

If you would open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5, put your finger there and open to Luke chapter 6, just so that we can build a bridge chronologically for you. We have come to an extraordinary portion of the New Testament, and I don't think it would be possible to overestimate the value of Matthew chapter 5 through chapter 7. It is commonly referred to as "the Sermon on the Mount," and it is, in my estimation, the seed-bed from which all New Testament doctrine is drawn in terms of the preaching of the apostles immediately afterward. You're going to see reoccurring themes here; you're going to see foundations laid down, and these are the things which the apostles wrote about and expanded upon and continued to teach to the body of believers.

Now it's interesting that this particular portion of Scripture would be controversial, but it is. It is because some say that this sermon, given by Christ at this particular time, was not really for the church today, but was only for those that were living then. I absolutely reject that concept; especially with the balance of what the rest of Scripture reveals.

However, there is a danger that is inherent in looking at this particular passage because we can, if we are not careful, begin to imagine that the Sermon on the Mount is a series of dictums, or authoritative sayings, statements, or pronouncement (formal) or laws and if we just follow them, we will be saved from God's wrath and condemnation. In other words, if we try to live according to these high moral standards we can get to heaven.

That is not what the Sermon on the Mount teaches.

We will discover this morning what it does teach, but to give us the bridge itself, look in Luke chapter 6 because here is where a little bit of interpretational controversy exists.

In Luke chapter 6 go to verse 12. This comes immediately after Jesus is engaged in a Sabbath controversy with who else but the Pharisees and the Scribes. And so verse 12 says, "**It was at this time**"-- at the same time that he had this last controversy

with them--"at this time He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." And this is *one of only two times* in the New Testament that we read Christ spent all night in prayer,

"He spent the whole night in prayer to God, and when the day came He called His disciples to Him and He chose twelve of them whom He also named apostles."

Don't overlook the fact that He called the whole host of disciples to Him, and out of that host of disciples, He ordained twelve. So there's a bigger crowd there than just the twelve, but He marked out the twelve publicly in front of them--"Simon, whom He also named Peter and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and there was a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured." So it's a very large crowd.

But when you get over to Matthew chapter 5, as you look at the first verse, it says, "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him." So the question is, is this the same event or is this a different event? In fact, it's the same event.

There's an interesting thing that didn't come to light until just a few years ago in the understanding of the Greek words that were used in these two passages--that in fact it appears what happened was He went up into a high place in the mountain and then came back down to a plateau, and in this plateau He was still up above the crowds, but He was on this flat place, and it's here that He did the ordaining and did the preaching with the greater masses down below this plateau area but a good number of

His disciples are up there right on the plateau with Him. That kind of takes away the differences between the two accounts. And it's just a simple matter of understanding how the words were used by Matthew and by Luke.

And so "when Jesus saw the crowds," follow with me -

Matthew 5: verse 1-2, "He went up into the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him, and He opened His mouth and began to teach *them*, saying." And so there is in one sense, by His use of that term--"them"—that this sermon is to be understood as being uniquely for those who are considered the disciples of Christ even though the large crowd is gathered and hearing this teaching.

And then He begins with these words, in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for *theirs* is the kingdom of heaven."

This is vital to our understanding of The Sermon on the Mount. He is giving instruction to those who will be members of His kingdom. This is the Kingdom that many were waiting for with great anticipation although it does not come in a way that they expected it. His kingdom is not constituted as a literal and final kingdom yet. That does not occur until His second coming and the eternal kingdom is established.

So listen closely as we establish this biblical truth concerning the constitution or establishment of His kingdom, before His ascension to heaven. Don't worry about remembering all of this at this time just get the idea of why this Sermon was preached.

