

Lesson 3

The Gospel of Matthew

Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven

Listed Scriptures

Mt 5-7; Ac 13:47; Phil 3:20; Eph 2:11-22; Col 1:12-23; 1 Pet 2:9-10;
1 Jn 2:1-18

Lesson Aim

- 1) To enable students to learn about the right attitudes a citizen of the kingdom of God should have
- 2) To enable students to understand that as people of God we need to be separate from the world

Memory Verse

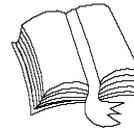
"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

(Mt 7:21)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Matthew 20-28

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



Please refer to the Bible Backgrounds in Lessons 1 and 2 for additional information on the Gospel of Matthew (the first three lessons of this book are Bible studies based on the Gospel of Matthew).



Draw up a list of the things that make a person a good citizen of his or her country. How do these traits differ from citizens of the kingdom of God?



The Beatitudes

Because of the nature of this Bible study, the **Check for Understanding Questions** are located after each beatitude.

Every kingdom has a king or ruler who governs his subjects. In the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ is King. Who are the citizens? When Pilate asked the Lord Jesus if He was king of the Jews, the Lord agreed. Does this mean that the Lord's subjects are only the Jews of this world? Apostle Paul gave a very clear explanation regarding this. He said, "for He is not a real Jew who is one outwardly,... He is a Jew who is one inwardly" (Rom 2:28-29). This means that all those who have been baptized into Christ have become the descendants of Abraham. They are the spiritual Jews, the citizens of the kingdom of God (Gal 3:27-29).

Since the Lord is king, the kingdom is operated according to His laws and principles. What then are the laws of the heavenly kingdom? The Lord says, "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day" (Jn 12:48). Since the teachings of the Lord Jesus are the laws of the heavenly kingdom, as citizens we should honor our King by doing whatever He says.

Matthew chapters 5-7 records the "Sermon on the Mount" given by the Lord on a hillside near Capernaum. In this longest-recorded sermon, the Lord Jesus expounds on what is in essence the law of the heavenly kingdom (Mt 5-7). He begins by describing the characteristics He looked for in His followers, and He gives directions on how to live as faithful subjects in His kingdom. The sermon begins with the "Eight Beatitudes." The beatitudes are named from the Latin word "Beatus," which means "blessed." The Greek term means "happy, fortunate." Each beatitude tells us how citizens of the kingdom should live in order to be blessed. Each beatitude

values are eternal, and the world's values are temporal. According to worldly standards, the types of people that the Lord describes don't seem to be particularly "blessed" because the beatitudes don't promise laughter, pleasure, or earthly prosperity. Instead, the blessed are those who are spiritually satisfied and rewarded.

a. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:3)

The spiritually poor are those who are "poor" or deficient inwardly. Those who are full will not desire to be filled. Only those who are poor will desire for more (Lk 6:20). Matthew 11:25 records how the truth is hidden from the wise and revealed to the babes. The wise are those who feel they already know enough and have lost the desire to pursue further. The babes, on the other hand, are spiritually "poor." They are those who are humble, inquisitive and open to God's truth. It is to such people that the Lord reveals His truth.

The Ethiopian eunuch is an example of such a person. Although he was the treasurer of Ethiopia, a man of power, knowledge, and status, the eunuch humbly admitted his ignorance when Philip asked if he understood what he was reading. Because of his humility, God opened his heart to understand the words of God and receive salvation (Ac 8:26-40). From this example we can see that the eunuch was "poor in spirit." Those who are poor in spirit understand and know their weaknesses. They realize their deficiencies and limitations and thus have a desire to better themselves. Apostle Paul was a great and accomplished worker of the Lord who received many divine revelations, yet in 1 Corinthians 13:9, he writes "for our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect." Paul recognized that what he knew was still inadequate. He knew how to forget about the past and to continue to strive forward in perfecting himself.

How are the "poor in spirit" blessed? The Lord promises them the kingdom of heaven. Notice how there is the use of the present tense in the first and last beatitudes. The intervening beatitudes describe the reward in the future tense. Those who are poor in spirit are those who recognize their inadequacies and pursue after spiritual fulfillment. When we pursue after God's word and the indwelling of His Spirit, when our hearts conform to God's will and we make God King, then the kingdom of God has come into our hearts.

