

# Moments *for* You

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Theme: Blessed



## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BLESSED?

Quite possibly, the most frequently used word in the Christian's vocabulary is *blessed*. "Have a blessed day," "blessed to be a blessing," and "God bless you" are just a few of the ways we put it to use. It's even common among unbelievers to describe themselves as "blessed." Some people think of blessed as a spiritual term for "good fortune," like when we receive something good, the desired outcome, or an exceptional comfort. But what does it really mean to be blessed?

The Greek word often translated as "blessed" in our Bibles is *makarios*, which means "fortunate," "happy," "enlarged," or "lengthy." *Makarios* is used to define the kind of happiness that comes from receiving favor from God. Consequently, the word can also be translated "favored," as with Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was "blessed among women" (Luke 1:42–45, 48). It was the Lord God who had blessed and favored her.

Perhaps the most well-known use of the word blessed in the Bible is found in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12), where Jesus used the term to describe the inner quality of a faithful servant of God. This blessedness is a spiritual state of well-being and prosperity—a deep, joy-filled contentment that cannot be shaken by poverty, grief, famine, persecution, war, or any other trial or tragedy we face in life.

The true servant of God is blessed, regardless of circumstances, because God has favored him or her with a fully satisfied soul (Psalm 63:1–5; John

4:14). The material things we crave can never bring genuine happiness or contentment. True fulfillment can only be found in a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1–2).

From the time God first created humans, He blessed them (Genesis 1:22; 5:2; 12:3) and has continued to do so throughout history (Genesis 26:3; Deuteronomy 7:13; Job 42:12; Judges 13:24). Because of Christ's work of redemption on the cross, we can now receive the full blessings of God through faith in Him (Ephesians 1:3). We are blessed because our sins are forgiven and can no longer be counted against us (Psalm 32:1–2).

The Bible measures blessedness differently from how people of the world measure it: "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12). To those who rest in God, He grants an inner state of joy that is unaffected by external trials. What is this promised "crown of life?" It is the never-ending, victorious life in the world to come, where all trials will be ended. The marvelous blessings we experience now are minor compared to the benefits God has stored up for us in His eternal kingdom (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Blessed speaks of our inner state of well-being, the prosperity of our souls in Christ. Blessedness comes from unhindered fellowship with God the Father through our Lord Jesus. To be blessed is to experience the full impact of God's presence in our lives now and for all eternity.

—GotQuestions.org, condensed

## BLESSED BY GOD

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is probably the best-known and most often quoted of all of Jesus' teachings, though arguably it is also the least understood and, without a doubt, the least obeyed.

Matthew makes it clear that the targeted audience was not the masses fascinated by His healings, but rather His disciples: "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" (Matthew 5:1-2). Jesus is not telling *people in general* how to behave; He is telling *His committed followers* how to live lives that are blessed by God.

The theme of the Sermon is that true followers of Jesus must be different. First, He contrasts the lifestyle expected of His followers against that exhibited by the religious elite in 5:20: "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." But then He also contrasts their lifestyle with the behavior of godless people in 6:8: "Do not be like *them*."

How different must we be? Very different! This Sermon is the most complete description anywhere in the New Testament of the appropriate lifestyle of a devoted follower of Jesus, and it is radically counter-cultural, totally at variance with the lifestyle of the non-Christian world, and sadly, even with much of what we see in Christian circles.

Please understand that I am well aware that its standards are absolutely unattainable by human effort alone. Anyone who claims to consistently live by the Sermon on the Mount is either totally ignorant about what it says, or is just a liar. On the other

hand, it would be a serious mistake to not even strive to meet its lofty challenges.

John Stott observes, "Only a belief in the necessity and the possibility of a new birth can keep us from reading the Sermon on the Mount with either foolish optimism or hopeless despair." But a new birth is possible! Through the miracle of regeneration and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we can make significant progress toward living in obedience to the lifestyle Jesus describes.

The sermon begins with the Beatitudes, a series of eight statements beginning with the words "Blessed are ..." (5:3-12). The key point I wish to make about the people Jesus is describing as "blessed" is that these are not eight separate and distinct categories of disciples, some of whom are poor in spirit, some who mourn, some who are meek, etc. The Beatitudes are Christ's description of what *every* Christian ought to be like. Each of these qualities are to characterize each of His followers.

