



## **“The Eleventh Beatitude”**

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### **Scripture (NRSV):**

#### **Matthew 5:1-12**

5 When Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely<sup>[b]</sup> on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### **Sermon:**

AH! The Beatitudes! So let’s start with a blessing:

“Baruch atah Adonai Elohenu melech ha-olam . . .”

. . . from the Hebrew . . . Blessed are you O Lord our God, Sovereign of the Universe!

Thank you God . . . and thank you Pastor Andy for inviting me to fill the pulpit on a Sunday with such a pleasant, easy (?) scripture passage to talk about.

So . . . Jesus lavishing the disciples and the crowd with blessings . . . eight of them in this classic list:

“Bless you . . . poor in spirit.”

“Bless you who mourn.”

“Bless you who are meek.”

“Bless you hungry and thirsty for the things of God.”

“Bless you who are merciful.”

“Bless you with uncluttered hearts.”

“Bless you whole-makers.”

“Bless those persecuted for doing Godly things . . . and bless *you* when you are cursed because of following me.”

Bless you! Bless you! Bless you! Eight blessed times! It feels like a day at the spa for your soul, huh!

In the interest of full disclosure, the Gospels contain two more Beatitudes: “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense in me,” [Matthew 11:6] . . . #9 . . . and “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,” [John 20:29] . . . #10. And we’ll find number 11 here in a little bit.

And, there are the Eight Great Beatitudes in the Book of Revelation! But that’s for another Sunday.

And there is, finally, the greatest blessing of all . . . the blessing found in the creation stories of the Book of Genesis . . . stories that tell us this amazing, basic truth: when the creation was finished, God sat down, leaned back on the great Andromeda Galaxy, propped her feet up on the Milky Way and said: “It is good! It is all good!” . . . or as it is often called . . . the “Original Blessing”. It’s the deal God made with everything God created. It goes like this: “Everything/one is my Beloved. My favor rests upon it/you all. No exceptions. I will never go back on this deal.” You can call this God’s “covenant”. But it’s a deal nonetheless.

Now I know there are a lot of “deals” in this world, even some “Good” deals. But this, my friends is THE REAL DEAL!

So the big story line in the Bible, beginning to middle to end, is the story of blessing . . . God’s blessing. And this story answers one of the most universal and deepest questions we humans ask . . . Who am I? . . . Do I matter? . . . Who cares about me? . . . Is there even an awareness of my existence somewhere? You know . . . like Psalm 8 [and Hubble, Spitzer, Chandra, Compton and Webb].

But, back to Matthew 5. The Bible story of God’s blessing *is* a wonderful, beautiful, meaningful story. But here’s the question that lurks behind all our piety and interpretation: Is it true? And what I invite you to ponder as you reflect on this “Sermon on the Mount” is that Jesus himself was and is the proof of its veracity.

Before the “Sermon” begins, the Gospel tells us that Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching, proclaiming and healing followed by great crowds of people. In other words, the proof is not just in what Jesus said. It was also in what he was doing. These “crowds, or perhaps “mobs,” consisted largely of the have-nots, the despised, neglected, hated, marginalized, the invisible and otherwise vulnerable folks who had nothing and were considered nothing by the “haves” and the political and religious powers-that-be . . . the ones who considered *themselves* the blessed by God and who would say “I’m glad I’m not like THOSE sinners.” The Gospel tells us Jesus had compassion for the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus acknowledged them, connected with them, healed them, fed them, comforted them . . . and gave them back God’s blessing that a blind, hard-hearted religious system had taken away. Just to hear Jesus call out to them, just to have him walk among them was proof God had not welched on the deal.

Today’s crowds are still hungry for the same. Here’s a set of Beatitudes for the 21<sup>st</sup> century from the heart of one of Jesus’s co-shepherds: [read Nadia Bolz-Weber; House for All Sinners and Saints, ELCA, Denver, CO ‘til 2018.]

So then, what shall I do? How can I stop and live with this essence of Jesus' teaching and ministry called The Beatitudes . . . instead of just getting past them and on with my life as I've done so many times before? I suggest first to myself and also to any of you as entranced, puzzled, inspired and troubled by these verses as I am.

1. Commit them to memory.
2. Make them the focus of some reflection and meditation.
3. Put them into my own words.
4. Refrain from trying to "interpret" them and let them interpret me.
5. Press them to that vulnerable part of me that's like the crowds of Jesus's day and today.
6. Understand them not as the updated 10 Commandments, a Christian to-do list, or as psychological techniques for self-improvement or achieving a happier life [cf. Robert Schuller's The Be-Happy Attitudes (1985).] They are statements of fact, not conditional *quid pro quos*, nor rewards for trying to be more pious or do more good deeds.
7. Look at them as the co-ordinates of a whole new world, the realm of reality Jesus called the kingdom of heaven/God, the realm where blessing rules.

It's true. God's favor rests unfailingly on me and on you. The original deal is still in effect. Trusting God and Jesus for this brings wholeness and joy to the soul. And this brings us to the reveal of the 11<sup>th</sup> Beatitude. It is found in Acts 20:35. The Apostle Paul quoted what he called the very words of Jesus himself: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." We are blessed. Let us go and walk among the crowds and bless. AMEN.