

5TH LESSON ON SERMON THE MOUNT (THE BEATITUDE)



Sermon on the Mount: The Sermon on the Mount is the most famous sermon Jesus ever gave, perhaps the most famous sermon ever given by anyone. We find the sermon on the Mount starting from Matthew 5:1 and concluding at 8:1. Since he preached this sermon on the mountain, it is called Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This sermon probably covered several days of preaching. Enormous crowds were following Jesus as he was the talk of the town and everyone wanted to see him.

Beatitude: The word 'Beatitude' is not found in the English Bible. But it is derived from the Latin word 'Beatus' meaning 'Happy' or 'Blessed', the meaning of which is very close to the original Greek word that Jesus used during His sermon on the mount. The Greek word for 'Blessed' is 'Makarion' which means 'happy, supremely blessed and fortunate'.

The Beatitudes are the Great Paradox/ Signs of Contradiction: When a person has acquired good fortune, we call him "blessed." The world values a person who is rich and powerful and equally values happiness and pleasures of this world. In the Beatitudes, Jesus calls some people "blessed" who appear to be quite the opposite. People who "mourn" don't seem to be "blessed," according to most other people. Jesus is contrasting the world's idea of happiness with true blessedness – spiritual prosperity – which comes from a right relationship with God. The Beatitudes are a great contrast to the worldly notion of 'blessedness' and 'happiness'. Therefore for a carnal mind, they sound conflict, confrontation and contradiction but for those who are in Christ, the messages in the Beatitudes are indeed messages of conviction, connection and salvation. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1st Cor 1:18)

- *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.*

Beatitudes in the lives of Saints: The 8 beatitudes of Jesus have a major importance in our Christian life and they shed light on our lives on how to know Christ more and live our ideal christian life with the mind of Christ. These beatitudes help us live a good life here that will lead us to an everlasting life in heaven. The beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus' preaching. The people who put these words into practice are called martyrs, saints and blessed. That is why on all Saints Day, we are called to reflect on the beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount is challenging but the Saints lived those challenges courageously and that is why they are known as Blessed.

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of India said, "Christ's Sermon on the Mount fills me with bliss even today. Its sweet verses have even today the power to quench my agony of soul." "The Sermon on the Mount left a deep impression on my mind when I read it." He says "The Bible is the crown of all books, and the Sermon on the Mount is the Jewel on the crown." The Sermon on the Mount is the heart of Mathew's Gospel. It reminds us that we Christians are called to live our lives in a different way from others around us. Today's gospel is called the Sermon on the Mount because the place of Jesus' preaching is a mountain and the listeners are his disciples.

Exegesis: Exegesis is an approach to study the biblical passage or a particular biblical them in the biblical world. Exegesis helps the reader to know what the text says and what does the passage mean then and now and how to understand the particular text or them within the biblical context and how do we apply the passage to our life at present.

Two beatitudes: Matthew and Luke present more or less same set of beatitudes in their gospels (Matthew 5:1- 8:1 and Luke 6:20-23). However there are few differences. Before we get looking into the beatitudes, let us first examine the similarities and the differences in the gospel accounts of Matthew 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23. In Matthew, all the 8 beatitudes are written in the third person ("those", "theirs"), except for the last one. On the other hand, in Luke, the Beatitudes are in the second person ("you"), followed by the list of 'Woes' as well. (Luke 6:24-26). The location where Jesus preached the sermon are different in both accounts. (Mat 5:1 - 'On the Mount' and Luke 6:17 - 'On the plain'). Bible scholars differ on their views regarding these two accounts. They wonder if they are different records of the same sermon, or two different sermons with similar content. People often tend to pick on such differences in order to discredit the authenticity and reliability of the gospel records. But paradoxically these minor differences actually serve as an evidence of the genuineness of these records. Other than these minor differences, there is a remarkable unity and order of thought and substance in these gospels.

Mountain: Jesus went up the mountain. Mountain in Hebrew is known as Shaddai . Mountain is the place of God's presence and that is why God is known as El Shaddai (God of the Mountains). Moses met the Lord in the burning bush at Mount Horeb (Ex 3:1-4). After his encounter with God on Sinai, Moses' face shone so brightly that the people were frightened (Ex 34:29-35). It is on the Mount Sinai, God revealed his covenant to Moses and to the Israelites. In the mount Moria, Solomon built his temple. In the mount of Carmel, prophet Elijah confronted the false prophets and made them worship the God of Israel. In the mount of Tabor, Jesus transfigured. In the Mount of Olives, Jesus was crucified. In today's gospel, Jesus went up the mountain and this mountain is traditionally known as Karn Hattin. Here in this mountain, Jesus reveals the new code of the covenant to the new Israel.

