

Chapter 9: The Blessedness of Believers

Matthew 5:1–10

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers the purest, most perfect wisdom the world has ever heard, in a distillation of only three chapters of material (Matt. 5–7). Within this Sermon, Jesus begins by a series of paradoxical statements about the blessedness of those whom the world would never consider to be blessed. Here, Jesus reveals the mysteries of a spiritual kingdom where the poor are rich, the hungry are satisfied, and the persecuted possess a kingdom. Here, Jesus teaches us about the centrality of repentance toward God, and the need for us to resemble God himself. Here, Jesus teaches that *blessed are the repentant who resemble God*.

The Blessedness of the Kingdom (Matt. 5:1–2)

In the latter half of Matthew 4, we saw a summary of Jesus' ministry of word (preaching and teaching; Matt. 4:17, 23) and deed (healing physical ailments and casting out demons; Matt. 4:24). As we will see, it is crucial for our interpretation to connect the introductory summaries of Jesus' public ministry in Matthew 4:12–25 to what comes in Matthew 5 and following. So, we must interpret Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 as a fuller exposition of the summary of his preaching we saw in Matthew 4:17: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Then, in Matthew 8–9, we will find narratives of Jesus' healing many people suffering from many afflictions, but physical and demonic. Of this structure, William Hendriksen writes, "it is characteristic of Matthew to introduce a subject and then to expand upon it. The river broadens into a lake. So also here. Christ's preaching and his healing have been introduced (respectively 4:12–17, 23a and 4:23b, 24). So now a sample of this teaching is given in 5:1–7:29; of the healing, in 8:1–9:34."¹

Furthermore, we also saw Jesus call his first disciples in the previous chapter (Matt. 4:18–22), as well as a description of the "great crowds" who were following him (Matt. 4:25). Matthew immediately distinguishes these two groups at the beginning of Matthew 5: "Seeing the crowds, he [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him" (v. 1). Here, Matthew makes a distinction between the crowds as a whole, and his disciples in particular: "Although his ministry touched the masses, he saw the need to teach his 'disciples'...closely."² Nevertheless, we should read the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount with the end in mind, where the crowds reappear: "And when Jesus finished these sayings, the *crowds* were astonished at his teaching...." (Matt. 7:28).³ Regarding the "disciples," we probably should not equate them with "the

¹ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 259.

² Carson, "Matthew," 158.

³ Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 85.

Twelve,” since Jesus has so far gathered only four of the Twelve (cf. Matt. 10:1–4).⁴

The reason we call this the “Sermon on the Mount” is obvious: Jesus “went up on the mountain” to teach (v. 1). This detail is significant, since Matthew uses this to portray Jesus as “a new Moses or new lawgiver.”⁵ Just as Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the law from God, so Jesus goes up on the mountain to teach the “gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23). While this parallel is important, we must both compare and contrast the ministry of Moses with the ministry of Jesus. Both Moses and Jesus teach about the law of God on their respective mountains (see esp. Matt. 5:17–20). Nevertheless, while Moses delivers only what he receives directly from God, Jesus teaches “as one who had authority” (Matt. 7:29), declaring repeatedly that, “You have heard...but *I* say to you...” (e.g., Matt. 5:21, 22; emphasis added).⁶ At the same time, we should also recognize that “Jesus is not proclaiming a new law but announcing what he believes is the legitimate interpretation of God’s will as contained in the already-existing Torah.”⁷ Finally, while the blazing fire and dark clouds of Mount Sinai may contrast with the peaceful setting of Jesus’ mountain, Hendriksen rightfully reminds us that “*the law was given in a context of love* (see Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:2, 3, 6, 28, 29, 32, 33; 6:3–5).”⁸

So, when Jesus “opened his mouth and taught them” (v. 2), what is he teaching? The redundancy of the phrase “opened his mouth” calls our attention to the solemnity, impressiveness, and significance of what Jesus is about to offer.⁹ Accordingly, the Sermon on the Mount is more, certainly, than a randomly selected sample of Jesus’ teaching: “This sermon is more. It presents the entire life of the kingdom, from the first entrance into the kingdom here on earth to the final consummation of the kingdom in the last judgment.”¹⁰ That said, there are a wide variety of views on how to understand and interpret the Sermon on the Mount. Craig Blomberg is worth quoting in full for a summary of the most prominent interpretations:

1. Since at least medieval times, many have seen two levels of ethics in Jesus’ teaching, with the sermon reflecting the stricter requirements for those who would pursue a higher level of righteousness, as, e.g., among clergy and monastic orders.
2. In Luther’s widely influential approach, the sermon functions as the law does for Paul—God’s impossible moral demands disclose the depths of our sinfulness and drive us to our knees in repentance.
3. Many Anabaptists applied the sermon’s ethics in an extremely literal fashion to the civil sphere and endorsed full-fledged pacifism.
4. Protestant liberals have seen the sermon as a paradigm for the social gospel and a call to the church to usher in the kingdom of God on earth (a view also adopted in secular form by Karl Marx).

