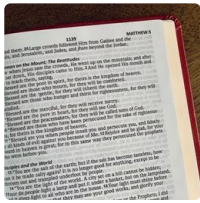


# OpenTheo

## Introduction



### **The Beatitudes** - Steve Gregg

In this introduction by Steve Gregg, he announces the beginning of a new series on the Beatitudes. He discusses the meaning of the English word "blessed," stating that it requires additional explanation beyond the simple word "happy." Gregg emphasizes that being blessed is not just a declaration that someone has God's favor, but it is also a wishing for happiness and blissfulness. He explores various biblical references to being blessed and concludes with a discussion of the ideal citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven.

## **Transcript**

Tonight we begin a new series which will be on the Beatitudes. I would like for you to look at Matthew chapter 5 where begins Matthew's rendering or report of the so-called Sermon on the Mount. And it is there that we discover at the outset of the sermon eight statements which are generally called the Beatitudes.

I'd like to begin reading at Matthew chapter 5 verse 1 through verse 12. And seeing the multitudes, Jesus went up on a mountain. And when he was seated, his disciples came to him.

Then he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. This sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, is

I think the most well-known, the most famous of Jesus' sermons.

It is arguably the most important. I realize there are people who would say all scripture is equally important. There are some who even object to having red letter editions of the Bible because they feel that that is somehow relegating all the scriptures that are printed in black to some lesser importance than those which are in red.

Obviously, the words of Jesus being put in a class by themselves. I'm not among those who believe that the words of Jesus are to be heeded more than say the words of the Apostles. I believe that the words of the Apostles are equally important.

However, I do believe that we would make a grave mistake if we did not recognize supreme importance in some portions of scripture and merely great importance in others. In the Old Testament law, Jesus made it very clear that there are some matters weightier than others. And not everything that God said through Moses or the prophets was equally, equally weighty.

Jesus said in Matthew 23, 23, that the scribes and Pharisees kept some of the things in the law, like to pay their tithes of mint anise and coming, but they neglected, he said, the weightier matters of the law. So there are some things in the word of God weightier than others. Now, in the sayings of Jesus, it would be very hard for me to find anything that I don't consider very weighty.

I think everything in the teaching of Jesus is quite weighty. But I do think that some things in the teachings of Jesus really stand out as at least for the practical purpose of knowing how to follow him in discipleship. They stand out as of particular importance.

And I think the Sermon on the Mount would have to fall into the category of that kind of passages. Now, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is found in chapters five, six and seven. We are not intending at this point to go through the entire sermon, but in the next several weeks, I intend to take each of the Beatitudes, which are the beginning statements.

And as you can see, I'm sure most of you are familiar with the Beatitudes, but if you were not very familiar with them, we're talking about those statements that begin with the expression, blessed are. And now this is not the only place in the Bible that we find Beatitudes, there are many Beatitudes in the scriptures, both in the Old and the New Testament. There are even many others in the teaching of Jesus that are not found in this collection.

A Beatitude is a declaration of blessedness. And by blessedness, we mean. At least the most common definition given for the Greek word is Markarius, the most common definition given is happiness.

A blessed person is one who is happy now, instinctively, when we read these statements,

we we feel that some additional explanation besides simply the English word happy needs to be given when we're trying to find synonyms for this word, blessed, because when we read blessed, for example, are they who mourn? It doesn't seem appropriate to say happy are those who mourn because the emotion experienced by a mourner is not happiness. And therefore, sometimes the word Markarius or blessed, which is found at the beginning of each of these statements, is expanded, for example, in the Amplified Bible. By the way, it gets very tedious reading this section in the Amplified Bible because the Amplified Bible translators decided to try to put in every possible meaning of the word at the beginning.

And it takes about an hour and a half to read through the Beatitudes in the Amplified Bible because blessed is rendered there as happy, fortunate to be envied. And several other words, too, and every time. Now, this does bring out, of course, more of the meaning of the word blessed.

It's not merely an emotion of happiness that is described, but it is describing persons who have grounds to be happy. And at a certain level, they are happy. Even those who mourn in the sense that Jesus speaks of it here are happy at a different level than merely in the emotions.

We'll explore that a little more later. But what I'd like to do tonight is take an overview of the Beatitudes. I had actually thought that I might start by taking the first one, but I think that before we even start taking the individual Beatitudes, it's important that we take some overall comments and observations about them.

A Beatitude is a statement that starts with the word blessed, blessed are or blessed is, and then states some kind of person who is blessed. In the Scripture, more often than not, it is God who is said to be blessed, especially in the Old Testament. Blessed be God.