Luke, chapter 1 --when the angel came to announce to Mary that Jesus was to be born, he said to her, "He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Then at the beginning of His ministry in Mark 1, we read, "Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying 'the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.'" And then in Luke, chapter 9, when he sent the disciples out, it says, "And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God." And then at the Last Supper in Luke 22, He says to His disciples, "And just as my father has granted me a kingdom, I grant that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." And then again, when He's standing before Pilate just before He's about to be crucified, and Pilate is inquiring as to whether or not He is, in fact, a king, Jesus responds, "My kingdom is not of this world." You see, He's been discussing the kingdom, preaching the kingdom; He's been announced as the king of the kingdom from the very beginning. So it's natural that what He says here has to do with the kingdom, but

we're not finished yet. He says, "'If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews, but as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm,' and therefore Pilate said to Him, 'So you are a king.' Jesus answered, 'You say correctly that I'm a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world to testify to the truth, and everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.'"

But even when He's on the cross, there is an emphasis on the kingdom, as He's hanging there and as the two thieves on either side of Him are saying malicious things, finally the one convicted by the Holy Spirit, understanding what was going on turns to Him and says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your **kingdom**."

And then when Jesus speaks to His disciples in the time between His resurrection and the time when He actually ascends in the clouds in Acts, chapter 1, listen to the account of those days--"To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning [what?] the kingdom of God." He was preoccupied with the kingdom of God.

I've heard some, who like to talk only of love, say that the thing Jesus talked about most was love. And I've heard of others who like grace, and we all like grace, that Jesus only talked about grace. But the Scriptural evidence proves that He spoke more about the kingdom than anything else because He came to be king over a kingdom.

So it makes perfect sense that when He sits on the hill at this moment to begin the Sermon on the Mount that the very first thing He says to them is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the *kingdom*."

That is His purpose for this teaching, this *entire passage* of Scripture is about the kingdom.

So, follow along with me as we overview the sermon.

In [Matthew] 5:1-12, He's going to talk about the citizens of the kingdom--those who are born again. What is it like for those who are the citizens of the kingdom of God? And His initial concept is this in what are called the beatitudes - it is that they are

blessed. Above all things, the citizens of the kingdom are acknowledged as blessed. We will discover why later.

As you look at verses 13-16, we find the **role** of the citizens of the kingdom in this present age--that we are to be **salt and light**, that we become citizens of two countries. We have a citizenship in heaven and of that coming kingdom, and yet we dwell here on this earth. So what is the role for those who are blessed of God? How is it that we're to function within the present kingdom when we know we're expecting to be a part of a new kingdom? Jesus says, "We do that by being salt and light."

In 17-48 then, He begins to discuss both the character of the kingdom and all of its citizens. And here He talks about true righteousness and true holiness. He'll address actually six perversions of the Law that the Pharisees had become accustomed to using, and we may see ourselves falling into some of their traps like wanting to manipulate and change and warp the Word of God in order to make it conform to us so that we can justify ourselves by the Law. Here He speaks of the Law in such great detail that He destroys any notions of us justifying ourselves by works in any way, shape or form, and gives us the true character of the kingdom and of the citizens of the kingdom.

In chapter 6, verses 1-24, He discusses the life of service in the kingdom--that we are to be living unto the Father and not for men. And in 25-34, he discusses the sufficiency of the kingdom and how we are then delivered from the anxiety of this life.

In chapter 7, 1-5, He discusses the humility of the kingdom--how we're to deal with one another uncritically as brother with brother. In verse 6 of chapter 7, He deals with the otherness of the kingdom--its unique preciousness and the way that it is contrary to all that the world values. In 7-12, He discusses the privilege of the kingdom and how we have unlimited access to the Father and what that means. In 13

and 14, He discusses the entrance to the kingdom--that it is a narrow gate and a narrow way and not a broad gate or a broad way. And then in 15-27, He discusses the integrity of the kingdom—that has to be that integrity of a heart on fire for God and how it lives out in everyday life.

The entire sermon is about the kingdom. He's discussing the reality of where you and I, if we are true believers, are in the kingdom. This is critical because Jesus also taught in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares, that the church will always have a mixture of those who are genuine and false sitting side by side until Christ returns and finally separates the true from the false.

For true believers, we live with this tension of the here and not yet, where we have a measure of the kingdom here and now because we have already been born again. And so we are a part of the kingdom, and yet we haven't seen the kingdom come in all of its fullness yet. There are still things that need to transpire.

