

The Golden Chain of Grace

Matthew 5:3-12

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

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I know we have many people in our congregation who have experience in construction: engineers, architects, carpenters, contractors, and real estate people. People in this industry know the importance of having a good foundation for a building or a house. As a matter of fact when Inspectors inspect houses or buildings, they want to know the condition of the foundation. They know what to look for when inspecting foundations and basements.

When I was on staff at First Baptist Church, Pittsburg, Texas, we built a Family Life Center. It was a 22,000-square-foot monstrosity of a building. When they were getting ready to lay the foundation, they tested the soil and found it was really soft. They decided to replace all of the soil, and when they did, they found a large water spring deep in the ground. So, in order to lay the foundation, they had to add a French Drain deep in the ground, and then they had to drill about 20 piers about 3 feet in diameter at 60 feet deep, then lay the foundation on top of those piers. Then after they had poured all the piers, they had to test the concrete to make sure it was the correct density. They did all of this just to make sure the building had a solid foundation on which to build.

This is kind of what the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount are for the rest of Matthew's Gospel. We learned who the Savior is in Matthew 1-4, and now He is going to inspect the foundations of our lives. He is the Master Building Inspector.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to stop building our lives on the sand and build on the Rock of Himself and His teaching. Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, lays a solid foundation for what it means to follow Christ.

Here is another way to think of the Sermon on the Mount. It is like the Law on steroids. Jesus helps us see how the Law does its work in our hearts. You see, the Law was never about mere externals, but it was always about the condition of the heart. The problem was most of the Jewish people only saw the Law as external. The Sermon on the Mount drills deep in our hearts so we can build on a solid Rock of Christ.

That's exactly what Jesus does at the end of Matthew 7. He calls us to build our lives on Him, the Solid Rock, because He is the sure Foundation.

The Sermon on the Mount is the foundational teaching in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew puts the Sermon at the very beginning of his gospel, and then the rest of his gospel unpacks its lessons.

Likewise, the Beatitudes are at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount because they are foundational to the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes prepare us for the teaching Jesus gives us in the Sermon on the Mount.

We can think of the Beatitudes as the *Golden Chain of Grace*. Each Beatitude is like a link in a chain. The first three links describe being **emptied** of dependence on self and self-righteousness. The second link describes being **filled** with God's righteousness. The final links describe the disciple's life being **poured out** for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Beatitudes describe the disciple's life. It begins with conversion and culminates in discipleship.

But before we get into the Beatitudes, I want to ask: What is a beatitude? It is important to understand this style of writing. It begins with a blessing, describes a character trait, and then moves to future reward.

When you read the Bible, you will find beatitudes in many places. For example, Psalm 1 carries the same idea of the *Beatitudes* and, in many ways, the *Sermon on the Mount*.

Listen to Psalm. 1:

¹ *How happy [or Blessed]¹ is the one who does not
walk in the advice of the wicked
or stand in the pathway with sinners
or sit in the company of mockers!*

² *Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction,
and he meditates on it day and night.*

³ *He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams
that bears its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.*

⁴ *The wicked are not like this;
instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.*

⁵ *Therefore, the wicked will not stand up in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

⁶ *For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.*

It has the same kind of form: blessing, character of life, and future reward. Psalm 1 describes two roads that a person can take in life. It describes a person who walks in the way of righteousness as being like a tree planted by streams of water, but the one who walks in the path of the wicked as chaff that is blown away like the wind.

In the same way, the Sermon on the Mount begins with Beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount describes two ways to live and ends by describing a person's life, like *two kinds of trees* and *two kinds of foundations*.

The question in Psalm 1 is: *Which road will you take? What kind of tree will you be?* The question at the end of the Sermon on the Mount is: *What kind of tree will you be? What foundation does your life have?*

Jesus is not introducing anything new with the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount; he is drawing on rich Old Testament teaching. He is reinforcing the Old Testament's purpose of the law—to get to the heart. The problem was, it didn't. Jesus is going to do what the Law could not. He is going to take the law, and like the tip of the spear, He is going to drive it deep into our hearts and leave us with only one way to be healed—trust in Him.

