



The First 40 Days

Seek God and Restore Everything

A 40-Day Journey with Glenn Beck

STUDIES 26-30

TWENTY-SIX

RECONSIDERING THE BEATITUDES PART ONE

*GUEST AUTHOR: SKIP MOEN,
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Matthew 5:1-16

When we think of the Beatitudes in the gospel of Matthew, we usually view them as some sort of spiritual blessing instructions. We read, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” and we think, “If I just become ‘poor in spirit,’ then somehow God will give me something in Heaven.” We treat the Beatitudes like this, imagining that each one asks us to develop some kind of spiritual attitude so that we will reap God’s rewards. In fact, many Christian commentaries view the Beatitudes in this way.

But what if this isn’t what the Beatitudes mean?

Our English Bible translations of the Beatitudes really depend on the Latin version of the early Christian church. In the Latin translation from the Greek text, the first word in each verse was rendered as “beatitudo,” a word that means “to bless.” That’s why we call these sayings “the Beatitudes.” But the Greek word (*makarioi*) and the Hebrew word (*ashrei*) don’t mean “blessing” at all. They mean something like “happy” or “lucky.” If we want to know what these sayings really mean, we need to know the meaning in the original language.

Jesus spoke these verses in Hebrew. Of course, in Matthew’s gospel they are translated into Greek (and then translated into English for modern readers), but the original language and the original meaning must be found in the language Jesus spoke. In that language, the Beatitudes aren’t “blessings” at all. They are descriptions of spiritual paradoxes. They use the Hebrew words to communicate something that doesn’t seem to make sense on the surface. When we read the “Beatitudes” in the original, we find some very strange connections. Jesus really talks about people who are experiencing life’s disasters—and then he shows us a deeper meaning in these terrible things. Jesus communicates these sacred paradoxes with a pattern that was familiar in the ancient world. It’s called a “*macarism*.”

This is a pithy expression of happiness related to the values of this world. One example is, “He who has no possessions is free of many worries.” We have the same sort of style in the famous sayings of Benjamin Franklin: “Early to bed and early to rise” or “a stitch in time.”

For the Greeks, these sayings were about children, wealth, love, honor and fame. The content is not crucial to us. It is the pattern that is important: That pattern is extolling good fortune and release from the world's troubles, either through earthly gains or inner peace and piety. Macarisms offered general advice about living by pointing out those who would receive favorable status in this life.

The same pattern of blessing can be found in the Old Testament wisdom literature.

Blessed is he who trusts in the name of the Lord.

JEREMIAH 17:7

Blessed is he whose sins are forgiven.

PSALM 32:1

These are sayings of practical wisdom with a deeply spiritual connection. Unlike the Greeks, the context of these blessings is within the framework of God's favor to men. Even when the Old Testament blessings are about prosperity or success on this earth, they are couched within the context of the chosen people of God.

In general, a macarism has both a linguistic and an instructional pattern. The linguistic pattern is the announcement of favor, who the announcement concerns, and a following relative clause that explains the reason for this happy state. The instructional pattern is an announcement, a recipient and a teaching about life.

But something changed when Jesus employed this familiar pattern. Linguistically, Jesus' macarisms are still announcements (not commands or magic success formulae, by the way). But the "who" of these announcements is specified in an entirely new way. First, the "who" is plural. Secondly, the ones to whom the announcement applies are actually a reflection of the relative clause that contains the explanation. In other words, if we really understand the teaching, we will find that the linguistic pattern turns back on itself to tell us that the reason for their happiness is already contained in the characteristic that makes the announcement applicable.

Each of the Beatitudes introduces a class of people who seem entirely incapable of being happy. They are:

The destitute

The losers

The oppressed

The ones under judgment

The ones who don't get what they deserve

The ones who aren't good enough

The ones who put themselves at risk

The ones who are persecuted

Now that you have a better idea about these sayings, let's see what we can learn from this ancient pattern.

- ▶ **TOMORROW:** Reconsidering the Beatitudes, Part 2

In Your Own Words

What is a macarism?

In the Beatitudes, how does Jesus turn the typical macarism on its head?

Hungry For More?

[Visit for a more in-depth look at the Beatitudes.](#)

TWENTY-SEVEN

RECONSIDERING THE BEATITUDES PART TWO

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Let's begin with the first "Beatitude."

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

MATTHEW 5:3

The Hebrew really says,

"The happiest (or luckiest) people in the world are those who are desperate. The Kingdom of Heaven came because of them."

In other words, the Beatitude doesn't tell us about getting a blessing. It describes those people who are beggars for God's grace, and it says that because of these people, God brings His Kingdom into human life.