It is also important to notice that Jesus is not describing anyone's economic, social, or psychological status here, but rather their *spiritual* status. The poor are the poor in *spirit*, the hungry are those who hunger for *righteousness*, the sorrowful are those who are sorry for *sin*, and the persecuted are those rejected because of their *faith in Jesus*.

Each person who exhibits these qualities is pronounced "blessed" in a way that is appropriate to the particular quality commended. The term "blessed," by the way, has always been a difficult one to translate and grasp. Many scholars have employed the word "happy," but that is not altogether satisfactory. Happiness in our culture is a subjective state,



whereas Jesus is making an objective judgment about these people. He is declaring not what they *feel like*, but what God thinks of them and therefore what they *actually are*. They are, in short, approved by God and content in God. And while these blessings—like enjoying the kingdom of heaven, being comforted, being filled, and seeing God—will only be fully experienced in Heaven, there are profound applications to our lives here on earth. In other words, we get to preview these blessings as we begin to live out these qualities.

Let me suggest one more truth about the Beatitudes as a whole. I believe they paint a portrait of Jesus Himself. There is not a single characteristic shared here that He did not exhibit perfectly. He was poor in spirit, He mourned over sin, He was meeker than Moses, He hungered and thirsted for righteousness, He was merciful and pure in heart, He was a peacemaker, and He was persecuted because of righteousness as no one before or since. Jesus not only taught us these truths, He modeled them. The call to be a counter-cultural Christian is the call to be like Jesus Himself.

Friends, what we see in this amazing passage of Scripture is such a reversal of human values that it actually turns everything topsy-turvy. The world says, “Assert yourself, stand up for yourself, be proud of yourself, defend yourself, avenge yourself, serve yourself.” But God exalts the humble and abases the proud, calls the first last and the last first, ascribes greatness to the servant, sends the rich away empty-handed and declares the meek to be His heirs. Jesus congratulates those whom the world pities and calls all who follow Him “blessed.”

—Michael P. Andrus, adapted

## BLESSED POVERTY

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

This is one of those statements which remind us there are always two sides to the gospel: there has to be an emptying before there can be a filling. There is a pulling down and a raising up. Conviction must always precede conversion. If one feels anything in the presence of God except an utter poverty of spirit, it ultimately means they have never faced Him. That is the meaning of this Beatitude.

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? It was the spirit of a man like Gideon, for instance, who, when the Lord sent an angel to him to tell him the great thing he was to do, said, “How can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (Judges 6:15). It was the spirit of Moses, who felt deeply unworthy of the task laid upon him: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11). You find it in David, when he said, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?” (2 Samuel 7:18). When Isaiah had a vision of the majesty of the Lord, he said, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). That is to be “poor in spirit,” and it can be seen throughout the Old Testament.

In the New Testament you see it perfectly in a man like the apostle Peter who was naturally aggressive, self-assertive, and self-confident. But look at him when he truly sees the Lord. He says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). Or look at the apostle Paul. Here was a man with great natural abilities. But

once he had seen the risen Lord on the road to Damascus all that became “loss” (Philippians 3:7). As he goes on with the task of evangelism, he asks, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:16). If any man had a right to feel “sufficient” it was Paul. Yet he felt insufficient because he was “poor in spirit.”

We see this most of all as we look at the life of our Lord Himself. He became a Man, He took upon Himself “the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3). Though He was equal with God He did not clutch at the prerogatives of His deity. He said, “I can do nothing on My own” (John 5:30). And look at His prayer life: as you watch Him spending hours in prayer, you see His poverty of spirit and His reliance upon the Father.

Being “poor in spirit” means a consciousness that we are nothing in the presence of God. If we are truly Christian, we understand that our salvation and spiritual service must flow from God, and not ourselves. We shall not rely upon our own morality and conduct and good behavior. We shall not rely upon the fact that we belong to a certain family or nationality. We shall not build upon our natural personality, or rely upon our education, intelligence, ability, or any wealth we may have. No, all that is what Paul came to regard as “rubbish.”

“Poverty of spirit” is to look to God in utter submission to Him and in utter dependence upon Him and His grace and mercy. When a person is in the presence of God, they of necessity fall “at His feet as though dead,” as did the apostle John (Revelation 1:17). Any natural spirit that is in us goes out, because it is not only exposed in its smallness and weakness, but its sinfulness and defilement become apparent at the same time.