Blessed be the Lord are frequently repeated phrases in the Scripture. And, you know, if we render that happy, happy is the Lord, happy is God. We are we really get a picture of God that is maybe different than we sometimes have.

Sometimes people think of a grumpy God up in heaven. But the Bible says we have a blessed God, a happy God, a blissful God. Actually, blessedness also has the idea of blissful, which is a kind of happiness.

Now, I'd like to just give you some examples of the other Beatitudes that are not about God himself. That is where it is not God who is declared to be blessed, but where categories of persons or sometimes individuals are called blessed. In the book of Judges, for example, we'll take some Old Testament examples first.

At the end of the battle, which was led by Deborah and Barak, when a woman named Jael was instrumental in winning that battle because the enemy general Sisera came into

her tent seeking hospitality and she nailed him to the floor with a tent peg. And while that doesn't seem very hospitable and it seems actually very treacherous, yet from the point of view of the Israelites, she is the one who saved the country. And so she is celebrated.

And in the song of Deborah, where Deborah and the children of Israel are celebrating the victory once it has been accomplished, they make this statement in Judges 5, 24. Most blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Blessed is she among women in tents.

That's a Beatitude. Blessed is this person. She's happy.

She's blessed. She's fortunate. Now, the suggestion here, of course, is because there's blessing upon her, not because she has a man nailed to the floor of her tent.

That doesn't make a person happier than other people, generally speaking. But it means happy because she's received favor from God, that she was God's instrument. She did something that was heroic in the sight of God and God favors her.

It is the favor of God that is implied as the basis for happiness here and also elsewhere throughout. In the book of Ruth, we have another instance when Ruth came home from gleaning in the field of Boaz and Naomi saw that she had come home with a particularly abundant bundle of gleanings. Naomi spoke in Ruth chapter 2 and I can't turn the page here properly.

There we go. And said and her mother-in-law said to her, where have you gleaned today and where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you. In other words, Boaz, who turned out to be the one who took notice of her.

So this is a blessing pronounced upon the head of Boaz. Now you can see here that that's not that's not merely a declaration that this man is a happy man, but it's wishing a blessing on somebody. A beatitude is more than in some case, at least more than just a declaration that somebody is enviable because the favor of God is upon them.

But it's wishing them happiness. It's wishing them blissfulness. And so a beatitude can have both of these forces, the force of simply declaring.

And I mean, they can be in the indicative or they can be wishing a blessing. They can be in an imperative mood. May this person be blessed.

One of the best known beatitudes in the Old Testament is the first line in the book of Psalms. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

That's a blessed man. Now, of course, that's in a singular. Blessed is the man, but there's not a particular man in view.

It's a category. Any man who meditates day and night in the law of the Lord, any man who shuns the counsel of the wicked and the company of the scorners and takes delight in the law of the Lord and meditates day and night, that man is an enviable man. That man is a blessed man, according to the psalmist.

Another place where a very well-known psalm, where there's a beatitude and it begins with one, is Psalm 32, possibly better known than some psalms because it's quoted by Paul in Romans chapter four. And there David says, Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. And that person is you and I. If we are Christians, if we've been born again, if God has forgiven our sins, we are blessed, we are happy people, we have occasion to be happy, we are enviable, we're fortunate.

In Proverbs chapter eight, likewise, a beatitude that can apply to us conditionally. You see, the blessing is on people of a certain category. The decision to be in that category is ours, but the blessing comes with the category.

In Proverbs chapter eight, it is wisdom personified who is speaking as if it were a woman speaking. And she says in verse 34, Blessed is the man who listens to me. That is who listens to wisdom.

For blessed are those who keep my ways. The person who listens to wisdom and keeps the ways of wisdom is a happy, fortunate, enviable person. The prophets also have their share of beatitudes.

I'm only giving samples. I'm not I'm not developing something systematic here at this point. I'm just trying to show you some random samples, really.

There are many more besides. But in Isaiah chapter 30, we have a beatitude in verse 18. Isaiah chapter 30 and verse 18 says, Therefore, the Lord will wait that he may be gracious to you.

And therefore, he will be exalted, that he may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for him.

Those who wait on the Lord, those who wait for God are a blessed kind of people. Now, those are samples of beatitudes in the Old Testament. We find that when Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount with a list of our catalog of beatitudes, he was not framing some new kind of sentence that was to be unique to his teaching.

Not at all. Nor are the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount the only beatitudes in the teaching of Jesus. I've given you in notes are quite a few others.