Sitting: A rabbi in the biblical world commonly sat down when he taught. If he spoke while standing or walking, what he said was considered to be informal and unofficial. But when he sat down, what he said was authoritative and official. In the beatitude we read that Jesus sat and preached. There is a deeper and theological meaning behind his sitting. In the OT, Moses (Exod 18:13) sat and gave the law and interpreted the Law and this is known as an authoritative teaching. In the NT, the Pharisees took Moses' seat (Matt 23:2) meaning they were the religious authority to interpret the law. The king sits in his throne and signs the documents.

When Jesus sat down and delivered the Sermon on the Mount, He spoke from His divine chair with absolute authority as the sovereign King. Even today we speak of professors holding a "chair" in a university, signifying the honored position from which they teach. When the Pope gives an official pronouncement, he is said to speak 'Ex cathedra', which literally means to speak from his chair. Every year on February 22, the Church celebrates the feast of the Chair of St. Peter, to commemorate St. Peter's teaching in Rome. Already in the second half of the 18th century an ancient wooden chair inlaid with ivory was venerated and traditionally held to be the Episcopal chair on which St. Peter sat as he instructed the faithful of Rome. Cathedral means chair. The bishop sits in his chair and speaks. Cathedral (chair) is the place where the bishop sits and preaches authoritatively. The chair in other words sitting signifies both importance and authority.

Beatitude 1: "Blessed are Poor in Spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

'Poor in Spirit' is a difficult phrase to understand. The word for 'poor' in Greek is 'Ptochos' which literally means having nothing, reduced to begging, like a beggar, totally broke. Here Jesus means spiritual poverty although real poverty can be inferred from these verses.

What is spiritual poverty? One can be financially poor and yet be arrogant and prideful in spirit, or one can be financially rich and yet be poor in the spirit. King David in the Old Testament is a great example because, in spite of him being the King of Israel, he had a humble and contrite heart/spirit. 'Spiritual poor/poverty' is exactly what is implied. It is a state where one realizes that they have nothing of their own and need

constant help from God. Being “poor in Spirit” is to have a humble and broken/contrite heart that constantly seeks help and forgiveness from God for their very existence. David sought God at all times in Psalm 27:4 One thing I ask of the Lord; this I seek: To dwell in the Lord’s house all the days of my life, To gaze on the Lord’s beauty, to visit his temple. This world promotes protection in self - sufficiency but in the Kingdom of Heaven, being poor in spirit is the most important qualification. Poverty of spirit is the root of all virtues. It is the state of the heart; it is how we should view ourself in the sight of God’s law. In this regard, this first beatitude is the root from which all other beatitudes evolve.

What is the promise? The Kingdom of Heaven is the promise for those who live spiritual poverty. The Kingdom of Heaven is the Messianic kingdom promised in the Old Testament, to be established by the Messiah. The Kingdom of God (Heaven) is already Here: Luke 17:20-21: “Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” The Kingdom of Heaven is Yet to Come: The Kingdom of Heaven will be fully realized and established when Christ comes back as the King and Ruler over all the earth. (Daniel 7: 13,14,27). What a blessed hope and promise, Jesus offers to those who are poor in spirit! “The Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Beatitude 2: Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted

The “blessedness” literally means the state of being happy or blessed! In that sense, this beatitude seems contradictory, for how can one be happy, when he is mourning or sad? There can be various reasons for mourning. It could be due to: loss of a loved one or job or any other kind of personal loss, suffering from sickness or disease, personal sin, mistakes or failures, mourning along with those who are afflicted or suffering, mourning for the ‘Lost’ and for the ‘Kingdom of God to come.’

