

Introduction

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount upended me. It came unexpectedly. Its kick was swift. And it was exactly what I needed.

I grew up attending church, so I was familiar with stories of Jesus. I liked Jesus, and I was even grateful for Jesus' death, but none of my religious experiences were deep in any way. For all of my teenage and college years, I truly thought being a Christian meant driving a certain car, not listening to certain music, and tucking in your shirt in certain situations. No one gave me a reason to second-guess these assumptions, and I did not seek out alternate opinions. My life looked fairly common on the outside, but was joyless on the inside. I worked for good grades and a good image while searching for fulfillment in parties, alcohol, girls, academic goals, etc. That pursuit drained me, leaving me with small hope that there was more to life than this.

I came across Jesus' Sermon on the Mount at a stage when I found myself wondering if the Bible had any relevance for me. After reading His sermon, I couldn't leave it. Jesus' message forced me to analyze myself, even the hidden parts. At the same time, it pushed this notion that enjoyment and ultimate fulfillment come only through a relationship with Jesus.

Humanity is hardwired for a relationship with God because we are made in the image of God.¹ For years I had tried to rewire myself so that other things would delight and satisfy me. Nothing worked. I appeared to have it all together but felt lost. Jesus' sermon unpacked for me the fresh new life offered in God's stunning kingdom. It was too great to pass up.

¹ Genesis 1:26-28

Jesus' sermon has spurred this question for centuries: "What will satisfy you, if God Himself will not?" It is the question we must revisit in this study.

Through the years, in a host of settings and circumstances, from beaches to wakes, people have said to me, "I don't go to church or anything, but I am a Christian." Although I recall sharing that sentiment, I now dig by asking, "Do you enjoy Jesus?" Puzzled looks sometimes follow. A more precise question might be, "Do you glorify Jesus?" To glorify God—humanity's chief purpose, as God made all things for himself²—is to enjoy, love, and trust Him, as well as reflect Him by obeying His will, commands, and law. But, that language doesn't necessarily translate quickly. So I initially ask about *enjoy*, a term people can grasp but also wrestle with.

Sure, I love God...

Sure, I trust Him...

But do I enjoy Him?

If one *enjoys* God, then outward expressions would be expected. Is there someone in your life whose company you enjoy? If so, doesn't that delight show itself in tangible ways—hearty laughs, rich relaxation? Enjoying Jesus offers similar expressions: eagerly and joyfully reading the Bible or sitting in prayer; genuine excitement for Christian fellowship (or church); regularly seeking God's counsel for life situations and *doing* what He says: these are opportunities to hang out with a good friend.

I was told in my youth that faith is private—internally treasured but not externally expressed. Maybe you have heard or thought the same. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount leaves no room for that perspective: Jesus is calling people into a right relationship with God through Himself, and that relationship then breeds outward action. "Come follow me," Jesus tells some fishermen in Matthew 4:19, "and I will make you fishers of men." The story is simple, familiar, and yet powerful. The

² Proverbs 16:4

men responded by leaving their boats and setting off with Jesus of Nazareth. A new family with new priorities was formed in their trusting of Jesus. Previously, ritual sacrifices and events signaled a relationship with God to these fishermen and their entire people; once Jesus entered the scene, however, new life came with following Him, obeying Him, knowing Him. Reflecting Him. *Enjoying* Him.

The Sermon on the Mount invites you to sit at Jesus' feet and banish all distractions. As Oswald Chambers wrote, "narrow all your interests until the attitude of [your] mind and heart and body is on Jesus Christ."³ After all, you cannot enjoy what you do not know. This study aims to introduce you—or re-introduce you—to Jesus.

First, a matter of introduction: Jesus went *to* people—be it weary people, rich people, sick people, powerful people, common people, devalued people, etc. He did not simply set up shop in the Jerusalem temple or a local synagogue (today's equivalent of a church). He walked miles to meet people stuck in their own messes, and now Jesus is coming to you through His sermon. In it, He opens the gates of God's kingdom to first show who it is that populates God's kingdom (those who enjoy Him). Second, He shows how those people are to live out that kingdom life on Earth (how they can reflect Him). They are kingdom men and women—citizens of heaven, satisfied in the living God, residing on Earth—who cling to Jesus' promises, rely on Jesus' power and example to persevere, and allow Jesus to build His presence and likeness into them.

What will satisfy you if God Himself will not?

Come and see why people enjoy and reflect their Savior and King.

³ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2017), Jan. 22 entry

Matthew 4:23–8:13 NIV

MATTHEW 4

Jesus Heals the Sick

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. ²⁵Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,⁴ Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

MATTHEW 5

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountain-side and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

He said:

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

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

⁵Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

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

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

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

¹¹“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Salt and Light

¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

The Fulfillment of the Law

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

¹⁹Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least

⁴ Matthew 4:25 That is, the Ten Cities

in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For 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.

Murder

²¹“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder,⁵ and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister^{6,7} will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’⁸ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

²³“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Adultery

²⁷“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’⁹ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

⁵ Matthew 5:21 Exodus 20:13

⁶ Matthew 5:22 The Greek word for brother or sister (*adelphos*) refers here to a fellow disciple, whether man or woman; also in verse 23.

