

Matthew 5A

- Tonight, in Chapter 5, we begin one of Jesus' best-known sermons, the Sermon on the Mount
 - When I last taught at the end of Chapter 4, I explained that Matthew's account focuses on five areas of Jesus' ministry
 - Jesus' authority as a teacher
 - His authority over the human body
 - His authority over the demonic realm
 - His authority over the Sabbath and all the Law
 - And His authority over the Creation itself
 - Collectively, these demonstrations of power and authority proved Jesus' claim to be divine, to be the promised Messianic King
 - But one area was more important than the rest
 - Matthew's account places special emphasis on Jesus' teaching authority
 - Matthew records, in detail, five major sermons or discourses Jesus delivered to His disciples
 - And these sermons reveal Jesus' unparalleled understanding of spiritual truth
 - And each one corrects false understandings of God and His plan for His people
- Perhaps the most famous of these five discourses is the one we start tonight, the Sermon on the Mount
 - We call this the Sermon on the Mount because of where Jesus stood when He delivered the teaching
 - More than likely, Jesus was somewhere near the Sea of Galilee, perhaps on one of the higher plains near Bethsaida or The Arbel
 - As we said earlier, Jesus is moving around the Galilee healing anyone who comes to Him

- Naturally, He's attracted a sizable following in the process
- And as He goes, He declares to those who follow that the Kingdom of God is at hand
- Jesus takes time to explain in detail what He means by the term, "Kingdom of God"
- The sermon on the mount is Jesus' first such extended teaching
- The sermon runs three chapters in Matthew's Gospel, until the end of Chapter 7
 - And it's best-known for how it begins, with a section commonly called, "the Beatitudes"
 - Let's read the Beatitudes to open this chapter, and then we'll take a moment to consider some important background

Matt. 5:1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

Matt. 5:2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,

Matt. 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Matt. 5:5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

Matt. 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Matt. 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Matt. 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Matt. 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Matt. 5:10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

Matt. 5:12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- Before we consider what Jesus is saying to this crowd, there are two major points of background we must appreciate
 - First, we need to understand the religious culture in the Israel of Jesus' day

- By the time Jesus appeared in the Galilee, Israel's religious life had been warped by centuries of bad teaching
- For at least four centuries, the nation had been led and taught by men who traced their origins to the scribes of Ezra
- Yet, these men distorted and corrupted the high standard of teaching Ezra established
- When the people of Israel returned from exile in Babylon, they were determined never to repeat the mistakes that led to their captivity
 - Among their leaders was a teacher named Ezra, who began to instruct the people in following the Law of God
 - Ezra was a man who knew and loved God's Word and he taught it truly
 - He desired to instill a heart of obedience in Israel so they might never be removed from the land again
 - As a result of Ezra's leadership, the people of Israel recommitted themselves to knowing and following God's commandments
- Ezra also began a school to train religious leaders called, "scribes", in the proper understanding of the Law
 - For a time, things went well for Israel
 - But after Ezra died, a new generation of scribes rose up, men who took Ezra's program in a new and dangerous direction
 - Not content to teach only God's Word, they began to expand the set of rules that the people should follow
 - For every "thou shalt not..." in God's Law, this new generation of scribes added 10 more restrictions
 - They claimed these additional rules ("fences") would ensure Israel's obedience by preventing any violation of God's law
- This new rabbinical movement resulted in two very serious problems for the people of Israel
 - First, the scribes' manual of manmade rules, which eventually became known as the *Mishnah*, grew in size and importance over the centuries

- Each new generation of scribes and religious leaders sought to invent new rules and reinterpreted old rules
- Eventually, the rabbinical rules became so all-encompassing that they rivaled Scripture itself
- In fact, the scribes and rabbis ultimately declared that their rules *were* Scripture
 - They claimed the Mishnah was an “oral law” that God originally gave to Moses, yet Moses never wrote it down
 - This additional law was preserved over time, being handed down orally to these scribes, who now put it in writing
 - Once this myth took hold among the people, the Mishnah became indistinguishable from Scripture in the minds of Jews
- Naturally, as keepers of the Mishnah, the Pharisees were the self-appointed models of piety in Israel
 - They portrayed themselves as the gold standard for righteousness among the people
 - So that when a Jewish man or woman wondered what pleased God, they only needed to look at the Pharisees to find their answer
 - Of course, this game was rigged, because the Pharisees set the rules and also decided how they were to be interpreted
 - It was like the fox guarding the hen house
- So after centuries of living under Pharisaical Judaism, Israel lost a true appreciation for what God’s Word taught on these matters
 - By the time of Jesus, Israeli society was regulated almost exclusively by the Mishnah’s precepts
 - Sabbath keeping, feast rituals, temple service, virtually all religious life and practice was conducted according to these manmade rules
 - These customs bear only a passing resemblance to the requirements of Scripture
 - And in some cases, the rabbi’s teaching directly contradicted the Word of God, yet still they prevailed