People react differently during their time of mourning or suffering. Some people may try to replace it with something else. They try to absorb themselves in the worldly pleasures, assuming that it may ease their pain. Some may try to run away from it. Some get addicted to alcohol or drugs. Many try to recover from it, thinking that the time is the greatest healer. And there are few, who turn to God to finding rest and restoration in their time of suffering and pain. Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-30 - “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Godly Sorrow vs. Worldly Sorrow: It is fascinating that the Bible talks about two kinds of sorrow. 2 Cor 7:10: “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” We can understand these different types of sorrow from two famous events during the Crucifixion of Jesus. Peter: When Peter denied Jesus three times, he “wept bitterly”. (Matthew 26:69-75). He was grieving for his failures, but this led him to repentance and towards Jesus. Judas: The very next passage talks about Judas. He also was “seized with remorse” when he realized his wrongdoing. (Matthew 27:1-10). But instead of repentance, his sorrow led him to

commit suicide. His remorse may have been of a worldly nature therefore resulting in his death.(literally “death” according to 2 Cor 7:10)

So, in the light of this beatitude, any sorrow or mourning which leads up to God as the source of comfort and strength is a “Godly sorrow”. God will comfort those who turn to Him. The Greek word for ‘comforted’ is *parakaleo* which means ‘to call to the side of’, or ‘to call near’. The comfort, which God offers, is not just consoling or soothing, it is much more than that. When we turn to God in our suffering, God calls us to His side, He comforts us and comes to our rescue. It is in our suffering that we seek God earnestly. James 4:8 - “Come near to God and He will come near to you.” Psalms 145:18 - “The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on him in truth.”

We often complain about God’s silence during our time of need or suffering. But this Beatitude (blessedness) portrays a very different picture. God is calling us near, He is always ready to comfort us and all we need to do is to respond to Him. (Matthew 11:28-30). To summarize, this Beatitude at its core, brings the “Message of Hope” for those who mourn or are hurt. One can try to ignore it, or escape it, but we can find true comfort and rest only in Jesus.

Beatitude 3: “Blessed are the Meek, for they will inherit the earth”

What is the meaning of meekness? It is an outward expression of inward humility, strength and spiritual poise. While others may act aggressively, the Meek walks in godly peace, others may claim their rights, the Meek focuses on his duties, while others may seek revenge, the Meek gives way for judgment of God. Meekness is not one’s weakness. It does not imply weak, sad, subdued person or false modesty. But it portrays a man who willfully and joyfully considers his own life worth nothing, when compared to the greatness of God. The words of Paul have similar expressions in Phil 3:7-11.

Who is a meek person? He / She is a person with humble and gentle heart. It describes a person who is kind and considerate to others, even to those who oppose him, who is easily approachable, not prideful or resentful, not temperamental or harsh.

Meekness in the Bible: Meekness is often commended in the bible. The word ‘Meek’ is used about 22 times in the bible. It is one of the fruits of Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:22 - ‘gentleness’). It is the character, Jesus himself associated with. Matthew 11:29 - “For I am gentle and humble in heart...” It is the mark of disciple of Jesus. (Eph 4:2). Christian leaders are to be meek. (2 Timothy 2:25)

Historical Setting: The historical setting of Jesus was a multi-cultural society which consisted Jews, Romans and Greeks, who often fought for their supremacy. The Jews took pride in their race, being superior to others. The Romans took pride in their power, the greatest empire in those times. The Greeks took pride in their knowledge, the greatest minds of that age. We notice that Jesus did not assert the prideful or the aggressor, but rather the ‘Poor in Spirit’ and the ‘Meek’. What is the promise for those who are meek? The Promise is Inheritance, an amazing promise. The meek will be the heirs and partakers of the Kingdom of God.

Beatitude 4: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

What is the meaning of hunger and thirst? ‘Hunger and thirst’ are strong words, meaning an ardent, eager craving/ desire and passion of the soul for God and his righteousness. Psalms often portrays picture of man craving and desiring more of God. Psalm 84: 1-2: “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty, my soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord.” Psalm 143:6: “My Soul thirsts for you like a parched land.”

What is the meaning of ‘Righteousness’? The word ‘righteousness’ comes from Greek word “dikaiosyne”, meaning rightness, quality of rightness or justice. it is justice held in love, both within the man and in the world. It is being right with God.

What are the things that we hunger and thirst for? We humans hunger and thirst for Power, Fame, Money, Beauty and pleasure. There are however those who long for God. These are the people who are not just interested or satisfied by worldly things or pleasures. They are the ‘Seekers’. These are the people who yearn after God.

