. As Stacy approached the bus door to greet Ben, she noticed something odd as he stepped off the bus. Ben had a giant red goose egg on his forehead. What the heck happened?! She was concerned and wanted some answers.
  - iv. Upon questioning, Ben said that one of the older kids on the bus had convinced him to put his change purse against the window of the bus and then place his head onto said change purse. At that moment, this older child - who is probably in jail, we assume - removed the change purse, and pushed Ben’s head into the window. Thus, the goose egg.
  - v. We told him, “It’s going to be GREAT!” Really?! “You’ll have a blast at school,” we said. Yeah right! In the end, we never really figured out who did it, but there was enough questioning on the bus that whichever delinquent did it didn’t do it again. Bless his heart!
  - vi. Why am I telling you this story?

- a. First, things aren't always as perfect as we hope they will be in this world and in the walk of Faith as believers. In fact, rarely to never do our lives turn out the way we hoped.
  - b. Second, each of us will go through hardships that shape our future.
  - c. But third, even though this world is a mess, the Kingdom that's coming is NOT...It's Going to be Great! And, in fact, because of Jesus, IT IS currently GREAT. Our calling is to live into the greatness of the kingdom now and in the future.
- vii. Write this down: **It's going to be great, not just when Jesus returns, but here and now because he will!**
- K. Today, we're going to learn from our Master Teacher about the Kingdom of God...which will then lead us to our next few lessons about the response we have NOW to the Kingdom of God breaking in through Jesus.
- L. Let's pray and then take our seats and get out our pencils and notes...
- M. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- N. Turn with me in your bibles to Matthew chapter 5...

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ MATTHEW 5:1-12

- B. I suspect, if you've been a believer for any length of time, and maybe even before that time, you've heard most of this scripture passage. These are sometimes what I like to call *bumper sticker verses*, meaning that they are often ripped out of context and slapped onto a bumper sticker or social media.
- C. Now, there's nothing wrong with quoting the Beatitudes, but without context, these can take on whatever meaning you choose. So, let's get some solid foundation here before we proceed.
- D. What the Beatitudes are and are not...
- i. First, they **are not** a philosophy for life designed to make people successful and calm today, in the present moment. This is not a recipe for happiness.
  - ii. What they ARE is a snapshot of Jesus' understanding of the eternal kingdom which is breaking into the world...which started breaking in when He was born. This is not prescriptive, but descriptive. They are not imperative but indicative...meaning that they don't command us to DO something per se, but are helping us to see what God already sees.
  - iii. And the Kingdom's focus is not the happiness of individual followers of Jesus, but an invitation to orient all of life to the reality of that Kingdom for the Church...and made only FOR the Church in the world...and made only for Kingdom people.

- iv. In short, being BLESSED is a current reality based on a future and present assurance! Not historical, but eschatological, or focused on what's to come when Jesus returns.
  - v. Being BLESSED is not just happiness or material provision. Being BLESSED is a sense of wholeness that comes into your life when you are following Jesus into the the will of God. That pathway goes through sacrifice and denying yourself and being humble and learning new things about God.
  - vi. Each of the beatitudes starts with a present tense, here and now, "Blessed ARE..." and concludes with a, "for they WILL..."
    - a. Jesus' lesson to the disciples is that they WILL BE experiencing something in the future, after everything is made right, like it was at Creation...YET, even though there is hardship NOW, that future reality created a blessedness now.
    - b. M. Eugene Boring said, "So, blessed are those who live this life now, even when such a life seems foolish, for they will, in the end, be vindicated by God."
  - vii. Having said all that, the Beatitudes require a response.
    - a. That response is for those who are IN the Kingdom to live now as if the future reality is already here...and then to project that into the world (we'll get to more of that next week).
    - b. John Wesley said, "It is undoubtedly true, that both poverty of spirit, and every other temper which is here mentioned, are at all times found, in a greater or less degree, in every real Christian. And it is equally true, that real Christianity always begins in poverty of spirit, and goes on in the order here set down, till the "man of God is made perfect (Sermon XXI).
    - c. The Christian faith is a way of living...based on the firm conviction that meekness is of God, righteousness and peace will prevail, and God's future will be one of mercy and not cruelty.
    - d. The Beatitudes are a compass to orient the Church to the coming reality...and to begin to live that reality today.
- E. But what do they MEAN?
- i. One could, and many have, preached entire sermons on each of the Beatitudes. However, since we're moving through the WHOLE Sermon on the Mount, today we'll just do a crash course on the Beatitudes...the Cliff Notes, if you remember those.
  - ii. Remember that the rhythm of the Beatitudes is: Blessed ARE...for they WILL... Blessed today...and with the hope that we will experience X in the future, when Jesus comes back to make it all complete.

iii. Nine Beatitudes and a quick shot at explaining each one...