Besides, it's not necessary for us to look them all up. But many of them, I'm sure, are already familiar. In the 11th chapter of Matthew, for example, and verse six, when John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus to ask if he was the one who is to come or whether another should be sought, Jesus sent back a message with the messengers.

Tell John what you've seen about the miracles and all. And he says, and tell John this verse four or six, excuse me. And blessed is he who is not offended or stumbled because of me.

Of course, he's referring to John, at least holding out a challenge to John, please don't be stumbled by me. You see, Jesus was not conducting his messianic mission in the way that apparently John thought he should. So that John, who had even declared him to be the Lamb of God earlier, now in prison, was having his questions now.

Some have argued that John didn't really have any doubts and that it was not for his own sake, but for his messengers sake that John sent them to Jesus so that they would get an answer to their satisfaction. But in any case, when he says blessed is he who is not offended or stumbled because of me, what he's saying is, if I'm not doing it the way that you thought the Messiah was going to do it, you could fall out. You could stumble, you could bail out and cease to be a believer, cease to be a follower.

But you're blessed if you don't allow these unexpected turns of events for the course I'm taking to stumble you and you just hang in there. The disciples, of course, were among those who were not stumbled by him, even though he spoke about eating his flesh and drinking his blood in John chapter six and a great multitude stopped following him. In fact, it says in John six and verse 66, from that day forward, many of his disciples turned and walked no longer with him, but the twelve stayed with him.

And Jesus said, will you go away also? And they said, where are we going to go? And you alone have the words of eternal life. How can how can we go anywhere? There's really nowhere else to go. And they were among those who were blessed because they would not allow themselves to be stumbled by what he said, stumbled in the sense of ceasing to believe and ceasing to follow him.

In Matthew 13 and verse 16, Jesus said, but blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear. That's a beatitude. Blessed are your eyes that see what you're seeing.

He goes on to say, many wise and righteous men desire to see those things and we're not able to. Though that's a special blessing on the disciples who are contemporaries, Jesus, who actually did see his works. That one doesn't apply quite as across the board to all.

In Matthew 24 and verse 46, this one can apply to us. Matthew 24 and verse 46, Jesus

said, well, I'll read verse forty five to which leads up to it. Who then is a faithful and wise servant whom his master made ruler over his household to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.

When Jesus comes back to check on his servants, to collect them up, to reward them. The man who is found doing what his master left him here to do is a blessed man. And we can just leave it to imagination as Jesus.

Well, Jesus doesn't. He goes on to say what will happen to those who are not faithfully doing what he left them here to do? Cuts them in half and gives them their part with the hypocrites. I'd say it's a blessing not to be in that crowd.

In the Gospel of Luke, also, we have several Beatitudes of Jesus. In Luke chapter six, we have the set of Beatitudes at the beginning of a sermon that closely resembles the Sermon on the Mount in verses 20 through 23. We won't read them at this time, but we'll look at them later today.

But in Luke chapter 11 and verse 27 and 28, we have an interesting exchange between Jesus and a woman in the crowd. In Luke 11 and verse 27, it happened. As he spoke these things that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to him, Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts which nursed you.

But he said, more than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it. Now, here's to the attitudes one uttered by a woman in the crowd. And one was almost sounds like a correction or at least shifting the emphasis.

The woman was saying, blessed is the woman who is your mother. You know, it blesses Mary. There's a beatitude directed toward Mary.

Now, the woman in the crowd might not have known who Mary was, but she was nonetheless hailing Mary, really. And saying that woman whose womb bore you and the breast that nursed you, that's a fortunate, happy woman. And Jesus said, well, really, more happy than her is anyone who hears the word of God and does it.

Now, you might say, well, isn't how could that person be happier than Mary? Didn't Mary hear the word of God and do it sometimes? But there were times when she wasn't all that on the right track. Once she and Jesus' brethren came to take him away and he wouldn't grant them an audience because he said, my real mother and brother are those who do the will of my father. Apparently, he did not include Mary and his brothers among that crowd at that moment.

But what, of course, he is saying is he's not saying that his mother is not one who hears and does the word of God. He's simply saying that the blessing on those who hear the word of God and do it is greater than the blessing of being his physical mother. Being his physical mother may have been a blessing, but how much greater a blessing it is to

those who have eternal blessedness because of a right relationship with God.

Now, Mary, of course, had a right relationship with God. I don't deny that at all. But her being the mother of Jesus was not as important as her being an obedient maidservant.

Her hearing the word of God and doing it like the rest of us. In John 13, 17, we have, I think it may be the only beatitude uttered by Jesus in the gospel of John. He said, if you know these things, blessed are you or happier you if you do them.

