

## The Beatitudes

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### (PAGE 1)

Over and against the trials, troubles and sorrows of this mortal life, Jesus wants His genuine followers to have engraved onto our hearts and minds that we are indeed fortunate, because we live NOW under the favor and approval of God.

OURS is an eternal outcome most desirable.

And so Jesus issued these eight pronouncements for our edification, assurance and comfort.

Over the centuries, the church has come to refer to these eight pronouncements as 'beatitudes'.

The word "beatitude" comes from LATIN. It simply means 'blessing'

Verses one and two make clear that these pronouncements are being spoken to Jesus' followers. And based on what Jesus says, we must conclude He is talking to His GENUINE followers.

I don't know if Judas Iscariot was there in His immediate audience.

But if he WAS there, what Jesus said, is not for him.

Judas Iscariot was never genuine about Jesus.

So there are two things to talk about.

First, who are the beatitudes FOR?

And Second, what do these eight pronouncements MEAN?

So we proceed with the question: 'who are the beatitudes FOR'?

The short answer, is they are for those who are right with God through faith in Jesus.

That is the only group of people for whom (the MESSAGE of these pronouncements) fits.

## **(PAGE 2)**

The Gospel of Matthew primarily uses two words to indicate HOW a person becomes right with God.

The two words are “repent” and “believe”.

These terms are very different from each other. Their fields of meaning do not overlap.

Yet each word (independently of the other) is used in the New Testament, to answer the question, ‘How can I be made right with God?’

While my focus today is on the Gospel of Matthew, the importance of these two words extends throughout the New Testament. Both are found in the other Synoptic Gospels, in the book of Acts, in the writings of Paul and of Peter, and in the Books of Hebrews and Revelation.

But since the BEATITUDES are in the Gospel of MATTHEW, I’ll stay focused on Matthew, for our discussion about these two words.

In the underlying Greek text, the word ‘repent’ has a VERB form - meta no EH oh.

And a NOUN form - Meta NOY eh

The verb is translated as ‘repent’

The noun is translated ‘repentance’.

The verb is found five times in Matthew.

The NOUN is found TWICE in Matthew.

So (whether as a verb or a noun) it is found seven times in Matthew.

I checked several translations, including the ESV, the CSB, the New American Standard, and the New King James and they were in agreement on this.

Everywhere this word ('repent') is found in Matthew, they all translate it the same way. And there is no OTHER Greek term that they ever translate as 'repent' or as 'repentance', in Matthew.

This is a good thing, for clarity and consistency across these translations.

So we can unambiguously say, the word 'repent' (whether the noun or the verb) is found a total of seven times in Matthew.

So what does the word 'repent' mean?

### **(PAGE 3)**

Based on how the word 'repent' is used in Matthew, and throughout the New Testament, I don't think the following definition is controversial:

Repentance is a spiritual response to the word of God in which a person recognizes it is true and is FROM God, and the person places himself or herself under its authority.

(repeat)

With that said, lets look at a few examples.

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The first occurrence of this word (in Matthew) is in chapter 3, verse 2.

There, the public ministry of John the Baptist is being summarized, and John's thematic message to Israel is boiled down into a single sentence:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

For John's audience, repentance meant, recognizing the Torah and all the Old Testament as God's word, and placing themselves under its authority.

Of course, at the time of John's public ministry, the New Testament had not yet been written.

So for the persons John was preaching to, 'repentance' would mean no longer living "in disregard" for how God wants them to live.

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Another example is in chapter 4, verse 17, where the thematic message of JESUS in HIS public ministry is summarized.

And it is summarized in exactly the same way as John's message:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

So for both John and Jesus, the public call for the people (to get right with God), featured the word 'repent'.

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Later, in chapter 11, verses 20 through 22, we find this word twice:

Then he (that is, Jesus) began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.

The central message in John's public proclamations was that people must repent. The central message in Jesus' proclamations was that people must repent.