What does it mean to ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’? It is not seeking self-righteousness, but it is the righteousness that comes from God. It is to depend, not on our own will-power to achieve it but upon God. Righteousness of God is available through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe in Him. And those who will seek him, will find him and will be filled. Jesus himself claimed to be the one who will quench the thirst. John 7:37: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.”

Practical Applications: Hunger and thirst are not one time need, they are our daily needs. Our body need constant nourishment from food and water to function properly. In the same way, our spirit needs daily food too. Many Christians suffer from ‘spiritual malnourishment’ due to lack of hunger and thirst or lack of feeding to their spiritual needs. Only God can quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger for righteousness. St. Augustine in his famous masterpiece ‘confessions’ says “ You have made us for yourself , O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.”

Beatitude 5:“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

What is the meaning of being merciful? It means being compassionate, helpful, kind, giving towards the weak, sick and the poor. This beatitude hardly seems as paradoxical as some of the other beatitudes. Today, most of us would agree that it is good to be merciful to others. However, when Jesus spoke these words, it was as shocking to the audience, as some other beatitudes. How?

The Romans despised pity. Being merciful was rather exception. The Pharisees were also very judgmental to others and showed little mercy. These could also be due to the common perception, that suffering was the result and deserving punishment of personal sin. Jesus accused and condemned the Pharisees for not showing mercy. (Matthew 23:23). Jesus' ministry was marked with the compassion, love and care for the 'unfortunate' of this world. And we are to have same attitude. Col 3:12: -"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion."

Being Merciful is an action based emotion. We cannot truly be merciful or compassionate to someone, unless we really do something about it. It is not merely feeling bad about someone's situation, it is an emotion which prompts one to act on it. It is one of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. (Kindness - Gal 5:22). Act of mercy first come from the realization that we ourselves have been shown mercy by God. Luke 6:36: -"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Being merciful does not always mean joining Red Cross or World Vision or some social justice organizations, but it is also to show compassion to those who are around us, with a kind word or a smile or a small "Act of Random Kindness"! (ARK) Tender Loving Care (TLC).

It is a daily practice or lifestyle whether at home or workplace or in the neighborhood. Jesus summarized it in a wonderful manner in Matthew 25:35-40, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

What is the promise? "They will receive (obtain) mercy as they show to others". Kindness and compassion are the integral part of Christian character combined with love and forgiveness. Many times, we may be kind to someone out of obligation or duty, but in our heart, we may find ourselves grumbling about it, often expecting return. But when we don't get in return, same kindness, it harbors bitterness. Remember the parable of the servant who received mercy from his master, but did not show mercy to his fellow servant. (Matthew 18: 23-35)

Beatitude 6: Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.

This beatitude is one of the most striking of all beatitudes. For who can claim to be pure in heart? If we peek into our hearts, we all know that we are not pure, we have thoughts, attitudes, desires which are not pure. We may hide it from others, but we cannot hide it from ourselves. So, what can we learn from this beatitude? Let us start with some of the bible verses related to 'pure in heart' and 'seeing God', and let the Word of God speak to us though it.

Pure in Heart: Psalms 24:4-5 - "He who has clean hands and pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive the blessing from the Lord." Psalms 51:10 - "Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Psalms 119:9-10 - "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart. Do not let me stray from your commands."

'Pure' is an absolute term. (Jer 17:9) So, how can we make it pure? It is beyond our reach to make it pure. It is God who initiates, sanctifies and perfects the heart of man who put his trust in him. It begins when we realize that we cannot do it on our own. We go through the process of sanctification throughout our life. And it will be perfected when we will be glorified in Christ Jesus. Sanctification is a difficult process. So, how can we pursue purity? By living, active fellowship with God through daily personal time with God in his words and prayer, allowing God to purify us through His Holy Spirit in us - "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

Beatitude 7: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

It would have shocked most Jews in the crowd. Jews were looking for 'Messiah' who would overthrow the Roman empire and establish earthly kingdom. But Jesus supports peace and encourages the peacemakers. Once again, Kingdom of Heaven goes against the norm of earthly kingdom of power, force and wars.

Blessed are the Peacemakers: The very essence of peace is the Love we have received from God first. We cannot love others, unless we have experienced God' love in first place. Luke 6:27-28 - "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." John 13: 35 - "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." 1 Peter 3:9 - "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."

