

SERMON NOTES
Matthew 5:1-16
“Life in All Its Fullness”

Intro:

- How would you like to experience a life that is *Joyful / Spiritually Prosperous / Satisfied / Happy / Whole / Healthy / At Peace / Divinely Favored / Fruitful / Honored & esteemed by God?*
- Jesus’ keys to living such a life are found in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5

- How would you like to peer into the mind of Christ to discover his perspective on how life works // how the Christian life can be lived in all its fullness // how to live a life of significance and fruitfulness // *how to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit // how to tap into the unlimited resources of the kingdom of heaven*
- Jesus reveals those inner workings of his mind in the Beatitudes

- How would you like to understand the core truths of all of Jesus’ teachings – the key that unlocks the essential meaning to all that he taught?
- *That key is found in the Beatitudes*

- How would you like to be a part of a spiritually dynamic church that is truly the salt of the earth and the light of the world – *a church that stands strong for truth and righteousness in a spiritually dark world* – a church known both for its compassionate ministries in meeting the needs of hurting people and for its effective proclamation of the Gospel – *a church that God is using as His agents of transformation in making a significant difference in the lives of students and families and an entire community?*
- *The keys to becoming that kind of church are found in the Beatitudes*

I. BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Matthew 5:3 (NIV) ³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

NLT: “God blesses those who realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them.

- It is impossible to translate the Greek word (*makarios*) with just one English word

- *Blessed // Joyful // Spiritually Prosperous // Satisfied // Happy // Whole // Healthy // At Peace // Divinely Favored // Enjoying the Fullness of Life with God* – all of these words capture some element or angle of the word
- *And so does another word: **Honored or Honorable** – that is – esteemed by God*
- *Honored and esteemed by God are the poor in spirit – for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*
- **If you weren't startled and jarred and dumbfounded by those words – then you weren't listening or paying attention**
- We need to understand the word *Poor* before we can understand what Jesus meant by *poor in spirit*
- There are two Greek words for *poor* – one refers to the working poor who work hard to earn a subsistence living covering the bare necessities of life
- *The other word refers to the begging poor who are so destitute and so desperate that they are reduced to begging and depending on the charity of others to stay alive*
- Guess which word Jesus used in both Matthew 5 and Luke 6?
- *The word for begging poverty*
- ***Blessed are the destitute // Honored are the beggars***
- *That is how Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount – and understanding this truth is key to understanding all that Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God and Salvation and Discipleship*
- Think of the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast
- *Some displaced persons have returned to rebuild their homes and their lives and to pull themselves up by their bootstraps*
- Most Americans respect people who may be poor but who are working hard to better their lives by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps
- *But how many Americans respect those who are destitute and homeless and either living on welfare or else are spending their days begging in the French Quarter?*
- ***Blessed are the destitute // Honored are the beggars // Fortunate are the homeless panhandlers — for theirs is the kingdom of heaven***

- **If you are not jarred by these words of Jesus – then you’re not paying attention – and you will never understand how to live under the reign of Christ in God’s Kingdom**
- *Because the Kingdom of God operates by the rule of Grace – which is alien to the ways of this world – to live and prosper and be fruitful in God’s kingdom, we must learn a whole new, radically different way of thinking*
- **The rule of grace means that none of us pays our own way in the kingdom of God -- ever**
- *The rule of grace means that everything you need to prosper spiritually is received as a gift by humble faith rather than earned as a reward by hard work and excellent performance*
- **The rule of grace means that the only merits that God will ever honor in His kingdom are the merits of Jesus Christ – and that every single citizen of God’s kingdom is living off the merits of Jesus Christ – always**
- *The rule of grace means that those who advance furthest and serve most effectively in God’s kingdom are those who most readily renounce their pride and self-reliance and self-sufficiency and self-respect, and admit their neediness, and come to God empty-handed – again and again*
- ***Blessed are the begging poor in spirit – Why? Because they always have their hand out looking for charity and therefore are most receptive to the unearned and undeserved blessings of the kingdom***
- To be Poor in spirit is to be *destitute of righteousness*
--not having what it takes to be accepted by God – standing in need of grace
- How do you feel when you recognize that you don’t have what it takes to be successful or respected or accepted?
- *Inadequate // embarrassed // ashamed // alienated // humiliated // inferior*
- **Those are the feelings that accompany poverty**
- *Blessed and honored and esteemed by God are the poor in spirit*
- **Our culture teaches us that anyone can achieve success and prosperity if they just work hard enough and live right**
- *That is why it is considered shameful to be poor in America – because to be poor in America is seen by most as indicating the person must be lazy or sinful or defective in some way*
- Most people assume the same principle holds true with God – *that the American Dream mentality rules in God’s Kingdom* -- you can achieve salvation and spiritual prosperity and spiritual maturity if you just work hard enough and live right

