

Matthew 5:1-12

Unless you're a ventriloquist, the first thing you do when you prepare to speak is to open your mouth. It's just understood. That's what you do. Perhaps that's why the New International Version (the version of the Bible printed on your insert) leaves out the phrase—"and opening His mouth." The translators felt it wasn't necessary. But it's in the Greek. Matthew wrote it down—"and opening His mouth, Jesus began to teach them."

Why draw attention to something so obvious? Perhaps for this reason...Matthew doesn't just want us to listen to the words that are said—he wants us to pay close attention to who it is that is saying them. The Beatitudes are wonderful words for us to hear; but they do us little good unless we focus on the mouth which is speaking these words. The mouth is that of our Lord, Jesus Christ. And when God speaks, we listen. Let's hear these Beatitudes of our Lord.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

When God speaks, He has two different words for us to hear. In the Bible there is His word of Law and there is His word of Gospel. We do the same thing with others. We may speak a word of command, and we may speak a word of encouragement or comfort. The Ten Commandments are God's word of Law to us. His word of Gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Now looking at the Beatitudes which you just heard, which one are they? Are they Law or are they Gospel? Are these words of command that we should obey, or are they words of comfort and encouragement which tell of God's love for us? How would you answer that question?

We should take note of how others have answered it. The Thompson Chain Reference Bible captures, perhaps best of all, how many understand these words of Christ. Here's what it says: Each Beatitude (or blessing) is a step by which we reach the higher altitudes of spiritual life. There are eight Beatitudes and there are eight steps. The first step is being poor in spirit, the next, we mourn, then, we become weak, and so forth. Jesus has given us these eight steps to climb in our walk with Him—being merciful, being peacemakers, being pure in heart...It is important that we keep climbing these steps.

In other words, the Beatitudes are depicted as words of Law. If we obey them, then we shall receive the blessings that are attached to them. To attain these wonderful blessings we need to keep climbing these steps. And that, dear friends, is a frightening thought—because we can't. We poor sinners cannot climb these steps to attain God's blessings. We are not so much climbing these steps as we are stumbling over them.

Look at your insert with me and see if this isn't so. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." We could translate this—blessed are the "humble" in spirit. Already we trip over this first step, for we are so often proud in spirit. When you children ignore the instructions of your parents and others who teach you, you are proud in spirit. You are not humbling yourself to their God-given authority. We adults also struggle with true Christian humility, by the way we relate to our spouse, our government, our God.

"Blessed are those who mourn."—who mourn with sorrow over their sin. But we so often delight in our sins. We enjoy disobeying the Lord. Our sinful flesh wants to satisfy our own sinful pleasures, and this is, too often, how we live.

"Blessed are the meek." Meekness is strength with discipline. And yet we are so often undisciplined with our life. We lose our temper so easily. We rise up with anger when others don't live by our standards.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Yet we so often hunger and thirst after unrighteousness. We crave that which is wrong, not that which is right.

"Blessed are the merciful." How often do we rather hold grudges? Is there someone, right now, you are unwilling to forgive? We're not merciful—so often we are unmerciful.

"Blessed are the pure in heart." But our hearts are sick with sin and its lusts. "Blessed are the peacemakers." And yet we, so often, cause tension—not peace. We bring strife and trouble because of our selfish living.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness." And yet it is often we who are persecuting others. And when we are persecuted, it's usually not because we're doing right, but wrong.

The truth is that I am none of these things...poor in spirit, mournful over sin, merciful, pure in heart...and that is frightening. Because how, then, shall I receive the blessings attached?—the kingdom of heaven, comfort, being shown mercy, seeing God, being called a son of God? I'm not climbing these steps toward a higher level of Christian maturity, I'm stumbling over them. If these are laws to obey, I'm not keeping any of them—not one.

And that's why, dear friend, we need to look at the mouth from which these words come. It is the mouth of Jesus who speaks these Beatitudes. And that makes all the difference in the world; for not only did Jesus speak these Beatitudes—He lived them. Was there anyone more "poor in spirit" than Jesus? No one. He emptied Himself and humbly followed the will of His Father, going to the cross. Jesus mourned with sorrow over our sins, and then He did something about it—He died to forgive them. Jesus was the meekest of all, for He had the strength of God and yet He used it to serve others. Jesus hungered and thirsted for righteousness. Jesus is the merciful one. Jesus alone is pure in heart. Jesus is the peacemaker. He is called the "Prince of peace." He has established peace between God and you. Was there anyone more persecuted than Jesus?

Friend, these Beatitudes are not laws for us to obey, for then we must say, "I have kept none of them." But, from the mouth of Jesus, listen to what He says to you: My child, all

of these things I have done for you. And all the blessings attached, my child, in connection with Me—they are yours.

We cannot climb these steps to receive the blessings; but Christ Jesus climbed them for us. He climbed higher and higher with His life of obedience—higher and higher to the top of Mt. Calvary, where He was placed on a cross, and there He died for you and me.

Each one of these blessings is yours in Christ. Even if you don't feel blessed, through Jesus you are blessed. Your marriage may be in trouble; your finances a wreck; your friends may hate you, and yet, you are blessed in Christ your Savior. Yours is the kingdom of heaven in Christ. In Him you will be comforted. In Christ you will inherit the earth; you will be satisfied; you will receive mercy. In Him you will see God; you will be called sons of God. In Jesus everything is yours. For in Him you are poor in spirit. In Christ you are pure in heart; in Him all things are yours.

Many of you will watch the Super bowl next week. And when the final gun sounds, one team will be victorious. But not only will that team be victorious, so will the fans who cheer for their team. They can rightly say, "We won! We won!"—even though they never caught one pass or made one tackle. Even though we are but poor sinners who trip and stumble our way through life, we've won! The blessings of these Beatitudes belong to us because in Christ we are victorious! Amen.