And now, Jesus speaks a message of condemnation toward certain towns of Galilee, because the people there (for the most part), did NOT repent.

In verses 21 and 22, Jesus says,

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

There are many things about this passage that could be discussed, but for our immediate purposes, the primary point is the failure to repent results in God's condemnation.

But if people DO repent, then they are NOT subject to God's condemnation.

When the messages of John and of Jesus were summarized into a single sentence, the first word of that sentence, was 'repent'.

And now we see how high the stakes are.

For each individual, repentance is the difference between being subject to God's condemnation, and NOT being subject to God's condemnation.

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Jumping ahead to Matthew, chapter 12, we find the word "repent" again, in verse 41.

Jesus says this:

(41) The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at Jonah's preaching; and look—something greater than Jonah is here.

When Jesus says 'something greater than Jonah is here', He is referring to Himself - and this is an extreme understatement.

Jesus is not just 'something' and He is INFINITELY greater than Jonah.

So Jesus' point is that if Nineveh repented in response to Jonah, how much more should ISRAEL repent in response to the Son of God Incarnate.

In addition, what Jesus is saying here means "that generation of Nineveh" **was indeed saved from their sins, because they repented.**

It is their status as REDEEMED that enables God to use them to speak condemnation (to these of Israel) who now refuse to repent, in the presence of the Son of God Himself.

So this is the importance of 'repentance'. Those who DO repent (like the people of Nineveh), are saved from their sins, and those who do NOT repent, are condemned to a lost eternity.

If we took the time to look at the other occurrences in Matthew, we would find the same.

Repentance is the difference between heaven and hell.

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Because this is so important, I'll restate the definition of 'repentance'.

It is a spiritual response to the word of God in which a person recognizes it is true and is FROM God, and places himself or herself under its authority.

The word 'repent' implies an emphasis on 'willingness'.

Some people are WILLING to place their lives under the authority of God's word. And some people are not willing.

Of course, 'repentance' does not mean that we never sin again.

As Paul describes in Romans chapters six and seven, we humans continue to be afflicted with a sin nature, and we will not be free of our sin nature until this mortal life is over.

So that is the word 'repent'.

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But ELSEWHERE, the gospel of Matthew uses the noun 'faith' or the verb 'believe' to indicate how a person becomes right with God through Jesus..

As with the word 'repent', the "underlying Greek" has one word that encompasses both the noun 'faith' and the verb 'believe'.

The noun is found 8 times in Matthew, while the verb is found 11 times in Matthew. In addition, there is an adjective form of the word, that is found 5 times in Matthew.

This produces a total of 24 times in the Gospel of Matthew.

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For the sake of time, I'll give you one prime example, which was read for you a few minutes ago.

This is from Matthew chapter 8, verses 5 through 12.

Previously, we saw the word 'repent' used to indicate how a person can be saved from sin and from God's condemnation.

Those who repent are saved and those who do not repent are condemned.

But in the PRESENT passage, the word 'repent' is absent.

Instead we have the word 'faith'.

## Matthew 8:5-12

(5) When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him,

(6) "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly."

(7) And he said to him, "I will come and heal him."

(8) But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.

(9) For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

So this Roman Centurion, a Gentile, is saying to Jesus, he is confident Jesus can heal the servant without being there in person. Continuing at verse 10, it says,

(10) When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such FAITH.

So in this passage, the key message is about FAITH.

And Jesus speaks a commendation, because of how strong this Gentile's faith is. He continues...

(11) I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,

Jesus is plainly saying that because of faith, this Gentile is indeed saved from his sins.

He will be there in the Kingdom of Heaven.



Not only THAT. Jesus is saying there will be MANY Gentiles, who, because of their faith in Jesus, will be there, in the Kingdom of Heaven.

At verse 12, Jesus says...

(12) while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The phrase 'sons of the Kingdom' is spoken with great irony.

