

Series: **WHO GETS THE BLESSING?** - October 19, 2008

**WHO GETS THE GOOD LIFE?**  
**Matthew 5:3-12**

**I. INTRO**

- A. There are two genes I didn't get that I've spent a good bit of my life wishing I had. One was the tall gene. It was quite apparent early on that I didn't get that one. The other was the **athletic** gene. I grew up in Pennsylvania where everything stops for two occasions; the first day of buck season—and football games. **Any** football game! -Of course, playing football was a normal part of growing up. Get any group of boys together where I lived, and they'd almost always end up playing football. So I knew football, played football—and even went out for football—but it was clear that I didn't have football shaped genes in my pool. I could never figure out if I was, a) chicken to get tackled—I mean, there **are** actually people who like to get bashed up, break their teeth and noses, bung their knees—and call it **fun!** b) too clutzy to catch or throw the ball well or c) just not interested enough to try harder.

-But the deal is—when everyone else is crazy about the game and crazy about those who play well, it's not a cool feeling to be left out. In that sense, I know what it's like to be on the outside of the plate glass window—looking in on the party at the cool people inside—cause I was never one of them. It doesn't at **all** feel good. Can anyone identify with that?

- B. What I didn't know then—but know now—is that everyone, at some point, has this feeling of being on the outside looking in. Even football stars. And especially those who get shoved down, pushed around—laid on stretchers around the margins of...**the GOOD life**. Permanently stuck on the outside of normality.
1. See, the world system we live in has a definition of what being **blessed** is...and what being **unblessed** is. Being blessed is being thin, young, good-looking, sexy, smart and well-educated—with lots of friends. This is the definition of **blessed** that gets shoved at us every day of life. We pray for it. Strive for it. We even try to push our children in that general direction.
  2. And that really gets into the guts of who's 'unblessed' and who's 'blessed.' Who makes that call? CNN? Much Music? Fashion mags? And is it money, looks, power, sex appeal, luck, health, age, race, skin clarity—height—athletic ability—having thick hair? Can short, non-athletic people who are going bald be **blessed**?
  3. Jesus is radical! He takes our definition of what it means to be happy, lucky, fortunate—**blessed**—and flips it upside down! Or...is it right-side up? Today, I want us to look carefully at what He said.

## II. THE BLESSING

- A. At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, He gave his "I Have A Dream" talk that laid out how the lives of those who followed Him would be transformed. It's found in Matthew's record of Jesus life—and usually carries the title, ***The Sermon On The Mount***. Let's read these words together:

**Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 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 5:1-12 TNIV)**

-In this message, Jesus answers two profound questions: First, "How can I be a ***blessed*** person?" and "What does a truly ***good*** person look like?"

-Now, here's the question I want us to think about today. In this talk—and especially in light of the list of ***blessings*** we've just read: Is Jesus kinda like Moses, coming down from the mountain with a new set of rules to follow. Is Jesus saying, "Okay, you're trying hard—but you've got to try a ***lot*** harder to live a life that's pleasing to God?"

1. In researching this message, I've realized that there are a lot of opinions out there on how to interpret and apply this passage.
  - At the end of the message, Jesus makes one thing ***very*** clear; he wasn't just passing out more information. What Jesus said was ***always*** aimed at the heart and intended to transform people's lives from the inside out!
  - When Jesus ended his talk, he made it clear that the test on the truth he'd taught would come in how we live—not what we know. A few weeks ago, I watched footage of an F17 jet putting on a demonstration at an airshow—when the wing suddenly came off, and it crashed into a house. Turns out that in a routine maintenance overhaul, the mechanics forgot to install four of the five clips holding the wing on. If these mechanics were all tested, they could all give the right answer about how to put the wing on and what the clips look like—they ***just didn't do it!*** Fortunately, no one was killed.
2. A few weeks ago, we talked about how Jesus' main message was the Good News that God's Kingdom—His leadership, power, grace and forgiveness had come here! And it came to people who typically had ***no*** good news coming

their way. To get an idea of who was gathered around Jesus that day, along with his disciples, let's read Matthew's description of the group:

**Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River. (Matthew 4:23-25 NLT)**

-How would you describe these people? Think they were wonderful religious people, looking for a brand new challenge because following the 10 Commandments had gotten a little boring?