Questions:



1. Suggest ways we can be poor in spirit.
2. How does the kingdom of heaven begin here and now if we are poor in spirit?

b. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Mt 5:4)

2 Corinthians 7:10 tells us that, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death." Here it mentions two types of grief: godly and worldly grief.

Like the widow of Nain who mourned over the death of her only son (Lk 7:11-15), people grieve over the death or loss of people or things dear to them. Sometimes the grief and sorrow over a loss affect a person so much that in some cases, these feelings lead to death. Godly grief however, leads not to death but to salvation. Godly grief is when a person mourns and grieves over sins and wrongdoings. The Bible records the different reactions that people have towards their sins. When Samuel confronted Saul about disobeying God's commands, Saul tried to justify his wrongdoings (1 Sam 13:11-14)). In contrast, when Nathan the prophet pointed out David's sins, David did not try to cover up his sins or excuse himself. Rather, he repented bitterly (Ps 51:1-4). David mourned and wept each night over his sins (Ps 6:6). In God's sight, this type of mourning is most precious.

Why are those who mourn blessed? Because they will be comforted. If we come before the Lord in our times of grief, we will receive comfort from the Lord. Prior to meeting the Lord Jesus, the widow of Nain may have tried to seek comfort from the people or the things around her. But only when she encountered the Lord did her grief turn to joy. The Lord knew her sorrow and bitterness, and He comforted her by raising her son from the dead. If God comforts us of our worldly grief, how much more will He comfort us if we come before Him mourning for our sins? This is by far more precious in the sight of God. Psalm 51:17 says, "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." And in Isaiah 66:2, the Lord says, "But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." When we come before the Lord with our grief, He will wipe away our tears and forgive us of our sins (Jer 15:19; Is 30:15).



Questions:

1. What things do we mourn over?
2. Have we ever mourned or grieved for our sins or the sins of others?
3. Why is mourning for our sins precious in the sight of God?

c. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth (Mt 5:5)

The meek are those who are gentle and humble. They are patient and not easily

angered (Prov 16:32). They do not look to their self-interests but give way to others.

The incident where Isaac gave way to the herdsman of Gerar three times is a great example of one who is meek (Gen 26:12-22). Here, we can see that biblical attitudes are very different from those of society. Today, we may be encouraged to fight for what is ours by right. We may be taught to stand up for ourselves and not allow others to "push us around." Society often requires us to have a more self-assertive and aggressive approach. However, in this beatitude the Lord reminds us that it is the meek who are blessed and not those who seek revenge themselves. In fact, we do not need to retaliate or "get even." It is considered a blessing if, because of our meekness, we are disadvantaged or wronged. In the end, God will fight for us and give us more than what we lost.

How are the meek blessed? The Lord Jesus promises us that those who are meek will inherit the earth. Here, "the earth" could refer to actual physical land or a spiritual inheritance. In Genesis 13:8-18, Abraham offered Lot first choice of the land. When Lot saw the Jordan valley, he chose the best land for himself. While Abraham lost out because of his generosity, God repaid him with much more land than what he had given up.

However, today, the land that we inherit may not be a physical land but a spiritual one. James 1:21 tells us, "to receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save our souls." The seed is the word of God. If we receive the word of God with a meek and humble heart, it will bring us eternal life and we will receive our heavenly inheritance (2 Tim 3:15).

Questions:



1. What does it mean to be meek?
2. How do worldly and biblical attitudes on meekness differ?
3. Have you ever been in a situation where you were treated unfairly? What did you do? What was the outcome?

d. Blessed are those who thirst and hunger for righteousness' sake, for they shall be filled (Mt 5:6)

