

MATTHEW

5

Matthew 5:1–8

5:1–2 *¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them:*

Chapter four ended with a vivid description of Jesus' ministry in Galilee actively addressing the physical maladies of those who sought him. Chapter five opens with Jesus' longest discourse recorded in the Gospels. Large crowds had assembled, coming from great distances to hear the words and teaching of this new rabbi. This discourse (*Matthew 5–7*) is called the Sermon on the Mount because it took place on a mountain somewhere in the region of Galilee.

In Jewish culture, it was customary for the rabbi to sit as he expounded on the passage of Scripture that had been chosen for that day. Jesus, although he had not been educated in the rabbinical schools, assumed this authority and sat down as he prepared to speak to the crowds.

Everything that Jesus taught the crowds was predicated on his primary call to repentance. Apart from repentance, the rest of the discourse cannot be understood. Repentance stands at the very heart

of the kingdom experience and the individual's relationship to the King.

Throughout the discourse, there is the clear distinction between the characteristics of the people of God's kingdom and the characteristics of the world's kingdoms. Indeed, the righteousness of the Messiah's kingdom stands in stark contrast to the religious stereotypes of his day, crushing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, who considered themselves to be above reproach in matters of the Law of Moses. John MacArthur stated, "This is the proper use of the law with respect to salvation: It closes off every possible avenue of human merit and leaves sinners dependent on nothing but divine grace for salvation" (cf. *Romans* 3:19–20; *Galatians* 3:23–24).¹

5:3 *"Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually helpless. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them."*

The word *blessed* simply means "happy." However, Jesus was not speaking of some superficial human emotion. Rather, Jesus was speaking of that divinely bestowed sense of well-being that suffuses the heart of those who are living in a relationship with the King.

The world's system tells us that the rich and powerful, the aggressive and arrogant are the ones who achieve power, position, and prestige in this world. But the kingdom of heaven does not follow this faulty line of reasoning. Rather, the kingdom belongs to those who, by virtue of the graciousness of the King, realize their spiritual poverty before the throne of heaven. A person recognizes the truth of his or her position before the Lord and Creator when that person receives citizenship in the kingdom and the wealth of the Lord's blessing. The King of heaven does not look on the external realities extolled by mankind, but on the internal realities that show one's true confession of unworthiness to receive the compassion and forgiveness of one's Ruler. "*The LORD is near to those whose hearts are humble. He saves those whose spirits are crushed*" (*Psalms* 34:18).

5:4 *Blessed are those who mourn. They will be comforted.*

Humanity's vain philosophies despise weakness, and one who mourns demonstrates an inability to overcome the trials of one's life experience. However, Jesus corrected this error. He told the crowds that those who mourn are most profoundly affected by their awareness that they are powerless to change the course of their lives. Particularly, people are completely incapable of changing the condition of their propensity for sin, anger, and rebellion. Therefore, those who grieve for the hopeless condition of their sinful lives will find comfort in the kingdom of heaven. There, in the context of God's love, forgiveness will wipe away the grief and turn that grief to peace and joy.

5:5 *Blessed are those who are gentle. They will inherit the earth.*

The world's culture teaches that there is power in war and domination. That is the only way to exert one's superiority over one's fellow creatures. When a person is beaten down by adversity, the natural reaction is to become angry and strike out in a vain effort to correct the offense. However, Jesus taught that the citizen of the kingdom of heaven would not react like that. Instead, filled with confidence in the faithfulness of the King, one rests in those circumstances, recognizing that the King has one's welfare in mind. In that kingdom, those who are *gentle*, or mild in heart, will inherit the earth.

5:6 *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God's approval. They will be satisfied.*

Jesus taught the crowds that they should hunger and thirst for the approval that comes only from God. Only then will they find that their hunger and thirst can be appeased. Only within the boundaries of the kingdom of heaven can one find complete satisfaction because he or she has been fed heavenly manna, which satisfies the soul.

5:7 *Blessed are those who show mercy. They will be treated mercifully.*

The people of the kingdom of heaven are characterized by the mercy toward those who are downtrodden by the circumstances of their lives. The citizen of the kingdom of heaven has received mercy from the King and has not suffered the punishment he or she clearly deserves. The kingdom citizen simply reflects the mercy he or she has received and treats others with the same mercy. When one is at peace with the King, he or she is also at peace with others, walking in the light of the King's mercy.

5:8 *Blessed are those whose thoughts are pure. They will see God.*

Jesus introduces another concept that seemed to defy what the crowd had known about faithful obedience to God's standards. Jesus taught them that outward displays of purity were insufficient to gain entry into the courts of heaven. It was essential that a person's thoughts must also be pure. While many had strived to keep the standard of purity with human effort, Jesus' standard of purity went deeper than mere obedience. Those counted among the kingdom of heaven must demonstrate a genuine faith that is rooted on the inside and not just outwardly demonstrated through adherence to the commandments.

In a detailed study of the history and meaning of the word *purity*, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* makes this comment:

The purity of the NT [New Testament] community is personal and moral by nature. It consists in full and unreserved self-offering to God, which renews the heart and rules out any acceptance of what is against God. Those who are pure in heart in this way are called to participate in the kingdom of God.²

Notes/Applications

The opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5:3–12*) are often called the Beatitudes because of the repetition of the word

blessed. To many Christians, Jesus' words offer comfort and encouragement even when their personal circumstances may be far removed from the peace and tranquility characterized by the kingdom of heaven.

However, Jesus was also describing the characteristics that would define the spiritual maturity that should characterize subjects of this kingdom. In doing so, Jesus set a standard for his people that seemed to require even more than the mandates outlined in the Law of God given to Moses nearly twenty-five hundred years earlier. Indeed, these principles of the kingdom are virtually 180 degrees opposed to the principles by which this world operates.

How can anyone be spiritually helpless? How can anyone live with contentment in mourning? How can anyone live a life in the spirit of gentleness in the face of the world's cruelty? With the press of everyday concerns, how does anyone have the time to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Most of all, how can anyone be truly and thoroughly pure in his or her thoughts? Jesus has outlined behavior that is absolutely foreign to the human experience. There seems to be no way that anyone can achieve such an unattainable level of control that could satisfy these requirements.

It seems that Jesus does not make sense in a world that promotes individualism at the expense of the common good. The truth of our lives in practical terms is reflected in the way in which we pursue our goals, indulge in our personal desires, and attempt to control those around us. Everything we do and say is centrally, unequivocally focused on our own agendas, which are designed to serve our self-directed happiness. How then can the words of Jesus be put into effect in a world like this?

The only way in which these two opposing lifestyles can be successfully reconciled to the satisfaction of the King of kings is found in the opening declaration of his message: "Turn to God and change the way you think and act because the kingdom of heaven is near!" Only in repentance for the human dilemma of our sin nature can we be fit for the kingdom of God. Only in submitting our will can we serve the King of heaven. Only in the act and attitude of repentance

can we successfully live in such a way that we will experience all of the happiness that the Lord of creation has promised to us. True repentance, induced by the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart, unleashes the Father's awesome forgiveness that frees the believer from the clutches of sin to experience the true peace and happiness promised.