



Over the past couple weeks, two of my children have participated in orchestra concerts. Those can be very enjoyable because when they practice at home, I only hear their notes. Or, I hear them practice the same stanzas over and over and over again. But once I hear the entire orchestra coming together, it's like a light bulb moment: everything comes together!

Last week, we began our new series. Again, we'll begin in Matthew 5, move to Daniel 1-6, and then we'll come back to finish Matthew 5. If you weren't here last week, the reason for this series is because the elders want us to take time to get back to the basics of what it means to be a citizen of Jesus' Kingdom, and then learn how that applies to living in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Daniel 1-6 is a wonderful example to us of what it means to live as exiles in this world that is not our home. So, we're merging these texts in the hope that God will shape us as a church family, and that we would grow in pursuing his glory in this world.

My hope is that this series functions like an orchestra concert. We will be going slowly through Matthew 5, but I pray that we never miss the main point and truth that Jesus is teaching. You know, sometimes people can read Matthew 5, and they can pick and choose statements of Jesus – pulling it way out of context and removing it from the beauty of the whole. As I stated last week, some people can even take this sermon and start applying these truths to the political realm or to their unbelieving neighbors and friends. That's like playing an untuned instrument in the orchestra. It's not meant to be!

Out of this desire to ensure that we understand the main idea of Matthew 5, this week is also going to serve as an introduction into this series. In the sermon a week ago, I gave an introduction with basic information on Matthew 5, and I also highlighted the first Beatitude (i.e. – the first statement of blessing that Jesus pronounces). I'm going to reiterate things I stated last week, and also emphasize new things, too. I'm doing this because I want to ensure that we, together, truly understand the basic thrust of Jesus' intentions with this sermon. So, if you weren't here last week, I hope this sermon serves you well. If you were here last week, I imagine this sermon will reinforce things you heard and learned last Sunday.

With all this in mind, we're going to incorporate Matthew 4:17 with the first Beatitude, and the main idea of this sermon today is: **Those who repent are those who are blessed.**

## 1. Repent

Let's read 4:17 again: <sup>17</sup>From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 4:17.

When you hear the word “repent,” what comes up in your mind? In some ways, I think I have trauma with this word. The word “repent” was often used by angry preachers who were so mad about sin. I would feel so bad about all the wrong I’d done, and they’d say something like, “You need to repent! Repent!” But they didn’t define the word. I felt like the word meant, “Commit to never doing that sin ever again in order to prove to God you’re serious.” The idea of repentance seemed to be some type of penance to make things right. So, repentance felt very much like a word to “shame” me. Even to this day, when I hear the word “repent,” I have to work against the shaming type of mentality. Maybe this is how you feel when you hear the word “repent.” Maybe not.

Either way, what does this word mean? The word “repent” does involve a change of behavior, but from a Christian perspective, it’s primarily a word that is relational. God doesn’t simply want you to turn from bad behavior and turn to good behavior. Many religions teach that kind of repentance. Christian repentance is turning from your sinful self and turning to Jesus. To repent means to know you are the problem. It’s not simply other things around you that are the problem – you. When problems come your way, you’ve turned to destructive means in order to cope. You’ve turned to other pleasures instead of the Lord. To repent means you turn from this and turn to Jesus.

This, I think, is clear in these words in Matthew. When Jesus says “Repent,” he’s calling people to himself because he’s the King of the Kingdom that is near. This message is also basically identical to John the Baptist’s message. Do you remember the words of John the Baptist who said, “He must increase, but I *must* decrease” (Jn. 3:30). John the Baptist’s message was correct, and Jesus validates John’s words by preaching the same words. So we see that repentance recognizes the value of something else and says, “I need you, not *this*.” Jesus, the Light, has dawned on people. He’s caused people to come face-to-face with God and His will. Now, the people must make a decision. Are they going to continue to value darkness or are they going to value the Light?

