

The Citizens of the Kingdom

Matthew 5:1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

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

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

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

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

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³ "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.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

(Matthew 5:1-16)

He was born under threat of death. All newborn males under two years of age were to be put to death. He was placed in a tiny bunk and protected from the wrath of the king. He lived for a time in the great land of Pharaohs and pyramids. He was commanded to return to his home after those seeking to kill him had died. He flew out of Egypt in a mighty exodus. He was baptized. He was led into the desert. For a period of forty he was tempted. He grew hungry in his wilderness fast. He was fed by God. He was followed by a multitude of people. He performed miracles in their sight. Now, he ascends to the top of a mountain. From here, the Law of God will be proclaimed and a kingdom of people will forever be changed. This Law commands and demands perfect obedience from its followers. But it is prefaced with a context: a context of grace. God is gracious to those that dwell in his kingdom.

Who am I talking about here? **Moses or is it Jesus?** Everything that I have said is true of both.

Today my message will focus on **Matthew 5:1-16**. As we are working our way through this magnificent book, we are seeing one intentional story placed after another.

Matthew's purpose in arranging his Gospel of Jesus Christ is not to give a chronological account of the life of Jesus. If this is what the Gospel writers were doing, then we would have to conclude that they were hopelessly *contradicting* one another, because the order of their stories is hopelessly different.

Telling history, especially for ancients, served a greater purpose than simply talking about events as they unfold in time. While they are recording actual historical events, they are framing them within a broader context. *Matthew's history is intentionally arranged to teach you about how Jesus Christ fulfills the OT.* My intention this morning is to highlight how *Jesus as the Great Prophet* is taking the place of the OT's greatest prophet, the leader of Israel, the servant of God: Moses.

This is why you could read my opening with either Moses or Jesus in mind. Matthew very much wants you to see the perfect life of Jesus as a fulfillment of the imperfect life of Moses.

Matthew 5 begins the most famous sermon ever preached. It is usually called the **Sermon on the Mount**; because as **verse 1** says, Jesus “**went up on the mountain**” where he then began to teach. It is really quite interesting to compare this introduction to the story in **Exodus 19**. There are some striking similarities, but also some very important differences.

The Exodus narrative begins this way, “**In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt--on the very day--they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and *Israel camped* there in the desert *in front of the mountain*” (**Ex 19:1-2**).**

There are two things to notice in comparison with **Matthew 5:1**. First, when it says that **Israel camped**, you are to understand that there were a *lot of people* here. In fact, it was an entire nation of people. This great multitude numbered perhaps as many as **two or three million**!¹

¹ **Ex 12:37** talks about 600,000 men. Including women, children, and the aged, a number of 2,000,000 people is not at all out of the question.

By way of comparison, we remember from the last chapter of Matthew that “Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Jesus” (Matt 4:25). Obviously, there are not millions of people gathering around Jesus. But the effect of the verse is to show that Jews from all over the entire nation, in fact even Gentiles from neighboring nations were beginning to hear about and follow Jesus as he taught in the region of Galilee.

Thus, Jesus sees the crowds and Matthew says “he went up on *the* mountain.” It is interesting that Matt. uses the definite article “the” Mt. here. We are not sure exactly which Mt. it might have been, though it was clearly up in the northern regions of Israel. Some scholars think that there might have been a Mt. that the disciples knew as “the” Mt. That may be true, but I think there is a much better explanation for what Matthew is doing. And I think it is important.

So, by way of comparison, here is the second thing. Ex 19:2 said that Israel camped in front of “the Mt.” The language is identical, even though the Mt. is not. There are some

very good reasons for this. The mountain that Israel was near is none other than **Mt. Sinai**, the Mt. of God. As **William Hendriksen** says comparing the two mountains, Sinai “was a cold, bleak, barren, almost inaccessible place, situated in the midst of a howling wilderness with its fiery serpents.”

By way of contrast, the **Mount of the Beatitudes** has its “smiling landscapes and grassy slopes... [which] extend a hearty welcome to all and spread delight by means of its lilies, daisies, and buttercups.”² The contrasting scene can help you see that the kingdom of heaven (which this entire sermon revolves around) is going to be very different from the kingdoms of old. The setting for this sermon shows the newness that has come. As Isaiah predicted, “**The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon, they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God... [when] the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the**

² Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 261.

desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest.” (Isa 35:1-2; 32:15).

