Μακαριός

The title for today's teaching comes from the Greek word which in English is translated as *"Beatitude."* It means *supremely blessed;* by extension *fortunate, well off, blessed* and *happy.*

1) *Happy are the oppressed, for to them belongs the kingdom of heaven.*
2) *Happy are those who grieve, for they shall be comforted.*
3) *Happy are those who have been humbled, for they shall inherit the earth.*
4) *Happy are those who hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be satisfied.*
5) *Happy are those who show mercy, for they shall be shown mercy.*
6) *Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*
7) *Happy are those who are peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.*
8) *Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

9) *Happy are you whenever they reproach you and persecute you and (lying) speak all kinds of evil concerning you for my sake.*

10) *Be joyful and be glad because in heaven your reward is great. For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who came before you.*

Matthew now presents a lengthy discourse given by Jesus to his disciples and by extension, to the crowd.

Matthew lists eight affirmations or *"beatitudes"* (possibly nine but the number is debated). These blessings are reserved for those who receive the Kingdom.

The form of these blessings is not unique to Matthew or the New Testament. Hellenistic literature applied these with minor variations, and we can see this form used in the Old Testament and even in the New Testament.

Μακαριός (happy or blessed) is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, and has not stood in the way of sinners, and has not sat in the seat of evil men.
Psalm 1:1 LXX

Μακαριός are they that keep judgment, and do righteousness at all times.
Psalm 105:3 LXX

Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; <u>blessed are all those who wait for him</u>.
Isaiah 30:18

And Μακαριός is the one who is not offended by me.
Matthew 11:6

And Μακαριός is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.
Luke 1:45

The structure of the *"blessings"* is patterned as follows.

1) *The initial blessing.*
2) *Designation of those called happy.*
3) *A clause that describes the reason for their happiness or blessing.*

There is also debate as to whether the 9th Beatitude is actually part of the previous blessings which is why in the Scriptural list above, I placed a space between the 8th and 9th blessings. If we look at the wording of the 1st and 8th Beatitudes, they both end with the same phrase creating bookends that include everything between them.

Happy are the oppressed, for to them belong <u>the kingdom of heaven</u>.

Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is <u>the kingdom of heaven</u>.

A support for this can also be found in that the 9th Beatitude repeats the persecution thought of in the 8th while shifting from the third person to the second person with the designation of *"you."*

Happy <u>are you</u> whenever they reproach <u>you</u> and <u>persecute you</u> and (lying) speak all kinds of evil concerning <u>you</u> for my sake.

More probably Jesus originally spoke the beatitudes using the second person plural form that we see in Luke, and the evangelist or someone before him, has altered the form to the third person plural to objectify these teachings and hence make clear their universal significance.
Hager – Matthew, page 90

The main thrust of these blessings is the grace-filled affirmation of the deep happiness of those who receive the Kingdom.

Happy are the oppressed, for to them belong the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5:3

I have used both the beatitude translations from the first page and also from the ESV which would read as a more common rendering. The purpose for using both here is to help clarify the meaning Matthew intended.

The Greek word Μακαριός (ma-ka-ree-os) has a Hebrew equivalent that is used some 46 times in the Hebrew cannon. It denotes deep happiness or blessedness, a characteristic of someone participating in the Kingdom announced by Jesus.

Rather than happiness in a mundane sense, the word refers to a deep inner joy of those who have long awaited the salvation promised by God and who now are beginning to experience such fulfilment.

Above, the word *"oppressed"* was used in place of *"poor in spirit."* In either case the word refers to the frame of mind that is characteristic of those literally poor.

Matthew differs from Luke by his addition of *"in spirit"* not to spiritualize the beatitude, but to focus on the phycological condition of the person, their frame of mind. Below are two phrases that were synonymous in Judaism at the time of Jesus.

The poor are almost always poor in spirit;
the poor in spirit are almost always poor.

In a day without assured assistance from governing authorities, the destitute had little recourse but reliance upon God.

For the needy shall always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.
Psalm 9:18

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.
Isaiah 57:15

The passage that may have been in the mind of Jesus and Matthew concerning this first beatitude is Isaiah 61:1. Luke uses this passage when Jesus begins his Galilean ministry.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted (poor); he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.
Isaiah 61:1

Happy are the oppressed, for to them belongs the kingdom of heaven.

The good news that has come to the poor is that the Kingdom belongs to them! Jesus is now present and therefore, the Kingdom has been inaugurated despite appearances to the contrary.