What we are doing this morning is a flyover of the Beatitudes and look at them as a whole. Then in the next few sermons we'll drill down into each Beatitude in greater depth. Here is our outline: *Emptied, Filled, and Poured Out*.

I. Emptied (5:3-5)

The first three beatitudes describe a life that has been emptied, and because it has been emptied—it is *blessed*. Look in vv. 3-5:

³ *"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

⁵ *Blessed are the humble,
for they will inherit the earth.*

The first thing we notice in the Beatitudes is that Jesus turns the religious wisdom of His day (and our day) upside down. These beatitudes are not what we expect. They come at us and turn our understanding of things inside out.

¹ ESV reads *Blessed*.

Consider the word “Blessed” that begins each Beatitude. The Greek word for blessed is *markarios*, and it is translated as “Happy.” However, happy is not exactly what it means in this text. Happiness is subjective, conditional, and circumstantial. Jesus is not making a subjective statement. He is making an objective statement. He is saying that being blessed in my Kingdom is not based on circumstances as the world defines it but as I define it.

A better way of understanding the word *blessed* is to think of it as approved or pleased. It is one who is declared approved by God. God is pleased with you. It is the applause of heaven upon your life. It is the smile of God. The approval of God is what produces the condition of happiness or joy.

Think of it like this: Jesus is the Master Building Inspector who comes into your life and says, “*Congratulations! You have been emptied. You are blessed!*” Or it is the Master Gardener looking at your life and saying, “*I have pruned your life of the things you do not need, so rejoice, but I have also given you the Kingdom of Heaven.*”

Here is the amazing thing about understanding God’s blessing as His approval of you—you did not earn it. God’s approval does not come from anything you do or did. God’s approval of you was purchased by Jesus on the cross. Jesus emptied Himself and became sin for us so that we may become the righteousness of God. Then God took his approval of Jesus’ life and set it on you.

This is why Jesus says that when you are *poor in spirit and see yourself as spiritually bankrupt and when you humble yourself and mourn over your condition—you should rejoice*. It is truly good news when a person feels this way about their sin.

What’s happening when a person feels this way about his life and sin? They are *repenting* because the Kingdom of Heaven is drawing near to him or her. They are on the threshold of conversion. They are being emptied of all dependence on self: self-righteousness, self-help, self-dependence, and anything that wrecks of their own effort to save themselves.

But what about those who are already disciples? After all, do the first three beatitudes not apply to those who are already followers of Jesus?

Here is what being emptied means for a disciple, it means to walk in deeper fellowship with Jesus. Discipleship is a continual emptying of one’s self and following Jesus. Jesus never just empties our lives one time. He continues to empty us of our dependence on ourselves and other things so that He may fill us with His life, which leads us to our second point.

II. Filled (5:6)

In v. 6, we get to the heart of the Beatitudes. After you are emptied, you need to be filled and not just filled with anything but with what you truly hunger and thirst for—the life of God. And this is what God does for those who humble themselves before Him and ask to be filled.

However, let’s make sure we are clear on what our need is. Our great need is to be emptied of self-righteousness and filled with Jesus’ righteousness. In other words, our great need is to be filled with the righteousness of Christ. Our great need is to be saved. Look at v. 6:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

What is it that this Beatitude has in common with the first three? They all point to our *spiritual weakness*.

Think about it this way. It is difficult for us to comprehend what hunger and thirst are like when we live in the land of plenty. We have enough money to buy what we need. There are grocery stores and restaurants on every corner to fill our bellies with food and drink.

To get our minds around this metaphor, we need to think of a time when we were desperate for food or water. For me, I remember two-a-days in football in the August heat in the south. Everyone was wringing wet with

sweat and so tired and thirsty. As soon as the coach called for a water break, we went as fast as our weary bodies would carry us to the coolers. You may think of another time when you were extremely thirsty and hungry.

Now take this kind of physical hunger and thirst and put it deep in your heart and soul. It is King David saying in Psalm 63:1,

*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

This is the hunger and thirst we should feel when we think of our need for the righteousness of Jesus. We are desperate to be filled.