The next section of verses in Exodus 19 tells us this,

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the Mt. and said, ‘This is what you are to say to... the people of Israel: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you **obey me** fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a **kingdom** of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites (Ex 19:3-6).

There are several things to notice by way of comparison and contrast here as well. Notice first that Moses leaves the crowd behind and goes up on the mountain. It is exactly the same way with Jesus. He goes up on the mountain. But just here there is also an infinite difference. Moses goes up “to God.” But this is not said about Jesus. Why not?

This is made clearer in the next words that should be contrasted. Moses goes up to *hear from God* what he will then deliver back to the people to tell them. *Moses is a recipient of a word from God.* As prophet, Moses is an *intercessor*. He stands between God and men and God's spokesmen to the people. The *word* that he receives is called in this passage "*the covenant.*" This covenant is to be "*kept*" and "*fully obeyed*" by the people. Therefore, we understand the covenant to contain stipulations and rules. In the next chapter they are laid out for us in the form of Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are the "Ten words" of the covenant. They come to Moses in the form of written covenant tablets made by the finger of God in stone.

But this is not what we see with Jesus, is it? Jesus does not go up to God! The infinite difference between Moses and Jesus is that Jesus *is* God. Jesus is the *True Prophet by virtue of who he is.* At the very end of this sermon we read the reaction of the people, "*The crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority*" (*Matt 7:28-29*). Jesus has authority over the law because he

is God. His words here are authoritative just as God's were on Mt. Sinai.

Jesus, as the True Prophet, is still an intercessor, however. Jesus is *not* the Father though he is God. Men cannot see the glory of God by looking at the Father. They must look to Jesus. So Jesus stands – like Moses – between God and men as the spokesmen of what God requires of men. He is not ascending all the way to heaven itself where he can no longer be seen or heard by us. **He has kingdom work to do.** He has come to *teach* the people about this kingdom.

He is establishing a new order of things. It begins to be fleshed out here in this sermon. This sermon is an explication of what it means when Jesus preaches, “**Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” **His words here form the basis of righteousness in the kingdom.** They are *new covenant* words. They are not written with a finger on stone and given to one man, but spoken directly to the disciples and crowds by Jesus Christ! Soon, the Spirit will come to take these words and write them directly upon the hearts of all kingdom citizens.

The last comparison you need to recognize is the one between the two different *kingdoms*. Notice that Moses said to Israel, if you do all these things you will become unto God a *kingdom* of priests and a holy nation. The kingdom of Israel, as John the Baptist made clear to the Pharisees, was a typological kingdom. By this I mean that it was always meant to point forward to the heavenly kingdom, without itself being confused as the heavenly kingdom. It was **temporary** in nature. It was **purely physical** (though obviously within Israel there were always spiritually renewed believers.)

This is not like the kingdom that Jesus is ushering in which fulfills the purpose of national Israel. Israel was but the sign pointing forward to *this* kingdom. Jesus' kingdom is an **eternal** kingdom, not a temporary one. Today, it is first and foremost a **spiritual** kingdom. But this does not make the physical world irrelevant. We are not Gnostics. The door of this kingdom is the Church of Jesus Christ. How can you enter any building legitimately if there is no door? Also, one day God will renew the physical world and incorporate it into this heavenly kingdom in such a remarkable way that the physical will no longer tend to decay and sin and ruin.

You simply can't read the Sermon on the Mount apart from its most basic theme, which is not law but the *kingdom*! Here is the structure of Jesus' sermon. The section we are looking at today teaches about the “**citizens of the kingdom.**” It includes their *character and blessedness* (5:3-12) and also their *relation to this present world* (13-16). The main portion is about the “**righteousness of the kingdom,**” and “**the high standard of life demanded by the King**” (5:17-7:12). Finally, it concludes with an “**exhortation to make sure you enter the kingdom**” (7:13-27). In other words, this sermon teaches you all about the kingdom of heaven. Notice, it even says that Jesus is teaching here, which is a different word than preaching.