Let us then ask ourselves these questions. Am I like that? Am I poor in spirit? How do I really feel about myself as I think of myself in terms of God, and in the presence of God?

How does one become “poor in spirit”? You may be tempted to start by looking at yourself or by trying to change things about yourself. But that is not the way. Instead, look at God. Read the Bible, look at what He expects from us, and contemplate standing before Him. Look at the Lord Jesus Christ and view Him as we see Him in the Gospels. The more we do that, the more we shall understand the reaction of the apostles when, looking at Him and something He had just done, they said, “increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5). Their faith, they felt, was nothing. They felt it was so weak and so poor.

You cannot truly look at Him without feeling your absolute spiritual poverty, and emptiness. Then you say to Him, “Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

—Adapted from *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* by David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

## BLESSED TEARS

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

We might almost translate this second Beatitude “Happy are the unhappy” in order to draw attention to the startling paradox it contains. What kind of sorrow can it be which brings the joy of Christ’s blessing to those who feel it? It is plain from the context that those promised comfort here are not primarily those who mourn the loss of a loved one, but those who mourn the loss of their innocence, their self-righteousness, their self-respect. It is not the sorrow of bereavement to which Christ refers, but the sorrow of repentance.

This is the second stage of spiritual blessing. It is one thing to be spiritually poor and acknowledge it; it is another to grieve and to mourn over it. Some Christians seem to imagine that they must wear a perpetual grin on their face and be continuously boisterous and bubbly. No. In Luke's version of the Sermon, Jesus added to this Beatitude a solemn woe: "Woe to you who laugh now" (Luke 6:25). The truth is that there are such things as Christian tears, and too few of us ever weep them.

Jesus wept over the sins of others, over their bitter consequences in judgment and death, and over the unrepentant city which would not receive Him. We too should weep more over the evil in the world, as did God-centered people in biblical times. "My eyes shed streams of tears," the psalmist could say to God, "because people do not keep Your law" (Psalm 119:136). Ezekiel heard God's faithful people described as those "who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in [Jerusalem]" (Ezekiel 9:4). And Paul wrote of the false teachers troubling the churches of his day: "many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ" (Philippians 3:18).

It is not only the sins of others which should cause us tears, for we have our own sins to weep over as well. Have they never caused us any grief? Was Ezra mistaken to pray and make confession, "weeping and casting himself down before the house of God" (Ezra 10:1)? Was Paul wrong to groan, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24), and to write to the sinful church of Corinth: "Ought you not rather to mourn?" (1 Corinthians 5:2). I think not. I fear

that Christians who make much of grace sometimes thereby make light of sin. We should experience more of the "godly grief" of Christian penitence (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Such mourners, who bewail their own sinfulness, will be comforted by the only comfort which can relieve their distress, namely the free forgiveness of God. According to the Old Testament prophets, consolation was to be one of the roles of the Messiah. He was to be the Comforter who would "bind up the brokenhearted" (Isaiah 61:1). That is why godly people like Simeon were said to be looking and longing "for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25). And Christ does speak peace to our sore, scarred consciences. Yet we still mourn over the havoc of suffering and death which sin spreads throughout the world. Only in the final state of glory will Christ's comfort be complete, for only then sin will be no more and "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:17).

—Condensed from *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* by John Stott

## BLESSED RIGHTEOUSNESS

*"Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ... David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin'" (Romans 4:3, 6–8).*

How does God bring righteousness to men and women? There are many like Abraham who have believed God and God has credited to them divine righteousness. David knew it too. What blessedness! God credits righteousness to those sinners who

believe in the Lord. He lays to their account a full pardon for their sins; He justifies them, declaring them to be righteous. And the righteousness that is credited to us has nothing at all to do with some goodness that we have accumulated because of our works. It is not something we have done community service to obtain. We have not worked for a year to have righteousness imputed to us. Paul says categorically these three words: “apart from works” (Romans 4:6). We have not worked to earn this righteousness.

Then what is this righteousness that is credited to us and makes us eternally blessed? It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Think of what Paul said to the Philippians: “Not having a righteousness of my own ... but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Philippians 3:9).

