

Matthew 5:1-5

Down is the New Up (Three Virtues for Human Flourishing)

Introduction: The Sermon on the Mount is not teaching us how to get into the kingdom - the Bible makes it clear that entrance to God's kingdom is only through grace - by the sacrificial work of Jesus. The sermon is also not teaching us how we stay in the kingdom. Rather it is a description of the character and conduct of those who already belong to the kingdom. The Sermon is not a call to repentance, though that may be involved at times, it is a description of the expression and evidences of true repentance.

Though anyone can listen and learn from this sermon, and respond to its offer of the fulness of life, its primary audience and focus is the disciple of Jesus. - The life of the true disciple. It describes the life that necessarily results from genuine salvation. What God is doing in us and wants to do in us. What he is making us into by the work of his spirit and grace upon us. So the purpose of this sermon, I believe, is for God to work his kingdom characteristics, his virtues in us. So that we can achieve the human flourishing that God intends for us, and so that we properly represent him and his Kingdom.

Jesus sermon begins with 8 pronouncements of blessing known as the Beatitudes meaning "The Happy" (Beatus is Latin for Happy). The first and eighth give the promise - Theirs is the kingdom of Heaven and serve as a brackets to the beatitudes making this the first literary unit of the sermon.

Though we use the term beatitudes to describe these characteristics our modern term happy does not quite capture what Jesus was getting at here. Happiness in our culture is a feeling based on our circumstance.

Jesus' phrase Blessed (Makarios in Greek) is drenched in rich biblical history - Makarios is an inner happiness, human flourishing, or fulness of earthly life. It is a mistake to turn this into a divine blessing only, rather, this blessedness is in line with the wisdom literature of scripture (Psalms Proverbs, Isaiah, Job, and Ecclesiastes)

The book of Psalms begins - "Blessed, O How joyful, flourishing are those who.....A promised richness of life to those who abide in the way of

Yahweh. Proverbs open up in a similar way. Proverbs portrays “Lady Wisdom” - She is in the town square where everyone is passing by and she is calling out with an offer of wisdom and flourishing to anyone that will hear. And this is the offer.. Who wants the good life, who wants endurance, who wants fulfillment, who wants flourishing and fullness? Then Listen, tune in, attend your ears to the voice of Lady Wisdom.

Here is flourishing in Biblical terms: Rooted. Never moved no matter the situation, Fruitful in all the right places and seasons. Never lacking, never drying up. Always prospering. Fulfilled and at peace in every sense of the word. Regardless of life’s varied experience the tree always shows signs of life and bears fruit in the correct seasons of life.

Jesus begins his ministry by painting a picture of what the state of true God centered human flourishing looks like; what true well being looks like in the kingdom of God. The beatitudes then, like the rest of wisdom literature in scripture, are an implicit invitation to consider what the best way of being in the world is and to pursue it. So in the light of this sermon and what we talked about last week - True flourishing is a life that is lived in light of the eternal kingdom of God, the kingdom that Jesus claims is here now, and at work through him.

Who is there in the world that does not want blessing? That doesn’t want joy, who doesn’t want a fulfilling life, who is there the doesn’t want flourishing?

I know that we all do. But are we ready to hear God’s view of flourishing? Jesus’ Life of flourishing is truly an upside down kingdom. He sets the world’s and even many churches value systems on their heads. Jesus is a countercultural force to be reckoned with; The rule here is: Down is the New up.

1. Flourishing are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

1. Upon first examination to be poor in any sense seems to be the opposite of flourishing. In the ancient Near-Eastern and Greco-Roman setting of honor and shame, the poor in spirit are in low places in society, not identified as possessors of anything, especially a kingdom, and this is why we must think deeply about what Jesus is saying here.

2. One who is poor (in Hebrew Anawim) is one who is humble, dependent and needy, crushed by their poverty. In scripture they are pictured as crying out to Yahweh in childlike dependence and expectation. They are pictured as helpless and hopeless in our world.
3. Listen to these passages from Isaiah, **“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”** And again, **“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”**
4. Reading these passages it would seem that someone who is poor in spirit - is not powerful or looking to their own power, knowledge or strength but is looking to Yahweh in dependence, and neediness. The one who is humble before God and his word - “like a child, like a servant to his master, the psalmist says, “Our eyes look to you.”
5. The opposite of this would be those who are rich in pride and self reliance, those who are rich in independence and in worldly wisdom. God is not opposed to effort, skill, power, wisdom or strength, but when it is used independent of him or in defiance or disregard of him he is. True wisdom, power and skill say with the Psalmist - The Lord is your keeper (Psalm 121)
6. Those who are needy, dependent, and humble before God are the truly flourishing of this world - this is where true and lasting flourishing is found, when we look to nothing but God’s hand of mercy and grace alone
 1. “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling. Naked come to thee for dress, helpless look to thee for grace. Foul I to the fountain fly, wash me savior, or I die.”
 2. To these and these alone belong the kingdom of Heaven - The Kingdom of God/heaven means, a guaranteed new heavens and new earth, a healed material creation. Absolute wholeness and well being- physically, spiritually, socially, and economically.”