Happy are those who grieve, for they shall be comforted.
Matthew 5:4

To declare the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of recompense; <u>to comfort all that mourn</u>; that there should be given to them that mourn in Zion glory instead of ashes, the oil of joy to the mourners, the garment of glory for the spirit of heaviness; and they shall be called generations of righteousness, the planting of the Lord for glory.
Isaiah 61:2-3 LXX

Once again it is clear that the words of Isaiah are in mind and the One anointed by the Spirit in Isaiah 61:1 has come to comfort those who mourn. Matthew uses the same Greek word or *"mourn"* that is found in the Septuagint version of Isaiah 61:2 which reveals to us that as Isaiah 61 speaks of eschatological expectations for the downtrodden and poor, Jesus is the Messiah who is now presently bringing in the Kingdom of Heaven for the comfort of the downtrodden and poor.

The idea here is that those who mourn do so because of the seeming delay of God's judgment. They are, however, to rejoice in their troubled circumstances in that their salvation has found its beginning in the incarnate person of the Messiah.

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
Revelation 7:17

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.
Revelation 21:4

Happy are those who have been humbled, for they shall inherit the earth.
Matthew 5:5

This beatitude is a quotation from the psalter in the Septuagint.

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.
Psalm 36:11 LXX

The Greek word translated here as meek is found in the Hebrew wording of the Psalm to mean *poor, humble,* or *afflicted.* Therefore, what we have here is approximately the same thought as in the first beatitude.

What Jesus has in view here are not people who are submissive, mild and unassertive, but rather those who are humble in the sense of being oppressed. These are the ones who have been humbled by the injustice of the ungodly. Their reward in Christ and His Kingdom is now at hand.

Thus they shall inherit the land a second time, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head.
Isaiah 61:7

The Qumran community saw themselves as those about to experience the vindication that would come with messianic fulfillment. Given that Jesus is the one speaking in fulfillment of Psalm 36 and Isaiah 61, the context here which originally referred to the land promised to Abraham, now expands to include the regenerated earth which the afflicted will inherit.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel."
Matthew 19:28

Happy are those who hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall satisfied.
Matthew 5:6

This beatitude can be connected to Isaiah 55:1-2 and the psalms.

Ye that thirst, go to the water, and all that have no money, go and buy; and eat and drink wine and fat without money or price. Wherefore do ye value at the price of money, and give your labor for that which will not satisfy? Hearken to me, and ye shall eat that which is good, and your soul shall feast on good things.
Isaiah 55:1-2 LXX

Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.
Psalm 106:5 LXX

Judge me, O God, and plead my cause, against an ungodly nation; deliver me from the unjust and crafty man. For thou, O God, art my strength: wherefore hast those cast me off? And why do I go sad of countenance while the enemy <u>oppresses</u> me? Send forth thy light and thy truth; they have led me, and brought me to thy holy mountain, and to thy tabernacle.
Psalm 42:1-3 LXX

In keeping with the preceding, the fourth beatitude names those who are literally hungry and thirsty. These are the downtrodden and oppressed who hunger and thirst after the justice that is associated with God's eschatological reign.

The word *"justice"* in the beatitude does not mean personal righteousness. The context regards those who have experienced injustice and therefore are those who long for God to act. They are the ones who *hear the word of the Lord* and find satisfaction in Him.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."
John 6:35

Happy are those who show mercy, for they shall be shown mercy.
Matthew 5:7

The first four beatitudes were focused primarily on an attitude within the people themselves, this beatitude has its focus on the happiness of the actions of those people.

He that dishonors the needy sins: but he that has pity on the poor is most blessed.
Proverbs 14:21 LXX

He that laughs at the poor provokes him that made him; and he that rejoices at the destruction of another shall not be guiltless: but he that has compassion shall find mercy.
Proverbs 17:5 LXX

Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'
Matthew 9:13

What the poor and oppressed have not received from those in power, they should nonetheless, show to others. Jesus demonstrates this beatitude in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35.

What is important in this beatitude is the judgment upon the wicked oppressor.

For judgment is without mercy to ne who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.
James 2:13

Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Matthew 5:8

There is a strong similarity here to the psalter.

For none of them that wait on thee shall in anywise be ashamed: let them be ashamed that transgress without cause. Show me thy ways, O Lord; and teach me thy paths.
Psalm 24:3-4 LXX

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit in my inward parts.
Psalm 50:10 LXX

Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
Psalm 73:1 ESV

"Pure in heart" refers to the condition of the inner core of a person. This includes thoughts that motivate which anticipates how those who hear the words of Jesus internalize them in the core of their being.

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.
1 Timothy 1:5

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.
2 Timothy 2:22

for they shall see God – this reference is again eschatological in tone and stands in contrast to the Old Testament statement found in Exodus.

But, he said, "you cannot see my face, for a man shall not me and live."
Exodus 33:20

The righteous in the eschatological age will experience the vision of the LORD: they will see the face of God.

They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.
Revelation 22:4

even for the downtrodden and oppressed, for those to whom the good news of the kingdom has come, purity is required and is not something that can presupposed.
Hagner – Matthew, page 94

Happy are those who are peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.
Matthew 5:9

The word *"peacemakers"* occurs only here in the New Testament.