Those who trust in Jesus Christ enjoy the three-fold blessings of this passage in Romans:

**All their transgressions are forgiven (v.7).** For every occasion when they have crossed the boundary into forbidden territory, God has forgiven them. Every single trespass, even the one you are most ashamed of. “Forgiven,” says God. He has gone on record. He says so. He declares, “I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 43:25). He makes a promise that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

**All their sins are covered (v.7).** In the Old Testament, sins were covered temporarily through sacrifices. But here is the new and remarkable way in which God covers the sins of believers once and for all. God takes

the robe of righteousness of Jesus Christ—His Son’s holiness and obedience—and He wraps us from head to toe in that. What a stunning covering! On the inside we are forgiven and on the outside our sins are all covered by the righteousness of Christ. What blessedness!

**Their sin the Lord will never count against them (v.8).** How is that possible? Does God turn a blind eye to our sin? Does He shrug in indifference? I will tell you how God can be a just God and yet not count our sins against us. God has counted them against His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Our sin was counted against Christ and nailed to His cross. God will not demand payment again for what Christ has already paid.

That is the eternal blessedness of the gift of God through what Jesus Christ has done. It is the privilege of everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. I am here today to tell you that if you turn away from your unbelief and trust in the Savior then God will not hold your sin against you. He will cover your sin and put you in Christ for evermore (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Don’t you want this blessedness? It’s real and it is being offered to you today. Receive Him who is the Savior. Give Him no rest until you know that He is yours for evermore. “Lord, save me. Lord, help me. Lord, forgive me.”

—Geoff Thomas, adapted

## BLESSING GOD

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3).*

The Christian life is really a treasure hunt in which you progressively discover the vast wealth that already is yours because you are now in Christ. One of the most important

things for your spiritual growth is to ask God to open the eyes of your heart so that you will know “what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18).

Because God has blessed us with every blessing in Christ, we should bless God. Blessing God means to speak well of Him, or to praise Him for His glorious attributes and for His gracious actions toward us in Christ (Psalm 103:1–5). We thank Him for all that He is to us, for all that He has done for us, and for all that He yet promises to do for us throughout eternity. We bless Him by joyfully giving back to Him what He has first given to us, namely, our time, our talent, and our treasure.

We bless God by offering up “a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name.” We bless God when we “do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Hebrews 13:15–16). We bless God when our hearts overflow with joy in Him because of His abundant grace towards us in Christ. —Steven J. Cole, condensed

## THE BLESSED HOPE

[Editor’s note: The purpose of this abbreviated article is not to comment on the specific timing of events related to the Lord’s second coming, but rather to draw out of our hearts praise for the One who is our hope, and remind us that “everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself” (1 John 3:3).]

*“Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).*

The blessed hope of Jesus’ coming again gives us victory in this life and a promise of resurrection and immortality in the life to come. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:19 “If in Christ we

have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” If this life is all there is, the Christian faith is like a bridge over a vast canyon which stops in the middle and leads nowhere. But the Scriptures present to us an altogether different promise.

In the holy word of God, there is a blessed hope for us. I think of three reasons why the apostle Paul could call this hope “blessed.”

1. In the coming of our Lord, in the glorious appearing of our Savior, there is the final end and the forever destruction of sin. The blessed hope in our Lord is the delivery of the whole creation from the bondage of sin (Romans 8:18-25). Some day, Jesus is coming again, and we shall live in a kingdom of righteousness.

2. When Jesus comes, He brings with Him the abolition of death. As 1 Corinthians 15:26 says, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” Jesus will come to raise us from the dead—to speak to the grave—and they in the grave shall hear His voice and rise to the glory of His marvelous presence (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18).

3. It is called “the blessed hope” because when He comes, it will be the Lord God Himself that we shall see (Revelation 1:5–8). When Jesus was here on this earth, human flesh covered Him, concealing His glory and His deity (Philippians 2:5–8). But there is coming a day when we shall see Him in all of His deity, in all of His manifest glory.

Small wonder that Paul calls it “the blessed hope”! It encompasses our victory over sin and death and the grave, and our resurrection to a new life in Him. That’s God’s invitation to us—to be sons and daughters in His kingdom, to be like Him, to live with Him, and to be caught up to Heaven with Him. —Dr. W.A. Criswell, condensed