-Probably not. From everything we can see, this was a group of **very** desperate people. This wasn't the "Seminar at the Hilton"—where people come with laptops and notebooks. They came to Jesus because they were sick or disabled or troubled by demons. They **wanted** something—and it wasn't a lecture on ethereal philosophical truth. Their religious leaders had taught them that God blesses **good** people with healthy bodies and thick wallets; that to live an unblest life—whether it's because of blindness, leprosy, infertility or poverty means you probably deserve it. "You're unblest—you're on the outside of the party looking in—and there's not a **thing** you can do about it!"

- B. I have a book in my library entitled the **Be-Attitudes**. Cool title, isn't it—you know—blessings--beatitudes—**BE-attitudes**? This book—and a lot of others like it—teach that Jesus is giving us a formula for a blest life. You know, "If you cultivate these attitudes in your life—you will be blest." And, of course, that's what high achievers like us want to hear. "Give me a list, give me a series of **do's** to do—and I'll attack them like a dog with a bone!"

-But, given Jesus' audience here—and the people that usually gathered around him, is that what he's really saying? Even his disciples were people who had been passed over—and rejected by other Rabbis. None of them were front-runners in any morality contest.

1. Notice what this passage says before describing the people who gathered. **Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. (Matthew 4:23 NLT)**

-We talked about this Kingdom in our series in September. The Kingdom all the prophets had said was coming—was here! God himself had showed up in human affairs; the invasion of Good had begun. Life would overtake death—God was reclaiming the planet! And this Kingdom—this leadership, grace, forgiveness, joy and peace is open to **everyone** who will follow Jesus and become His apprentice. That's the message Jesus gave—and then He sits

down in a place where the crowd can hear him—in the natural amphitheater of a mountainside.

-Think about a time in your life when you were broken. Hurt. In need. Felt desperate—or alone—or defective—like these people did. Would it have been **Good News** for you if someone had come along and said, “Okay. Here’s the deal. The **good** news is that there is a blessing. The **bad** news is that it’s conditional; you only get the blessing of God if you can manage a major attitude adjustment!”

-For people in pain, that’s not a message of hope, and that’s not what Jesus is saying. I believe His message to that group was more along the lines of, “The **God of the Universe** is freely offering his friendship and power; **Everybody’s** welcome! **Anything** can happen! Come—whatever you are—no matter how many rules you’ve broken, how outside the circle you feel—no matter how crushed you feel by life and by bad choices—and He will **transform** you into a truly good person! I’m here to turn everything on this planet **right-side up!** So—why don’t you follow me? Why don’t you become my apprentice? If you will—I’ll give you **life** and make you the salt of the earth and the light of the world!”

2. Look at Jesus’ first words:

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

-The word Jesus uses here that is translated **blessed** means absolutely fortunate, lucky—truly filled with joy and happiness and peace.

-I need to be straightforward with you. In the past, when I’ve spoken on this verse, I’ve translated **poor in spirit** as meaning that we need to be humble before God—understanding who we are and who He is—if we’re ever going to find this blessed life. Is humility a good thing? Absolutely? Do we have to see who we really are when we come to Jesus? Of course we do. But that’s not what Jesus is saying—and it doesn’t fully translate the phrase he used—or who he’s talking to.

-If Jesus had wanted to say, “You need to approach God with humility”—He could’ve. Later on in Matthew’s record, He **does** say:

**So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 18:4 NLT)**

But that’s not the word he uses here.

3. If Jesus had said that, know how that would affect most people? “Wow! I want His blessing! I want to be in the kingdom. So—how can I be really, really, **really** humble?” And that’s why Jesus said, **Blessed are the poor in spirit.** People who, when it comes to their spiritual life—are poverty stricken. His blessing is on the spiritual zeros; people who are totally bankrupt, deprived and deficient. These are people who don’t know their Bibles, don’t necessarily know God and have no spiritual or biblical background or qualifications. Which would describe our world—maybe you?

-In a recent Gallup poll people were asked who gave the Sermon on the Mount. Know what the number one answer was? Billy Graham. And a substantial number of people—24%--thought it was called the Sermon on the Mount because it was delivered on horseback. A lot of people in our world—maybe some of you—have just never had any exposure to the Bible.

