

**Christianity in a New Age**  
**Series 5: The Journey to Jerusalem** (Affirmation 4)  
**Part 2: Jesus's Teachings (Beatitudes)**  
**February 28, 2018**

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-16

**I. Blessed Be**

Scripture Reading

Today we are discussing the teachings of Jesus from the sermon that started his whole ministry: The Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon Jesus talks about the Kingdom and what makes for an abundant life. The Beatitudes are a list of "Blessed" sayings that describe this life.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they will be filled.
- Blessed are the merciful, they will be shown mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers: They shall be called the children of God.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires, theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

We hear these phrases all the time yet don't know exactly what Jesus means when he says "blessed." Could Jesus possibly have the same understanding of blessing that we have today? Could being poor in spirit ever be considered a blessing? What about those who mourn – how is grief a blessing? Perhaps there is something more to this term.

The Hebrew understanding of "Blessed" comes from the word *Ashrei*. אֲשֵׁרִי  
It is really a term of congratulations that is not fully capable of being translated into our current worldview. The idea of it is that "you have gone down the right path, chosen well, and in the end, it will be worth the choice." Some Hebrew scholars have chosen to translate *Ashrei* as "Oh! The gladness of...." Since Jesus spoke Hebrew, it is likely that this might have been the frame of reference he was using.

The Greek word for blessing is *Makarios*: μακάριος, meaning "A joy that is self-contained and not dependent on the circumstances surrounding the feeling." It's not used to express happiness as in "I will be happy when....," but rather it expresses a sense of joy that comes from an interior source that frames how I see the world. It's more like "In my joy, my life is good."

In the ancient Greek world, this understanding of “blessed” went through many nuanced changes. It was often used to refer to those who were privileged and were “above” being concerned about the foundational things in life like a job, a home, and where their food would come from. Often this was a reference for the gods who lived above everyone else. Matthew used this word in a totally different way. Matthew has Jesus turning the cultural tables. The privileged in God’s kingdom are those who are at the bottom of the social ladder. For Jesus:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.*

Being aware of your lack of spiritual fitness to deserve God’s kingdom, and trusting the promise that God loves you regardless of your merit, means you are free to live the life God has promised to you rather than constantly trying to earn your way into God’s privilege. This also means that if you are already loved and don’t have to fit a mold to be accepted, then that is also true for everyone and everything else in creation. There is no need for a standard to hold anyone else to, therefore you are free to love others just as they were created, too. No strings!

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

Having loved strongly enough to grieve a loss means that this love of God dwells in and through you to others. God’s love is shared by all, so we are all able to understand this pain and can reach out to comfort each other.

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

Being meek is not weakness, but rather humility. Being patient, kind, slow to anger, quick to praise, and always looking for the best in creation, rather than resenting the worst. Think of how peaceful and enjoyable your life would be...

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they will be filled.*

What if your greatest desire was to fulfil Micah 6:8, *To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?* If this is what you are seeking how blessed are you? And how would you be a blessing to others?

*Blessed are the merciful, they will be shown mercy.*

Remember the parable of the ungrateful servant: The king forgave his servant his debt when asked for mercy, and then the servant turned right around and had the man who owed him money jailed until the debt could be repaid? Jesus tells us that if you show mercy to others you will also receive it.

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they see God.*

How clear will your vision be when you awaken to the reality that God is present with you, loves you unconditionally, and wants to be an active participant with you in your life? To trust in this reality is to open your eyes to seeing God in and as a part of all things.

*Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the children of God.*

Those who seek a third alternative that gathers the world together in justice and peace are those who choose to inherit the life God has promised for all of God's children.

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires, theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.*

Those who are persecuted are calling out the very best in creation which requires us to drop all of our delusions and false endeavors to live into who we were most fully created to be. Jesus was one of these. Prophets are not always treated well.

The paintings of these beatitudes you have been seeing this morning were created by an artist named Hyatt Moore who set these beatitudes up along a particular color spectrum, building on the intensity of the colors for each one, as a metaphor for the growing intensity of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Of these 8 teachings of Jesus, which stood out most for you? Was there a specific energy swirling around you after hearing me speak of any of these? Take some time during our musical offering to consider how these beatitudes have shown up in your lives.

Musical Offering: "Blessed" by Paul Weber

## **II. Be Blessed**

Video: [Contemporary Interpretation of the Beatitudes](#)

If these teachings of Jesus in the Beatitudes show us a way to live our most abundant lives, then does it stand to reason that by living this way, we not only are blessed ourselves, but are also then a source of blessing for others? This is particularly clear, I think, in the Beatitude on mercy.

So how are we doing at being peacemakers? Honoring the meek? Comforting those who mourn? How are we resourcing those who hunger and thirst for righteousness? How are we protecting those being persecuted? How are we nurturing the pure in heart? How are we doing in both giving and receiving mercy? How are we doing at uplifting and learning from those who are poor in spirit? Are we actually learning something in the struggle?

A friend of mine who died at age 41 of brain cancer showed me beautifully how being blessed allowed her to be a blessing for me. In her last days, my friend was grieving her own life. In her grief, she had an incredible focus on, and wisdom about, what was truly important and meaningful in her life. As I sat with her one afternoon, she snuggled her two boys, ages 6 and 4, for a little while. When they left, she looked straight to me and asked, "How will my children know I am hugging them after I die?" In that moment it was clear to me that love and grief are so powerful that they gather us all in together, being the presence of each other, to each other, all the time. This is what community is all about. This is how I experience the kingdom of God.

So, what are we learning from the families and friends of the 17 students and teachers shot in Parkland, Florida, last week? How are we being community for them?

We will continue to let these paintings of the beatitudes rotate on the screen to inspire the conversation, while I invite all of you together into groups of three or four to talk about how these beatitudes have shown up in your lives. How have you been blessed and how are you being a blessing?

Cherin's Video

### **III. Communion**

Jesus was both blessed and a blessing on the night he was betrayed...