In the context of the beatitudes this seems directed against the Zealots, the group that used violence to push back against Roman oppression in the hopes of ushering in the Kingdom.

By their militarism, the Zealots demonstrated that they indeed, saw themselves as the *"sons of God."* Jesus, however, announces the Kingdom apart from any human effort and action while indicating that the *"peacemakers"* are the true *"children of God."*

Perhaps implicit here in the context of Rome is that though the Romans are Gentiles, the Kingdom Jesus brings has expanded beyond the misunderstanding of the Zealots to include those who were once separated from God and alien to his covenants.

And the LORD said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."
Hosea 1:9

And in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they will be called, "sons of the living God."
Romans 9:26

Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5:10

The beatitudes are a paradox and here they reach a conclusion in the 8th and 9th blessings. Not only are the poor and oppressed declared to be happy, but also those who experience active persecution for their righteousness.

for righteousness – points to the character of those who receive the Kingdom as it has been described in the previous 7 beatitudes. Their loyalty to God who has called them and their living in that loyalty has caused the persecution and suffering.

and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.
Matthew 10:22

The theme of persecution is important to Matthew's Gospel most likely because his readers are Jews who have come to follow Christ and experiencing the suffering that comes from such a decision. These beatitudes offer them a framework for how to endure.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share with Christ's sufferings, that you also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.
1 Peter 4:12-14

The paradox to the beatitudes is that the poor, oppressed, and persecuted, who are the most unlikely people, are the ones whom Jesus proclaims receive the Kingdom.

This may well have been the closing of the beatitudes since the phrase at its conclusion, *"for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* offers bookends in both the first beatitude and the eighth.

Happy are you whenever they reproach you and persecute you and (lying) speak all kinds of evil concerning you for my sake.
Matthew 5:11

Rather than being another blessing, this beatitude seems rather an elaboration of the one previous with the addition of the word *"reproach."* It also uses the second person *"you"* which was absent from the previous eight.

The type of reproach the readers may very well be experiencing come from the behavior one would expect from Jewish opponents: first toward Jesus, then toward the disciples, and now to the Jewish-Christan readers.

Understood in this context is that the persecutors do not speak the truth (lying) and their reproach of the believers is motivated by hatred.

Blessed are you <u>when people hate you</u> and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn you your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man.
Luke 6:22

Be joyful and be glad because in heaven your reward is great. For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who came before you.
Matthew 5:12

This joy and gladness, the happiness in the beatitudes is not shallow. This type of joy is deep and is submerged beneath the current of emotional happiness. Matthew even emphasizes this by repeating this concept with the seemingly redundant *"be joyful and be glad"* which has to be viewed as remarkable in connection with the reproach and persecution that is expected.

Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.
Revelation 19:7

This verse reminds us of why the persecuted and reproached for Christ can be joyful and glad, *"because in heaven your reward is great."*

It is self-evident that, in any persecution context, the reward spoken of must lie in the future, which is the meaning of "in heaven." That holds true here, too, but it is confidence about the future that can and should produce joy in the present in full contradiction of the present, painful circumstances. The kingdom is already theirs, hence, the appropriateness of the happy rejoicing in advance of the consummation. If this is a reward for their faithfulness under testing, it is also a reward that stems primarily not from their merit but from the grace of God, who gives the kingdom both in the present and the future.
Hagner – Matthew, page 95

The idea of reward is important to Matthew and even when he doesn't use the word explicitly, he still implies in the language he uses.

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.
Matthew 25:34

The Kingdom must be understood as something given by God. It is a reality that exists outside of human effort or achievement. The beatitudes then are predicated upon the experience of the grace of God. Those who receive this Kingdom are no more than those who simply receive the good news.

Being poor and oppressed, they can make no claim upon God for any achievement. Understand that it is the mercy of God that is stressed in the beatitudes as the teachings of Jesus.

It is the mercy of God coming in His Kingdom that sets the desire of these people to walk in the ways of righteousness, peacemaking and inner purity.

The recipients do not merit God's Kingdom; they merely await his mercy.

The mercy of God must be emphasized by Matthew; it is essential at the beginning of the teaching of Jesus ministry since this teaching concerns the righteous character of the recipients of the Kingdom.

The importance of using Old Testament texts in this teaching is to highlight the truth that the beatitudes are not a new law but simply a repeated utterance that in God's dealings with humanity, grace exceeds requirements.

Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'
Matthew 9:13

These declarations of happiness are to some extent a manifestation of realized eschatology. The remarkable tension throughout is, of course, caused by the temporary delay of the final consummation. In this interim period those who may appear to enjoy anything but the favor of God are paradoxically pronounced blessed. In their present condition, and even as they experience intense persecution, they are already accounted as supremely happy. Salvation has begun; their time has come, and this assurance of the of the future is meant to transform their present existence.
Hagner – Matthew, page 96