The great hymn writer, Augustus Toplady, said it this way in the hymn *Rock of Ages*:

*Not the labors of my hands
can fulfill thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.
Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.²*

It is the empty, hungry, and thirsty person who says to God, *"I cannot do this anymore. I give up. Save me. You are my only hope. Change me and make me in to what you want me to be. Fill me with Jesus' life and Spirit."* This is what it means to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness run to Jesus. He is the *Bread of Life*; He is the *Living Water*. He fills those who have emptied themselves and come to Him for salvation.

The question is, are you hungry for righteousness? Are you desperate for the Bread of Life and the Living Water of Jesus?

Bottom line: *To reject the Bread of Life and the Living Water of Christ is to choose to starve to death. Only those who rest in Jesus are filled, content, satisfied, and saved.*

But we are not filled to simply just take it all in and keep it to ourselves. We are made disciples and then poured out for the sake of the gospel.

III. Poured Out (5:7-12)

The last links in the Golden Chain of Grace is pouring out of a life filled with the righteousness of Christ. So, once a life is filled with the life of Jesus, it does not simply sit and soak. That life is then poured out for the glory of God and the sake of others. This is the picture we find in vv. 7-12:

⁷ *Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.*

² Augustus Toplady: https://hymnary.org/text/rock_of_ages_cleft_for_me_let_me_hide.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

¹¹ "You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. ¹² Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

These are characteristics all Christians are to possess, not just spiritual elitists or some spiritual SWAT Team. All Christians should manifest the characteristics of the Beatitudes. Yet, Christians will manifest them in different ways, in different degrees, and at different times of their lives.

Think about it this way. Disciples who have been shown the mercy of Christ in spite of their sin against God now want to show mercy to others. Disciples who have had their sinful hearts made pure by the holiness of Jesus now desire to live lives of holiness. The holiness of God that they once feared and hated has become the very thing they greatly desire. Disciples realize they now have peace with God, so they strive to help others find peace with God. Finally, in vv. 10-12, disciples who are faithful in being poured out will be persecuted. We will not all be persecuted in the same way or to the same degree, but we will all know the rejection and persecution of the enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet, as the life of Christ is poured out through the disciple, there are great rewards promised. Notice that at the end of each Beatitude, there is a reward that is present and futuristic. What I mean is that the disciple gets a taste of these heavenly blessings in this life, and they are experienced in their fullness when they are in the presence of Jesus.

Consider the first beatitude v. 3 and the last beatitude vv. 10-11. These two beatitudes contain the same reward: receiving the kingdom of heaven. This emphasizes the assurance of receiving heaven. It is certain it is going to happen. Being spiritually bankrupt and persecuted may look like rejection, but it is not. It means Jesus' disciples are blessed! Jesus has turned the wisdom of the world upside down.

Let me close with a question: *Is there anyone you know who has perfectly embodied the Beatitudes?* Brothers and sisters, a follower of Jesus may embody some of them really well at times, but no disciple has ever fully, continually, and perfectly embodied all of the Beatitudes except for one. Only Jesus embodies them fully and perfectly.

When Jesus became human, He emptied Himself of His own will and submitted to the Father's plan. He became fully human. He was poor in spirit though not in the same way, we are (we are sinners). Jesus was humble. Although He was God, He humbled Himself and became like us. He didn't do anything of His own will but fully submitted to God's will. Jesus didn't mourn over His sin, but instead, He mourned over our sin and separation from God.

Also, Jesus didn't hunger and thirst for righteousness in the same way we do. He was/is God, so He was filled with the righteousness of God. His hunger and thirst were to see the righteous Kingdom of Heaven on earth, so He brought the righteousness of God to us. Then He took His righteousness and holiness to the cross for us and paid our debt of sin. On the cross, His life was poured out for us.

Now those who come to Him humble and helpless because they have been emptied of strength, hope, and self-effort to save themselves can be filled with the righteousness and life of Jesus. Then they can walk in the steps of the Savior and be poured out for the sake of the gospel.

The question is: Will you humble yourself and build your life on the Foundation of Christ today? Will you receive the grace of God for you in Christ?