

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Makarios”
Sermon on the Mount, pt. 1
Matthew 5:1-16
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Jesus has now started his ministry.

Last week, we spent time with him in the wilderness, wrestling with all those programs for happiness and those lies about our identity that want to drive us. Jesus got gut honest about how they were working in him and faced them down. And now, with the Spirit of God in the driver's seat, his ministry is off to a powerful start.

Through the rest of Matthew 4, he's preaching, and people are coming from all over, and there are healings... and there's all kinds of excitement... especially for those who have been hoping for a long time that things might change for them.

In fact, Jesus draws a crowd of people that are mostly on the down and out... the kind of people everyone would look at and think,

“I'm glad I'm not them!”

Or maybe, “What did they do to tick off God?”

Many of the people who are flocking to Jesus... are there because they are struggling with something or another.

At the end of chapter 4, Matthew starts naming some of them off:

the sick,
those afflicted with all kinds of diseases,
those who are possessed,
those who just can't shake the darkness that haunts them,
the paralyzed, the lame.

It's kind of an unsettling list of problems you don't want to catch. And if Dorothy and Toto were there I could just hear them:

The sick, the possessed the paralyzed, oh my!

They are all there at the end of Mathew chapter 4.

And Matthew chapter 5 begins with Jesus looking at this motley crowd and saying the last thing anyone would expect him to say... about them:

“Blessed are you.”

It's kind of strange, isn't it? Their lives are not what we tend to think of when we hope for blessings... or when we pray for God to bless our children.

And certainly, that was true in Jesus' day. There was a strong assumption in their neighborhoods and in their churches that if something like this happened to you...

you probably did something to deserve it.

It was a kind of cosmic punishment from God, they thought.

Bad karma, you might say.

But it's to these sick, demon possessed, paralytic, mourning hearts whose spirits have been crushed again and again... Jesus says, "Blessed are you..."

This is how he begins his first major sermon that we've come to call, "The Sermon on the Mount." It's probably still his most famous sermon today. It encompasses Matthew chapter 5, 6, and 7... and we're going to spend the next few weeks working our way through it because it's worth our time.

But all of it begins with what has come to be known as the Beatitudes...

Jesus looks at this crowd of people and sees something unexpected. He sees something that makes no sense to most ways of thinking.

And he speaks it in the most simple and direct way:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit... those whose spirits have been crushed and dried out.

Blessed are you who are mourning... whose hearts ache...

Blessed are the meek... you who have lost sight of your own strength..."

"Blessed..." he says again and again... to the most surprising of circumstances.

The word in the original Greek here is *Makarios*. There are some bibles who translate that word as "happy." But I don't think "happy" really fits what Jesus is trying to say here.

He's not saying, "You are happy when your soul has been crushed.

or you're happy when you mourn."

"Happy" kind of misses it.

Grief is real, and it's painful, and it's anything but happy.

Being poor in spirit, having your spirit worn down and dried out...

or thirsting for righteousness... for things to be made right again, for that justice of God to come... (that's what righteousness means). It's a real longing that doesn't at all feel happy.

Jesus is not about telling these people to be happy. He's telling them... that despite how they feel... and despite what they may think... there is something profound happening in their lives.

Makarios, blessed: It's a way of saying, "Divine favor is upon you."

"Blessed are you..." is Jesus' way of saying, "You are a recipient of divine grace and love."

Makarios.

And what is also interesting about the original Greek here is that there aren't actually any verbs. We translate it as "blessed *are*" to make it more readable. But in the Greek?

it's just "*Makarios*" the poor in spirit.

Makarios the mourning

Blest--The meek.

Blest—Those who are longing for Justice, for righteousness

Makarios... The grace of God ... in your grief. The grace of God in your longing.

Makarios.

This is how Jesus starts his first major sermon. He starts with these mind-bending proclamations. It's like he's taking the way we see the room of our lives [arms out and twisting the image] and he's turning it, and twisting it upside down... so that, maybe for the first time in a long time... we can begin to recognize a reality that we've not been able to see:

The reality that *God's favor, God's love is coming to you.*

God's grace is not just some formula that erases our mistakes. That's such a diminished view of grace. **No, God's grace is something much more powerful than that. God's grace is the power of life and love that's reaching from the heart of God... to your very own life... and all that you carry.**

It is God reaching out, right into your particular struggles and questions... your doubts and uncertainties.

Right into your heartaches and fears.

Right into your longings and desires.