- *If true, that would be good news for the religious and bad news for the irreligious // good news for the morally respectable and bad news for immoral sinners // good news for the elder brothers of this world and bad news for the Prodigal sons // good news for the Pharisees and religious conservatives and bad news for everyone else*
- ***Blessed are the poor in spirit turns that whole mindset upside down on its head***
- *To be poor in spirit -- spiritually destitute -- implies that one is defective in some way*
- **Exactly – spiritually bankrupt, in fact -- destitute of righteousness – entirely dependent upon the grace and merits of Another – namely, Jesus Christ**
- *Blessed are you if you see yourself as God sees you and live your whole Christian life as one who is entirely dependent upon the grace and righteousness of Christ --Blessed are the begging poor – for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*
- **We enter the kingdom of heaven as beggars – completely empty-handed**
- *That means we empty our hands of everything we depend upon for acceptance and respect and honor and righteousness and self-esteem – whether beauty or strength or intelligence or education or talents or success or possessions or social status or morality or spirituality or good works or character strengths or religious activities*
- *When we enter the kingdom of heaven – we exchange all of that for humble dependence upon the righteousness and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for right standing with God*
- And we continue to do so throughout our Christian life
- *We rely on the finished work and merits of Christ's obedience and righteousness rather than on our own spiritual performance or worldly success – **not just for our initial acceptance by God – but for our daily acceptance and for receiving all the blessings and resources of the kingdom needed for our Christian living and service***
- Throughout the whole of your Christian journey – what one issue will trip you up and cause you to stumble more than any other?
- *Your stubborn, prideful conviction that there must be something that you can do to make yourself acceptable to God – something you can do win God's favor*
- And over and against that deeply ingrained attitude within all of us come these startling words of Jesus: ***Blessed are the destitute in spirit who recognize their need of God's grace // Honored are the beggarly in spirit who always have their hand out begging for grace // How fortunate are those who recognize their desperate need of the Grace of God – not only when they first accept Christ as Savior – but throughout their Christian life***
--for the kingdom of heaven and all its blessings and resources and power belong to those who recognize their neediness and dependence upon the Grace of God and the Finished Work of Jesus Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit

- Now, most of you are familiar with Jesus' words: *Blessed are the poor in spirit*
- But here's the problem: *Having put your trust in Christ's finished work on the Cross to save you from your sins and give you eternal life in heaven – now you are living by the values of the working poor: Blessed are those poor who work hard to obtain the blessings of God // Blessed are those poor who work hard to progress spiritually beyond their peers // Blessed are those poor who work hard to serve Christ and build up His church and advance His kingdom // Blessed are those poor who are honored by God because of their correct doctrines and moral lifestyles and generous giving and dedicated service in the church*
- Somewhere along the way you became righteous enough and spiritually mature enough and knowledgeable enough in the Scriptures and valuable enough in the work of the church that you made the transition from the destitute and beggarly to the working poor in spirit
- *Your hands are no longer empty – you no longer have to beg for everything you need to sustain you*
- The destitute, begging poor approach the throne of God with humility, neediness, repentance, and empty hands – *asking God for His help and blessing and empowerment – acknowledging that their best efforts are in vain without the power and love and energy and wisdom of God flowing through them*
- The working poor approach the throne of God with their resume in hand – *awaiting their next assignment with the confident assurance that their talents and hard work are sufficient to accomplish the work of the Lord*
- It happens to all of us – after we've been Christians for awhile – our hands start to become full – we lose our beggarly spirit – we join the ranks of the working poor – *we pray less and work more because we feel less desperate to beg for God's mercies*
- **Given the choice between devoting our best energies and limited time to praying or to serving – we choose to serve – because we value working over begging**
- *But God's richest blessings are given by His grace to the begging poor in spirit*
- **God gives grace to the humble**
- So either we must humble ourselves under God's mighty hand – *or else God must humble us Himself because He loves us and wants to give us His best gifts – which are gifts of grace and the fullness of His Spirit*
- The Sermon on the Mount begins with this declaration – which is the key to understanding the mindset and theology of Jesus: ***Blessed are the poor in spirit***