Have you ever noticed that you're not very happy when you know what you're supposed to do and you don't do it? When you know what Jesus said to do and you know you're not doing it, it's not a very happy state of conscience for mine. Jesus said, if you know these things, you're happy if you do them. He didn't say you're unhappy if you don't, but that's a given.

You're happier if you don't know them, if you're not going to do them. But if you do know them, it'll hurt your conscience and interfere with your happiness if you're not obedient to them. So notice how often Jesus spoke of the blessedness of those who are obedient.

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and do it. Blessed are those if you know these things, if you do them. There's a blessing in a certain course of action, and Jesus frequently was making reference to that fact.

Now, there are other Beatitudes in the New Testament that are not uttered by Jesus himself. It's not necessary for us to see all of them at all, but just if you are interested in a sampling of them. In Luke 1 and verse 28, when the angel appeared to Mary, says, When she came in, the angel said to her, Rejoice, highly favored of the Lord.

The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women. There an angel pronounced the Beatitude upon Mary.

Blessed are you among women. Same thing that was said of Jael in the Old Testament. She was a particularly blessed woman.

That is to say, she had God's favor upon her. Mary was privileged to be the one who delivered Israel in the Old Testament from Sisera. And Mary was privileged to be the one who was to bring about the deliverance of the human race through giving birth to a son.

In the same chapter later on, when Mary visits Elizabeth in verse 42, Then Elizabeth spoke out with a loud voice and said, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. So, we have Elizabeth pronouncing a Beatitude. You see how common this was among the Jewish people to speak in these terms, to pronounce or to announce or to wish blessing upon persons who seemed fitting or deserving of it.

In James chapter 1 and verse 12, we have yet another from another source. James says,



Blessed is the man who endures temptation. For when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Now, this is an interesting thing, because this one, this Beatitude from James, is constructed like the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Unlike the ones we've looked at so far. Because here it says, Blessed are those in this category because they have such and such a reward.

That's exactly the way Jesus constructed the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

So, James does that here. Blessed is the man who endures temptation. For when he has been tested, he'll receive a crown of life.

This is not probably any accident that James framed this Beatitude in just the form the Sermon on the Mount does. James is the one book in the New Testament that quotes the Sermon on the Mount. Although that particular Beatitude is not an exact quote from any of those in the Sermon on the Mount.

But James, in five chapters, has no fewer than 20 close allusions or quotes from the Sermon on the Mount. So, James seems to be, if anything, a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. Certainly greatly influenced by his meditation on that sermon.

And thus, when he pronounces the Beatitude, unlike the others we've seen, he frames it just the same way Jesus does. In 1 Peter, chapter 4, and verse 14, here's an inverted Beatitude. It is a Beatitude, but the sentence is inverted.

In 1 Peter 4, verse 14, he says, If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you. He could have said, blessed are those who are reproached for the name of Christ. Which, by the way, is very close to the last Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount.

Blessed are you when men reproach you or revile you or whatever. And Peter may well have simply been alluding to that very one. In Revelation, there are seven Beatitudes.

In fact, seven is a very prominent number in the book of Revelation. And, in fact, there are many things in the book of Revelation that are numbered in sevens. Seven seals, seven trumpets, seven vials, seven other things.

There are also, in Revelation, many sevens kind of interwoven that you only find out they're seven by counting them. Because they're not counted for you in the text. And when it comes to Beatitudes, there are seven of those in the book of Revelation as well.

In Revelation 1, 3, it says, Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep the things which are written in it for the time is near. Notice again,

this has to do with hearing the word of God and doing it. Blessed are those who read and hear and do it, who keep these words.

This is the most common Beatitude, I suppose, in the Scripture. His obedience to the word of God places a person in a blessed state. In chapter 14 of Revelation, we have the second one.

Most of them are bunched up near the end of the book. Chapter 14 and verse 13, Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, Write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Okay, and then he tells why.

Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors and their works fallen. To die in the Lord is a blessing, especially after a certain point in time when things are so horrendous that being alive is not all that much of a blessing. In Revelation 16, 15, we have another Beatitude.

This one is uttered by Jesus. Jesus speaks, at least it's in red letters in this particular Bible. Behold, I am coming as a thief.

Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame. We won't discuss the meaning of that in detail. It's obviously got a lot of symbolism in it, about garments and nakedness and so forth.

But the point is, blessed is he who watches, because Jesus made it very clear it's necessary that we do watch. In chapter 19 of Revelation, in verse 9, Then he said to me, Write, Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. I don't think anyone would disagree with that.

