**Coronado Community Church**

“Blessed Life”

Matthew 5:1-12

A sermon by Pastor Eric Smith

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Today and for two more Sundays we will look at Matthew Chapter 5 – a collection of the teachings of Jesus.

When we look at the specific things that we’re pretty sure Jesus actually said – like we will for these next couple of weeks – we’ll take care to make sure we get what he was talking about.

Today we consider **the first 12 verses** – what we call *the Beatitudes*. You’ve heard them.

They introduce the teachings that follow in the rest of the chapter.

A Beatitude is a blessing. The Greek word is ***markarios****,* it means: to call or consider blessed, happy, or fortunate.

Let’s get the context right… first, ***who was spoken to?***

Jesus was speaking to his disciples. Here’s the first verse…

*When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2Then he began to speak, and taught them…*

This is important because the Sermon on the Mount is really a misnomer… it has been portrayed as a sort of **Woodstock gathering** - Jesus preaching to a lot of people… but that is not what it says.

It says …

*he saw the crowds … he went up the mountain… (perhaps to escape the crowd)… he sat down* (funny way to speak to a huge crowd) *… his disciples came to him* (rabbis sat to teach their disciples) *then* he began to speak and taught them… taught who? …his disciples!

More context: ***who was being spoken about*?**

He started by talking about *all those people.* Jesus described the crowds as blessed.

His opening beatitudes were teaching for his disciples about *their attitude* toward all those people.

Those people who came to hear Jesus were not well-to-do. They were peasant people – they were poor people. They were the *have-nots* of their place and time. They had little hope of changing their circumstances.

Jesus knew that their chances of improving their situations or lifestyles or economics was not likely to happen. *But their circumstances were not definitive for their experience of life.* They could have *abundant life, peace that passes understanding, streams of living water, deep joy, and hope*… (not in transitory things)… hope in the spirit of God.

The values of the world they lived in… and the world that we live in have an overwhelming perspective. The world says your *wealth* matters, your *status* matters, your *education* matters, your *employment* matters, and you are measured by your success.

But Jesus said …

your wealth does not matter,

your status does not matter,

your education does not matter,

your employment record does not matter,

your police record does not matter,

no matter how much you have failed or not succeeded by the standards of the world you live in – you are valued by the Creator who gives life. Open your heart to God because God loves you. That’s the gospel.

Now listen to the beginning Beatitudes…

“Blessed, happy, and fortunate are the poor in spirit,

“Blessed, happy, and fortunate are those who mourn,

“Blessed, happy, and fortunate are the meek…

Over the years, as I read these blessings, I heard them as *terms under which you might be blessed*.

For instance, when I read *"Blessed are the pure in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,"* I thought, "Am I pure enough in spirit?"… maybe I should try to be more pure in spirit.

Or, when I read *"blessed are the peacemakers...,"* I thought, "Yes, I really should be more committed to making peace."

Do you follow me? We have read and heard these beatitudes as ***transactional***… *if* you do this, *then* you will be blessed.

But Jesus wasn’t teaching that… he was teaching something else.

Today we’re living with a heightened awareness of what people call *winners and losers*. You know what I mean.

If you have a lot of money you’re a winner…

if you live in Coronado you’re a winner…

if you get more votes than the other candidate you’re a winner…

Our culture celebrates winners. Tik-tok celebrity is a winner! Losing and losers are ignored or quickly forgotten. You don’t want to be a loser. You don’t want to associate with losers.

We have this heightened awareness for several reasons. But it’s not just today… people have always been this way. It’s common practice to avoid people who have tragedy in their lives … what do you say to them? …they must have done something wrong for it to happen, right?… stay away from people who are sick… stay away from weak and needy people.

The disciples were like that … they didn’t want to associate with those folks, either.

That’s the dynamic… *the labeling* … that Jesus was addressing… *he was talking about people who were perceived as not winning.* The poor in spirit? Those who mourn? The meek? Those folks are not winners and Jesus said … you’re *wrong… they are.*

These *not winning* folks who you think of as not-being-blessed *are* blessed.

As a matter of grammar, when Jesus spoke the beatitudes he spoke in the indicative… he was stating a fact… like when Walter Cronkite closed the news with his sign-off… he said: *"and that's the way it is."* That’s what Jesus was doing.

He said everyone is blessed. That’s the way it is. The lesson for the disciples was *they had responsibility was to let people know they were blessed.*

We all *need to know* that God has blessed us and welcomes us.

Now…

The disciples were soon to go do their thing and proclaim the good news of God’s favor on everyone – particularly for those who felt they didn’t have it. In his listing of Beatitudes, Jesus focus shifted from the people that the disciples would be talking to – to the disciples themselves. He said…

*Blessed are you (my disciples) when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven....*

So **this was the message**: everyone is in. Everyone is God’s blessed child.

Everyone is worthy in God’s sight. And those who are following Jesus who are doing alright in life? … we are to embrace the poor, the downtrodden, the hopeless, and the afflicted… and act on God’s behalf for their good.

Alright?… that’s the passage. What can it mean for you?

I’ve been reading and thinking about happiness. I think it was Robert Schuller who called the beatitudes the ***Be-Happy Attitudes*.** Can’t recall the sermon. But happiness, your happiness is in this equation.

So how happy are you? Rhetorical question. Scale of 1-10. Rate yourself. Where are you on your happiness scale? Any 10’s?

Maybe we can move up the happiness scale.

I’ve always thought of some person or event or thing *making* me happy.

If I have a big event and it goes well I’m happy.

If a bunch of people come to Church that makes me happy.

But that sort of happiness fades rapidly. It’s transactional. Something happens that I like – I’m happy. For a little while. It’s more of a thrill than a life characteristic.

The teacher I am reading, Anthony de Mello, says that we can have ongoing happiness. Daily happiness. Continual happiness. I want that – don’t you?

I had lunch with some friends this week and I asked them about happiness. Everyone had an opinion. *Something you’re working toward… doing the things you enjoy… helping people…* all good things.

But consider this…

*We have built our lives on the unquestioned belief that without (some combination of) money, power, success, approval, a good reputation, love, friendship, spirituality, or God, we cannot be happy. (de Mello)*

We’re *attached* to these things – or to specific manifestations of these things.

So when we don’t have them, or they don’t work out, or something is lost or taken away… we lose *happy*… maybe become *un*happy.

We live with attachments. But we don’t have to – we can let them go. Remember Jesus said, *if a person asks you for the shirt off your back give it to him?* That’s a simple example of letting go.

You don’t have to give away all your things to be freed of your attachment to them.

But if you did give them away and you weren’t attached it wouldn’t bother you to do it. Like the rich young ruler who asked Jesus… *What do I have to do to connect with God? Jesus said give your money away -* let go of your attachment. It wasn’t about the money – it was about his attachment.

The gospel says there is nothing wrong with any of these things – but if we want to be happy we’re not attached to them.

Your attachments do not determine the value or the quality of your life unless you have decided they do.

Your ability to let go of things – relationships – misplaced values – all the stuff that is not part of the spiritual economy of the gospel - your ability to do that determines how happy a person you are. So what do you hold onto? … God… and whatever else you decide.

This is simple – but it’s not easy. Lots to think about.

You’re a winner. You are God’s child. You have the blessing of life and you have a blessed life.

It’s yours.

You can let go of whatever is keeping you from moving higher on your own scale of happiness.