

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

THE JOY OF ANTICIPATION

MATTHEW 5:3-12

MARCH 20-26, 2016



MAIN POINT

The Kingdom of Heaven is our hope, longing, and the source of anticipated joy.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. What are some ways you have seen heaven or the afterlife depicted in the movies?
2. When you think about the picture of eternity presented in Scripture, what do you anticipate or long for? How much of your anticipation is off the mark of what we know will really happen?

Leader: Throughout His life and even in His death, Jesus continually pointed our eyes toward eternal riches, and this can be seen in many of His teachings. In the text we will look at today—the Beatitudes—Jesus calls those who follow Him to take on attitudes or viewpoints that are not like those of the rest of the world. In doing so, we reflect Jesus more clearly to the world around us, and we find joy in fixing our eyes on the hope and blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven, our eternity in God's presence.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:3-6.

3. The Beatitudes show us what it looks like to live as Kingdom people today and the joys that await us in eternity. Verses 3 through 6 address inward qualities. How would you describe each of these kingdom traits in your own words? How do the Beatitudes in verses 3-6 relate to the promises that follow them?
4. The common theme throughout the Beatitudes is recognizing ones need for God. Would you say you recognize your need for God in day-to-day life? What are some things that make this challenging?
5. Why should living for the Kingdom of God be where we find our hope and joy? According to Jesus' teaching, what awaits the citizens of His kingdom?

Leader: The word "blessed" in these verses means joyful or happy. When Jesus brought the kingdom of God to us, He brought a reversal to the order of our lives. While we experience the kingdom now as members of the body of Christ, there is another sense in which we are not yet seeing the fullness of the kingdom we will

experience at Christ's return. In the meantime, we live as a people set apart by the way we live and by our need for Jesus Christ and fullness of His kingdom. The poor in spirit seek their need for God. Those who mourn lament the sin around them and long for their king. Those who are meek or gentle surrender control of their lives to God and live under His rule. The more we recognize our need for God and depend on Him, the greater our understanding becomes of the future He has secured for us.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:7-9.

6. Verses 7 through 9 examine outward qualities. Consider what it means to be full of mercy, quick to make peace, and to have a heart that is pure. Why are each of these important kingdom traits? How do we affirm and encourage these traits in one another?

7. When we are merciful, pure, and seek peace, how do we experience the joy of the kingdom? Have you found this to be true in your own experience?

Leader: In this portion of Jesus' message, He calls His followers to demonstrate outward qualities that go against what our culture tends to praise. We are not called to be neutral, but rather to exert ourselves to show mercy, be peacemakers, and be pure in heart. In doing so, we demonstrate that the things we value are not of this world, but of the kingdom of God.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:10-12.

8. What do these verses have to say about being persecuted for the sake of Christ? Have you ever experienced persecution or been marginalized because of your faith in Christ?

9. Jesus says we are blessed when this happens to us. How does this promise cause you to change your perspective from one that is temporal and earthly to a kingdom-minded perspective?

10. In the Lord's prayer, we pray, "Your kingdom come." What are we asking God to do when we pray this? Why should the reality of persecution cause us to long for and pray for this coming kingdom more earnestly?

Leader: Historically, choosing to follow Christ was dangerous. It's worth reminding ourselves that choosing to follow Christ does not guarantee a life of ease, but rather the opposite. Yet, despite the cost, we have found the only treasure worth obtaining. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a pearl of such matchless worth that the man who found it sold all he had to own it. Through persecution we experience more of God and firm our longing for the kingdom that is to come.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- 11. The kingdom traits presented in the Beatitudes stand in opposition to many of our culture's ideals. What are some things that people tend to turn to for happiness, other than to God and His blessings? Why is pursuing the joy of the kingdom better? How do we do that?**
- 12. What causes us to forget about the kingdom of God and our need for Him? How can we remind ourselves daily that we're first and foremost citizens of God's kingdom?**
- 13. What do the Beatitudes look like when they are lived and embodied in Christian community? How can we demonstrate these attitudes of the heart toward each other in our Growth Group?**

PRAYER

Thank God for the promise of eternity and the blessings it entails. Ask that the words of Jesus in these verses would change your view of what it means to be blessed. Ask God to give you a heart that is pure and that wants to please Him. Pray for those around the world who are persecuted for their faith. Ask that Jesus would comfort them with His presence and that their faith would be strengthened.

MEMORIZE

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

MATTHEW 5:3-13

5:3. Jesus declared people who exhibit particular characteristics to be divinely blessed. He was not saying that people should strive to attain those characteristics so they could earn the right to tap into God's blessings. Rather, those characteristics identify people who by God's grace are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. This designation does not imply they are perfect, fully mature believers. It does indicate they have begun to follow the Lord.