2. Flourishing are those who mourn for they shall be comforted

1. Again, it is antithetical to our way of thinking to see some one who is in mourning as be a flourishing person. What can it mean?
2. Most commentators agree that the beatitudes at least in the first part seem to be an echoing of Isaiah 61. Isaiah 61 shows the Servant of Yahweh who has come to bring good news to the poor,

to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives... to comfort all who mourn, to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, oil of joy instead of mourning, garments of praise for spirits who are poor or heavy..

3. Those in this context were mourning and broken hearted over their personal as well as national failures - they had forsaken the way of Yahweh and suffered dearly for their sin and folly.
 4. Therefore those who Mourn or are broken hearted must be away of saying those grieving our own sin, the sin and brokenness of the world. Broken hearted at the state of life - we are not what God created us to be. Often times we have born more of the Image of the beast than the image of our Creator God. Those who are broken hearted over the status quo are truly flourishing and they will receive Comfort - a filling up, a restoring and healing of the creation and a banishment of the curse of sin, brokenness and chaos.
- 3. Flourishing are the Meek for they shall inherit the earth**
1. **Again, the meek are anything but flourishing, they are stepped on, pushed over, door mats of the world.**
 2. This would have been a radical declaration in the 1st century. This time is known for the many Jewish messianic revolutionaries and the zealot rebellions. The zealots were a group of Jews living in the time of Jesus who believed that they must take the land of Israel, the kingdom by force. They were known as dagger-men or assassins, because they would carry daggers under their cloaks and kill Roman soldiers with them. This was a hearkening back to the time of the Maccabean revolt under the Hasmonean and Seleucides.
 1. But this is also radical in our day and age, because the meek are the opposite of those who rule our world. It is the powerful, the assertive, the shrewd, the cut throat, who win in this life. One commentator translates it, "Blessing on the little people, because they will be granted the earth." It's almost comical when put like that....The meek may inherit heaven, but the entrepreneur and the revolutionary will inherit the earth
 3. **What is meekness?** The greatest example we have is Jesus (actually He is our example in all of these). When Jesus stands accused before the Sanhedrin (The Jewish High court) he is quiet, calm, collected, almost passive at his own condemnation. His is the poise of not having to assert one's self - Peter comments on this - "**when you do good and suffer for it (if) you endure, this is a**

gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

1. I will only quote one passage but this theme is repeated again and again in scripture -“**There is none holy like the Lord: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world.”** **1 Samuel 2:2-8**
2. Meekness live and rest in the truth of the goodness and sovereignty of God. Meekness must not become apathy, for Jesus also calls us to hunger and thirst for righteousness.
3. Meekness is holding our judgment or retaliation, our cut-throatedness, when wronged and sinned against, knowing and resting in the fact that it is God who is judge and will one day set the world right and gift it to his meek people.
 1. “*The great need of the age may be this Beatitude's gentle-men and gentle-women... the little people may well be the hope of the earth, though the rest of the world tells us that the real hope of the earth is the big people and the earth shakers*” - *Fredrick Dale Bruner, Matthew, A Commentary*
4. **So Where are we so far?**
 1. **Jesus teaches us -The needy and dependent, broken-hearted and mourning, little lowly people, are the ones who are truly**

flourishing. To them belongs the kingdom, ultimate comfort and the right to the earth.

2. In the kingdom of God there will be a complete turnaround: those now on top will be on the bottom, and those now the lowest of the low will be lifted very high. All 8 Beatitudes speak of this Great reversal and the last judgment.
3. Some of us might be thinking, as I said we would, this is so countercultural you can't actually live this way. But isn't that the whole point - Shouldn't the people of God live in a way that defies the common practices and perspectives of the world and our culture? As a matter of fact yes, Christians lives should be lived in a way that both resonates with the deep longings of our culture yet simultaneously defies the power, practices and idols of that culture. As Eugene Peterson says, "*The Church is to be a colony of heaven in the country of death*".
4. Not only that But each of these characteristics are portrayed beautifully in the life of Jesus.
 1. In Matthew 11, Jesus says, "**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart (or Meek and poor in Spirit), and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**"
 2. John and Luke both record Jesus weeping, broken hearted and mourning. John over the death of Lazarus and Luke at Jerusalem's rejection of him and impending doom.
 3. Far from these qualities making Jesus weak and ineffective they drew thousands of sinners to him - His life was radically powerful and refreshing. These same qualities and character were at work in the early church and shook the 1st century world. God wants to form this same countercultural dynamic character of Jesus in us!
 4. "*What Jesus teaches in the sayings collected in the Sermon on the Mount is not a complete regulation of the life of the disciples, and it is not intended to be; rather, what is taught here is symptoms, signs, examples of what it means when the kingdom of God breaks into the world which is still under sin, death, and the devil. You yourselves should be signs of the coming kingdom of God, signs that something has already happened.*" -Joachim Jeremias

5. What if we actually lived as signs of the kingdom? What if we actually put into practice, in our hearts, in our homes, at our work, around our neighbors, in our politics the upside down kingdom of God?
6. Jesus says this is the way of true flourishing. Will we believe him and take him at his word? Will we repent of our self-reliant, proud, assertive ways and take his yoke upon us, his kingdom mission and learn from him? I pray we will.