Jesus is referring to persons of Israel. He is saying that not only will there be a lot of Gentiles in Heaven, there will also be a lot of Jewish people who are NOT in Heaven.

It all depends on who - like this centurion - has faith in Jesus.

When we looked at some examples of the word 'repent' in Matthew, the word FAITH was not mentioned.

But NOW, we see the word FAITH, and the word 'repent' is not mentioned.

And it is 'faith' that is here presented as crucial for a person to be saved from sins.

Even though the word 'faith' and the word 'repentance' have definitions that are very distinct from each other, each word - independently of the other - is used to indicate how a sinner is saved from sin and is made right with God.

So 'repentance' and 'faith' are complimentary.

One IMPLIES the other.

Just as a person cannot possess one side of a coin without possessing the other side, one cannot repent without entering into a faith that is genuine.

Conversely, one cannot have a faith that is genuine, without repentance having taken place.

One always implies the other.

This means that our Roman Centurion has repented - even though the word 'repent' is not in that passage.

And it also means that the unrepentant towns of Galilee that Jesus condemned had failed to enter into a saving faith.

When I came to faith in Christ, I did not think about 'repentance', per se. In my own experience, "repentance and faith" just happened together.

But the Holy Spirit did cause me to be aware that Scripture is true and is from God, and that I needed to place myself under the authority of Scripture.

For me, the faith and the repentance just happened together.

And I suspect that is how it is for MANY who now know Christ.

## **(PAGE 11)**

But here is the thing to watch out for.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul says this:

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

When Paul wrote this, it was certainly not his intention to cause any genuinely saved person to doubt his or her salvation.

His aim was to bring to salvation anyone in his audience who was not yet saved.

Having a cultural affinity to Christians does not mean you are saved.

Shrugging one's shoulders and saying, 'sure, I'm fine with Jesus', does not mean a person is saved.

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Let's go back to that passage from chapter 11, where Jesus denounced certain towns of Galilee because they did not repent.

If you or I had been there, among the crowds of those towns, as Jesus was there performing many miracles of healing - if you were to randomly ask someone in the crowd, 'do you believe in Jesus?' - that person would probably have responded with indignation.

“Of course I believe in Him. Look at His miracles. How could I NOT believe in Him?”

Yet, Jesus said the people of these cities are condemned, because they did not repent.

What this leaves us with, is that there are indeed many people (out there, in the world) who SAY they believe in Jesus.

But they have never repented.

Because of unrepentance, there are many who SAY they believe, but their profession is not genuine.

Such persons continue to live independently from God, and with indifference to God's word and with indifference to the will of God for their lives.

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The beatitudes (that we are about to look at), are not for them.

The beatitudes are for you and I who have placed our lives, in faith, under the authority of God's word.

With these things said, we briefly consider the beatitudes, which were read for us, a few minutes ago.

This is the only place in scripture where we find a sequence of eight concise and consecutive pronouncements of blessing. As a result, these pronouncements are distinct and memorable among the broader writings of the Bible.

First, in chapter 5, verses 1 and 2, we are told that Jesus creates some separation between Himself and the crowds, by going up a mountain.

But Jesus' disciples are motivated, and it would seem they stay with Him as He climbs.

Eventually, the crowds do catch up, but Jesus has first taken the opportunity to speak specifically to His disciples, who must be understood, in this context, as genuine believers.

In verse one, it explicitly says, 'his disciples came to Him'.

And in verse 2 it says 'He began to teach THEM', that is, He began to teach His disciples.

Next, Matthew says Jesus 'sat down', which is suggestive that He is about to teach. In that cultural context, it appears to have been traditional for the teacher to sit as a signal that he is about to begin teaching.

Later, in chapter 13, verse 2, we are told that Jesus sat down in a boat, before beginning to speak to the crowds who were standing on the shore.

And in chapter 24, verse 3, we are told Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, when he began to teach the disciples.

