

Matthew 5:1-12 – Epiphany 4 – The Sermon on the Mount – February 1, 2026

+In Nomine Iesu+

What does the *blessing* of God look like? We might think it is about a healthy body—happiness—or life on some warm Greek island. Maybe we think *blessing* is just getting whatever we want—whatever that might be. But Jesus has something else in mind—something better—something deeper. He knows what we need—over against what we want. And His form of blessing will last so much longer than any of these things.

Last week we talked about discipleship through the lens of the early pages of Matthew's Gospel. Here in Matthew, Jesus called His first disciples. And in His call, we found two commands. He called upon His hearers to *repent* because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. And He called upon them to *follow* Him. And this really is the most important kind of obedience—the obedience of faith.

Today in our Gospel reading, Jesus sits down with His disciples on the mountain and Jesus begins His famous Sermon on the Mount. Jesus finds a natural amphitheater. The crowds likely sat even higher, so that all can hear Him. Many were beginning to follow Jesus—although perhaps with some selfish motives. We often see the crowds trying to get what they want—and only what they want out of Him.

He had been healing people all over the region of Galilee. And the crowds were pleased when their physical problems were undone. But now He would give them something else—something better. He would preach to them the Word of God. This was what they most needed—even though they probably didn't recognize that reality.

Again, the Sermon on the Mount was preached to Jesus' disciples. The crowds were there. And they certainly would have heard what Jesus said. But Jesus' target audience is the disciples. This key will help us to understand the beatitudes—the series of blessings from our reading today. And it will help us to understand the foundation of grace that undergirds everything else He will say in the sermon.

Jesus begins here with the Gospel. He begins with good news for those who struggle in this life—for those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness—those rejected by the world for Jesus' sake. And He is preaching to His disciples to build their lives from the blessings and promises that God *has* granted them—*is* granting them—and *will* grant them at the end.

So, with His followers, Jesus begins with the Gospel. And then, and only then, will He get into the sanctified life that Jesus Himself will work in them. He begins with His own obedience before He talks about theirs.

This was the way of things when God gave His Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai as well. God begins by talking about the deliverance He works for them—rescuing them from Egypt. He claims this people as His own. He makes His name known among the ancient Israelites. And He speaks to them of the covenant that He will make with them. And I hope you can see the connection between these two events. Jesus is the new—and better Moses—just like He is the new and better Jonah, Aaron, and David.

Later, Jesus will give some very specific instructions about how we handle our lives in the world. And the issues of His sermon are remarkably relevant today. He is worth listening to carefully and slowly.

We should not just gloss over His comments with a dismissive shrug. We can't just read this—call ourselves bad Christians—and move on. He would have us put our lives to the test. And He invites contrition—confession—change—and conformity to His will among His followers.

He will talk about God's definition of marriage—that goes all the way back to creation—between one man and one woman. Jesus speaks about divorce—only permitting divorce in cases of adultery. He will talk about anger—calling us to love our enemies—to pray for them. He will talk about lust. And He tells us that it is better to pluck out our eyes than have lust drag us into hell. And our opinions on such issues—or modern cultural trends—don't matter at all.

But first we must see that Christian obedience flows from the Gospel. This whole Sermon is a gift. And the true Gospel in the lives of Jesus' true disciples produces gratitude—thankfulness—even praise. And this is my main point today.

We Christians obey Christ in all things because we are grateful for what Christ has done—and what He has taught us. Christians are grateful people. And by this I don't mean just generic feelings of gratefulness. And I really don't mean the kind of gratefulness that becomes an opportunity for pride. If we think of gratefulness as an opportunity to gain admirers and followers, then something is wrong.

Rather, Christians are grateful for Christ. We are grateful for what He has revealed. We are grateful for what He has accomplished. And we are grateful because we know that what He has promised is enough for us. In fact, it is abundantly more than we can even ask or imagine.

The Christian life is most certainly *blessed*. That is Jesus' word here. But blessing is not about getting whatever we want out of life. The Christian life is blessed with those things that Jesus promises right here in our text. And we quickly discover that most of us have been expecting way too little from God.

If we are just looking for God to take away our disease or fix our relationships, we aren't expecting too much, we are expecting too little. The Mediterranean diet—mixed with exercise—and lower stress—might be able to heal your body. A little listening—and being slow to take offense—might heal your friendships. But God is providing something so much more amazing.