⁴ Carson, “Matthew,” 158.

⁵ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 97.

⁶ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 157.

⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 97.

⁸ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 261, original emphasis.

⁹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 183; Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 94.

¹⁰ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 179.

5. Existentialists have rejected taking any of the sermon's ethics as absolute but view them rather as a profound challenge to personal decisions to live in the consciousness of human finitude and divine encounter.

6. Albert Schweitzer's interim ethic also relativized the sermon by finding in it a unique urgency that remained only as long as the first disciples, like Jesus, mistakenly believed that he would return in their lifetime.

7. Dispensationalism has classically limited the sermon's ethic to the future millennial kingdom which Jesus offered to the Jews but which they rejected so that it was postponed until after his second coming."¹¹

8....Inaugurated eschatology recognizes an "already/not yet" tension in which the sermon's ethic remains the ideal or goal for all Christians in every age but which will never be fully realized until the consummation of the kingdom at Christ's return.¹¹

To this list, Grant Osborne adds a ninth option: "Some believe that this exemplifies Jesus as 'a sage who expressed his eschatological convictions in Wisdom forms,' so this is a set of wisdom teachings."¹² Without wading into the vast literature on the subject, we will follow Osborne's ultimate recommendation to interpret the Sermon on the Mount that combines the eight and ninth options: "There is a distinct wisdom flavor in the sermon, but primarily it is the new laws for the kingdom age, intended as an ethical model to be followed by the new citizens of the kingdom."¹³

To refine this general approach a little, I believe that D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones offers some helpful principles for understanding the Beatitudes in particular:

1. The Beatitudes describe ethical requirements for all Christians.
2. The Beatitudes may not be divided up; *all* Christians should conform to *all* the Beatitudes.
3. None of the Beatitudes are a "natural tendency,"¹⁴ but are wholly spiritual, supernatural, and given by grace.
4. Therefore, the Beatitudes describe "the essential, utter difference between the Christian and the non-Christian."

In line with this, Lloyd-Jones distills all of these principles into a single concept: "The truth is that *the Christian and the non-Christian belong to two entirely different realms*. You will notice the first Beatitude and the last Beatitude promise the same reward, 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'"¹⁵ The "gospel of the kingdom" announces spiritual realities that are imparted by the reign of Christ by his Holy Spirit within his people—realities that the kingdoms of this world *do not* possess. Therefore, we must not turn the Beatitudes into platitudes. Moreover, we cannot expect the kingdoms of this world to

¹¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 94–95.

¹² Osborne, *Matthew*, 159.

¹³ Osborne, *Matthew*, 160.

¹⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 33–36.

¹⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:39.

follow these (views #3, 4), but neither should we think that Jesus is describing something that he does not intend for us to keep (views #2, 5). Moreover, these principles were not for the first disciples, nor for clergy alone, nor to be postponed into the future (views #1, 6, 7). Through the course of our exposition of this passage, we will attempt to thread the needle through these various mistaken views.

The Blessedness of Repentance (Matt. 5:3–6)

There are eight beatitudes, each structured as “Blessed are those [criteria], for [promise].” There are four such beatitudes, where the first four deal with our blessedness in relation to God, and the last four deal with our blessedness in relation to others.¹⁶ As Lloyd-Jones observed above, the Beatitudes are organized so that the first and the last promise are the same: “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 2, 10). Thus, we are reading about the blessedness of those who have a share in the kingdom of heaven. Such people are “blessed,” although it will become immediately clear that this blessedness is not always observable in the eyes of the world. Therefore, R. T. France’s definition of the “blessedness” described in this passage is critical, when he writes that these statements “are essentially commendations, congratulations, statements to the effect that a person is in a good situation, sometimes even expressions of envy.”¹⁷

In this way, the blessedness that Jesus teaches is very reminiscent of what we find in several psalms, including the very first words of the first psalm: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:1–2). While the world commends one kind of blessedness that seems to prevail in this world, those are truly blessed who walk by faith in the promises of God. Therefore, as John Calvin warns, it is a “mistaken opinion, that those are happy who lead an easy and prosperous life according to the flesh. For it is impossible that men should mildly bend the neck to bear calamities and reproaches, so long as they think that patience is at variance with a happy life. The only consolation which mitigates and even sweetens the bitterness of the cross and of all afflictions, is the conviction, that we are happy in the midst of miseries.”¹⁸

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit (v. 3)

Jesus begins with, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 3). As we discussed earlier, in the Sermon on the Mount we have an expanded form of the preaching and teaching that was only summarized in the latter half of Matthew 4. For this reason, we need to hear in this beatitude the echo of the earlier summary of Jesus’ preaching: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17).¹⁹ This poverty of spirit is not a material poverty, but the spiritual poverty that drives a person to repentance. As we have discussed several times in our study of Matthew, repentance is a change of mind, arising from a change of heart, and spilling out into a

¹⁶ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 197–98.