-Think about the people who hung around Jesus his whole ministry? They were typically spiritually impoverished—sometimes morally scandalous people. The religious professionals of his day summarized the people Jesus welcomed and spent time with as **tax collectors and sinners**. Or **sinnah's!**

-Now, here's my point. Being spiritually bankrupt is not a spiritual attitude to aspire to! So, the question is, why would Jesus call them **blessed**? There are two forms of blessing in ancient literature. The best-known form of blessing is instructional. You see this sometimes in the Psalms—or Book of Proverbs. "Blessed are the obedient" or "Blessed are the faithful." The implication is, "If you live this way, go!"

-The other form of blessing which is much more rare could be called the **surprise announcement**. You sometimes see these in biblical prophecies when the nation of Israel was in a totally hopeless situation. The prophet would make a surprise announcement of blessing—Good News. The intent was, "Hang on! Don't give up! Be encouraged and comforted—and whatever you do, don't quit!"

4. This whole idea of a surprise announcement is even clearer when you look at the recording of these blessings in Luke 6:  
**"Blessed are you who are poor...Blessed are you who hunger now...Blessed are you who weep now...Blessed are you when people hate you..." (Luke 6:20-22 TNIV).**

-In our world there are people who live in **extreme** poverty. They experience hunger every day. Their time is spent working and scrounging for food. Sometimes they sit helplessly and watch their children die from malnutrition—or drinking contaminated water. There are people who are ground up by grief—and that would include some of you. You've lost someone you love—maybe through divorce or death.

-Some people, right this moment, sit in prison—or have had their reputation shredded because they've unjustly accused. Their neighbors **hate** them! Some people go through this world **hated** simply because of their last name, or the color of their skin, or because they are unwanted and unloved.

-Now. How many of you would look at someone like that and say, "Now there's the fortunate life! That's the **blessed** life! It fills me with longing to even think I could live like that! So, where do I sign up? What can I do to merit a life like that?" No one says that. Our hearts break over people who face stuff like that—and we try to help them. Why? Because we don't consider suffering a blessed condition.

-If it was—then those of us who aren't poor, who aren't hungry, who aren't sad or hated would be in big trouble, right? That's why this is a **surprise** announcement. The people who never get blessed, **never** feel blessed—are suddenly blessed. Not **because** of their condition, but despite their condition! And **that's** why this Kingdom Jesus brought was such **fantastic news!** Jesus point was that this Good News is for **everyone!** Not just the Jewish people—Gentile outsiders, Greek pagans. Paul, an early church leader, even included the **Scythians (Col.3:11)**—the moral equivalent of cannibals in our day.

5. I can imagine Jesus bringing his primary style of teaching—right into these blessings he gives. He was the master of story—or illustration. He's by a freshly planted field, picks up a seed and says, "Seeds like this hit **all** kinds of soil; some grows good crops, some doesn't. You see Him picking up a child and saying, "Did you know that the Kingdom is made up of people with attitudes of dependence like this child?"

-I can imagine Jesus using the people around him—whose lives had been transformed--in precisely that same way.

- a. He walks over to a man who, in his demonized state, had terrorized everyone around him—and he **still** looks pretty scary—clothes torn and dirty, straggly hair. But instead of insanity, there's coherent speech; and tear streaks running through the dirt on his cheeks reveal a heart that has been deeply touched. His spiritual aptitude is **zip**. Nada! But then Jesus puts his hand on his shoulder and says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit—for **theirs** is the Kingdom of Heaven!" And it blows people's minds! "Him? Devil boy? I don't think so!" But the power of God has made him whole! Set him free!
- b. He walks over to a woman with a son who's lived with severe cerebral palsy—needing constant, intensive care for the 35 years he's lived. Religious people have blamed her for his problems—and she's cried herself to sleep every night—knowing that exactly what her day will be like.  
-But not any more. Her son's **standing** right beside her! Whole. Flexing his muscles—doing something he's **never** been able to do—thank his Mom with sobs he can't control. Jesus walks over, puts his arms around them, and says, **Blessed** are those who mourn, for they will be comforted! The crowd cheers.
- c. Jesus walks over to a widow—whose husband defied—and was killed by an angry Roman soldier—years before. And she's been shoved around—trampled on—ever since. She couldn't pay her taxes, so her home and land was taken. She now works as a servant on her own land and in her own house. But her **eyes** are shining—and a smile that would brighten any room shines out.

