

THE EIGHT BEATITUDES OF JESUS



Jesus Christ gave us the Eight Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, recorded for all posterity in the Gospel of Matthew, the first Book of the New Testament of the Bible. Matthew's Gospel was directed to an audience steeped in Hebrew tradition. The Gospel of Matthew stressed that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah foretold in Hebrew Scripture, our Old Testament, and that the Kingdom of the Lord is the Kingdom of God in Heaven. Jesus offers us a way of life that promises eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The teachings of Jesus of Nazareth were simple but unique and innovative during his time on earth. The historical setting of his life found that He began teaching about 27 AD during the ruthless Roman occupation of Palestine. There were four major groups in the Jewish religion then, the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and the Zealots, all of whom presented a different viewpoint to the Hebrew people. The Pharisees demanded strict observance of the Mosaic Law expressed in the Torah, but also accepted the oral tradition of Jewish customs and rituals. The Sadducees were mainly from the priestly families and accepted the Law of Moses but rejected oral tradition. The Pharisees, unlike the Sadducees, believed in the resurrection of the dead. The monastic Essenes awaited a Messiah that would establish a Kingdom on earth and free the Israelites from oppression. The Zealots were a militant Jewish group who wanted freedom for their homeland, and were centered in Galilee; one of the Twelve Apostles was Simon the Zealot.

The Ten Commandments, given to Moses on Mount Sinai in the Old Testament Book of Exodus, related a series of "Thou shalt not" phrases, evils one must avoid in daily life on earth.

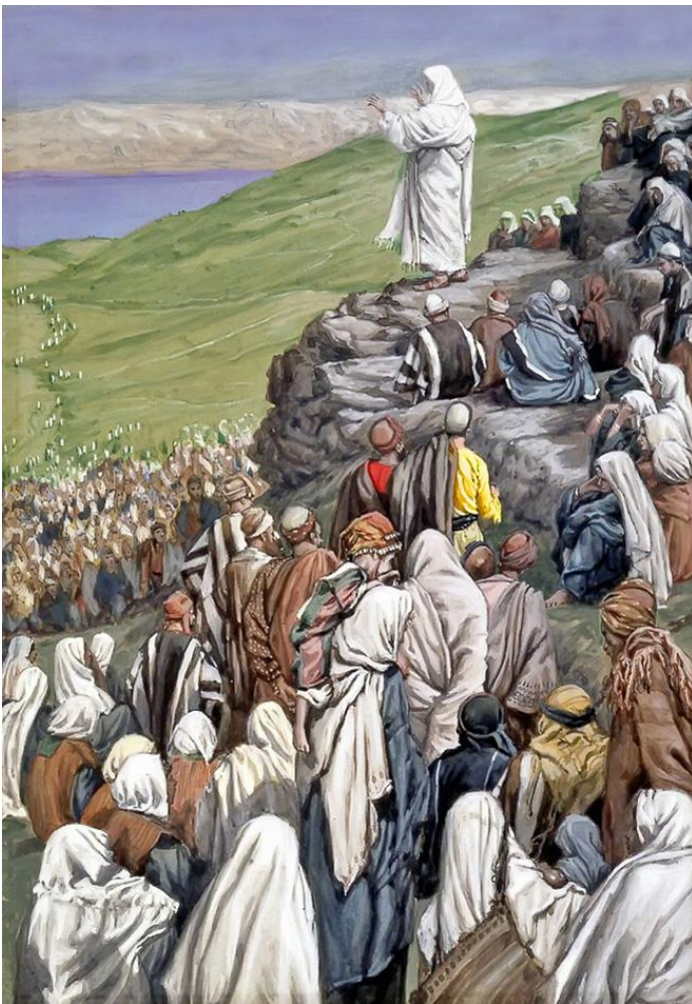
In contrast, the message of Jesus is one of humility, charity, and brotherly love. He teaches transformation of

the inner person. Jesus presents the Beatitudes in a positive sense, virtues in life which will ultimately lead to reward. Love becomes the motivation for the Christian. All of the Beatitudes have an eschatological meaning, that is, they promise us salvation - not in this world, but in the next. The Beatitudes initiate one of the main themes of Matthew's Gospel, that the Kingdom so long awaited in the Old Testament is not of this world but of the next, the Kingdom of Heaven.

