

Happy

Vineyard Church of Milan

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God is arriving for accursed people with blessing and involving himself in (previously) impossible struggles with grace. That's good news, isn't it?

Here's the question for us today. Do we believe it? **Will we live as if that's true?** Because if God is genuinely present through his son Jesus in the middle of our financial struggles, our sickness, our addictions, our fraying relationships, our failures, our grief, our depression, our fears, our uncertainty about the next right step, our regrets about our mistakes, the tragedies befalling our world, the biggest problems we face as a community, a country, a world, **then certain responses make sense.** Then working hard to develop habits that make sense in that kind of world is worthwhile. But if God is not arriving for accursed people with blessing and not involving himself in impossible struggles with grace, or we don't *believe, trust* that he is, then **why not live the way we've so often lived,** trusting our own instincts and not Jesus' announcement of good news?

This is the fundamental question for a human being who encounters Jesus' announcement of the kingdom, his brand of good news. In light of it, **do you repent and believe the good news,** or do you go on living as if nothing is new?

Now when Jesus saw the crowds [...large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him...], he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,

for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:5-12

This is the full on, say what?, you'd better not be messing with me, get out of here, bring it on, preach it brother announcement of the good news of God's kingdom. The life of God, the blessing of God for everyone who might be considering themselves counted out. Considering themselves cursed. Considering themselves forever on the outside looking in.

Not **do this, and then** you... Or **become this, and then** you... These aren't even timeless truths... the poor in spirit are often insurmountably far from God, mourners often go uncomforted, the meek often get trampled and end up with nothing but leftovers.

No. This is a late breaking news bulletin and it's wonderful news. **Something is changing right now.** This blessing is the case for you in **the kingdom of God that is near, here, approaching, encroaching, present in and through me.** Blessing. The life of God, yours. People just like you, happy in this kingdom. Possessing this kingdom. Inheriting the earth. Satisfied. Experiencing mercy. Seeing God. Revealed as his kids. Rewarded. And it's all coming to pass though the work Jesus is doing.

[don't some of us need this kind of good news...?]

It's **no accident** this announcement shows up here in Matthew 5. Matthew wants us to see that **Jesus is announcing God's new covenant** with humanity. In the first covenant, the covenant that established Israel as the people of God, the people of Israel came **out of Egypt**, through **the red sea, into the wilderness, and up to a mountain** where God gave them a solemn covenant. On that mountain, God gave them a list of blessings and curses that they would experience if they were obedient or disobedient. Matthew showed Jesus coming **out of Egypt** in chapter 2, **through the waters of baptism and the wilderness of temptation** in chapters 3 and 4, and **now here on this mountain**, he is announcing the new covenant that establishes a new humanity, the people of the kingdom of heaven.

Here's how it works, Jesus is revealing. I'm telling you good news about the kingdom of heaven. Only this time it's not about obeying a set of laws. It's **about receiving** the good news announced by, demonstrated by, and embodied in me. This *is* what the kingdom of heaven is like. *This* is what it means for you, for the world, that the kingdom of God is arriving in and through me.

You see one reality around you – the beautiful, the powerful, the rich, the smart, the cruel, the privileged getting ahead at the expense of the common, the weak, the poor, the uneducated, the kind, the underprivileged – **and you live as if it's just how things work. As if you can see clearly. As if you understand what it means.** But it's not true; it *isn't* how things work, not in the world that's being invaded by God's kingdom. Not anymore. Not for long enough to really matter. And **you're not seeing things clearly.** Not as clearly as you think. Not as clearly as you need to. And **you don't understand what what you see means.** Not as well as you think. Not as well as you need to. What you've observed may have held sway for a time, may have been true so far as it goes, may have made certain promises, **but it's time is up**, it's truth has been revealed as a twisting of the deeper truth, it's promises are in the process of being unmasked as the lies that they are.

So turn away from it. **Turn towards the truth I'm showing you.** Turn

towards the truth that I am. Believe it. Believe me. Trust it. Trust me. Live like a person would who knows what I know about the kingdom of heaven, about the world under the influence of the Father in the heavens.

The choice is yours. Hear what I'm saying and write it off as fanciful thinking and go on dying as if nothing has changed. Or hear what I'm saying and **let the energy, the life, the power present in this good news course through your body**, your mind, your heart, your soul. Let the life of the heavens animate your every action, every thought, every decision, every relationship. You'll taste the life of God. You'll be blessed. **Happy.**

Think about **who** is writing this good news account. Matthew, previously a tax collector working for the illegitimate king of Israel, Herod, and for the oppressive occupying empire of Rome. He's **a Jewish man**, someone who was supposed to have been putting his trust and hope in YHWH, the creative and sustaining God of Israel. But he'd looked around when he was young, and saw that **those who trusted in God were getting the short end** of the stick and the heavy end of the boot. The faithful were rewarded with poverty, slavery, heartache. And he saw that those who got on Herod's good side, who worked for Rome, had access to power, to wealth, to living the good life without interference. **So he did what made sense to him** in light of how he perceived the world to work. He became a tax collector. Cut off ties with his brothers and sisters in Israel, became a pariah and their enemy, cut off ties with YHWH, abandoned righteous living, and made new friends with a new crowd.

Until he met Jesus. At which point everything changed. He heard the good news Jesus was announcing, he turned from the life he'd been living, and he trusted the good news, becoming a follower and student of this rabbi from Nazareth.

These words of Jesus had that kind of power in Matthew's life. They proved themselves true. Matthew was a first hand witness to the blessing Jesus was talking about. To the life of God Jesus was experiencing and passing on to his followers.