And to see that, let's start with this word *blessed*. We hear it nine times in our text. But Jesus will use it more than 30 times in the Gospels. Sometimes we use this word to talk about the blessings of creation—when we are blessed with first article stuff—clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. These are real blessings. And they are supplied by God. Sometimes we call this common grace. But that really isn't what Jesus is talking about.

A strict definition of this word *blessed*, is something like, “the privileged place of receiving divine favor.” It can refer to things that stand in a very close relationship to God. Perhaps the most famous use of this term in the Old Testament is at the beginning of the

first Psalm. And notice the implications for where one stands both before God—and before the world.

“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.”

Notice that this blessing is still the work of God in the Psalm. He alone grants the ability to truly delight in God’s instructions. But there is human responsibility here too. We must think carefully about where we stand in this life—and who has our attention.

On a side note, there is a second form of blessing which we make to God in Scripture. And it means something like, “to praise someone’s ability to bring about what is right.” We hear this kind of thing in Psalm 34 from David when he says, “I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.” This is our response to His good gifts.

But here in our Gospel reading, Christ is granting His blessing to His disciples. He is the Great One. And he grants His grace and empowerment to these disciples. And to us. And His blessings will sanction all that we will hear about next week in the Sermon on the Mount.

And this blessing is nothing less than grace—and saving faith. So, to be blessed is something like to have access to the Word of God—and to truly recognize that access. It is the call of Christ, as we heard last week, to repent and follow. Christ calls us to Himself, and as His Word does what He says, we repent and follow. He works faith in our hearts and we become His disciples.

And in this way, Jesus’ Disciples are blessed. We are even blessed nine times. But notice what the blessings actually are here in our text. These blessings all suggest humility in the present—and great promises for the future. We are blessed because of what Christ has in store for us. Even though we are poor in spirit now, we will be given the Kingdom of heaven.

And we might be in mourning right now, although this seems to be the kind of mourning that is caused by our sin—or the sins of the world—even the whole curse under which all creation exists. Nevertheless, for all who mourn, and are in Christ, we have His promise. We will be comforted.

Disciples are meek. We are unimportant to the world. We don’t draw attention to ourselves. We are humble and simple. We are even persecuted like the Prophets sometimes. But we will inherit the earth. And I hope you are getting the idea.

Disciples are called to follow our Lord into His ways. And this is not going to look like success or blessing to our world. It is going to look very simple, very ordinary, very humble. It is a life of discipleship—of following, learning, fasting, prayer, and sacrifice. It might even look like a cross.

But even though these blessings have this appearance, the reality of what Christ is giving to us exceeds our wildest expectations. Not only are we promised to see God—and live in the world to come—there are also benefits of the Kingdom now. We have His mercy. We have the forgiveness of sins. We have His righteousness—as a gift. We even have

instructions for how we are to order our lives—our friendships—our marriages—our passions.

And when we really get this—when it gets through our thick heads how blessed we are—we start to be grateful. Our sour and grouchy hearts are set free. The etched in irritable expression changes to a pleasant resting face. The complaints and arguments can stop.

We are blessed by God in Jesus Christ. Our great God has granted this huge set of nine blessing to us humble, simple, broken people. And His blessings are so much greater than whatever discouragement the world can throw at us.

So, before we go right to the difficulties of obedience in this sermon—and it will be difficult—Christ sets before us amazing promises—for all who will follow Him. We first hear the Gospel. We hear what Jesus has come into the world to accomplish. We hear His blessings. And this fills us with hope. We are promised a grand and glorious future.

Ours will be the kingdom of heaven. He will give us comfort. We shall inherit the earth. We shall be satisfied with righteousness. We shall receive mercy. We shall see God. We shall be called sons of God. This is what God has prepared for those who love Him—and those who eagerly await the appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Christians always think forward. We are people full of hope. We have our eyes set on the blessings of eternity. The kingdom of God means everything to us. And knowing the nature of God, and the promises of God, we see that obedience comes quite naturally to a grateful heart. He has promised great joy, even in the midst of life's difficulties.

Obedience is a response of gratitude for all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus. And obedience is a response of gratitude for all that He will do for us in the world to come. We are blessed. And that makes our obedience to God a delight—even a privilege.

Next week we continue in the Sermon on the Mount. We won't get through all of it in this short Epiphany Season. But, Jesus will continue to talk to His disciples. And He will give them an identity and a purpose.

If you have ever wondered about what you were put on this earth for—and I hope that this is a question that you grapple with regularly—this sermon will be worth your time. Until then, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+