- ***Blessed are those who come empty-handed -- begging Him for grace – for theirs is the kingdom of heaven – to them belong the power and authority and resources of the kingdom of God***
- The resources and blessings of the kingdom of God are infinite – but only the poor in spirit are able to receive
 --those who are full of themselves / confident in themselves / resourceful in themselves / strong in themselves / wise in themselves – are too full of themselves to be able to receive God’s grace and the fullness of the Spirit
 --the way to increase your capacity to experience the Spirit’s fullness is by emptying yourself of pride and self-sufficiency
- The more emptied we are of pride and selfish ambition – the greater our capacity for receiving grace and the fullness of the Spirit – *and the greater our capacity for receiving grace and the fullness of the Spirit – the more we grow in Christlikeness and the more fruitful we can be in God’s Kingdom*
- ***The starting point for serving Jesus Christ and being salt and light in the world is not what we have to offer God – rather, the starting point is how well we are able to receive what He needs to give us in order to work through us – and receiving is a function of being poor in spirit – and our individual and corporate prayer life is the evidence of that begging attitude – or lack of it***
 --God gives grace – not to the strong, not to the talented, not to the successful, not to the intelligent, not to the attractive, not to the prosperous, not to the hard-working, not to the religiously committed, not to the morally conservative, not to the self-reliant and self-righteous – ***but to the humble and poor in spirit***
- ***Blessed are the poor in spirit – for theirs is the kingdom of heaven***

II. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

Matthew 5:4 (NIV) ⁴ **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

- ***There is an application here for those mourning a major loss – the death of a loved one or a divorce or the loss of a job or business or the loss of health or the inability to conceive and bear children or any other major loss***
- **Ultimately, we find our comfort in God and His love and care and sovereign control and hope for the future**

- *But in the progression of thought in the Beatitudes, the primary meaning here is the mourning of repentance*
- This is the grief and godly sorrow we experience in response to our loss of righteousness and our poverty of spirit
- One of the essential steps to recovering from a spiritual defeat or failure is to take inventory of our losses and the damage and pain we have caused others
- *What has your sin cost you? How has your sin wounded and damaged others?*
- Only as we appreciate the full depth of these losses caused by sin can we be cleansed and healed as we fully surrender to Jesus Christ
- *Godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation and recovery and leaves no regret*
- Rather than trying to minimize our sin or excuse it or rationalize it or blame others in order to save face – we need to own our sins – count our losses – make amends for the damages to others – recognize the severity of our character defects – *only then can we be comforted by the Gospel and Christ's healing grace*
- To mourn our sins is to submit to the painful process of asking God to remove those sins that are damaging to ourselves and to others – and to acknowledge our dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome our sinful habits
- *A paradox of spiritual recovery is that we must give up in order to win – admit defeat in order to experience victory – yield our wills in order to gain self-control – surrender in order to overcome*
- *And how does God bring comfort to broken people mourning their sinfulness?*
- With the truth of the Gospel: *I am totally accepted, fully pleasing, deeply loved, completely forgiven, and empowered to live a new life in Christ – because of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus*
- *Blessed are those who mourn their sinfulness and experience godly sorrow leading to repentance – for after great pain – a new life emerges*

III. BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

Matthew 5:5 (NIV) ⁵ **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

NLT: God blesses those who are gentle and lowly, for the whole earth will belong to them.

- Meekness has nothing to do with weakness
- *The Greek word for meekness was used of breaking a wild stallion*
- It has to do with bringing strength under control
- The human soul is much like an untamed stallion – sometimes majestic and powerful – other times stubborn and destructively dangerous
- *Just as an untamed stallion must be broken in order to be ridden and used, so also an untamed soul must be broken in order to be guided and used by God*
- Meekness is the result of the breaking process
- *The evidence of meekness is submission to authority – both God’s authority and human authorities*
- It is one of the most essential qualities in a spiritual leader – submission to the leadership authority of other leaders
- This quality is also essential in wives who want to encourage their husbands to become spiritual leaders
- *The word used here is the same used by Peter in addressing Christian wives:*