Dear Christian, are you looking forward to inheriting this kingdom? Let me use the rather poetic vision that the Great Bard of Britain Taliesen foresaw as he looked into the future and glimpsed the soon coming reign of King Arthur,

There is a land shining with goodness where each man protects his brother's dignity as his own, where war and want have ceased and all races live under the same law of

love and honor. It is a land bright with truth, where a man's word is his pledge, and falsehood is banished, where children sleep safe in their mother's arms and never know fear or pain. It is a land where kings extend their hands in justice rather than reach for the sword; where mercy, kindness and compassion flow like deep water over the land, and men revere virtue, revere truth, revere beauty, above comfort, pleasure, or selfish gain. A land where peace reigns in the hearts of men, where faith blazes like a beacon from every hill, and love like a fire from every hearth, where the True God is worshiped and his ways acclaimed by all . . . It is a golden realm of light. It is called the Kingdom of Summer.³

Beloved, this describes the reign of King Jesus in his Kingdom of Heaven. Is this not what a man's soul longs for? Is this not the kind of society you mothers desire for your children? Do we not all have this subconscious understanding that this is what life is supposed to be like? This is the kingdom of heaven.

³ Lawhead, Stephen R. *Merlin*. (New York: Avon Books, 1988), 108-09.

Jesus begins his great sermon with nine great “beatitudes.” It is interesting that this sermon is known for its laws and the unique way that Jesus penetrates to the heart and soul, the true intention and meaning of the law of God. But it does not begin with law. It begins with beatitude; that is with gospel. In this respect, the very basic outline of this sermon follows the very basic outline of the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses when he went up on top of that rugged mountain.

The Ten Commandments have a preface, “I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the Land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Ex 20:2). This preamble roots the Law in God’s covenantal grace. How very, *very* important this is, but most people just dismiss it as irrelevant.

Exodus 2:24-25 tells us *why* God led Israel out of Egypt, “God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.” God brought the people out of Egypt because this is what he swore to Joseph that He would do (Gen 50:25; Heb 11:22).

But he did so also because he loved Israel his son. Hosea 11:1 says, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”⁴ The Ten Commandments rest upon the love of God for his people!

Just like the Ten Commandments, Jesus’ great Sermon begins with gospel in the form of beatitude. And I want to point out to you that there are only three commands first 16 verses of this chapter. Do you know what they are? In order they are: Rejoice! And Be glad! And Let your light shine. This is hardly the type of law that is burdensome, for it comes purely as a result of something done to you to make you this way. These commands are fulfilled as reflexes to the good thing done to you by God. Gospel always drives true obedience. The obedience God loves only comes from a heart already changed by the gospel. And how often do we forget this, beloved, as we subtly turn good obediences into works that make us “spiritual” Christians.

The word beatitude is important to understand. The dictionary defines it as “supreme blessedness or exalted

⁴ Matthew has already told us that these words spoke about Jesus, but since Jesus comes out of Israel they speak about the people too.

happiness.” The word comes from the Greek “*makarios*.” A few years back, Robert Schueller published a book titled “The Be-Happy Attitudes.” Unfortunately, Schueller long ago left his Reformed roots and the book is nothing but a self-esteem gospel. Nevertheless, the idea of happiness and the commands to rejoice and be glad are part and parcel of a beatitude. The only reason bible translations do not translate *makarios* as “be happy” is because happiness in and of itself does not get at the heart of the word. The word is an exalting in, a delighting in and being happy *in God*, not in the circumstances themselves.

The Catechism teaches that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. This gets to the heart of Jesus’ nine-fold pronouncement of blessedness. Christian, it is your supreme duty as a human being created in God’s image, graciously saved and transformed, to glorify God and enjoy him forever. In fact, since the catechism says that there is only *one* end of man and not two; John Piper suggests that the *way* we glorify God is *by* enjoying him forever. Therefore, your supreme duty above all other duties on this earth is to enjoy God! Not love of things, or people, of treasures, of money; but love of God.