Let's dig into them a little bit.

9 groups of people identified; **it's not an exhaustive list, just representative.** The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted for the sake of righteousness, and the insulted and oppressed for the sake of Jesus.

What do those groups of people have in common? What they have in common is that if the world continues to work the way it's always seemed to work, **it sucks to be them.** Seriously. If you are one of those people, you find yourself in an accursed situation, as far as you can tell, outside of God's blessing.

If you're a new parent, you've just given birth to your first child, and **a wizened guru** stops by from his mountain cave with a prophecy for your daughter, and he says: *"Oh, little Becky, she is destined to be poor in spirit..."* *"Sweet Chris, now this one, he's going to have a life of heartache and mourning..."* *"Ah, baby Johnny, now there's a boy who will grow up to be the meekest man alive..."* Well that's a major bummer. **In this world, those are curses, not blessings.** I mean, you want your child to have a good life, right? To do well, to make in this world. Maybe even to be able to take care of mom and dad in their old age. You want them to be rich in spirit. To be full of joy and celebration. To be strong and assertive.

The poor in spirit. The poor in spirit we talked about in September. Lots of us may identify with the poor in spirit – **the spiritual zeros**, as Dallas Willard calls them, those who've had their spirit knocked out of them, like you can get the wind knocked out of you from a hard fall, those who know what's it like to be far from God. If you are, or you've ever been poor in spirit, you know **it's an awful place to be.** Empty, dark, hopeless, lifeless. Going through the motions at best.

Jesus is saying that through him and his work, **he's bringing the life of the heavens right to their doorstep**, even though they're too winded go out and

get it for themselves.

Those who mourn. I know I don't need to do much to convince you that those who mourn fall into the accursed category. **Death is the first and final curse, isn't it?** And when you brush up against it, when you've lost someone you love, especially when they've been ripped from life before their time or unjustly or with great suffering, the loss can be crushing, even debilitating. **Never is the feeling of the absence of God more pronounced** than when you're in mourning. How much mourning is happening in Haiti right now?

Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is arriving in him and his work specifically **to bring comfort** to those who mourn, because God hears their cries and has been mourning with them.

The meek. The meek **get trampled on**, don't they? They get the short end of every stick. People take advantage of them all the time. They get pushed to the back of the line. They may have all sorts of interesting things to say, great gifting and talents to contribute, wisdom to offer, but they rarely have their voices heard above the din. **So they live quietly in the corners** no one else pays attention to, quietly suffering, often assuming God is paying no attention as well.

Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is arriving in him and his work **to make a place of significance at the head of the table** for the meek, so that the rightful, allotted portion their heavenly Father has set aside for them in the inheritance of his children will be secured for them, even though they haven't been able to secure it for themselves.

Now several of the next ones are a little more confusing – hungry and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, etc. Those sound like great qualities, don't they? And in some respects, some of them may in truth be great qualities. **But having those qualities can really make life difficult for the person who has them.** Can make your experience of life feel accursed. We'll save them for next week, since they'll take a little extra time to

unpack.

In the meantime, let's consider **what our response could be to Jesus' good news** that God is arriving for accursed people with blessing and involving himself in (previously) impossible struggles with grace.

Well, first, **it depends on what your situation is.** Are you in a situation that seems like God might be far off, even actively ignoring you?

When the thought comes into your mind that it's hopeless, that God isn't hearing you, that you're on your own so you might as well just do your thing, recognize that that thought is from the enemy of your soul. **Jesus has come with the life of the heavens for you**, and through his Spirit you can experience that life even in the middle of your difficulty. Your lack of spiritual richness and strength doesn't make God look down on you and say, well, I'll wait to draw near to him until he gets his act together. No, **God is looking to draw near to you through Jesus today.** Here, now.

What would you do if you believed that was true? Doing that is the first step in trusting Jesus.

Your hurt and pain and frustration and loss and heartache because of the awful things that have happened in your life, even if some of them were your fault, even if some of them were completely unjust and unfair, **doesn't mean God has abandoned you.** Exactly the opposite. It means **God's heart aches for your suffering and longs to join you in it** through his Son Jesus, longs to take it on his shoulders and redeem it, turn it into something that can serve his healing and redemptive purposes in your life and in this world.

What would you do if you believed that was true? Doing that is the first step in trusting Jesus.

The abuse you've suffered, the way you've been made to keep silent, the way you've been pushed aside in life, the times you've been afraid to speak up, the

things you've missed out on because you weren't fast enough or assertive enough or strong enough or mean enough, **doesn't mean God intends for you to get the short end of the stick** in his kingdom, to play an insignificant role. Just the opposite, your Father in the heavens **has an inheritance for you** that he is saving up to give you through his son Jesus, **a role for you to play** in his kingdom, **blessing that cannot be taken away** from you by anyone.

What would you do if you believed that was true? Doing that is the first step in trusting Jesus.

What if you don't fall into any of those categories? Well praise God. To those whom much has been given, much will be required, right? We'll talk about your role in a couple of weeks, as we continue in the book of Matthew.

But in the meantime, what would you do if you believed what Jesus is saying about the kingdom of God, that what God is up to right now is arriving for accursed people with blessing and involving himself in previously impossible struggles with grace? **Maybe you'd be wanting to do the same**, to get in the game with him somehow...? Doing that perhaps is the first step for you in trusting Jesus.

[Jesus is our center. The gospel is our message. The bible is our book. Love is our aim. We're infusing our world with the life and love of Jesus, building growing communities of growing disciples, faithfully creating breathing room for the disconnected to connect, the disfavored to find favor, and the discounted to count.]