The paradox is that when we see beggars we think they are unlucky. We think they are the worst off people. They certainly aren't blessed. But Jesus is saying that this kind of desperation is what God is looking for. When you know you can't live another day unless someone shows you grace and mercy, then you are close to what God desires. The Beatitude is upside-down thinking.

There's another part of this first Beatitude that is much deeper when we look at the original language. What does it mean to be "poor in spirit?" Can you look in the mirror and see yourself as "poor in spirit?" Does it just mean being humble, polite, kind, or submissive? In Hebrew there are four different words for "poor." One means "financially strapped." One means "oppressed." One means the people at the bottom of the social ladder. But one, the crucial one, means "desperate," the kind of desperation that you see when someone is starving to death. This is the word Jesus probably used. He wanted to tell us that we need this kind of desperation for God if we're going to see God's Kingdom show up.

Jesus is saying that the luckiest people on earth are the ones who are desperately poor, who are beggars for God. What we think are the unfortunate ones are really those God prizes.

With this pattern in mind, see if you can discover the paradox in the other Beatitudes. Here are some clues:

“Blessed are those that mourn” is really about what you feel at the funeral of someone you loved. Being at a funeral seems like the most terrible experience you could have, but Jesus is asking you to look deeper. What do you learn about life when you are confronted with death? What spiritual lesson about “happiness” comes from this? What is the one most important thing you learn about life when you are at a funeral?

And when you discover that secret, then Jesus says you will be comforted. What do you think “they will be comforted” means? Think about this experience. Do you think Jesus is only saying that your lost loved one is in Heaven now? Is that really comfort for you? What if Jesus is saying something about your life now, at the very moment you realize that truth about life and death?

Here’s a clue: God will comfort us in heaven but Jesus is only telling us to hold on. We need to look harder at the backwards thinking that Jesus wants us to understand. Jesus looked out on the broken hearted in the crowd and he saw that some were ready, poised to accept the incredible announcement about to be theirs. They were ready because they were no longer able to cope alone. They were indeed the lucky ones. God could reach them, now, in the moment of their raw openness. The rest of us were too preoccupied with our own agendas to know that God had drawn near.

That brings up the second important word. The word that translates what Jesus said about being comforted is the Greek word “parakaléō.” It is made up of two Greek words “para,” which means “beside,” and “kaléō,” the word for the action of “calling.” Jesus says that those of us mourning now are lucky because we are ready to have God answer our call. And it is not an answer from afar. It is the “right alongside of me” return of my plea. It is the comfort that comes when I feel those arms around me, when I know the warmth of another’s care. It is relief, right here, right now. Jesus knows that this comfort has two critical elements. First, it is comfort found only by those who are at this moment open because of their agony. And secondly, it is a promise that reaches beyond the immediate. The same root word for comfort in this verse is used by John to describe the role of God’s Holy Spirit, the Great Comforter.

What if the lucky ones are those who understand how to draw near to God when life seems so fragile?

Now let’s look at a Beatitude that seems to be just redundant.

Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.

MATTHEW 5:7

In this verse, we have the familiar opening pattern: “Makarios”—Happy! Be joyful! Jesus is making an announcement. This is not a conditional command. It is not a statement that says, “You should be merciful so that you will get mercy.” This is not a variation of the Golden Rule. Jesus is announcing that those who are already practicing mercy are happy. Literally, the phrase reads, “Happy the merciful.” There is an implied verb in the English translation, but the Greek makes it clear that Jesus is proclaiming a statement of fact, not an invitation to action.

Our English word “mercy” is a word taken from the legal context. We imagine a courtroom scene. The guilty person stands before a judge waiting to be sentenced. He falls to his knees and begs for mercy. He is asking that the sentence he deserves be set aside. For us, mercy is about removing punishment. But it didn’t always have this kind of meaning. In Greek culture, mercy was not a moral or legal consideration. It was a psychological emotional response. We are swept into the emotion of mercy when we come into contact with someone who is experiencing undeserved suffering. Something in us responds to the plight of another. We just can’t help it. And this creates another problem in the Greek mind. Mercy is connected with fear, the fear that what has happened to this person who has aroused my feelings of mercy might also happen to me.

Mercy is not a passion that is aroused when we see someone suffering because they deserved it. We don't feel sorry for them. Actions have consequences. If they are suffering because of justified consequences, then that is right. No mercy is required. It is undeserved suffering that births mercy in our souls. And precisely because it is undeserved, we fear it. Since there is no apparent reason for this tragedy, it also could happen to us.

But Jesus quotes the Psalms, and in Psalm 37 there is a very special Hebrew word that was translated into Greek as "mercy." But this word really means something much bigger. That word is "hesed." We could learn a lot about that word, but for now let's just notice that Jesus says those who are undeserving of mercy are the happy ones. But this seems entirely backwards. We might understand mercy for the innocent, but how do we feel about mercy for the guilty? That doesn't seem fair. Another paradox.