And in chapter 26, verse 55, Jesus specifically says that He had an ongoing pattern of sitting in the temple as He taught the people who were there.

So on this mountain, Jesus sits down, and His disciples come to Him.

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As we look at these pronouncements of blessing, it is easy to observe certain patterns of repetition.

**First, we have the eightfold phrase ‘blessed are’.**

Observe that this is in the present tense.

Regarding this word ‘blessed’, the underlying Greek term, is “mak ARE eos”.

In this context, it indicates a person who is fortunate to be under the favor and approval of God.

In this mortal life, we are subject to trials, troubles, sorrows and suffering of many kinds, but in the midst of this, Jesus encourages His followers by telling us we are under God’s favor and approval right now.

All because our faith in Jesus is genuine.

## **(PAGE 15)**

Now, in these pronouncements, there is a present tense aspect, and there is a future tense aspect.

Here, certain verbs in the present tense are highlighted, to show that we are fortunate NOW, in the midst of this present mortal life.

Every genuine believer is fortunate and well off NOW, because of being under God’s favor and approval.

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On this next slide, certain verbs that are FUTURE tense are highlighted.

This shows that we will fully experience the full benefits of God’s favor toward us, when we enter Heaven, when this mortal life is over.

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But regarding the broader message of the beatitudes, Jesus is affirming our status as “fortunate under the favor and approval of God”.

He tells us this - not once, not twice, but eight times.

I don't know of anything significant about the number 'eight' in the Bible. It is the number SEVEN that is found many times in the Bible and that often signifies completeness.

But the EFFECT of there being EIGHT beatitudes, is to make this span of text, very distinct within scripture.

So (in the first red box), we have the eightfold (present tense) pronouncement 'blessed are'.

**This is followed by a series of eight descriptions.**

THAT is the SECOND red box.

Since Jesus is talking to His genuine followers, we must understand that these eight descriptions are not talking about eight different groups of people.

These descriptions are talking about ONE group of persons - we whose faith in Jesus is genuine.

These descriptions IDENTIFY us in terms of eight characteristics.

As you and I look at these eight descriptions, we may find ourselves identifying primarily with just two or three of them, and less with the others.

In the case of some of these characteristics, we will identify more and more with them as we grow to greater maturity in our faith and devotion to Jesus.

But ultimately, these descriptions are looking at us collectively - as a group.

If you think about all genuine believers, everywhere, across the centuries, and around the world, we are indeed distinguished by these eight characteristics, to the glory of God.

Moving on from the eight descriptions, (in the THIRD red box) we then have eight REASONS.

That is, eight reasons that we, as genuine followers of Jesus are fortunate, under the favor and approval of God.

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The first of the eight is exactly the same as the eighth of the eight.

Both say 'for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

And it is present tense.

Right now, as we live out our mortal lives, we do in fact possess an irrevocable citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Because the first reason and the last reason are the same, and they both indicate citizenship in the coming kingdom, we understand that the six reasons in between are embellishing and describing the benefits of being citizens IN the Kingdom.

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And observe that these six that fall between are all future tense.

Our citizenship in Heaven is now, but we are not yet IN heaven.

These six "reasons" pertain to our experience during the one thousand year rule of Christ upon the earth - what we today call 'the millennial kingdom', and they also describe our experience beyond that, through all eternity - in the New Heavens, the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem.

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So in summary, we have eight pronouncements and eight descriptions.

But one group of persons being described.

And seven reasons are specified, but all seven pertain to ONE ultimate benefit - our status as citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The effect of all this is twofold.

First, it intensifies our eagerness to enter into this most desirable of outcomes.

And second, it gives us assurance that we will indeed, as genuine believers in Jesus - enter into it.

The sorrows and troubles of this life notwithstanding. It is absolute and certain.

The Holy Spirit testifies within the heart of each genuine believer that this is true.

And that comfort and full assurance will be used by God to keep us going, as His useful instruments, in this mortal life.

Prayer