1 Peter 3:4 You should be known for the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God.

- *A gentle or meek spirit does not mean a weak or passive spirit – but it is respectful toward to the leadership of her husband – even when he is spiritually immature or doesn’t know the Bible as well as the wife*
- One of the most effective ways for a Christian wife to discourage and stifle her husband’s spiritual growth is by correcting her husband’s spiritual or biblical deficiencies in front of others – **it’s better to keep quiet**
- *The attitude that needs to show off knowledge or win arguments or challenge leaders or prove oneself right all the time is not the gentle and quiet spirit of meekness*
- **But meekness is not a female characteristic – it was also a primary character quality of two of the greatest male leaders of all time: Moses and Jesus**
- **What are the characteristics of meekness?**

(1) Giving up our rights

- These rights include the right to run my own life // the right to be materially successful // the right to be respected and well-treated // the right to have my own way // the right to have the last word // the right to prove I’m right //

- *Anger is the emotional signal indicating that we are clinging to our rights and our rights are being violated*
- **The more rights we cling to – the more anger we will experience**

(2) Humility

- **Humility does not demand its own way**
- *Humility seeks to serve others*
- **Humility does not seek attention or credit**
- *Humility does not dominate conversations*
- **Humility forgives when offended, but is hard to offend**
- *Humility does not have a critical spirit*
- **Humility has a teachable spirit**
- *Humility has a gracious and thankful spirit*

(3) Gentleness

- **Harnessed strength**
- *Sensitivity to the feelings of others*
- **Calmness in the midst of stress**

(4) Servant Attitude

- **Someone has said that you know whether or not you really have a servant attitude by how you react when you're treated like one**
- *God normally uses brokenness to tame our soul and develop meekness*
- **Brokenness is like childbirth: extremely painful – but leading to new life**
- *Everyone gets hurt in life, but not everyone responds with meekness*
- *Spiritual brokenness is responding to trials and suffering with an attitude of humility, repentance, submission and surrender to God – what the Bible calls a broken and contrite spirit*
- **Martin Luther: “It is the nature of God to make something out of nothing. Consequently, if someone is nothing, God can make something out of him.**
- **“Thus GOD accepts no one except the abandoned, makes no one healthy except the sick, brings no one to life except the dead, shows mercy upon no one except the wretched, and gives no one grace except those who have not grace.**
- **“Consequently, no proud person can become holy, wise or righteous, or become the material with which God works, or have God’s work in him.”**

- **God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble and meek**

IV. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 5:6 (NIV) ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

- *Righteousness is the state of being in a right relationship with God*
- Righteousness is essential for eternal life and for living an abundant life here and now
- *Why do those who are blessed of God hunger and thirst for righteousness?*
- Because we understand the value and necessity of righteousness – and we understand that we are lacking and destitute of that righteousness
- *If the first step in becoming righteous is to crave it – the second step is to admit that we don't have it*
- ***Blessed are the poor in spirit***
- *Blessed are those who mourn their spiritual poverty and lack of righteousness*
- Blessed are the meek, the humble and the broken
- *Some religious people – such as the Pharisees in Jesus' day – try to achieve righteousness by their own efforts*

Matthew 5:20 (NIV) ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

- *You will never be able to out-Pharisee the Pharisees – you will never be able to achieve a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees*
- How then will you be able to enter the kingdom of heaven?
- **By believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior – by accepting the gift of a right relationship with God by faith in what Jesus Christ did for you on the Cross in taking away all your sins**
- Most of you have already received the righteousness of Christ by faith when you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior
- *Is that all there is to hungering and thirsting for righteousness?*

- If a Christian has this attitude: *God sees me as righteous in Christ – so it doesn't matter that I still have so many sins and bad habits in my life*
- Would you call that *hungering and thirsting for righteousness?*
- ***NO – there must also be a passionate craving to live righteously***

- Living righteously begins with affirming by faith the truth of God's gracious acceptance of us in Christ
- ***Many Christians try desperately to become something they already are: accepted***
- **You cannot do for yourself what has already been done for you by Christ**
- ***Acceptance with God is a gift that was achieved for us by Christ***

- Our faith-union with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection enables us to say confidently: *'I am no longer a product of my past – I am a product of the work of Christ on the Cross'*