In the same verse, Jesus draws a conclusion. The connecting word is the Greek "hoti." We usually translate it as "because." If I read the Beatitude with "because" in the translation, then I might conclude that the reason for the happiness Jesus announces is due to the fact that these people will receive like-kind action, that is, they will be rewarded for their mercy. Therefore, they are happy because they know that they are going to get what they need. They gave mercy to someone who didn't deserve it, and now they get mercy too. This would make the Beatitude a self-fulfilling moral law, the practice of delayed gratification.

Fortunately, there is another reading. “Hoti” after words of emotion such as joy, pity, sorrow or rejoicing (happy) can be translated to “seeing that.” That is to say, the first idea is built on the second, not the other way around. This little change makes all the difference. Now Jesus’ words do not say “Happy are those who willingly give up what is rightfully theirs because they will be shown the same consideration later.” Instead, Jesus says, “Happy are those paying the price of being merciful. They understand that they stand in need of mercy too.” I don’t show mercy in order to be rewarded with mercy. I show mercy as a result of knowing why mercy is essential for me. It is the fact that I am a candidate for mercy that makes me willing to pay the price of mercy now. It is not my reward; it is my obligation. In other words, the paradox of mercy is that I must need it first before I can understand how important it is to give it to someone else.

► **TOMORROW: Turn the Other Cheek**

TWENTY-EIGHT

TURN THE OTHER CHEEK

Matthew 5:17-48

In perhaps his most remembered teaching—the Sermon on the Mount—Jesus infamously said these words:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

The Greek word translated as “fulfill” is “pléroó,” which means “to make full.” Jesus filled up the law—instructions—of God. He brought them to life. He provided deeper meaning.

He called the people back to the God of their ancestors saying, “Be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

With his words, he brought the people to the heart of the matter.

Proverbs 4:23-27

As you read on Day 14, in Hebrew, the “heart” is the driving force of our behavior. It is our heart, mind, will, and inner man.

But I tell you that a man who even looks at a woman with the purpose of lusting after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

MATTHEW 5:28

By warning against adultery in their hearts, Jesus was asking the listeners to cut sin off at the root. He dove deeper to the sin behind the sin. He taught them to not give sin even one inch in their hearts—their inner lives.

For from within, out of the hearts of people, come the evil thoughts, acts of sexual immorality, thefts, murders, acts of adultery, deeds of greed, wickedness, deceit, indecent behavior, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile the person.

MARK 7:21

Then Jesus got radical.

You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I say to you, do not show opposition against an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other toward him also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

MATTHEW 5:38-42

How are we to interpret this? Is Jesus saying to never oppose evil? If the Nazi's invade our town, do we just turn the other cheek? Should we not fight them?

How do we reconcile this with when He overturned the money-changers' tables?

Matthew 21:12-13

When Jesus saw the money-changers defiling the temple, why didn't he just turn the other cheek?

The difference lies in the question: whose honor are you protecting?

In Matthew 5, Jesus is telling us to disregard attacks on our own honor. When we personally are slighted, belittled, cheated, or disrespected, we are asked to take it on the nose and forgive.

Our honor is not worth protecting. We lay that down.

God's honor, on the other hand, must be protected. That is why Jesus overturned the tables; because the money changers were not an affront to Him but to God.

God's causes must be fought. But we must surrender our own. That is what Jesus was teaching in Matthew 5. Our pride, honor, possessions, and feelings don't matter. Only God and His causes are worth fighting for.

► **TOMORROW: Patterns of Jesus**

Imagine This

Discuss the following scenarios with a friend or group.

You have hired a local man to help with a big project in the yard. You paid him up front because he said he needed rent money for him and his family. He never finished the job and isn't answering your calls.

What should you do?

You pass a man on the street beating a child. What should you do?

A woman is berating you on social media by making personal, nasty attacks. What should you do?

Your neighbor owes you money. What should you do?

An active shooter invades your place of worship.

What should you do?

Your in-laws are making fun of your political views.

What should you do?

Your boss yells at you for no reason. What should you do?

Your neighbor is being persecuted for her faith. What should you do?

TWENTY-NINE

PATTERNS OF JESUS

Matthew 5: 17-20

Yesterday we looked at how Jesus “fulfilled the law”—God’s instructions—by bringing them deeper meaning. Today we will delve into another aspect of how Jesus fulfilled the law.

To do so we must remember that our God is a God of patterns.

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

ECCLESIASTES 1:9

Remember what happened long ago, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me. I declare the end from the beginning, and ancient times from what is still to come.

