

My high school and college years were in the 1980s, which some of you remember as the “Me Decade.” That era was all about materialism, success, and chasing the American dream. It gave us the term yuppie—young urban professionals who were climbing fast, dressing sharply, and measuring life by the size of their paycheck and car brand. That decade shaped me. I graduated high school with a particular vision of the good life.

By the time I graduated college, I wanted to be driving either a red convertible BMW 325i or a 1986 Porsche 911 Carrera Targa Super Sport in Iris Blue if things went really well. Now, that would’ve been a serious upgrade from what I was actually driving, a 1975 Orange Honda Civic CVCC. It was not exactly luxury, but the dream was alive. To me, the good life was success, comfort, and status.

Our culture often defines blessings in this way. We say, “I’m so blessed,” when we land the job, buy the house, or take the perfect vacation. While those can be good gifts from God, they’re not the foundation of our blessings.

During college—especially during my time at Mount Hermon—I encountered Jesus in a new and deeper way. He redefined everything, including what it truly meant to live the “good life.” In today’s passage, Jesus reminds us that true blessing isn’t found in what we have—it’s found in who we’re becoming in him.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus doesn’t bless the successful, the ambitious, or the affluent. He blesses the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and the people who are hungry, not for more stuff but for righteousness.

Jesus says the good life isn’t about what’s in your driveway or bank account but about who you’re becoming. It’s about being the kind of person who reflects the heart of God—even when life is hard.

The world says the good life is something you earn. Jesus says it’s something he forms in you. And that changes everything. Jesus redefines what the good life is! He starts his famous sermon by blessing internal postures, not external achievements:

### **The Blessing Begins with Who You Are**

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Matthew 5:3-6**

Nine times in these verses, we hear the word “Blessed.” But what does that mean? Jesus is offering something far deeper, far more stable than fleeting happiness. He’s not describing a feeling; he’s declaring a status—a reality of who these people are in the eyes of God. In the Old Testament, when God blessed someone, it meant they had his approval, his favor. Being “blessed” was like God saying, “Congratulations—you’re living the life I value.”

To be blessed this way is to be grounded in God’s approval—not the world’s applause. It means we don’t need success, comfort, or status to find joy. Our contentment flows from this unshakable truth: God sees, knows, and affirms us. That’s what it means to be truly blessed.

It is a joy that doesn’t depend on our circumstances because it’s rooted in something eternal—our relationship with him. When God calls us blessed, we don’t have to chase approval, comfort, or success to feel secure. Our well-being isn’t at the mercy of what’s happening around us. It’s anchored in who God says we are. God is saying, “I am on your side!”

That brings us to the surprising part. Who does God bless? You might be shocked by the list. Jesus isn’t pointing to the powerful, the successful, or the admired. He’s pointing to the poor in spirit, the mourners, and the meek. In other words, God’s blessings are aimed at the internal, not the external, at the heart, not the resume.

Looking closely, it almost feels like God’s Kingdom is upside down compared to our world. Where the world says, “Climb to the top,” Jesus says, “Lower yourself.” Where the world says, “Show strength,” Jesus says, “Be meek.” Where the world says, “Win,” Jesus seems to say, “Lose—and you’ll gain everything.” It’s a radical reversal. In God’s Kingdom, you don’t win by getting ahead. You win by giving your heart to him.

### **“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”**

Right from the start, Jesus gives us a key to the Kingdom that cuts against everything our culture teaches. The world says, “Blessed are the self-made, the confident, the ones who have it all together.” We’re told to be strong, independent, and proud of it. So when Jesus opens the Sermon on

the Mount by saying the poor in spirit are the ones who are blessed, it's jarring. Honestly, it's hard to believe. It doesn't sound like good news—it sounds backward.

What does Jesus mean by “poor in spirit”? To be poor in spirit literally means to crouch or grovel like a beggar—someone entirely dependent on the mercy of another. Jesus is saying, “Blessed are the spiritual beggars.” Those who know they have nothing to offer God, nothing to impress him with, nothing to bring except need.

As one of our late elders, Allen Johanson, would say, “We’re all just beggars telling other beggars where to find bread.” For those who pride themselves on having it together, this verse stings a little because we don’t want to be beggars. We want to be capable, competent, and in control.