I wish you could understand all that this means for you. I wish *I* could understand all that it means for me! We are not set free to live miserable, depressed, sad lives. We are not saved to wallow in our sorrow, or to stoop into repulsive and guilt laden sin again and again. We are not saved to continue our previous pattern of living or to continue to be fixated on the patterns of this age. We are saved to enjoy God. **Psalm 35:9**, “*My soul will rejoice in the LORD and delight in his salvation.*”

But there is a very specific content to this enjoyment of God that Jesus now sets forth in this sermon. Part and parcel to this enjoyment is faithful happy *obedience to his laws and his commands*. David says, “*Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart*” (**Ps 119:1-2**). Those are the beatitudes that preface the greatest Psalm ever written on the Law of God. I will try to keep your minds focused on this as we work our way through the substantial portions of this Sermon on the Mount. It is my sworn duty as a minister of the gospel to not let you to get sucked in again to the legalism or self-

righteousness that so infects the contemporary Christians whenever they think about this sermon.

The beatitudes are arranged in a very specific way. There is a progression that takes one from the very beginnings of a Christian walk through the late stages. In fact for some, the last beatitude is the very last phase of their walk with Christ on this earth. The beatitudes themselves show you the life of a Christian.

This is how **Christ is teaching what a kingdom person looks like**, and he is pronouncing a blessing upon any in whom God chooses to work salvation. **These beatitudes explain all that we need to know about salvation and God's work in our hearts.** The beatitudes are adjectives, not commands. You don't do anything to be blessed. The blessedness pronounced simply describes all kingdom participators no matter what particular feeling or action they are doing at any given moment. And in this, you can and should take even greater comfort.

The first and last blessings frame the set. I want to call attention to the tense of the verbs here. **Vs 3** says, "**Blessed**

are the poor in spirit, for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven.” Vs 10 follows the same pattern. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven.” What is the tense of the verb? It is a *present tense* verb. This means, remarkably enough that the *kingdom of heaven presently belongs to such as these*. They have their inheritance *now*. They are living in the kingdom now! The new covenant is inaugurated now. Jesus has come. He has brought justification in his blood. The Spirit’s presence is roaming all throughout this earth, indwelling God’s people today as a sign that the kingdom to come has come.

Between these first and last blessings, all of the rest of the beatitudes are, however, in *the future tense*. “They shall be comforted” (4). “They shall inherit the earth” (5). “They shall be satisfied” (6). “They shall receive mercy” (7). “They shall see God” (8). “They shall be called sons of God” (9). This is the future aspect of the kingdom that awaits final consummation, the return of Christ, the renewal of all things, and final redemption. The presence of the kingdom that belongs to such as these is the guarantee or surety of our hopes to come.

This understanding of the already/not yet can alone keep you moving through life's difficulties that have and will come your way. You must never be tempted to think that because life is very difficult today that the kingdom is a farce and that your hope is uncertain. The most remarkable thing about these beatitudes is that Jesus takes these *very sufferings* and, paradoxically to the way men think, says that when you experience them you must consider yourself blessed and you must rejoice and be happy! What kind of a fool says that? Jesus is no fool. Such is the revolutionary nature of the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew's first beatitude concerns the *poor in spirit*. Luke's gospel records four beatitudes and this is one of them. But there is a difference between Matthew and Luke. Luke says "**Blessed are the poor.**" How can we make sense of this rather significant difference without doing injustice to either one? I do not believe Matthew is "spiritualizing" away the physical trait that Luke clearly emphasizes.

Luke is clearly concerned in his gospel with the poor. And he sees this as a Messianic work of Christ. In fact, the great proclamation of Christ from **Isaiah 61** (cf. **Luke 4:18**) has

Jesus preaching good news to the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, and the mourners. This is strikingly similar to the beatitudes that both Luke and Matthew record! So, in preaching what he does in these beatitudes, Jesus is showing the people that Messiah is here! His kingdom is for such as these.