- This is still the case among orthodox Judaism today
 - The Mishnah and later works, like the Talmud, drive Jewish religious life and custom today, not Scripture
 - **Addendum:** *The Mishnah is a collection of Jewish oral traditions, and forms the first part of the Talmud. The second part of the Talmud is the Gemara, rabbinical commentary of the Mishnah.*
- So ironically, the system Ezra hoped would preserve God's Word in Israel had become a means of obscuring it
 - With the result being that today (as in Jesus' day), a typical Jew is largely ignorant of Scripture
 - In place of the truth, they bear the burden of literally thousands of meaningless manmade rules
 - The consequence being, that the Jewish people have largely forgotten God's promise of forgiveness and mercy in the Messiah
- Which leads us to the second major point of background: the crowd listening to Jesus' words
 - Remember, I said these men and women came to Jesus because they heard Jesus was healing every kind of illness
 - Jesus has attracted literally thousands of sick, paralyzed, demon-possessed outcasts
 - That's not exactly an "A" list of the religious elite
 - On the contrary, from the perspective of the religious elites in Israel, these people were at the bottom of the pecking order
 - The Pharisees commonly held that those who suffered from incurable diseases and disabilities were experiencing God's judgment for their sins
 - That false charge gave Jewish society license to ignore their plight, because they were just suffering what they deserved
 - So as a result, these people were marginalized and forgotten within Israel
 - Anytime their thoughts turned to God and heaven, or of their prospects of entering the kingdom, they would have found little reason for hope

- They were being judged by God, or so the rabbis told them
- So how could they ever rise above their poverty and shame to equal the piety of the scrupulous Pharisees?
- If the Pharisees were God's gold standard for righteousness, then they obviously had no chance to merit the Kingdom
- So Pharisaical Judaism yielded two seriously negative consequences for Israel
 - First, it replaced God's Word with onerous manmade rules that left Israel ignorant of God's true desires for His people
 - And secondly, it perpetrated a false standard for righteousness by elevating corrupt hypocritical religious leaders as God's representatives
 - This combination of false teaching and false teachers resulted in an upside down view of God and righteousness among God's people
 - And it robbed many of the hope of salvation, since they couldn't measure up to the Pharisees' hypocritical standard
 - Anyone who has ever been trapped in a works-based false religion, that replaces grace with works, can certainly identify with the situation I just outlined
- So, in Matthew 5, Jesus sits down near the Galilee and delivers this sermon to overturn that upside down understanding and replace it with long-lost Biblical truth
 - That's why so much of what Jesus says in this sermon may sound backwards at first
 - It's Jesus repeatedly denying the authority of the Pharisees and their oral law so He can reassert the authority of God's Word
 - He exposes the Pharisees' wrong view of righteousness, so He can exhort the people to look elsewhere for the truth on these matters
 - And in the process, Jesus establishes Himself as the One true authority on righteousness and the Kingdom
 - And as He begins His sermon, Jesus issues a series of statements, often called "the Beatitudes"

- Each of the nine statements begins with the word, *makarios*, usually translated as “blessed” or “happy”
 - We get the term “beatitude” from the Latin translation of this Greek word
 - So instead of blessed, you could say, “spiritually happy” or “spiritually rewarded”
- But notice first, the blessing or reward Jesus is talking about here is not something vague...it’s something very specific
 - Notice, Jesus defines “blessed” at the beginning and again near the end of the nine statements
 - In v.3, and again in v.10, Jesus defines being blessed as entering into the Kingdom of God
 - Or today, we would say, “being saved” or “going to Heaven”
- So Jesus isn’t talking about trivial, everyday blessings of happiness on earth
 - Jesus is talking about the ultimate, eternal blessing of entering the Kingdom with Jesus
 - Each of these nine qualities or conditions is linked in some sense to entering the Kingdom
- Secondly, notice that each of these qualities or conditions is spiritual in nature, not physical
 - It’s easy to see how qualities like purity or gentleness refer to the spiritual condition of a person’s heart
 - But even in cases of being poor or hungry, Jesus qualifies what He means, to ensure we understand that He’s talking spiritually
 - In v.3, He says poor *in spirit* and, in v.6, He describes hungering *for righteousness*
 - So in all cases, Jesus was not talking about physical conditions... He was describing spiritual conditions
- Thirdly, notice that the reward for each condition does not come now, but will come in the future Kingdom