What about you? What do you value? As I ask this question, I imagine some people could say, “Well, it sounds like Jesus just doesn’t want me to have fun anymore.” Or “What’s so wrong with doing this thing or that thing?” The reality is that each of these statements focus on you or your actions, but Jesus focuses on your heart and what you love. I genuinely want to press this point of love. The last two weeks, I’ve brought up the apostle Paul’s words that concluded 1 Corinthians 16: If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.<sup>2</sup> Jesus didn’t come into this world to condemn the world. The world is already bound in sinfulness. Jesus came to save. If someone has no love for Jesus, they reveal what they love, and it’s not him. As we continue going through the Beatitudes, **The real question you should be asking yourself is, “Do I (or, Why don’t I) love Jesus?”** Jesus came to sinners and calls sinners to be set free and rescued from the darkness of sin! His immense kindness should lead us to repent. Turn away from your love of self and stuff and turn to Jesus and find salvation. If you never have, God calls you even now to turn to him and trust the Lord.

Now, look back at verse 17. Jesus says, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This means that the prophesied rule of God over Jews and Gentiles has broken into this world. The Messiah is drawing hearts. By the way, I believe we can also legitimately say that the kingdom of heaven is at hand even today. As Jesus rules from Heaven and reigns through us, his followers, the Kingdom is near. We long and await the Kingdom to come, when it is finally complete, but we live under the Kingdom rule of Jesus now. So, very simply, what Jesus is saying is that there’s time right now to repent. The door’s been opened to you. Don’t miss the opportunity. Don’t wait another day. Why wait when you could have life?

---

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 16:22.

Why wait when there's no guarantee of repentance for tomorrow? The kingdom of heaven is right here, right now. Turn to Jesus as your Lord and Messiah and King.

This reality of repentance should shape our understanding of the Beatitudes and the entire Sermon on the Mount. As I said earlier, some people try to apply the Sermon on the Mount to politics or even to their unbelieving neighbors. That is not Jesus' intent. In Matthew 5:1, we're told that when Jesus sat, his disciples came to him, and the crowd was listening in. The crowds, throughout Matthew, represent a neutral group of people. Often they were awed at Jesus, but they didn't repent. As readers of Matthew, we're confronted by the crowd. Will we only be in awe of Jesus or will we turn to Jesus? But the disciples are those who have turned to Jesus. These disciples left their jobs because they trusted the Lord as who he is. So, Jesus speaks these statements of blessings to reveal to the disciples what they have received. As I say this, I hope you're picking up on the fact that the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount are intended for disciples of Jesus! Only those who have turned to Jesus experience these blessings, and only those who trust in Jesus have the assurance that they can live out the commands Jesus gives here.

So again, will you repent? Have you repented? But maybe you think, "Why do I really need to repent?" In other words, "Why do I need Jesus?"

## 2. We are blessed in Jesus alone.

Why repent? Because we are blessed in Jesus alone. This was a point I brought out last week, based on Ephesians 1:6, where Paul writes that "[God] has blessed us in the Beloved."<sup>3</sup> The Beloved is Jesus. And we can only be blessed in Jesus – nowhere else. Practically, I think you know this. There are many things we turn to for ultimate happiness, pleasure, peace, assurance – but we often find that those things do not give to the degree that we long. Sure, we get varying degrees of pleasure, but we're still left lacking. We can relate to Ecclesiastes and how often Solomon longs for the eternal in temporal things, but he can't find it here. The only One who can grant the eternal is Jesus. He is Eternal Life, and he gives it.