While the Beatitudes of Jesus provide a way of life that promises salvation, they also bring peace in the midst of our trials and tribulations on this earth.

An early contemplation on the Beatitudes came from St. Gregory of Nyssa, a mystic who lived in Cappadocia in Asia Minor around 380 AD. He described the Beatitudes this way:

"Beatitude is a possession of all things held to be good, from which nothing is absent that a good desire may want. Perhaps the meaning of beatitude may become clearer to us if it is compared with its opposite. Now the opposite of beatitude is misery. Misery means being afflicted unwillingly with painful sufferings."



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*"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are they who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for
righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

*Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure of heart,
for they shall see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God.*

*Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of
righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

Gospel of St. Matthew 5:3-10



ON THE BEATITUDES

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Poor in spirit" means to be humble. Humility is the realization that all your gifts and blessings come from the grace of God. To have poverty of spirit means to be completely empty and open to the Word of God. When we are an empty cup and devoid of pride, we are humble. Humility brings an openness and an inner peace, allowing one to do the will of God. He who humbles himself is able to accept our frail nature, to repent, and to allow the grace of God to lead us to conversion.

It is pride, the opposite of humility, that brings misery. For pride brings anger and the seeking of revenge, especially when one is offended. If every man were humble and poor in spirit, there would be no war!

"Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

If we are humble and appreciate that all of our gifts and blessings come from God, we grow in love and gratitude for Jesus Christ our Savior. But this can only produce mourning and regret over our own sins and the sins of this world, for we have hurt the one who has been so good to us. One also mourns for the suffering of others.

St. Gregory describes another reason to mourn: the more one ascends in meditation of Divine Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and then realize the poverty of human nature, man can only be left in sorrow. When one

contemplates that we were made in the image and likeness of God and lived in Paradise, the Garden of Eden, and compare that to our present state after the Fall, one can only mourn our present condition. But the sentence continues that *they shall be comforted*, by the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and hopefully one day in the Kingdom of Heaven. Pray for the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22) - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Mourning in this context is called a blessing, because mourning our fallen nature creates in us a desire to improve ourselves and to do what is right!

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

St. Gregory of Nyssa saw the Beatitudes as arranged like so many steps, so as to facilitate the ascent from one to another. For example, a humble person comes to be meek, or becomes gentle and kind, and exhibits a docility of spirit, even in the face of adversity and hardship. Jesus was "meek and humble of heart" (Matthew 11:29). A person that is meek is one that exhibits self-control. St. Augustine advises us to be meek in the face of the Lord, and not resist but be obedient to him. Obedience and submission to the will of God are certainly not in vogue these days, but they will bring one peace in this world and in the next.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Justice and righteousness in the New Covenant indicate the fulfillment of God's will in your heart and soul. It is not mere observance of the law (Matthew 5:20), but rather an expression of brotherly love (I John 3:10). A continuous desire for justice and moral perfection will lead one to a fulfillment of that desire - a transition and conversion to holiness. This is true for all the virtues - if you hunger and thirst for temperance, you will head towards the goal you have in mind. St. Augustine called the Beatitudes the ideal for every Christian life! In his discourse on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, he noted the correspondence of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and their necessity in fulfilling the Beatitudes. For example, one must have the gift of fortitude so one may be courageous in seeking social justice.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). Mercy is the loving disposition towards those who suffer distress. Love, compassion, and forgiveness towards a family member or neighbor will bring peace in your relationships. We say in the Lord's Prayer: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*. As we are merciful to others, we pray our Heavenly Father will be merciful to us! Jesus reminds us that whatever "you did to the least of my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:31-46). St. Paul calls for the *obedience of faith* in the beginning and end of his Letter to the Romans (1:5, 16:25-27). The following are ways to be merciful to others as well as to be obedient in faith to Christ our Savior.