That is a blessed privilege, especially since those who are not invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb are invited to another feast in chapter 19 of Revelation, which is the feast that God invites all the carrion birds to, the vultures, where they eat the bodies of horses and kings and so forth. There's two feasts in this chapter. One is the marriage feast of the Lamb, and the other is the feast of the vultures.

So, blessed are you if you're in the first of those, and not the second. In Revelation 20, in verse 6, Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Why? Over such, the second death has no power.

What's that? Well, the second death is the lake of fire. So, blessed is the one who's exempt from that. The last two Beatitudes in the Bible and in the book of Revelation are in chapter 22 of Revelation, verses 7 and 14.

Both of them, well, no, the first one's uttered by Jesus. The other is not necessarily. In verse 7, it's, Behold, I am coming quickly.

Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. Again, blessing upon obedience. Verse 14, Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life.

Again, blessings on obedience. It's quite clear that an obedient life is the life most often spoken of as the one that is happy. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.

So, we've just surveyed, really, quite a variety of Beatitudes in both the Old Testament and the New. Some from the lips of Jesus and some from a variety of other sources in the New Testament. I want, of course, to focus especially on those Beatitudes that are found as an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount.

And these form, obviously, a discrete group. Unlike the ones we've looked at so far in these various samples, which were just individual Beatitudes scattered about in conversation or in contexts that, you know, that only had one. But Jesus very clearly wants to focus on this concept of true blessedness as he opens his Sermon on the Mount because he says it again and again and again and again eight times.

He actually has eight separate Beatitudes and then he, at the very end, he personalizes the last one. Matthew 5 and verse 9, which says, excuse me, 10, which says, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And it may look like there's another Beatitude coming at verse 11, and there is, but it's really just a personalizing of the previous one.

It says, and blessed are you when they revile and persecute you. He already said those who are persecuted are blessed. Now he says, and blessed are you if you're persecuted.

So we have here Jesus giving us some important teaching on happiness. Now this happiness of which he speaks is in a different realm than the happiness that the world seeks to obtain. It is the happiness of the kingdom of God.

Jesus says, in each of these Beatitudes, he gives not only a Beatitude, but also a reason that he finds such people to be blessed. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And each time he gives one of these Beatitudes, he says, because of this.

Now, it's nice of him to do that because some of the things that he says are blessed are not self-evidently blessed. To be blessed, being persecuted, is not self-evidently a happy condition to be in. To be mourning is not self-evidently a condition that would be happy in itself.

To be meek, in other words, one who does not press for his own way. A person who is most likely going to be, he's going to finish last. He's a nice guy.

He's not aggressive. He's not self-assertive. Those people don't seem like the ones that most people envy.

There are many conditions here described that are not necessarily those that we would associate in our natural thinking with happiness. And so, Jesus always makes sense when he teaches. Now, he doesn't always explain why what he says makes sense, but he always makes sense.

He's always got a good reason for what he says. And in this case, he gives us the reason since it's not always self-evident. Why are the poor in spirit happy? Because theirs is the kingdom.

Why are those who mourn said to be happy? Well, because they will be comforted, and so forth. Now, although there are eight Beatitudes, there are only seven things that are said to be the reason for their blessedness. Because the first one is repeated at the end.

The first reason, in verse one, or verse three, is that theirs is the kingdom of heaven. That's also the reason why the last Beatitude, the last group, are blessed, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So that it appears that Jesus has made a full circle.

He starts out by saying, this group of people are blessed because they possess the kingdom. Then he gives all these other things, and gives the reasons why these conditions are blessed. Then finally comes around to those who are persecuted and says, they're blessed because theirs is the kingdom.

Now, it's important to note that this is probably a deliberate literary closure that he's bringing to this whole set. I think it's deliberately trying to point out that he completes the circle, and that all of these blessings belong to the same people, those who have the kingdom. You see, it's those who have the kingdom of heaven who will be comforted.

It is those who are in the kingdom of heaven who will inherit the earth. It is they who will be filled. It is they who will obtain mercy.

It is they who will see God. It is they who will be called the sons of God. It is they who will possess the kingdom, or who do possess the kingdom.

Now, this is interesting too, because when he talks about the reasons why certain people are blessed, because for they whatever, all of the statements are in the future tense, except for the one about the kingdom. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. All the others are future.

They will be comforted. They will inherit the earth. They will be filled.

They will see God. They will be called the sons of God. But they now have the kingdom.

There is a future for these people, but there is a present for them as well. These are

people who are in the kingdom. These are people who possess the kingdom, which is the chief happiness.

You see, Paul said in Romans 14, 17, he said the kingdom of God is not food and drink. He is referring to the dietary laws that restricted the Jews in what they could eat and drink. So the kingdom of God is not about that.