The first four Beatitudes (vv. 3-6) reflect inner attitudes, the first of which is poor in spirit. This is opposite the attitude of being arrogant and self-sufficient, a trait prized and admired by the world. No one can earn God's blessing. People who think they can please God on their own are blind to their sins and ignorant of God's high standards. Poverty of spirit is the prelude to the riches of salvation. Jesus pronounced the poor in spirit to be blessed because, as followers of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is theirs ("kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are used interchangeably in the Gospels). While this citizenship is a present possession of believers, the full benefit of kingdom citizenship awaits Christ's return.

5:4. Those who mourn are blessed, for they will be comforted. Jesus did not specify what sort of mourning He had in mind, so it could include all mourning. In the context of the other Beatitudes, mourning over our sins of commission and omission probably should receive emphasis. When we honestly repent of our lapses into sin, we are comforted anew with the assurance our sins all have been atoned in Christ. Mourning over sin also can include the sinful attitudes and actions in cultures throughout the world and around us. We mourn sins' destructive effects on multitudes. Part of God's comfort in that arena lies in the assurance that in the end, His scales of justice will be balanced.

5:5. The next attitude is gentleness. The word translated gentle conveys the notion of being meek, humble, sensitive, considerate, and courteous. Gentleness puts the focus on others rather than self. Being gentle does not mean being a pushover. This inner attitude stems from a spiritually educated awareness of our own spiritual poverty. Scripture indicates Jesus' followers will reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10). That promise will be fulfilled when He establishes His kingdom in the new heavens and earth. Ruling with Him implies our attitudes will parallel His. The blessing Jesus pronounced won't be centered in ownership but in serving Him (in ways not yet revealed).

5:6. The fourth attitude is a hunger and thirst for righteousness. This righteousness is not the righteousness of Christ through which God views us believers (justification). Rather this is the inner desire to make right choices, say right words, and do right actions, which is part of God's work to make us more like Christ. We who seek to follow Christ know we don't measure up to His standards, but we want to do so. As we walk faithfully with Him over time, He instills in us more and more the purpose and the power to please Him (Phil. 2:13). Admittedly, though we grow in right living, in this life we will never be absolutely righteous. So we are called blessed as we long for righteousness in the sense that we have the sure hope that we will be filled with righteousness (Matt. 5:6). The process has begun, and our limited progress brings encouragement. That process won't be completed, however, until Christ's second coming (1 John 3:2).

5:7. While the first four Beatitudes focus on inward attitudes, the last four concern outward relationships. Being merciful involves forgiving, but it also includes a loving response to the miserable and helpless. As God's children we have received mercy, and this equips us to extend mercy to others. The merciful will be shown mercy. Showing mercy to others demonstrates we have received God's mercy.

5:8. Jesus then described as blessed those who are pure in heart. The Pharisees were scrupulous about performing washing rituals that made them ceremonially clean. Jesus stripped away their pretense, saying that they were as beautiful tombs on the outside but filled with impurities within (23:27). Heart indicates the core of our being—our thoughts, our feelings, our intentions, our values, our longings. The word pure includes sexual purity but much more. It describes those whose hearts are cleansed by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Such hearts lead us away from acting with any kind of deceit, meanness, or selfish motives. Will see God is future. We will see the Lord when He returns (1 John 3:2). This hope motivates us to act with pure hearts until then (v. 3). Now, however,

we see Him with eyes of faith. When our hearts are clean, we see Him more and more clearly (meaning we better understand Him, His ways, His purposes).

5:9. Peacemakers are blessed, for they will be called sons of God. Sons of God is a way of saying “like father, like son.” God is the supreme Peacemaker, making peace between sinners and Himself through Christ. He also leads redeemed sinners to help others be reconciled to God as well as to one another.

5:10-12. The final Beatitude seems paradoxical. Mixing persecution and blessing seems akin to mixing oil and water. Perhaps this is the reason Jesus added comments in verses 11-12. He shifted to the second person, you, apparently addressing His chosen disciples in particular. Notice first that the persecution is for righteousness, and in verse 11 Jesus defined that as because of Me. People who willfully reject Christ are prone to reject those who live for Christ. This can include insults, false accusations, slanderous gossip, and, in extreme cases, death.

In what sense are the persecuted Christians blessed? They are citizens of His kingdom. Jesus never encouraged His followers to hide their faith in Him when facing persecution, but rather to be glad and rejoice. He added that their heavenly reward would be great. He placed persecuted believers in the same category as God’s persecuted prophets. Jesus wasn’t giving us a list of qualities to strive for in order to be blessed. We are blessed because these qualities demonstrate that we are His followers.