Yet, there is not a poor person on this earth who would say that being poor is a blessing. Leon Morris says, “I cannot rid myself of the feeling that much modern writing proceeds from the comfortable, people for whom poverty is an interesting subject for discussion but who have never themselves experienced what real poverty is. I have. And poverty is not a blessing, nor is powerlessness.”⁵ You should know that the Law commanded Israel to lend to the poor so that there would not be poor among them. The ideal was always that there would *not* be any poor in Israel (Deut 15:4, 7-8). Being poor in itself is not a blessing and this is proven from the law.

Matthew therefore focuses on the poor *in spirit*. Just being poor does not get you into the kingdom. That would be a

⁵ Leon Morris, *Matthew*, p. 96.

rather perverse form of works righteousness (that sadly many throughout church history have fallen into). **So what does it mean to be poor *in spirit*?** It means to be empty of any spiritual resources from which you may begin to boast of righteousness. It is to be completely and utterly destitute in the spirit realm.⁶

This is the first step to repentance and faith. It is to recognize not just *a need for assistance*, like Jesus throwing you a life preserver that you can then reach out and grab yourself; but utter total helplessness to save yourself. It is to acknowledge complete deadness and not mere sickness in your sin. **This is the sort of poverty that belongs to the kingdom of heaven.** In fact, I would say that this sort of poverty will *forever remain* in the kingdom of heaven so that people can always acknowledge their utter dependence upon Christ for all that they have and will ever receive. Can you see how this first beatitude beings the experience of salvation for a Christian?

The next beatitude says that those who **mourn are blessed**. There is a mourning that comes purely from the terrible

⁶ Ibid., p. 95-6.

circumstances of life that cannot be overlooked. Indeed, when a loved one dies or a friend is robbed or a country falls into great sin, the Christian can mourn and know that he will one day be comforted. This is a hope that the unbelieving world can never know.

But the placement of this beatitude as coming immediately after the last seems to follow logically. Jesus is saying that who recognize their own spiritual poverty cannot help but mourn, especially if they do not know an answer to their dilemma. Jesus says that when this type of mourning occurs, you are to rejoice, because you can trust that one day you will be comforted. You will not be thrown into hell where there is eternal torment. Here, in Christ, there is comfort for your soul, release from your sin, and peace for your guilt.

Jesus says “blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.” Psalm 37:11 says, “But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.” Clearly this is a covenantal promise being fulfilled in the words of Christ. I once had this kooky science teacher (Mr. Beidler) who told us that bugs would one day rule the earth because (I kid not), “*the*

meek will inherit the earth.” To be meek is not to be a bug, or even just a “little person.” To be meek is to be humble before God. To humble yourself here is to acknowledge openly that you are in spiritual poverty and that you need Christ for salvation. Is this not a logical order of salvation itself? Recognize spiritual deadness, mourn over it, then humble yourself before God.

The great future reward of his verse is *inheriting the earth*. In the context of the OT, this would have meant Israel. But looking through the eyes of the Apostles, and understanding that Israel was always only a type; Jesus clearly means the whole world. This argues strongly that the world we live in will be reconstituted, purified with fire, and made eternally new. We will live on *it*. We will enjoy *it*. We will tend *it*, take care of *it*, and serve God in *it*. This is why the *Gloria Patri* rightly ends, “**world without end, Amen.**” We sing it every week for a reminder.

Jesus says, “**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they will be satisfied.**” Again, Luke seems to put the emphasis on physical hunger, and Jesus could have related to this, for he had just come through a great fasting

ordeal in the wilderness. But Jesus' ordeal demonstrates that physical hunger has a spiritual counterpart. His truest hunger was for intimate fellowship with his Father in heaven. Jesus knew that man does not live by bread alone. I believe God made us creatures that have to eat food so that at least three times every single day we would be forced to read the sign that food is for us: physical food points to our spiritual hunger and need for spiritual satisfaction in Christ.