God's grace... is reaching out, to meet you there. This is *Makarios, blessed!*

So, hear this beatitude with that image in mind:

You who are poor in spirit,
whose spirits have run dry, *Makarios*

You who are mourning...
whose hearts are heavy, *Makarios.*

You who long for righteousness, for things to be made right in your life and in your family, and in our world. *Makarios*

You who are meek, who feel powerless, *Makarios. Blessed are you. God's grace to you.*

You who show mercy even though it's risky, and vulnerable, and it hurts, God's grace will meet you there... *Makarios*

You who are trying to bring some kind of peace to the conflicts around you,
and you who are looking for peace within you, *Makarios.* The grace of God will meet you there.

And you who bear the weight of doing the right thing even when it's hard,
and even though it might mean no one will join you,
and some will leave you, and say all kinds of hurtful things about you,

In that loneliness and in that faithfulness to stand up for what is right:

Makarios.

The grace of God to you.

That's what Jesus is saying in these Beatitudes.

The grace of God is reaching out to meet you in those very places,
even those places that have the chill of the shadow of death... *Makarios,*
for God meets you there... and will bring you to a new place, a place of green pastures and still waters, as Psalm 23 describes it.

You see, God's grace doesn't just meet you there... but God's grace always takes you somewhere. That's what makes it a deep blessing.

And so, in line after line, Jesus uses the word "will" to help us see what the grace of God **will do**, where **it will take** you.

There is a forward movement in each of these Beatitudes. There is something that comes out of it... there are green pastures, so to speak.

If you read through each one, you'll see Jesus describes the place where the grace of God will take you,

as the place where you will
discover the Kingdom of God...
and know the comfort of God,
and your deep hunger for righteousness will be filled,
and you will encounter the divine mercy.

It's the place where you will... see God... and in that moment, you may just discover that this is what your heart, and mind, and body have been longing for all along, though you did not even know it.

The grace of God will meet you.
And you will see God,
And you will be called children of God. *Makarios*. Blessed are you.

This is the beginning of Jesus' great message to the world.
And it is the foundation of Jesus' great message to you.
It's the truth that we need to know, deep in our bones, before we know anything else.

And once we begin to discover that it's true ... we also discover a divine calling woven into the fabric of our lives. We start to discover a holy vocation. You see, it's just after these beatitudes that Jesus tells us, you are salt... so be salty. You are the light of the world... so let your light shine."

Jesus is saying, "There is something of God already in you.
Let it come forth...
and let it shape the world around you."

I really like the way Eugene Peterson translates this in the Message. This is how he writes it. "Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth..."

"Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world."

What Jesus is saying to us is... you're not just here to grind away at your job, making more money for your company or your retirement. Sure, that has its place, but you are more than your job and your bank account.

And you're not just here to bathe, and feed, and clothe your kids or fix your family... as holy as all that is. Yes, caring for your family is important. But you are more than your place or your role in your family.

And you're not just here to mark time until the end. You are more than your age.

You are... salt and light... You can bring out the flavor of God and the colors of God no matter where you are... at work or at home, and no matter how old you are, 9, or 19, or 90. You are holy salt and divine light. There is something of God in you. So, let that come forth.

**When you do... you will become *Makarios* to the world, blessing to the world.
And you might just help those around you see the room of their lives... in a new upside-down way... where they can know the grace and love coming to them in their very particular life.**

To be salt and light is to help the whole world taste and see: *Makarios*... Blessed Are you!
Grace, Love, Life...

Which is exactly what Jesus did, isn't it? He was, in his very body and work, *Makarios*.
Throughout his ministry and even in his great suffering, he was showing the world... that the grace, and love, and life of God is reaching out to you... even, and maybe most especially, in your brokenness...

It's the deep truth that bookends his ministry...
here at the beginning,
and again, at the end.

**So, on the night he was betrayed [move to the table]
he took the bread... broke...
cup... poured...**

This table is *Makarios*... It is the blessing of God, reaching out to you...

**It's the table where we learn to taste and see the God-flavors and the God colors of the world...
and in the process, it forms us into salt and light...**

Think about that for a moment:

Through this table, we can taste and see the *Makarios* of God,
and from this table we can begin to share the *Makarios* of God.

It's one more reason why I think coming to this table is something we need to be doing every week in our worship.

For today, we're going to prepare for this table by singing "Taste and See" together. And after we sing, I'm going to invite you to come and receive. And after you receive... [you serve....]

Let's sing that now.