But Jesus says the Kingdom doesn’t start with strength—it begins with surrender. To be poor in spirit means we stop looking inward for answers and start looking upward in desperation. It means coming to grips with our spiritual bankruptcy and acknowledging we are empty without him.

Here’s the surprise: Jesus doesn’t shame the spiritually broken—he blesses them. “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” That’s not just a future promise, it’s a present reality. To be part of the Kingdom of Heaven is to be in a relationship with God. It’s to know Jesus as King and to live under his gracious rule. It means grace now and glory later. But we don’t get either unless we first admit our need.

That is why this beatitude comes first. You cannot receive the Kingdom until you recognize your need for the King. But here’s where it gets tricky: Spiritual pride can creep in even through humility. The moment we start thinking, “Wow, I’m really nailing this whole being poor in spirit thing,” we’ve missed the point. True humility isn’t something we achieve and then move on from—it’s a posture we return to daily.

Most of us would readily admit we’re sinners in need of grace. But very few of us live daily with a deep awareness of our constant need for it. So, Jesus starts here—not to shame us, but to set us free. The blessing doesn’t come from pretending we’re enough. It comes from admitting we’re not and trusting the One who is. That is why Jesus begins with poverty of spirit because freedom starts with honesty. It’s only when we stop hiding our needs that we can start to experience his grace. How have you been avoiding your spiritual desperation? Have you confessed your dependence on God?

**“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”**

At first, this sounds strange. How can mourning be a blessing? But Jesus offers something powerful: absolute

comfort for those who grieve what’s truly broken. What kind of mourning is this? Jesus isn’t talking about walking around sad or depressed. He’s not even talking primarily about grief from the loss of a loved one, although we know that Psalm 34 tells us that the Lord is close to the brokenhearted.

What Jesus is getting at is spiritual mourning, the sorrow that comes when we recognize our sin and the world’s sin. This flows from the first beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” When we see our spiritual poverty, our total need for God, mourning follows. It’s not just admitting sin; it’s grieving it, feeling the weight of it, a brokenness that moves us to cry out for mercy.

King David models this in Psalm 51. After his sin with Bathsheba and the death of her husband, the prophet Nathan confronted him. David didn’t deflect—he broke. He prayed, “Wash me clean from my guilt... I recognize my shameful deeds; they haunt me day and night.” That’s spiritual mourning.

But Jesus also calls us to mourn beyond ourselves—to grieve the brokenness in our world. He did. As he approached Jerusalem, knowing it had rejected him, he wept over the city (Luke 19:41). Jesus didn’t just see sin—he felt it. And here’s the promise: “They will be comforted.”

## **God Comforts Us**

First, God himself comforts us. Scripture calls him “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3). Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit—the Comforter—to be with us (John 14:16). Father, Son, and Spirit all move toward us in our sorrow.

## **Comforted By Forgiveness**

Second, we’re comforted by forgiveness. When we mourn our sins, God meets us with grace. David later wrote, “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered” (Psalm 32:1). This isn’t a one-time event; it’s the ongoing rhythm of the Christian life—confess, turn, and receive mercy.

## **Comforted By Hope**

Third, we’re comforted by hope. Revelation 21:4 says, “He will wipe away every tear... there will be no more mourning or crying or pain.” One day, Jesus will return and say, “Enough. No more sin. No more suffering.” That day is coming, and it gives us strength for today.

Here’s the challenge. Many of us don’t mourn because we don’t take sin seriously. We downplay it. Until we see the weight of it, we’ll never grasp the depth of his comfort. Blessed are those who mourn—not because mourning is pleasant, but because it leads us to the heart of God.

And in his presence, we find absolute, lasting, and eternal comfort.

**“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”**

When we hear “meek,” we think weak. In our culture, the loud, assertive, and aggressive seem to get ahead. Meek people? They get walked on. But that’s not what Jesus means at all. Meekness is not a weakness. Meekness is strength under control. It’s the posture of someone gentle, humble, kind, and grounded. A meek person doesn’t lack power. They’ve surrendered it to something greater.

We can better understand meekness by looking at the first two beatitudes. Poor in spirit means we recognize our spiritual poverty. Those who mourn grieve their sin, and meekness is the result. A correct view of ourselves before God is how we begin to relate to others. When I see my need for grace, I don’t posture or power up. I approach others with humility, not arrogance.