- Beginning in v.3 again, Jesus says the poor in spirit will receive the Kingdom
 - Likewise, those who mourn today will rejoice in the Kingdom
 - And those who are meek today will be rewarded in the Kingdom
 - And those who desire to see righteousness and justice reigning will be satisfied in the Kingdom
 - And those who pursue purity will know the purity of God Himself in the Kingdom
- We clearly see how Jesus is contradicting the false religious leaders of His day, as well as those of our day
 - The Pharisees set their minds on receiving the praises of men and obtaining the riches of the earth
 - Then, they pointed to their wealth and prestige as proof they were pleasing to God
 - The false prosperity teachers of our day are repeating these very same lies
 - But Jesus taught that God's children await to receive their reward in the Kingdom
 - God's priority isn't giving us our best life now, but rather granting us the joy of the Kingdom in the age to come
- Finally, notice in these nine statements, that Jesus was describing the heart of the one who *has received* the Kingdom, not giving us a recipe for *how to receive* the Kingdom
 - If Jesus had intended the Beatitudes to be a roadmap for how to obtain the Kingdom, then He would have been teaching a Gospel of works
 - In fact, many false teachers and false churches teach that this the way we are to earn entrance to Heaven
 - But that view simply repeats the error of the Pharisees
 - It's substituting new rules for the ones found in the Mishnah
 - When in reality, rule-keeping never brought anyone into Heaven, no matter which rules you follow

- On the contrary, the Bible teaches plainly that salvation cannot be obtained by good works, but only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ
 - And even common sense says that the Beatitudes can't be a recipe for gaining Heaven
 - Because we know that not everyone who is gentle goes to Heaven
 - Not everyone who mourns over the death of a relative will be in the Kingdom, *etc.*
- So what was Jesus trying to say here? Simply put, this is a character sketch of the Kingdom citizen
 - He or she will look very different than a Pharisee
 - Those you will find in the Kingdom will look very different than a Pharisee
 - They will not be pious, hypocritical, self-righteous, proud religious leaders
 - Instead, the Kingdom will be populated by men and women who look a lot like Jesus' crowd
 - They will be poor in spirit, hungering to see righteousness prevail, merciful, gentle, and pure in heart, *etc.*
- So let's get to know this character Christ is sketching for us, so we can see how we compare
 - We can divide the list into two groups: a group of four and a group of five
 - The first four conditions describe the person's relationship with God, beginning with poor in spirit in v.3
 - To be poor in spirit is the opposite of being spiritually proud
 - To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge our inability to meet the lofty standard of Heaven
 - It's recognizing that if we have to qualify for Heaven on our own merits, we have no chance...we are spiritually impoverished
 - Therefore, the one who is poor in spirit comes to understand that he is utterly dependent on God's mercy and grace to enter into Heaven

- It's literally the opposite perspective of that of a Pharisee
- Pharisees were proud in spirit, proud of their piety, proud of their reputation and completely in denial of their sinfulness
- They weren't just qualified for Heaven, they expected to be welcomed into Heaven with great fanfare and high praise
- But Jesus says that's not who we will find in the Kingdom
- So how does someone become poor in spirit?
 - The Bible says that obtaining such a perspective is a work done by God's Spirit in our heart as part of our salvation experience

2Cor. 7:10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

- As the Spirit convicts us, bringing us to repentance, He replaces our spiritual pride and self-righteousness with a humility that understands our true sinful condition
- And in that moment, we come to recognize that we need Jesus, for there is no other way to enter the Kingdom
- And even after receiving God's grace, we are to continue to depend upon it
 - I once saw a sign that said, "Jesus loves you, but I'm His favorite"
 - Have you ever met a Christian who seemed to think like that?
 - They understand that their salvation comes by God's grace, not by good works
 - Nevertheless, they act as though they were deserving of God's grace
 - They wear their self-righteousness on their sleeve and look down on all those who can't measure up to their lofty standard of piety
 - That's a type of Pharisaical thinking, of spiritual pride, rather than being poor in spirit
 - If we slip into that state of mind, we're taking the grace of God for granted
 - We're forgetting how we gained the Kingdom in the first place