The kingdom of God is not food and drink, but it is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, Romans 14, 17. The kingdom of God is righteousness, and it is peace, and it is joy in the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is a joyful place to be.

And I guess I've been assuming all along here that you will know or that you will agree that the kingdom of heaven of which he speaks here is the same thing as the kingdom of God. Almost all Christians throughout history have recognized that, but I can't assume that everyone knows that because there is a stream of theology that tries to make a distinction between the kingdom of heaven on the one hand and the kingdom of God on the other. But there really is no consistent biblical basis for doing this.

You'll find the term kingdom of heaven used exclusively in the gospel of Matthew. It's not found anywhere else in the scripture. But where you find the same statements that are recorded in Matthew concerning the kingdom of heaven, when you find the parallels to those in Mark or Luke, it's always the kingdom of God there.

These are just interchangeable terms. Matthew, for whatever reason, used the term kingdom of heaven, where the other gospels used the term kingdom of God. And I won't go into any further arguments about that.

I have on other occasions. But suffice it to say that I use the term kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God as synonyms because it is my conviction that's how the Bible uses the term. So the kingdom of God is the issue here.

Those who have the kingdom are a blessed group of people. In fact, we could say that these particular beatitudes that begin the Sermon on the Mount are sort of a charter of citizenship in the kingdom of God. There are those who have called the Sermon on the Mount itself as a manifesto of the kingdom of God.

I don't know exactly the range of meaning of the word manifesto, so I wouldn't have selected it myself, but it may well be rightly called the manifesto of the kingdom of God. But I would say that the beatitudes certainly describe the conditions of citizenship and the privileges of citizenship in the kingdom of God. I would say we could call these beatitudes the charter of citizenship in the kingdom of God.

And as such, there are several things I'd like to observe in them. One is that in the kingdom of God, though we read that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, it is not a joy as the world gives. It is not worldly giddiness.

It is not worldly ecstasy that he is describing here. He's talking about something that is a supernatural phenomenon, something that is not known outside of the kingdom of God, but is to those who are in it. It is rightly called happiness, even if it is not always at the emotional level.

A person who is mourning over his sin can at a deeper level experience joy at the same time. A person who is in trials, in weariness, in heaviness, can rejoice in that trial. I know because the Bible commands us to, and the Bible never commands us to do things that you can't do.

Rejoicing means to take joy in it. In fact, James says in James chapter 1, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations or trials. It's all joy.

Well, I mean, I guess at the level of the Spirit, it's all joy, and the level of the emotions, and in the level of even physical experience, trials can be very unhappy experiences. But there is a joy that exists at a level that only is known in the kingdom of God. It is, as Paul said, joy in the Holy Spirit.

Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. It's a spiritual joy. It is a fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and other things. Now, Jesus is describing, therefore, a spiritual state which is enjoyed by those who are in his kingdom, who are citizens of the kingdom. Now, it's important that we realize that we are citizens in the kingdom now.

We do anticipate a broader manifestation of the kingdom at the second coming of Christ. But the kingdom does not await the second coming of Christ for its inauguration. And we do not have to await the second coming of Christ in order to experience the benefits of the kingdom, at least the ones that are available now.

Some of them are still future, of course. But Paul said in Colossians 1.13 that God has translated us out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of his own dear Son. That's already been done.

He has translated us out of the power of darkness into the kingdom. And in this kingdom, we have a citizenship which entitles us to certain privileges that are not to be had outside of this kingdom. Now, what is the kingdom of God then? Well, I have spoken about that some weeks ago when we talked about the gospel of the kingdom.

I've actually on many occasions spoken about what the kingdom of God is. If I could just say it very briefly, the kingdom of God is the new order of things that Jesus inaugurated when He came. The Old Testament prophets predicted that the Messiah would come.

And when He would come, He would come as a king. Now, there are some who think that

Jesus didn't come as a king when He came the first time and that He awaits His second coming to come as a king. However, this doesn't seem to agree with the biblical data.

Because in Zechariah 9, it says, Behold, your king cometh. He is meek, riding on a donkey. He is gentle, riding on the foal of an ass.

Now, was that the second coming or the first coming? Well, we have no doubt about that because Jesus rode into Jerusalem in that very manner and the evangelist who wrote the gospel tells us that was the fulfillment of what Zechariah said. And yet, what did Zechariah say? Your king is coming. It was as king that He came.

Now, the new order of things that Jesus established, therefore, is rightly called a kingdom because it is a monarchy. As the gospel message was understood when preached by the apostles, by those who heard it, expressed in Acts 17, 7, it says, These people are preaching there's another king, one Jesus. That's right, they were.