- Because of that reality – because our sins are washed away and our chains are gone and Christ is living within us – *we can live righteously*
- ***Living righteously is not an unattainable goal – if we surrender to Christ living in us, He will manifest His righteous life in and through us***

- *How will the craving for righteousness manifest itself in our actions?*
- Jesus talked about three “acts of righteousness” in Matthew 6: *praying // fasting // and giving*
- Bible reading and Bible study could be added to the list
- *If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will read your Bible, pray, fast, and give*

- But here is the key that many Christians misunderstand: *Bible reading and praying and fasting and giving do not MAKE you righteous*
- ***Righteousness is not something we achieve by doing spiritual disciplines or religious activities***
- **Righteousness comes from Christ alone**
- Reading your Bible, praying and fasting are means of abiding in Christ and connecting to Christ so that Christ's life can flow through you and empower you to live righteously
- *And giving – especially giving to the poor – is Jesus' remedy for overcoming greed and the love of money which is at the root of so many other sins*

- The Pharisees excelled in Bible study, praying, fasting and giving – yet were not connected to Christ, and thus became self-righteous rather than righteous

- Here's how the Beatitudes produce true righteousness: *I desperately need righteousness – but I don't have it – I am poor in spirit – destitute of righteousness – a reality that I mourn with repentance and brokenness – and then I humbly seek righteousness from the Only Righteous One – Jesus Christ*
- I accept by faith the right standing His finished work on the Cross gives me
- *But I also crave experiential righteousness – freedom from captivity to sin – I long to live righteously and to grow in Christ-likeness*
- So I seek to abide in Christ because His life is the only source of righteousness
- *In order to stay connected to Christ and His life – I read my Bible and pray and fast and give – not because these activities make me righteous or better than anyone else – but because these spiritual disciplines are the means of staying connected to Christ who is My Righteousness*
- ***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled – filled with what?***
- ***Filled with the Presence & Life & Righteousness of Christ – filled with the fullness and Power of the Holy Spirit to live a new life – filled with the blessings of the kingdom of heaven***

V. BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

Matthew 5:7 (NIV) ⁷ **Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.**

- Mercy is the outworking of the first four Beatitudes
- *Humility and poverty of spirit and repentant brokenness show us our need of mercy and expand our capacity to extend mercy to others*
- **Mercy is showing kindness and compassion to the needy and undeserving**
- *The first four Beatitudes are all about recognizing that we are among the undeserving*
- You see, the person who regards himself as deserving of the favor and blessing of God will find it difficult to show mercy to the needy who are perceived to be undeserving of help
- *But there is nothing like a little brokenness and failure in life to tame spiritual pride and self-righteousness*
- **Those who have fled to the Cross for refuge and mercy are in no position to look down on other sinners**
- *Mercy is a godly response to the undeserving– beginning with counting ourselves among the undeserving*

- Mercy is showing compassion for the suffering and needy, and extending forgiveness to the guilty who have sinned against us
- *Mercy doesn't just feel compassion but also takes action in meeting needs*
- ***Merciful Christians and merciful churches are active in meeting needs in their community – especially those who are needy and hurting and broken and cannot repay acts of kindness or generous gifts***
- When I first came to Cornerstone 15 years ago and preached on this Beatitude, I mentioned this dream for Cornerstone: ***That we would become a merciful congregation characterized by numerous compassionate ministries initiated by merciful church members active in meeting needs of hurting people***
- That dream has already been partially realized – and it will be fulfilled in greater measure as we implement God's vision for our church over the next 3-5 years
- What kind of people function as the salt of the earth and the light of the world – glorifying their Father in heaven by their good deeds?
- ***Merciful people***
- And what are the qualities that produce merciful people?
- ***Humility and poverty of spirit // broken and contrite spirit // meekness and gentleness of spirit // a craving for the kind of righteousness that comes from Christ alone // a self-image based on the twin truths that we are among the undeserving and yet are accepted by God because of the Cross // a compassion for people who are needy and undeserving and perishing apart from Christ***
- **These are the kind of Christ-followers whom the Holy Spirit can fill to overflowing with the Life and Love and Power of the Risen Christ**
- ***These are the kind of Christ-followers who can become God's agents of transformation in a community of broken families and hurting people***
- **May God make us into that kind of people**

Prayer

"I Surrender All to You" / Altar Call