¹⁷ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 160.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 1:259–60.

¹⁹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 184–85.

change of life. It is the “change of heart” aspect of repentance that Jesus describes here, where we begin to hate the “filthiness and odiousness of [our] sins” (WCF 15.2). We are disgusted by the things that we have done, and we undone as we ponder the ramifications of our sin toward our own souls, toward others we have offended, and toward Almighty God. Those who see and sense not only their danger, but the vileness of their sin, are undone in the face of their utter spiritual bankruptcy. This kind of devastation is the foundation of true repentance.

To those in such dire straits, Jesus proclaims the promise of the gospel: such people should be called blessed, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” There are three implications of this promise. First, we should recognize that the kingdom of heaven is “‘theirs alone.’ Those who are not poor in spirit can never have membership in the kingdom.”²⁰ Second, we should receive as a warning the fact that, while all suffer in this world, not all respond by an inward poverty of spirit, as Calvin reminds us: “Many are pressed down by distresses, and yet continue to swell inwardly with pride and cruelty. But Christ pronounces those to be happy who, chastened and subdued by afflictions, submit themselves wholly to God, and, with inward humility, betake themselves to him for protection.”²¹ Third, Jesus is contrasting the strong of the world with the weak who derive their strength from faith in God. D. A. Carson puts this well: “The kingdom of heaven is not given on the basis of race (cf. 3:9), earned merits, the military zeal and prowess of Zealots, or the wealth of a Zacchaeus. It is given to the poor, the despised publicans, the prostitutes, those who are so ‘poor’ they know they can offer nothing and do not try. They cry for mercy, and they alone are heard.”²² **Thus, this beatitude deals particularly with identifying *who* will receive the kingdom: the poor in spirit—that is, the repentant.**

Blessed are those who Mourn (v. 4)

Second, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (v. 4). This beatitude continues and confirms the first beatitude.²³ While a right sorrow for our sins will draw us into the terrors of hell itself, the gospel reminds us that God has not left us there. Rather, through Jesus Christ, God comforts us. William Hendriksen puts this so well: “Godly sorrow turns the soul toward God. God, in turn, grants comfort to those who see, their help from him. It is he who pardons, delivers, strengthens, reassures (Ps. 30:5; 50:15; Isa. 55:6, 7; Mic. 7:18–20; Matt. 11:28–30).”²⁴

There are two important implications from this beatitude. First, it is perhaps clearer in this beatitude than the first that the blessedness of those whom Jesus describes does not rest on their external circumstances, but on the promise of God.²⁵ Second, in connection with the first beatitude, the mourning here is spiritual. Thus, R. C. H. Lenski is right to remind us of Martin Luther’s first thesis of the 95 Theses: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Mt 4:17), he willed

²⁰ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 96.

²¹ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 1:260.

²² Carson, “Matthew,” 162.

²³ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 1:261.

²⁴ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 271.

²⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 165.

the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”²⁶ The believer’s life is enduringly characterized as a life of poverty in spirit and mourning, because the believer’s life is enduringly characterized by repentance. **Thus, this beatitude deals particularly with an understanding of *how* we receive the kingdom: by an ongoing mourning (repentance) that looks to God alone for comfort through the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Blessed are the Meek (v. 5)

Third, Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (v. 5). Lenski gives a good definition of meekness: “The word refers to an inward virtue exercised toward persons. When they are wronged or abused they show no resentment and do not threaten or avenge themselves. The opposite are the vehement, bitter, wild, and violent. Jesus is the greatest example of meekness.”²⁷

Earlier, I argued for an understanding of the organization of these Beatitudes that sees the first four as laying out our relationship to God. This beatitude would be the strongest objection to that understanding of the structure of the Beatitudes as a whole. Still, taking stock of the context helps us to see the specific point Jesus is making. Jesus is not so much talking about *how* we treat people, as he will when he speaks of the “merciful” (v. 7) or the “peacemakers” (v. 9). Rather, he is getting at *why* we react meekly: from a settled confidence that we will “inherit the earth” by faith, and not by strength.