Meekness isn’t being passive or shy or simply “nice.” It’s a deeply rooted attitude shaped by God’s grace. My friend Steve once described it like this: Imagine a German shepherd trained to defend your home. It’s strong, fierce, and ready to attack if needed. But that dog is calm and gentle around the toddler in the family. That’s meekness—strength under control.

What’s the reward? “They will inherit the earth.” That’s a massive promise. Jesus is talking about the New Kingdom, which he will one day establish as a renewed earth free from sin and sorrow. Who inherits it? Not the proud, not the self-sufficient. It’s those who trust God, wait on him, and walk in humility.

And like any inheritance, it’s not earned; it’s received. We don’t fight for it. We accept it by grace because of our relationship with the King. So, how do we grow in meekness? Start by taking a hard look at your heart:

How unselfish are you? When was the last time you gave up something for someone else? How do you handle criticism? Do you become defensive, or are you teachable? How approachable are you? Would someone in pain feel safe coming to you for comfort? Meekness doesn’t come naturally. Our flesh resists it. That’s why we need God to shape it in us.

**“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”**

Hunger and thirst are powerful human drives. We can’t survive without food and water, but we also hunger for other things—success, approval, relationships, and comfort. While those aren’t necessarily bad, when they become what drives us, they can leave us empty.

Advertisers know this. Sprite tells us to “Obey our thirst,” as if a soda could satisfy our deeper cravings. But we all know those things don’t truly satisfy. They often leave us wanting more. Jesus invites us to crave something better—righteousness. But what does that mean? The Greek word Jesus uses here is *dikaiosynē*, which goes far beyond rule-following or religious head knowledge.

It speaks to being right in relationship with God and living with integrity, justice, and compassion toward others. It includes relational righteousness—being made right with God through grace—and ethical righteousness—living rightly in the world as a reflection of his character. It’s about being right, in character and conduct, with God and others.

Max Lucado says, “We’re thirsty for a clean conscience, a fresh start, to be made right again.” That’s what this beatitude is about. It’s not a hunger for perfection or performance. It is a deep soul-level longing to be set right, inside and out, with God and others. Jesus calls us to crave that kind of wholeness and promises we will be filled.

When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we long to be made whole. We want what’s wrong in us to be made right. We want to think, speak, and act like Jesus. This isn’t about a mild interest, it’s a deep, soul-level craving.

But sometimes we miss that hunger because we fill up on junk—entertainment, distractions, social media, even sin. Just like eating a cookie can spoil your appetite for dinner, filling up on the world’s quick fixes numbs our desire for what’s truly good. The good news?

Jesus promises that when we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will be filled—not with guilt or pressure, but with satisfaction. And here’s the beautiful part: the more he fills us, the more we hunger for more. The Christian life becomes a rhythm of longing and fulfillment—growing more and more into the likeness of Christ.

As I said in my introduction, there was a season in my life when I had everything mapped out—career goals, timelines, even the kind of person I hoped to marry. I was chasing what I thought was the “good life,” and I did not want to surrender it. I believed in God, sure—but deep down, I doubted whether his plan would satisfy me. Would following him mean missing out?

But then things started to unravel. Next-level schooling fell through. The relationship ended. My mother passed at an early age. My carefully built plan crumbled, and I was left wondering if God had anything better—or anything at all. It felt like a loss, but it was actually the beginning of something new.

In that space of disappointment and uncertainty, I started leaning into God—not out of strength but desperation. And that’s when he began to reshape me. I discovered a deeper peace than I’d ever known. A quieter kind of joy. A freedom that did not come from getting what I wanted but from learning to want him more. I would not have chosen that path—but now, I would not trade it. Because what God gave me was far more fulfilling than anything I had planned. Not always easier, but better. Richer. Deeper.

So, what are you hungry for? Do you hunger for success, comfort, and control? Or do you hunger for righteousness, for your life to reflect the heart of Jesus? Because if you do, Jesus says that you’re blessed and you will be filled.

The Beatitudes don’t stop with who we are before God—they move toward how we live with others. In verses 7–9, Jesus shows us that a heart transformed by grace produces a life marked by mercy, purity, and peacemaking. The blessing doesn’t just stay within, it overflows into the world around us.