The first century Christians, even in the most atrocious persecution, refused to react violently, but always promoted peace. We may find certain people in our church, community, family, workplace. These are the people who resolves differences and conflicts to maintain peace. The reward for the Peacemakers is very unique. "They will be called sons of God." People may critique methods or ways of peacemakers, but they cannot deny their work or the fact that it can only come from God.

**Beatitude 8: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."**

1 Peter 4:12-14,16,19 - "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you...However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name...So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." Romans 8:18 - "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Great Paradox: This last beatitude is the most striking and contradictory of all the beatitudes. For how can you rejoice or be blessed, when you are going through insult, persecution, suffering, even death for doing good or right? Yet, Jesus very clearly proclaims 'blessedness' for those who are being persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

For the first century Christians, persecution was a norm rather than an exception. Peter and Paul, the first apostles to Jews and gentiles, also reiterate and often desire for sharing and participating in suffering with/for Christ. It should be noted that it is not in the suffering or pain, we rejoice, but it is in the hope of God's glory to be revealed. We are told to rejoice in our suffering for the righteousness, due to the fact that we participate in suffering of Christ, that we bear his name, and that we will be overjoyed when Christ' glory will be revealed in us. It is our privilege to suffer with Christ. It is not the suffering, but the Cause that makes a Martyr.

People may say that this is absolutely absurd. yet, we all believe in an idea of pain and suffering for future joy. A good example of this is a 'child-birth'. Mother goes through immense pain and struggle, with pain intensifies as the time comes nearer. For her, the present pain is not worth comparing with the joy she will experience in her child. Nobody finds it strange, in fact, women long and desire motherhood. Her focus is not on the suffering, but the joy that her child will bring. We find it difficult to grasp rejoicing in suffering because we have not seen the complete picture. Even among many Christians, there is a growing tendency to focus on earthly blessings. There are parts of the world, where people are being persecuted for Christ. For them, following Christ means suffering, rejection and even death. They are blessed or privileged to share in suffering with Christ.

We may not go through physical persecution or suffering, but we all feel being constantly chased after by the enemy of Christ. When we pursue righteousness, we may find being constantly running or fleeing from the spiritual forces, who are after us to knock us down. What is the promise? Jesus offers those who are persecuted for his name, the inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Romans 8:24) Paul rightly say that our present sufferings are not even worth comparing with the glory that will be manifested when Christ will return.

The Sermon on the Mount covers several different topics.

Matthew 5:3-12 - The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:13-16 - Salt and Light

Matthew 5:17-20 - Jesus fulfilled the Law

Matthew 5:21-26 - Anger and Murder

Matthew 5:27-30 - Lust and Adultery

Matthew 5:31-32 - Divorce and Remarriage

Matthew 5:33-37 - Oaths

Matthew 5:38-42 - Eye for an Eye

Matthew 5:43-48 - Love your enemies

Matthew 6:1-4 - Give to the Needy

Matthew 6:5-15 - How to Pray

Matthew 6:16-18 - How to Fast

Matthew 6:19-24 - Treasures in Heaven

Matthew 6:25-34 - Do not worry

Matthew 7:1-6 - Do not judge hypocritically

Matthew 7:7-12 - Ask, Seek, Knock

Matthew 7:13-14 - The Narrow Gate

Matthew 7:15-23 - False Prophets

Matthew 7:24-27 - The Wise Builder

Conclusion: If we were to summarize the Sermon on the Mount in a single sentence, it would be something like this: How to live a life that is dedicated to and pleasing to God, free from hypocrisy, full of love and grace, full of wisdom and discernment. How can we find happiness in poverty, hunger, mourning, and persecution? Is it possible? Yes it is possible. When we have the spirit of Poverty, when we mourn for our helplessness, when we hunger for God's word, when we are persecuted for his gospel values and our Christian faith, then we possess God, the greatest treasure possible. He comes to our faith. In our helplessness, persecution, poverty and suffering, we surrender to God and we depend on God. When we depend upon him he gives lasting peace. The beatitudes are the code of ethics and standard of conduct for all believers. They are eternal values and not temporary. They stress discipleship and not merely piety. The heart of Jesus' message is that we can live a very happy life if we follow these eight beatitudes.