Jesus was satisfied in the wilderness after his ordeal, not because he was self-righteous and made the stone turn into bread, but because God came to him in the hour of his great need. The Spirit overshadowed him, and angels restored his strength. He was satisfied with his God, and all those that hunger for righteousness, for holy obedient faithful living in the light of God's commands will be satisfied. After you humble yourself, you then begin to desire that spiritual satisfaction for God on a daily basis. We can take comfort in knowing that when we forsake the pleasures of sin for a season, that we will be rewarded with a satisfaction that the world, the flesh, and the devil can never give. This reward is eternal life in the kingdom of heaven with Christ and his

people. Christ and his merits are all the reward we will ever need.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” Now we are moving past those initial moments of salvation and into a life lived in obedience. “Mercy is love for those in misery and a forgiving spirit toward the sinner. It embraces both the kindly feeling and the kindly act. We see it exemplified in the parable of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10), and especially in Christ, the merciful Highpriest (Heb 2:17).”⁷ The mercy that is shown stems from a mercy that is received. If you do not know how to show mercy, it is because you have not received any yourself. And so I pray you will flee to Christ for mercy, for you will receive mercy from him.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Purity of heart in Ps 24:3-4 is one who is sincere, honest, full of integrity, and lacking in deceit and hypocrisy. But this definition is not enough, for a man may be sincere, but sincerely *wrong*. He may be lacking in hypocrisy, yet not know the truth that can set him free.

⁷ Hendriksen, p. 275.

Many in the false religions of this world could be said to be like this. I think of the Dali Lama or Ghandi as prime examples.

This is why the order of the beatitudes is so important. These are not random proverbs, but organically related beatitudes. The pure in heart will see God because they first know God because they hunger for righteousness, and have meekly acknowledge their spiritual poverty and need for Christ!

Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” Leon Morris makes a very astute observation in his commentary that a *peace maker is different from a peace keeper*. *Peace keepers* have a disinclination to engage in disputes.⁸ But peace makers are people who end hostilities and bring the quarrelsome together. These are not appeasers, but those who actively overcome evil with good. They are also not politicians who compromise, especially in the area of religion. The first and most important area of hostility lay between God and man. Jesus is the ultimate peace-maker for in his death, he has put

⁸ Morris, p. 101.

an end to the hostility for all that will one day believe in him because of God's electing grace.⁹

Jesus says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for there is the kingdom of heaven.” This beatitude brings an end to the cycle for many believers, for their persecution ends in death. For others, the persecution leads to great suffering in this life, including poverty, sadness, hunger and other things already mentioned in this sermon. Jesus does a “one-up” to those who will say you are to expect persecution in this life. He

⁹ The story of Phinehas the grandson of Aaron is a very interesting one to read in this light. As a priest of God, Phinehas had the sworn duty to guard the assembly by keeping sin out of its midst. While in the desert, the men of Israel began to engage in sexual immorality with Moabite women and began to offer sacrifices to their detestable gods. The Lord's anger burned against them. In other words, Israel's actions had invited God's open hostility against them. God was at war with his own people.

God sent a plague that would eventually kill 24,000 Israelites. In order to end the hostility, the LORD said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight so that my anger might turn away from Israel” (Num 25:4). As you can about imagine, there was much weeping going on in Israel then. At that time, an Israelite man openly rebelled and brought a Midianite woman to his family with Moses watching. Phinehas the priest saw this, took a spear in his hand, followed the man into his tent and drove a spear through both of them. Then the plague was stopped. As a reward, God gave Phinehas the great covenant of the priesthood.

Now, to a culture like ours, this seems akin to the terrorist act of 9-11. But to God, Phinehas was a great peace-maker because he ended the hostilities between God and man. In this way, Jesus is typified by Phinehas the priest of God.

says that such persecution is a *blessing* and that those who undergo it belong to the kingdom of heaven.

But again, **he does not have mere persecution in mind**. The Spiritual context is everything. For the **next verse** adds to this one and it teaches that the sort of persecution Jesus has in mind is the reviling and persecution *that comes because you bear the name of Christ*. In *this*, we are to rejoice and be glad, because the reward that belongs to the humble, meek martyr of God is “**great in heaven**.” God does not promise to spare us in this life from these things. What happened to the prophets before will happen to God’s people today.

Let me make one important word about this by way of transition to the last couple of verses this morning. If you were Islamic and reading this, you might be tempted to see in these things a radical call to *jihad*. If you were a medieval hermit, you might be very tempted to read in this a command to sell all you had and become the poorest man on earth. Many people abuse these things because they do not understand the difference between the law and the gospel.