John Calvin makes this observation: “When Christ promises to such persons *the inheritance of the earth*, we might think it exceedingly foolish. Those who warmly repel any attacks, and whose hand is ever ready to revenge injuries, are rather the persons who claim for themselves the dominion of the earth.”²⁸ Nevertheless, it is the *meek* who inherit the earth (through God’s promises), rather than the *aggressive* (through their strength). **Thus, this beatitude warns us about how we *should not* pursue the kingdom: by laying a claim through the assertion of our own strength.**

Blessed are those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness (v. 6)

Fourth, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (v. 6). What is the “righteousness” of which Jesus speaks here? There are two important aspects to answering this question, and we must see both. First, we must recognize that this hungering and thirsting for righteousness is connected with the spiritual poverty and mourning that Jesus mentioned earlier. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to seek after a righteousness that we cannot obtain—and thus, a righteousness for which we mourn. The blessedness Jesus speaks about here, then, echoes the blessedness that David speaks about in the Psalms: “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Ps. 32:1–2).²⁹

Second, the word “righteousness” in Matthew predominantly deals with the ethical obligations

²⁶ Martin Luther, “95 Theses,” October 31, 1517. <<https://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>> Accessed February 22, 2022. Cited by Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 187.

²⁷ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 188.

²⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 1:262.

²⁹ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 273.

for how we *should* live (e.g., v. 10).³⁰ So, we hunger and thirst for a righteousness that we can only receive by faith and through grace, but yet we also must hunger and thirst for a life of faith-driven obedience, where we walk in the paths of righteousness. **Thus, this beatitude teaches us how to live in the kingdom—by hungering and thirsting for righteousness.**

The Blessedness of Resemblance (Matt. 5:7–10)

In the final four beatitudes, Jesus shifts from dealing with blessedness of those whose lives are marked by the kind of repentance necessary for entering into the kingdom of heaven. We should remember, though, that John the Baptist turned away the Pharisees and Sadducees from his baptism, saying, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt. 3:7–8). In our definition of repentance, Jesus is teaching us toward a *change of mind* about our sin and our relationship to the world, primarily by seeking for a *change of heart* that leads to poverty in spirit and outright mourning over our sinful state. Now, Jesus drives his sermon home to seek “fruit in keeping with repentance” that comes from a *change of life*.

Blessed are the Merciful (v. 7)

The first beatitude in this sequence is fitting: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (v. 7). Those who have received God’s mercy must extend mercy to others as a response of gratitude: “This, then, is not mere natural mercy as it is occasionally found among men generally but the mercy growing out of our personal experience of the mercy of God. God’s mercy toward us always makes us likewise merciful, 18:21, etc.”³¹ The promise of this beatitude is that the merciful (who are merciful as a response to the mercy that they have *already* received) will receive still *more* mercy.

Jesus will later suggest that some of has to do with the mercy that we receive from God. So, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray “...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). Then, in the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus tells us a story of how the master throws a servant into prison for the debt that he had previously forgiven (Matt. 18:21–35). Despite having been forgiven of his debt, the servant immediately went out to collect the (much smaller) debt that someone else owed to him. Jesus summarized the warning, saying, “So also my Heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from you heart” (Matt. 18:35). Those who are forgiven much, should also show much mercy. **Thus, this beatitude teaches us the principle manner in which we will resemble God: in our mercy.**

Blessed are the Pure in Heart (v. 8)

Next, Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (v. 8). Obviously, Jesus is not commending indiscriminate sincerity, but only the kind of pure-hearted sincerity that relates to the worship and adoration of the true and living God.³² While Jesus will go on to speak of the heart’s natural *impurity* (Matt. 15:19), Leon Morris notes that this “is the one place in the New Testament

³⁰ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 167.

³¹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 191.

³² Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 277.

where purity is predicated of the heart.”³³ While “heart” for us refers to the seat of our emotions, the “heart” in the Hebrew mind was the source of the three major faculties of the soul: our understanding, desires, and will.³⁴

This beatitude hooks into an entire biblical theology about seeing God, a theme that runs from the beginning of the Bible to the goal of the Bible at the very end: “They will see his [God’s and the Lamb’s] face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). We might summarize this theme (and gain clarity into Jesus’ message) in three points, which we can best appreciate by working backwards in the beatitude. First, in the Bible, to *see* is to *know*. William Wilder writes, “In Hebrew as well as in English, to *see* something is to *understand* it.”³⁵ The idea of *seeing* God carries the idea of a deep *knowledge* of him. We see this idea expressed perhaps most clearly when Moses asks God to “Please show me your glory” (Ex. 33:18). While the Lord does let Moses “see” his glory, he obstructs Moses’ vision, and instead we read only of what the Lord proclaims about his character: “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger...” (Ex. 34:6–7). Seeing God meant *understanding* God, according to God’s revelation of himself to Moses.