### **The Blessing Flows Through How You Live**

**Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matthew 5:7-9.**

#### **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”**

Are you a merciful person? In Jesus’ day, mercy wasn’t admired—it was seen as weakness. Roman culture was brutal. A slave past his usefulness could be tossed aside like trash. Unwanted babies were discarded. Mercy had no place in a world driven by power.

Even today, mercy can feel conditional. We love it when we’re the recipients but prefer to choose who gets it. Mercy for the underdog? Maybe. But mercy for those who’ve failed or wronged us deeply? That’s harder.

So, what does Jesus mean by mercy? Mercy isn’t sentimental. It’s not a soft, anything-goes attitude. It’s not forced kindness. Mercy reflects God himself—holy, just, and yet moved to compassion. To understand mercy, we need to see it alongside grace. Grace is love freely given to the unworthy; mercy is compassion extended to the suffering. Grace says, “I forgive you.” Mercy says, “Let me help you.” Both are unearned, both are gifts, and both flow from the heart of God.

Jesus promises mercy—not from people, but from God—to those who are merciful. But this isn’t about earning God’s favor. Mercy isn’t a reward for being nice. God’s mercy is a gift. He gives it because of who he is, not because of what we do. Jesus is saying that when you’ve truly

experienced God’s mercy, you’ll show it. You can’t separate the two. If God has been merciful to you, that mercy will start flowing through you.

This beatitude builds on the first four. Once we’ve seen our spiritual poverty, mourned our sin, embraced meekness, and hungered for righteousness—we begin to see others differently. Their wrongs don’t provoke self-righteous anger; they stir compassion. We stop seeing enemies and start seeing fellow beggars for mercy.

That’s why Jesus tells a story in Matthew 18:21–35 about a servant who has forgiven an enormous debt but refuses to forgive a small one. He wants mercy for himself but cannot extend it to others. In the end, he proves he never truly grasped what mercy is. If we say we’ve received God’s mercy but refuse to give it, we may not know it at all. True mercy changes us, and Jesus says those who live in it will receive it.

#### **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”**

When Jesus spoke of the heart, He wasn’t talking about emotions, he meant the inner person. The heart is our control center, the source of our thoughts, desires, motives, and will. Scripture says, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts,” and “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” What’s in your heart shapes everything.

That’s why Jesus says the pure in heart are the ones who will see God. Not just the outwardly clean but those who are clean on the inside. Sadly, we often focus on polishing the outside—fixing behavior, hanging with the right crowd, and wearing the right “Christian” image. But inside, we leave things untouched. It’s like my coffee mug at church. I don’t use it very often, and I sometimes forget to empty the last sip. So the next time I use it, it looks clean on the outside but moldy and overlooked on the inside. The outside doesn’t matter if the inside is full of rot.

Jesus is after our inner life. The word “pure” means both clean and sincere—a heart not polluted by sin and not divided by duplicity. Psalm 24 says, “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart... who does not lift up his soul to falsehood.” In other words, the pure in heart are real. They don’t wear masks. What you see is what you get.

So, how do we get a pure heart? We don’t start with one. Like oil needs refining, so does the heart. And that process begins with the first beatitudes: recognizing we’re spiritually poor, mourning our sin, becoming meek, hungering for righteousness, receiving God’s mercy—and showing it. Over time, this refining shapes our hearts into ones of sincerity, humility, and integrity.



And here's the promise: the pure in heart will see God. Not just one day in eternity, but even now—in glimpses of his presence, his work, and his beauty. The clearer our heart, the clearer our view of him. So ask yourself: Are you nurturing a heart that seeks God or just polishing the outside? Because it's the pure in heart who see him most clearly.

**"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."**

What is peace? It simply means avoiding conflict or keeping quiet to avoid tension. But the peace Jesus talks about is much deeper. It's not the absence of trouble but the presence of God's goodness, righteousness, and wholeness. Jesus is celebrating those who actively bring God's best into broken situations—his justice, his mercy, and his rest. True peace always includes purity and righteousness. You can't separate them.