- a. **#1 BLESSED ARE the poor in spirit, for THEIRS IS the kingdom of heaven.** The poor in spirit are those who are both monetarily poor and humble because they know that everything they have comes from God. You can be poor in spirit and have enough to be comfortable in life. However, if money or pride or skill ever become a replacement for your dependence on God, then Jesus is indicating that the Kingdom of God is not yours. Lifting up the poor in spirit was 100% counter-cultural in Jesus' day because those who were poor or had no standing were never exalted. When we fully rely on God, the Kingdom is ours.
- b. **#2 BLESSED ARE those who mourn, for they WILL BE comforted.** We all have times of mourning. And being a followers of Jesus doesn't change that. Yet, ultimately, when Jesus returns, "...he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." Rev. 21:4. This is not 'mourning causing blessedness', but being blessed knowing that you will not always be mourning. Be blessed NOW in every DIScomfort because you WILL BE comforted.
- c. **#3 BLESSED ARE the meek, for THEY WILL inherit the earth.** The meek are not those who are weak or frail. Just the opposite. The meek know who they are in relation to God - poor in spirit, humble, and gentle - and because of that they CHOOSE to be meek. This is as opposed to the ways of the world, which expects people to fight and use violence and lie to get their own way. Those who know that something bigger and greater is coming, have the confidence to be meek now and are blessed by that quiet confidence.
- d. **#4 - BLESSED ARE those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for THEY WILL be filled.** Literally, this starts with those who are hungry for food...but Matthew also includes those who are hungry for more of the Lord in their lives. As believers, we have a hunger that can only be satisfied when we worship, pray, love, and witness to others. We never stop learning, and ONE DAY, we will be completely filled with the knowledge and presence of God when Jesus returns. So for now, we are blessed in the hunger for more of Him! Not more money or power or status, but more of Him!
- e. **#5 - BLESSED ARE those who are merciful, for THEY WILL receive mercy.** The word that Matthew uses here for mercy (*eleēmōn*) means **concrete acts of mercy**, not just an attitude of being merciful. Mercy is *not getting the punishment you deserve*. So, because God WILL show mercy to those in the Kingdom at the last judgment, we are freed to show mercy now to others. Mercy is counter-cultural...since the

world thinks that everyone should get what they deserve. God doesn't think that, thankfully. You will receive mercy...so, be merciful.

- f. **#6 - BLESSED ARE the pure in heart, for THEY WILL see God.** Being pure in heart is a single-minded focus on the things of God. This is opposed to a divided heart, which has one eye on the world or money and one eye on God. For eternity, we will see God and worship God after Jesus returns. Because of THAT, are we not called today to be pure in heart - single-minded on Him? We are blessed when we do!
  - g. **#7 - BLESSED ARE the peacemakers, for THEY WILL be called children of God.** Being a peacemaker is not sitting on ones hands when there is conflict. Being a peacemaker is about working towards reconciliation in this life. Why? Because when Jesus returns and the Kingdom is fully present, then Jesus will reconcile all people to God through Him. If Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is what reconciles YOU to GOD, then are you not called to do all you can now to reconcile with others? Because we will be reconciled, we are reconcilers - peacemakers now...#blessed.
  - h. **#8 - BLESSED ARE those who are persecuted for righteousness; sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** Throughout the bible, and around the world, people are right now being persecuted and even killed for their faith in Jesus. Martyrs for the faith give us a glimpse of this, since most of us are not really persecuted for our beliefs. Yet, again, this is about being blessed when we ARE persecuted, simply because we are CONFIDENT that in the end, Jesus saves us and God loves us. Whatever we go through in this life, for Jesus' sake, is nothing compared to the glory of the Kingdom for eternity.
  - i. Finally, **#9 - BLESSED ARE you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.** Again, whatever we go through in this life is not unique to us and our time. The reward in heaven - everlasting life with God - is GREAT! It's GOING to be GREAT! So endure...
  - j. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 says, "So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal."
- F. It's going to be great!

### **3. Application**

- A. If I had to give us some application of this today, it would be very simple: Live today in the full and sure hope of what is coming and you will be blessed.
- B. Don't make the mistake of biding your time here as a follower of Jesus, learning everything you can about the God we love and serve, and then not letting that live itself out in your life. Jesus never said, "Blessed are those who hear but don't do..."
- C. You are pre-blessed because you're a follower of Jesus...so it's OK to know who you are in God, to mourn this life, be gentle and meek, hungry and thirsty, to withhold some punishment they deserve. It's OK to be 100% focused on God with your whole heart, to reconcile with everyone, and endure whatever persecution comes your way. You ARE already blessed!
- D. Why? It's simply that you ARE and DO those things because of your knowledge and faith that in the end, God will make all things right! Don't be afraid to live this life in confidence that Jesus is coming back to make all things right.

### **4. Conclusion**

- A. Ben did recover from that first day of school and went on to be the Valedictorian. We, no matter what happens, are blessed because we follow the One who wins it all and puts all things right.
- B. It's going to be GREAT not just when Jesus returns, but here and now because he will!
- C. Next week, we'll come back to class with Jesus and his disciples (and the crowds) to learn what it means to be salt and light, and how to live that out here and now.
- D. Let's DO THIS! Class dismissed!
- E. Let's pray...