Our bodies have basic needs and desires. When we are hungry, we long for food. When we are thirsty, we desire water. These are the very things that will satisfy our needs. Our inner being has needs and wants too. However, if we use material things to satisfy our inner hunger and thirst, we find that those needs will not be ful-

filled. We need to find the right things that will satisfy the needs of our soul. After the Lord Jesus fed the five thousand, the people came looking for Him again the next day. When they found that He was not at the place where He fed the five thousand, they got into boats and traveled from Tiberias to Capernaum, which was on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. When they found the Lord, He told them not to pursue after physical food, but spiritual food (Jn 6:27). The people were hungry and thirsty for physical satisfaction. They went through great pains to find the Lord Jesus, which showed their intense desire and need. But they sought for the wrong things. People today thirst for more wealth, achievements, and pleasures. But this beatitude says blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Righteousness here refers to doing God's will and imitating Christ. We should have an intense desire and longing to be like the Lord Jesus, and to be right with God. The Psalmist wrote, "as a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?" (Psalm 42:1-2; 119:20)

What blessings will those who hunger and thirst for righteousness receive? They will be filled. When the people came to the Lord, their motive for seeking Him was to gain physical blessings. Such material blessings and enjoyment are temporal and cannot fully satisfy our inner thirst and hunger. It is only when we pursue after the righteousness of God that we are truly satisfied. Through His word and His spirit, our souls will be refreshed, supported, and strengthened (Is 55:1-3; Jer 31:25; Ps 81:16).



Questions:

1. What does "righteousness" here refer to?
2. What kind of attitude do the words "hunger and thirst" suggest that we should have?
3. Was there ever a time when you strongly desired God and His words?

e. Blessed are those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy (Mt 5:7)

The merciful are those who have compassion and sympathy for the misfortunes and afflictions of others. Being merciful is not only a state of mind, but it is manifested in action. During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus not only demonstrated great power, but many of His miracles were motivated by the love and compassion that He had for the people. He pitied them, for they were like "sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36; Mt 14:14; 15:32). Often we are selective over who we show love and mercy to. The Lord sets us a good example by reaching out to whoever was

in need regardless of background, gender, or status (Mt 14:14; 15:32).

How are the merciful blessed? They shall obtain mercy. This tells us that by being merciful to others, or showing kindness to others, we are in fact showing mercy to ourselves, because we in turn will be shown mercy. In the story of Rahab and the two spies who went out to spy the land of Canaan, Rahab and her family were spared of their lives because she showed kindness to the two spies (Josh 2:1-14; 6:22-25). Ecclesiastes 11:1, tells us that if we cast our bread upon the waters, which is to have mercy and kindness to others, we will find it again after many days. "For the measure we give will be the measure we get back" (Luke 6:38).



Questions:

1. Who needs our mercy and compassion?
2. In what ways has the Lord been merciful to you?

f. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Mt 5:8)

The pure in heart are those who are without sin and impurity. They have a close relationship with God and are washed clean with the truth and the spirit of God (Heb 12:14; 1 Jn 3:1-3). From this we know that to be close to God, we must have a pure heart and lead a holy life. Without a pure heart we cannot lead holy lives. Psalms 24:3-4 reads, "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully." We should preserve our hearts more than anything, for from it flow the springs of life (Prov 4:23).

How are the pure in heart blessed? They can see God. Not only will they see God every day in the future (1 Jn 3:2-3), but they can see God in this present life.

There are different ways that we can see God. The Bible records how God appeared or spoke to different characters. The Bible does not specify how, but God may have appeared to them in dreams and visions (Job 33:14), or through a voice (1 Kgs 19:9-13).

Another way that we can see God is when we see the abidance of God in our lives. When Joseph was made the overseer of Potiphar's house, he was so successful and prosperous in everything he did that even his master, who did not worship God, saw that God was with him (Gen 39:1-4). We realize that we do not have to see visions or dreams to see God. In fact, when we perceive the blessings and abidance of God in our lives, our families, or our work, and when our prayers

are heard, we have seen God. This in itself is most valuable.

Questions:



1. How can we be pure in heart?
2. Have you “seen” God in your daily life?

g. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Mt 5:9)

Peacemakers are those who actively seek to end bitterness and bring about reconciliation. Peacemakers are: 1) those who make peace with God 2) those who make peace with others 3) those who cause others to reconcile 4) those who cause others to reconcile with God. After the fall of Adam and Eve, man was cast out from God’s presence. Man made himself hostile with God. And only through the blood of Christ can man be reconciled with God and reestablish the former relationship he once had (Col 1:20). Thus, we are peacemakers when we make peace with our God. Furthermore, we are entrusted with the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-19), and it is our duty to preach the gospel to those separated from God. Not only that, but we have to seek harmony with all men (Heb 12:14) and settle disputes among the brethren. Recognizing that Satan works to destroy peace everywhere, we, the good soldiers of Jesus Christ, must work to maintain peace between God and our fellow man.