This is made clearer even in Psalm 1. Let me read the first few verses: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;<sup>2</sup> but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.<sup>4</sup> A couple verses later, David contrasts the blessed man with the wicked man. He writes, "The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;<sup>6</sup> for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."<sup>5</sup>

Notice how Psalm 1 begins: Blessed is the man. . . . It's similar to Jesus' Beatitudes: Blessed are the. . . . The problem is that many of us, when we read Psalm 1, we think to ourselves, "I want to be blessed. So, I'm going to make sure I don't walk in the counsel of the wicked, sit in the seat of scoffers. I will delight in God's Word. I'll memorize Scripture, and I'm definitely not going to be wicked." And, we can take this viewpoint with Jesus' Beatitudes, too. We say, "How do I become blessed?" Answer: I'll just be meek. I'll be poor in spirit. And if I do these things, I'll get the blessing. But that's the exact opposite way of how we should read these things.

---

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 1:6.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 1:1–2.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 1:4–6.

When you read Psalm 1 and read, “Blessed is the man,” and when you read all the things this blessed man does, you should quickly realize, “Wow, I’m not the blessed man. I have lived in sinful ways and I still live in sinful ways. I don’t delight in the law as I ought to. That means, left to myself, I won’t be able to stand in the judgment.” To not stand in the judgment means that you will be condemned. You will be judged for your sins and will have to endure the punishment your sins and sinfulness deserves.

But you might say, “Well, who is the Blessed Man and is there any hope for me then?” The Blessed Man shows up in Psalm 2. Psalm 2 begins actually stating that all the nations rage against God and his Anointed. Meaning, everyone is sinful. None of us fit the Blessed Man qualification. But at the end of chapter 2, we read, “**Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.**”<sup>6</sup> Do you hear that last line? Blessed are all who take refuge in the Son. Who’s the Son? Jesus. We are blessed in Jesus. Why? Because he was the one who took the wrath that we deserved. On the cross he took it. And in rising from the dead, he conquered death, too! If you turn to him in need, he won’t punish you. He will embrace you and forgive you. He took everything on himself, in the place of sinners like you and me! Repent! The Kingdom of Heaven is near. Therefore, this brings us to the final point:

### **3. Blessed one, embrace your spiritual poverty.**

<sup>3</sup>“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>7</sup>

The Beatitudes are not statements of how you can be blessed. They are statements of fact to those who have repented. And, I don’t think it’s a coincidence that the first statement is “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” To be poor in spirit means to be spiritually bankrupt. This isn’t a statement of how much money is in your bank account. This is a statement of how you spiritually have *nothing* to offer to God. As a matter of fact, apart from Jesus, you can do nothing.

Doesn’t this statement sound odd? The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are spiritually bankrupt? I don’t know about you, but I don’t think an earthly kingdom could survive if every citizen was bankrupt. Societies around the globe are careful about the people they welcome in. They don’t want to spend so much money on individuals that won’t also contribute to that society. So, think about Jesus’ words here. And think about being a first century listener to this sermon. It would seem like the Pharisees and Sadducees actually have something to offer the Kingdom. They know a lot about the Scriptures. They know how to dress and act, and they behave really well in the world. They look and act spiritual, too. But Jesus says those people aren’t qualified for the Kingdom.

All of what has been said so far reminds me of the story Jesus tells of the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke 18. The Pharisee goes to pray and he thanks God he’s not like other people who seemed to have greater sins than he did. But the tax collector comes in, beating his chest and crying out, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Who do you relate to in this story? Do you find yourself more like a Pharisee who trusts in God’s kindnesses given to you and then simply thanks God you’re not worse off? Or, do you realize that left to yourself, you’re a sinner? Do you know that the sinner is the one accepted and blessed by the Lord? This should bring great joy to you. If you feel your sinfulness and weakness, know that Jesus came to bless sinners. To bring forgiveness and wholeness and purity and grace to sinners!

---

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 2:12.

<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:3.

Jesus doesn't want you to prove yourself to him. You can't. And so, we hear Jesus' words to the listeners of this story. He tells them that the sinner walked away justified. Meaning, the sinner walked away being declared righteous in God's sight.