⁷ Matthew 5:22 Some manuscripts *brother or sister without cause*

⁸ Matthew 5:22 An Aramaic term of contempt

⁹ Matthew 5:27 Exodus 20:14

²⁹If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Divorce

³¹“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’¹⁰ ³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Oaths

³³“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ ³⁴But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.¹¹

Eye for Eye

³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’¹² ³⁹But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:31 Deut. 24:1

¹¹ Matthew 5:37 Or *from evil*

¹² Matthew 5:38 Exodus 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21

Love for Enemies

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor¹³ and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

MATTHEW 6

Giving to the Needy

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Prayer

⁵“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father,

¹³ Matthew 5:43 Lev. 19:18

who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,¹⁴
but deliver us from the evil one.¹⁵

¹⁴For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Fasting

¹⁶“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

¹⁴ Matthew 6:13 The Greek for temptation can also mean testing.

¹⁵ Matthew 6:13 Or *from evil*; some late manuscripts *one, / for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Treasures in Heaven

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy,¹⁶ your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are unhealthy,¹⁷ your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Do Not Worry

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life¹⁸?

²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry,

¹⁶ Matthew 6:22 The Greek for *healthy* here implies *generous*.

¹⁷ Matthew 6:23 The Greek for *unhealthy* here implies *stingy*.

¹⁸ Matthew 6:27 Or *single cubit to your height*

saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

MATTHEW 7

Judging Others

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

⁶“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Ask, Seek, Knock

⁷“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your

children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

The Narrow and Wide Gates

¹³“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

True and False Prophets

¹⁵“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

True and False Disciples

²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

The Wise and Foolish Builders

²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds

blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

MATTHEW 8

Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. ²A man with leprosy¹⁹ came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

³Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, “See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”

The Faith of the Centurion

⁵When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶“Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”

⁷Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”

⁸The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers

¹⁹ Matthew 8:2 The Greek word traditionally translated *leprosy* was used for various diseases affecting the skin.

under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹²But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

¹³Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment.

Matthew 4:23–5:5, 8:1–13

Introduction

"Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down" (Matthew 5:1).

Not the grandest gesture, but still important: this meant the teacher was ready to teach. *Notebooks open, pencils ready.*

At this point, Jesus had already been baptized, persevered through Satan's temptations in the wilderness, and started His ministry. Several men had obeyed Jesus' invitation to throw aside their fishing nets and become His disciples. Jesus had also been traveling "throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (4:23). His fame had spread. Crowds had formed. The people were eager to hear Him. When He sat, Jesus' disciples "came to him" (5:1), and the crowd pressed in as well. Jesus was teaching His disciples, but others could hear.

He begins, "Blessed are.... Blessed are.... Blessed are...."

Repetition means the teacher wants the students to grasp a concept. And starting with God's blessing would have excited the crowd because that is what Scripture addresses, starting with the first page of the Bible. "Who does God bless?" runs through the book of Genesis. Adam and Eve, made in the image of God, receive His blessing as a family, but they give it up. Who receives it drives the story from there: it is not the self-dependent people of Babel who receive the blessing, but rather lowly Abram, who left his belongings, inheritance, family, land, native language, career, and general safety to trust solely in God and where He leads. It is not Ishamel, Abram's firstborn, but second-in-line Isaac who receives God's blessing. And it isn't Esau, Isaac's eldest, but Jacob, the younger brother and schemer, who receives

God's blessing without any merit. And from Jacob the blessing falls to his descendants, the nation of Israel.

So, on this mountainside in Galilee, Jesus' first words piqued the crowd's interest, as they wanted to know, "Who does God bless? What does that blessing look like?" Israel didn't feel blessed at the moment. Conditions were harsh, and Rome's taxes harsher. Plus, their religious elite—like the Pharisees—might possibly have been the harshest, burdening Israel with hundreds of rules in order to obtain a right relationship (or *righteousness*) with God.

Jesus addresses these issues at the start of His sermon. Let's listen together while Jesus begins to unpack who God's blessed people are.

Exploring the Text

1. What are some shared elements between verses 3, 4, and 5?
2. These statements have been described as arresting or shocking. How would that be so?
3. Is there anything confusing about these statements?
4. What do you think "blessed" means? "poor in spirit?" "meek?"
5. Do you think "mourn" in verse 4 is physical or spiritual?
6. Why do you think there is a distinction in the promises ("is" in verse 3; "will be" in verses 4 and 5)? What do the promises have to do with the calling Jesus issues in each verse?
7. Why do you think Jesus is telling this to a Jewish audience?
8. Read Luke 18:9–15. Who exhibits being "poor in spirit" in this passage? In what way(s)?
9. Who is Jesus telling this to? Why? What is His teaching?
10. Who is mournful in this passage? What are they mourning? Why are they mourning in this way? What can we learn from that?

Implications and Applications

11. If every thought you ever had, word you ever spoke, and deed you ever carried out were presented for the viewing public, how would you feel? And, what does that reaction tell you about yourself?
12. Which of the blessings challenge you the most?
13. People, at times, want to work off their bad feelings. What are some ways you try to earn a right standing before God?
14. Many have expressed the following: "Oh God could never forgive this or love me after this...." Do you ever doubt God's love and invitation?
15. The "meek" humble themselves so God can use them as His hands and feet here on Earth. Have you witnessed God change others?
16. In what ways did Jesus display submission and humility? How might you express your submission to Him this week? This month?
17. What would it take for you to memorize the first three beatitudes? Of what benefit could that be in your day-to-day life?
18. A Savior does not look appealing if you don't think you need saving. Jesus starts with those who know they need a Savior. What, if anything, hinders you from owning your sin and bringing it to God?
19. Do you believe that following Jesus requires trusting Him? What is unique about that?

Considerations and Synopsis

Being poor does not immediately communicate *blessing*. Neither does being mournful, for that matter; nor meek. These are not desirable stations. So why does Jesus say they are?