-Jesus puts his hand on her arm and says, “Blessed are the meek, for they will **inherit** the earth!” In a side whisper to Peter and John he says, “Okay guys—watch out for her, because among **my** people, she will be celebrated! Got it?”

- d. He walks over to a woman wearing gaudy clothes—and the perfume? Whew! Man, she’s got rings on her fingers and bells on her toes. People are muttering, “Oh no, not her! The town whore! We’ve lost **count** of the marriages she’s broken as the town whore!” But today is different. There’s not that defiant look in her eye. There’s a softness about her. Jesus touches her shoulder and says, **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness—for they will be filled!** The crowd gasps—and whispers, “She’ll be righteous—when hell freezes over!!!” But, see, they don’t understand the power of **grace!**
- e. And that’s the way it goes. People who seem to always get scammed and taken advantage of because they trust too much—and are **desperate** to be liked. People who, like the hippies from the 60s, have these huge dreams for a better life and a better world where love, and not war reigns—but give up because they can’t get there. People who are perfectionists—and hate themselves because they never feel good enough. People who get kicked around, lied about, slandered—simply because they’ve chosen to come and listen to and hang out with Jesus. -In **Jesus** suddenly all the blessing and fullness and happiness and healing can come from **up there—down here!**

6. And that **is** the point. Because of Jesus—and **through** Jesus--the offer of God’s friendship and grace and forgiveness and power—the door to a blessed life has been forever kicked down. For everyone who will repent—rethink their lives, believe Jesus—and follow Him. . For the good and the bad. For people with no spiritual appetite—and people who are starving for spiritual direction. Everyone—**everyone** is welcome. -This isn’t a list of attitudes spiritually adept people can practice to find the blessed life; this is an announcement that because of Jesus—the Good News of the Kingdom comes to **everyone!** And I’m **glad!**

### III. AND THE BLESSING GOES TO...!

- A. I thought this morning would be an appropriate time to tell you just how **important** I am! I got an email the other day from **Continental Who’s Who**. It starts out, “Welcome to our **inner circle**.” Wow! **INNER CIRCLE!** But wait...there’s more! “We believe that your accomplishments as a respected professional in your area merit earnest and intense consideration for inclusion...” I thought, “I’m so lucky!!!” Then I realized that it was addressed to our dog, Jaz. Actually...
  1. Every person in this world—**every** one of them—longs to be blessed. That’s why we are vulnerable to the incessant promises of ads, the media, diets, and the comments of those who **seem** blessed—to find the inner circle of blessing. The **good** life—of plenty, of admiration, of respect, of self-esteem.

2. That's how the audience Matthew was writing these words from Jesus to felt. They were Jewish—but they believed in a Messiah largely rejected by their culture—and probably, their families. Today, one of the cruelest punishments in religious circles is practiced by the Amish. It's called **shunning**. It's where everyone you've grown up with—including your family—will have nothing to do with you. You are **truly** on the outside looking in.

-What I'm saying is that if you've ever felt on the outside—looking in—Jesus' blessings are for you. There is a damning message that streams from our culture that many believe—maybe some of you. "Oh, we're **so** sorry! You got the shallow end of the gene pool when it comes to being a desirable person!"

-Sometimes people might think that appearance is a silly thing to worry about; but it's not; not when people will slowly kill themselves for it in a world that worships the outer ¼ inch of our bodies.

-Maybe Jesus would say, "Blessed are the short, balding, non-athletic types! Blessed are the geeks, the nerds and the wimps. Blessed are you when you have oily hair, zits and all manner of bad breath. Blessed are those of you who knoweth not about wearing plaid and stripes on the same body!

-And blessed are those who are those who feel like they are **mistakes—losers**. Jesus says, "You're not a loser—the party is for you!" Then, of course, there are the more serious cases—and they're blessed too. Blessed are those who are filled with anxiety. Blessed are the divorced. Blessed are the homeless, the clueless, and the job-less. Blessed are the drop-outs, the burn-outs and the left-outs. Blessed are the sexually addicted, the sexually frustrated and the sexually infected. Blessed are the mentally ill and those who are HIV positive.