But this we do know--that we have this coming, conquering kingdom which is going to dispel and destroy all of the kingdoms of this earth, and Christ is going to reign and He's going to cause every knee to bow and every tongue to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father, and that will be the fullness of the kingdom. We are awaiting that day; we are looking for our Blessed Hope - Christ Himself and the consummation of His kingdom. That's what we're excited about.

So as we approach the beatitudes, and by the way if you have been afflicted by that abominable idea that was once propagated to call these "the be happy attitudes," please banish that unbiblical idea from your brain. That's utter foolishness. That is not the concept that is being communicated here.

What Jesus is talking about here are the citizens of the kingdom. And He outlines this in a series of ways. In each one, we read about the blessedness (literally

blessednesses)--"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 gentle, 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 have been persecuted for righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He's not talking about individual groups of people. He's talking about Christians as a whole, and that each of us is to be partaking of these very things.

There are three things you ought to notice about this entire passage of the beatitudes, of verses 1-12.

The first is that the Christian mindset is paradoxical to the world's thinking. Secondly, that the Christian life is a progression--that it starts at one place and moves on toward another, what we call progressive sanctification.. And thirdly, that the Christian is to live in a constant tension between the present and the future that is yet to come.

So what is this Blessedness? The word, in the Greek is "makarios," it means blessed, possessing the favor of God, the state of being marked by fullness from God." It indicates the state of being of the believer in Christ—the believer is blessed for the Son of Man's sake. It speaks of one who becomes a partaker of God's nature through faith in Christ. The believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit because of Christ and as a result should be fully satisfied no matter what the circumstances.

But what many are usually talking about, in terms of being blessed, is being happy. What we are usually connecting with this idea of blessedness, is having things going our way, is having the conditions of life favorable to our liking. But when Jesus uses the word blessed, He's not worried about the outward conditions; He's speaking to individuals who count themselves and know themselves as truly blessed because

they're God's own special people, chosen from the foundation of the world who are guaranteed eternal life and glorification with the Savior. And the outward circumstances of earthly, temporary life have no impact on that. The reality is they live in the blessedness of being Christ's no matter what else may come in life.

Now the truth is, we all like to say that theologically; but very few of us live that in reality. I'm blessed, but don't let something bad happen tomorrow, because then I'm going to think I'm not so blessed. I'm blessed, but don't let something transpire that is even just an irritant against my flesh, because pretty soon I'll tell you I'm not all that happy about the circumstances. Hear what the great Anglican preacher J.C. Ryle once said: "God is more concerned with you being holy than He is with you being happy" and if you do not believe that then you are acutely unaware of what the bible teaches regarding the true Christian life.

So, blessedness is that sense, that reality of being God's, and of His favor being poured on you. Let me expand that just a little bit more. Makarios differs from the word happy in that the person who is happy has good luck; it comes from the root 'hap,' meaning, luck as a favorable circumstance. To be makarios, blessed, is equivalent to having God's kingdom in one's heart. Makarios is the one who is in the world yet independent of the world, for his satisfaction comes from God and not from favorable circumstances."

Now, if in fact what He's doing in these twelve verses is describing what a citizen of the kingdom of God is like, then I will have to ask you and me, this question, Are we, as citizens of the kingdom of God, living as if we are the blessed? Or are we ornery and mean and cantankerous and upset and cranky and touchy and out of sorts with everybody, because our joy and our blessedness depend on outward circumstances? And all God's people said, "Ouch."

If you haven't heard anything else this morning, Christ is speaking right now--listen to Him, this is God. And He is saying to those who belong to Him, "*You are blessed because you're mine!*" And if you're habitually and constantly worried and anxiety ridden about temporal circumstances, your focus is wrong--you're reasoning like the world, showing wordliness, rather than being transformed continually by God's Word and showing Godliness..

Some Baptists talk about worldliness, and talk about it in terms of going to dances, going to movies, or doing other things. But real worldly-mindedness is not being blessed or considering ourselves blessed because we are Christ's, and instead we gaze upon those things that are happening in life and say, "Well, this isn't going right; that isn't going right. I want this to be changed; I want that to be the changed," and we find ourselves basing all of our happiness, all of our joy and all of our contentment on those temporary external things when Jesus says, "My people are a people who know they are blessed because they're mine." And that goes beyond everything else.