Their hearers misunderstood the implications of that and they thought that that meant that the apostles were trying to overthrow the power of Rome, which was not at all what they were preaching, but they did get one part right. They were indeed preaching that there is another king, one Jesus. But there cannot be a king without a kingdom.

There cannot be a monarchy without a domain. There cannot be a ruler without subjects. And the kingdom of God exists because the king exists and he has subjects.

And wherever those subjects are, there is the kingdom. They have the kingdom. They possess the kingdom of God and they experience kingdom status, kingdom privileges.

And Jesus here defines what those privileges are. So he lays out a charter for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. In redefining happiness, he obviously picks categories that not all, certainly those who are unspiritual, would not agree that these categories truly define happiness.

If you look at the closest thing to parallels to these beatitudes in Luke, and by the way, we can discuss later on whether this is the same sermon in Luke or a different one, but there are a group of beatitudes in Luke as well and they resemble closely, somewhat, these ones in Matthew. Luke 6, verses 20-23 says, Then he lifted up his eyes toward his disciples and said, Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and revile you and cast out your name as evil for the son of man's sakes. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

Now, notice, happy are you poor, happy are you who are hungry, happy are you who

weep, happy are you who are persecuted. Every one of those conditions is not regarded as an enviable condition by the world. In the world's eyes, those who are to be envied are those who are rich, powerful, insulated from sorrow, popular, loved by all.

But those are not the ones that are happy in the sense that Jesus defines the happiness of the kingdom of God. The happiness of the kingdom of God comes from knowing the favor of God. Remember David said, we read it earlier, Psalm 32, verse 1, How happy, how blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven.

Happy is he against whom the Lord does not impute iniquity. What is that a description of? That is the rejoicing of a clean conscience. I would like to give you an axiom.

It's not found in Scripture quite in these words, but I think the Scripture will bear it up. And that is that it is difficult to be unhappy with a clean conscience. And it is difficult to be happy with an unclean conscience.

The conscience is very much the arbiter of the kind of happiness that this is talking about. There is a blessedness, a blissfulness in knowing that God favors you and that there is no occasion of complaint that God has against you. Now this may be because you've done something pleasing in His sight or it may simply be that because although you haven't been pleasing in His sight, you have obtained forgiveness.

In either case, your conscience is clear. Once you have received forgiveness from God, your conscience is clear. Better still, if you don't do the things that require forgiveness.

If you don't violate His commandments. It speaks in 1 John 3, verse 18 and following, My little children, let us love in word... not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him.

For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God and whatever we ask, we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. Now notice, if our heart does not condemn us, then we have confidence toward God.

That's a happy condition. How could we ever have confidence toward God except that we recognize that He favors us. He welcomes us.

We can come confidently before the throne of grace. Now, we know from the book of Hebrews that we can come confidently before the throne of grace whether we've sinned or not if we have obtained forgiveness, which is available through the blood of Jesus. But John actually points out another reason for confidence toward God because we actually don't... because we keep His commandments and because we do those things that are pleasing in His sight.



It's not just that I've been forgiven and therefore I have confidence toward God. John points out, I can have confidence toward God also when I have been obedient, especially when I've been obedient. When I have kept His commandments and done those things pleasing in His sight, then I have confidence toward God.

My heart doesn't condemn me. It is the cleanness of conscience that provides the sense of access to God, that confidence toward God, that absence of condemnation that comes knowing that either I have been doing those things that God is pleased with and I can sense His pleasure, or even though I have done some things He wasn't pleased with and have repented, He has forgiven me. He has not imputed iniquity against me, as David said, and that too is a happy state.

Happiness comes from having a clean heart and a clean conscience. There are many people who are happy in all the ways the world looks for happiness. They are rich.

They are full. They do not mourn. They laugh.

They are not persecuted. All men speak well of them. But when they go to bed at night, they don't sleep well because they are not happy in the sense that Jesus is talking about.

Their conscience is not clear before God. I'm not saying a person can't have a clear conscience before God and be rich and full and laugh and have people like you. I'm not saying that people in that condition necessarily are at odds with God, but Jesus is saying that all those conditions which the world counts as the basis of happiness do not confer happiness.

What confers happiness is being rightly related to God, having a clear conscience before God. Men may hate you, but if God says, I like you, well done, good and faithful servant, that is a happy condition. That is a fortunate and enviable condition vis-à-vis the opposite condition to that.