The Corporal Works of Mercy

- 1 Feed the Hungry
- 2 Give drink to the thirsty
- 3 Clothe the naked
- 4 Shelter the homeless
- 5 Comfort the imprisoned
- 6 Visit the sick
- 7 Bury the dead

The Spiritual Works of Mercy

- 1 Admonish sinners
- 2 Instruct the uninformed
- 3 Counsel the doubtful
- 4 Comfort the sorrowful
- 5 Be patient with those in error
- 6 Forgive offenses
- 7 Pray for the living and the dead

"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."

Moses (Exodus 33:20), John 1:18, and Paul (I Timothy 6:16) all say that no one can see God here on earth. God is hidden. But Jesus says the pure of heart *shall* see God! To be pure of heart means to be free of all selfish intentions and self-seeking desires. What a beautiful goal! How many times have any of us performed an act perfectly free of any personal gain? Such an act is pure love. An act of pure and selfless giving brings happiness to all.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."

Jesus gives us peace - *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you"* (John 14:27). Peace is also a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Peacemakers not only live peaceful lives but also try to bring peace and friendship to others, and to preserve peace between God and man. But one cannot give another what one does not possess oneself. Praying for peace will help change your heart. The Lord wants you first to be filled with the blessings of peace and then to pass it on to those who have need of it. By imitating God's love of man, the peacemakers become children of God.

**"Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."**

The biblical passage continues to elaborate: *"Blessed are you when men 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 men persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matthew 5:11-12). Jesus said many times that those who follow Him will be persecuted. *"If they persecute me, they will persecute you"* (John 15:20-21). Before his Conversion, Saul persecuted the early Church in Jerusalem, which scattered the Christians throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). St. Peter advised *"Whoever is made to suffer as a Christian should not be ashamed but glorify God because of the name"* (I Peter 4:16). The Woman who brought forth the male child destined to rule all nations with an iron rod was persecuted in Revelation 12.

Stephen, Peter and Paul, nearly all of the Apostles, and many Christians in the Roman era suffered martyrdom. Oppressive governments and endless conflicts in the last one hundred years, such as World Wars I and II, and the Middle East wars in Iraq, Egypt, and Syria have seen their share of martyrs, such as Maximilian Kolbe, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Latin American martyrs, and Middle East Christians. St. Maximilian Kolbe offered his life in place of a stranger at the Auschwitz death camps on August 14, 1941. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor who was hanged on April 9, 1945 for condemning the leadership of Hitler in Nazi Germany. The Central American Martyrs include the 38 recognized martyrs of La Cristiada, the Cristero War from 1926 to 1929, when the Mexican government persecuted priests of the Catholic Church, such as St. Christopher Magallanes, St. Toribio Romo Gonzalez, and the 14 year old martyr Blessed Jose Luis Sanchez del Rio. Another Central American martyr was Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, who was assassinated while saying Mass at Divine Providence Hospital on March 24, 1980 for speaking out against government human rights violations.

Middle Eastern Christians have suffered severe persecution since the crises in Iraq and Syria. At least 58

Christians were slaughtered during Sunday Mass at Our Lady of Salvation Syriac Eastern Catholic Church in Baghdad on October 31, 2010. In July 2014 the terrorist Islamic State marked remaining Christian homes in Mosul with the Arabic letter Noon - for Nazarene, Nasrani, or Nasara - and advised residents that they have 24 hours to leave, convert to Islam, or die. Sixty thousand Christians in Mosul have been displaced from their homes, and over one million Christians have fled Iraq since the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003. It is estimated that the present turmoil in Syria has resulted in over 700,000 Christian refugees escaping to Jordan, Lebanon, and other Middle Eastern countries. But the Lord promised those that suffer for his sake will be rewarded with the Kingdom of Heaven!

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Source: <https://www.jesuschristsavior.net/Beatitudes.html>

Note: This article is drawn from a much broader ecumenical Roman Catholic website devoted to the life of Christ, Biblical teachings, our national Christian heritage, and Christian unity that was written and posted online several years ago by an anonymous physician and a Masters graduate in Theology and Christian Ministry from Franciscan University, Steubenville, Ohio. He teaches Sunday Bible Class, and serves both Pastoral Care and the Medical Staff at St. Joseph's Hospital. It is well worth a visit by going to <https://www.jesuschristsavior.net/>.