

Commentary on Matthew 5:1-12

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, October 30, 2011**, is from **Matthew 5:1-12**. Five **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse by verse [International Bible Lesson Commentary](#) below. The **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, which are also available on the [Bible Lesson Forum](#), will aid teachers in class preparation and in conducting class discussion.

Matthew 5:1-12

(Matthew 5:1) When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

Jesus probably taught this sermon with variations many times to thousands of people wherever He traveled, allowing His disciples to memorize the message so they could repeat it when they taught and wrote after His death and resurrection. These beatitudes of Jesus (“beatitude” means “a state of utmost bliss”) may reveal the course of spiritual development of disciples (students) of Jesus Christ as they mature. The traditional position for teaching in the day of Jesus was sitting.

(Matthew 5:2) Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

The gospel message is not only a few facts or truths about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that one should believe in order to be saved. The gospel message in the New Testament included the call to repent, the call to faith in Jesus the Messiah, and truths to live by daily in relationship with God in the kingdom of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus expected those who followed Him to learn and apply these truths so they could enjoy a taste of heaven in this life.

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

The word “blessed” has more recently been translated “happy.” The beginning of spiritual development and growth must include the recognition that one is in need, that one is spiritually poor and not spiritually rich or morally perfect. Turning to Jesus Christ for spiritual direction and a new beginning requires humility. By turning from immoral and worldly concerns to spiritual and moral concerns and by believing Jesus' teaching, a person can begin a new life and enjoy an earthly portion of the kingdom of heaven now; for Jesus' kingdom is not of or from this world (see John 18:36).

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

Recognizing our spiritual poverty and moral lapses (or moral imperfections and times of disobedience) will lead to mourning for our sins. We look back and think of the sorrow our sins have brought others and us. We regret missed opportunities and how our sins and the sins of others have changed the course of their lives and ours. We may mourn that we are not the type of person we want to be spiritually or morally (or could have been). Jesus promises that even though we mourn we will be comforted, especially as we receive the gifts of grace, forgiveness, and empowerment from Him as we grow spiritually in this life.

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

A meek person demonstrates humility, but also keeps their strength and emotions under control when offended by others. A meek person patiently endures when others sin against them; in part, because they know they have sinned too (as in Moses’ and Paul’s cases, but not Jesus’ case, for He was meek and without sin and did not strike back with resentment but endured the cross: see Hebrews 12:2). A meek person will not try to appear before the world as better than others or better than he knows he is, but will love and serve others. The meek will inherit the earth from our heavenly Father; therefore, they do not grasp for more and more “things” (or recognition or money, etc.) in this life.

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

As we grow spiritually, we seek the power and grace of God to live, think, feel, and choose the right things to say and do; we want the will of God done at all times by us as well as others. We hunger for this positive righteousness in our lives and not just the cleansing from sin that we also hunger to enjoy (and that Jesus promises to give His followers). We also hunger to live in a just, merciful, and righteous world—the kingdom of God now and forever. Someday, we will be filled with righteousness and live in a righteous world in the future with Jesus, the King of the universe, made visible for all to see.

(Matthew 5:7) “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

We recognize our need for mercy from a just, merciful, and loving God, and from others too. God also knows our need for mercy, because God knows that we have sinned. To act with both justice and mercy toward us, God sent His Son into the world as the perfect sacrifice for our sins (see 1 John 2:2 and 1 John 4:10). We are not yet perfect in all that we say and do; therefore, we know the value of receiving mercy and of extending mercy to others. As we continue to grow spiritually, we cease being judgmental and seek to treat others with mercy. We are merciful toward others, and we receive mercy from God and those who follow Jesus.

(Matthew 5:8) “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

As we develop these spiritual traits as followers of Jesus Christ, we come to seek and desire the will of God—both doing the will of God as well as the perfect will of God for our lives. We seek a pure heart, cleansed by the blood of Jesus and leading to our following and obeying Him. We want God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, and this is our prayer. We seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, knowing that we will see God someday (see Matthew 6:33).

(Matthew 5:9) “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

As we seek and receive both righteousness and purity in our lives as a gift by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we find and enjoy peace with God, peace with other children of God, and peace within ourselves. We cease to be at war with God (which is wanting our will to be done instead of His). We cease to be at war within ourselves (which is wanting to do one thing while knowing we should be obeying God). Having the Spirit of God within us, Who enables us to act as Jesus himself would act in similar circumstances, we will be called children of God by our heavenly Father (if not by others). We will be members of God’s family.

(Matthew 5:10) “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

By the time we have grown to be seen as children of God, because we are seeking and working for righteousness and peace based on the truth, justice, mercy, and love of God, the world will begin to persecute us. The world does not want to behave according to the will of God or obey His commandments or even allow God to be mentioned or prayed to or the Bible read in many places. Those persecuted for living in righteous ways are living in the kingdom of heaven now, for the kingdom of God is theirs now (even as they suffer persecution).

(Matthew 5:11) “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

The world and the devil hate Jesus. They crucified Jesus based on false charges. The world and the devil hate the disciples of Jesus, and they persecuted those who first followed Him—killing many. When the world sees that you are different from the world because you follow Jesus, you will be persecuted on account of Jesus. How wonderful to grow spiritually to the point that others recognize that you are a true follower of Jesus Christ, so much so that the world hates you and wants you silenced.

(Matthew 5:12) “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

At this point in the beatitudes, the true disciples of Jesus Christ have grown spiritually to the point that they can remind themselves to rejoice, to actually choose to rejoice, to choose to be glad, when those of the world and the devil persecute them. The prophets and Jesus were persecuted by “the church” leaders and the political leaders of their day. The greatest persecution for the true followers of Jesus Christ can come from some in their church and not just from those of the world. If so, our reward from God is great, and we will be rewarded by Jesus in the future when He says, “Well done good and trustworthy servant” (see Matthew 25:21).

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think Jesus began His beatitudes by saying those who are poor in spirit are happy or blessed? How might this differ from a worldly perspective?
2. What is the promise in the second beatitude? How might this promise encourage a follower of Jesus?
3. What does the world usually think of a meek person? What does Jesus think about a meek person? Why do you think there is a difference in thinking?
4. What is the relationship between hungering and thirsting for righteousness and purity of heart?
5. Why are the followers of Jesus persecuted rather than honored by the world? Why do you think some in the church persecute those in the church who are truly seeking to follow Jesus?

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