Being a peacemaker isn't passive. It requires courage and action. It's often costly. It may mean going out of your way, and it applies to friends and enemies.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus tells us that if we're in conflict with someone—especially a fellow believer—we should stop what we're doing, including if we are worshipping God, and go make things right. Notice: it's not about who's right or wrong. If you know someone has something against you, you take the first step. That might mean swallowing your pride and saying, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" Or it may mean extending forgiveness when it's asked of you. Either way, it's hard—but holy work.

In Matthew 5:43-45, Jesus pushes it further. We're to be peacemakers even with enemies, especially those who hate us because of our faith. Just as God continues to bless people who ignored or rejected him, we're called to love, pray for, and bless those who don't deserve it.

This isn't easy; especially where it's tempting to hold grudges, nurse wounds, and throw past wrongs back at people. However, Jesus calls us to something higher. Why? God is a peacemaker. He's called the "God of peace." When we make peace, we reflect his heart. That's why Jesus says peacemakers will be called sons and daughters of God, because they look like their Father.

Who must you make peace with? Being a peacemaker may not be easy, but it's one of the clearest ways we can show the world who God is. Living out the Kingdom through mercy, purity, and peacemaking is powerful, but it won't always be popular. We may find that the world pushes back as we reflect God's heart in the world. That's why Jesus doesn't end the Beatitudes with ease or comfort. He prepares us for the reality that living a righteous life may

come with resistance. But even in hardship, his blessing holds firm.

### **The Blessing Holds Firm in Hard Places**

**Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Matthew 5:10-12.**

**"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

If Jesus had started with this beatitude, he might not have had many followers! Who wants to be persecuted, slandered, or rejected? But Jesus isn't trying to sell us something. He's telling the truth.

Persecution, in this context, isn't about being weird, self-righteous, or offensive. It's not about suffering because we're holier-than-thou or breaking rules in Jesus' name. Jesus is talking about suffering because we're living righteously—because our lives reflect him.

That's why this beatitude comes last. Living out the first seven—poor in spirit, merciful, pure, meek, peace-making—will clash with the world's values. When light confronts darkness, the darkness pushes back. The world praises confidence, not humility. Strength, not meekness. Self-promotion, not purity. If you live the Beatitudes, you will stand out, and you may suffer for it.

Jesus warned this would happen. In John 15:20, He said, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." That's precisely what happened to his followers. Ten of the remaining eleven disciples were killed for their faith. Paul was beaten, whipped, and imprisoned. Early Christians were thrown to lions or lit on fire under Nero.

And persecution isn't just ancient history. Historians estimate that more Christians were martyred in the 20th century than any other. Today, around 140,000 people are harassed or persecuted every year simply for following Jesus. While we may not face death in America, we still experience rejection—failing grades, family shame, being mocked or excluded—just for standing with Christ.

Jesus doesn't dismiss the pain of persecution. He knows what it's like to suffer unjustly. It wasn't right that the crowds mocked him, or that soldiers ripped his flesh, or that he hung in silence while bearing the weight of our sin. It wasn't fair—but it was love.

That's the Kingdom Jesus offers: a kingdom not earned but received, a kingdom of grace, adoption, and eternal life. It belongs to those who are willing to follow him even when it costs everything. So, don't give up if you're being

misunderstood, rejected, or mistreated because of your faith. You're blessed. The Kingdom is yours.

The Beatitudes challenge our modern definition of the good life. We're told it's about having more money, comfort, success, and influence, but Jesus flips the script. He says the good life isn't found in what we possess but in who we're becoming.

The truly blessed aren't the ones who, in the world's eyes, rise to the top, but those who are shaped by the values of God's Kingdom. The blessed are those who are humble, merciful, hungry for righteousness, pure in heart, and willing to make peace even when it's costly.

In Christ, the good life means deep dependence on God. It's a life of integrity, compassion, and courage. It's not defined by ease but by the presence of God's favor—even in mourning, meekness, or persecution. According to Jesus, the good life isn't about climbing higher—it's about being transformed from the inside out. It's marked by a joy the world can't give and a peace that circumstances can't steal.

So the real question isn't, "How can I get more?" It's, "Who am I becoming?" If the answer is "More like Christ," then you're already living the blessed life.

The best version of your life may not look like the dream you once had. Maybe it's quieter, slower, and simpler. But if you're being made into someone who looks more like Jesus—that is the good life. That is what it means to be blessed.

True blessing isn't found in what we have but in who we are becoming in Christ.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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