I tell you, we don't live like that in this age. We too often live more like the unsaved. We live more like the world does in this context.

Because of this blessedness, each of the things listed in the beatitudes is something that the world would designate as that which produces misery. And yet the Christian is not to become miserable by it, but is supposed to take particular satisfaction in it.

Too often we've taken the world's concepts and imported them into the church. We've blended it into our church services with so called seeker sensitive services where sin is never mentioned in a public preaching service and even more sadly in pastoral counseling where pastors refer all of their members to so called Christian psychologists and therapists who try to Christianize worldly ideas.

The world cultivates and rewards aggressiveness, but Jesus says, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." Well wait a minute, if we don't stand up for ourselves, nobody will stand up for us. You might be right. Who says standing up for yourself is the best way? It's a tough thing to do, but, you see, the world thinks differently than the Christian thinks. The world encourages the satisfaction of every lust and the denial of none. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. The world does not believe in mercy but in survival of the fittest, but Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." The world applauds a duplicity which says, "What does it matter what I'm like in my private life as long as I can do my job well?" And Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart." The world is continually restless, and Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers." The world rejects any form of persecution, whether it's real or imagined, demanding to be treated after their own self conceptions. And Jesus says, "Blessed are you when they persecute you." And so we'll start the Christian Anti-Defamation League. And we'll write letters to the newspaper and to the television station and say, "You portrayed Christians in a bad light," as though we're doing something righteous. What a bunch of idiots we've become. We've bought the world's mind. And the citizens of the kingdom think differently. And that's what He begins to open to us here. In utter contrast to the mindset of the world, we have the Christian whose character is Christ. The beatitudes are an extraordinary passage for that reason.

The second thing, though, I would have you see out of the beatitudes as a whole is that in them we see that the Christian life is a progression. We see it in three different ways actually. First, we understand that there's a progression as we work through each of the beatitudes themselves. In other words, you begin, salvation begins with a revelation of the poverty of our souls. You begin as poor in spirit, and then it moves on to mourning and grieving over sin. And then it moves on from there to humbling

ourselves before the throne of God, and then having done that, it produces within us a hungering and a thirsting after righteousness. And then having come to mercy, we carry that mercy to others who are out there who still need Christ. We pursue after holiness and purity. We desire to see others reconciled to God, and we want to be peacemakers for them in that situation. And we gladly begin to suffer the identification with Christ that may lead to persecution. You see, there's a progression in life that works all the way through that, and each of these are to be owned by all Christians. They're not just, one guy is gentle, one guy is pure in heart, one guy is poor in spirit, but each of us is to partake of the fullness of these things because they are the progression through which the Christian life moves.

But lastly, we understand that it's a progression and that we don't end here. We aren't existentialists. We have an expected end--"Blessed are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We don't live just in the here and now, but we live in the here and now knowing that God has yet set for us a goal and an end and a place for us to be. And so we see the progression of the Christian life as moving from this age into the next age, from this kingdom into the next kingdom, from this day into the one that is yet to come. So the Christian mindset is paradoxical to the world's thinking, and the Christian life is a progression. But then thirdly, we see this, that the Christian lives in a tension between the present and the future. I love this because it happens in each one of the beatitudes separately--"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." I'm poor in spirit now, but the kingdom of heaven is yet to come. "Blessed are those who mourn now, for they shall be comforted," maybe not now. "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." In each of these, there's a constant moving, there's a tension here between what is and what is yet to come. And when we lose that tension, when we lose the

reality of that tension, we don't know how to live in the present world.

We have laid a solid foundation this morning and I would ask you to go home and spend some time looking through the Sermon on the Mount. These chapters [Matthew] 5-7 are extraordinary. And they are Christ speaking to the church, specifically about His rule and reign, This is Christ teaching us from the depths of His soul beginning at this time, that we understand the whole of it being wrapped up in the blessedness of being Christ's. Let's pray.