Now, in addition to redefining happiness, the attitudes give us a composite description of those who qualify for citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Now, I didn't say that we qualify by having these traits because some would argue we have these traits because of the work God has already done. Because we have been brought into the Kingdom of God, these traits now describe the way we are in our changed condition, in our regenerated condition.

I would have no argument against that. But I would also say that the statements do sound as if the rewards mentioned are the result of qualifying in these conditions. A person who is poor in spirit will have the Kingdom.

A person who is arrogant is not going to have the Kingdom. There is such a thing as qualifying for citizenship. And of course, we need to make it very plain.

We don't mean to say that you get into the Kingdom of God by doing these things. These would rather be conditions for grace. If you are poor in spirit, if you are mourning over your sin, if you are, in other words, sensitive and sorry for what you've done to God, those would be the things that bring grace.

Now, I realize that some people tell us we receive grace first, then the conditions come, because grace is unconditional. Not necessarily so. The Bible does not teach that grace is unconditional.

In fact, it says specifically twice in the New Testament, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. He gives grace to people who are humble. That's qualifying.

If you're proud, you don't qualify. He resists the proud. He gives grace to the humble.

His favor is upon those who are humble. The poor in spirit are blessed for having been poor in spirit. We'll say more about that beatitude, of course, next time.

But I just want to say that we are not describing here eight different kinds of people, and each will receive his own individual blessing. This group over here, they're poor in spirit. There's the kingdom.

This group over here, they're mourning, so they're going to be comforted. Here's another group over here, they're meek, so they're going to inherit the earth. Now, this is simply a composite picture of all the citizens in the kingdom of heaven.

To be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, you must be poor in spirit. You must be meek. You must be pure in heart.

These are the descriptions of one people, those whose is the kingdom. Likewise, it is an enumeration of privileges, but these privileges don't fall to one group or another. It is those who are in the kingdom of God who will have all these privileges.

How could it be otherwise? Can you imagine that any truly saved person would lack the privilege of being called the children of God, or lack the privilege of seeing God ultimately, or lack the privilege of being comforted or being filled? All these things are privileges that every child of God experiences because every child of God is ideally described in each of these statements. I say ideally because the Bible often presents things in an idealized form. God never presents as a goal for us anything less than perfection.

But this doesn't mean that the Bible teaches that we are perfect or that we live up to the standard. But God could never lower the bar because if He lowered the bar and it was no longer at perfection that we were aiming, we might make it over that bar and say, hey, I've made it. But until we are like Jesus, we haven't made it.

The bar is Jesus Himself. He is perfection. And to be like Him is the goal.

The idealized Christian is like Christ. And the true Christian has that as his ideal and as his goal. To be like Jesus and all of these traits.

Part of a description of himself and herself. But the Bible is very realistic. The Bible is aware that the Spirit may be willing and the flesh weak.

The disciples were not perfectly obedient. They wanted to be. That's why Jesus said their spirit was willing.

They wanted to be, but their flesh was weak. They weren't. They fell asleep when He said, stay awake.

That's not obedience. And likewise, many things Jesus has told us, as James says, in many things we all stumble. But stumbling describes a person who has taken a misstep from the goal he's been on.

When you stumble, you're not deliberately stumbling. Stumbling is a deviation from your normal path, from your normal walk. The normal walk of the believer is a walk of obedience, a walk toward perfection in the image of Christ.

Stumbling is an accident. Stumbling is a failure. And when people stumble, they don't suddenly define the rest of their life in terms of a series of stumbles.

You stumble. You find yourself to have stumbled. You get back on your feet.

And you don't just keep stumbling. You keep walking. You may stumble yet again, but the point is, life is not simply a series of stumbles.

It is a series of steps. It is a walk. Stumbling is not characteristic.

Sometimes bad people stumble into good behavior once in a while. And sometimes godly people stumble into some kind of a failure, imperfection. And yet, because it is stumbling, that's not how they walk regularly.

The ideal is not to stumble. The ideal is to walk. Realistically, we know that we sometimes stumble.

In many things, we all stumble, James said. But that doesn't mean every moment. That doesn't mean most of the time.

That is not descriptive of who we are or what we're aimed at. What we are aimed at is Christ-likeness and perfection. That's where the bar is.

The Bible cannot lower the bar for us. God can only give grace to us when we fail to measure up. That's fine.

That's good enough. But failing to measure up suggests that we're attempting to, that we have it as our goal to. And Jesus describes the ideal citizen of the kingdom.

And that ideal is our ideal, which is why we want to take the time in the next few weeks to look at each of these things carefully enough to know how to define and obtain, as best as the resources God has given us, allow these ideals and to be the kinds of citizens that the king deserves to have in his kingdom.