-Blessed are the parents who have failed, and the children who have hit the streets. Blessed are those who can't have kids—and those who are pregnant out of wedlock. Blessed are the failures, the losers, the victims of prejudice and injustice. You're blessed. You're blessed. You, you and you.

-If you feel like you've missed out on a good life; if you feel like you've blown through all your money and all your chances—you **haven't** missed out! There is still a blessed life for you **so** worth living! I will **be your God!** You will **never** be alone! When you're tempted to give up, I will give you strength to keep on. I will fill your heart with joy—when there's **absolutely** no reason for it. I will comfort you—and help you—and love you—and make you a **loving** person! I will walk with you through life! I will heal your brokenness; When things seem hopeless, **I** will give you hope! I will use your life—in fact, **in fact...** I will heal and use that broken part of your life for good in this world. **Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal!**

-Can you see the power of what Jesus is saying at the very start of this message on what His people will be like? Everyone is eligible for all the blessing of Heaven—because it comes from God directly people by grace, not as something they earn by having the proper attitude!

B. There are two things I can think of that might be barriers for some of us here this morning—2000 years after this talk was given, reading it in a totally different language and totally different context.

1. The first is where we tend to go to find **blessing**. The word **blessing** is a distinctively Christian word. I can always tell when someone speaking in an interview has had some Christian influence if they say something like, “I’m so blessed...” Sometimes those of us who have been around these Beatitudes all our lives still search in all the **wrong** places for blessing.

-You will have to decide **what** you believe about blessing—and what you will teach your children **about** the blessed life. Does it, in fact, come from money, beauty, privilege, education, career and stuff? Does it **really**? Does it come from finding the right person to hook up with? Does it **really**? If that’s what you believe and practice—then you will find yourself directly contradicting Jesus. And you will have to decide, “Will I be the apprentice of conventional wisdom—or will I be Jesus’ apprentice and find and live the blessing **only** God can give? -Jesus’ promise is, “I can bless you, you know, right in the middle of your poverty. I am more powerful than your deepest sadness—and I can bring a sense of comfort and hope, right to the part of your heart that hurts. You’ve tried everything to get your act together and bring change to your life? I can fill that longing to be right with me and right with the world. And His invitation is open—to you!

2. Something else—another barrier. We live in a part of the world where we might be tempted to say, “Well, what about me? I’m a biblically literate, respectable person who’s well-fed, well-clothed, and well-spoken of? -Of course, the Kingdom—all the power, joy, comfort, purity, mercy and peace of Heaven is available to you! Anyone can come in! But Jesus gives a warning that initially sounds pretty grim:

**"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets. (Luke 6:24-26 TNIV)**

-What’s the deal here? Does Jesus have it in for people who, like us, are well-off? Who have food and comfort and are well-thought of? Is He out to settle the score? No. He warning is about us mistaking having plenty of all the things everyone seems to want—as a **blessed** life. People, see, can begin to think, “I don’t need Jesus’ blessing! I’m doing pretty good on my own, actually.”

-Even believers in Jesus can mistake **blessed life** Jesus is talking about for being well-taken-care-of, well-heelled, well-fed, well-supplied, well-dressed, well-educated and well-spoken. If that happens, all the corruption of attitude, the pride, the sense of entitlement, the self-pre-occupation Jesus warns about can creep in. And when this happens—churches become clubs. Churches forget their mission. Churches forget what blessing really looks like. And the

people who are not well-off, well-fed, well-educated, and well-thought of think, “I could never be a part of that.”

3. There’s a little mat people put in out at their front door—and it says...? **Welcome!** It means, **Everyone** is welcome here. **Everyone** counts! Nobody gets left out!

-When Jesus came, he kicked a hole in the inner circle of the blessed—and opened up a blessing for **everyone**. And that includes not just you—but everyone around you! And when we receive the blessing of being accepted and comforted and filled—we are called to pass on the good things we’ve received who stand outside the door asking, “Is there a blessing for me?”

#### IV. SEARCHING IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

Years ago, Bono sang the song that gripped everyone’s heart. ***I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For***. I think he has now. It’s possible, this morning, that the deepest longing of your life is for the sense that you are **blessed**. And that **is** the deepest longing of everyone’s life. Where are you looking? Do you think you’ll find it there?