How will the peacemakers be blessed? As peacemakers we will obtain a rich reward as sons of the Most High God. When we make peace with the Lord, we return to our former status as sons of God. Isaiah 9:6-7 records how the Lord Jesus came as “the Prince of Peace.” As the ultimate sacrifice, He brought peace between God and humanity. Therefore, by making peace with God and others and by preaching the gospel of peace, we will be called sons of God because we imitate our Lord and reflect our Father’s character.

Questions:



1. How do you resolve conflicts?
2. Explain how we are sons of God by being peacemakers.
3. Who should we make peace with?

h. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake (Mt 5:10)

Persecution can arise for many reasons. People may be harassed or oppressed due to differences in race, religion or beliefs. In the Bible, there are many characters

who were persecuted for the sake of Christ and the gospel (1 Pet 2:19-20).

Why do we face persecution? The Lord once said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36). As followers of Christ, we do not belong to the world. Our faith, values and lifestyle are different from those of the world. Because of this, we stand out from the world and are hated by the world (Jn 15:18-19; 2 Cor 6; 14ff). Furthermore, the Lord tells us that as long as we are on earth, we will have tribulations, and we are destined to suffer (Jn 16:33; 1 Thess 3:3). Since the Lord suffered and was persecuted, we should not be surprised when we too have to undergo the same trials. As servants of Christ, we should arm ourselves with the same mentality as Christ, our master (1 Pet 4:1; 12; Jn 15:20). Recognizing this, we need not be afraid of persecution but should consider it a deep spiritual joy and honor when we suffer for the Lord (Jn 1:2; Ac 5:40; Ac 13:49-52).

What blessing will the persecuted have? To those who endure trials, the Lord promises the kingdom of heaven, where they will receive great rewards. Therefore, our present suffering fades in comparison with the eternal glory that we are being prepared for.

Questions:



1. Have you ever had to stand up for what you believe in despite opposition?
2. Were you ever teased or slandered because of your faith? How did you feel? Did you take the easy way out?
3. The Bible tells us to rejoice and be glad when we are persecuted. How can we rejoice when being insulted or persecuted?

Teaching Tips

You may wish to have the students discuss in groups and complete the table on the following page (also found in the Student’s Workbook), which serves as a good summary of the main points in each beatitude.

Beatitude	Write the beatitude in your own words	Name an example from the bible that illustrates this attitude	What are the clashing worldly values?	What blessings are promised?	How can we develop this in our daily lives?
Poor in spirit					
Mourn					
Meek					
Thirst and hunger for righteousness					
Merciful					
Pure in Heart					
Peacemakers					
Persecuted for righteousness					

were a nation separate and different from the rest of the nations. They were God's own people, and only to them were the laws and commands of God given. God called the Israelites so that they could bring God's qualities to the world. Similarly, God has called us so that we can be the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13-16). He has asked us not to conform to the world but has set us as a light to the Gentiles, that we should bring the salvation of God to the ends of the earth (Ac 13:47).

Questions to think about:

1. Has there been a time when others could see that you were different - a citizen of heaven?
2. Have you felt inclined to conform to those around you?
3. Do you feel proud or ashamed to be a citizen of heaven?
4. What makes it hard to be God's citizens in this world?
5. How can we be the salt and light of the world?

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING



The questions can be found in the Bible Study section, after each beatitude.

LIFE APPLICATION



Let Others See Jesus in You

Numbers 23:9 reads, "for from the top of the mountains I see him, from the hills I behold him; lo, a people dwelling alone, and not reckoning itself among the nations." Throughout history, the chosen people of Israel

REFLECTION & PRAYER



The Lord Jesus has given us very specific instructions on how to live and act as citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

1. Do we qualify to be in God's kingdom?
2. Which beatitude is manifested in our lives?
3. Are our attitudes a carbon copy of the world, or do they reflect the ideals to which the Lord Jesus has called us?