These beatitudes are nothing but pure gospel. They tell you what the citizens of the kingdom are like without calling you to do anything. These words were given to the disciples primarily and the crowds secondarily to teach them what the kingdom of heaven is and to cause them to question if they are in it. But they do not tell people how to live in this life.

This belongs to the next set of verses that I will only briefly sketch for you here. There is **one command** given now and it is to **let your light shine before others so that they can see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

What are these good works? In the context, they would be that you are exhibiting the qualities of kingdom people before the world. Jesus gives three illustrations to demonstrate what your relation to the world is supposed to be. You are to be the **salt of the earth**. You should know that this phrase needs to be read in context, because if you pour salt *on* the earth, it scorches the ground and makes it good for nothing. That is not what Jesus is saying.

Instead, you are to understand salt as a metaphor and the earth as the people of this world. The function of salt here is as a *preservative*, as the enemy of decay, as giving taste to food.¹⁰ Salt acts secretly.¹¹ This is the passive function of salt. If you are around a bunch of crude guys at work and you tell them you are a Christian and suddenly they stop cursing, your very presence is preserving in a tiny way the rot and decay of a society. That is but one tiny example.

But, on the other hand, if you persistently give into the lusts of the world, then soon you will find that your preserving quality is gone. You will lose your flavor. Jesus gives a warning here and says that since it is no longer good for anything, it will simply be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. It seems to me that this is a warning of false profession ending in hell.

The other analogies are of *light in a dark world* and a *city on a hill*. Light plays a positive role. It is active. It works in the open. It dispels darkness. It awakens creatures from their slumber. It illuminates what we need to see. Jesus

¹⁰ See Morris, p. 104.

¹¹ Hendriksen, p. 283.

knows all about this first hand because he *is* the light of the world. He is the sun that shines directly into the heart of a person.

So Jesus says, “**Let your light shine.**” Understand that your light is like that of the moon. It is derivate. It is reflective. Like the moon, your light comes from the sun. Like a bulb, your light come from the electricity flowing in your house. Kingdom people let their light shine before men because they know the goodness of their great God. They want people to glorify the father because they love the Father who has saved them.

Ronald Reagan’s favorite metaphor was one of America as a city on a hill, a light shining for the world. Since the inception of this great country, people have thought of America as this city. But that right does not belong to America, even though it is true that a nation can be ruled by godly principles and be a kind of representative of the kingdom of God. This right belongs only to the heavenly kingdom. And we mustn’t confuse America with the kingdom of God. We have this right because Jesus is True

Jerusalem, he is the city set on a hill that has not been hidden from men for 2,000 years.

Take these words with you this week and be of good cheer. For the kingdom of heaven has come. And if you believe in Christ, he has placed you in it. Nothing this world can throw at you can defeat you. For great is your reward in heaven.

Now, following Matthew's example and not my own fanciful imaginations, I have already shown you how this has worked itself out in Jesus' conception (Matt 1:22), his birth (Matt 2:6), the flight to Egypt (Matt 2:15), the murder of Bethlehem's babies (Matt 2:17), and return to the Promised Land (Matt 2:23) as well as numerous other events in the early life of this God-child.¹²

¹ He is the king Son of David (Matt 2:2; cf. 2 Sam 7:13-14). He is Abraham's seed (Matt 1:1; cf. Gen 22:17-18; Gal 3:16). He is descended from Judah (Matt 1:2-3; cf. Gen 49:10; Rev 5:5) to name just a few in the genealogy. His star comes as predicted (Matt 2:2; cf. Num 24:17). He received royal gifts from wise men of the east (Matt 2:11; cf. Ps 72:10, 15, Isa 60:6). And he is beginning to be introduced as one greater than Moses (Matt 2:20; cf. Ex 4:19).

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God has led you in the wilderness [note: as Jesus was led by the Spirit in the wilderness] these forty years [note: as Jesus was there forty days], that He might humble you, testing you [note: as Jesus was “tested”], to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and let you be hungry [note: as Jesus was made hungry by his fasting], and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord [note: just as Jesus says to Satan].”¹³

¹³ John Piper, *A Hunger for God*, pg. 55ish.