

**The Beatitudes**  
**Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 6:20-23**

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets, who were before you.  
(English Standard Version – ESV)

**Background:**

- The blessings listed here are the promises of the kingdom for those who live the repentant life. Jesus’ hearers would have understood them especially as promises for the future time of God’s reign. Readers today must read them in the light of the present aspect of the kingdom as well.
- Although one would stand to read Scripture publicly, Jewish teachers would sit to expound it, often with disciples sitting at their feet. Many scholars have compared the “mountain” here to Mt. Sinai, where God through Moses taught his ethics by the Law (Exodus 19-20; Isaiah 2:2-3).
- Many Jewish people believed the kingdom would be ushered in only by a cataclysmic war and force of arms, but Jesus promises it for the “poor in spirit,” the “meek,” and the “peacemakers.”
- “Mourning” was usually associated with either repentance or bereavement. The conjunction with “comforted” means that the second aspect is in view here. It could mean grief over Israel’s sins, but in this context probably refers to the pain of the oppressed.
- Jesus cites Psalm 37:9, 11 in Matthew 5:5, not with respect to people who try to bring in the kingdom politically or militarily, but with respect to those who “inherit the earth” by humbly waiting on God. The Hebrew of the psalm could mean “inherit the land” in a narrower sense (see Psalm 25:13), but in Jesus’ day Jews expected God’s people to reign over all the earth.
- The “pure in heart” (Psalm 73:1) were those in Israel whose hearts were clean or undefiled – those who recognized that God alone was their help and reward (Psalm 73:2-28). The righteous would see God on the Day of Judgment (Isaiah 30:20), as in the first exodus (Exodus 24:10-11).
- Both the Jewish people and the righteous were called “sons of God” in Jewish tradition. The ultimate declaration of that fact would be made in the sight of nations on the Day of Judgment.
- Most Jews didn’t believe that prophets still existed as they did in Old Testament days, so Jesus’ comparing his followers to the prophets indicated that they would have an extraordinary mission.

## Questions:

- + Based on the context, what is the meaning of “blessed,” and why did Jesus pick that word? With that meaning in view, which group of those who are “blessed” most represents you? Which group of those “blessed” is most unlike you? What must happen for that to change?
- + What does “poor in spirit” mean? How do “poor in spirit” and “kingdom of heaven” relate? How will “those who mourn” “be comforted?” How do you need to be comforted right now? What does it mean to “inherit the earth,” and why would “the meek” get that particular gift? What does “hunger and thirst for righteousness” mean? What do you hunger and thirst for? What does it mean for “the merciful” to “receive mercy?” How can you be merciful today? What does it mean for “the pure in heart” to “see God?” What needs to be purified in you? Why are “peacemakers” called “sons of God?” With whom do you need to make peace? What does it mean to be “persecuted for righteousness’ sake?”
- + Why does Jesus focus so much attention in this passage on those who are persecuted? Have you ever been persecuted for doing what is right? If so, describe your experience. Have you ever been persecuted for your faith in Christ? If so, describe your experience. If you are a Christian, how great is your reward in heaven? How could it be even greater?