Do you see this? You need to turn to Jesus because Jesus is the only One in whom we find blessedness! Oh, and by the way, if you recall, the term "blessed" here in Matthew 5 refers to being in the highest possible state as a human being. No matter your circumstances in this life. No matter how much or how little money. No matter if you are married, single, have children, or have none, to be in Christ is to be in the supreme state of blessedness! This ought to be a truth we preach to our souls daily. If you've repented of your sins, you're blessed, Christian!

As I said last week, this ought to shape how you live life and even view yourself. Too often, I think Christians try to put on a "Christianity" exterior to show that they're really great, but the very first characteristic of a citizen of Jesus' Kingdom is "spiritual bankruptcy." That means we all admit and embrace our spiritual poverty. Did you know that? And, as I said last week, if you think to yourself, "Ok, I'll just try hard to be spiritually poor," you've missed the point. You can't try to be spiritually bankrupt. To be spiritually bankrupt means you realize there's nothing you can do to attain. You come as you are.

Also, this Beatitude (and the remaining ones) aren't simply speaking of things that happen once and are over. But they have a continuing aspect. So it is with our spiritual bankruptcy. You and I are always needy of the Lord. And we are always blessed in Christ. We are both bankrupt in and of ourselves, but we have been blessed with all the riches in heavenly places in Christ Jesus!

So, how does this shape us? How does Repentance, Looking to Jesus and Embracing our Spiritually poverty shape our lives? Here are some potential applications:

**Cultivate love for Jesus.** The book of Matthew continually calls people to respond to Jesus. If repentance is relational, and if the Bible states that we love because God first loved us – then knowing that he accepts us completely in spite of our sins and brokenness, and that he promises to heal us and grow us – then we ought to be amazed by his love and love him in return. Oh, how I pray that we as Ventura Baptist Church wouldn't simply be a people who know all the doctrinal information in the Bible. I pray that we would love the Lord. I pray that our Bible reading would be fueled by God's love and that we would love him in greater ways. I pray that our prayers would be motivated by the love of God and that we would love him more. I pray that our lives would be fueled by love of God and love for him and others. Isn't this what Jesus says? The summation of the law is loving God and loving neighbor. And, Paul's prayer was that we would know the height, breadth, depth of the love of God in Christ! Listen, if you have trusted Christ, you are part of the Kingdom! You, poor in spirit though you are, are a Kingdom citizen. Love your King more and more!

**Remove spiritual "showiness" and "self-condemnation."** The point of Jesus is that we're not showy, and we're not focused on ourselves. Both the Pharisees and those who walk around with a self-pity mindset are not focused on Christ. They're focused on themselves and what they either have done or have not done. Many times, those who live in self-pity are trying to figure out ways to make things up to God. Maybe that's you. You think, "Well, if I'm really sorry, I'd do this or that thing and then God will be fine with me." No! Jesus welcomes the poverty stricken in spirit – not those who think they can prove themselves. On the other hand, there are those who take pride in their spiritual accomplishments. They think to themselves, "Well, I read my Bible daily, pray an hour a day, serve in the church. I'm pretty good!" And when you look at others, you think, "God, I thank you I'm not like them!" NO! That's not spiritually bankrupt. That's the height of spiritual pride. If we are blessed in Christ, and if the

characteristic of a kingdom citizen is spiritual bankruptcy, may we daily remind ourselves of our need for our Savior, and also of our Savior who meets us in all of our needs!

**Boast in your weakness.** Paul talks about this in his pains and struggles. When we are weak, we are strong. Last week, I said that it seems many times we can think spiritual maturity is being able to do things without God's help, and we try to say, "Look God, I can do this on my own." But God's response is essentially, "Why would you ever want to do something without me?" Ventura, spiritual maturity is living in such a way that we are always doing by depending on the Lord. We're weak. He's strong!

**In living as one who is poverty stricken in spirit, God receives all the glory because he's the One who is doing all the work in and through us. And we receive the grace, help and love we need. Therefore, it's true: those who repent are those who are blessed because Jesus is the Blessed Man who gives blessings to all who are poor in spirit.**