- And we're becoming a stumbling block for others who perceive our self-righteousness as cause to lose hope for their own prospects of Heaven
 - Don't become so proud of your salvation that you become a stumbling block preventing others from sharing in it
- Next, Jesus connects being poor in spirit with mourning in v.4
 - By the context, we know mourning refers to feeling sorrow for the devastating effects of sin, both of our sin and that of others'
 - Those who are destined for the Kingdom know true sorrow for having offended God by their sins
 - Christians mourn over our mistakes and especially for how our mistakes have hurt others
 - This is the natural consequence of having a soft heart, made so by the conviction of the Holy Spirit
 - And in many cases, we will know literal sorrow – shedding tears – over these things
 - Once again, Jesus is flipping the tables on conventional thought
 - The world doesn't mourn its sin, it celebrates it
 - Sure, the world sheds tears when the consequences of their sin catch up to them
 - But that's not the kind of mourning Jesus is talking about
 - If you want a good example of how the godly mourn over their sins, consider David's own words in Psalm 51

Psa. 51:1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.

Psa. 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.

Psa. 51:3 For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.

Psa. 51:4 Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak

And blameless when You judge.

[Psa. 51:5](#) Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.

[Psa. 51:6](#) Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

[Psa. 51:7](#) Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

[Psa. 51:8](#) Make me to hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.

[Psa. 51:9](#) Hide Your face from my sins
And blot out all my iniquities.

[Psa. 51:10](#) Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

- Can't you hear David mourning over his sins before God?
 - And yet David also appreciated that, in a time to come, when he received his glorified body in the Kingdom, he would be comforted
 - He would no longer mourn his sin, because his sin would be no more
 - That's what Jesus promises those who mourn over sin: that one day, we will be comforted
- Moving to v.5, we see this pattern continuing
 - Jesus says gentleness will make citizens of the Kingdom, and they will inherit the earth
 - You've probably heard this verse translated as, "the meek"
 - That's probably a better word choice, because Jesus is talking about an attitude of submission to God's authority
 - Being gentle or meek means accepting our station in life as God has assigned it, and seeking to please Him from that place
 - It's the opposite of earthly ambition, of seeking the power and riches of this world

- The Kingdom citizen will exhibit this attitude, and to the extent he or she lives according to this conviction, they will receive reward in the Kingdom
 - And that reward takes the form of a share in Christ's inheritance
 - At His resurrection, Christ received back the earth and all it contains as His inheritance
 - One day, He will return to rule over His inheritance
 - And when He does, He will share His inheritance with the children of God according to our faithfulness in serving Him
 - That's meekness...seeking to please Christ with our service, not to please the world
- Once more, this is an opposite state of heart compared to the one commonly held by Pharisees
 - They were men motivated by riches and willing to use their position of authority to gain wealth
 - They sought the approval of men and loved to receive greetings in the streets
 - They were anything but meek
 - And now, Jesus tells the stunned crowd that such naked ambition would have no part in the Kingdom
- Next, in v.6, Jesus says the Kingdom citizen will hunger and thirst for righteousness
 - When someone hungers or thirsts, it means they don't have the thing they desire
 - You say you're hungry because you want food, but don't have it
 - Or you're thirsty because you want water, but none can be found
 - Similarly, those destined for the Kingdom long to see righteous reigning on earth, yet we realize this is an unreachable goal apart from Christ's ruling
 - We hunger and thirst for righteousness, but we don't think we can achieve it by calls for social justice or at the voting booth

- We recognize righteousness can only be found in a kingdom ruled perfect by the King of Kings
- For now, God's righteousness reigns in our hearts by His Spirit, but we await the day it reigns from sea to sea on earth
- Jesus promises that those who look forward to such things will be satisfied in a day to come, in the Kingdom
 - As the prophet Micah proclaims

Mic. 4:1 And it will come about in the last days

That the mountain of the house of the LORD
Will be established as the chief of the mountains.
It will be raised above the hills,
And the peoples will stream to it.

Mic. 4:2 Many nations will come and say,

"Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD
And to the house of the God of Jacob,
That He may teach us about His ways
And that we may walk in His paths."
For from Zion will go forth the law,
Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Mic. 4:3 And He will judge between many peoples

And render decisions for mighty, distant nations.
Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they train for war.

Mic. 4:4 Each of them will sit under his vine

And under his fig tree,
With no one to make them afraid,
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

Mic. 4:5 Though all the peoples walk

Each in the name of his god,
As for us, we will walk
In the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

Mic. 4:6 "In that day," declares the LORD,

“I will assemble the lame
And gather the outcasts,
Even those whom I have afflicted.

[Mic. 4:7](#) “I will make the lame a remnant

And the outcasts a strong nation,
And the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion
From now on and forever.