ISAIAH 46:9

To better understand God, we must look for these patterns as we study His word.

So, how did Jesus fulfill God's patterns? Let's take a look.

Hebrew scholars and Rabbis have long acknowledged a concept of two Messiahs: Messiah son of Joseph (Mashiach ben Yosef, in Hebrew) and Messiah son of David (Mashiach ben David, in Hebrew). The Joseph story is found in Genesis 37- 50. Because of jealousy, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. But in a series of God-ordained events, Joseph rose from slavery to the second in command after Pharaoh. When a regional famine hit the land, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt begging for food. In a shocking twist, they found themselves begging at the feet of their brother Joseph who mercifully forgave them and saved their lives.

Genesis 50: 15-21

Rabbis understood Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, to be "the suffering servant." Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, but his suffering was orchestrated by God to result in good for not only his brothers but for much of the world at that time.

Many students of the Bible see this pattern of the suffering servant echoed in Isaiah 53, long understood by Christians as being a description of the suffering of Jesus.

Isaiah 53

“Messiah ben David,” or “Messiah son of David” is, of course, a reference to King David. In contrast to the suffering servant, David is understood to be the pattern for the conquering king.

 **Revelation 19: 11-16**

What is important to understand is that the Bible portrays the Messiah as being both the suffering servant and the conquering king. If we miss either of these patterns, we may miss the Messiah.

Imagine This

Answer the questions below, and, if you are able, discuss your answers with a friend.

Consider the story of Moses who delivered his people from bondage to Pharaoh. Does Jesus fulfill this pattern of Moses? How?

THIRTY

NARROW WAY

Although we have divided up our study of the Sermon on the Mount into 5 separate days, the teaching itself was delivered as one continuous speech. Remember that as you read the final chapters of it.

Matthew 6 & 7

At first reading, seeing phrases such as, “Don’t worry about tomorrow,” paired in this speech with ominous phrases such as, “Wide is the gate to destruction,” can feel strange. That wide-destruction gate feels like something to worry about, doesn’t it?

But both phrases are about our priorities. We tend to worry about our shelter, wealth, food, and clothing.

“Will I be able to pay my bills?”

“How can I afford food in this economy?”

But Jesus is saying not to focus on those things. Instead, we should concern ourselves with walking the narrow path. But we tend to do the exact opposite. We focus on our jobs and bank accounts and homes; and think we will leave faith to God. *“He will put us on the right path,”* we think. *“But I need to make sure my family has food on the table.”*

Yet here Jesus says the opposite. He says that God will handle the material concerns. We must spend our time walking the “hard road that leads to life.”

But how do we do that?

The answer to that question follows perhaps one of the scariest verses in the Bible.

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; get away from me, you workers of lawlessness.”

MATTHEW 7:21-23

The verse says that there will be people who come to God saying, “But I was prophesying and casting out demons and doing miracles. You must know me.” God says no. God isn’t impressed by the miracles—the wonders. As you read in Chapter 6, God is concerned about the work done “in secret.”

But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your charitable giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

MATTHEW 6:3-4

More than public miracles, prophecy, and spiritual force, Jesus is reminding us that His Father—our Father—is looking for everyday acts of obedience, the acts most people never know about.

In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

MATTHEW 7-12

Again, Jesus helped the people understand the law and the prophets—the scriptures in the time of Jesus—in a more comprehensive way. Later, he expanded on this point when he was asked, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

MATTHEW 22:37-40

Love God and love your neighbor. That is the heart of the law and prophets—the word of God. With this in mind, consider again

Matthew 7:23:

“I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness.”

The people Jesus is warning about are rejected by God because of “lawlessness.” This is not just general disorder or chaos. If “law” is loving God and your neighbor, then “lawlessness” is not loving God and your neighbor. But who defines love? That’s an important question these days. We don’t define love; God does. Whenever we try to define it, “love” becomes corrupted. It becomes perverse. God’s love is perfect, and it’s perfectly defined in the whole of His scriptures. It’s our job to adopt His definition and then live it. That’s the sentiment of the sentence that immediately follows.

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts on them, will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and its collapse was great.

MATTHEW 7:24-27

You must hear the words and act on them. This is the meaning of the Hebrew word “Shema” (See Day 2). “Shema” is both “hear” and “put into action.”

Jesus is reminding us that faith is not an intellectual exercise. Imagine if God had said to Noah, “Build an Ark,” and Noah replied, “I agree with you,” but did nothing. Noah would have died in the flood. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is issuing the same warning. Hear and then act, or else when the flood waters of life rise, we will be swept away with them.

In the Word

Now that we have done an in-depth study, go back and read the entire Sermon on the Mount from start to finish.

 **Matthew 5, 6, & 7**