Second, the *sight* of God, through true *knowledge* of God, brings about resemblance and conformity to him. The Bible teaches this idea clearly in two texts. The first text is in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” This transformation comes now, in this life, from “seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,” and by the “knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). Ultimately, though, the Apostle John teaches us that there is a much greater transformation that will happen when we see Christ fully: “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

Third, this transformation is necessary to see God, since we must resemble him to see him.³⁶ Therefore, only the pure of heart shall see God, for God is perfectly pure (Ps. 12:6; 19:8; 119:140; Hab. 1:13). Only those with clean hands and a pure heart may approach him in his holiness (Ps. 24:4). As the beatitude about the meek (v. 5) was an outlier for the section of beatitudes dealing with our relationship with God, this beatitude is an outlier for the beatitudes dealing with our relationships with others. In context, though, Jesus seems to be pointing to the kind of “purity of heart” that is not ultimately distracted away from God by the cares of this world. **Thus, this beatitude deals with the primary engine of transforming us to resemble God.**

Blessed are the Peacemakers (v. 9)

In the seventh beatitude (the third of this second series), Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (v. 9). Here we see a further development of the theme of

³³ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 100.

³⁴ A. Craig Troxel, *With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires, and Will Toward Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

³⁵ William N. Wilder, “Illumination and Investiture: The Royal Significance of the Tree of Wisdom in Genesis 3,” *WTJ* 68.1 (2006): 51–69.

³⁶ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 277.

resemblance. We resemble God not only in purity of heart (v. 8), but in peacemaking.³⁷ Furthermore, this resemblance does not only lead *us* to see God, but leads *others* to recognize a resemblance to God that prompts them to call us “sons of God.” We resemble God both by seeking purity, and by seeking peace. **Thus, this beatitude identifies the key fruit by which others will recognize our resemblance to God.**

Blessed are those who are Persecuted (v. 10)

In the final beatitude of this series, Jesus draws the implications of resembling God starkly: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 10). If the world hates God, then the world will also hate those who closely resemble God. Thus, those who live righteous lives will be persecuted for righteousness’ sake. As Calvin writes, “Satan, the prince of the world, will never cease to fill his followers with rage, to carry on hostilities against the members of Christ....Above all, it is, as we may say, the ordinary lot of Christians to be hated by the majority of men: for the flesh cannot endure the doctrine of the Gospel; none can endure to have their vices reprov’d.”³⁸ Nevertheless, Jesus says that those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake are blessed, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Thus, we come full-circle, so that those who entered the kingdom through a repentant poverty of spirit (v. 3) become those who practice righteousness, for which they are persecuted. Indeed, the persecution of the world not only leads us into deeper poverty of spirit and mourning as we lament the sin of the world in which we live. Additionally, the persecution of the world leads us to a deeper confidence that we possess the kingdom of heaven. This single paradox therefore encapsulates the paradox of all the beatitudes: though we suffer in this world, we are blessed through Christ. **Thus, this beatitude identifies the response of the world that confirms our resemblance to God.**

Discussion Questions

1. Of the nine approaches to the Sermon on the Mount listed above, which has most shaped your own understanding of this Sermon? How does it help to understand the Sermon on the Mount as an unfolding of the summary form of Jesus’ preaching in Matthew 4:17? Why does Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones argue that the Beatitudes describe the distinguishing characteristics of Christians vs. non-Christians? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
2. What does it mean in the Beatitudes to be “blessed”? How is this blessedness similar to the blessedness that the world seeks? How is it different? How should we understand the paradoxical blessedness that Jesus declares for the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and even those who are persecuted? Why do you think Jesus begins the teaching about the kingdom of heaven with these paradoxes?
3. What do the first four beatitudes teach us about the nature of repentance toward God? What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Why is this essential for possessing the kingdom of heaven? On what

³⁷ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 101.

³⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 1:265.

basis can we have confidence that those who mourn will be comforted? How will the meek—as opposed to the aggressive—inherit the kingdom? In what way can those who hunger and thirst for righteousness expect to be satisfied?

4. What do the last four beatitudes teach us about how we come to resemble God? Why must those who have received God's mercy also extend mercy to others? What is the relationship between purity in heart and seeing God? What does the rest of the Bible teach us to help us to understand the significance of seeing God? Why do others recognize our resemblance to God by our peacemaking? What role does persecution play in confirming our resemblance to God?