- But once again, Israel’s leaders didn’t hunger or thirst for righteousness
 - They believed they had already found it in their law and customs
 - They were already satisfied by the system they established
 - Especially since it rewarded them and kept them protected and in power
 - Such men will not be found in the Kingdom
- The second set of five beatitudes relate our relationship with people in the world, beginning with being merciful in v.7
 - Jesus says those destined for the Kingdom are those who show mercy in their dealings with others
 - Believers appreciate the mercy we received from God when He extended salvation to us by His grace
 - And so, we are inclined by our new nature to show mercy to others
 - This trait is very unlike the unsaved, especially among the religious in Israel, who have never known God’s mercy and have been taught an eye for an eye, *etc.*
 - Similarly, in v.8, Jesus says the Kingdom citizen is one who possesses a pure heart
 - He’s referring to being upright and honest in the way we conduct ourselves in all matters of life and especially in our dealings with others
 - Kingdom citizens do not seek to profit from another’s loss or gain at another’s expense

- Once again, this is not a recipe for gaining Heaven, but rather the mark of those who have gained Heaven by faith in Jesus Christ
- And in the Kingdom, these citizens will enjoy the unrivaled purity of seeing God face to face
- In v.9, Jesus says the Kingdom will be occupied by those who make peace in the world
 - Jesus says God's children will exhibit a sincere desire to mediate conflict, to reduce strife and encourage peace in their relationships
 - We may not always find the peace we want, but our new spirit is programmed to seek for it rather than to provoke, much less celebrate, conflict
- Jesus says Kingdom citizens live this way because we will one day be called the sons of God in the Kingdom
 - Jesus is alluding to the role believers will play in the Kingdom ruling with Christ and establishing peace among the nations
 - As Paul taught

1Cor. 6:2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

1Cor. 6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?

- Finally, Kingdom citizens will know persecution and slander because our relationship with Christ will invite it
 - Yet, we rejoice in such things because it's a mark common to all God's children
 - Just as the prophets who came before us, if we share in their persecution, then we can know we will share in their reward in the Kingdom
- Now let's take a step back and consider this character sketch of the Kingdom citizen
 - The person entering the Kingdom is a humble person aware of their own unrighteousness and resting in God's mercy and grace

- They are saddened by their own mistakes and long to see God's righteousness prevail
- They submit to God's authority, seeking to please Him rather than placing their trust in the world's rewards
- They seek to show mercy to others, to deal honestly with others, seek peace with others
- And yet, they will be persecuted by that world because they love Jesus
- This is the person God has prepared to enter the Kingdom
- Now if you're a believer and you're thinking, "I don't do some of those things very well," what does that tell you?
 - First, it tells you that this list sets the ideal standard, the new gold standard to replace the one offered by Pharisees
 - And as such, it's an ideal, not something any of us can meet with perfection
- Nevertheless, by the Spirit, we ought to be moving in this direction
 - So, if your behavior doesn't measure up in any of these areas, then it tells you that despite the Spirit of God dwelling in your heart, you're still living in the flesh
 - You have been saved by your faith and your future in the Kingdom is secure – but you still have some work left to do in sanctification, in representing Christ to this world as Jesus expects
- On the other hand, if you're not sure your future includes the Kingdom...
 - If you're thinking to yourself, "I want to enter the Kingdom (go to Heaven) so I guess I need to begin doing these things," then you missed the point
 - As I said, this isn't a recipe for Heaven...you can't mimic these behaviors, expecting it to result in your salvation
 - That's like trying to push on a rope...you're not doing it right
 - Before you can act like a Kingdom citizen, you need to be a Kingdom citizen

- And the only way you can become a child of God is by placing your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, knowing He died on the cross to pay the price for your sin
- As you accept Jesus as Lord, you are born again by the Spirit, Scripture says
- Your old spiritual nature is put to death in Christ and you receive a new spiritual nature
- And that new nature is formed in the image of Jesus, so that you may share in His nature and character
- And it's only by obtaining that new spiritual nature that you will begin to exhibit these characteristics
 - By your new nature in Christ, you will be spiritually humble, you will mourn over your sin, you will submit to Christ in gentleness, you will show mercy, you will seek for peace
 - Confess Christ and He brings you these qualities
 - And with them, you receive eternal life – God's promise that you will enter the Kingdom in the day it appears, along with all God's children
 - And in that day, you will be truly blessed and your greatest spiritual desires will be fulfilled beyond your imagination
- You won't gain these things by mimicking the piety of the hypocritically self-righteous, whether priests, popes, imams, yogis, or gurus
 - Their hearts betray their ignorance, yet God's children display His heart